

Round Lake State Park

Introduction: Idaho probably has thousands of naturally occurring lakes within its border. But Round Lake is the only naturally occurring lake that is completely within the boundaries of a state park. This provides Round Lake State Park with a most unique setting. Round Lake State Park has also been in a protective status for many decades. For such a small park of about 200 acres, it has an abundance of “nature” to enjoy. Like Farragut State Park, Round Lake State Park is within an hour driving time from Spokane, Washington. So if Farragut is Spokane’s backyard, then Round Lake is the frontyard. So Round Lake’s reputation of being a great place to get away from it all and enjoy some time in “nature” makes it a park that can rapidly fill to capacity with visitors during the summer season.

Flocks of Canada geese pass over towering pine, hemlock and larch as osprey plunge to the lake for trout or perch. Robins and raven inspect the campgrounds while a lake breeze carries campfire smoke up though the canopy of ponderosa, western red cedar and paper birch. Close to the shore, turtles and frogs, beaver and muskrat dart about for food amid the reeds and grasses, red alder, skunk cabbage and pond lilies. Along one of three trails, hikers find beaver lodges, dams and ponds and often, glimpse a resident moose.

Getting There: Take Highway 95 north from Athol, Idaho. About 1 mile after passing Cocolalla Lake, look for Dufort Road which will be on the left. Turn left on Dufort Road and proceed for about 2 miles to the park.

Major Features:

The Landscape: From the day use area there are great views of a forested mountain to the south. The park is well forested and it has representation of every conifer species in Northern Idaho except for sub-alpine fir. Fortunately the land to the south is somewhat protected as it is owned by the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL). However, they do occasionally log areas on this land. The east side of Round Lake out to the park boundary is very marshy.

The Lake: The lake has 58 acres of surface. The lake is fairly shallow, only 37 feet deep near its center. Lake water rapidly warms in the summer and provides a warm, lush nursery ground for fish and other aquatic organisms. The lake is fringed with floating rafts of picturesque pond lily. There is an attractive sandy swimming beach at the park. The lake is fed by Cocolalla Creek. The head of Cocolalla Creek is Little Blacktail and Blacktail mountains about 1 mile west of Lake Pend Oreille. The creek follows a circuitous path through Cocolalla and Round lakes, Hoodoo channel, and onto the Pend Oreille River.

The Park: The IDPR reports the size of the park at 143 acres. But if the 58 acres of surface of Round Lake is added, the park is more like 201 acres. Then the IDPR has somewhat influence and control over another 100 acres just to the west of the park where they cooperate with the IDL in providing the Stewardship Trail. So the actual number of acres the public can enjoy here is about 300 acres. The elevation of Round Lake is 2,122 feet. The park gets about 82,692 day users each year and 17,423 campers for a total of 100,115 annually. A 2018 BSU Study found the Economic Impact of the park to be \$2,102,000. The south end of Round Lake is intensively

developed with 16 campsites that have water and electric hook-ups, 35 standard campsites, 2 improved restrooms with showers in the campground, 3 vault toilets, 2 docks on the lake, 3 gravel parking lots, a group shelter with 4 tables, and 9 picnic tables with nearby grills for individual families. There is a sandy beach for swimming and 5 miles of hiking trails. There is a primitive un-paved boat ramp for launching of small boats and watercraft. A \$26,000 project is underway to improve the day use parking lot along with an additional day use area.

Geology: Northern Idaho has a rich geologic history, the incomplete record of which extends from 2.6 billion years ago to the present. The oldest known rocks, exposed near Priest River, Idaho, originated as sedimentary layers deposited in an ancient ocean. About 2.6 billion years ago, these deposits were intruded by granitic magmas and at some later point metamorphosed to form metasedimentary gneisses. The details of the subsequent billion years of geologic time are sketchy, but included granite magmatism west of present-day LaCleda about 1.57 billion years ago. The geologic record improves dramatically at 1.47 billion years when widespread deposition of the Belt Supergroup began, continued for at least 70 million years, and produced a tremendous thickness of sedimentary rock that contains remarkably well-preserved mudcracks, ripple marks, and algal mats. Shortly after this in the Middle Cambrian, about 510 million years ago, sediments containing trilobites were laid down. Remnants of the Cambrian strata are preserved in down-faulted blocks near the southern part of Lake Pend Oreille.

Mountain building began in the Cretaceous (about 140 million years ago) as the entire region underwent compression. Rocks in the west were thrust up and over rocks to the east thickening the crust. Strata low in the geologic column were buried to great depths and metamorphosed. Erosion was extensive, and sediments were shed eastward into central Montana off the uplifted land mass. Granitic magmas intruded into the middle and upper parts of the earth's crust and cooled slowly, forming batholiths. The youngest bedrock in the area is the Miocene Columbia River Basalt Group, which flowed north toward Sandpoint about 16 million years ago. Basalt flows exposed just north of Athol are the Priest Rapids Member of the Wanapum Formation.

Even at 7,000 feet, the nearby Selkirk, Cabinet and Coeur d'Alene Mountains were almost completely covered by a vast sheet of ice during the last Great Ice Age, which ended about 12,000 years ago. A lobe of glacial ice moved southward along the Purcell Trench where it dammed the Clark Fork River upstream from the present day inlet into Lake Pend Oreille. Blocked by the ice dam, water backed up and created a massive lake, known as glacial Lake Missoula. When the ice dam inevitably failed, the massive lake emptied. The result was a flood as big and powerful as the earth has ever known. Water ripped through what is now Lake Pend Oreille and continued west to the Pacific Ocean. The land was scoured – the landscape changed forever. This cycle of freezing and flooding repeated many times during the last ice age. Round Lake is located in a glacial meltwater channel that drained from ice in the Dufort area. As the ice margin retreated northward, meltwater and proglacial lakes in the Cocolalla valley established the route of present-day Cocolalla Creek. When the arm of ice eventually retreated it left behind large pieces of ice embedded in the rocky debris. The weight of these massive ice chunks caused depressions in the earth called kettles. Over time these giant “ice cubes” melted and the kettles were left on the land. Round Lake is a kettle that has filled with groundwater.

Ecosystems and Plant Communities: The park includes four ecosystems: mesic forest, lake,

wetlands, and riparian.

Mesic Forest: The forest present at Round Lake State Park is the typical mesic forest of Northern Idaho. Trees common to this forest include western red cedar, grand fir, Douglas fir and western hemlock. Each of these species is fire tolerant. You will also find trees common to dry sites mixed with these wetter habitat species. All of the forest trees of Northern Idaho except for sub-alpine fir are represented in the forests of the park. These trees are: Douglas fir, western hemlock, grand fir, western white pine, ponderosa pine, Englemann spruce, western red cedar, lodgepole pine, and western larch. The mixture of other plants found in this forest include: common snowberry, mallow leafed ninebark,, lady fern, pachistima (Oregon boxleaf), Oregon grape, thimbleberry, Rocky Mountain maple, huckleberry, Rocky Mountain ash, Rocky Mountain maple, bunchberry, spirea, red-osier dogwood, syringa, wild rose, wild ginger, calypso orchid, buttercup, lady slipper, tiger lily, twin flower, night shade, fireweed, trillium, trumpet honeysuckle, wild strawberry, yarrow, lupine, thimbleberry, Oregon grape, Kinnikinnick, and chokecherry.

The Lake: The most prominent features at Round Lake State Park is most certainly the lake. There is more than meets the eye in these waters. This aquatic community has a variety of plants that provide shelter and food for many animals. Plants also add oxygen to the water. Aquatic plants at Round Lake include the pond lily, water smartweed, native milfoil and duckweed to name a few. Thousands of insects live in and around the lake. Some insects begin their lives underwater, clinging to the rocks. They grow and change from their wingless, immature stages, known as nymphs and larvae, to become flying adults. This transformation is called metamorphosis, and all insects go through it. In the lake and creek you may find an immature stonefly, dragonfly, caddisfly or mayfly, all of which prefer cool, clean, flowing water and are indicators of good water quality. Crayfish are also present in the aquatic environment. Crayfish are related to lobsters and use their pincers for defense and catching food. Likewise, the crayfish are food for fish such as the rainbow trout, largemouth bass and brook trout, as well as other hungry birds and mammals. Fish present in the lake include: rainbow trout, brook trout, largemouth bass, pumpkinseed sunfish, yellow perch, crappie, and catfish.

