

**MORE THAN 50 TRAILS YOU CAN HIKE IN A DAY**

**Day Hike!**

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**MOUNT  
RAINIER**

Ron C. Judd



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# Day Hike!

## MOUNT RAINIER

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

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Ron C. Judd



SASQUATCH BOOKS  
SEATTLE

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Sasquatch Books

1904 Third Avenue, Suite 710

Seattle, WA 98101

(206) 467-4300

[www.sasquatchbooks.com](http://www.sasquatchbooks.com)

[custserv@sasquatchbooks.com](mailto:custserv@sasquatchbooks.com)

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# CONTENTS

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Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Overview Map

Hikes at a Glance

Acknowledgments

Mount Rainier

What's New in the Third Edition

Using This Guide

Be Careful

## Longmire/Cougar Rock

- 1.** Kautz Creek/Indian Henry's Hunting Ground
- 2.** Twin Firs Loop
- 3.** Trail of the Shadows
- 4.** Rampart Ridge Loop
- 5.** Carter/Madcap Falls
- 6.** Comet Falls/Van Trump Park

## Southwest Foothills

- 7.** Round Pass
- 8.** Lake George
- 9.** Goat Lake
- 10.** Glacier View
- 11.** High Rock Lookout

## Paradise Area

- 12.** Nisqually Vista
- 13.** Alta Vista
- 14.** Panorama Point/Skyline Loop
- 15.** Camp Muir
- 16.** Paradise to Narada Falls
- 17.** Upper Paradise Valley
- 18.** Paradise Glacier
- 19.** High Lakes Loop
- 20.** Pinnacle Saddle
- 21.** Bench and Snow Lakes

# Stevens Canyon/Ohanapecosh

---

- 22.** Stevens Creek
- 23.** Cowlitz Divide
- 24.** Grove of the Patriarchs
- 25.** Silver Falls Loop
- 26.** Three Lakes

## Chinook Pass

- 27.** Eastside Trail
- 28.** Naches Peak Loop
- 29.** Sheep Lake

## White River/Sunrise

- 30.** Noble Knob
- 31.** Crystal Lakes
- 32.** Owyhigh Lakes
- 33.** Summerland
- 34.** Emmons Moraine/Glacier Basin
- 35.** Palisades Lakes
- 36.** Silver Forest/Emmons Vista
- 37.** Sunrise Rim Loop
- 38.** Sourdough Ridge/Dege Peak
- 39.** Huckleberry Creek/Forest Lake
- 40.** Frozen Lake/Mount Fremont Lookout
- 41.** Burroughs Mountain
- 42.** Berkeley Park
- 43.** Skyscraper Pass

## Carbon Glacier/Mowich Lake

- 44.** Green Lake
- 45.** Really Big Tree/Ipsut Pass
- 46.** Carbon Glacier Viewpoint
- 47.** Cataract Camp/Seattle Park
- 48.** Yellowstone Cliffs
- 49.** Mowich River Camp
- 50.** Tolmie Peak
- 51.** Spray Park







# HIKES AT A GLANCE

## Easy

NO.	HIKE NAME	RATING	TRAIL ACCESSIBLE	KIDS	DOGS
1.	Kautz Creek	★ ★ ★	June-Nov	✓	
2.	Twin Firs Loop	★ ★ ★	Year-round	✓	
3.	Trail of the Shadows	★ ★ ★	Year-round	✓	
5.	Carter/Madcap Falls	★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
7.	Round Pass	★ ★ ★ ★	Year-round	✓	
9.	Goat Lake	★ ★ ★ ★	June-Oct	✓	✓
12.	Nisqually Vista	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
16.	Paradise to Narada Falls	★ ★ ★	Mid-June-Oct	✓	
24.	Grove of the Patriarchs	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	June-Oct	✓	
25.	Silver Falls Loop	★ ★ ★ ★	May-Oct	✓	
28.	Naches Peak Loop	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	✓
34.	Emmons Moraine	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
36.	Silver Forest/Emmons Vista	★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
37.	Sunrise Rim Loop	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
38.	Sourdough Ridge/Dege Peak	★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	

