Goat Rocks, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 89 miles southeast of Seattle, WA and 85 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

Directions:
From Portland –
Drive north on I-5 to exit 68. Exit to Hwy 12 and turn right for 62 miles to the junction with Forest Road 21. This is about 2 miles before Packwood.

From Seattle –
drive south on I-5 to exit 133 at Tacoma. Follow WA Hwy 7 for 55 miles to Morton. Drive through Morton and turn left onto US Hwy 12 and drive 31 miles to the junction of Forest Road 21. This is about 2 miles south of Packwood.

From either Portland or Seattle, once at Forest Road 21, turn right and drive 13 miles to the junction with Forest Road 2150. Follow signs towards Chambers Lake. The junction may not be signed but it is the first well graveled turnoff in the area. There should be a small plastic post marked 2150 along the road on the right, just after the junction.

Follow Forest Road 2150 for 2.8 miles, keeping to the left when you come to the junction 1 mile farther along. At the junction in 2.8 miles, continue straight ahead on Forest Road 040 for another .3 mile to the Berry Patch trailhead. This road and trailhead is much less dusty than Snowgrass trailhead and there appears to be more parking.

A Northwest Forest Pass is required to park. Click here for the link for purchase locations. Passes can be bought online but they are mailed to the buyer. A Wilderness Permit required, which is free and filled out at the signboard near the trailhead.

There is an outhouse at this trailhead.

Trail:
Goat Ridge Trail #95, Snowgrass Trail #86, Pacific Crest Trail #2000, and Bypass Trail #97 with connections to Jordan Creek Trail #94.

There are no geocaches along these trails.

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Length and Elevation:
21 miles round trip. Elevation gain of 4,635 feet and loss of 950 feet to the trail summit on Old Snowy Mountain. Elevation of Old Snowy Mountain is 7,930 feet. Elevation gain of 5,600 feet and loss of 5,600 feet roundtrip. Elevation at the trailhead is 4,650 feet, highest point on the trail is at 7,650 feet. Lowest elevation is 4,650 feet.

Review: August 25, 2011.
Just west of the trailhead past the end of the parking lot is the Klickitat Trail. Walk about 100 feet down this trail for a source to filter water if needed.

Day 1 – Berry Patch trailhead to Hawkeye Point
Goat ridge Trail and a connector to Snowgrass Trail both start from this trailhead. In just a few yards from the trailhead is the junction. Stop here to fill out the wilderness permit that is needed to enter the area. Bear left for the Goat Ridge Trail, #95. In a short distance is the boundary sign for the Goat Rocks Wilderness. If you haven't filled out your Wilderness Permit by the time you reach this sign, turn back and find the signboard and forms near the trailhead. The trail is a little rocky from horse use and climbs through the forest to the junction with Trail 95A, 1.3 miles from the trailhead. I didn't take 95A because I was worried about having to climb over additional deadfall across the trail.

Continue up the trail and walk .4 mile to a nice viewpoint of Mt. Adams. Trail 951 rejoins at the saddle which is 2 miles from the Berry Patch trailhead. The saddle has a nice view of Mt. Rainier. The trail loses elevation for the next .5 mile or so and passes the junction with Jordan Creek Trail #95.

From the junction the trail climbs and crosses the west slope of Goat Ridge. The trail passes a nice campsite with a view of Jordan Creek Canyon. There is supposed to be a spring about 5000 feet farther along the trail, just downhill on the left.

The views improve as the trees thin and the trail climbs above Jordan Creek. About 3.5 miles from the trailhead you get a good view of what you have to ascend to get to Jordan Creek Basin. The rugged trail looks intimidating as it climbs far up the slopes and there is one place where the trail was blasted out of the rocks. Eventually the trail climbs next to Jordan Creek then goes over the lip of Jordan Creek Basin at 6,300 feet and you find yourself in a small hanging valley. From the far end of the basin the trail switchbacks up the next mountain slope and then switchbacks up a ridge to the junction with Lily Basin Trail #86.

Drop your pack and search out a campsite for the night. I found one with spectacular views. Once you've made camp, continue up a faint trail to Hawkeye Point. The trail climbs a couple hundred feet then drops across a saddle and climbs up a couple of switchbacks then follows the ridge to a 360 degree view from Hawkeye Point at 7,431 feet in elevation. This is the site of an old fire lookout. The only thing left is some concrete, steel eyebolts, and some rusty nails and junk under the rocks. It looks like there was a climbing register here at one time but the box was empty in 2011. This trail is fairly steep but it is not technical.

Back down near the junction of Goat Ridge Trail and where Snowgrass Trail goes to Heart Lake, are some spectacular patches of lupines and other wildflowers in the summer.

The soil is gritty here and the winds will blow some into your tent, given a chance. Fortunately the winds died down in the night. There were few bugs this high up and I enjoyed watching a herd of 20 mountain goats come down to graze near camp. I heard there was good cell phone reception at Hawkeye Point but not for my cell phone provider.

Near sunset I took my flashlight and walked west a bit to a ridge to watch the sun set on Mt. Adams and Mt. Rainier.

6.2 Miles to Hawkeye Point and Camp. 3,225 feet of gain and 950 feet of elevation loss.

Day 2 – Goat Ridge to Snowgrass Basin
the day dawned somewhat cloudy and I wondered about the possibilities of thunderstorms. I watched the clouds for a bit and decided the clouds weren't coming my way.

From camp I headed down to the Lily Basin Trail Junction and turned left to travel east. The junction was still covered in snow and I cold see that a good part of the morning would be spent traveling across snow slopes.

Jasmine and I walked along the trail, in an arc to Goat Lake. There were several small streams and patches of beautiful wildflowers. The streams join together into Goat Creek far below.

