



# Visiting the Tieton River

There's a grandness to the Tieton River Canyon, a larger-than-life magnificence that suggests the kind of place Ansel Adams might have photographed had he come upon it. Twenty miles west of the city of Yakima, it extends from the forested flanks of the East Cascades to the arid, sage-dotted hills of the Columbia Basin. And as befits such a grand place, it is home to grand species: golden eagles, Rocky Mountain elk and mountain lions. Dozens of other smaller but equally important animals live in the diverse and rugged landscape as well: spotted owls and pygmy nuthatches, pine martens and river otters. These rugged hills and canyons also support some of the few remaining mature groves of Ponderosa pine in the state, as well as an expanse of Oregon white oak woodlands near the northern edge of its range.

The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and supported by other agencies and organizations, has protected 10,000 acres within the Tieton River Canyon, land once owned by Plum Creek Timber Co. The Conservancy has purchased the land and transferred it to WDFW to become part of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. Like many other parts of the central Cascades, the land was owned in a checkerboard pattern—a historical legacy from the 19th century, when Congress gave alternating square miles to railroad companies. The result: A fragmented landscape that has been a bane to both timber companies and conservationists. But it also gave the Conservancy and its partners an exciting opportunity: Successful completion of the project has had the effect of putting more than 20,000 acres into a contiguous landscape of protected habitat.

**This visitor's guide will help you experience the wonder of the Tieton River Canyon.**

It suggests driving tours and hikes, campgrounds and kayaking outfitters. It also lists a number of community events that we believe will enrich your visit. We hope you'll take the time to visit this remarkable landscape. And if you'd like to help us in our campaign to protect Eastern Washington forests, please call us at 509-248-6672.

**The Nature Conservancy** 



## Planning your visit

Your visit can be as short as an hour's drive through the heart of the region along U.S. Highway 12 or several days' long. Consider including a drive up Windy Pass Mountain (Forest Service Road 1302), a hike on the Tieton River trail, and a stop at the Oak Creek Wildlife Area interpretive center.

If you have more time, we recommend you combine your trip with visits to the nearby Wenatchee National Forest, William O. Douglas and Goat Rocks wildernesses, the Yakima wine country, the city of Yakima, the western theme town of Toppenish, or the Yakama Indian Nation Cultural Heritage Center.

A visit any time of year provides stunning scenery and recreational opportunities. Between December and February, the Oak Creek Wildlife Area has a winter feeding program for elk and bighorn sheep that draws hundreds of animals. Brilliant colors can usually be seen in October, when the leaves on the oaks and cottonwoods turn. And because of its drier climate, the Tieton Canyon experiences spring earlier than other mountainous areas, and wildflowers are abundant as early as April or May.

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**For up-to-date information on visiting this area,** contact the Wenatchee National Forest's Naches Ranger Station at 509-653-1400 or visit its Web site at [www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee).

**DRIVING TOURS:** U.S. Highway 12 winds through the heart of the Tieton River Canyon and reveals the dramatic landscape and a wide range of natural communities. The road follows the Tieton River as it flows from the heavily forested slopes of the Cascades to the shrub-steppe of the Columbia Basin. Steep hillsides and basalt cliffs create dramatic canyon scenery.

**Two sets of gravel roads allow exploration of the backcountry.** Take Forest Service Road 1302 (between mileposts 177 and 178 on Highway 12) up Windy Pass Mountain to see stands of mature Ponderosa pine and for dramatic views of the Tieton region. From this vantage point, you can see how the shrub-steppe of the lower elevations gradually transitions into the forests of the Eastern Cascades.

Take Forest Service Road 1400 (between mileposts 182 and 183 on Highway 12 just west of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area elk feeding station), also called Oak Creek Road, to explore more of the backcountry. (This road is closed from



late November until the beginning of May.) A recommended route is to take FS Road 1400, drive about seven miles to FS Road 1410 and turn left. Drive to the junction of FS Road 1301. This route will take you through a number of natural communities typical of the area, including shrub-steppe, river corridors with Oregon white oak, cottonwoods, and aspen, and mixed forests dominated by Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. (Best to obtain a recent Forest Service map of the area because these back roads can be hard to follow and poorly signed.)

**HIKING: The Bear Canyon Trail** begins near milepost 179 on Highway 12. This trail follows Bear Creek and allows you to explore a riparian area and view the shrub-steppe and forested hillsides around it. After about three miles, the trail merges with FS Road 1302, which can be followed further into the area. This hike is particularly pretty in the spring, when the creek is running strong.

**The Tieton River Trail** follows the Tieton River for approximately four miles. Park at a footbridge leading across the river (between mileposts 182 and 183 on Highway 12) and cross the river. This trail allows you to savor the dramatic scenery found along the river and Highway 12.