Click [here](#) to view the details

# Moderate

NO.	HIKE NAME	RATING	TRAIL ACCESSIBLE	KIDS	DOGS
4.	Rampart Ridge Loop	★ ★	June-Oct	✓	
8.	Lake George	★ ★ ★	June-Oct	✓	
10.	Glacier View	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	✓
17.	Upper Paradise Valley	★ ★ ★ ★	Late June-Oct	✓	
18.	Paradise Glacier	★ ★ ★ ★	July-mid-Oct	✓	
19.	High Lakes Loop	★ ★ ★ ★	Late June-Oct	✓	
21.	Bench and Snow Lakes	★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
27.	Eastside Trail	★ ★ ★	June-Nov	✓	
32.	Owyhigh Lakes	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
33.	Summerland	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
34.	Glacier Basin	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct		
39.	Huckleberry Creek/Forest Lake	★ ★	Mid-July-Oct	✓	
40.	Frozen Lake/Mount Fremont Lookout	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
42.	Berkeley Park	★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
43.	Skyscraper Pass	★ ★ ★	Mid-July-Oct	✓	
44.	Green Lake	★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
46.	Carbon Glacier Viewpoint	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct	✓	
51.	Spray Park	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Mid-July-Oct	✓	

Click [here](#) to view the details

# Moderately Difficult

NO.	HIKE NAME	RATING	TRAIL ACCESSIBLE	KIDS	DOGS
6.	Comet Falls	★★★★	Mid-July-Oct	✓	
13.	Alta Vista	★★★★	July-Oct	✓	
20.	Pinnacle Saddle	★★★★	Mid-July-Oct	✓	
22.	Stevens Creek	★★	June-Oct		
29.	Sheep Lake	★★★	July-Oct	✓	✓
30.	Noble Knob	★★★★	July-Oct	✓	✓
31.	Crystal Lakes	★★★★	July-Oct	✓	
35.	Palisades Lakes	★★★	July-Oct		
41.	Burroughs Mountain	★★★★★	Late July-late Oct		
49.	Mowich River Camp	★★★★	July-Oct	✓	

Click [here](#) to view the details

# Difficult

NO.	HIKE NAME	RATING	TRAIL ACCESSIBLE	KIDS	DOGS
I.	Indian Harry's Hunting Ground	★ ★ ★	June-Nov		
6.	Van Trump Park	★ ★ ★ ★	Mid-July-Oct		
11.	High Rock Lookout	★ ★ ★	June-Oct	✓	✓
14.	Panorama Point/Skyline Loop	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Late July-mid-Oct		
23.	Cowlitz Divide	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct		
26.	Three Lakes	★ ★ ★ ★	July-Oct		
45.	Really Big Tree/Ipsut Pass	★	July-Oct	✓	
47.	Cataract Camp/Seattle Park	★ ★	July-Oct		
48.	Yellowstone Cliffs	★	July-Oct		
50.	Tolmie Peak	★ ★ ★	July-Oct		

Click [here](#) to view the details

NO.	HIKE NAME	RATING	TRAIL ACCESSIBLE	KIDS	DOGS
15.	Camp Muir	★★★★	Mid-July-Sept		

Click [here](#) to view the details

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The 3rd edition of this guide is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Ronald Lewis Judd, who loved to camp, photograph, and hike at Mount Rainier. He put the outdoors bug in me as an infant and I am forever grateful. Thanks also to MJ, my inspiration in the woods and out, and longtime trail buddy and Rainier-ophile Elliott Almond, for keeping me going. And as always, thanks to everyone who loves Mount Rainier enough to keep it special, because it truly is.

—Ron C. Judd

# MOUNT RAINIER

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Mount Rainier: Yeah, you've seen it.

But have you really seen it?

