

Northrup Canyon

Why? Fine basalt, eagles in season

Season: March to November; eagles, December through February

Ease: Moderate. It's about 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles to an old homestead, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Northrup Lake.

Northrup Canyon is just across the road from Steamboat Rock, and the two together make for a great early or late season weekend. Northrup, however, is much less visited, so offers the solitude that Steamboat cannot. In season, it's also a good spot for eagle viewing, for the head of the canyon is prime winter habitat for those birds. The trail starts as an old road, staying that way for almost 2 miles as it follows the creek up to an old homestead site. At that point the trail becomes more trail-like as it heads to the left around the old chicken house and continues the last 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Northrup Lake.

At its start, the trail passes what I'd term modern middens – piles of rusted out cans and other metal objects left from the time when Grand Coulee Dam was built. Shortly thereafter is one of my two favorite spots in the hike – a mile or more spent walking alongside basalt cliffs decorated, in places, with orange and yellow lichen. If you're like me, about the time you quit gawking at them you realize that some of the columns in the basalt don't look very upright and that, even worse, some have already fallen down and, even more worse, some have not quite finished falling and are just above the part of the trail you're about to walk. I assume, however, that you'll be lucky like me and that the pillars will finish falling in that slowest of measures, geologic time.

My other favorite part of the hike is just past the old homestead, after you've turned left. It's $\frac{3}{4}$ mile or so of up and down on narrow trail through big rocks of granite and basalt, with trees here and there. It reminds me a bit of a spot near Mt. Assiniboine in Canada, the Valley of Rocks – a place where it feels like little forest gnomes should at any moment jump out at you from behind the rocks. Not sure just why I like both, but I do. Perhaps I have a secret desire to meet a forest gnome. Once past this area, the trail passes a shallow lake, has a steep section, and moves through more open areas until it tops out above a small meadow just before Northrup Lake.

Northrup Lake is small, with lots of tall vegetation around most of its perimeter. That means there's no easy water access, though right below the trail there is a lovely sitting spot, a nap spot for me – not far from where you first see the lake. When not napping, I watched coots, Canada geese and a shoveler. You can hike up the rocky slope behind the lake for different views of the surrounding area. However, I'm not really sure that the new views are worth the hike.

Directions: Head south on Highway 155 from Grand Coulee, WA, or north from Coulee City on the same road. Turn east between mile markers 18 and 19, at the marked road for Northrup Canyon. The trailhead is 0.7 miles up the road. There is a pit toilet.

Information: Steamboat Rock State Park, Electric City, Washington. (509) 633-1304

Maps: USGS Electric City and Steamboat Rock SE, Washington.

Note: For best eagle viewing, visit the canyon from December through February. Either take the short path to a good viewing area that's to the left a few yards from the trailhead, or walk a ways up the old road that junctions with the trail shortly thereafter, on the right. The eagles come in to roost as evening approaches and leave in the early morning light, so time your visit with that in mind.