**The Cowiche Canyon Trail** follows the Cowiche Creek just west of Yakima through a dramatic canyon. From Yakima, go west on Summitview Avenue for 6.5 miles, then turn right on Weikel Road. After a short distance, past a sharp turn, take a right onto the trail's access road and continue to the parking lot. The trail is 3.2 miles one way with minimal elevation gain.

**Numerous informal hiking opportunities** start along many of the Forest Service roads that traverse the Tieton area. A number of roads have been abandoned in the area and make excellent hiking trails. For example, after driving approximately 4.7 miles along FS Road 1400 from Highway 12, you'll pass a beaver pond to your left. Up the road from the beaver dam, an abandoned road can be hiked to explore Oak Creek.

**CAMPING:** The Windy Point Campground (between mileposts 177 and 178 on Highway 12) lies in the heart of the township. This is a fee and reservation campground. For more information or to make reservations, call 877-444-6777 or visit [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) on the internet. Dispersed primitive camping is allowed within the Tieton area off Forest Service roads.

**OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES:** The Oak Creek Wildlife Area protects approximately 42,000 acres of habitat immediately to the north and northeast of the lands The Nature Conservancy is working to protect. The area provides critical winter habitat for Rocky Mountain elk, bighorn sheep, golden eagles, bald eagles, and many other animals. Between December and February, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife runs a winter feeding program for the elk and bighorn sheep. Bald eagles can also be seen roosting in the trees along rivers and streams during this time. An Access Stewardship decal is required to park at the area's parking lots and can be obtained anywhere state hunting and fishing licenses are sold (but not at the parking lots themselves). For more information, visit the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Web site at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/outreach/viewing/graphics/region4/oakcreek.jpg>.

**ON THE WATER:** Many people also enjoy rafting and kayaking the Tieton River. A number of companies arrange trips. For more information on kayaking, visit the Yakima Kayak Club Web site at [www.yakimakayak.org](http://www.yakimakayak.org). For a list of rafting companies, contact the Washington Outfitters and Guides Association at 509-997-1080 or 877-ASK-WOGA or visit [www.woga.org](http://www.woga.org).

**BIRDING:** The abundant year-round and migratory birds make this an excellent area for bird watching. Visit the Yakima Valley Audubon Society's Web page at [www.yakimaaudubon.org](http://www.yakimaaudubon.org) for more information.

**HUNTING AND FISHING** are popular activities in the Tieton region. Information on seasons and restrictions can be found at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Visit its Web site at [www.wa.gov](http://www.wa.gov) or call the regional office at 509-575-2740.

The Wenatchee National Forest extends west of the Tieton River township. Forest Service Road 1500 between Highway 12 and State Route 410 provides dramatic views of the Cascades and passes through a number of meadows. There are also many campgrounds and hiking trails in the area, especially in the William O. Douglas and Goat Rocks wilderness areas. For more information, contact the Wenatchee National Forest's Naches Ranger Station at 509-653-1400, or visit its Web site at [www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee).

Mount Rainier National Park lies on the west side of the Cascade mountains. For information on hiking or camping in the park, contact the park's information center at 360-569-2211 or visit [www.nps.gov/mora](http://www.nps.gov/mora).



**bighorn sheep**



**beaver dam**



**golden eagle**



## Other Activities in the Area

The Yakima Valley offers many attractions near the Tieton River area. For more information, contact the Yakima Valley Visitor bureau at 800-221-0751 or visit its Web site at [www.visityakima.com](http://www.visityakima.com).

### Consider the following popular activities:

Over two dozen **wineries** dot the Yakima Valley southeast of the city of Yakima. The best strategy is to pick up a copy of the **Yakima Valley Wine Tour** map and travel the back roads that parallel Interstate 82. You can also get information from the Yakima Valley Winery Association's Web site at [www.yakimavalleywine.com](http://www.yakimavalleywine.com) or 800-258-7270.

The city of Yakima's **North Front Street Historic District** offers shopping and dining. The city's Greenway provides 10 miles of paved paths that follow the Yakima River through parks, natural areas, and playgrounds.

**The city of Toppenish** provides a western theme and more than 55 murals showing scenes ranging from the Old West to aviation events.

**The Yakama Nation Cultural Heritage Center** shares the culture of the Yakama Indian Nation. For more information, [www.yakamamuseum.com](http://www.yakamamuseum.com) or call 509-865-2800.

Many festivals and events are scheduled throughout the year.

**The Spring Barrel Tasting**, sponsored by the Yakima Valley Wine Association, allows you to sample the vintner's craft directly from the barrel.

**The Red Wine and Chocolate Festival** held on President's Day Weekend combines an indulgence of these two favorites. **Thanksgiving in Wine Country** is held the weekend following the Thanksgiving holiday and allows you to sample newly released wines. 800-258-7270.

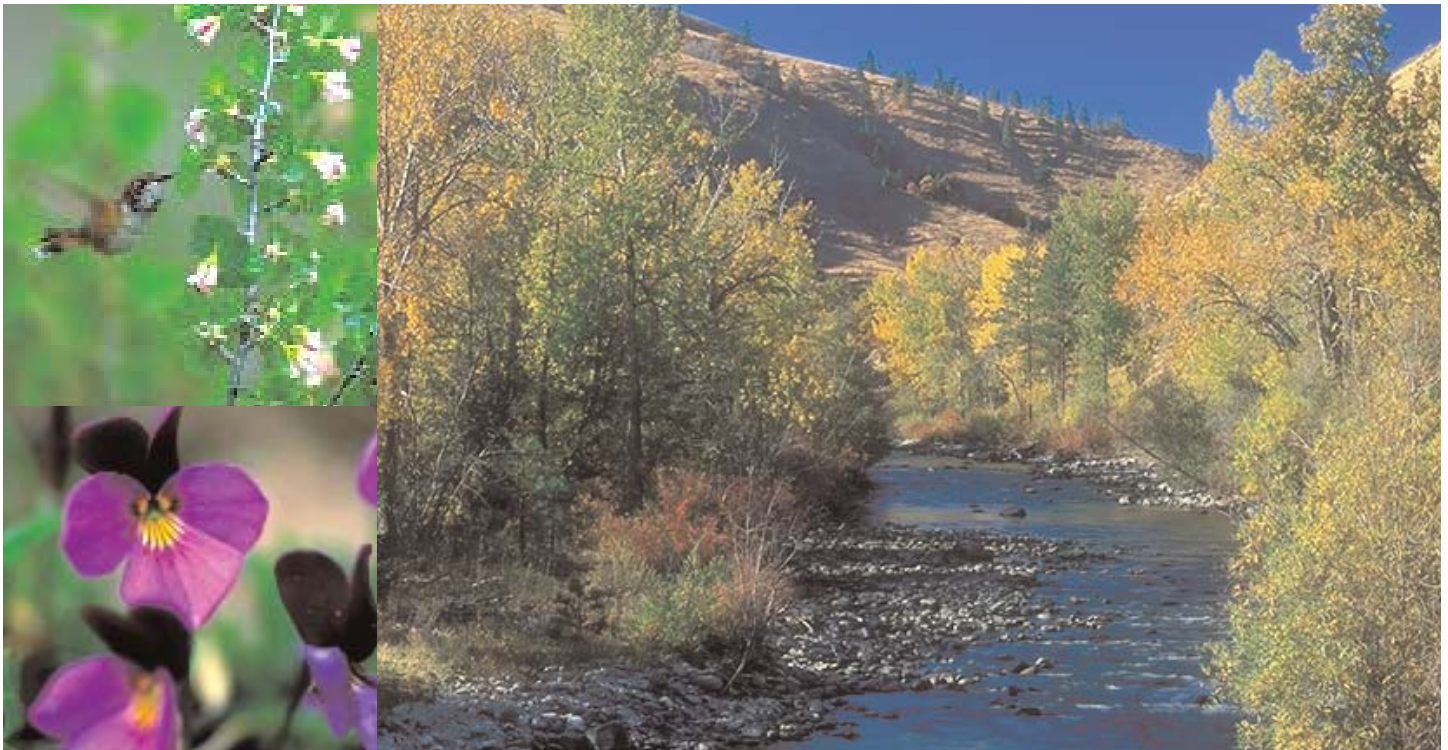
**Saturday Farmers' Market** in Prosser offers fresh foods and crafts Saturday mornings from late April to late October. 509-786-3177.

**Yakima Folklife Festival** is a weekend of folk music, food, and crafts in mid-July. 509-248-0747 or <http://folklife.yakimavalleymuseum.org/folklife/>

**A Case of the Blues and All That Jazz** combines music, wine, beer and food in mid-July. 509-453-8280 or <http://yakimagreenway.org/>

**The Great Prosser Balloon Rally and Harvest** in Prosser is held in late September. 509-786-3177.

**The Central Washington State Fair** in Yakima occurs in late September through early October. 509-248-7160 or [www.fairfun.com](http://www.fairfun.com).



This visitor's guide was produced by The Nature Conservancy of Washington. To learn more about our work in the Tieton River area, call us at 509-962-1333 or 206-343-4344, or visit our Web site at [nature.org/washington](http://nature.org/washington).

photography by Keith Lazelle