Maybe that's not the right word. You can't really say you've experienced one of North America's most stupendous peaks until you get to know the place intimately. And to know Rainier is to leave its congested parking lots and enter its wild spots, shake hands with its evergreens, breathe in its crisp air, smell its wildflowers, and soak your aching feet in its cool streams.

These are all things, fortunately, that can be done easily, without venturing very far down any one of Mount Rainier National Park's 240 magical miles of maintained trails.

We emphasize here the word "easily." One of the great misperceptions of the mountain local natives call Tahoma is that you have to be in Everest shape to partake of its 228,000 acres of pristine wilderness. This is understandable: Just *look* at the thing. The mountain is huge, forbidding, and rough-hewn. Since Rainier truly is an exposed, vertical being, much of its land is very rugged, and the terrain from its shoulders on up requires the kind of backcountry know-how you can't get by walking around Seattle's Green Lake a half-dozen times a year.

But all around this mountain's waistline, magic awaits. Alpine meadows too beautiful to be real. Sprawling snowfields; stunning views. Old-growth trees, bigger than your house. Liquid-crystal rivers. Box canyons. Two dozen of the most massive glaciers on the continent. Ample wildlife.

You can see some of it without ever getting 50 feet from your car. But you can't really see it until you're in it, and the best—and only—way to get there at Mount Rainier is by foot, down a path.

That's a simple lesson we learned anew by researching this guide, which aims to bring to light fifty-one of the greatest walking paths in the Northwest, if not the nation, for Rainier visitors who get to the mountain once a week or once in a lifetime.

They range from the awesome—and occasionally dangerous—alpine trek to Camp Muir above Paradise to a placid, universally overlooked path winding through old-growth forest west of Longmire. Most of the trails fall somewhere in between, and all of them remind us of a delightful fact often overshadowed by the mountain's sheer size: You can get out in Mount Rainier National Park—really out, in the memory-of-a-lifetime kind of way—without committing a week of your life to ten years' wear and tear on your knees.

Almost all the hikes listed in this guide can be undertaken by the average it's-a-sunny-Sunday-morning-let's-do-something-grand hiker. Granted, some are steep, and hiking above 5,000 feet will leave the unconditioned flatlander huffing and puffing (take your time and hydrate; you'll adjust). Proper preparation and attention to weather, snow levels, and other factors are important. But the fact remains that Mount Rainier National Park presents a rare opportunity for both visitors and residents. Perhaps nowhere in the world is such a unique alpine environment within such close reach of a major metropolitan area.

This explains the crowds that plague the park on summer weekends—and threaten to make today's unfettered auto access to park attractions and trailheads a thing of the past. More than two million people visit the park each year, with the vast majority landing there on summer weekends.

Being park consumers in the same way you are, we've kept that in mind in preparing this guide, attempting to warn you away from the worst overcrowding—and suggesting alternatives to popular trails when there's simply no way you can get to the park except on that same sunny August

weekend with everyone else.

One of the more profound findings in our summer-long trek through the park, however, was how easily solitude or near-solitude could be attained by walking more than a couple miles from some of Rainier's most overcrowded tourist haunts. Pick a trail from the guide, follow it as far as you wish, and find out for yourself. You just might discover something about a place you thought you knew and about yourself.



# WHAT'S NEW IN THE THIRD EDITION

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If you haven't noticed all the new color pictures, you're not paying attention!

Beyond that, here's some good news: Most of the changes in this guide between its 2nd edition in 2008 and the 3rd edition in 2014 reflect *improvement* in Mount Rainier trails, not degradation. That's because this time span saw the repair, in most cases, of major damage done to trails in and around the park when massive winter storms in both 2003 and 2006 caused extensive flood damage.

At the time, some observers offered a pessimistic prognosis that it would take a decade, or more, to restore most trails to their former glory. That turned out to be essentially true. Now, a full decade after the first of those storms, some damage remains, although first-time visitors to Mount Rainier National Park might not notice it, because they won't be familiar with what used to be here. One example is the former Sunshine Point Campground, just inside the park's Nisqually Entrance, which floodwaters literally swept from the face of the earth. It hasn't been replaced, as the ground that stood beneath it is gone. Viewpoints along the Nisqually River—particularly a major bridge crossing on the Longmire-Paradise Road—bear stunning witness to this flood devastation. Take a moment to stop, walk out on the bridge, and take it all in, both upstream and down, to appreciate the fury of Mother Nature in action here—even in a nonvolcanic event!

Fortunately, trails are easier to repair than roads, bridges, and campgrounds, and trail crews at Mount Rainier have done a stellar job repairing or rerouting most of the trails savaged by those floods. Even the more-heavily damaged paths, such as a popular hike from White River Campground to Glacier Basin and Emmons Moraine, have been repaired, with final touches being finished as recently as summer 2012. And thanks to great trail work, some of the new routes are substantially better than the old ones, in terms of trail width and routing.

The 3rd edition includes notations throughout on some of those improvements. It also reflects the major, less-satisfactory result of that flood damage: the now-permanent closure to automobile traffic of the Carbon River Road at the National Park boundary ([this page](#)). Day hikes in that area now are listed as much longer day hikes, due to the additional six to ten miles of travel required, on foot or bicycle, just to get to the old trailhead.

Aside from that, we have rechecked all the trail data and contact information, updating ranger station locations and phone numbers in a couple cases. And we have happily used the excuse of a new edition to re-hike many of the trails and check up on all others in the guide, adding some new observations and subtracting others that now seem funny or anachronistic (such as all references to film cameras!). Feedback to the authors from you, the readers, suggest this guide has proven a useful tool to many hikers. For that we are grateful, and please know that your feedback and/or new information are always welcome.



# USING THIS GUIDE

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The beginning of each trail description is intended to give you quick information that can help you decide whether the specific day hike is one that interests you. Here's what you'll find:

## Trail Number & Name

Trails are numbered in this guide following a geographical order; see the [Overview Map](#) for general location. Trail names usually reflect those names used by the national park, national forest service and other land managers. In some cases, portions of very long trails or multiple sections of separate trails may have been combined into a single hike and assigned a new name by the author.

## Overall Rating

Assigning an overall rating to a hike is a difficult task, given the fact that one hiker's preferred trail is another's dung-heap. Yet every hike in this guide is worth taking (we're still working on the dung-heap trail guide). Here, the difference between a five-star hike and one with four stars might only be the number and variety of wildflowers along the trail, or the height of the tripping tree-root arrayed on the path before you. The trails in this book are the best you'll find at Mount Rainier. Some might not be as good as others, but they are all better than the ones we've excluded.

Another problem is attempting to be objective in rating the trails. Some of us are pushovers for trails above timberline, where the wildflowers wave in gentle summer breezes, where mountain claw clouds, where cooling snowfields linger through summer. Hikes with these features may be rated higher than you might rate them. If you're a hiker who loves walking along rattling river padding on rain forest trails softened by mosses while trying to find the sky through a canopy of 300-foot-tall evergreens, you might add one star to every lowland hike listed here, and subtract one star from every alpland hike.

Finally, many factors must be considered in assigning an overall rating. Besides all the aesthetic stuff like scenery and wildlife and Really Big Trees, there are objective criteria like trail condition, length and steepness, and obstacles like creek crossings or deadfall. On the other hand, you can forget all that junk and just take our word for it:

- ★ This hike is worth taking, even with your in-laws.
- ★★ Expect to discover socially and culturally redeeming values on this hike. Or, at least, very fine scenery.
- ★★★ You would be willing to get up before sunrise to take this hike, even if you watched all of Letterman the night before.
- ★★★★ Here is the Häagen-Dazs of hikes; if you don't like ice cream, a hike with this rating will give more pleasure than any favorite comfort food.
- ★★★★★ The aesthetic and physical rewards are so great that hikes given this rating are forbidden by most conservative religions.

## Distance

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The distance listed is round-trip, exclusive of any side trips to other features mentioned along the way. If these excursions off the main trail are longer than about 0.2 mile, that distance will be mentioned in the description of the hike.

## Hiking Time

This is an estimate of the time it takes the average hiker to walk the trail, round-trip. Since none of us are average hikers, you may feel free to ignore this entry. For the most part, however, the pace on the trail is calculated at about 2 miles per hour. Times are estimated conservatively; even so, this rate might slow on trails with significant elevation gain. (Some hikers will wonder what sort of trail slug came up with such ridiculously long hiking times—and we're okay with that.)

## Elevation Gain

This is a calculation of the total number of feet you'll have to climb on the trail. Don't assume that all of the elevation will be gained on the way to your destination. Some of these trails actually lose elevation on the way and gain it on the return, or alternately gain and lose elevation along the way. The certainty is that on a round-trip hike, you always gain the same amount of elevation that you lose.

## High Point

This is the highest point above sea level you'll reach on any given hike. In a few cases, this might be the trailhead.

## Difficulty Level

Here's another tough one. Experienced hikers might find a hike rated "Moderately Difficult" to be only "Moderate," while beginning trekkers might rate the same hike "Difficult." As with the hiking times, noted above, the difficulty of individual hikes was rated conservatively.

The terms used here are:

- ◆ **Easy:** Few, if any, hills; generally between 1 and 4 miles, round-trip; suitable for families with small children. In some cases at Rainier, these trails are even paved.
- ◆ ◆ **Moderate:** Longer, gently graded hills; generally 4 to 6 miles long, round-trip.
- ◆ ◆ ◆ **Moderately Difficult:** Steeper grades; elevation changes greater than about 1,000 feet; between 6 and 9 miles long, round-trip.
- ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ **Difficult:** Sustained, steep climbs of at least 1 mile; elevation gain and loss greater than 1,500 feet; usually more than 9 miles long, round-trip. Your deodorant may fail you on these.

◆◆◆◆◆ **Extreme:** Sustained steep climbs; distances greater than 10 miles, round-trip, or shorter hikes with special conditions requiring extreme care, such as loose rock or snow crossings. These trails will provide a rigorous test of your hiking skills and muscles.

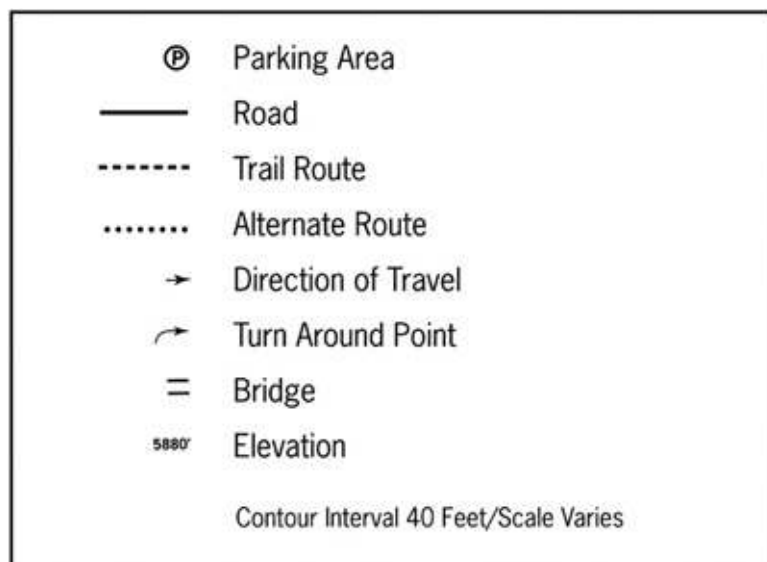
## Trail Accessibility

Here you'll find when the trail for any given hike is accessible. Some trails may be open year-round while others are open seasonally. For the hikes listed as open year-round, check current snow levels as some are not accessible when the levels are lower than average.

