

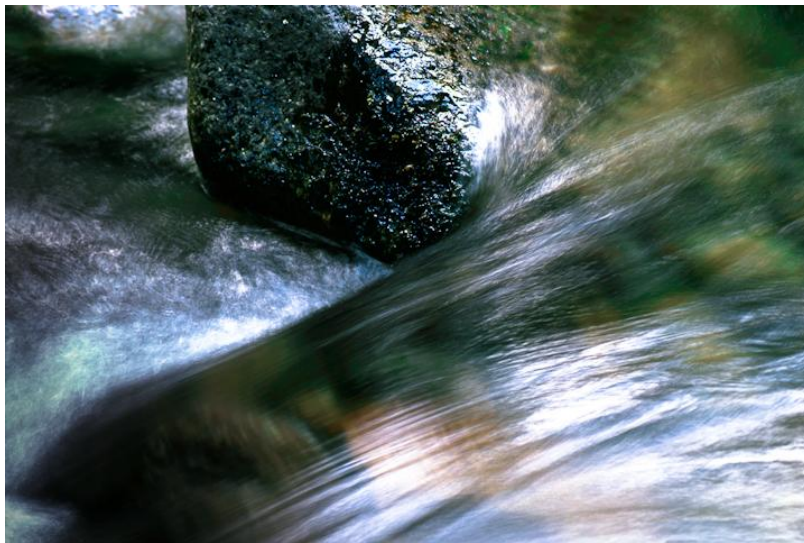


OUTDOORS

River Music

THE HORSESHOE BEND TRAIL

Story and photo by John D'Onofrio · Wednesday, November 14, 2012



I know the joy of fishes in the river through my own joy, as I go walking along the same river.

—Zhuangzi

Here in the Pacific Northwest, we often experience a pause between seasons as winter draws its breath. The joys of hiking in the high country are a fading memory, behind us until next summer. In the mountains, the snow has begun to fall, but full-fledged, snow-based, rip-it-up fun is not yet here. We are betwixt and between.

At this time—when the seasons are shifting gears—it’s a good opportunity to take a deep breath and listen to the river.

The Horseshoe Bend trail, located on the banks of the North Fork of the Nooksack, provides a perfect opportunity to transition from season to season. This trail, short and exceedingly sweet, offers a chance to slow down for an hour or two, to lose your mind and come to your senses.

What a river it is! The Nooksack is a wild delight, a whooping, rambunctious torrent that excites the senses and quiets the internal chatter. It’s easy to take the Nooksack for granted. Our landscapes are so epic, so dramatic, that a simple and straightforward river walk might be overlooked.

Look deeper. The river has a story to tell, and its lessons might just be the tonic you need to make your way from summer to winter, an admittedly difficult transition here in the North Woods.

The drive up the Mount Baker Highway is delightful in its own right. Leafless trees have replaced the Technicolor hues of autumn, a taste of winter on its way. The Horseshoe Bend trailhead is on the right, just across the bridge that crosses the river at the Douglas Fir campground (closed now), two miles past the Glacier Ranger Station.

Head down the stairs. Turn left at the river. The trail traces the edge of the wild-eyed water beneath bare, moss-covered trees. Take your time. If you're fortunate enough to have the entire afternoon to while away beside the dancing river, count your blessings. The music of the river is both soothing and energizing, if you listen. There are many places where you can stop, sit and contemplate. Bring a sit-pad, it's bound to be wet.

Or keep going. The trail skirts the flashing water, and you'll find new small wonders around every bend. After about a mile and a half, the trail starts to peter out. No worries; the walk back is just as reverie-inducing.

If you have some extra time, continue under the bridge when you get back to the base of the stairs and wander downriver through the empty campground. There are some openings along the river here and if the sun's out—not a statistical impossibility—you might just find a patch to warm your face.

Even in the rain, the river is a joy. Low clouds soften the landscape and mute the hubbub of the rushing water, so don't let the falling wet stuff stop you.