

Camping Cozy in the Pacific Northwest:

“We’re Yurtin’ for Certain!”

“WARNING: Yurts are actually ALIEN TRANSPORT PODS. It is strongly recommended that you anchor your yurt to several large trees, lest you be cosmically kidnapped during the night...”

I’m sprawled on the green futon in our yurt at Tugman State Park, on the Oregon Coast south of Reedsport, taking a few minutes to read from the “yurt journal,” a notebook for comments and observations graciously provided by the park rangers. This particular entry includes illustrations – not half bad – of yurts blasting off into the stratosphere. But it’s not the only clever passage I’ve found in this notebook. In fact, along with the “we’re having a great time” entries, the journal has a healthy sampling of original essays, artwork, even limericks.

Are all campers this creative? Or does yurting bring out the poet in you? I’m inclined to think that “yurters,” if not more talented, at least have the time to ponder and pontificate – without a tent to pitch or tarps to hassle with.

Yurts, for the uninitiated, are a cross between a teepee and a cabin and feature futons, bunk beds, a floor lamp and coffee table – how civilized! – electricity, and even a space heater for cool autumn nights. They’re a roomy 16 feet in diameter with 10-foot ceilings and a small, Plexiglas skylight. And they’re ideal for the Pacific Northwest where you’re never quite sure if the camping weather will be glorious or if you’ll spend the weekend in your rain slicker, huddled under a tarp.

I’m a big fan of yurting, partly because I don’t have to sleep on the ground and the futons are quite comfortable. Plus, I’m always the first one up and the yurt’s electrical outlet means I can fire up a quick cup of



Yurts at Fort Stevens State Park

java, then sip it while making “cow-boy coffee” for the rest of the gang.

My kids know the yurting routine, and love it. Their first “task” when they arrive is to get re-acquainted with their miniature “home away from home.” They yell “dibs” on beds – we make them trade off over our three-night stay if there’s a squabble – throw their sleeping bags down, and then run to explore the park’s amenities.

My extended family likes yurts too. So much so that three of my sib-

lings, their families and mine have been observing an annual “yurting ritual” for the past six years. Over the course of those years, we’ve stayed at Beverly Beach, Devil’s Lake, Cape Lookout and Fort Stevens (twice). This year we chose Tugman and, even though it’s almost a four-hour drive from Portland, we’re glad we came.

Tugman’s big draw, we discover quickly, is Eel Lake, a turquoise jewel rimmed with evergreens, just a couple minutes’ walk from our

yurt. It isn’t long before the canoe and raft are unpacked and then, at my sons’ urging, my husband brings out the fishing tackle. Instead of just “fishing,” for a change we actually hook several trout. We cook our catch over an open fire and then gather around the flames later for s’mores; we are still camping, after all.

The state park’s brochure characterizes yurting as “camping lite,” and that designation fits. If drizzle kicks in, as it often does, we find refuge in our quaint little quarters, playing word games like “Taboo” and “Boggle.” It’s nice to have both options.

On one day of our stay, we ventured north a few miles to the Umpqua Lighthouse and then south to the small town of Lakeside. But with the fish biting and trails to hike, we’re happy to stay close to our temporary home.

At the end of each day, I’ve taken to reading and writing in the yurt journal. I find one short poem that pretty much sums up the Northwest yurting experience:

We came to camp/ But it started to rain/ So we switched to a yurt/ And we all stayed sane/ Comfy and dry/ No sleeping on the ground/ Lights and heat/ Best deal around.

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IF YOU GO

Availability: Yurts are offered at 19 state parks across Oregon: those mentioned in this article, plus Honeyman, Harris Beach, Wallowa Lake, Champoeg and others.

Cost: They cost a bit more than a campsite, but they’re still a great deal at \$27 a night. (Campsites range from \$15 to \$20.)

Contact Information: Call Reservations Northwest at 800-452-5687 or 503-731-3411 in Portland. You can also reserve sites at www.oregon-stateparks.org.

For general information, call 800-551-6949.

Tips: Reserve your stay early; yurts are popular and fill up fast. You may also want to check out some of the other “tent alternatives” offered by the state park system: teepees, log cabins, houseboats and covered wagons. If you miss out this summer, consider a yurt for fall or winter camping. They may be reserved up to nine months in advance and are available year-round.