

WEEKLY

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Whatcom Falls SAMSARA IN THE CITY

Story and photo by John D'Onofrio · Wednesday, April 4, 2012



Who doesn't love a waterfall?

There's something about tumbling water that quiets the mind and exhilarates the sensibilities. The sound—that eternal white noise—is soothing and sensuous. If you sleep next to a waterfall, it is impossible to have nightmares (it's been scientifically proven).

And moving water emits negative ions, those wonderful particles that cause the body to boost serotonin levels. Higher serotonin levels mean more energy and less stress. I like that combination. And I like waterfalls.

It is my exceedingly good fortune to live within walking distance of Whatcom Falls Park, and I visit often. To have a waterfall like this within the city limits is our good fortune indeed.

It's *so* Bellingham.

Located in a shadowy grotto, the picture-perfect falls are easily enjoyed from the arching stone bridge—a thing of beauty in its own right—that spans Whatcom Creek and affords a front row seat. The bridge, constructed in 1939 out of Chuckanut sandstone, is a product of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and blends perfectly into the landscape. The CCC was a government-financed work project in place from 1933-1942, one of this country's best ideas.

Whatcom Falls has many different looks. In spring, the falls roar and the bridge seems to shake from the vibration. In summer, the dappled sunlight illuminates the white froth at the base of the falls in pleasing contrast to the emerald green of the forest. In fall, it's a Currier and Ives portrait of autumn color, a calendar shot. In winter, if it's snowed, it's an ice-draped spectacle, crystalline and blue.

Cross the bridge and turn left. Whatcom Falls is just one of many cascades in 240-acre Whatcom Falls Park. Continuing downstream in the gorge of Whatcom Creek, you'll see more. Officially, there are four waterfalls in the park, but I'm not sure what makes a waterfall "official." It looks to me like there's a lot more than that, and some of the smaller ones are particularly elegant.

Continue downstream and you'll arrive at Whirlpool Falls in its mossy basin. Hormone-crazed teenagers like to jump from the 60-foot cliffs here in summer, seeking the thrill of risking life and limb for a reckless caress of gravity. Boys will be boys.

Upstream from the bridge, the creek is filigreed with froth and foam as it tosses and turns in its bed. Several more falls—including a real beauty immediately below Derby Pond—await your contemplation.

Spend some time along the creek. There's no hurry. Suck up the ions. They're good for you.

Of course, there's more to Whatcom Falls Park than waterfalls. The aforementioned Derby Pond is a lovely little pool and a favorite of kids and ducks. Kids also love the fish hatchery, with its tanks of juvenile salmon, the color of liquid metal. The old trestle that spans the creek upstream from the pond is a weathered icon, leaning like a history lesson in the wind.

Whatcom Falls Park is, simply put, a treasure. You should go there at once.