

Photo Destination: Columbia River Gorge

by Photographer Raymond Klass

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area lies to the East of Portland Oregon just south of Washington State. It is a gorge whose area encompasses inspiring waterfalls, moss filled valleys, and luscious green landscapes. Photographic and recreational opportunities here vary from Multnomah Falls which can easily be seen without leaving your car, to strenuous hikes and backcountry camping where it is easy to find solitude.

Getting to the area is easy. It is best accessed from the Portland area via Interstate 84, about 22 miles East of the city. Some of the park lies along this highway, while many of the most easily accessed areas, and therefore most crowded, lie along historic route 30, which parallels Interstate 84. For an introduction to the area, I would drive the loop formed by Interstate 84 and Historic Route 30. This will give you good views of many of the most popular waterfalls, ones that you might choose later to revisit by hiking further up.

Accommodations are sparse in the park, as the surrounding area is mostly National Forest and Oregon State Park land. There are several small towns throughout the park, though a wider variety of lodging can be found in the city of Portland – the drive is quite short between the city and





the prime waterfall areas. The other notable options is the very nice and well maintained campground at Ainsworth State Park, just 3.5 miles past Multnomah Falls, the most recognizable icon of the area. There are other campgrounds found mostly in the State Park land scattered throughout the park. Some campgrounds accommodate RVs, while other cater solely to tent campers.

Visit the Oregon State Park website at : <http://www.oregon.gov/OPRD/PARKS/index.shtml> for updated information about the services offered at individual parks, and to make advanced reservations.

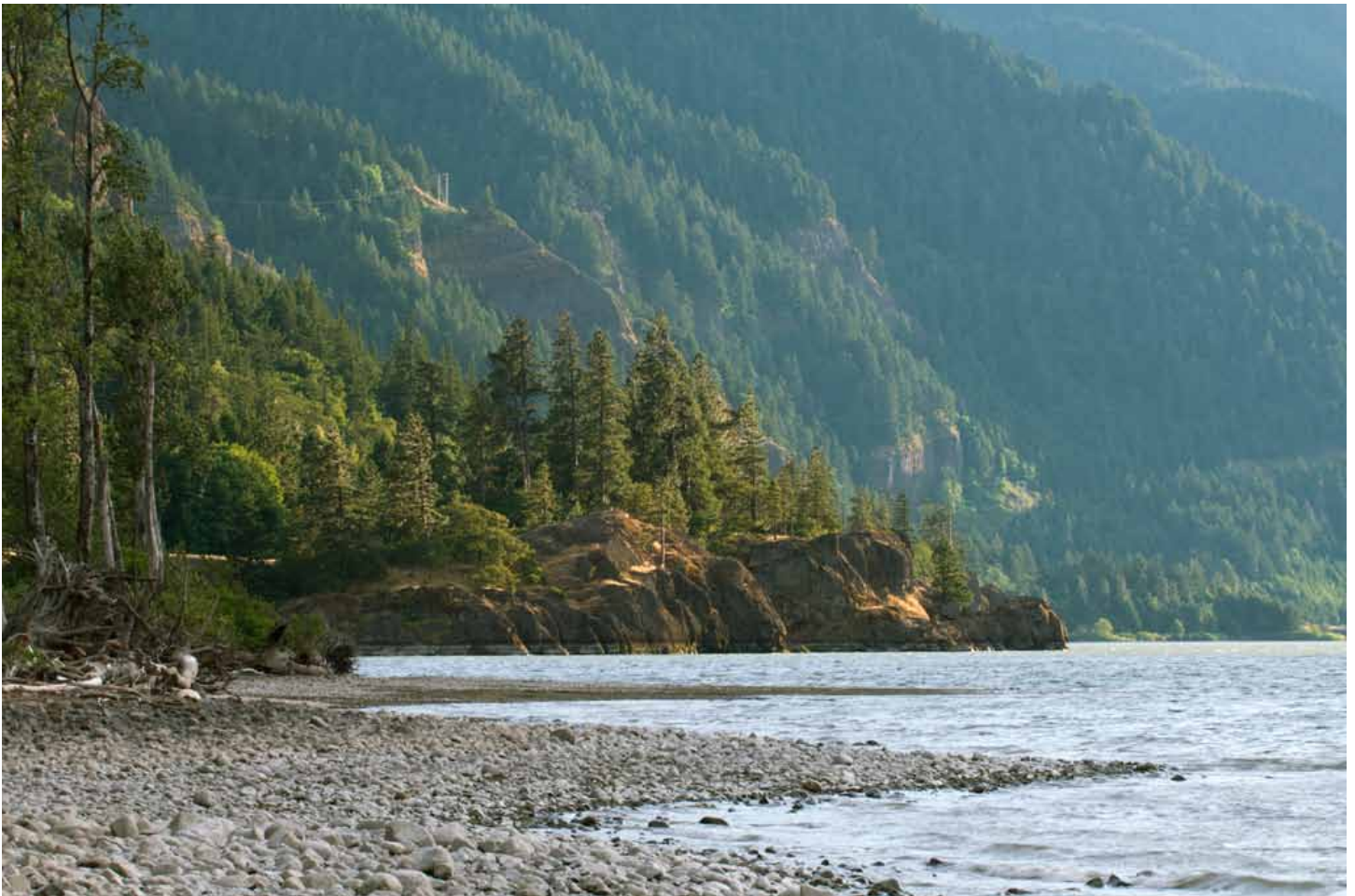
Anytime between spring and the end of fall is a nice to visit the falls. The winter can be a good season as long as you don't mind the cold and ice that is sure to build up around these falls. My last visit was in the late summer, toward the middle of August. The temperatures varied between the high 70s and mid 80s, and the waterfalls were running with plenty of water. As an added bonus, blackberry bushes all throughout the gorge were just beginning to ripen, so there was always a delicious, fresh snack at hand.



