

Paradise River Snowcamp, 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:

61 miles southeast of Seattle in Mt. Rainier National Park.

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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. Drive about three miles from the entrance and cross the bridge over Kautz Creek. Continue to Longmire and take a right turn just after the lodge. Drive about .1 mile and park on the right.

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. Drive about three miles from the entrance and cross the bridge over Kautz Creek. Continue to Longmire and take a right turn just after the lodge. Drive about .1 mile and park on the right in the parking lot.

Flush toilets are available at Longmire.

Pets aren't allowed on National Park trails.

National Park 7-day Entrance fee of \$30.00 or Annual Pass is required to enter the park.

You can see avalanche forecasts here: [Northwest Avalanche Center](#)

National Weather Service Snow Level forecast: [West Slopes South Central Cascades](#)

Length and Elevation:

7.5 miles round trip. Elevation gain 555 feet and 30 feet loss. Total gain and loss is 1,170 feet. Elevation at the trailhead is 3,165 feet, the high point of the trail is 3,920 feet.

Trail:

Wonderland Trail. Connections to Trail of Shadows, Rampart Ridge Trail.

Trail Maps:

Topo Map, National Park Service Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Review: February 18, 2012

This is a great snowshoe trip to take when the road to Paradise is closed. However the log bridge over the Nisqually River by Cougar Rock Campground is washed out during the winter about 2 of every 5 years. Make sure the log bridge is in before going on this trip.

From the Longmire museum, walk across the road towards the gate across the road. Look for the Wonderland Trail which is about 30 feet to the right of the road. There is a junction of the Wonderland Trail in a few hundred feet where you will continue straight ahead. The trail goes gently uphill through the woods between the road and the Nisqually River. Sometimes the trail is close to the road, other time it is close to the river.

Since the road is closed then there will only be administrative vehicles and plows on the road. Lucky for us no plows came by when we were close to the road. I would hate to be plastered by wet snow from a plow.

After about 1.5 miles the trail passes a junction to Cougar Rock Campground. Continue straight, keeping on the Wonderland Trail. In about .2 mile the trail drops down to cross the Nisqually River. Once across the Nisqually, look for where Paradise River joins the Nisqually. The trail is on the left side of Paradise River, about 50 feet from the river. Walk up a slope to the bench above the river and enjoy one of the few flat areas of the trail. This nice stroll lasts about .25 mile and then the trail starts to climb and in almost no time, you're climbing along Paradise River, enjoying the views of the mountain slopes and the river below.

As the trail climbs the hill, it passes an old wood-stave water pipe. The pipe is covered with metal bands. This pipe supplied water to a powerplant that was once on the bank of the Nisqually. There used to be powerlines across the Nisqually, but have been removed.

In about .6 mile from the Nisqually and 600 feet higher, you reach Carter Falls. Though it is a bit hard to see, it sounds wonderful. From the falls, walk just a bit farther to Madcap Falls. This is more a steeply sloping riverbed than a waterfall but you have a great view of it. The steep trail is mostly past and the trail soon passes little side streams and wet areas where the standing water keeps the snow melted.

Watch out for places where the snow hides voids. There won't be many that a snowshoe will fall into but walkers could well find some nasty step-through places.

In about .5 mile farther, the trail crosses the first of three strong bridges. The third bridge crosses the largest branch of Paradise River. I can remember hiking through this area in the summer before these bridges were built. These bridges have to be really strong because of the weight of winter snows.

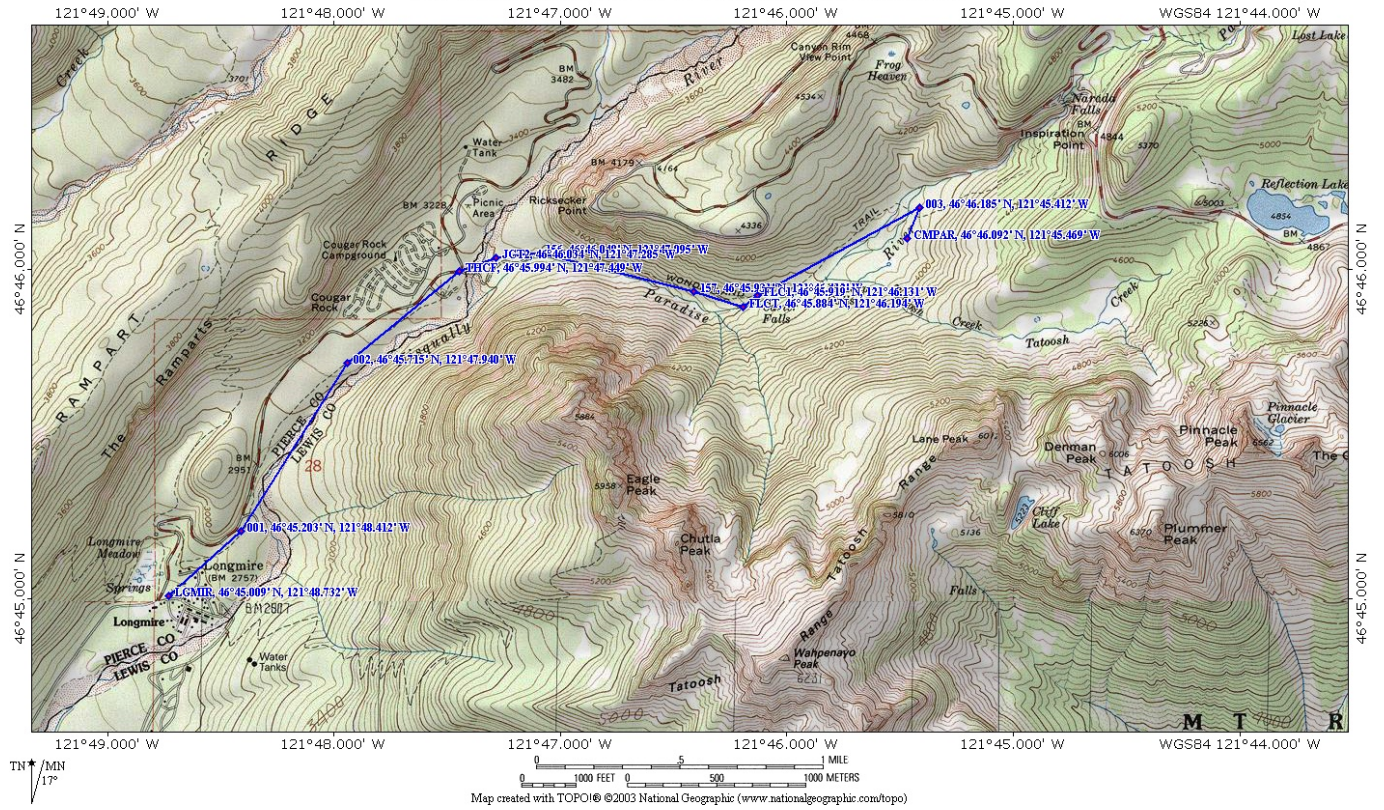
Soon after crossing the last bridge, the trail curves to the left around a large fir tree. Paradise River Camp is off to the right and back towards Paradise River a bit. If you want to find the camp, look for the bear pole which is left up all year.

After enjoying the winter scenery, retrace your steps, taking time to look at the interplay of the snow on the tree bark or the texture of lichen on the rocks. Be careful about going off trail because of voids under the snow. I found a hole along the river over eight feet deep.

This is a wonderful snowshoe trip because of all the water along the trail. Avalanche danger is low along this section of the Wonderland Trail. There is just one bare slope to watch for avalanches.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
 Switchback Steve

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