Lakes Trail and High Lakes Trail, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 14 miles east of Ashford, WA in Mt. Rainier National Park.

Directions:
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. Now, follow the last paragraph of the 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. The drive take about 3 1/4 hours.

Shuttle:
Once you are in the park, continue several miles and park at Longmire Inn. Take the shuttle bus to the Paradise Inn parking lot.

Self-Park at a trailhead:
Peak weekends: Once you are in the park, continue about 18 miles on the Longmire-Paradise Road. If you are in the park by 9am then you can follow the signs and probably park at Jackson Visitor Center or the Paradise Inn parking lot. If you are in the park by 10am then you can probably park at Reflection Lakes and modify this hike. Otherwise, think about using the shuttle.

National Park entrance fee must be paid to enter Mt. Rainier National Park.

Flush toilets available near the parking lot, near Paradise Inn and at Jackson Visitor Center

Length and Elevation:
5.5 miles roundtrip, Elevation gain 1,500 and loss 1,500, total 3,000 Feet in elevation change.

Trail:
Lakes Trail, High Lakes Trail, and Wonderland Trail

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, National Park Service Map

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Due to the renovation of the Paradise Inn, parking is severely limited. Either arrive early on a weekday, very early on a weekend, or take the shuttle. This is one of my favorite hikes in the Paradise area. The first part is in the forest and the last part is above the timberline. Black flies and mosquitoes can be a problem in late June and July. Look for the trail at the east end of the parking lot where the lot narrows back into a two-lane road. Begin the hike by descending the granite stairs on the downhill side of the lot. The trail descends down the west edge of Paradise valley. After about 1/2 mile, turn left at the junction to Narada Falls Trail and cross Paradise River. The trail crosses the one-way road from Paradise and begins to climb, about 500 feet and crosses a saddle. At the flat area in the saddle, turn right at the High Lakes trail junction, and drop down towards Reflection Lakes for about 4/10 of a mile. Turn left at the junction with the Wonderland Trail and follow the Wonderland Trail, stopping to enjoy the views at Reflection Lakes. You have to walk on the road

shoulder for a bit, then leave take the Wonderland Trail as it leaves the roadway. In early October, there are great fall colors at the second, smaller Reflection Lake.
In a very short distance is a trail junction to Faraway Rock. Pause to enjoy the views of the Tatoosh Range while perched on the precipice overlooking the valley below. Continue on the Lake Trail which climbs Mazama Ridge and marvel at the incredible fields of wildflowers with Mt. Rainier as a backdrop. My favorite part of the trail is a level stretch and you walk straight towards Mt. Rainier. The nearby landscape is nearly devoid of plant-life and the Mountain towers over you.

At the junction with the Skyline Trail, turn left and proceed downhill. This part of the trail has great patches of Avalanche Lilies in spring and hillsides of red foliage in the fall. At the junction with the Fourth Crossing Trail, turn right and stay on the Skyline Trail. Continue on this generally downhill trail, passing the junction to the Golden Gate Trail. Stop at Edith Creek and Myrtle Falls, then pass the Paradise Inn and back to your starting point.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve