

## Fostering Queer Joy with Queer Mountaineers

By **Juan Jocom**

Photos by **Sarina Pizzala** and **Abby Tang**

Queer Mountaineers is a Seattle based group that focuses on **fostering queer spaces** and **community** outdoors. I recently joined them as a volunteer a few months ago, and it has been honestly the best thing I've done this year.



They recently hosted their first ever multi-day trip to the climbing haven of Eastern Washington, Vantage Point, where more than 50 participants showed up! Climbing may seem like an isolated sport, but the **queer joy** that I felt during this climb with Queer Mountaineers, is something I haven't felt in a long time.



By day, the climbs were energized by the **ProBar Protein Bars** that were provided by the good folks at ProBar. Rock climbing is an energy demanding sport, so it's always good to have something to munch on to make sure you're not running low on fuel, especially when you are doing cragging trips like this.

By sun down, everyone gathered around the warmth of comforting company and campfire after a long day of climbing. We watched the embers fly from the campfire melt away into the star-filled night sky while we talked about drag and other climbing projects we want to do in the future.





During our hike to the Ancient Lakes, I was delighted to find out that my co-hikers brought Probar BOLT energy chews! – my favorite outdoor snack. I remember having this fun little snack when I went biking through the Continental Divide Mountain Bike Trail. Energy bars are great, but having these guilt-free gummies as an alternative for refueling is a god-sent gift.



Having a space where I can feel openly myself and be safe is something that I haven't been able to find in the climbing community, not until I started doing things with Queer Mountaineers. But don't just take my word for it. One of the attendees shared what they experienced during that week that drew a smile across my face.

*"I left feeling overwhelmed with joy and crying happy tears. I have been climbing and recreating in the outdoors for years, and this weekend was the most at ease I've felt in an outdoor group setting. I have found outdoor community and queer community in isolation, but have struggled to find the intersection between these two - that has changed with the Queer Mountaineers."*





Now that the climbing season has finally started in Washington, I'm looking forward to doing more things with Queer Mountaineers, where we are hoping to deliver a much needed community in the outdoor arena.