High Rock Overlook Trail, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 14 miles east of Ashford, WA 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 through Ashford.

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.

From Seattle or Portland, once past Ashford, drive about 2.4 miles and look for the sign for FR52/Skate Creek Road. Turn right onto Kernahan Road, Which turns into Skate Creek Road. Skate Creek Road turns into Forest Road 52. Drive 4.7 miles to the junction with Forest Road 84 and turn right.

Continue along FR84, which is a dirt road and in 4.2 miles you reach the junction for FR8420, stay left on FR84.

At about 6.8 miles, you come to the junction for FR8440. Turn right and go uphill on the dirt road for about 2.6 miles.

After driving 9.5 miles from Hwy 706, you come around a large hairpin turn. Parking is at this wide spot in the road.

No permits are needed to park at the trailhead.
There may be a better route using FR85, but I couldn't find it at the time of this review.

No restrooms are at the trailhead. The nearest restrooms are at Ashford.

Trail:
High Rock Overlook Trail #266.with connection to Allen Mountain Trail #253.

There are no geocaches along this trail.

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Length and Elevation:
3.4 miles round trip. Elevation gain 1,375 feet and about 30 feet of loss. Total gain and loss is 2,810 feet. Elevation at the trailhead is 4,320 feet, the high point of the trail is 5,685 feet.

Review: July 14, 2013.
High Rock Overlook Trail is an out and back trail with a potential loop.

The trail starts out by climbing through Huckleberries and Bear Grass. The trail is basically along Sawtooth Ridge which is fairly sandy and the forest is fairly open. There are views of the forested ridge off to your left.

The trail soon makes a pair of switchbacks and then comes out along the top of the ridge, following the spine of the ridge through a heavy forest that doesn't afford views of the nearby mountain ridges.

The trail starts to get steeper after the first .5 mile. At about .6 mile the trail gets very steep as it continues to follow the ridge without switchbacks. The forest is still pretty dense along here. In July Beargrass and Lupine dot the trail. You can see this trail hasn't had as much maintenance as it should have because the trail is in a fairly deep rut on a couple of the uphill portions. Luckily the trail is on the side of the ridge and the water can easily flow off the trail.

After a bit the trail levels off for a short distance and even drops down a few feet, passing a wooden bench where you can sit down and take a rest. All too soon you begin climbing again along the spine of the ridge.

After climbing steadily for 1.25 miles, you reach the first nice viewpoint of Mt. Rainier and the destination of the hike. You can see the fire lookout perched near the edge of a sheer cliff.

In about 1.5 miles from the trailhead, the trail passes an old cabin that has fallen down and in a few more feet, comes out onto a monolithic rock with the lookout on the top. Follow wherever convenient up to the lookout. The lookout was built in 1929 and is one of the three remaining lookouts in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and is open to visitors.

The north side of the rock ends in a 600 foot cliff, then about 1,000 foot drop down to Cora Lake. After exploring the fire lookout and nearby viewpoints overlooking Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, and Mt. Rainier, you can either go back the way you came, or make a bit of a scramble along the cliff edge back down to the trail. Looping along the cliff takes some effort, be careful not to slip on the loose rocks, but there are nice views of the fire lookout and Mt. Rainier along this way trail.

The loop heads steeply down a rock slope towards pillar of rock jutting into the air. Just before you drop down into the swale in front of the stone pillar, cut off to the right and look for any boot path that drops down to the trail nearby.

This loop option is not for small children because it is steep, at the edge of a cliff, and the footing can be slippery on the loose rocks. If you have problems negotiating steep slopes with loose rocks do not take this loop option, but return to the trailhead using the main trail.

Enjoy the Photos!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve