

Lake Eleanor, WA

Vicinity Location:

About 58 miles southeast of Seattle, WA in Mt. Rainier National Park.

Directions:

From Seattle: Follow I-5 South for 25 miles and take exit 142A to merge onto WA Highway 18 East toward North Bend/Auburn. Drive 4.4 miles and take the Auburn Way/WA Highway 164 East exit toward Enumclaw for 0.2 mile.

Make a slight right at 6th St SE then turn left at Auburn Way S/C St SE/WA Highway 164. Continue to follow WA Highway 164 for 14.7 miles then turn left at Roosevelt Ave E/WA Highway 410.

Continue to follow WA Highway 410 for 37.3 miles.
Make a slight right at Sunrise Park Rd and follow it for 15.0 miles.

From Portland: Take I-5 North towards Seattle and drive for about 75 miles.
Take exit 68 for US-12 East. At the top of the off ramp, turn right onto US-12 and travel about 71.8 miles. This takes you past Morton and through Packwood.

Make a slight left onto WA Highway 123, driving for 16.1 miles. This road is seasonally closed.
Continue straight onto WA Highway 410 for 3.5 miles.

Make a sharp left onto Sunrise Park Rd and follow the road for 15 miles to the Sunrise Visitors Center.

The road to Sunrise is usually only open from July through September.

There are bathrooms and water at the trailhead.

Pets are not allowed on the trails in National Parks.

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.

Trail:

Sourdough Ridge Trail, Wonderland Trail, Northern Loop Trail, and Lake Eleanor Trail with connections to, Huckleberry Creek Trail, Burroughs Mountain Trail, and various other trails.

Trail Maps:

Topo Map

Length and Elevation:

18 miles round trip. 9 miles to Lake Eleanor. Elevation gain of 700 feet and loss of 2,140 feet to Lake Eleanor. Elevation gain of 2,840 feet and loss of 2,840 feet roundtrip. Elevation at the trailhead at 6,400 feet, highest point is at 6,770 feet. Lowest elevation is 4,960 feet.

Review: August 24, 2004.

Park at the Sunrise Visitors Center and perhaps take in the exhibits at the Visitors Center.

The trailhead is on the north side of the main parking lot. Follow this uphill and after .1 mile, keep left at the next two junctions leading to the Sourdough Ridge Trail. Follow the signs west towards Frozen Lake, passing the junction with the Huckleberry Creek Trail. This first part of the trail is the busiest, still you may see a marmot along the trail gathering food for the long winter. Winter in this part of the park can last from October to July or longer and the marmots hibernate through the winter in groups of up to 10, waking up now and then throughout the winter. This first part of the trail has a continuous view of Mt. Rainier and views down into the shallow valley below the trail. There is a very rocky portion of the trail but trails near the visitors center are wide, well maintained, and heavily used.

1.4 miles from the trailhead, continue straight, past the 5-way junction at Frozen Lake towards Berkeley Park. This is the highest elevation on the trail and a good spot to start looking for mountain goats on the hillsides and marmots along the trail. Frozen Lake is fenced off because the lake is the water supply for the Sunrise area. This is a turning-back point for many tourists and from here the foot traffic really drops off.

Shortly after the 5-way junction, the trail begins to descend under the cliffs of Burroughs Mountain. You may see people hiking along the tops of the cliffs on the Burroughs Mountain Trail. The trail descends moderately to the junction of the Wonderland Trail and the Northern Loop Trail at 2.4 miles from Sunrise. Take the right fork for the Northern Loop Trail and descend more steeply, keeping an eye out for marmots and ptarmigans.

In the summer, the next couple of miles of the descent offer fields of wildflowers along the sparkling Lodi Creek. Along the way, stop at the large spring next to the trail and sample the icy-cold water. Mt. Fremont is on the right and Skyscraper Mountain is on the left.

Continuing down along the creek, the trail enters trees and after 3.9 miles you reach Berkeley Camp. The trail continues down through the forest and then leaves the creek and climbs up to Grand Park. Enjoy the views of the West Fork of White River and Mt. Rainier. At 6.9 miles from Sunrise is the junction to Lake Eleanor on the right. Follow this into Grand Park, a 3 mile long flat pumice plain for spectacular views of Mt. Rainier. The only water in Grand Park is the early season melt pools, a couple of small lakes at the north end of Grand Park, and Lake Eleanor. Watch for elk and black bears in this part of the park.

Continue through Grand Park, taking time to turn around for those spectacular views, and step past a marshy area along the trail. From here, the trail re-enters the forest and gains about 50 feet in elevation before dropping down to Lake Eleanor.

The campsites at Lake Eleanor must be reserved ahead of time and the weekend reservations usually are snapped up. Staying at Lake Eleanor can create a quandary of choosing between wildflowers and bugs. Lake Eleanor has mosquitoes and black flies in July and they peak about the same time the wildflowers do.

Lake Eleanor is a nice-sized lake with the rugged face of Scarface Mountain behind it. Lake Eleanor is lower in elevation than Grand Park and the nearby mountains block any view of Mt. Rainier from Lake Eleanor.

A possible option is to continue past Lake Eleanor and descend for about 1.5 miles and camp outside the park. Still another option is to make this a shuttle hike by using Forest Service Road 73, just outside the northern boundary of the park and a unmaintained trail from the Forest Service Road to Lake Eleanor. Check with the ranger station in Enumclaw for closures if you plan to use Forest Road 73.

The return trip gains about 1,900 feet back up Frozen Lake, but your pack will be lighter and you can replenish water along the way.

This is a pretty safe trail for small children, though the distance and elevation gain on the return trip are daunting. Even though the elevation gain is only 300 feet to Frozen Lake, it feels like a lot more because the first part of the trail is steep, then the trail climbs continuously to Frozen Lake. The trail is above timberline and large sections of the trail can be seen climbing the hillside.

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