In the not too distant future, mud will continue to wash into the lake, eventually filling and creating a freshwater marsh. Reeds and grasses, along with skunk cabbage, will migrate out from the old shoreline and also will trap sand and silt, forming a meadow. In a few centuries, all that will remain of the lake will be a vernal pool ringed with wildflowers and a meandering creek.

Wetlands: The whole east side of Round Lake is a large wetland. It is quite possible that this marshy area was one part of the surface acreage of Round Lake. But over hundreds of years sediments carried by Cocolalla Creek have washed into the lake area and spawned the growth of aquatic plants. From the sediments and plant debris, soil replaced water acreage. This area is subject to periodic flooding. Common plants found in this wetland include: cattail, duckweed, milfoil, water smartweed, skunk cabbage, corn lily, pond lily, and horsetail.

Skunk cabbage is the keynote species. Western skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*) is one of the earliest plants to flower. It is often smelled first and spotted second due to its distinctive odor, that of a skunk. The skunky smell attracts flies and gnats that pollinate its flower. Early in the spring, before the leaves grow, the bright yellow flower pokes out of the wet

swampy area where it thrives. The leaves are very large, growing up to five feet in length. Most Native Americans used these large leaves like waxed paper to line steam pits for cooking. The leaves and roots contain calcium oxalate crystals that irritate and burn the throat and stomach of those who consume them. Bears don't seem to mind the burning; they dig up and eat the roots in the spring to clean out their intestines after a long winter fast.

Riparian: The riparian ecosystem is along the edges of the lakeshore and along Cocolalla Creek. The typical species found here include black cottonwood, aspen, red alder, paper birch, pink spirea, willow, and red-osier dogwood. Common grasses include reed canary grass and red top. Emergent plant species primarily include cattail, bulrush species, woolgrass, spikerush, and elk sedge.

Wildlife:

Mammals: The mammals present in the park include: whitetail deer, elk, moose, black bear, raccoon, beaver, muskrat, mink, coyotes, bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, weasel, Columbia ground squirrel, pine squirrel, chipmunk, badger, porcupine, and striped skunk.

Birds: The birds present in the park include: common loon, pied-billed grebe, western grebe, goldeneye, teal, mergansers, great blue heron, Canada goose, mallard, hooded merganser, mountain and western bluebirds, osprey, great horned owl, bald eagle, American kestrel, red-tailed hawk, Cooper's hawk, turkey vulture, common raven, ruffed grouse, wild turkey, common nighthawk, belted kingfisher, northern Flicker, pileated woodpecker, cliff swallow, Steller's jay, Clark's nutcracker, black-capped chickadee, nuthatch, western tanager, red winged blackbird, and dark-eyed junco.

Reptiles and Amphibians: The reptiles and amphibians in the park include: western painted turtle, garter snake, rubber boa, western skink, alligator lizard, western toad., bullfrog, and tiger salamanders.

The keynote species is the western painted turtle. Round Lake is home to the most widely distributed turtle in North America, the Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta belli*). Ideal habitat includes slow moving water with thick plants growing on the muddy bottom. Turtles feed on plants, insects, spiders, earthworms, fish, frogs and tadpoles. Lacking teeth, the turtle's jaw has tough, horny plates for gripping food. Young painted turtles are mostly meat eaters but become plant eaters as they mature. Painted turtles bask in large groups on logs, fallen trees and other objects next to the water. Sunning themselves helps eliminate parasitic leeches. Hiking around Round Lake provides many opportunities to view sunning turtles, but "sssshhhhh," turtles dive quickly at the first hint of danger. In the early summer female painted turtles lay 1 to 2 clutches a year of 4-15 oval soft shell eggs in a flask shaped hole. The eggs need 10-11 weeks to incubate. The sex of the turtle is determined according to the temperature during incubation. Cool temperatures produce females. Like most reptiles, turtles hibernate in the winter by burrowing into the mud to protect themselves from the cold.

