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THE DAILY



Backpacking in the PNW: Explore Seattle's backyard with these amazing trails and tips

By [Anya Farwell](#) The Daily

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As new students filter onto campus, gearing up for their freshmen year, Seattle's outdoorsy charm will be a new look for many. This iconic Pacific Northwest (PNW) city is known for many things. If I were to rattle off a list, the city's large abundance of salmon and the constant, unyielding rain would take the top five.

Nestled between the Cascade and Olympic mountain ranges, Seattle allows for endless hiking, camping, and backpacking. With the hustle and bustle that comes with the start of a new school year, finding someplace to center yourself and meet new people wouldn't be the worst idea. Surrounded by expansive wildlife and natural beauty, there is no limit when it comes to the activities the PNW has to offer.

"In the summer, we do extensive programming for our first-year students; we call it our first-year adventure program," Alexis Ryan, the field director of the UWild program, said.

The UWild program allows incoming students to UW the opportunity to experience the outdoors before the school year kicks off. In groups of eight to 10 students, UWild leads them on outdoor adventures while fostering long-lasting connections between students in Seattle's backyard.

"We offer overnight kayaking, hiking, and backpacking trips, and we operate mostly out of the national parks around Washington," Ryan said. "We try to think about proximity to campus, and the general interests people have."

With amazing trails just miles outside Seattle, backpacking and other outdoor excursions have never been easier for students.

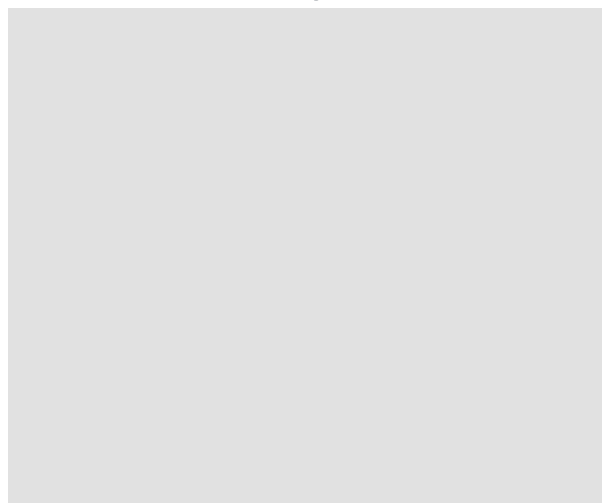
"[When] getting out into the wilderness, all the issues of the city disappear," Luke Peterson, a Seattle local, said. "It's just yourself, your friends, and an incredible space.

"Nowhere else can you feel that alive [...] That feeling is what we all strive for," Peterson said.

Whether you are new to backpacking and hiking, or this isn't your first rodeo, there is something for everyone in the PNW. Trails off Highway 2 and around Snow Lake and Mount Rainier are easily accessible and offer elevation gains gentle enough for beginners, while still delivering the views that make the journey worth it.

"You can do two Alpine lakes in one," Ryan said. "Camp at Snow Lake, and hike three extra miles to Jem Lake."

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With up to 2 million people visiting Mount Rainier each year, outdoor activities prove to be the best weekend excursion to escape the city. But, in recent months, the future of many of our national parks has been called into question.

Several pieces of legislation have been drawn up with the intent of opening national parks to logging and mining minerals, potentially endangering the ecosystems and animals that live there. And this is not the first time.

Organizations such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) have long played a role in preserving national monuments and parks. Established in 1933, the CCC's aim was to give job opportunities to Americans and protect our national monuments after World War I and the Great Depression. The CCC helped build trails and combat deforestation. Their work can still be seen today throughout some of America's most notable national parks, including Cedar Breaks National Monument, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Zion National Parks.

With these bills sitting in the Senate, the outlook towards PNW nature seems to have shifted.

"It makes it more special," Peterson said. "The fact that the administration is trying so hard to take it away, and the people who enjoy those places are fighting so hard to keep them. It just goes to show how special it really is."

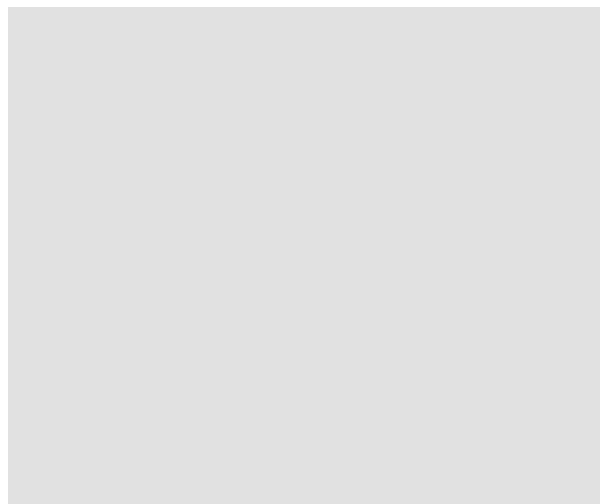
If you are an incoming freshman or a seasoned college student, the PNW has so much to offer. With the endless backpacking trails just miles outside the city, exploring nature can be the best respite from the fast pace of college life.

"Go out there, have fun, and talk to people," Ryan said. "Don't underestimate your capabilities."

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