After driving the scenic loop of Historic Route 30, plan to spend some time at Multnomah Falls. This is the tallest of the waterfalls, and also the most recognizable from the park. A parking lot serves the trails in the area, and the falls can be seen from the road or the viewing platform about 50 feet from the parking lot visitor center.

Be warned that this is probably the single most crowded spot in the entire park, so to photograph the falls you'll want to get there early. Luckily this is not a gated spot so you don't have to worry about visitor center hours, just arrive 10 minutes or so before sunrise, and wait for the light to get good. The falls don't receive any sunrise light, but with a tripod, sunrise is a great time to experiment with long exposures and silky smooth water. Though it is a moderately strenuous hike, the trail to the bridge and viewing platform have excellent views of both the valley and the falls.

Latourelle falls are also easily accessed from their dedicated parking lot via a short trail, and provide a spectacular view of the falls and accompanying bridge over a small stream. Ferns line the banks of the



falls and stream swaying in the breeze created by the falling water. Though not as popular as Multnomah, this parking lot can fill up on warm summer days, so you would be best to get here early if you want shots of the falls without visitors hiking and playing on the rocks at the base of the waterfall.

Beyond the scenic waterfalls, it is worth part of a day to explore the shores of the Columbia River at Viento State Park, known for its high winds and local windsurfers who call this home. The park is also a great spot for shoreline images and if you're lucky, can be a great location for sunset or sunrise. Incidentally the tastiest blackberries I've ever had grew along the shores here.

Finally, for an overview of the park, 2 locations are a cut above the rest. Larch Mountain provides a great view of the forested areas within the region, while Crown Point is the perfect location to spend the morning photographing sunrise light. Larch Mountain requires a short but strenuous hike to the top of an observatory for the view, while at Crown Point you can simply park in the designated spots and look out over the Columbia River Gorge.

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area encompasses some of the best forest and waterfall landscapes that I've ever encountered. There are ample opportunities to explore both by car and by foot. This is truly an area that has something for everyone. Photographically there are few other areas that have so much to see in such a small space, and just outside of a major city. If you are looking for a place to get away for a weekend or a week, the Columbia River Gorge is worth considering.

