Pinnacle Peak Trail, WA

Vicinity
Location:
About
14 miles east of Ashford, WA in Mt. Rainier
National Park.

Directions:
The road to this trailhead is
generally closed from November to May. Check the Mt. Rainier National Park website for the Stevens Canyon Road opening and closing dates.

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. Continue several miles past Longmire Inn
turn right towards Stevens Canyon Road. Continue to Reflection Lakes and look for the Pinnacle Peak Trail sign on the right side of the road. Park in any nearby parking area.

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. Continue several miles past Longmire Inn turn right towards Stevens Canyon Road. Continue to Reflection Lakes and look for the Pinnacle Peak Trail sign on the right side of the road. Park in any nearby parking area.

There are no bathrooms at the trailhead. Flush toilets are available at Narada Falls.

Pets are not allowed on the trails in National Parks.

A permit is needed to park in National Parks.

Trail:
Pinnacle Peak Trail, Plummer Peak with connections to Pinnacle Peak and The Castle.

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

Length and Elevation:
3.2 miles round trip. Elevation gain of 1,510 feet and loss of 40 feet to Plummer Peak. Elevation at the trailhead is 4,900 feet and the highest point is at 6,370 feet. Lowest elevation is 4,900 feet.

Review: July 14, 2013.

Pinnacle Peak Trail is an out and back trail and is maintained to Pinnacle Saddle.

The trail leaves the parking area on a moderately uphill grade for a bit and parallels a tumbling stream. Soon the trail climbs more steeply and it isn't long before you see patches of snow even in mid-July. You will pass avalanche lilies and other plants that bloom near patches of recently melted snow.

As you climb higher the trail leaves the dark green Hemlock forest behind and begin to cross rocky slopes of Pinnacle Peak. You will probably cross other snow fields along the trail. Looking back, there are spectacular views of Mt. Rainier and some of the smaller peaks on the shoulders of Mt. Rainier.

The trail crosses a couple of small streams that are easily stepped across and after about a mile comes to a couple of switchbacks on a slope of chattering rocks below Pinnacle Peak. The trail is fairly wide through the rocks and the footing is good.

From the switchbacks the views extend into the Nisqually valley and towards Mt. Rainier and those views are spectacular on a clear day. You can now see the Stevens Canyon road that goes around Reflection Lakes.

If you plan to summit Plummer Peak, while on the switchbacks, look south to the right side of the saddle and study the size of the snowfield. If there is a safe track across it then you could use that footpath. If there is no apparent path across the snowfield then plan to use the rocky slope on the other side of the saddle, which is detailed in this review. Trying to cross this steep snow slope could result in a most unfortunate slide into bone-breaking rocks that leads to the final slope of Plummer Peak.

Continuing up the trail, you pass under a couple of small cliffs on the way to the saddle. At the saddle are great views into the Butter Creek drainage to the south and Paradise River and the Nisqually River to the north.

The saddle is the end of the maintained trail and this can be a good place to turn around. If you decide to go off trail, be aware that the route to Plummer Peak has poor footing and skirts steep cliffs.

To continue up to Plummer Peak, walk through the saddle and turn to the right. These are the slopes of Plummer Peak. Follow the boot path that stays on the southeast side of the slope.

Pick your way up across the rocks, tracing the most used path. When you come up through a little rocky area that opens onto a wide slope, look back to remember your path so you can find this spot on the way back and avoid the steep snow slope above the saddle.

From here, choose any easy way up to Plummer Peak. Near the top there are some old trees that you need to squeeze past but patience will soon be rewarded with spectacular 360 degree views. Plummer Peak has several small flat area to sit and enjoy the sweet views of endless mountains. From the top you can see Mt.

St. Helens, Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, and of course Mt. Rainier.

On the way down, stay on the south side of the ridge until you can see the final approach to Plummer Peak.

This trail is safe for small children up to the saddle and is a short hike with great views. Between the saddle and Plummer Peak the unmaintained boot path covers broken rock, steep slopes, and passes by cliffs. Other user trails in the area are very dangerous, passing beneath tall cliffs and having poor footing.

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