Palouse Falls, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 80 miles southwest of Spokane, WA.

Directions: From Seattle take I-90 east for about 140 miles. Just after crossing the Columbia River, take exit #137 for Othello/Pullman onto Highway 26 and drive for 83.1 miles. Turn right onto WA-260 and drive 6.4 miles. Turn Left on WA-261 and go 8.6 miles.

Look for Palouse Falls road and a sign for Palouse Falls State Park. Make a left turn off the paved road into the open range area. Watch for cows on the road during certain times of the year. Palouse Falls State Park is about 2.3 miles down the dirt road. The road curves down and ends in a parking lot overlooking the Palouse River.

A State of Washington Discover Pass is required for parking.

There is an outhouse near the trailhead.

Trail:
There are no named trails in the park.

There is at least one geocache near this trail at: N 46° 39.958 W 118° 13.891 Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Length and Elevation:
2.2 miles round trip. Elevation gain of 550 feet and loss of 550 feet. Elevation at the trailhead is 875 feet.

Review: March 27, 2011
As you drove south from highway 26, you drove at the bottom of the Washtucna Coulee. This was the course of the Palouse River before the Missoula Floods. The floods stripped away hundreds of feet of soil. The floodwaters washed away a section of fractured basalt rock and carved the present channel for the river.

From the north end of the parking lot, follow the jeep road northeast for a short distance. The jeep trail dips down past some electric meters and to a gravel path off to the right leading to a viewpoint of the Palouse River and the Upper Palouse Falls. Head back to the main jeep trail and continue heading north to the end of the jeep trail. Find the trail through a narrow defile leading down to the trail tracks.
Turn to the right, walking north for about two to three hundred feet. Follow along the shoulder of the tracks, watching for fast-moving trains, to pick up the trail at the top of a switchback.
Follow the rock and gravel path leading down to a meadow and to the upper falls of Palouse River.
Of course this is rattlesnake and poison oak country so take the appropriate precautions.
It is a pretty easy walk along the Palouse River to the overlook of Palouse Falls. There are no railings so there are several places where one misstep could result in falling off the trail and being swept downriver over the falls, or just plain falling down the falls to certain death.
At the viewpoint above the falls are some interestingly shaped fingers of basalt with splotches of orange and green lichen growing on them. This formation is called Castle Rock. Looking at the falls,

the river usually runs brown because of the erosion from the surrounding farmland colors the river brown.
Palouse Falls plunges over a basalt cliff and down to the riverbed 120 feet below the overlook. The falls make a constant mist in the spring and it is easy to spot a rainbow on a sunny day.
On the trip back, at the beginning of the jeep trail, take the trail to the left and walk along the edge of the sheer basalt cliffs above the river.
For more views of the falls, walk to the south end of the parking lot and follow the paved path to the Fryxell Overlook in honor of Roland Fryxell who discovered bones and artifacts nearby which were proven to be 10 to 12 thousand years old. This was much older than any other discovered skeletal remains found anywhere in the western hemisphere.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve