

up work every night when he left on stuff he didn't do as bid. The next day he'd always walk in and wonder if we had some kind of little magical elf running amok. In the end everything from the tile floor to stone countertops to hardwood cabinets to stainless steel appliances all fit together like a big expensive puzzle. Oddly enough, all of the food that comes out of that room still tastes the same. Also since the last X-letter I undertook a bathroom remodel. Again, down to the studs. I've discovered that when you are doing painting, sheetrock, texturing, electrical, plumbing, tile, and mill work it really doesn't matter if the room is 5'x5' or 50'x50'. In the end your knees are just as sore, your back is just as stiff, and your patience has always run out halfway thru the project. And it's funny, after all of that work, the paper holder still doesn't magically refill and the water continues to flush counter-clockwise. We also took back the formal family room this year and basically have an extra 500 square feet of living space. You know, those wonderful formal family rooms that you fill up with furniture that no one sits in and knick knacks that belong in a Goodwill store. Now it's home to an enormous sectional sofa matched to an equally enormous TV, which required me to build a matching enormous coffee/end table set (which was and undertaking in itself, but I did get to pull out the router/planer/table saw/miter saw/band saw and every wood clamp I had). It will look good once we decide on a stain color and distress all of it with a hammer and sack of marbles. And then there was bedroom furniture for the master, which for some reason Nancy is very happy with. I never really understood bedroom furniture. It's a room that 95% of the time I'm in it my eyes are closed and the lights are off. So what's wrong with plywood, cinder blocks, and cardboard boxes (I'm talking the quality ones, from the liquor store)? Since I'm into sleeping on the bed and not the couch, I just took it all in stride (although that sectional downstairs is looking mighty comfy).

Summer was crazy, as usual. It started off in June with a 30 mile bike ride around Lake Quinalt in the rain forests of Olympic National Park. It was sponsored by a cancer support non profit, leaving Jac with two skinned knees, me with a sore butt, and the family with a wonderful afghan hand stitched by the elderly volunteers with yarns of love.

KFC (Kelso Family Campout) was another great outing with weather to match (compared to the previous rain & mud fest). This year kids out-numbered adults, with lots of time at the swimming hole and floating the river. Some of the dads even found a little time to sneak off and do a little target shooting. I recently found out how easy it is to get a collectors Federal firearms license, and have an appreciation for the simplicity of design and great stock wood in surplus military rifles. Of course, getting use to how some can kick like a blind angry mule is an acquired taste. But I love a country where you can buy a gun with a built-in bayonet and grenade launcher and have it delivered right to your door with just a signature (of anyone over 18, of course).

The crown gem of the summer season was a week long trip thru central Oregon to Crater Lake National Park. I've been wanting to start these long family trips, but anything with a NP take a solid year of planning. We did a combination of camping in the high desert of Oregon and staying at the historic Crater Lake lodge on the lake. The kids had a great time. We watched the ant lions feast at the LaPine State Park, touched the biggest ponderosa in the state (OR), trekked thru the pumice desert, hiked the obsidian fields, wondered thru cold and dark lava tubes, and walked thru wildflower meadows. At the High Desert Museum we saw a replica of a 1915 lumber mill in full swing with open drive belts and unguarded blades everywhere (cool). At Crater Lake we climbed the highest peak in the park, explored fire lookouts, and even got to drive (with ranger escort) a part of the annual Crater Lake Marathon around the lake in the truck (talk about sneers from the runners). We couldn't visit Wizard Island (high winds ripped off the boat dock this summer), but we did take the steep trail down to the shore where we dipped in the 55F water and I tormented pesky golden mantels with super soaker water guns. Good times. Next year will be Glacier Park - let me know if there is any interest in hitching your wagon to our caravan August of 2009.

Crater was followed up by a week camping up on Orcas in the San Juan Islands. Family friends invited us to join them in boating, fishing, big campfires, and spectacular sunsets. Even summer time can be spotty that far north, but the weather window we hit was just incredible. The days were long and warm, while lazy wafting of the tide was enough to leave anyone peaceful and content. And you really can catch crabs with hot dogs in the shallows off the end of a dock.

And the season ended at the annual pool party and wine tasting trip in the Tri-Cities. A day of kids splashing around until they started growing gills followed by a day tasting at the many local wineries in Washington's internationally recognized wine region (where we also grow beer hops for 80% of the world). I wore my new kilt for the outing, and found that people are not as open minded as they say they are. But I'll save that story for another time, as I think this is more than enough for one year and this small print has surely made for tired eyes.

Merry Christmas and seasons greetings, wishing the best to you and yours.

Dave, Nancy, Jachyn, & Mitchell

Mountain Man Review 2008

The 13th (yes, there have been than many) Annual Snow Camp was a little too close to the city this year. We were just up at Snoqualmie Pass, and the nearness of local beer places that picked up winter football games was too much for some of the guys. The snowshoeing and weather was unusually wet and less time was spent around the campfire than usual. However, the spirit of the outing was alive and well, as this is when we annually set the hiking schedule for the entire year (he who gets to the family calendar first wins).

And what a year it was! It started out with too much snow, a reoccurring theme until mid summer and beyond. Areas always hikeable in May didn't open up until mid July. Not that this stopped us from trying. Jac and I did our 5th annual February trip to the San Juan Islands (which was cut short for jury duty). We got a nice little pocket of weather, and found snow on the upper trails almost two feet deep. The crust and boot ruts made it pretty hikeable, but there were a LOT more people than we usually see (even for this time of year). Camp just wasn't the same. Generally there might be one other person tenting it; this year must have been a dozen. Maybe people are catching onto winter camping.

We did a long road trip to eastern Washington in May to revisit the much talked about Snow Peak Shelter along the Kettle Crest. Conditions could not have been worse. Just enough snow and just soft enough to make for hours of literal postholing (in places to the hip), with steep slopes to traverse and blow downs like pick up sticks. Weather was marginal at best, which made that little log cabin with antique wood stove seem all the more like a five star hotel (after we cut wood since the pile was nearly empty, of course). And in the unexpected warmth the mice came out to greet us.

June found us on the opposite end of the extreme in central Washington on the Skyline Rim trail outside of Yakima. Being the only place free of snow, it was a desert hike where the single source of water turned out to be a very difficult to find natural spring miles from nowhere (with an established history of running dry this time of year). Temps were scratching the 90's, and we actually found the only two species of cactus native to the state. Washington can be such a diverse geographical gem, from the rain forests to the sage brush within a few hours.

The little kid hike took us to the enchanting Esmeralda Basin. Mitch and his quarter scale hiking cronies did two plus miles and close to a thousand feet of gain, all with a backpack full of army men and Star Wars light sabers. Wildflowers were everywhere in the basin, campsites were great, and other than a little bow saw incident that resulted in a blood trail and some prominent scarring (Mike), some great memories for the kids.

The older kid hike was at the end of the known world: the famed Cape Alava loop at the northern tip of the Washington's rugged coast and Olympic National Park. It is remote, hard to get to, and incredibly popular in spite of its locale (for those who came from the east side it was a 9.5 hour drive - one way). But it was worth it. Great camping sites with the rolling ebb of the tides, piles of driftwood for forts and exploring, miles of sand, tide pools with starfish and crabs, Makah petroglyphs a century and a half old, and majestic sunsets full of inspiration. A kid's paradise and stories to tell as they grow old like us. Mike even pulled out a bamboo mat and rolled a little fresh sushi to go with the rum punch (although my spicy veggie couscous with almonds & golden raisins was a close second). It's amazing what you can do with a three ounce stove.

The fall hike was a re-run for me of a trip a couple years ago: Buck Creek/Spider Glacier loop. I raved this was the best backpacking experience of my life. Well, we turned it up a notch by adding a 5th day, more miles to make it 50+, a scramble up an 8k peak, and a supper on a 70 year old fire lookout with indescribable views. As a bonus it was one of the guy's 40th birthday, the full moon was crisp and magnificent, and weather OUTSTANDING. The miles were long and so very boot worthy, views of Glacier Peak stunning at every turn, no summer swarms of bugs, days in the 70s night in the 30s, with fall colors erupting while the sweet smell of foliage decay hinted of approaching winter. Company was great as usual, and the stories will age nicely and embellish well with time.

Ah, so little time, so many miles. Teaser for 2009: Snow Camp at Timberline Lodge with a summit climb on Mount Hood??? Fall Hike a rim-to-rim day hike of that Grand Canyon - TWICE??? Oh, the humanity..... I'll never understand why knee cartilage is wasted on the young.