Pebble Creek Trail / Camp Muir, WA



Vicinity Location:
About 15 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 into Morton 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 the Paradise Inn parking lot.

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 Memorial Visitor Center. Outhouse is available at Panorama Point and seasonally at Camp Muir.

Length and Elevation:
4.5 miles round trip. Elevation gain 3,155 feet and loss 15 feet one way. Elevation at the trailhead at 6,975 feet, highest point is at 10,100 feet. Lowest elevation is 6,960 feet. From the Jackson Memorial Visitors Center, at elevation 5,425 feet, it is 4,675 feet of gain to Camp Muir.

Trail:
Skyline Trail, Upper Skyline Trail, and Pebble Creek Trail with connections to multiple other trails.

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, National Park Service Map, National Park Service Camp Muir Trail Map with bearings

Review: October 27, 2008, September 24, 2024
“The Muir Snowfield, a permanent field of snow, ice and rock outcrops, is located north of Paradise between 7,000 and 10,000 feet in elevation. Thousands of people hike on the Muir Snowfield each year enroute to Camp Muir. On a clear day, the hike is spectacular. But when the weather deteriorates, as it often and unpredictable does, crossing the Muir Snowfield can be disastrous. The trail from the Upper Skyline Trail drops down a bit and crosses Pebble Creek. From there the trail through rocks and snow up to Camp Muir.

Don’t Become A Muir Snowfield Statistic:
Avoid the snowfield in questionable weather, especially if you’re alone or unprepared. Weather conditions can change suddenly and drastically.

Thunderstorms are especially dangerous on mountain slopes because there is no cover or shelter on this trail between Panorama Point and Camp Muir. If you’re ascending and clouds or fog start rolling in, turn around and head back to Paradise. If that’s not possible, stop moving, dig in, and wait for better weather.

Without a GPS or a compass, map, and altimeter, it is extremely difficult to find your way back the trailhead in a whiteout. Carry these items and know how to use them.

Do not attempt to descend from Camp Muir in poor weather. Do not descend on skis or a snowboard in limited visibility – you could quickly become lost.

When hiking to Camp Muir, be sure to carry emergency bivouac gear so that you can spend the night out if you have to.

While it may be disappointing to abandon your hike to Camp Muir, remember that the snowfield will still be there in better weather.

To protect fragile alpine vegetation, hike only on trails or snow.” Says The Tahoma News.

About .5 mile up the Pebble Creek Trail is Pebble Creek, which is a tiny trickle on cold days but a fair sized stream in the spring and summer. There is a sign marking the creek and it notes the elevation as 7,200 feet. After crossing Pebble Creek the trail becomes more of a scramble than a trail. You have to clamber over rocks following the most used path. There are sandy sections of the trail between the patches of rocks. You soon come to the Muir Snowfield. On a nice day the snowfield doesn’t look dangerous at all but in bad weather people have died on the snowfield.

Depending on the time of year and the weather, this is an easy trek and there lies the danger. A fatality happened on June 10, 2008 when a group of 3 experienced hikers were caught in a sudden snowstorm just below Camp Muir, near Anvil Rock, with 70 mph winds. These people were in their 30s and had previously climbed Mt. Rainier. The storm quickly created whiteout conditions and 2 feet of snow fell at Paradise. This is an extra reminder that it is imperative to be able to navigate in a whiteout if you want to climb to Camp Muir and be ready to turn around if clouds start rolling in. Take a GPS, map, and compass or don’t go on this hike. Have the equipment to hike in freezing weather any time of year on this hike. Being unprepared is not the way to get your name mentioned in the local papers and social media.

In the summer and fall the Muir Snowfield has crevasses that open up. Most of the crevasses are less than a foot wide, but that is still wide enough to fall and injure yourself. In September 2008, one hiker fell 25 feet down a crevasse. The Park Rangers try to mark the crevasses with wands, so walk where others have gone, follow their path, and watch for wands and crevasses.

When you’re on the snowy slope be extra careful about pulling anything out of your pack because if it slides down the hill it is going to be a long walk to retrieve it. It is best to wait until you get to a rocky spot to take anything out of your pack.

Following the footprints in the snow, you eventually can see the Park Ranger building at Camp Muir. After gaining a few hundred more feet you reach Camp Muir. On a clear day the views are fantastic. The air is so clear and the sky is so blue at 10,000 feet that The Mountain looks awe inspiring. Huge crevasses loom on the nearby glaciers and even just to the north of Camp Muir.

Put on that fleece or raincoat and if the weather looks safe, take some time to savor the view, catch your breath, and explore the camp. Pay attention to any signs and stay off the snowfield to the north of Camp Muir unless you're roped up.

The time comes to return to the trailhead and going downhill is so much faster than the trudge up. During certain times of the year you can glissade down a long way and during the late spring and early summer bring a heavy plastic bag and you can slide down portions of the snowfield.

This is a fantastic hike on a good day but it is a long ways up to Camp Muir. Don't worry if the weather causes you to turn around. Camp Muir will still be there the next time you visit the Park.

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