Seattle to Lopez
by ROXY ROBLES

The Ⱦ̱SAÑEC People, the Salt Water People, traditionally had homes throughout what is now known as the San Juan Islands and on the east and north coasts of the Saanich Peninsula. W̱SÁNEĆ (SÉNĆOTEN) or Sx’wálech (Coast Salish), now known as Lopez Island, was the site of five reef net sites as well as Xwil’ēnep, which in Coast Salish means Ancient Village. You can learn more about the history and ongoing cultural legacy of Indigenous peoples including Tulalip, Samish, S’Klallam, and Semiahmoo through their respective websites or by researching these territories on native-land.ca.

I like to take advantage of Seattle’s proximity to the incredible San Juan Islands at least once a year. The vibe in the San Juan Islands is different. There is some kind of portal in the Salish Sea that tones down the chatter of the mainland, and I sleep like a baby under the pitch-black sky that peeks out between the tops of gigantic Douglas fir trees all across these islands. Lopez Island is touted as the most bike-friendly of the islands because it is the flattest and least trafficked. The island is a patchwork of working farms knit together with meandering country roads and peppered with farm stands. There is a single tiny town that serves as the economic and cultural center during the tourist season. I highly recommend biking onto ferries rather than driving because ferries are reserved far in advance for the busy summer season. However, there is always room for cyclists! Make sure to check the Washington State Ferries website for service updates and schedules.

This road route will carry you along lush coastal scenery, farmland, and adorable island towns. Your final destination on Lopez Island is a quiet rural getaway where you can unplug and take in the sunset over the sea. The itinerary can be as short as a day trip if you drive or take a bus to Anacortes, or as long as a week if you bike from Seattle and visit several islands, depending on interest and ability. You’ll sample everything western Washington has to offer, from the urban density of Seattle to forested islands and beautiful bridge crossings over a tapestry of waterways.

SPECIAL SITES

Deception Pass State Park is a great place to camp or just stop for a beach picnic. The views from the bridge are stunning, even on a cloudy day. Be aware that bridge traffic is extremely busy in the summer, so take care when crossing and for a few miles before and after.

It’s worth it to get up early and take in the sunrise from Spencer Spit. It’s so peaceful, and watching the sun creep over the water and bobbing sailboats is magical.

While it is about 20 miles round trip from Spencer Spit State Park, a day trip to Iceberg Point is worth it for the expansive views of the Olympic Mountain Range across the Salish Sea to the south, Vancouver Island to the west, and Whidbey Island to the east. This is a special conservation area managed by the Bureau of Land Management and bikes are not allowed onto the private access road. You will need to park your bike at the designated rack and hike to the park.
**GROCERIES AND FOOD**

Most of the islands are seasonal and sparsely inhabited, but both Seattle and Lopez Island will have delicious payoffs for your hard effort. In Lopez Island, be sure to check out the many farm stands, which are abundant and all over the island (last time I was there, we ran into a lemonade stand in the middle of nowhere). Additionally, popular spots include Lopez Village Market, Blossom Grocery, Isabel’s Espresso, and Holly B’s Bakery. The bakery uses locally grown and milled flour, but the owners are trying to sell it, so it may not be around much longer.

**GO AND STAY**

Seattle has a large airport, so flying in and out isn’t a problem; there are also Amtrak trains and Greyhound buses. If you’d like to shorten the trip or don’t want to depart from Seattle, you can bus or drive to Anacortes, Washington, and take a ferry from there. If you’re not in the mood to camp, you’ll find plenty of lovely B&Bs or vacation rentals in the area that you can book ahead of time. Otherwise, you’ll be able to find plenty of hiker/biker sites on the islands.

**PLAN AHEAD**

Western Washington’s climate is wet and chilly, and you’ll encounter misty mornings almost any time of year. August and September are most likely to be dry, warm weather. Cell service is spotty on the islands; expect to be completely out of service on most of Lopez Island. The islands are also close enough to Canada that depending on your phone carrier, you may pick up a Canadian cell tower (and their potential roaming fees).

**FOUR-DAY ITINERARY**

- **DAY 1:** Seattle to Fort Ebey
  - **DISTANCE:** 72 miles
  - **ELEVATION GAIN:** 3,720 feet

Take Seattle’s urban bike routes north to Mukilteo, where you’ll bring your bike aboard a short ferry ride to Clinton. Stay at one of the hiker/biker sites at Fort Ebey, or one of the many Airbnbs on Whidbey Island. If you’d like a shorter ride than going all the way to Fort Ebey, there are some vacation rentals in the south end of Whidbey Island.

- **DAY 2:** Fort Ebey to Lopez Island
  - **DISTANCE:** 46.5 miles
  - **ELEVATION GAIN:** 2,417 feet

Enjoy a more mellow ride with incredible scenery today. You’ll go through Deception Pass State Park, a jewel in Washington’s parks system with rugged coastline, old-growth forests, and vistas of Puget Sound. Your biggest cycling challenge will be a long climb out of Deception Pass into Anacortes, but the grade is manageable. Stock up on food and snacks in Oak Harbor or downtown Anacortes, one of the last places with services before the Anacortes ferry. Take a short ferry ride to Lopez Island, where you’ll relax and unplug on this quiet, less-visited island. Stay at the Spencer Spit hiker/biker campsite.

- **DAY 3:** Lopez Island to Fort Ebey
  - **DISTANCE:** 46.5 miles
  - **ELEVATION GAIN:** 2,310 feet

Start your return via the same route you arrived, and don’t expect to do much coasting: the rolling hills of this route mean you’ll also have plenty of climbing to do on the way back, keeping things interesting.

- **DAY 4:** Fort Ebey to Seattle
  - **DISTANCE:** 72 miles
  - **ELEVATION GAIN:** 3,915 feet

Continue to return along the same route, taking the opportunity to check out points of interest you may have missed the first day. Pull off to the coastline or stop at a winery for a tasting before heading back to Seattle!