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Summer shouldn't cost the Earth

Three outdoors aficionados provide tips on living large, treading lightly

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Summer in the Pacific Northwest has something for everyone, whether it's strolling on the beach, kayaking on the water, hiking the mountains, or exploring ancient rock art. But what kind of impact do summer activities have on the environment?



Pictures made by American Indians attract visitors such as archaeology graduate student Robert David at Washington's Columbia Hills State Park, a 90-minute drive from Portland. COURTESY OF MIKE TAYLOR

Three outdoor enthusiasts share advice for how to be good stewards while still having fun.

favorite summer vacation, especially on holiday weekends, is the Oregon Coast.

"I'm in love with Cannon Beach," writer and radio programmer Kerri Buckley says. "The view of the ocean and Haystack Rock is probably one of the most beautiful views I've ever had in my life."

Unbeknown to many tourists, the coast is home to fragile ecosystems that need special protection. Buckley says sea creatures are exposed at low tide, left vulnerable in tide pools.

"People have no idea they're walking on these living creatures," she says.

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“Human footsteps will destroy a great deal of life that we’re not aware of.”



Buckley and her teenage twins, Alex and Aleah, have learned a lot from coastal interpretive centers, and from the Haystack Rock Awareness Program volunteers, who are easily identified on the beach by their red ponchos.



“They point out all these amazing sea animals that you wouldn’t even look at if you weren’t aware,” Buckley says. “Children are able to see starfish, something they learned about but have never seen. They’re really beautiful.”




Big fun carries little impact



The summer also sees an increase in outdoor adventures like sky diving, hiking and white-water rafting. Devin Kelly, one of the organizers of Oregon Active, says concern for the environment is a huge focus for his group. “It’s the lifeline of what we do,” he says.




Like many similar outdoor-activity groups, Oregon Active hosts a variety of trips, from spelunking to bungee jumping, with proceeds going to local charities and nonprofits.



“We always try to educate our groups on the best way we can protect, preserve and improve the environment,” Kelly says. “It all starts and ends with using common sense and being conscious about the impact you’re having.”




Oregon Active also offers a wilderness first-aid program, teaching survival skills alongside environmental awareness.



Art speaks to spiritual side



If historical and archaeological sites are more to your liking, Horsethief Lake at Columbia Hills State Park in Washington – a 90-minute drive from Portland – offers Indian rock art that is “just unbeatable in this part of the country,” according to Mike Taylor, former president and board member of the Oregon Archaeological Society.



“It’s this fascination people have with ancient things,” Taylor says. “Rock art has a kind of spiritual component to it.”



Taylor says the carved images let visitors get into the heads of the native people who originally created the art over the course of thousands of years.



Unfortunately, Taylor says, “a lot of people feel compelled to leave their mark on these already marked rocks.”

Graffiti is a problem at Horsethief and other sites. Some rock art is virtually obscured by spray paint, and Taylor says one act of vandalism draws more graffiti “like a magnet.”

Some visitors want to make rubbings as souvenirs, but once crayon and the like get onto the rock, it can be difficult to remove. “It’s illegal,” Taylor says. “It’s very bad for the rock art to be touched like that.”

His advice to visitors is simple: Look, but don’t touch.

“Kids are really tactile. They like to touch things,” Taylor says. “They like to pick up rocks and throw them. You don’t want to be climbing all over rock art.”

For parents with active children, Taylor recommends explaining the spiritual aspect of the sites. Tell kids that visiting the rock art is like “being in church to the people who did these. Be respectful.” So far, Taylor says, the approach has worked.

To help protect archaeological sites, Taylor says, individuals and families can volunteer with the U.S. Forest Service or at state parks like Columbia Hills – or they can informally “adopt” a favorite site by visiting several times over the

summer, picking up trash and alerting authorities to any problems or damage to the site.

“Be aware. Be visible,” Taylor says. “If the bad guys know there are people watching, they won’t do graffiti.”

Litter problem can use hands

A problem common to all outdoor areas is litter. Buckley often sees spent fireworks floating in the ocean following Fourth of July celebrations, and says the beaches are covered with garbage and dead birds. Her children comb the area, picking up trash and rescuing birds injured by fireworks.

“I don’t think people think about that kind of thing when they’re down there with beer and it’s a holiday weekend and they just want to have fun,” Buckley says. “They leave their trash all over the place. I know the animals get hurt.”

Taylor often carts out large quantities of discarded trash when he visits historical sites in the area. To combat the problem, he suggests families make a game out of picking up litter, with a prize for whoever cleans up the most.

“If people want to be good citizens,” he says, “don’t leave any litter. Pick some up. Throw it in the garbage can.”

“A good way to protect the great outdoors is to remember that while you’re there, you’re a visitor,” Kelly says.

He recommends researching the regulations and special concerns for an area before you visit. When at a friend’s home, he continues, you don’t drop garbage on the carpet or scrawl your name across the wall.

“When you visit the backcountry, the same courtesies apply,” he says. “Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, and kill nothing but time.”

Find out more

Haystack Rock Awareness Program

For volunteer information, follow the Natural Areas link at www.ci.cannon-beach.or.us, or call coordinator Lisa Sheffield, 503-436-1581 ext. 108.

Oregon Active

For activities, visit www.oregonactive.com, or e-mail Devin Kelly, devin@oregonactive.com.

Columbia Hills State Park

The park’s Horsethief Lake is a National Historic Site.

Guided tours of the Indian rock art are 10 a.m. Friday and Saturday, April through October.

Reservations are required and should be made two to three weeks in advance. Tours are limited to 25 people.

Tours are free, but donations are accepted.

To reserve, call 1-509-767-1159.

For information, visit www.parks.wa.gov and select park information for Columbia Hills State Park.

To volunteer, visit www.parks.wa.gov/volunteer.asp; call Sarah Oldfield, 1-360-902-8583; or e-mail volunteers@parks.wa.gov.

A note on injured wildlife

When exploring the Oregon Coast, you may encounter injured animals and birds. Experts recommend that you not touch the wildlife, since you may cause further injury or prevent the animals from reuniting with their families and flocks.

Report injured seals to the Cannon Beach Police Department, 503-436-2811.

Report injured birds to the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, 503-338-0331 or 503-338-3954.

For injured wildlife in Portland, contact the Audubon Society of Portland's Wildlife Care Center, 503-292-0304. For information, visit www.audubonportland.org/wildlifecarecenter.

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