

Thar She Blows! Story and Photos by Greg Johnston

Photo at right: A heavy, storm-driven surf crashes below North Head Lighthouse at Cape Disappointment State Park, Wash.

The Washington Coast is magical in any weather.

When seas are calm the living's easy, razor clam digging and surf perch fishing are optimal and it's the perfect time for a stroll along this spectacular edge where sea and sky meet and tectonic plates collide.

But, when the storm winds blow in off the mighty Pacific, the raw spectacle of it all can be astonishing. Waves crash and catapult. The wind doesn't howl, it screams. And, the rain doesn't fall, it pummels.

If you're flexible and study the forecast — as any lover of the coast must — post-blow coastal hiking can offer the best agate-hunting and beach-combing.

History indicates vividly that this coast does take a regular beating, which is an appropriate way to launch into the following list of great spots on the Washington Coast to watch a storm.

Pacific Beach

The stretch of the coast from Ocean Shores north to Moclips is the epicenter of razor clam habitat in Washington and my favorite part of it is in and around the town of Pacific Beach. Here, I can truthfully say, I have excavated a limit of razor clams during a raging gale. It isn't easy, in fact it's downright crazy — but possible, with persistence.



Light shines between the storms clouds, illuminating a flock of sanderlings north of Pacific Beach, Wash.

It was on a winter nighttime minus tide, the rain was coming down almost sideways, the surf was snarly, and the six of us worked in pairs, one holding the lantern and watching the surf while the other spotted the telltale “shows” in the sand.

I managed a limit of 15, while the other two diggers got a couple each. We repaired to the Ocean Crest Resort, cold, sodden and sandy, and went back into our warm room. The others commented on what a crazy idea it had been (mine). But a blissful grin raged across my face.

The next day we drove just south to a favorite coastal dive, the Green Lantern Tavern in Copalis Beach, and enjoyed beers, burgers and billiards while watching logs and limbs sweep down the swollen Copalis River.

What makes the Pacific Beach area a peach of a place to watch the Pineapple Express is its trio of traditional, old-time resorts right on the ocean: Iron Springs Resort, recently renovated stem to stern; the Sandpiper Resort, basically mere feet from the high-tide line; and the aforementioned Ocean Crest.

For a great hike nearby, check out Copalis Spit, all of it protected as Griffith-Priddy Ocean State Park (day-use only). Here the tidal reaches of the Copalis River meander past a mile-long sandpit before spilling into the Pacific. Beach driving is not allowed here since it is managed as a wildlife preserve.

Legend has it that occasionally silver dollars dating to the 1880s are found on the beach here, allegedly washed in by storms from a ship that foundered back then.

<http://outdoorsnw.com/2014/best-storm-watching-spots-on-the-washington-coast/>