

CURIOSITY CORNER

THE GREAT (local) ROAD TRIP

~ Sandi Bumpus

Traveling these great United States gives one the opportunity to visit the special and the spectacular; the quaint and the quirky, and many places in between. Minnesota, for example, Land of Lakes and hot dishes, hosts the World's Biggest Ball of Twine and the SPAM Museum. North Dakota has a lake that has continuously grown since 1990, devouring thousands of acres of farmland and whole towns, with no end in sight. Nebraska has Carhenge, a round-up of vintage cars planted bumper down in a corn field.

While these novelties surely beckon, leisure trips across the country are not on the agenda of most adventure-seekers right now. Within the COVID-free confines of our cars, however, and just a short drive from our own backyard are wonders aplenty. The North Cascade foothills are stunning, steeped in history, and make a local road trip a worthwhile endeavor.

Sedro-Woolley, WA – Just 24 miles east of Deception Pass on Highway 20, is a sleepy town with a hyphenated name that must have caused early surveyors to work overtime. In 1878, the original town site on the northern banks of the Skagit River named “Bug” was renamed “Cedra” (cedar in Spanish), and then shortly thereafter morphed into Sedro. During these years, epic logjams in the Skagit created angular wooden islands and disastrous floods that ultimately caused the town to migrate a mile to the



Sedro-Woolley in 1906

northwest. Before Washington became a state, the newly located Sedro had a booming lumber business, and drew the attention of railroad magnates and real estate developers. One of the former, Phillip Woolley, arrived in the 1890s and formed the company town of Woolley on Sedro's border. Before the turn of the century, thirteen different railroad companies used the tracks that converged in a triangle between Sedro and Woolley. By 1898, the towns of Sedro, Woolley, and the small mining town of neighboring Cokedale merged, becoming Sedro-Woolley. Serving as the Gateway to the Northern Cascades, the North Cascades National Park

Service Complex provides a wealth of information about the park, native plants and animals, and park history.

Concrete, WA – 24 miles further east and tucked into a deep crevice carved by the Baker River is another strangely-named town originally called Baker, then Cement City, and finally Concrete. If the name didn't clearly broadcast its limestone-based claim to fame, the 90-foot cement silos built in 1908 between the river and Highway 20 will.



The Superior Portland Cement Company provided the cement for not only structures in western Washington, but for the Grand Coulee Dam in Eastern Washington, and many of Seattle's post WWI structures. Don't miss the 297-foot Lower Baker Dam (1925), the gracefully arched Henry Thompson Bridge (1916), and the Skagit County Cascade Trail which follows the former Great Northern Railway track bed.

This 100-mile round trip is a day well spent. It requires some fuel, a picnic lunch, and a sense of wonder...not much more.