Owyhigh Lakes, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 63 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.

For the Owyhigh Lakes Trailhead: Continue to follow WA Highway 410 for 37.3 miles. Make a slight right at Sunrise Park Roadand follow it for 3.5 miles.

For the Deer Creek Trailhead: Continue to follow WA Highway 410 for 40.8 miles. Make a slight right at WA-123 S and drive for 5 miles. Look for trail sign and a small parking area along the right shoulder of the road.

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.

For the Owyhigh Lakes Trailhead: 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 Road and follow the road for 3.5 miles to the Owyhigh Lakes Trailhead.

For the Deer Creek Trailhead: Make a slight left onto WA Highway 123, driving for 11.4 miles. Look for a brown trail sign and a small parking area along the left shoulder of the road.

Highway 123 is seasonally closed. The road to Sunrise is usually only open from July through September.

There are no bathrooms at the trailhead.

Pets are not allowed on the trails in National Parks.

A permit is needed to enter Mt. Rainier National Park. Permits cost $30 for an annual pass or $15 for a 7 day pass.

Trail:
Owyhigh Lakes Trail. With connections to Eastside Trail and Chinook Pass Trail.

There are no known geocaches along this trail at the time of this review.

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

Length and Elevation:
Owyhigh Lakes: 8 miles one way. Elevation gain of 2,515 feet and loss of 2,038 feet. Elevation at the Deer Creek trailhead is 3,250 feet, highest point is at 5,350 feet. Lowest elevation is 2,905 feet on Owyhigh Lakes Trail. Owyhigh Lakes Trailhead elevation is 3,740 feet.

Tamanos Mountain: 2.2 miles round trip. Elevation gain of 1,162 feet and loss of 0 feet to the summit. Elevation at trail junction is 5,350 feet. Highest point is at 6,512 feet.

Review: July 23, 2009.
This is a shuttle hike starting near Deer Creek and ending at the Owyhigh Lake Trailhead.

From the pullout on Highway 123, descend fairly steeply at times, down the trail towards the junction of Deer Creek Trail and Eastside Trail. Just before the junction with Eastside Trail, you pass above Deer Creek Falls.

At the junction with Eastside Trail, the Deer Creek backcounty camp is just off to the left of the junction. Turn right at the junction and cross over Chinook Creek. Just upstream from the bridge is a small but very nice waterfall which cascades into a clear green pool. Just across the bridge is a giant Douglas fir tree next to the trail which must be at least 200 years old.

Very shortly, just .1 mile after crossing Chinook Creek, is the trail junction leading up to Chinook Pass. Take the left fork which leads northwest up the Kotsuck valley. The trail along the valley is in the forest, providing welcome shade on hot days. At 1.5 miles, the trail provides great views of a majestic waterfall.

From here the trail ascends above Kotsuck Creek Valley and on clear days there are striking views of rocky crags towering above the valley. The trail continues to climb up several switchbacks and the hillside is alive with tiny streams and seeps.

As the trail approaches the timberline, it crosses a slide area resplendent with wildflowers. This is a great place to climb up the rockslide a bit, take a break, and enjoy the view. The mountain meadows hold multitudes of wildflowers and the Cowlitz Chimneys come into view to the west.

The trail climbs up into the meadows surrounding Owyhigh Lakes. The earlier in the season, the more flowers and mosquitoes in the meadows. Continue along the trail to a small trail junction to the left.

This user trail climbs up the side of Tamanos Mountain. Use your GPS or look back frequently to mark the last trees along the route for your return trip. Continue climbing up the steep, grassy slope using the tailings from burrows new and old until you reach a saddle between the south peak and north peak of Tamanos Mountain.

From here you can easily walk up to the south summit and then continue along the ridge heading north towards the true summit of Tamanos Mountain. There is a bit of a scrabble in a couple of places and you can pick your way across or enjoy the spectacular views down into the Fryingpan Creek valley and across to Mt. Rainier from anywhere near the peak. Governor’s Ridge is the ridge to the east and Barrier Peak forms the south end of the ridge.

Back at the junction to Tamanos Mountain trail, turn left and walk along the trail above Owyhigh Lakes and past the backcountry camp.

The trail descends gently for about 1.5 miles and then drops steeply through the forest, switchbacking down to the base of Tamanos Mountain. The last part of the last mile of the trail is

fairly gentle as it drops down to the Owyhigh Lakes Trailhead.

Enjoy the Photos!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve