Kautz Creek to Indian Henry's, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 11 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 the Nisqually entrance on the west side of Mt. Rainier National Park. Drive about three miles from the entrance and cross the bridge over Kautz Creek. Park in the Kautz Creek trail parking lot on the right-hand side of the road. The drive takes about three hours.

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 three miles from the entrance and cross the bridge over Kautz Creek. Park in the Kautz Creek trail parking lot on the right-hand side of the road.There are outhouses available at the trailhead and flush toilets at Longmire.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:
11.5 Miles round trip to the Wonderland Trail junction and back. Elevation gain 2,950 feet and loss of 50 feet to the Wonderland Trail. Total gain and loss is 6,000 feet. Elevation at the trailhead is 2400 feet, the Wonderland Trail Junction elevation is 5,350 feet.
Side-trip to Mirror Lakes – Distance – 1 mile, Elevation gain 140 feet, loss 90 feet each way. High point 5,410 feet.

Trail:
Kautz Creek Trail with connections to the Wonderland Trail. Wonderland Trail connects to Mirror Lakes Trail.

An outhouse is available at the parking lot. Flush toilets are available at Longmire.

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Trail Maps:
Topo Map, National Park Service Map

History:
October 2nd and 3rd 1947 saw a lahar unleashed on Kautz Creek. The lahar was probably triggered by 6 inches of rain from that fell October 1st. After the flood, about 1 ½ miles of the glacier was mostly washed away. The lahar was said to have a consistency of wet cement and it swept away everything in its path, moving boulders as large as 12 feet across downstream. At the trailhead you can look around and see the gray trunks of trees killed in the flood.

Review: October 26, 2005
There is a short interpretive trail with handicapped access to an overlook of what was once Kautz Creek. You can see dead trees from the lahar that happened about 50 years ago. The trail to Indian

Henrys is flat for the first mile, to the creek crossing. Look for the burned out tree trunk on the left side of the trail. After crossing the old Kautz Creek streambed, the trail gets steeper and winds through an old growth forest and crosses several small streams. About 2 ½ miles from the trailhead is a bridge across a small stream. This is the best place on the forested part of the trail to take a break.

The trail gains elevation and you trudge up several sections of steep switchbacks and erosion board steps. Most of the trail is in the forest shade with glimpses of Mt Adams to the East and the Tatoosh range from an opening just off the trail. In the fall you'll want to take extra time to pick blueberries and huckleberries from along the trail.

Near Mt. Ararat the trail is narrow and rocky. There is a nice meadow where you can stop for lunch before finally getting to Indian Henry's Hunting Ground. Meadows of wildflowers bloom from the middle of July through August with great fall colors after that. Look for butterflies sunning themselves in the trail on sunny days. Stop in at the patrol cabin to look inside and read the trail logs. Go north a bit on the Wonderland Trail and take the junction to the right for Mirror Lakes. The reflections of Mt. Rainier are terrific on a still day. Return the way you came, or plan ahead and have a shuttle arranged at Longmire and take the Wonderland Trail back down to Longmire.

Gallery Pics – Steve
Gallery Pics – Drew
Switchback Steve