## Permits/Contact

This entry will tell you whether you need any permits to hike the trail, and whom to contact for more information. Day hiking in Mount Rainier National Park is still free. Sort of. Most of the trails in this guide are found inside the Nisqually, Stevens Canyon, White River, and Carbon River entrances where a day-use fee (presently \$15 per carload) is collected. Frequent park visitors usually foot over \$30 for an annual pass or \$80 for a pass granting admission to all US national parks for one year.

The park requires permits for overnight backpackers—and charges fees for advance backcountry campsite reservations. But at this writing, no permits or fees are required for day hikers. These regulations are prone to revision, though: Call before you go. Some trails in this guide fall outside national park boundaries and require the purchase of a Northwest Forest Pass or other permits; they are so noted.



## Maps

The two most popular types of maps, United States Geological Survey (USGS) “quads” and Green Trails, are listed for each hike. Maps are available at outdoor retailers, park visitor centers, and from other sources. Many hikers now use GPS devices or Internet map servers (such as <http://mapserver.maptech.com>) to download USGS maps, or print their own, customized maps from software.

Each hike in this book includes a trail map of the route, featuring parking and trailhead

alternate routes, direction, elevation profile, and more. Our maps are based most often on USGS maps. Use the following legend:

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## Trail Notes

Look here for a quick guide to trail regulations and features: Leashed dogs okay; off-leash dogs okay; no dogs; bikes allowed; kid-friendly; good views. Rainier hikers should note up front that people and mountain bikes are not allowed on any trails within Mount Rainier National Park, but are allowed on a few of this guide's hikes outside park boundaries.

After the at-a-glance overview of each hike, you'll find detailed descriptions of the following:

## The Hike

This section is an attempt to convey the feel of the trail in a sentence or two, including the type of trail and whether there's a one-way hiking option.

## Getting There

You'll either find out how to get to the trailhead or, God forbid, become hopelessly lost. The elevation at the trailhead is also included here. Most of the trailhead directions will get you to the trailhead from the nearest national park entrance station. Here are some guidelines for getting to those entrances:

In the summer, Mount Rainier is approached by two main access routes: Highways 7 and 706 from the Puyallup/South Tacoma area (to the Nisqually Entrance, Longmire, and Paradise); and Highway 410 from Enumclaw (take Highway 18 to Enumclaw from Interstate 5) beyond Crystal Mountain Boulevard, to the White River Entrance, and Sunrise. Note that the upper portions of the latter route to Sunrise usually are not open until approximately July Fourth. Allow about 2.5 hours from the Seattle area via either route when snow isn't a concern. Snowshoers or cross-country skiers sharp enough to turn some of this guide's hikes into winter routes should note that, in the winter, Highway 410 (Chinook Pass Highway) closes near the National Park border, at the Crystal Mountain Boulevard turnoff. That leaves Highway 706 as the only winter park entrance—the Park Service keeps the highway open to Longmire all winter, and endeavors to plow the path to Paradise every day. Chains often are required above Longmire in winter and are required to be carried in all vehicles from November 1 to May 1.

The park has three other summer entrances, whose opening dates vary depending on snowpack. The Stevens Canyon Entrance is on Highway 123 (Cayuse Pass Highway) on the southeast side of the park. This entrance can be reached via US 12 from the south or Highways 410 and 123 from the east, via Enumclaw or Yakima. (Highways 410 and 123 are closed in the winter.) On the northwest side of the park, both Mowich Lake Road and Carbon River Road are unpaved entrances to the scenic (and less heavily visited) north side. Both are accessed via Highway 165, which runs south into the park from Buckley and Wilkeson. These roads are open summer only, and often are in rough condition. And their future as auto-accessible roads is in doubt.

The Carbon River Road, in particular, has been beset by natural calamities. Built below the river grade in places, the old road has washed out repeatedly. The most recent washout, during the deluge of park flooding that struck in November 2006, proved to be the fatal blow to the road. Since then, the National Park Service, after much study and deliberation, has decided to c



“Uncle!” and give up on rebuilding the Carbon River Road, once and for all. As this book went to press (spring 2014), the road remained closed at the park boundary. Hikers can stop for parking information and/or permits (for overnights) at a new Carbon River Ranger Station—located on the Carbon River Road, 5.5 miles east of the Mowich Lake Road (SR 165) junction, about 2 miles before the park boundary and the old Carbon River Ranger Station—then proceed to the park boundary to park and either walk or mountain bike the road-turned-path to local trailheads.

Alas, this adds 5 miles each way to formerly short, spectacular day hikes departing from Ipsut Creek Campground, which now has been converted to a backcountry campsite. On the other hand, many people look at this as an opportunity: The closed portion of the road is one of very few scenic places inside the park where one can ride a mountain bike. (Note, however, that bikes remain forbidden on trails that depart from the road.) And what were once unique, short hikes to destinations such as the snout of the Carbon Glacier are now even more unique bike/hike options inside Rainier’s boundaries. Like it or not, it’s the way it is, and not likely to change.

Note: The park’s “preferred alternative” for this project in planning documents includes the possibility of a vehicle “drop-off area” on the Carbon River Road, 1.2 miles beyond the park boundary/parking area, at the site of the Old Mill Trailhead. This would allow a driver (presumably the one in your car who drew the short straw) to drop off a party there and park the car back at the park boundary. But at publication time, this project still awaited funding. Either way, at least one member of your party is going to wind up adding 10 miles round-trip to most day hikes in the area. (A 7-mile hike from Ipsut Creek thus becomes a 17-mile trek.)

That in itself raised a serious question for this guide: Do those hikes still fit the parameters of “day hikes”? The answer is yes—just long ones. Surely the road closure will limit the numbers of people who will venture into the Carbon drainage. But the payoff for those who do will be that much more pronounced. And, as indicated, for those who wish to bring along bicycles, not all of the 10 miles of road must be trod on foot. (And remember: the last 5 miles on a hike/bike trip here are mostly downhill!) In this third edition, the round-trip mileages for each trail in the region have been permanently updated to reflect the additional 10 miles of travel.

Likewise, the park’s oft-washed-out West Side Road, which follows the turbulent Tahoma Creek drainage on the southwest side of the mountain, has been permanently closed by the Park Service at a large washout 3.3 miles above its beginning off Highway 706, just inside the Nisqually Entrance. An entire series of spectacular day hikes emanating from the West Side Road have thus become long walks—too long, in most cases, for the average day hiker, even if you employ a mountain bike to get from the washout to the trailhead (where the bike must be left). Much of the road has been repaired—Park Service vehicles seem to have no problems traveling it. But park managers say frequent outbursts from the South Tahoma Glacier make it too dangerous for private auto travel. An oft-floated proposal to run a hiker’s shuttle bus from the road closure to popular trailheads along the route now appears to be a flight of fancy; no federal funding has even materialized. As a result, we’ve left some of the otherwise-grand day hikes emanating from the upper reaches of West Side Road out of this guide, because they exceed the mileage and time guidelines we’ve established for a day-hiking treatise. But we’ve included those West Side Road hikes still within a day-hiker’s reach, and we’ve even suggested making a fun day hike out of the lower portions of the road itself—see [Round Pass \(Hike 7\)](#).

Stay tuned for further developments on the West Side Road and other park access issues: The park’s long-term plans also call for shuttle service to Sunrise, Paradise, the upper Mowich Lake Road, and other popular destinations—and possible auto restrictions in the same places. F

updates on road conditions, call (360) 569-2211, the park's recorded information line.

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## The Trail

Here's where you'll get the blow-by-blow, mile-by-mile description of the trail. It's information you'll find useful, and we apologize if, every now and then, we take time to recognize a Really Big Tree or an awesome view, since you'll probably recognize these features without much coaching.

## Going Farther

In this section, you can learn about good options to take a longer hike along the same trail. Interesting side trips can be found here, too. And if there's a nearby campground that could get you on the trail sooner, or a great place to stay while exploring area trails, it also will be mentioned. Not every hike includes this section.





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