



EXCLUSIVE CONTENT

WEEKENDS

WEST



In fall, Death Valley cools down and empties out, as seen on this approach to Telescope Peak from Hanupah Canyon.

RAMBLIN' ROSE

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

THE HOWLING NORTHWEST winds rake tears from my eyes on the barren summit of 9,064-foot Wildrose Peak. I'm standing near the center of the Panamint Mountains, which run north-south for 50 miles. Seven miles south of me, 11,053-foot Telescope Peak dents the horizon as the range's high point. I turn my back to the wind and gaze over the elevation extremes of the Lower 48. To the east is the desolate expanse of Badwater, sinking 282 feet below sea level, with the Mordor-like Amargosa Mountains looming over the salt flats. To the west rise the snow-capped peaks of the eastern Sierra anchored by 14,505-foot Mt. Whitney. Beneath my feet is the trail that binds together the diversity of this Golden State masterpiece. And here in November, I am all alone in the middle.
By Chuck Graham

TURN-BY-TURN FROM CHARCOAL KILNS

1) The **Wildrose Trail** begins at 6,800 feet, just north of the historic charcoal kilns that once converted timber to fuel for silver miners at the end of the 19th century.

2) Begin the steady, 3.9-mile climb that gains 2,200 vertical feet to the summit. At mile .25, reach the first overlook, where **Wildrose Canyon** burrows its way westward.

3) After another 1.2 miles, the trail steepens sharply above the pinyon pines.

4) Climb another 2.3 miles with switchbacks at the end to a false summit. From there, follow the well-defined trail a little farther to a small rock pile and the summit sign. Note the plateau just to the north: That's your campsite (BYO water). Soak in the rocky grandeur, slow-draw sunset and sunrise, and retrace your steps back to the trailhead the next morning.

CAMPSITE WILDROSE SUMMIT (MILE 3.9)

The north-south Panamints yield terrific sunrises and sunsets. Shoot for a primitive site along the crest, where several wind-whipped juniper trees are your only company. It'll be chilly in late fall, but the views are worth it. Schlep all the water you'll need to this moon-scape plateau.

WILDLIFE

Nimble desert bighorn sheep thrive at all elevations of Death Valley, blending into these stark mountains from the flanks to the summits. These year-round residents can go weeks without water. Lower down, on the approach to Wildrose trailhead, scan the desert for scruffy wild burros snorting their way across the Panamint Valley floor.

Introduced by the Spanish in the 1880s, they've eked out an existence here ever since.

THE KILNS

You can't miss the beehive-shaped charcoal kilns lining the road up Wildrose Canyon. The 10 fieldstone ovens each stand 25 feet tall and are well preserved for being 100 years old (historians speculate they weren't used much). The structures date back to the area's silver-mining days in the late 19th century, when miners used hot-burning charcoal to refine the ore they excavated.

DOUBLE-PANAMINT

Wildrose Peak offers a solid ratio of effort to scenery. If you want to push the former and reap more of the latter, add on a dayhike to Telescope Peak, the range's windy high point. It's 6.1 miles each way from the Telescope Peak trailhead off Mahogany Flat, just south of the charcoal kilns.

TRIP PLANNER TRAILHEAD Emigrant Canyon Road (36.2467, -117.0763) at the charcoal kilns. The last 4.5 miles are unpaved and close at times during the winter. **SEASON** Fall to spring **PERMIT** Required (free); obtain at the visitor center. **INFO** nps.gov/deva

Distance 7.8 miles (out-and-back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Camp in the meadow near Dollar Lake.

FIRST SNOW KINGS PEAK, UTAH

I UNZIP THE tent door and am dazzled by the light. Big snow flakes drop out of the sky. After yesterday's blue-sky trek, the wintry scene makes me feel like I've been transported somewhere far away. As my friends and I eat breakfast, the wind picks up, sending ripples through the deep blue water of Dollar Lake and tearing some clouds off Kings Peak's face, as if to summon us to the top. We lace up our boots. Who are we to pass up an audience with a royal? *By R. J. Thieneman*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE HENRY'S FORK TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head 5.5 miles up well-maintained **Henry's Fork Trail** with occasional glimpses of the rushing Henry's Fork stream to the left, ultimately crossing it over a log bridge.
- 2) Go left and after 2.1 miles set up camp, just past **Dollar Lake**. Keep an eye out for sud-

dently rare tall trees to hang your bear bag.

- 3) Leave basecamp early with light packs for the 8-hour summit day. It's 4 miles up to **Gunsight Pass** before a short descent into **Painter Basin**.

- 4) In Painter Basin, keep right at the fork on the **High Line Trail** to close out 3.5 miles up to **Anderson Pass**.

- 5) From here, it's a straightforward ridgewalk to the 13,528-foot summit.

- 6) Retrace your steps, camp another night by the lake, and head back to the parking lot.

CAMPSITE DOLLAR LAKE (MILE 7.6)

There are no marked sites, but you'll find plenty of fire rings from previous camps. Pick an impacted site near the Dollar Lake sign and at least 200 feet from the shore. Views of the surrounding snow-capped mountains make the evening sunset a colorful show you won't want to miss. The lake is your water source.

PEAK BRAGGING

At 13,528 feet, King's Peak is the tallest in Utah. It's also ranked 19th in the contiguous United States for prominence; it's 6,348 feet from base to tip.

ESCAPE ROUTE

If severe weather sneaks up while you're on the ridge, there's a small gully to the north-east of Anderson Pass known as The Chute which rapidly descends 1,000 feet on loose talus and scree. From the bottom of The Chute, bushwhack/contour toward Gunsight Pass to intersect with the trail. Expert navigation skills required.

STARGAZING

On a clear night, the elevation and lack of light pollution make for an unrivaled display of the night sky from your campsite at Dollar Lake.

DO IT TRAILHEAD Henry's Fork (40.9091, -110.3312) from the parking lot at the end of Country Road 294 **PERMIT** None **SEASON** June to late September, when first snowfall typically comes. **CONTACT** www.fs.usda.gov/uwcnf

Distance 24.4 miles (out-and-back)

Time 2 or 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Cowboy camping beside Hamilton Lake

A CAMP FOR KINGS

SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

THE HIKE IN was great—like, massive-gorges, snowcapped-peaks, knock-your-socks-off great. But it's nothing—*nothing*—compared to the Hamilton Lakes basin. We crest the final set of switchbacks, and suddenly we stand before a blue jewel of a lake surrounded by thousand-foot-tall granite walls. This is Yosemite on steroids, a glacial cirque cut deep in the Great Western Divide. Each tick of the clock improves our already-awesome situation, as sunset turns the rock coral, then starlight begins to fleck the sky and, before I know it, I've got a front-row seat to the best dinner show in the Sierra. I don't know how tomorrow could possibly be better, but I suspect it might be. *By Emily Pennington*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE CRESCENT MEADOW TRAILHEAD

- 1) Take the **High Sierra Trail** 10.6 miles east, threading together lodgepole pine forest, alpine meadows, and big views of the Great Western Divide high above the Middle Fork Kaweah River gorge, to **Bearpaw Meadow High Sierra Camp**.
- 2) Next day, stay on the trail 1.6 miles.
- 3) Cross the wooden bridge over Lone Pine Creek and veer east to stay on the **High Sierra Trail**, which steadily climbs 900 feet in 1.9 miles to the **Hamilton Lakes** basin.
- 4) Retrace your steps 14.3 miles to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE 1 BEARPAW MEADOW (MILE 10.6)

Pass the Bearpaw Meadow High Sierra Camp, a summer-staffed, rustic backcountry lodge, and descend .1 mile to the first-come, first-serve backpacking camp, tucked in a grove of red firs and lodgepole pines. It lacks the views of the tent cabins next door, but it's a lot cheaper. Good plan: Buy a sunset beer at the adjacent High Sierra Camp and toast all that money you saved.

CAMPSITE 2 HAMILTON LAKES (MILE 14.3)

This hike's pièce de résistance, the Hamilton Lakes basin is truly a can't-go-wrong sort of heaven. Pick a granite shelf on the northwest

corner of the bigger (eastern) of the two lakes for your tent, and skip the fly on a clear night. You just might feel like you've tiptoed into the living room of the mountain gods. Nature calling? Lucky you: Perhaps the world's most scenic pit toilet is 100 yards northwest, facing 2,500-foot-tall Valhalla, an El Capitan look-alike.

FLORA

Depending on snowpack, July is typically prime time for petal peeping at this elevation. A parade of summer blooms smears the meadows along this bit of the High Sierra Trail; look for purple and blue lupines, red Applegate's paintbrushes, and unique crimson Western columbines.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 36.5547, -118.7493; 25 miles northeast of Three Rivers on Crescent Meadow Rd. **SEASON** June to October **PERMIT** Required (\$10 + \$5/person); reservations recommended in high season. **CONTACT** nps.gov/seki

Distance 28.6 miles (out and back)
Time 3 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



The Keet Seel Trail drops into Long Canyon.

LAND OF THE ANCIENTS

NAVAJO NATIONAL MONUMENT, ARIZONA

SEWING-MACHINE LEG is never fun, but it sure is memorable when scaling an escalator-length ladder bolted to slickrock. I look ahead and try to focus on what's to come when my hiking partners and I enter a huge undercut in the cliff: a Pre-Columbian settlement, sheltered from weather and time. On solid ground, legs finally still, I notice the alcove's acoustics, which amplify every word. But we keep our voices down, subdued by the empty doorways cut from stone, pictographs daubed on the back wall, and pots as old as Europe's cathedrals sitting on a beamed rooftop as if their owners left only yesterday. It feels pleasant in here, out of the sun. I imagine the long-ago residents. Their dwelling shaped them, as ours does us. *By Michael Engelhard*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE VISITOR CENTER

- 1) Hop on the **Keet Seel Trail**, a faint path that leads east across the mesa before plunging to the floor of **Long Canyon** at mile 1.5.
- 2) Stay on the trail as it doglegs east through **Tsegi Canyon** and immediately into the mouth of **Keet Seel Canyon** at mile 1.8.
- 3) Head north into the arroyo of Keet Seel, following sandstone walls and weaving across the stream (low, easy water year-round) to camp near mile 7.2.
- 4) Ditch your overnight gear and continue .5 mile to the backcountry station (a hogan) near the ruins, then check in with the Navajo ranger for the guided afternoon tour.
- 5) Retrace your steps to camp, then, next day, the trailhead.

CAMPSITE OAK GROVE (MILE 7.2)

Pull off the trail at this obvious, creekside Gambel oak grove (first-come, first-serve; there's room for everyone). Scan for colorful potsherds, but don't take any, of course. Haul in all your water; drinking from the creek isn't allowed.

GEOLOGY

Tsegi Creek gouged the band-shell alcoves and undercuts from the Navajo sandstone in Keet Seel Canyon. (Some 800 years ago,

Ancestral Puebloans likely used these as shelters because they were so easily defended.) At mile 6, look up to see cascades flowing over purplish Kayenta sandstone ledges—sweet music on sweltering days.

ARCHAEOLOGY

An extremely dry climate and the rock overhang make Keet Seel—"Broken Pottery" in the Navajo language—one of the Southwest's best-preserved cliff dwellings. Built around 1100 AD, it housed 150 people before being abandoned in 1300 AD.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 36.6881, -110.5338; 60 miles northeast of Tuba City on Tsegi Canyon Rd. **SEASON** Late May to mid-September (Thursday to Sunday only); May, June, and September are best to avoid extreme heat and monsoons. **PERMIT** Required (free); reserve by phone and arrive at the National Monument a day early to obtain it and attend a mandatory orientation at the Visitor Center. **CONTACT** nps.gov/nava

Distance 15.4 miles (out and back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Follow coastal bluffs en route to camp at Parsons Landing.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

CATALINA ISLAND, CALIFORNIA

AS MY DAUGHTERS AND I arrange our tent to face the sea stacks poking out of the Pacific, I keep an eye on the water. In March, hundreds of whales—blue, gray, humpback, and even orca—pass through this channel on their way to cooler climes. We're on Catalina, an island where piles of boats ferry tourists every day. But you wouldn't know it here. Midway along the 38-mile Trans-Catalina Trail, we've hiked through chaparral, climbed ridges with ocean views, and dropped into oak-studded canyons where mule deer graze. But we haven't seen another hiker. In fact, we won't see anyone outside Avalon, the small village on the island's east end. All the while, we'll keep an eye on the water.
By Nancy Bouchard

TURN-BY-TURN FROM TWO HARBORS

1) Catalina has two main land masses; Two Harbors is on the isthmus in between them. Tick off the west side first: Follow the **Trans-Catalina Trail** 7.5 miles to camp on the coast,

where views stretch 30 miles to Huntington Beach.

2) Next day, knock out a 1,700-foot climb on **Old West End Road** to close the first circuit at Two Harbors at mile 14.

3) Now begin leg two: It's 13.9 miles east along a roller-coaster ridge to **Black Jack Camp**.

4) Day three, close out the route with 9.8 blessedly flat (relatively speaking) miles to **Wrigley Road** in Avalon.

5) It's .5 mile to the ferry dock—or hitch a ride on a golf cart.

CAMPSITE 1 PARSONS LANDING (MILE 7.5)

Spending the night here means a gonzo day two (20.4 miles), but it's worth it: Wash off trail grime with a dip in the bay, which is peppered with Volkswagen-size rocks for diving and bouldering. All eight sites overlook the Pacific—so you can claim with relative certainty that you'll be the last person in SoCal to see the sun set when it melts into the water. Note: For here and Black Jack, reservations are recommended, but not required (reserveamerica.com).

CAMPSITE 2 BLACK JACK CAMP (MILE 27.9)

Set up your tent at 1,600 feet, high above the Pacific. From camp (there are 11 sites), it's an easy, 1-mile hike to the summit of Mt. Orizaba, the highest point on the island at 2,125 feet.

WILDLIFE

A Hollywood filmmaker brought bison to Catalina Island in 1924; you can spy the herd inside the gates near Little Harbor (mile 20). Scan for bald eagles floating on updrafts or perching on rocky outcrops. Look for house-cat-size foxes prowling in the scrubs.

EASIER MILEAGE

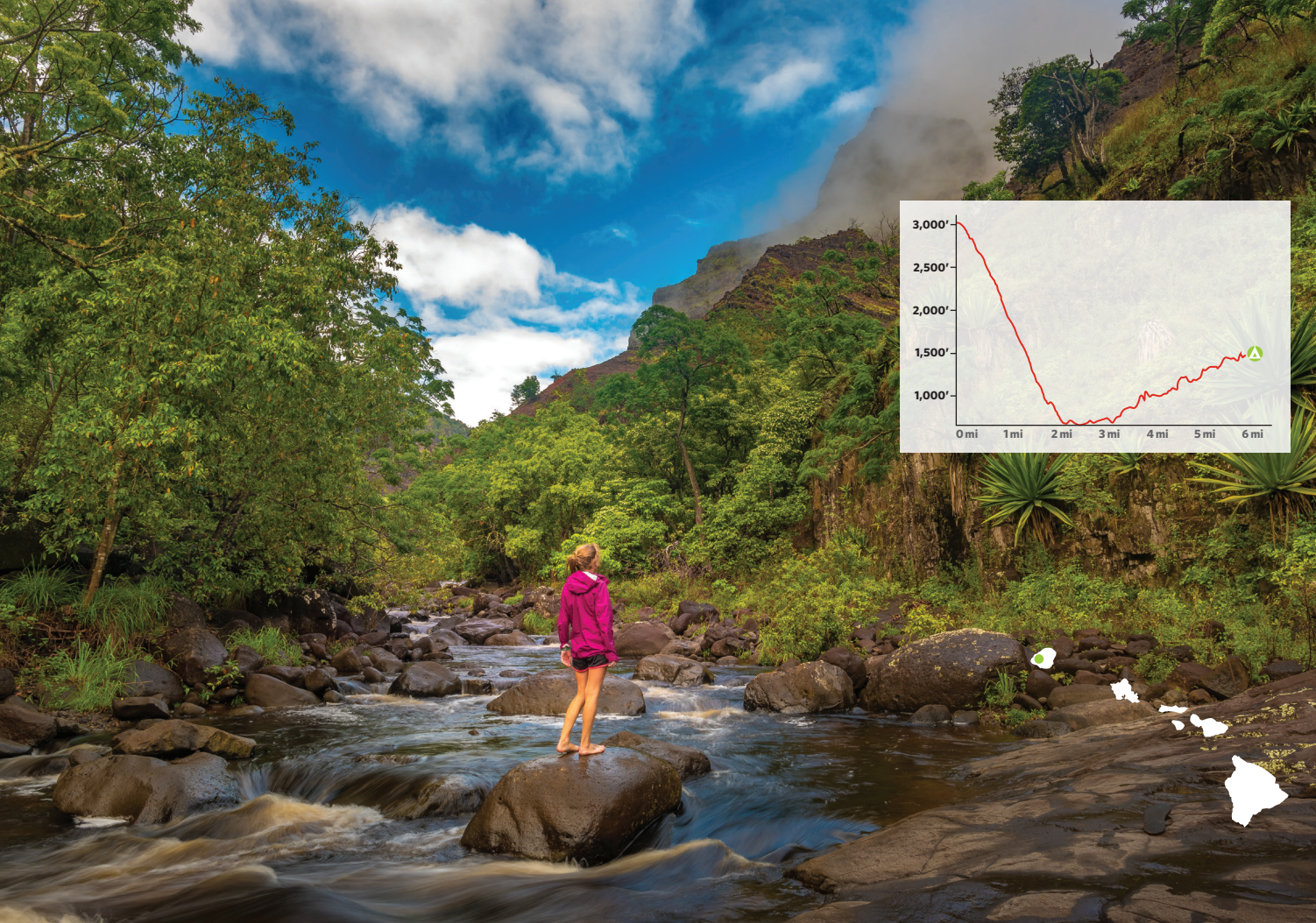
Even out the daily distances by pushing past Parsons to overnight at Two Harbors for a 14-mile day one and 13.9-mile day two (rather than 7.5- and 20.4-mile days). Bear in mind that it's frontcountry, with shuttle drop-offs, showers, a convenience store, and a restaurant. Or turn this trip into a three-nighter with nights at both camps.

DO IT STARTING TRAILHEAD 33.4414, -118.4981; take the Catalina Express from San Pedro (starting at \$74 round-trip). **ENDING TRAILHEAD** 33.3434, -118.3253; take the Cyclone ferry back to the Two Harbors terminal (\$15), then catch your return ferry. **SEASON** Year-round **PERMIT** Required (free); obtain online. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapTrans-CatalinaTrail (\$15) **CONTACT** catalinaconservancy.org

Distance 38.2 miles (point to point)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



PARADISE FOUND

WAIMEA CANYON STATE PARK, HAWAII

TWO RIBBONS OF WATER, including one taller than 30 feet, fill the pool I'm floating in. I lean back on my sleeping pad to take in the panorama: the waterfalls, the river coursing down the valley, the foothills full of wild guava, avocado, and mango. The brick-red walls of Waimea Canyon rise above it all like the Colosseum. Waimea is one of the most-visited places on Kauai, popular for its scenic overlooks, helicopter tours, and infrastructure. But all that stuff is confined to the rim. Here, below the walls, it feels like—and is—one of the least explored places on Kauai. The 6-mile route to get here is tough and barely marked, but that's how it should be. It's not the Hawaii you hear about, but it's exactly the Hawaii I've been looking for. *By Will McGough*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE KUKUI TRAILHEAD

- 1) Pick up the **Kukui Trail** and take it 2.2 miles into the canyon until it dead-ends at the Waimea River.
- 2) Turn north (hiker's left) onto the **Koai'e Canyon Trail** and take it 1.1 splashy miles along the red-hued Waimea River to its confluence with the Koai'e Stream, beneath the dome of 1,485-foot Po'okaeha.
- 3) At the fourth river crossing, don't ford; instead, veer northeast, following the Koai'e Stream upriver to stay on the Koai'e Canyon Trail (this turn is poorly marked) 2.7 miles to **Lonomea Camp**.
- 4) Retrace your steps.

CAMPSITE LONOMEA (MILE 6)

Set up your tent in an established site beside the Koai'e Stream (pictured). The river changes based on the season, but expect to find between one and four swimmable pools near camp and waterfalls between 5 and 30 feet pouring down the ravine. In rain, snag the covered shelter in the wooded area adjacent to the river—but it isn't as pretty. Reserve online.

GEOLOGY

Called the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific," Waimea Canyon is 3,600 feet deep at its lowest, up to a mile wide, and close to 14 miles

long. Its name means "reddish water," derived from the erosion of exposed basalt, which weathers from its original black to brick red. Runoff from Mt. Wai'ale'ale, one of the rainiest spots on Earth, flows down the Waimea River, turning it red.

GEAR TIPS

Wear sturdy sandals (such as Chacos or Tevas) for the hike in if you can—river crossings and swimming opportunities abound. If you prefer traditional boots for the rocky trails, bring sandals or water shoes for fording. Pack an inflatable pad (or a cheap inner tube) for floating in the pools at Lonomea.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 22.0515, -159.6601; 32 miles west of Lihue on State Hwy 550/Waimea Canyon Dr. **SEASON** Year-round, but beware of flash flooding in the rainy season (usually November to March). **PERMIT** Required (\$18/night for nonresidents); reserve at bit.do/lonomea-permits. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapWaimeaCanyon (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/waimea-canyon-sp

Distance 12 miles (out and back)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



The views start early on the Boulder Canyon Trail.

SECRET SILENCE

SUPERSTITION WILDERNESS, ARIZONA

WE'RE ALONE, but our solitude has been hard won. This morning, we set off to thru-hike the range, starting on a well-marked trail that attracts Arizonans like hummingbirds to a prickly pear. The Superstitions' wonders—Weaver's Needle, Battleship Mountain, Geronimo Head—lined the way, ushering us into La Barge Canyon. But there, we and the trail went our separate ways, and our long ascent through one of the least-visited stretches of this wilderness began. Now, our shins are bloodied, our fingers ache, and our nerves are a little frayed. But as we sit beneath a giant sycamore, dusk paints the canyon walls lavender. It's silent: We're alone in the Superstitions. Eventually, we'll reconnect with the main drag and continue to Charlebois Spring, a place for people who like their hikes a little less painful. We'll see other folks, and they'll give us funny looks when we emerge from La Barge battered and bruised, but for now we're alone. Completely, blessedly alone. *By Max Wilson*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE CANYON LAKE TRAILHEAD

- 1) Take the **Boulder Canyon Trail** 3.3 miles south to where it doglegs west, away from La Barge Canyon. (Note: There's no sign here, but it's near 33.5071, -111.4007.)
- 2) It's simple: Stay in La Barge Canyon. Follow the bottom roughly 3.2 miles southeast, boulder-hopping, scrambling, and wading your way upcanyon until you meet the **Cavalry Trail** (near 33.4794, -111.3760). It's easy to miss; map and compass (and nav skills) required, GPS encouraged.
- 3) Follow the Cavalry Trail 1.7 miles south to a T-junction.
- 4) Veer east onto the **Dutchman Trail** and proceed to an unsigned (but obvious) intersection for Charlebois Spring at mile 9.5.
- 5) Head .2 mile north to reach the tree-framed camp.
- 6) Retrace your steps to the junction and continue 3.4 miles on the Dutchman Trail to a Y-junction.
- 7) Split west onto the **Bluff Springs Trail**, taking it 3.4 miles to the Peralta trailhead.

CAMPSITE CHARLEBOIS SPRING (MILE 9.7)

This oasis is a longtime favorite of Arizona backpackers. Fed by a deep and powerful spring, Charlebois is the only water source for miles in any direction—making it a stopover point for most overnights. Luckily, it's a looker, with riparian trees sheltering level campsites. If you arrive early enough, snag one of the spots near the water. Otherwise fill

up your bottles and pick one of the sites along the Dutchman Trail.

FOLIAGE

Arizona isn't known for its fall color, but hikes like this will make you think it should be. Time it right and La Barge Canyon's cottonwoods and sycamores should greet you with a golden ceiling of leaves. Peak color varies, so check bit.do/foliage-prediction-map to know for sure.

CACTUS DEFENSE

It's good practice in Arizona—especially if you're venturing off-trail—to pack either a fine-tooth comb or rubber cement. Use the former to gently scrape spines out. With the latter, smear a glob on the spines, let it dry, then peel it off.

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 33.3972, -111.3478; 9 miles northeast of Gold Canyon on Peralta Rd. **TRAILHEAD** 33.5341, -111.4228; an hour-long drive north of the shuttle car on AZ 88/N Apache Trail **SEASON** November to March **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapLaBarge-Canyon (\$15) **CONTACT** www.fs.usda.gov/tonto

Distance 16.7 miles

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Sea lions off the coast of Santa Barbara Island

PARADISE FOUND

SANTA BARBARA ISLAND, CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

THE WIND IS blowing 40 mph across the rocky seafloor as I trek to my camp, which overlooks the Pacific. But even the whistling gusts can't drown out the barks and bellows of the hundreds of California sea lions sunbathing on the beach below. Santa Barbara may be the smallest of the Channel Islands at 1 square mile, but that just means you can see it all in one go. The isle's 5.9-mile loop crosses grassy meadows smeared with yellow tickseed flowers, skirts jagged bluffs abutting the water, and, of course, offers near-constant views of the glittering sea. Add the seldom-visited campsites and the raucous wildlife, and the island is proof that, as they say, size doesn't matter. *By Chuck Graham*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM LANDING COVE

- 1) Climb .2 mile to the **Landing Cove Campground**. Drop off your overnight gear and load a daypack.
- 2) Hike north on the **Arch Point Loop**, passing spurs to Arch Point (.7), Elephant Seal Cove (2.2), and Webster Point (2.3) to a junction near mile 3.4.
- 3) Pick up the **Signal Peak Loop**, heading 2.3 miles south over the mountain and past the sea lion rookery back to camp.
- 4) Retrace your steps to the landing.

CAMPSITE LANDING COVE (MILE .2)

There's one designated campground on the island with 10 sites (reservation required), but it's a good one: Every spot offers views over the east side of Santa Barbara. There are no trees (anywhere on the island, actually), so batten down the hatches, and bring earplugs if you need to drown out the sea lions' chorus or burrowing owls' coos. Note: There's no fresh water on Santa Barbara; pack your own.

WILDLIFE

Sea lions bark right near camp, brown boobies and black-vented shearwaters soar overhead, and endemic island night lizards and

deer mice skitter across the terrain. If you're kayaking or snorkeling, see northern elephant seals bobbing in the surf and black oystercatchers and pelagic cormorants near the surface.

GETTING THERE

A storm washed out the pier in 2016. It hasn't been replaced yet, but the NPS built a trail to a flat, rocky slab nearby that private boaters and kayakers can access. (It's a 40 miles from Long Beach and just 24 from Catalina Island.) That's the only way to get to Santa Barbara currently, but the ferry service Island Packers plans on skiffing visitors to shore as soon as this spring. Head to islandpackers.com for updates.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 33.4815, -119.0299; 40 miles west of the coast **SEASON** Year-round **PERMIT** Required (\$15/day); obtain at recreation.gov. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapSBI (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/chis

Distance 5.9 miles (loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



ALL FOR ONE SANTA FE NATIONAL FOREST, NEW MEXICO

IT'S A WHILE before I realize I'm no longer on the user path through Calaveras Canyon. I've accidentally wandered onto a game trail, probably forged by the state's largest herd of Rocky Mountain elk. The new path carried me from volcanic rock formations on the canyon bottom to a broad shelf overlooking a forest of Douglas fir. It's day two on my trip through the Jemez Mountains, where a lack of official trails means hikers must piece together overgrown, abandoned Forest Service roads and social paths through sandstone chasms. My circuit relies on both as it carries me past subalpine meadows and into a classic Southwest canyon network that was formed by lava flows 40,000 years ago. In the Jemez

Mountains, you'll find everything but crowds." *By Patrice La Vigne*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE SEVEN SPRINGS PICNIC AREA

- 1)** For a shorter first day, do the loop counterclockwise, following dirt doubletrack **FR 314** 4.8 miles east along Rio Cebolla to a meadow.
- 2)** Veer onto abandoned **FR 257** and trek 2.8 miles to the mouth of **Calaveras Canyon** at mile 7.6.
- 3)** Veer south into the football field-wide gash on an easy-to-find social path and hike 3.8 miles past tuff formations, natural arches, and balanced rocks to dirt **NM 126**, the only road on this trip where you *might* encounter a car (doubtful).
- 4)** Follow the dirt road 1.2 miles south to rejoin **FR 314**.
- 5)** Head east past the fish hatchery to close the loop at mile 14.3.

CAMPSITE RIO CEBOLLA (MILE 4.8)

Take your pick between aspens and ponderosas: Groves of each flank the waterside meadow here. (Scan for the clearing just past

an abandoned cabin.) Rio Cebolla is the last reliable water source on the trip, so be sure to top off for day two's trip through Calaveras Canyon. All sites are first-come, first-serve.

WILDLIFE

The unusual ecosystem where high desert meets subalpine zone in the Jemez Mountains is home to everything from black bears and Rocky Mountain elk (pictured) to bobcats and prairie dogs. Pack binocs to spy owls and raptors, or cast for New Mexico's state fish—the Rio Grande cutthroat trout—in Rio Cebolla (catch and release).

DO IT TRAILHEAD 35.9359, -106.6833; 40 miles west of Los Alamos on **FR 314** (high-clearance vehicle required) **SEASON** April to November **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapCalaverasCanyon (\$15) **CONTACT** www.fs.usda.gov/santafe

Distance 14.3 miles (loop)
Time 2 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



Pass through this section of Aravaipa Canyon near mile 3.

WALK ON WATER

ARAVAIPA CANYON WILDERNESS, ARIZONA

“DON’T TELL ANYONE about this place.” This is my hiking partner’s entreaty after two days in Aravaipa Canyon. With its thousand-foot-tall walls, the canyon offers a full-immersion lesson in what a little water can accomplish if given a lot of time. Under the shade of giant

sycamores, we’ve spent a weekend sloshing through the knee-deep water, scrambling up side canyons, and catching glimpses of bighorn sheep balancing on rock ledges between the saguaro cactuses and dense streamside vegetation. Aside from the sheep—and raccoon-like coatis that keep trying to steal our food—we’ve had this rock cathedral completely to ourselves. “Don’t tell anyone about this place,” he repeats. Sorry, old friend, but places this special deserve to be shared. *By Max Wilson*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE WEST TRAILHEAD

- 1) Dip into **Aravaipa Canyon** and pick your way roughly 5 miles up the streambed to **Horse Camp**.
- 2) Continue approximately 3.5 miles along the canyon floor, following faint user trails and wading through ankle- and knee-deep water, to **Deer Creek Canyon**. (Despite being marked “Hell’s Hole Canyon” on some topos, Deer Creek Canyon is anything but: It’s quiet, narrow, and nontechnical.)
- 3) Explore the straightforward canyon as long and far as you like. (The author turned around at the spring about 2 miles in, but it goes farther.)
- 4) Retrace your steps back to the West trailhead.

CAMPSITE HORSE CAMP (MILE 5)

Nestled in a grove of sycamores, a handful of sandy platforms rise above the water where Aravaipa and Horse Camp Canyons intersect. Make a basecamp at the one where several mesquite trees offer privacy from the “trail.” From your backcountry digs, explore Horse Camp Canyon, where some easy scrambling lands you at the foot of a 50-foot-tall pour-off.

WILDLIFE

Black bears, bighorn sheep, and both of Arizona’s deer species call Aravaipa home, but perhaps the coolest (read: cutest) resident is the white-nosed coati. Though rare in the U.S., this relative of the raccoon hangs out in large groups throughout the canyon. They look like miniature black bear cubs with long, monkey-like tails. (Store your food in critter-proof sacks; coatis are harmless, but mischievous.)

OPTIONS

This route offers the easiest logistics, but if you have a second vehicle (and don’t mind up to four hours of additional drive time), leave a shuttle at the East trailhead (32.898658, -110.418427). On day two, trek 7.4 miles through Aravaipa from Horse Camp to your car to make it a 12.4-miler with no backtracking.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 32.897602, -110.569803; 24 miles southeast of Hayden on E. Aravaipa Rd. **SEASON** Year-round; winter brings solitude, but pack for freezing nighttime temps and frigid river crossings. (Consider neoprene socks or even rubber boots.) **PERMIT** Required (\$10 + \$5/person per day); obtain from recreation.gov. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapAravaipaCanyon (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/az-blm

Distance 17+ miles (out and back)
Time 3 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



Kayakers float through Black Canyon, just north of the takeout at Willow Beach.

SPA DAYS

LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, NEVADA/ARIZONA

I'M ONLY 30 MILES from the neon lights of Sin City, but this strip is better. Instead of skyscrapers, sienna sandstone walls tower 800 feet overhead, contrasting with the blues and greens of the Colorado River. We put in below Hoover Dam and navigate flatwater the entire 11.6 miles through Black Canyon in a wooden canoe. The easy going means we can load our boat with luxuries like homemade lasagna and stop often, enjoying watermelon and mixed drinks on rocky beaches. We check out caves and soak in hidden hot springs and cold pools before spending the night on a sandy shore beneath a three-tiered, 105°F soaker. The light from the low-hanging sun plays off the cathedral's rock walls, creating yet another new shade of color on our trip: this time, a deep honey. It's not the Bellagio, but it's definitely five stars. *By Kathy Kyle*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM HOOVER DAM

- 1) After securing access to the restricted area below the dam (see Do It for details), launch from the west (Nevada) bank of the **Colorado River** near the Bureau of Reclamation office and head 3.8 miles downstream.
- 2) Pull ashore on the Arizona side (east) just past the large mile marker 60 to make camp slightly upriver from **Arizona Hot Springs**.
- 3) Put in and continue 8 miles down the Colorado to the marina at Willow Beach on the Arizona side to find your car or pick up your shuttle.

CAMPSITE ARIZONA HOT SPRINGS (MILE 3.8)

Most people who do this trip will camp just after the mild Ringbolt Rapid, where there's a privy; instead, secure solitude by pulling ashore on the Arizona side just before. There's a quiet beach (make camp above the high-water line) near an unnamed, reliable stream. From here, it's about .1 mile downriver to the slot canyon, where 130°F water collects and cools in three separate pools called Arizona Hot Springs. (Sites are free; first-come, first-serve.)

NATURAL SAUNA

Just after launching from Hoover Dam, reward yourself with a celebratory soak in 50-foot-long Sauna Cave, a rock tunnel filled with warm water. Find it .2 mile below the

put-in on the Nevada side. (Pull ashore onto a gravel spit.)

SIDE TRIPS

On day one, budget time for Nevada Hot Spring (west side), Palm Tree Hot Spring (east), and Boy Scout Canyon Hot Spring (west), in that order. Day two brings easy-access caves, including one containing arches and falls near mile marker 59 on the Nevada side. (Scan for desert bighorn sheep on rocky ledges.)

DO IT SHUTTLE CAR 35.869925, -114.659363; 25 miles southeast of Boulder City, NV, on Willow Beach Rd. **TRAILHEAD** 36.010962, -114.743206; 36 minutes north of Willow Beach off NV 172 **SEASON** September to May **PERMIT** Required to overnight in Black Canyon (\$22); obtain from National Park Service. To gain access to the Hoover Dam launch (and a shuttle), you must use a private vendor (starting at \$180). Find a list of them at bit.do/black-canyon-water-trail-vendors. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapBlackCanyon (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/lake

Distance 11.8 miles (point to point)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Mt. Alice looms above the twin Lion Lakes.

LONELY AT THE TOP

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO

THE TRAIL FADES into the grass at the northern edge of Upper Lion Lake. Ahead, beyond the great sloping apron of tundra, beams the wide and craggy face of Mt. Alice. The granite monolith soars into the sky, blocking a symmetrical section of the horizon. Imposing is an understatement. It's the centerpiece of our 17.6-mile overnight and looks the part. My hiking partner and I climb a ridge to its shoulder as the mountain seems to grow before us. From the saddle, the route is less a path than a series of terraces with class 3 moves between. Hours later, we top out on the craggy peak. To the east, the iconic 14,259-foot summit block of Longs Peak hangs in the sky. It's striking—but we choose to climb in solitude. *By Casey Lyons*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE WILD BASIN TRAILHEAD

1) Set out west on the **Wild Basin Trail**, paralleling the North St. Vrain Creek upstream, to a Y-junction near mile 1.5.

2) Veer onto the **Thunder Lake Trail** (hiker's right) and continue ascending the valley to a

junction at mile 4.1. Set up a basecamp here, at the start and finish of the loop portion of the lollipop.

3) With only the essentials, bag 13,310-foot Mt. Alice on a challenging, 9.4-mile day trip: Start early and split immediately right onto the **Lion Lake Trail**. (Doing the circuit counterclockwise puts the most difficult scrambling on the uphill.) Take the path to its terminus at its namesake, near mile 6.7.

4) Head off-trail, alternating between faint user paths and tundra benches, to gain the ridge between Chiefs Head Peak and Mt. Alice near 12,470 feet of elevation (roughly 40.248221, -105.660103).

5) Follow the ridge south, maneuvering across mostly class 3 rock (with a few particularly airy moves) to the summit at mile 8.9.

6) Head south off Alice, tiptoeing down steep tundra and glissading down 45-degree Boulder-Grand Pass to the **Thunder Lake Trail**.

7) Follow the singletrack 3.3 miles east and south past Lake of Many Winds and Thunder Lake to the original junction from step 3.

8) Veer back into camp to gather your stuff (if leaving) and follow your original route to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE NORTH ST. VRAIN (MILE 4.1)

Several campsites line the route, but none is more convenient than North St. Vrain (#49) at the junction of the loop. There are two spots (reservation required). Bonus: The

woods are filled with truck-size boulders for scrambling practice.

WATERFALLS

It adds traffic, but this .5-mile detour passes a series of gentle waterfalls, adding scenery to an otherwise pedestrian section of trail. At mile 1.5 (step 2 on this itinerary), stay on the Wild Basin Trail, which twists past a number of cascades off Ouzel Creek, including a 40-footer. The Wild Basin Trail then intersects the Thunder Lake Trail again near mile 2.8 of this route.

GLISSADE

The snowfield on the south side of Mt. Alice (Boulder-Grand Pass) offers hikers two options: Purposefully butt-slide down, or end up that way by circumstance and gravity. Brush up on your glissading at backpacker.com/glissade, then let it rip.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 40.207940, -105.566536; 5 miles west of Allenspark off CO 115 **SEASON** July through October; the aspens turn in late September. **PERMIT** Required (\$26) **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMtAlice (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/romo

Distance 17.6 miles (lollipop-loop)
Time 2 or 3 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



Parallel the East Fork of the Little Colorado for the first half of the journey.

CHANGE OF PACE

MT. BALDY WILDERNESS, ARIZONA

A FEW HOURS into the trip, my boots start punching through snow. Hard to believe it was 90°F when I left Phoenix this spring morning. But if there's novelty underfoot, there's beauty ahead: The more I climb, the better my view of the verdant high country of the Colorado Plateau, its folds and mounds glowing in the afternoon light and slowly fading into the Blue Range. I'm on a 16-mile loop across the wooded slopes of Arizona's second-highest peak, 11,421-foot Mt. Baldy, exploring the headwaters of the Little Colorado River. I'll follow it as it gains speed and volume, flowing northwest to where it will join the Colorado River and course through the Grand Canyon. Where I am, the Little Colorado hasn't yet bored

through the redrock, but here, amid the pines and through the snow, it's at the heart of Arizona. *By Quinn Harper*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE EAST MT. BALDY TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head 6 miles west and south on the **East Baldy Trail #95** along the East Fork of the Little Colorado.
- 2) Continue 6.5 miles on the **West Baldy Trail #94**, which drops to the headwaters of the **West Fork of the Little Colorado**.
- 3) Veer south (hiker's right) onto the **Baldy Connector Trail #96**.
- 4) Hike 3.5 miles back to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE LITTLE COLORADO RIVER (MILE 10.5)

Pick an established site amid the ponderosas. Water access is a breeze, and we doubt you have to share with anyone, except maybe mule deer, coyotes, or bobcats.

CRASH SITE

Near mile 5, enter a clearing in the conifers caused by a 1943 plane crash. Look to the

uphill side of the trail to see pieces and insignia of Air Force AT-11.

WILDLIFE

The Mexican gray wolf was reintroduced to the region in 1998, and a small population has established itself. Elk and beaver frequent the meadows, and the streams are bubbling with trout.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 33.931735, -109.489937; 45 miles southeast of Show Low off AZ 273

RED TAPE The summit of Mt. Baldy is on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and off-limits. The boundary is marked by wooden posts. **SEASON** Mid-May to mid-October
PERMIT None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMtBaldyLoop **CONTACT** fs.usda.gov/asnf **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/mt-baldy-loop

Distance 16 miles (loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

BIGFOOT TRAIL, MARBLE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS, CALIFORNIA

“WE’LL KNOW IT when we see it,” my husband tells me after I stop to check the map for the third time. Trail beta for the next water source is particularly enigmatic: *The spring is in the middle of a field just past the three-forked tree.* I scrutinize the trees—sugar pines, Pacific yews, mountain hemlocks—scattered on the dry ridge, but nothing looks quite right. That seems on-theme for a 360-mile trail named for an elusive beast. Finally, we see it: not Sasquatch, but a massive Shasta fir, with three branches locked in a centuries-old race to reach the sky. It shades a site that’s large enough for a dozen tents, but my husband and I have it to ourselves. We drop our packs as the sun casts a long shadow over the peaks to the south, and find the elusive spring in a field of golden grass. On this trail, seeing is believing. *By Laura Lancaster*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE COLD SPRING TRAILHEAD

- 1) Take the **Bigfoot Trail** 2.8 miles south, following signs for the **Pacific Crest Trail (PCT)**.
- 2) Stay left to follow an unmarked path to **Buckhorn Spring**.
- 3) Back on the main path, continue 10.2 miles south to the **Marble Gap Trail**.
- 4) Turn left and go .4 mile to the old cabin.
- 5) Retrace your steps to your car.

CAMPSITE 1 BUCKHORN SPRING (MILE 2.8)

Take a nero (see right) and spend your first night under the big Shasta fir near Buckhorn Spring. The proximity to water is almost as luxurious as the view of the 9,000-foot Klamath Mountains, which stretch into the western horizon.

CAMPSITE 2 MARBLE VALLEY CABIN (MILE 13.4)

This ranger cabin itself is reserved for Forest Service use, but it’s ideally located near a reliable creek and multiple first-come, first-serve campsites with expansive views of bright-white Marble Mountain and Black Marble Mountain.

ORIGIN STORY

The 360-mile Bigfoot Trail, a mishmash of already-established trails and Forest Service roads, spans six wildernesses as it meanders from the Yolla Bolly to Redwood National Park on the Pacific coast. *Conifer Country* author Michael Kauffmann headed its creation in 2009 to establish a route through the most diverse concentration of conifers on the

planet. The Bigfoot Trail passes 32 types of the trees, including rare Siskiyou cypresses and weeping spruces.

GEOLOGY

Buttressed by the granitic Trinity Alps to the south and the Cascades’ dormant volcanoes to the north, the white domes of the Marble Mountains look a little out of place. And they are: These limestone peaks are the remnants of a huge coral reef that dates back to the Triassic era.

SASQUATCH SIGHTINGS

The Bigfoot Trail may have been *created* to show off the region’s conifers, but it was *named* for an alleged big, hairy local. More than 50 Sasquatch sightings have been reported in the area. We won’t opine on the legend, but it seems like as good a method as any to drum up local tourism.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 41.696680, -123.246091; 20 miles southeast of Happy Camp on Elk Creek Rd. **SEASON** June through October **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapBigfootTrailsection (\$15) **CONTACT** bfta.bigfoottrail.org **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/bigfoottrailsection

Distance 26.8 miles (out and back)
Time 3 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



Soak with a view: See Sheep Mountain downcanyon from Rainbow Hot Springs.

SOAK IN SOLITUDE

WEMINUICHE WILDERNESS, COLORADO

THE WALK THROUGH pine forests and stands of gold aspen was peaceful. We gained just a thousand feet of elevation over 5 miles alongside the charged San Juan River, where we parted swaths of skunk cabbage and ferns beneath the pink dome of 13,168-foot Sheep Mountain. It's dark by the time we reach camp. The beam from my headlamp reveals my breath smoke—and a cloud of steam twisting above the embankment. It's our prize: Rainbow Hot Springs, nature's hot tub. From its warm waters, we'll be able to see downcanyon to Sheep Mountain as the rising moon sets it alight. We should make camp or start dinner, but we have other priorities. *By Kirsten Dobroth*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE WEST FORK TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head .4 mile north on the dirt road to a junction.
- 2) Turn east onto the **West Fork Trail** (also called the Rainbow Trail) and parallel the San Juan River 4.5 miles upcanyon.
- 3) Veer west onto the social path and take it .1 mile to **Rainbow Hot Springs**.
- 4) Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE RAINBOW HOT SPRINGS (MILE 5)

Set up at one of the 10 or so first-come, first-serve sites on the cliff overlooking the springs. It's an easy scramble down to the water.

SOLITUDE

A sight for sore eyes (and legs): Rainbow Hot Springs owes its relative quiet to remoteness, sure, but that's a small price to pay for getting it to yourself. Expect to share in the high season (summer), but come November, it's private.

KEEP GOING

The West Fork Trail intercepts the

Continental Divide—and the CDT—6 miles north of Rainbow Hot Springs. From there, fuse together any number of trails (Pine River and Sawtooth are good bets). Loop option: Take the CDT east about 7 miles and link up with the Beaver Creek Trail, which meanders 6 miles south before converging with the West Fork Trail (call before you go; it may be closed for mudslides). All told: a 28-miler that samples the Weminuche's best high passes.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 37.457627, -106.919307; 17 miles north of Pagosa Springs on W Fork Rd.

RED TAPE Check before you go: The beetle kill can make travel dangerous. **SEASON** June to November; fall is best for solitude. **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapRainbowHotSprings (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/weminuche-wild **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/rainbowhotsprings

Distance 10 miles (out and back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



The Green River cuts through the Uintas at Whirlpool Canyon, the turnaround point of this hike.



Fremont rock art at Dinosaur National Monument

QUICK-AND-EASY CANYON GETAWAY

DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT, UTAH

A MILE INTO this overnight, I'm checking out thousand-year-old petroglyphs. Less than 2 miles in, I'm soaking in a secluded, sandstone-rimmed pool. Later, I will stroll back to my creekside camp—just a mile and a half from the trailhead, mind you—and

have to decide if I want to make the 1.5-mile-long trek to the Green River for fishing and floating. Not bad for a Friday after work. *By Rose Conry*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM JONES HOLE FISH HATCHERY

- 1) Pick up the **Jones Hole Trail** and hike 1.5 miles to **Ely Creek**.
- 2) Continue 1.5 miles south to the Green River in Whirlpool Canyon.
- 3) Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE ELY CREEK (MILE 1.5)

Nab this spot for its central location: The best swimming hole is .4 mile west and the Green River is 1.5 miles south. Set up your tent (there is room for two) on the far side of the bridge over Ely Creek. Reserve the (free) site ahead of time or follow the park's dispersed camping rules (bit.do/dinosaur-camping).

SWIMMING HOLE

Sure, you can cool down in Jones Hole Creek at any point on the hike, but break from the main trail at mile 1.5 to find a secluded pool inside a side canyon. Just before you cross Ely Creek, veer .4 mile west (on a trail) to a 12-foot waterfall that spills into the swimming hole in Ely Creek.

ROCK ART

See thousand-year-old Fremont artwork just past the first bridge (mile 1.2) under the rock overhang. See well-preserved pictographs of humans, bighorn sheep, and repeating triangles, as well as a petroglyph of an intricate sun.

GONE FISHIN'

Find brown and rainbow trout in Jones Hole Creek and, if you make it down to Whirlpool Canyon, you can cast a line for foot-long roundtail chub (catch-and-release only).

DO IT TRAILHEAD 40.584243, -109.054949; 47 miles northeast of the Quarry Visitor Center on Jones Hole Rd. **SEASON** Year-round, but winter brings freezing temps. Visit in late spring for daytime temps in the 70s and creekside flora. **PERMITS** Required (free) for backcountry camping **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapJonesHoleCreek (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/dino **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/jonesholecreek

Distance 6 miles

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



The Aqua Peak massif is actually comprised of three summits: Aqua proper, Spectre, and Dyadic (pictured). Head a mile southwest from Inner Basin Pass to reach them.

WINTER REFUGE

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

I NEED TO SCRAMBLE on all fours to reach the top of the crumbly ridge. When I look up to survey my progress, I see canyons splitting the desert in every direction. The boulder-strewn wash I followed to get here melts into the desert floor, which is dotted with Joshua trees and yellow wildflowers. I feel like a pioneer in the Wild West—not a tourist midway through a 10.4-mile overnight in a national park. There are no trails in the northeast corner of Joshua Tree National Park, so this could actually be the first time someone has climbed this ridge. But it won't be the last. *By Emelie Frojen*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM MILEPOST 73 ON TWENTYNINE PALMS HIGHWAY (CA 62)

1) Head 3.6 miles south toward the Coxcomb Mountains in a distinct, unnamed wash to

where it merges with another (much larger) wash at the base of the mountains.

- 2)** Continue southeast into the canyon to the end of the wash near mile 4.4.
- 3)** Scramble .8 mile to the top of Inner Basin Pass.
- 4)** Retrace your steps.

CAMPSITE END OF THE WASH (MILE 4.4)

There are no designated sites, but we like the plateau at the head of the canyon because it offers a see-forever view down the wash and easy access to Inner Basin Pass. Pack in all water (a gallon per person per day in mild, winter conditions). If weather allows, leave the tent at home and sleep under Joshua Tree's famed starry sky.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

From your basecamp, explore the Coxcomb Mountains. There are no trails, so pick a side canyon, wash, or drainage and follow it to its end (or as far as your legs will let you). One peakbagging option: From Inner Basin Pass, head a mile southwest to the unofficially named 4,416-foot Aqua Peak massif (pictured above).

TORTOISES

Desert lavender wildflowers (blooming at lower elevations and in washes as early as late January), cactus pads, and Joshua Tree yucca (fruiting in early spring) double as tortoise food. Identify the plants, then scan nearby for the high-domed, brown shells of desert tortoises (they're most active January through May). Note: Park rangers are trying to track the tortoise population (they're threatened), so if you spot one, stop at the visitor center on your way out and let them know where.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 34.095200, -115.420583; 40 miles east of the Twentynine Palms Visitor Center off CA 62 **SEASON** September through May; expect lows the 30s in midwinter. **PERMIT** Required for camping (free) **CUSTOM MAP** bit.ly/BPmapInnerBasinPass **CONTACT** nps.gov/jotr **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/InnerBasinPass

Distance 10.4 miles (out and back)

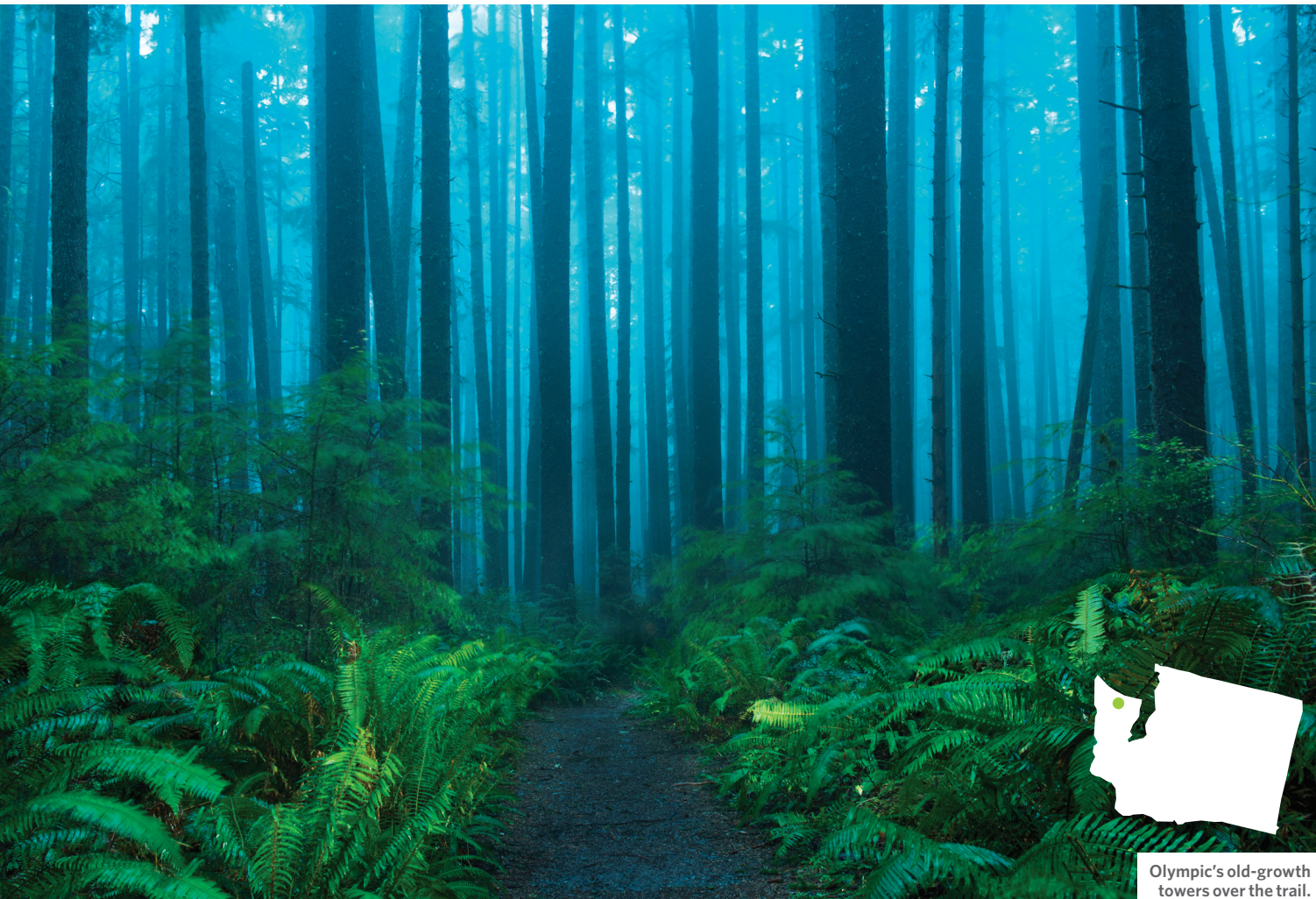
Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



WEEKENDS

NORTHWEST



Olympic's old-growth towers over the trail.

RIVER RUN

OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK, WASHINGTON

AT MILE 20, disorientation sets in. We're buried in a canopy of lichen-draped Douglas firs that are so dense, not even a splinter of sunlight filters through. A day after we left behind the usual crowds of Olympic National Park, we're in the company of 700-year-old giants standing sentry over the otherworldly beauty of the Elwha River—upstream minerals keep the stream bright blue even on stormy days. We laugh at the good luck of having this place to ourselves, breaking the silence. But our laughter dies in our throats at the next bend: 30 feet down the trail a black bear looks just as startled as we are. We start to backtrack, and the bear goes back to its early-season berry foraging. It would rather be alone, and how can we blame it? *By Laura Lancaster*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE WHISKEY BEND TRAILHEAD

- 1) Pick up the **Elwha River Trail/Pacific Northwest Trail** and take it 16.1 miles south through a forest of Douglas firs as it dances above its aquamarine namesake the whole way to the **Hayes River Guard Station**.
- 2) Next day, dayhike 6.5 miles south on the main trail, following the Elwha River upstream to the first crossing.
- 3) Retrace your steps back to camp and, next day, the trailhead.

CAMPSITE HAYES RIVER (MILE 16.1)

Skip the crowds at Elkhorn and make a base-camp at this riverine, first-come, first-serve site. Hike past the ranger cabin and the bear hang to find the sites between the trees. Cross the logs running perpendicular to a marshy flat and crest a short hill to find the best (read: most private) camp on the edge of the Elwha River.

RETURN OF THE SALMON

For nearly a century, salmon from the Pacific would start the journey each fall to reach their spawning ground—before getting thwarted

at the Elwha and Glines Canyon Dams. In 2012 and 2014, respectively, each was removed, and the salmon began to make the climb again. To date, they've made it 10 miles up along the Elwha River Trail—near the Elkhorn Guard Station.

GOBLINS GATE

The dams are gone, but the nature-made Goblins Gate, one of the Elwha's biggest challenges for the salmon, remains. Here, near mile 1.2 on this hike, steep canyon walls pinch in on both sides of the river to 20 feet wide. (Early visitors thought that this section of the river resembled medieval gates.)

DO IT TRAILHEAD 47.9678, -123.5824; 17 miles south of Port Angeles on Whiskey Bend Rd. **SEASON** May to September **PERMIT** Required (\$6/person); obtain at an information center. **CONTACT** nps.gov/olym

Distance 45.2 miles (out and back)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



CASCADIAN KINGDOM

NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK, WASHINGTON

PIKAS ARE THE *roosters of the alpine zone.* I say this aloud, to no one, at daybreak as I unpeel my sleeping bag in the hazy lavender light to a chorus of squeaks. I roll my tent door back, revealing a picture that the national park brochures would be lucky to have: a crown of chalky spires that give way to a sea of green noble firs and gold larches. When the sun delivers on the pikas' pronouncement, there's nothing you can do except stop, stare, and listen. *By Dan Burwell*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE BRIDGE CREEK TRAILHEAD (IN WENATCHEE NATIONAL FOREST)

- 1) Head 1.8 miles south on the **Pacific Crest Trail** to the national park boundary.
- 2) Continue 1.5 miles to a Y-junction at Fireweed Camp.
- 3) Split east onto the **McAlester Lake Trail** and climb to 6,000-foot McAlester Pass at

mile 8.5.

- 4) Follow the **Rainbow Creek Trail** off the pass around 6,905-foot East Peak to a social trail on hiker's right (near mile 8.7).
- 5) Take the social path 1.1 miles west to a larch-framed, unnamed lake beneath Rainbow Ridge.
- 6) Retrace your steps.

CAMPSITE 1 FIREWEED CAMP (MILE 3.3)

This clearing sits at the hike's low point near 3,600 feet—roughly 2,400 feet beneath the pass. Recharge before a tough climb at one of the two sites (reservation recommended). Get water at nearby McAlester Creek.

CAMPSITE 2 UNNAMED LAKE (MILE 9.8)

This campsite might ruin all others for you: Squeeze your tent between the 2-acre tear-drop and Rainbow Ridge, facing the door south toward a 2,000-foot cliff that falls away to the Stehekin River Valley. Glacier-mantled McAlester Mountain and Crescent Peak dominate the horizon, while granite-and-ice pinnacles outrun the skyline.

ADD TWO SUMMITS

With some class 3 scrambling, bag Rainbow Ridge's twin peaks: Continue west past the lake on a clearly defined ramp to 7,237-foot

West Peak, about a mile away. From there, trace the ridge 2 miles back east to tag 6,905-foot East Peak before picking a path down the talus back to camp.

SEASON

Hiking season in North Cascades is notoriously narrow. This year's warm spring means the snowpack should melt out by August, but check with the Marblemount Wilderness Information Center before heading out; you may need an axe and crampons near McAlester Pass. The larches turn in mid- to late September, and the snow typically returns in October.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 48.5045, -120.7181; 53 miles east of Marblemount on WA 20 **SEASON** August to October **PERMITS** Required (free); obtain national park permit from the Marblemount Wilderness Information Center and self-issue a wilderness permit at the trailhead. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapRainbowRidge (\$15) **CONTACTS** www.fs.usda.gov/okawen; nps.gov/noca

Distance 19.6 miles (out and back)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Camp at Alice Lake on day two.

FULL CIRCLE SAWTOOTH WILDERNESS, IDAHO

I GET IT, I think to myself, as I lean back and take in the mountain majesty that unfolds before me. I'm sitting on a warm slab of granite, air-drying from an impromptu swim along the 19.7-mile Alice-Toxaway Loop, which has earned something of "classic" status among backpackers. The early-evening light tinges the blade of ragged teeth as blue as the icy lakes cupped between its slopes. I pinpoint the trail, which crisscrosses through those alpine passes, swinging through stands of skyscraping Douglas fir and scree slopes adorned with waterfalls. This place has everything, and, luckily, one route touches it all. *By Ryan Wichelms*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE TIN CUP HIKER TRAILHEAD

1) Follow **Trail 7041** as it switchbacks over a moraine through dense lodgepole pine to an intersection at mile 2.

2) Head 6.8 miles west (hiker's left) on **Trail 7096**, climbing the drainage of Yellow Belly

Creek past Farley Lake to a junction on the north shore of Toxaway Lake.

3) Continue on **Trail 7092** as it curls around 123-acre Toxaway Lake and ascends steep, exposed switchbacks to 9,475-foot Snowyside Pass at mile 11.5.

4) Drop off the pass on **Trail 7095**, savoring a head-on view of Twin Lakes before cruising northeast past Alice Lake to close the loop back at Pettit Lake.

CAMPSITE 1 FARLEY LAKE (MILE 5)

Make camp atop the outcroppings on Farley Lake's north shore for tent-door views of Parks Peak's 2,400-foot face. It's easy enough to pick your way down the 20-foot embankment to top off water, swim, or find a jumping point.

CAMPSITE 2 ALICE LAKE (MILE 13.7)

Follow the trail to Alice's eastern edge and set up near the lake's outlet below the face of 9,899-foot El Capitan. From here, the peak—which gets its name from its Yosemite-like appearance—rises like a shark fin above the lake. Scan for mountain goats on the cliffs, or get a closer look by scrambling up El Cap's class 3 east ridge: From camp, it's 2 miles to the summit.

GONE FISHIN'

Midway through day two, stop at Toxaway

Lake to cast a line. Though fish swim in all the pools on this route, Toxaway is famous for its foot-long brookies. From the main trail, follow any number of social paths down to the lake's north shore for the best spots to cast for the Sawtooth icons.

MAKE IT LONGER

Have an extra day? Tack on the Imogene Lake extension, which turns the trip into a 27.2-mile tour of alpine glory. At mile 6.9 on the regular Alice-Toxaway Loop, split north onto Trail 7040, passing Edith Lake to find Trail 7092, which crosses the 9,200-foot pass to Imogene Lake, 3.4 miles from the main loop. Camp on the tarn's southeast shore among a horseshoe of 10,000-footers before circling 5.6 miles back to the Alice-Toxaway Loop; Trail 7092 rejoins the circuit at Toxaway Lake.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 43.9843, -114.8719; 20 miles south of Stanley on FR 362 **SEASON** July to October **PERMIT** Required (free); self-issue at the trailhead kiosk. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapAliceToxawayLoop (\$15) **CONTACT** www.fs.usda.gov/sawtooth

Distance 19.7 miles (loop)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Snow dusts Temple Crag in November.

AIM HIGH

JOHN MUIR WILDERNESS, CALIFORNIA

IT'S OUR FIRST backpacking trip together. Might as well be the first date all over again, I think to myself as I feel the pressure build. One misstep could undermine future hiking and camping for us for years to come. What if she doesn't like my favorite spot? But I can't see that happening, not on this itinerary: We'll follow the riverside trail, splitting a valley between 12,000-foot peaks where waterfalls spill year-round, to the seven Big Pine Lakes. We'll stop at my spot: Second Lake, a turquoise pool below the pointy pinnacles of Temple Crag. There, we'll enjoy a romantic lunch of smushed PB&Js on a granite shelf that overhangs the water like a diving board. Then, before the sun sets, we'll take a hike around the five

higher lakes. I'll bust out my old-fashioned fishing pole, we'll leap into the frigid water, and we'll gaze at the granite edifices in every direction. In the morning, sunrise will light up the Palisades and we'll walk back more connected—to the landscape and each other—than ever. *By RJ Thieneman*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE BIG PINE CREEK TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head 4.1 miles west on the **North Fork Big Pine Creek Trail**, following signs for "Big Pine Lakes," as it steadily ascends 2,000 feet to a junction for the **Big Pine Lakes Loop**.
- 2) Veer south to reach the lower lakes, continuing .4 mile past **First Lake to Second Lake**.
- 3) Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE SECOND LAKE (MILE 4.5)

The view from the granite bench on the north shore of teal Second Lake may be the closest you get to the Alps in California: Angle your tent to face the castle-like turrets of the cirque, including imposing Temple Crag, which looms nearly 3,000 feet above the

water. (Tip: Trace the lake counterclockwise to find the best cliff-jumping spots on the northwest shore.)

DAY TRIPS

Options abound. Take the 6-mile Big Pine Lakes Loop to tour the five other alpine pools or visit Palisade Glacier (the Sierra's biggest sheet of ice) on a 5-mile out-and-back. For a complete guide to the area, visit backpacker.com/200-miles-of-awesome-in-california.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 37.1253, -118.4375; 10 miles west of Big Pine on Glacier Lodge Rd.

SEASON June to October **PERMIT** Required for overnighting (\$10 + \$5/person); reserve online at recreation.gov or obtain from any Inyo National Forest ranger station. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapSecondLake (\$15)

CONTACT www.fs.usda.gov/inyo

Distance 9 miles (out and back)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Lupine blooms in the Plains of Abraham in midsummer.

LIFE FINDS A WAY GIFFORD PINCHOT NATIONAL FOREST, WASHINGTON

HAS IT REALLY been 37 years? From the top of Windy Ridge, it looks as if Mt. St. Helens erupted yesterday. You can still see the steaming, gray wound on the side of the now-peakless mountain. Below, Spirit Lake is half hidden by a logjam built from the white ghosts of a long-dead forest. But the trek across the eastern slopes, which were wiped clean by the surge of rock and volcanic gas in 1980, reveals small signs of life hidden among the devastation, like smears of lichen and lupine. We leave the scorched earth behind for more signs of renewal: Knee-high pine saplings carpet the south side of the ridge, and, by the time the trail hits Smith Creek, the trees are 20 feet tall. Shiny new forest, in the blink of an eye. *By Laura Lancaster*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE APE CANYON TRAILHEAD

1) Follow the **Ape Canyon Trail (#234)** 4.5 miles northwest up the flank of Mt. St. Helens.

- 2)** Turn north (hiker's right) onto the **Loowit Trail (#216)** and take it 1.7 miles through the **Plains of Abraham** to an intersection.
- 3)** Stay north on the **Abraham Trail (#216D)** and hike 2 miles to its terminus at the **Truman Trail (#207)**.
- 4)** Take the **Truman Trail** north to the parking lot at the Windy Ridge Interpretive Site at mile 10.
- 5)** Continue clockwise, linking the **Windy Ridge (#227)** and **Smith Creek (#225) Trails** 5 miles to a small tributary.
- 6)** Stay on the **Smith Creek Trail** for 5.1 miles to the Muddy River.
- 7)** Veer west onto the **Lava Canyon Trail (#184)** and go 1.5 miles through the chasm to the Lava Canyon Interpretive Site parking area at mile 22.6.
- 8)** Walk .2 mile west on NF-83 to your car.

CAMPSITE 1 PLAINS OF ABRAHAM (MILE 5.4)

Spend night one in the shadow of Mt. St. Helens. From the 1.5-mile, pancake-flat plateau, you're guaranteed the best vantage of the sun setting behind the volcano. Also in the viewshed? Mt. Hood 60 miles south and Mt. Adams 30 miles east. Pick from any number of great sites north of scree-packed Pumice Butte. (Top off water before turning onto the Loowit Trail; springs in the blast zone aren't

reliable.)

CAMPSITE 2 SMITH CREEK (MILE 15)

The Smith Creek Trail descends from Windy Ridge to its namesake waterway, where a number of tributaries splinter outward. Pick one of the sites that's tucked in the Douglas firs west of the water, closer to Mt. St. Helens.

EXPLORE A CANYON

In the 1980 blast, a wave of mud and debris ripped up centuries-old forest that covered what's now known as Lava Canyon. When the Muddy River resumed its course, it found the exposed bedrock, creating a staircase of waterfalls and pools that parallels the trail from miles 20.1 to 22.6 on this itinerary.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 46.165429, -122.092151; 46 miles east of Woodland on NF-83 **SEASON** Mid-June through October **PERMIT** Required (free); self-issue at trailhead **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMtStHelens (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/gifford-pinchot-nf

Distance 22.9 miles (loop)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



The Snake River Trail #102 follows its namesake through Hells Canyon.

GET LOW HELLS CANYON WILDERNESS, IDAHO

STAND ON TOP of a mountain and everything recedes around you. That's fine, but I prefer the opposite effect—when the world seems to swallow you whole. That's how I feel now, midway through a 40-mile epic through the country's deepest canyon. Towering, brown-and-green walls crowd around me and the calm Snake River, which bored this chasm millennia ago.

There's a name-brand canyon like this one in the southwest corner of the country, but here, beneath a canopy of ponderosa, I don't have to share. Well, except for the bighorn sheep, elk, and partridges. *By Ida Koric*

TURN BY TURN FROM THE PITTSBURG LANDING TRAILHEAD

- 1) Pick up the **Snake River National Recreational Trail #102** and take it 6 miles south to **Kirkwood**, a good turnaround point for those looking for a quick overnight.
- 2) Continue south to **Bernard Creek** at mile 20.7.
- 3) Retrace your steps to Pittsburg Landing.

(Not down for a mega day? Spend another night at Sheep Creek on your way back; it's midway between Bernard Creek and Kirkwood, near mile 27.)

CAMPSITE 1 KIRKWOOD HISTORIC RANCH (MILE 6)

Rustic charm meets the backcountry in a throwback to the early 1900s. Historic buildings remain largely unchanged from when the place was a sheep farm. Flush toilets are nice, but the best part is the creek-side camping in the meadow. There are five sites; if all are taken, continue south on the trail to more dispersed campsites.

CAMPSITE 2 BERNARD CREEK (MILE 20.7)

Pitch your tent in the meadow among an array of summer blooms. Water access is a breeze, and intrepid visitors can downclimb the canyon to the Snake River (there is a nice beach campsite down there). Skip the old McGaffee cabin unless you like mice.

GONE FISHIN'

Cast a line for steelhead trout, walleye, and even monstrous sturgeon in the Snake River. (Or wait for the chinook salmon run in fall.)

MAKE IT LONGER

Sucker for suffering? Keep going 5 miles south on the main trail (#102), then split east onto the Little Granite Creek Trail (#112), which heads 5 miles—climbing more than 6,000 feet—into the alpine zone. But a DIY adventure through the 9,000-foot Seven Devils Mountains is awesome in its own right, we promise. (Leave a shuttle car at Windy Saddle.)

MAKE IT SHORTER

Jet-boat outfitters offer drops along Trail #102. Catch a ride with the U.S. Mail boat (\$219; hellscanyon.com) to Sheep Creek Ranch to knock off the first 14.5 miles. From there, you can continue 6.2 miles on foot to Bernard Creek or head back north to the trailhead, overnighing at Kirkwood Historic Ranch.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 45.617565, -116.462803; 20 miles southwest of White Bird off NF-493

SEASON March through November; summer is great for swimming and flora, but temps can crest 90°F. Wait for late summer or early fall for best weather. **PERMIT** None

CUSTOM MAP bit.do/BPmapHellsCanyon (\$15)
CONTACT bit.do/hells-canyon-rec-area **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/hells-canyon

Distance 41.4 miles (out & back)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Gem Lake is hemmed in by granite.

SIERRA SOLITUDE EMIGRANT WILDERNESS, CALIFORNIA

MY HEARTBEAT SPIKES when I feel the ground change, from a bed of cushy pine needles on soft dirt to hard granite. I know what's coming. Like stepping through velvet curtains, I emerge into a new scene: Evergreen gives way to an amphitheater of smooth rock where 9,000-foot peaks close around me and cradle a near-perfect circle of blue. I know that good things come to those who wait (as does every High Sierra hiker holding out for snow-free passes), but I'm ready for my close-up now. That's why I came to the Emigrant. Here, lower-elevation lakes shed snow from their shores by June and I have an 18-mile loop through Muir country all to myself. So let's update the adage: Good things also come to those who hike. *By Maren Horjus*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE CRABTREE TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head 1.4 miles south on the main trail to a Y-junction at the beginning of the loop.
- 2) You can do the loop either direction (it's similar distance to camp either way), but it's more dramatic to drop into the lake basin through the pine forest, so head clockwise: Stay left on the **Gem Lake Trail** and take it roughly 7.6 miles to its namesake.
- 3) Leave Gem Lake south on the **Pine Valley Trail**, which wends another 7.6 miles to the initial Y-junction.
- 4) Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE GEM LAKE (MILE 9)

Gem is small, less than .4 mile around, so there's no harm in circling it in search of the best spot. We like the pine-dotted granite shelf above its west bank for its seclusion and views toward the rocky massifs to the north-east (pictured), but set up as far back from the water as you can to avoid skeeters. Bonus for swimmers: The pool's granite bottom is easy on bare feet. (The best entry is on the southern shore.)

FLORA

Yellow monkeyflower and purple lupine smear the flats in June. Look for them in abundance at Piute Meadow on day one and Groundhog Meadow on day two. Some flowers will spring up through cracks in the granite at Gem Lake.

STRETCH IT OUT

Get an after-work start on Friday and spend night one at Camp Lake near mile 2.6. It offers the same Sierra grandeur, but it's closer to the trailhead.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 38.178696, -119.907188; 38 miles east of Sonora on Crabtree Rd.

SEASON May through October; early summer is best for temps and solitude. **PERMIT** Required (free); obtain from the Mi-Wok Ranger Station off CA 108 **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapGemLake (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/chis **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/gem-lake

Distance 18 miles (lollipop-loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ● ● ● ● ●



Explore Marble Canyon from camp.

DESERT DREAM

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

I STUDY THE petroglyphs that adorn the walls of Marble Canyon and wonder if the squiggly lines mean water once coursed through this desertscape. I follow the orange sandstone with my eyes and come across an etching that looks like a flying saucer. What could that mean? I'm standing in a 15-foot-wide slot in the remote Cottonwood Mountains of Death Valley National Park, and while I lost count of the number of shooting stars I saw last night, I never saw a plane, let alone a UFO. In fact, I haven't seen another soul here—just owls, wild horses, bighorn sheep, and coyotes. The 26-mile Cottonwood Canyon-Marble Canyon Loop takes you through slot after slot, past leaning towers of zebra-striped rocks, across time-chiseled amphitheaters, and, yes, by 3,000-year-old rock art. Consider the possible presence of aliens a bonus. *By Amy Jurries*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE JUNCTION OF COTTONWOOD CANYON AND MARBLE CANYON ROADS

- 1) Follow **Cottonwood Canyon Road**, an ultra-rugged ATV track, 8.5 miles to its namesake.
- 2) Pick your way 3.7 miles southwest up canyon (no trail) through thick underbrush, passing Lower and Middle Springs, to **Cottonwood Springs**.
- 3) Next day, head 3.4 miles northwest up the

open valley to where it narrows, around 36.551397, -117.399216.

- 4) Bear northeast, hiking 1.7 miles into the 5,000-foot peaks to hiker's right and stringing together the two obvious saddles (36.556432, -117.395774 and 36.566587, -117.380086).
- 5) Coast .5 mile down to **Deadhorse Canyon** at mile 17.8.
- 6) Continue .9 mile northeast through the open canyon (use caution downclimbing the 8-foot-tall dryfall at mile 18.3) to the intersection of **Deadhorse and Marble Canyons**.
- 7) Hike 5.6 miles northeast through Marble Canyon, weaving through a series of narrows, to its end at **Marble Canyon Road**.
- 8) Walk 1.8 miles east on the dirt track to close the loop.

CAMPSITE 1 COTTONWOOD SPRINGS (MILE 12.2)

Bed down in the sandy flats north of the springs and ditch the tent: Death Valley boasts an International Dark-Sky Association certification, meaning its nightscape is one of the world's best. Next morning, tank up with enough water to last two days.

CAMPSITE 2 INTERSECTION OF DEADHORSE AND MARBLE CANYONS (MILE 18.7)

Day two's 6.5 miles will take longer than you think, but if you make good time, explore Upper Marble Canyon from this open, sandy spot. Set up camp at the mouth of Upper Marble Canyon, and venture northwest into its narrows. Note: This site is dry.

WILDFLOWERS

In the right conditions, Death Valley can fill with a sea of gold, purple, pink, and white blooms come March. The recipe: well-spaced

rainfall the preceding winter, warm weather in the spring, and drying winds. On this trip, your best bet at spotting flora is in the valley north of Cottonwood Springs.

ROCK ART

Scan the walls in Marble Canyon for 2,000- to 3,000-year-old Timbisha Shoshone engravings and paintings. Most petroglyphs are of abstract patterns and designs, but some are recognizable: lizards, snakes, scorpions, deer, bighorn sheep, and dancing humans. After your hike, check out more rock art in nearby Echo and Titus Canyons.

WATER

Cottonwood Springs is the only reliable water source on the trip. We recommend carrying a gallon of water per person per day (in mild conditions), so set out from the trailhead with a gallon of water and containers for another gallon. Top off before departing Cottonwood Springs on day two.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 36.631983, -117.295706; 35 miles northwest of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center off CA 190 on Cottonwood Canyon Rd. **SEASON** Fall through spring (beware of flash floods after rain) **PERMIT** Recommended (free); obtain one at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center or the Stovepipe Wells Ranger Station. **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapCottonwoodMarbleLoop (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/deva **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/cottonwood-marble-loop

Distance 26.1 miles (loop)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



The Rogue River Wilderness has rebounded from a 2005 fire.

GOOD AS NEW

WILD ROGUE WILDERNESS, OREGON

IT'S LATE AFTERNOON when I finally catch sight of the Rogue River—a quick glance between the peeling bark of the madrones. A wildfire roared through here a decade ago, so I thought open vistas on the recently restored, 28.1-mile Wild Rogue Loop would be plentiful. But between the dense Pacific Northwest mist and the rebounding forest, I haven't had much in the way of views. When the canopy eventually opens atop Panther Ridge, I can just barely make out the river twisting through the cloud-shrouded ravine 3,500 feet below. Totally counts. *By Laura Lancaster*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE MULE CREEK TRAILHEAD

1) Do the loop counter-clockwise and head 7.1

miles on the **Mule Creek Trail** as it wraps around to a dirt road on Panther Ridge.

2) Turn south (hiker's left) and take the road .1 mile to the Panther Ridge trailhead.

3) Take the **Panther Ridge Trail** 6.4 miles southwest to an intersection.

4) Veer southeast (hiker's left) onto the **Clay Hill Trail** and take it 3.4 miles south to the rapids of the Rogue River at mile 17.

5) Parallel the water downstream on the **Rogue River Trail** to the Marial trailhead at mile 26.3.

6) Follow the dirt road 1.8 miles to the original starting point at Mule Creek trailhead.

CAMPSITE 1 MULE CREEK (MILE 5.2)

Knock out the majority of the climbing on day one, then take a pit stop for the night at this flat spot near the offshoot of Mule Creek. Look for it trailside upon exiting the canyon. Be sure to replenish your water before you take off next morning: There's no more until you hit the Rogue at mile 17.

CAMPSITE 2 TATE CREEK (MILE 17.6)

Skip the first sites on the Rogue River Trail and

continue to the flat spot just past Tate Creek. From camp, follow the short spur upstream to a deep pool at the end of a rock chute that doubles as a waterslide.

VIEW

Panther Ridge is densely forested, but a unique outcropping—called Hanging Rock—near the high point of the trail provides a view of the Rogue River Valley. To reach it, look for an unmarked, .3-mile spur at mile 8.7.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 42.722299, -123.877330; 38 miles west of Glendale on Mule Creek-Marial Rd. **SEASON** Spring through fall; October is best for temps and solitude. **PERMIT** None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/bpmapwildrogue (\$15) **CONTACT** fs.usda.gov/rogue-siskiyou **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/wildrogue

Distance 28.1 miles (loop)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Get unobstructed views of Rainier on the Spray Park Trail.

WILDFLOWERS & WATERFALLS

MT. RAINIER NATIONAL PARK, WASHINGTON

CALL IT THE FACE that launched a thousand trips: The view of Mt. Rainier's northwestern façade from Spray Park, where overflowing lupine and paintbrush blooms jostle

each other to get into the frame, may just make for the most memorable photo opp in the park. There's just one problem on my trip here—I can't actually see the peak. On this summer morning, chilled mist swirls among the wildflowers, blotting out the postcard view. But I don't mind: The fog lends an otherworldly vibe to the scene and keeps fairweather hikers away, giving me a rare chance to savor the colorful meadow in solitude. Besides, as I'll be reminded over and over again on this 17-mile loop through



high-altitude scree fields and lush temperate rainforest, you don't have to see the mountain to feel its power. *By Elisabeth Kwak-Hefferan*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM MOWICH LAKE CAMPGROUND

- 1) Take the **Wonderland Trail** .2 mile.
- 2) Pick up the **Spray Park Trail** and take it 5.4 miles through subalpine meadows to **Cataract Valley Camp**. (Don't miss the view of 350-foot Spray Falls near mile 2.)
- 3) Continue north to a fork at mile 7.7.
- 4) Follow the rerouted **Wonderland Trail** (a 2006 flood washed out the original) to **Ipsut Creek Camp** at mile 11.4.
- 5) Go 5.1 miles over 5,100-foot Ipsut Pass to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE 1 CATARACT VALLEY CAMP (MILE 5.6)

Bed down in an electric-green understory at this seven-site camp. Despite its name, you won't get waterfall views, but nearby salmonberries fruit in July and a stream makes water duty easy.

CAMPSITE 2 IPSUT CREEK CAMP (MILE 11.4)

This site on the ice-blue Carbon River was a car campground before a monster storm washed out the 5-mile access road. Without traffic, it's now a mellower destination for backpackers looking to linger another night on this loop.

BERRIES

Prepare for stained fingertips: Thickets of the Northwest's tastiest berries line this route. Harvest salmonberries and blueberries near Cataract Valley Camp; huckleberries on the climb to Ipsut Pass; and thimbleberries and raspberries near the Carbon River. Park guidelines limit you to what you can snarf on the spot.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 46.932865, -121.863121; 6 miles east of Mowich Entrance on Mowich Lake Rd. **SEASON** July through October; August is prime berry season. **PERMIT** Required (free for walk-ins) **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapMotherMountain (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/mora **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/mothermountain

Distance 16.6 miles (loop)

Time 3 days

Difficulty ●●●●●



Don't fall in: Get a permit to explore Indian Tunnel, a 30-foot-tall lava tube that stretches 800 feet underground, via the Cave Trail.

WALK THE MOON

CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT, IDAHO

DESCENDING INTO THE ancient volcano feels like being swallowed by a monster. I set up camp in the mouth of the beast, surrounded by 200-foot cliffs—and am immediately overwhelmed with peace and quiet. But the tranquility in the crater bottom belies a violent past: Two-thousand years ago, molten rock gushed from these cracks in the earth, while ferocious explosions from thousand-foot-high cinder cones sent car-size boulders hurtling through the air. A quick foray from my campsite, 3.8 miles deep in Craters of the Moon National Monument, reveals evidence of this rocky past. Cylindrical cavities mark the spots where trees were entombed in flowing lava before rotting away, leaving their hollow forms in the hardened rock. Jagged chasms exist where ancient tunnels of lava formed and collapsed. A weekend of exploring these geologic wonders only fuels my curiosity—and ensures that I'll be back soon. *By Paul Chisholm*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE TREE MOLDS TRAILHEAD

- 1) Head .1 mile east along the walkway.
- 2) Turn southeast (hiker's right) and follow the **Wilderness Trail** 1.7 miles past the Buffalo Caves (explore with a free permit) to a .1-mile-long side trail leading to a cluster of lava tree molds.
- 3) Continue about 1.6 miles on the main path toward Echo Crater.
- 4) Veer .4 mile off-trail into the crater (it's only accessible from the north end).
- 5) Head back to the Wilderness Trail.
- 6) Continue 1.8 miles to the Sentinel, a 5,812-foot cinder cone.
- 7) Head east off-trail through the open sagebrush prairie, tracing a lava flow, to a cluster of rock formations (marked with 8-foot-tall cairns) near mile 9.7. Highlight: the 25-foot-long Bridge of Tears, a tunnel that was named by an early explorer who hit his head on it.
- 8) Identify Echo Crater in the distance and loop back northwest through the Little Prairie to your camp at mile 14.6.
- 9) Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

CAMPSITE ECHO CRATER (MILE 3.8)

The crater's cliffs will shelter you from the winds that whip across the sagebrush steppe, while the rim provides an unmatched vantage point for catching the sunset over Idaho's Great Rift. Pitch your tent below the rare limber pines for shade, and make it a base-camp. Since Echo Crater is near the apex of

the lollipop loop, it's ideally positioned for spending both nights (approximately miles 3.8 and 14.6, if you follow the writer's route). Free permit required.

WATER

Although USGS quadrangles show some blue, water is unreliable. Not convinced? The area's first nonnative explorers documented "innumerable little bright red wrigglers" inhabiting the few puddles they found. Case closed: Pack it in (a gallon per person per day).

ISLANDS

There are four *kipukas*, or uplifts of land that were surrounded by lava flows, 1.5 miles north-east of Echo Crater. Since the flows protected them, their native plant community is largely preserved. Look for endemic whitish basalt milkvetch, purple Great Basin violet, and pink longleaf phlox (blooming April to June).

DO IT TRAILHEAD 43.428197, -113.548722; 24 miles southwest of Arco off Loop Rd.
SEASON April to November **PERMITS** Required (free) **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapEchoCrater (\$15) **CONTACT** nps.gov/crmo **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/echocrater

Distance 18.3 miles (lollipop loop)
Time 3 days
Difficulty ●●●●●



EARLY SEASON IN THE HIGH DESERT

WENAS WILDLIFE AREA, WASHINGTON

I WAKE TO the smell of sage and unzip my tent, which is perched high on a ridge facing the Cascades. Sunshine paints the snowy domes of Rainier and Adams pale pink; due south, I can just make out the pyramid of Hood. But while those peaks are still cloaked in snow, I'm awash in spring color. Purple spikes of lupine and golden bursts of arrowleaf balsamroot peek above a white carpet of phlox. It will be at least three more months before hiking season really kicks off in the Cascades, but here in the desert, spring is bringing its best act. *By Paul Chisholm*

TURN-BY-TURN FROM THE UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA

1) Cross the Yakima River via a bridge to a fork.

- 2)** Pick up the **Umtanum Creek Trail** and head upcanyon to a grassy slope at mile 2.5.
- 3)** Turn south and follow a switchbacking game trail 1.3 miles to an old road. (This route uses a jigsaw of decommissioned roads that are so overgrown, they feel like double-wide trails.)
- 4)** Take the road south to a junction on Umtanum Ridge at mile 4.4.
- 5)** Follow the **Skyline Trail** a mile east to a spur.
- 6)** Veer south .2 mile to the campsite.
- 7)** Continue southeast on the Skyline Trail to a junction at mile 8.4.
- 8)** Take the east option onto another old road that plunges 1,600 feet in .8 mile to the rim of the Yakima River Canyon before meandering 4.3 miles along the rim to a fork at mile 13.5.
- 9)** Head .8 mile north on the **Umtanum Ridge Trail** to your car.

CAMPSITE UMTANUM RIDGE (MILE 5.7)

Secure tent-door views of the Cascades and the green Wenas Valley on this grassy knoll at 3,400 feet. The first-come, first-serve site is dry, so fill up water at Umtanum Creek en route.

GEOLOGY

Umtanum Ridge is part of the Saddle Mountains, a basalt uplift that extends east across central Washington from the Cascades. Normally a geologic disturbance of this kind would displace local rivers, but the excavating activity of the Yakima River kept pace with the uplift, resulting in the 1,000-foot-deep Yakima River Canyon.

WILDLIFE

From December to April, look for overwintering mammals, like elk and bighorn sheep, bedding down among the canyon's cottonwoods.

DO IT TRAILHEAD 46.855378, -120.483241; 14 miles south of Ellensburg off SR-821
SEASON Year-round, though winter may bring a dusting of snow at the higher elevations.
PERMITS None **CUSTOM MAP** bit.do/BPmapUmtanum (\$15) **CONTACT** bit.do/WenasWildlifeArea **TRIP DATA** backpacker.com/umtanum

Distance 14.3 miles (loop)

Time 2 days

Difficulty ●●●●●