Reaching Goat Lake I saw a campsite near the lake outlet and snow still covered most everything else. Goat Lake was still completely frozen over with just a couple melt pools on the surface. I could see the trail on the slope on the other side of the lake outlet so we headed over that way to rejoin the trail.

From Goat Lake the trail continues along the open slope and passes through meadows, sometimes losing elevation, but then gaining elevation to the lower Snowgrass flats. Several trails and user trails come together here and there are several nice campsites and a water supply nearby.

Take SnowgrassTrail 96, which is to the left, up a couple of switchbacks to Snowgrass Flats and several campsites. I found a nice campsite just below timberline with a partial view of Mt. Adams. After setting up camp, I left Jasmine in the tent and went looking for wood so I could have a small cookfire. In my search for dead wood, I came across a mole rooting around on top of the ground. I watched it for a while because it was the first time I had seen a mole above the ground.

The camp had a nice firepit and I moved a rock so I could make a small fire just under my cookpot. There were enough mosquitoes that I put on bug spray. I ate my rehydrated chili mac, cleaned out my cookpot, and made instant chocolate pudding. I set the pot in the nearby stream to chill and got camp ready for the night. Then I retrieved my pudding, sprinkled crushed graham crackers over it and chowed down. This was one pot I didn't have to clean because the leftovers would flavor the water nicely for breakfast.

I walked up the trail just a bit to get a clear view of Mt. Adams and watched as the sun went down. I saw a couple of patches of snow still near camp.
4 miles from night 1 camp to night 2 camp. Elevation gain of 640 feet and loss of 1,245 feet.

Day 3 – Snowgrass Flats to Berry Patch Trailhead
I packed up camp and backpacked a short distance up to the junction of the Pacific Crest Trail and Snowgrass Trail. I took what I needed for dayhiking and stashed my pack in the stubby trees just west of the trail. I stood in awe of the meadows of wildflowers. I think the flowers were at their absolute peak of bloom. This is a great place to enjoy lupines, paintbrush, and other flowers with the mountains for a backdrop.

Jasmine and I followed the Pacific Crest Trail north towards Old Snowy. The trail steadily climbs and passed over many large snow patches and some campsites along and near the trail.

At 1.4 miles from the junction is a side trail to the west on the shoulder of Old Snowy Mountain. I opted to continue hiking up the trail as the overlook seemed too crowded. A short distance past the overlook trail is a junction on the PCT for stock and hikers. Take the hiker junction to the right and climb through the rocks up Old Snowy. The thin rocks sound almost like pieces of thick glass hitting each other as you walk over the rocks. The high elevation and steep trail take your breath away as you reach the high point of the trail.

At the top of the trail is a sign for the Pacific Crest Trail going seemingly nowhere. This is the highest point on the Pacific Crest Trail in Washington, at 7,650 feet high. The trail turns left at the sign, climbing a bit higher, then dropping down the ridge, heading north. For added adventure you can turn left here and pick your way up to the top of Old Snowy. That looked too dangerous for Jasmine so we continued north, down the trail. There is a short section of trail with very abrasive volcanic rocks here so you need protection for your dog's feet. We were able to descend on snow but that will not be the case in most years.
In the distance you can see the trail continuing north along the ridge towards Elk Pass. I decided to save that for another trip and turned left at the stock trail, about .2 from the top of the PCT.

The stock trail has been blasted out of the mountain slope in spots and can be covered by a long sloping section of snow late into the year. Jasmine and I had to take our time and traverse this section very slowly to avoid sliding down the slope.

Back at the southern hiker/stock junction, we walked back down the trail or walked down snow slopes to Snowgrass Flats. Water sources had been looking safe so I drank straight from fast flowing streams.

I had a snack at my cached pack then we headed down the PCT through a nice valley with a creek and great views of Mt. Adams. There are plenty of additional campsites along this section of the trail and some of them have great views.

Looking for the Bypass Trail 97, my GPS showed an old route starting from an rock cairn and crossing a meadow. I followed the track and found the abandoned trail switchbacking down from the meadow. I was able to follow this down to a hop-across stream crossing. I found a place just a bit upstream where there was a boulder on my side of the creek. I easily jumped across and Jasmine followed.

From there I followed and old trace of a trail down the valley and past a large campsite. There were a few deadfalls to go around but nothing major. As I descended the trail became better used and I joined Bypass Trail 97 just before it crossed a small stream. I turned right and soon met the junction for Snowgrass Trail 96. From there it is an easy walk down the well maintained trail.

This section of the trail goes through the forest and by a couple of meadows. There are several swithbacks and couple of small streams. There is a great place to get water at a rushing tributary to the Cispus River.

The trail continues to swichback down and flattens out as it crosses the valley for Goat Creek. The far side of the bridge over Goat Creek is another fine spot to get water. From here the trail continues down until about 1.5 miles from the Berry Patch Trailhead where it climbs gently for just past a mile. The slopes of Goat Creek Valley fall away to the left until the junction with trail 96A, which leads to the dusty Snowgrass Trailhead parking lot. Take the junction to the right here and walk .5 mile along a level trail passing a lilypad dotdded lake on the left.

The forest screens the parking lot until you are almost at the trailhead.
10.7 miles from night 2 camp back to the trailhead. The elevation changes are a gain of 1,750 feet and a loss of 3,350 feet.

Seeing the flowers in peak bloom at Snowgrass Flats along the Pacific Crest Trail is a "must" hike. The area is popular and a weekday hike may be the best choice to enjoy the scenery. I found that even on weekends there are times when sections of the trail offer solitude. Taking the section of the

abandoned trail practically guarantees the time to enjoy the peace of the wilderness.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve