

SANTA CRUZ WAVES

LIVE THE LIFESTYLE

MAGAZINE



VOL 8.2
OCT/NOV 2021

Seeking

ON WASHINGTON'S WHIDBEY ISLAND

By LIZA MONROY



Photo by Peggy Gennatiempo

No surf cams. No lineups. (Well, at least not while I was there, off-season and feeling cautiously

hopeful). On Whidbey Island – a 20-minute ferry ride from Mukilteo, just north of Seattle – waves must be found the old-fashioned way: drive around and look.

Even if that's all you do, it's glorious sightseeing, with empty, long stretches of rock and sand beaches and nary another soul, much less another surfer. Fort Ebey State Park, a bounty of hiking trails and historical interest on the island's west side, is known for a seasonal point break.

Fort Ebey was established in 1942 as a point of defense during World War II. Now, one of the lookout spots has a tower that forms a clearly delineated lineup point. It's a short hike from the parking lot and an ideal place from which to assess conditions and take in the view of smooth, rocky beaches and dramatic driftwood.

At daybreak, the park was empty. I hiked the short path down to the beach and spent a couple of hours paddling through bull kelp beds in near-still waters. Baby otters frolicked, a tranquil backdrop of mountains and ships in the distance. Bald eagles flew overhead.

In Captain Whidbey Inn's suspended treenet, a local source clued me in on how to conduct an expanded hunt and find some spots not mentioned online. With sunset not until after 8 p.m., I headed northwest from Captain

Wild Surf

ADVENTURE



Photo by Kea Mowat

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Previous Page: Top Left: Photo by Josh Gordon, Top Right: Photo by Will A., Bottom: Photo by Ashlyn G. Above: Photo by Elizabeth Haslam

Whidbey. At the end of W Hastie Lake Road, windswells create surfable waves — even if minimal — regardless of tide or swell.

An eight-minute drive north from Captain Whidbey, the road dead-ends at Hastie Lake County Park. In the water just in front of the rock wall were the first and only other surfers I'd seen since leaving Santa Cruz, two shortboarders in hooded black wetsuits having a solid go at choppy windswell. I watched one of them catch a wave and ride it, kicking out before the wave crashed against the rock wall. I had worried about the lack of waves — here were some that were a bit too wild for my first go at a new spot alone, despite the boat ramp providing a tempting entry point. I returned to Fort Ebey instead.

Moments before sundown, I jogged down the forested path. The tide was a whopping 9 feet, the morning's exposed rocky reef buried underwater, beach reduced to a strip of shoreline. What had that morning been a peaceful, flat ocean inviting for paddleboarders, swimmers, or determined journalists who just want to get on a surfboard no matter what was now churning and, under the darkening sky, even somewhat ominous. Waves pounded the rocks.

I did a duck dive under the shore break. Paddling out, I remembered what Emile, my longtime surf teacher back home, said when I told him I was coming here: "You could surf windswell, leftover, crumbly waves ... or just make sure to get wet."

My water-time on Whidbey turned out to be the latter. While the point of a surf expedition is to surf, and it's disappointing when nature has other ideas, there's beauty in the search, especially during the red-and-orange splendor of last light when you are the only person out.

The main takeaway from my Whidbey wave hunt, though, is an intense longing to return when conditions look as they did on image searches I conducted when travel-planning.

As I loaded my board back into the trunk, a sunset-watching bystander approached. "Pretty amazing that you went out there," she said. "Must have been exhilarating!"

Reader, she wasn't wrong. 🌀