Narada Falls to Reflection Lakes, WA – via road

NOTE: Road restrictions and closures can occur during the winter. The highway from Longmire to Paradise may not open until 9:30 a.m. or later. Inquire about the road opening time before you go. Call 360-569-2211 and press 1, 1, 2 at each prompt. You can usually see road closures and opening times at twitter.com/MountRainierNPS

Vicinity Location:
About 97 miles northeast of Portland, OR. and 65 miles southeast of Seattle 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.Once you are in the park, continue several miles past Longmire Inn and park at the Narada Falls parking lot. If you stay overnight then you must have a wilderness camping permit. During much of the winter, you have to go to the Longmire museum to get your permit. Don't forget your blue bags for human waste disposal. Overnight parking at Narada Falls is on the north side of the parking lot.

Flush toilets available near the parking lot, across Paradise River

Pets aren't allowed on National Park trails.

National Park Entrance fee of $30.00 or Annual Pass is required to enter the park.

Length and Elevation:
4 Miles, Elevation gain and loss total 500 Feet

Trail:
Reflection Lakes road and Wonderland Trails

Review: March 21, 2006
Saturday morning found us at the Longmire museum at 9:30. We determined the avalanche danger was low so we planned to follow the road to Reflection Lakes. The road to Paradise is gated until at least 9am and today we lucked out and the gates opened just after 9:30. Some of carpooled and left their car at Longmire in the overnight parking area.

We were lucky the road to Narada Falls was melted out enough that we didn't need chains. The weather at Narada falls was sunny and just below freezing. We loaded up our pulks. My pulk is just a plastic toboggan with a rope at the front and back.

We stopped at the comfort and warm-up stations for one last pit stop before venturing into the snow. Up into the trees we went. Hoosierdaddy was soon in front with Fogduo and Joshenj. Orygawn and Rumidude were next and I brought up the rear with my 13 year old daughter. The trail is wanded and the trail volunteers tend the trail regularly. We followed the Paradise River until we reached the snow-covered road to Reflection Lakes.

Once on the road, the trail offers spectacular views of Mt. Rainier and the Tatoosh Range. We had to be careful crossing the avalanche area, not only because of avalanche danger, but because the sleds want to slide down the open slope back down to the comfort station. After that, the trail is easy to navigate all the way to the overview of Lake Louise.

By the time my daughter and I arrived in camp, a couple of the tents were set up already. Hoosierdaddy and Joshenj went snowshoeing towards Ptarmigan Peak while the rest of us worked on our abode for the night.

Elizabeth and I started on our igloo and Joshenj started digging a pit for his tent. I think he moved more snow than we did. While we were working, a group of Boy Scouts came by to take a look. One of the adults with the Scouts told me they come to Reflection Lakes every year on this weekend and camp out in snow caves.

The igloo was finished in just under two hours and we moved in. Rumidude shoveled a trench in a rectangle shape which made the center a cooking table. Sleeping Bag Man appeared before dinner and pranced about in the snow and posed for some pictures then disappeared. The adults had ice cold beers after dinner (I couldn't resist adding that).

The east wind was picking up, so Elizabeth and I got into our igloo. Shortly after I was in my bag, undressed, and warmed up, I heard noises outside. The others saw a fox come by camp and go over near the igloo. I thought about my food outside, especially the bacon!

I hurriedly got dressed and went outside. Our food was okay but the fox was gone. I learned you can't take your food stash for granted, even in the middle of winter with 12 feet of snow outside!

I went back inside and got all comfy and went to sleep. Of course, during the night, I had to make a short trip outside. The winds were still blowing and the stars were beautiful. Not a cloud to block the stars. By morning it was snowing fairly hard. Snow had sifted in through a crack and piled up on the candle. I could barely hear the wind blowing. To make breakfast, I cut a hole in the igloo and set the stove just outside. We ate our oatmeal and I went to check on the rest of the group. The blowing and snowing had wakened them a few times. Orygawn said clumps of snow blowing off nearby trees woke him a few times.

We broke camp, collapsed the igloo, and pulled our pulks back to the comfort station and then to the car. We pickup up Fogduo's car at Longmire and went to Copper Creek Inn for food. We just missed having breakfast so we ordered burgers for lunch. Reflection Lakes is an excellent place to snow camp and the trip is well worth it. Plan to take the Mazama Ridge route if there is any avalanche danger.

Switchback Steve