



Columbia and Snake Rivers



Floating hotels. That's what they really are, what they've always been on the rivers of America. But nowadays riverboats are more deluxe and expensive than in Mark Twain's days. For \$5,556, plus maybe \$300 in tips, we purchased a week aboard the *Queen of the West* as she paddled through the Columbia Gorge and along the Snake River, with Oregon on one side and Washington and Idaho on the other. This was in April 2007. By the time it was over, after eight days and seven nights, I wished I had signed up for the four-day short cruise. But hey, Lewis and Clark came this way more than 200 years ago, a round trip just like mine, but in much less comfortable circumstances. Who am I, pampered as I was, to complain?

JACKSON SELLERS
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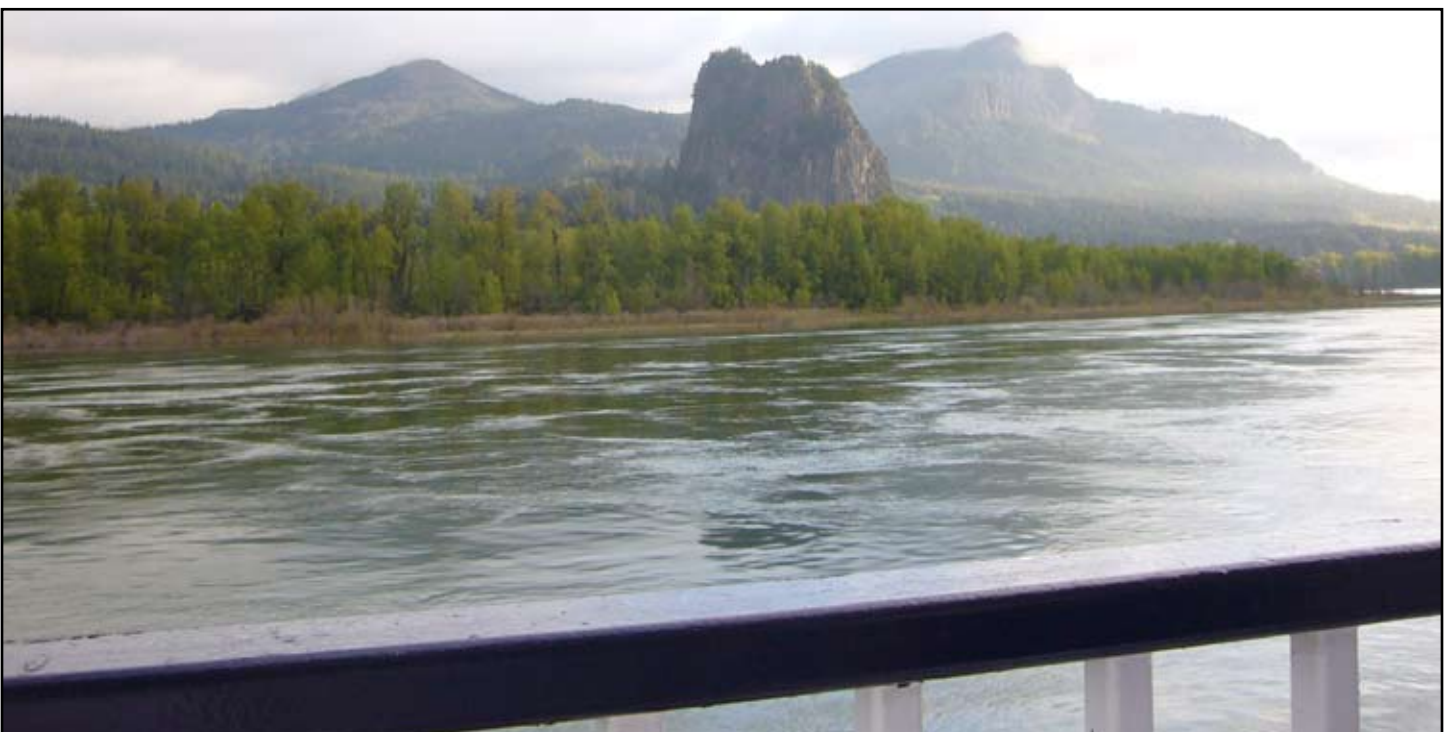


Big Wheel



The pilot house on top of the riverboat featured a huge traditional wheel that could indeed be used to steer the *Queen of the West* through gorgeous vistas. But day by day, and night by night, the less romantic lever at upper right actually did the job. I hoped to get a photo of the famous Multnomah Falls in the Columbia Gorge, but I lost interest when I learned we would pause for a view just after daybreak, which was too early for me. Instead, farther upriver, I contented myself with a picture of a big rock, as seen below from

our cabin's veranda. I shouldn't call it a big rock. This core of an ancient volcano is almost as famous as Multnomah Falls. Lewis and Clark's 1805 journal cites "a remarkable high detached rock ... about 800 feet high." A pretty good estimate. The height is actually 848 feet. At first in the journal the craggy protuberance was called "Beaten Rock" – logical enough although maybe just a syntactic spelling error. By the time the explorers came through here again, homeward bound in 1806, it had become *Beacon Rock*. And it still is.





Jackson Slept Here

Above is where I spent seven nights. Yoshi had an identical bunk on the other side of the cabin. Damn, I was in the Navy again, fifty years later, but with a few amenities that I didn't have then – a wall-mounted TV, an in-cabin shower and toilet, a private veranda and a chocolate on my pillow. Truly, our *Queen of the West* cabin wasn't much bigger than my officer's stateroom aboard the *USS Colahan* during three years in the mid-1950s. I didn't have enough sense, back then, to take pictures that would have interested me as a nostalgic old man. I just wanted to get out of the Navy. But in 2005, on a trip to Boston, Yoshi and I toured the memorialized *USS Cassin Young*, a cookie-cutter *Fletcher*-class destroyer, just like the *Colahan*. And it was there that I snapped the photo at left of Yoshi in the stateroom that was mine as a young man. "It's smaller than I expected," she said.





Hells Canyon

One certainly appreciates the famed Columbia Gorge, but Hells Canyon dividing Oregon and Idaho is more rugged and much less civilized. The Snake River running through Hells Canyon need not apologize to the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. In fact, Hells Canyon is the deepest river gorge in the entire nation, and the energetic Snake is what did it over the eons. Jetboats showed up shortly after the *Queen of the West* docked at Clarkston, Washington, and they took us to Hells Canyon, putting us ashore only once to stretch our legs and stand in awe.

