Narada Falls to Reflection Lakes Snowshoe, WA



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 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.

Once you are in the park, continue several miles past Longmire Inn and park at the Narada Falls parking lot. The drive takes about three hours.

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

Flush toilets available near the parking lot, across Paradise River

Dogs aren’t allowed on National Park Trails.

You can see avalanche forecasts here: Northwest Avalanche Center

National Weather Service Snow Level forecast: West Slopes South Central Cascades

Length and Elevation:
3.5 miles roundtrip, Elevation gain and loss totals 1,800 Feet

Trail:
Mazama Ridge and Wonderland Trails

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, National Park Winter Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Review: February 21, 2004, January 15, 2005, March 3, 2012

Friday afternoon I checked the weather forecast and saw Saturday looked mostly clear and decided it was time for a trip to Rainier.

The roads were mostly dry with a few wet patches. At the Narada Falls parking lot I saw several people with cross-country skis. I started about noon at Narada Falls. There was probably seven feet of snow around the parking area.

I snowshoed down to the falls overlook. The waterfall comes out from underneath the ice, cascading down the rocks, then disappearing again into the ice-covered streambed.

In 2005 I found out the snowshoe trails here are marked and maintained by volunteers from the Seattle area. Most years the trail starts just past the restrooms. Look uphill on the left for an orange trail sign. In 2012 the bare snow slope showed a shear line from a recent slab avalanche. Travelling up the steep, bare slope is not a good idea due to potential avalanches. Staying in the trees is much safer.

Follow the black and orange bamboo wands along Paradise river. Maybe you can still see the waterfall plunging into a green pool of water just below the highway bridge. About 1/4 mile from the parking lot I found collapsed snow caves. It was probably from last weekend. In 2004 I tried taking a short-cut up to the road and found the going to be quite a workout! My snowshoes grabbed the snow on the uphill parts and I was able to side-hill because my snowshoes have a fixed pivot point.

On the road above the falls you will find a sign for Paradise or to Reflection Lakes via Mazama Ridge. I advise taking the ridge route and not to take the road to Reflection Lakes because the steep slopes above the road are too much of an avalanche hazard in the winter.

The maintained trail is marked with bamboo wands so it is hard to miss. There are some very nice views from Mazama Ridge across Paradise valley to Mt. Rainier and the Jackson visitor center. This trail is pretty steep for cross-county skis but it is fine for snowshoes.

The trail climbs to a junction with another trail up Mazama Ridge. This trail is unmarked and sometimes you will be the one to break trail. The trail to the right drops down fairly steeply after crossing the ridge. I reached Reflection Lakes about 1:30 and the pristine snow covered the lakes and the road.

I’m guessing the snow was at least 12 feet deep around the lakes. Great views of Mt. Rainier and the peaks of the Tatoosh range. I snowshoed along the road until I could overlook Lake Louise and Stevens Canyon. I stopped to take more pictures then headed back along the other side of the lakes. A wide clearing runs along the lakes and meets back up with the trail.

The sky was a little hazy with clouds off in the distance so I didn’t need my sunglasses. I was warm enough that I didn’t use a hat or gloves for most of my trip. On the way back I saw just a few people and had the trail mostly to myself.
I saw where one person had taken off their skis and walked up the hill. As steep as those hills were, I don’t think I would want to ski them.

The total round trip is about three miles. I made it back to the car about 3:30 p.m., packed up my gear, and headed to Longmire for a last look at Rainier. Snow depth was about two feet at Longmire.

Photos in the Gallery 2004

Photos in the Gallery 2012
Switchback Steve

