

Carter Falls and Madcap Falls, WA

Notice: 9/24/2019 - The log crossing across Nisqually River near Cougar Rock Campground condition is in. The log crossing can wash out if there are hot daytime temperatures or heavy rainfalls. **Check the National Park website for current trail conditions and closures.**

Vicinity Location:

The trailhead is about 61 miles southeast of Seattle Washington in Mt. Rainier National Park.

Directions:

From Portland, take I-5 North and take exit 68 to Hwy 12. Take Hwy 12 for about 30 miles to Morton. Turn left on Hwy 7 and drive about 17 miles to Hwy 706. Turn right on Hwy 706 and drive to the Nisqually entrance on the west side of Mt. Rainier National Park. Drive about seven miles from the entrance and park near Cougar Rock Campground. A shuttle service from Longmire is available in the summer.

From Seattle, take I-5 South to Hwy 512 East and go towards Puyallup (Exit 127). Follow Hwy 512 East for about 2 miles. Turn south onto Hwy 7 towards Mt. Rainier. Follow Hwy 7 south to Elbe. At Elbe, turn left onto Hwy 706, travel through Ashford, and then to the Nisqually entrance of Mt. Rainier National Park. Drive about seven miles from the entrance and park near Cougar Rock Campground. A shuttle service from Longmire is available in the summer.

No outhouses are at the trailhead. Flush toilets are available at Longmire or at nearby Cougar Rock Campground.

Pets aren't allowed on National Park trails.

National Park Entrance fee of \$30.00 for a car or \$25 for a motorcycle and a single passenger or Annual Pass is required to enter the park.

Length and Elevation:

2.2 Miles roundtrip, Elevation gain 550 feet and loss 550 feet. Trailhead is 3200 feet in elevation. The turnaround point at Madcap Falls is 3,700 feet in elevation.

Trail:

Wonderland trail with connections to Narada Falls and Reflection Lakes.

There is a virtual geocache along this trail at: N 46° 45.910 W 121° 46.221. Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:

Topo Map

History:

The wood-stave water pipe was probably built in 1920s. After crossing the Nisqually River, the trail follows an abandoned road to the site of a generating station which once provided electricity for Longmire. The coordinates for the power house are: N46° 46.055' Lat., W 121° 47.048' Long. There is a wood-stave pipeline along the trail which was used to divert river water for the powerhouse.

Review: July 20, 2006

Carter Falls Trail is a good hike for a cloudy day. Are you ready for a new challenge? Try the Carter Creek Falls trail. But this time, hike it barefoot! The most important rule to follow when hiking

barefoot is to always step straight down and pick your foot up for every step. Never drag or shuffle your feet on the ground because you will cut your feet. Never kick because you will break your toes. Be sure to deliberately tread on the trail setting, not stomping, your feet straight down and lifting them straight up again. You can find more tips on the web and there are barefoot hiking clubs in Portland and Seattle.

After you cross the Nisqually River, put your shoes and socks in your pack and follow the trail along the Paradise River. Since you're hiking uphill anyways, you'll be going slowly and you will have plenty of time to pick your way among the rocks. For the most part, the trail is covered in dirt, fir needles, and cones.

It is a very different experience to feel your toes curling around a cool rock or to feel the difference in temperature at the soles of your feet and the top of your head. So go hiking hobbit style. It is only a 1.1 mile walk to the falls. Take your time and become aware of the roots, rocks, twigs, and stones in the trail. Heedlessly walk through the small muddy patches in the trail because the mud doesn't matter. And then there is the stare factor. Since this is a busy trail, when you hike it barefoot, you'll be the talk of the trail.

Along the way you will walk alongside a wood-stave pipeline which runs past Carter Falls. Have a seat and take in the sensations of Carter Falls. However, don't turn around at Carter Falls. Walk up the trail about another 200 feet and see Madcap Falls that cascades down the bed of the creek. You can get down close to the base of the falls and the rushing water drags the air along with it and blows the air towards you like opening the door of a refrigerator. I think this should be called Refrigerator Falls.

After cooling down at the falls, put your shoes or boots back on (or not) and return down the trail. When you get back to the Nisqually River, stop to listen to the torrent of dirty water with rocks tumbling and thudding down the river. Though this isn't a really easy hike, it is good for children who are experienced hikers. The short trip to the waterfalls is a nice reward for the hill climb. Children who are inexperienced hikers should not hike this trail because of the log crossing over the Nisqually River.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve