



Ice Age Floods

Sep 15-21, 2024

Tentative Itinerary

Sunday, September 15:

Arrive Missoula, MT in the late morning and meet leaders at airport. We'll visit the UM campus for our first look at ancient shorelines of Glacial Lake Missoula etched into the surrounding hills, and we'll orient ourselves to the week ahead. We'll travel along the Clark Fork River on our way to Thompson Falls and, if time permits, we'll stop at the Bison Range for some exciting bird and wildlife watching on the way. Dinner together at Big Eddy's, a local restaurant. We stay the night in Thompson Falls at the Falls Motel.

Monday, September 16:

After an early breakfast at the Butcher's Nook, we'll head east toward Camas Prairie. Highlights of the day include viewing giant ripple current marks and other flood features under the ancient lake. We'll stop at Blue Slide for a picnic lunch before we head for Spokane Valley, pausing en route at the site of the massive ice dam that impounded Glacial Lake Missoula and eventually failed in a most spectacular way. We'll get out of the van at several stops but no real hiking is planned. Overnight at La Quinta Inn and Suites, Spokane Valley.

Tuesday, September 17:

Our destination today is Grand Coulee Dam, and along the way we pay a visit to Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, encompassing over 18000 acres of the Channeled Scablands and home to a diverse array of birds and wildlife. From there, we'll visit many interesting flood features, including a hike to view a ring dike (~ 2 miles round trip, mostly level but involves some uneven terrain in the vicinity of the dikes.) Grand Coulee itself is a sixty mile long and 1300 foot deep channel carved out by the floods. We stay two nights in our lodging at the Columbia River Inn, in order to fully explore this exciting area.

Wednesday, September 18:

We explore both the lower and upper Grand Coulee today, visiting Lake Lenore Caves, the Dry Falls Overlook and Visitor Center, and after lunch a drive along Banks Lake for a hike in Northrup Canyon where we will glimpse the much older granitic rocks that underlie the Columbia River Basalts. We return to Grand Coulee for the evening. The hike to the Lake Lenore Caves involves some steep stairs and then is mostly level on uneven ground. All together it is less than a mile round-trip. The hike in Northrup Canyon is along an old road and about 3 miles round trip with a 400 foot elevation gain.

Thursday, September 19:

Today we will cross the Ephrata expansion bar, composed of sediments that range in size from sand to house-size boulders, deposited as the flood waters left the constricting walls of the lower Grand Coulee. We head south towards the Drumheller Channels, just north of Othello. This area of fifty square miles was scoured by the floods and J Harlen Bretz mapped over 150 anastomosing (braided) channels here. A three mile round-trip hike with moderate elevation gain will give us a view of the area and a taste of its wildlife inhabitants. After our hike we will continue our way to Connell, where we spend our last two nights at the M&M motel.

Friday, September 20:

Connell lies at the mouth of the Washtucna Coulee, one of the larger flood-carved channels in this part of the state and once the path of the Palouse River. The ridge on the south side of the Washtucna Coulee once served as a divide between the Palouse River and the Snake River but flood waters spilled over near Hooper, WA and scoured out a new channel that the Palouse River now follows. The spectacular Palouse Falls are part of the story that we will explore today, where we will take a few walks and have lunch before finding our way back to Connell for the night. The walks today are mostly easy, with one optional excursion which involves a short but steep dirt slope, walking along railroad tracks and descending a switchback trail on a talus slope (and returning).

Saturday, September 21:

As we make our way back to Portland, we will make multiple stops at key points to stretch, bird watch and view flood features such as the dramatic Wallula Gap and Hat Rock. We plan to arrive back in Portland around 6pm.

Trip Leaders:

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