Fish: The fish present in the park include: rainbow trout, brook trout, largemouth bass, pumpkinseed sunfish, yellow perch, crappie, and catfish.

Cultural History: Evidence such as ancient rock art and rare finds of arrowheads in the area suggest that Native Americans lived in the Round Lake area as early as 7,000 years ago. This area was important hunting and fishing ground for the Kalispel Indians. Here they hunted deer, caribou and snowshoe hare. While fishing, the Kalispels glided across lakes in “sturgeon-nosed” canoes made of cedar frames and white pine bark.

During the mid to late 19th century, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians worked to preserve its culture and life in the midst of increasing white settlement in the area. Roman Catholic priests began working with the Tribe in 1844. In 1855, the Upper Kalispel Tribe ceded its lands and moved to the Jocko Reservation in Montana at the request of the U.S. Government. The Lower Kalispel Tribe, ancestors of today’s Kalispel members, refused to give up ancestral lands and continued to work toward an agreement that would allow the Tribe to remain on its homeland.

During the late 1800s, while most other tribes were going through the process of having reservations established, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians had almost no relationship with the federal government. Congress did propose a treaty in 1872, but the terms were poor and the Tribe refused to sign it. By 1874, Congress had stopped establishing treaties with tribes altogether, leaving the Kalispel Tribe with no legal protection.

By 1875, the Tribal population had shrunk to only 395 people. From 1880 to 1910, as more white settlers moved into Kalispel territory, the Tribe witnessed its land disappearing, but could do nothing to prevent it. Many of the white settlers filed claims under the Homestead Act in order to “legally” obtain land which was rightfully home for much of the Tribe. This time period also introduced the widespread use of alcohol, which many consider to be a fundamental source of the breakdown of the family unit.

For generations, Kalispel members remained trapped in a subsistence lifestyle. In 1965 only a couple of homes on the reservation had running water and there was only one telephone for the whole Tribe. The average annual income for a Tribal member was approximately \$1,400. The Kalispel Tribe of Indians has faced several challenges associated with life in remote rural areas such as unemployment, inadequate housing, limited economic opportunities and prejudice. With most of the land on the reservation unsuitable for development, the Tribe has had to develop innovative ways to create opportunity for Tribal members. A Kalispel Indian Reservation was established along the banks of the Pend Oreille River near Cusick, Washington in 1914.

History: Between 1808 and 1812, North West Company fur agent and surveyor David Thompson traveled through the area as he established the first circle of trade houses in what his company called “The Columbia District.” Thompson’s distinctive maps clearly show that the trails Kootenai and Salish people showed him follow geologic features across the landscape. In spring 1808, Thompson and his crew canoed down the Kootenai River to an encampment near modern Bonners Ferry. From there Kootenai people led him north to Kootenay Lake, following the path of the Purcell Lobe as it retreated in the last ice age. Although the trader wanted to push south to Lake Pend Oreille, his guides told him that spring flooding had rendered the trail impassable.

In September 1809, David Thompson and a voyageur named Joseph Beaulieu, guided by “a Kullyspel lad,” rode horses around the north end of Lake Pend Oreille to the river. Thompson described a “sandy point” near City Beach at modern Sandpoint, then continued to the outlet of the river near Dover. He established his Kullyspel House at the Clark Fork Delta, which during the Pleistocene would have been beneath the ice dam that backed up glacial Lake Missoula.

Thompson wintered in Saleesh House, about 70 miles upstream on the Clark Fork at the modern town of Thompson Falls, Montana. When Thompson canoed across the lake in a Kalispel canoe in April 1810, Thompson put up at the “point of Sand.” When he canoed the route again in June 1811, he set a course by “the Rock below the Sandy Point”. The rock feature is now known as Tank Hill and is composed of granitic bedrock scoured by ice age glaciation and floods. Also in spring 1810, he dispatched clerk Jaco Finlay to build Spokane House, a full hundred miles across a divide and downstream on the Spokane River.

Over the winter of 1811-12, Thompson visited Flathead Lake and the area around Missoula Montana. On his maps, mountains rendered with the “caterpillar” method of the time define the outline of glacial Lake Missoula above the Clark Fork, Flathead, and Bitterroot Rivers. The tribal trail he called the “Skeetshoo Road” leading from Kullyspel to Spokane House follows ice age flood channels across Rathdrum Prairie between the Pend Oreille and Spokane drainages. It would be a French Canadian fur trader in Thompson’s party that likely gave the lake its name. The words “Pend Oreille” are French for “an ear hanging pendent.” The lake is shaped much like a human ear.

After the Idaho lands were surveyed by the U.S. Government, Round Lake ended up being situated in section 36 of Township 56 North, Range 3 West. At the time of statehood (1890), the new State of Idaho was granted all the lands within sections 16 and 36 of each township for school endowment purposes. So Round Lake itself has been under continuous government ownership.

Just to the north of section 36 is Section 25 of Township 56 North, Range 3 West. This entire section was granted by the U.S. Government to the Northern Pacific Railway on July 12, 1897.

The Charles Albert Smothers family came to Idaho sometime after 1910. He and his wife, the former Ida May Apple, and their family came from Rushville, Nebraska. Charlie Smothers was born on February 11, 1859 in Whitesboro, Iowa. He and Ida May were married in 1887 in Missouri Valley, Iowa. Five of their children were born there and a sixth child was born in Nebraska. Their daughter Clara Ethel was born on August 8, 1892. Clara Smothers was still living in Nebraska in 1920 and 1930. Ida May Smothers died in 1928 while she and Charles were living in Morton, Idaho at the time.

Around 1900, several family-owned timber companies sent timber cruisers to tally stands of western white pine and redcedar in Idaho and Washington. Much of their attention was focused on Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR) lands granted to the railroad by Congress as an incentive to build a trans-continental railroad. John Humbird, of Mason, Wisconsin, liked the white pine stands surrounding Sandpoint. He formed Humbird Lumber Company in late 1900 by purchasing the existing Sandpoint Lumber Company sawmill and several thousand acres of NPRR grant lands including Section 25 of Township 56 North, Range 3 West. It has been reported that Humbird used Round Lake for a log pond.

Round Lake was becoming a popular recreation place for those who established farms in the area. The Humbird Lumber Company sold a 40 acre parcel of land in Section 25 of Township 56 North, Range 3 West that was adjacent to the State Lands in Section 36 to Clara Smothers in 1921..Her parents enlisted the help of their sons Nathan and Glenn to build a house on the property in 1926. Supposedly it was the home of Charles and Ida May Smothers. Which would be consisted with the Morton, Idaho location given in Ida May’s 1928 death record. However, as pointed out above, Clara Smothers was still a resident of Nebraska in 1920 and 1930. So she might not have been a permanent resident in the house.

In 1955 John C. Sorenson and Vivian Rae Sorenson became owners of the 40 acre parcel that had been owned by the Smothers family. They turned around in the same year and sold the property to the Idaho State Land Board for \$5,000. This allowed public access to Round Lake which had always been in state ownership. In a remarkably progressive move, the IDL began developing the property for a state park. Lester Tovey was the first park custodian.

The house built by the Smothers family is today the park office and visitor center.

Park History: The IDL began to create a more professional program when it created a Division of Parks within the Department in 1953. A few state parks began to be carved out of the endowment lands in this period. Round Lake State Park was first established in 1956 under the IDL and they began constructing rudimentary recreational facilities here.

When the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation was started, they took over operation of Round Lake State Park in 1965. Park Planner Don Partridge prepared new site plans for the park, erasing much of the previous development. Fifty-three campsites were partially constructed, new roads put in and bumper logs were placed throughout the use areas. The campsites were designed with the much smaller size of the camping vehicles of the era in mind. This is why today the park staff restricts the campground to trailers that are less than 24 feet in length.

In 1973 IDPR purchased the 200 acre Round Lake State Park site from the IDL for \$248,878.

The World Fair was held in nearby Spokane in 1974. Round Lake State Park received 11,129 visitors that year.

A Boy Scout eagle project in October 2015 built some substantial boardwalk to get the trail on the east side of the lake up and out of the marshy and sometimes flooded ground.

The Stewardship Trail was restored with new interpretive panels in 2017, both IDPR and IDL staff members contributing to the project.

Recreation Activities:

Camping: Camping is perhaps the most popular activity at the park. The park features 51 individual campsites. Trailers must be 24 feet or less.

Picnicking: There are nine picnic tables available for individual use. There is one group shelter available in the park.

Boating: The park has a primitive natural surface (unpaved) boat ramp and very limited parking for vehicles with boat trailers attached. The boat ramp has 1 lane (at best) with 1 courtesy dock. Both motorized and non-motorized craft can be launched here. However, only electric motors are allowed so that Round Lake is a “no-wake” lake. Canoe and kayak rentals are available.

Trails: There are over 5 miles of trails in the park. Some of the trails are available for mountain bike use. The trails can also be used in the winter for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

The Trapper’s Trail is about 2 miles in length. This trail is a slow meandering hike along the shore of the lake and creek. There are a variety of habitats to explore and opportunities to see wildlife.

The Swamp Tromp Trail is a short 1/4 mile trail through the swampy area below the

campground. There are a number of interpretive signs describing some of the unique habitats in this area.

The Ski Trail is the portion of the trail system that allows skiers and bicycles to continue around to the east side of the park.

The Stewardship Trail is about 2.5 miles in length. This self-guided interpretive trail introduces the various land owners and their different management styles. The trail is a collaborative project between IDPR and the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and surrounds Round Lake State Park, providing local citizens and visitors to the area a unique interpretive opportunity. This award-winning trail offers a learning opportunity about the benefits of our natural resources, and threats to our natural resources and how to care for them. Along the trail, 25 interpretive signs provide information on the local geology, forest health, fish and wildlife, water quality, soils, wetlands, wildfire, natural and managed forests and best management practices.

Nature Study: You can start your nature study at the park visitor center where there are exhibits, guides, and nature-oriented books and publications available. Hikers on the trails will discover beaver lodges and may see a glimpse of a moose, waterfowl, songbirds, deer, beaver and maybe a bear. The Stewardship Trail is a must for nature study. Over the years, thousands of visitors and community groups have used this trail as an outdoor classroom.

Swimming: The park only has one official swimming beach. It has a sandy approach and bottom with a gentle slope into the water. There are docks on both sides.

Fishing: The fish that can be caught include: rainbow trout, brook trout, largemouth bass, pumpkinseed sunfish, yellow perch, crappie, and catfish.

Resource Management Issues:

Noxious Weeds: Canary Reed Grass has invaded the east side of the park.

Overcrowding: Round Lake State Park is small and the demand is high. But the small parking lots severely limit the number of persons who can use the park.

Please Remember

- There is a \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee required for access to the park even if the entrance station is closed.
- All campers are asked to stop at the visitor center and register before occupying your campsite, even when you have a reservation..
- Open fires are not allowed on the beach.
- There are no lifeguards on duty at the designated swimming beach.
- Personal flotation devices are required for any watercraft on the lake.
- All watercraft must display a current invasive species decal.
- Dogs must be on a leash at all times, and are not permitted in the buildings.
- Motor vehicles are to stay on established roadways unless directed otherwise. When parking lots are full, please do not park on the side of the access roads.
- Motor vehicles (including OHVs) must have a park permit and be street legal, licensed, and insured.

Future Improvements Planned: There appears to be no current master plan or general development plan available for this park.

Suggestions for the Future: The following are suggested improvements to the park:

- IDPR should consider paving all the roads in the park.
- In 1961 the Legislature approved an act incorporating a 677 acre parcel of state endowment land into the McCroskey State Park with IDL retaining the right to harvest timber off the property. Either this method or an agreement with IDL should be pursued that essentially does the same thing with the 160 acre NW 1/4 of Section 36 of Township 56 North and Range 3 West. This quarter section of land is located just to the west of Round Lake State Park and it contains the Stewardship Trail and the areas along Cocolalla Creek. This could be done as a pre-cursor to the eventual purchase of the property by the IDPR. In the meantime it seems that this parcel has not been heavily logged and there are places where the contours may be suitable for developing another campground for the park.