Trail of the Shadows, WA



Vicinity Location:
About 10.5 miles east of Ashford, WA in Mt. Rainier National Park.

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 Entrance fee of $30.00 for a car or $25 for a motorcycle and a single passenger or Annual Pass is required to enter the park.

Length and Elevation:
.7 Miles round trip. Elevation gain 50 feet and 50 loss. Total gain and loss is 100 feet. Elevation at the trailhead is 2,750 feet, the high point of the trail is 2,800 feet.

Trail:
Trail of Shadows with connections to Rampart Ridge Trail.

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

Review: July 8, 2008, January 1, 2009
This is one of the easiest loop trails to take in the Park. I like to walk clockwise and to do that, look for the trailhead just across the road from the old gas station and follow the trail through the forest to the left.

The spring-fed marsh and meadows were discovered accidentally by James Longmire in 1883 after he had returned from a climb of Mt. Rainier. His horses got loose one night and he found them grazing in the marshy meadow. When he found the meadow streams came from mineral springs he decided to file a claim and open a spa. You can still smell the sulfur in places as you walk the trail.

The well maintained trail crosses a couple of log bridges and there are views of Longmire Meadow and Mt. Rainer. After about .2 mile there is a junction with the Rampart Ridge trail. Turn right and continue through the woods taking time to read the interpretive signs. Shortly after the junction is a short spur trail to the right. The trail leads to Medical Springs on a boardwalk. In the spring, Lysichiton americanum, commonly called Skunk Cabbage, blooms large yellow hooded flower spikes and their smell reminds you of how the plant gained its common name.

After walking about half-way around the meadow, you pass Iron Mike Spring. The iron in the water has turned the rocks around the stream orange as a testament to the name. A bit farther through the forest is an early cabin that was built by Elcaine, James Longmire's son, in 1888. You can peek in and see how small a house used to be.

Continuing along, the trail passes near the site of the old Longmire Hotel. As you continue along the trail, there are views into the meadow and the soda spring on the left. The spring bubbles continuously but can be a little sluggish in the summer. Soon the National Park Inn comes into view and you return to the trailhead.
This trail is recommended for small children and people of all ages and can be hiked or snowshoed.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve

