



AUTO TOUR

AAA Washington Travel Services

Mount Rainier – West

Mount Rainier, one of earth's great volcanic peaks, dominates the Washington Cascades. Its massive dome-like summit is the highest point in the Pacific Northwest – 14,411 feet. In clear weather Rainier is visible from distances of up to 150 miles. Congress set aside 378 square miles around the peak as the nation's fourth national park in 1899. The park includes an impressive array of natural zones. A dense forest of coniferous trees cloaks the lower slopes. At higher elevations alpine woodlands give way to open meadows. Higher yet is the realm of rock, talus slope and perpetual ice. The volcano supports the largest single-peak glacial system in the contiguous states.

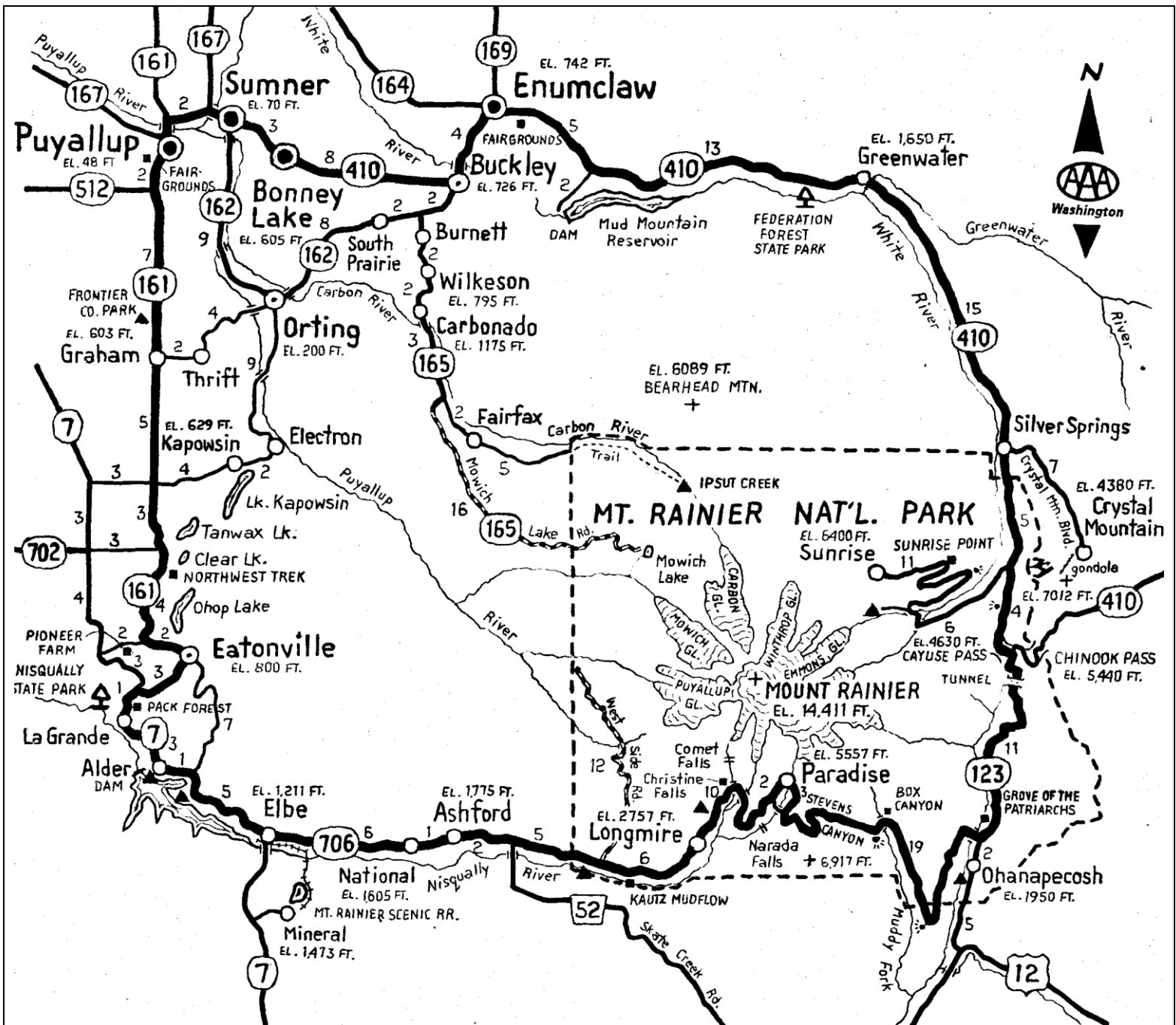


[Photo: Tony Mayer]

AAA Washington's **Mount Rainier-West Auto Tour** traces a 162-mile itinerary around the peak (the total is 196 miles adding a side trip up to Sunrise). The description follows the main route in a clockwise direction, starting in Puyallup. The estimated driving time for the main route is 3 hours, 45 minutes (not including stops) – adding the Sunrise Road increases the driving time by another hour.

Elevations along our route range from near sea level in the Puget Lowlands west of the park, to nearly 5,600 feet at Paradise and 6,400 feet at Sunrise, both located on the volcano's flanks. The entire route is paved, with the exception of the Mowich Lake side road. Roadways are mostly two-lane, with some multi-lane sections in the Puyallup-Sumner areas. There are sections of winding alignment between Ohanapecosh and Longmire, between Elbe and La Grande and on the Sunrise Road.

During the snowy winter months (usually late November into early April) all roads in Mount Rainier National Park are closed, except the road from Ashford up to Paradise. This road is kept open except during heavy snowstorms. Winter motorists should have approved traction tires and carry tire chains.



1. Puyallup to Park Entrance (via WA-410)

We start our Auto Tour in **PUYALLUP** (pop. 41,100, alt. 48 ft.), the busy commercial trading center of the fertile Puyallup Valley, noted for its spring displays of daffodils and tulips. In early April, the city co-hosts the annual **Daffodil Festival** with its neighbors Tacoma, Sumner and Orting. Puyallup was founded in 1877 by pioneer Ezra Meeker who had trekked west on the Oregon Trail in 1852. The town was first named Franklin and became a center of the hop industry. It was later renamed for the local Indian tribe – Puyallup means *generous people*. Commercial bulb growing dates back to the 1920s and was important in the vicinity through the end of the twentieth century.

Area attractions include the 1890 Italianate Victorian **Meeker Mansion** at 312 Spring Street, and the **Karshner**

Museum & Center for Culture and Arts (309 4th Street NE). The compact downtown area has a number of antique and second-hand stores, mostly on Meridian Street. **Pioneer Park** hosts a farmer's market on Saturdays from June through September.

A rite of passage for folks who live on the west side of the Cascades is to “*Do The Puyallup*,” the **Washington State Fair**. Held every September at the Puyallup Fair and Event Center on the south side of town, the Fair draws over one million visitors over its 16-day run.

East of Puyallup on SR-167 there is an outstanding view of the massive, snowy dome of Mount Rainier, 30 miles to the southeast. Highway 167, which leads to **SUMNER** (pop. 10,030, alt. 70 ft.) three miles east of Puyallup. The city's name honors Charles Sumner, a mid-19th-century statesman. The **Ryan House**, 1228 Main Street, built in 1875, serves as the local history museum. Like Puyallup, Sumner was an early center of hop growing. The whole area is now part of the rapidly-urbanizing region that stretches from Tacoma north through Seattle to Everett.

East of Sumner Highway 410 ascends a broad ridge, emerging on a large plateau. Mount Rainier looms on the horizon. The highway skirts the sprawling suburban community of **BONNEY LAKE** (pop. 20,940, alt. 605 ft.). Despite its name, the town sits on the shores of Lake Tapps, several miles to the north. Highway 410 continues east to **BUCKLEY** (pop. 4,765, alt. 726 ft.), established around a shingle mill in the 1800s. The town was first called Perkins Prairie, later White Siding. **Foothills Museum**, 175 Cottage Street, has displays of area history.

Side trip – Carbon River & Ipsut Creek

This side trip leads 22 miles into the northwest corner of Mount Rainier National Park. From Buckley, take SR-162 southwest 2 miles. At the junction with SR-165 turn south. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the district south of here was an important coal mining area – known as the Wilkeson-Carbonado Field. The weathered towns along this road retain vestiges of this period. **BURNETT** (pop. 100, alt. 696 ft.) was a coal town until the area mines closed in 1927. A branch rail line once lead several miles east to the former coal town **SPIKETON** (pop. nil, alt. 699 ft.). The site, also known as Morristown, is overgrown.

WILKESON (pop. 490, alt. 795 ft.) has a number of interesting buildings, abandoned rail yards and mines. Two of the town's structures, the **Holy Trinity Orthodox Church** (1910) and the three-story **Wilkeson School** (1913) are on the National Register of Historic Places. There are also remains of several dozen coke ovens. The district once had 160 of these ovens, used to burn off gases to produce a hotter burning fuel for steel mills and smelters. Wilkeson's sandstone quarries yielded stone for building (including the Capitol in Olympia) and ballast for railroads.



Remains of coke ovens testify to Wilkeson's historical importance as a coal mining center.



Holy Trinity Orthodox Church was built for a Slovakian congregation.

Two miles south, **CARBONADO** (pop. 665, alt. 1,175 ft.) is another former coal mining town. Company-built clapboard houses line streets and concrete foundations are all that remain of once impressive mining structures. From the 1880s until World War II, coal from the Wilkeson-Carbonado mines was sent to Tacoma by rail, where it was

shipped to San Francisco to fuel Southern Pacific steam locomotives

South of Carbonado SR-165 parallels the Carbon River, which flows at the bottom of a narrow gorge. The highway crosses the river on the 240-foot high **Farrell Bridge** – tallest in the state when it was completed in 1921. Beyond the south end of the span, two branches of this road lead into the northwest corner of the park. Beyond

the south end of the span, two branches of this road lead into the northwest corner of the park. Highway 165 winds 16 miles up to scenic Mowich Lake – most of this road is gravel, and is closed during the snowy months (generally from late October or early November into July). The road ascends ridges where clear-cut logging has exposed sweeping views west across the Cascade foothills and south to Mount Rainier.

At the park boundary the road returns to the forest and continues to climb. After four miles it ends at **Mowich Lake** (elev. 4,938 ft.). On sunny weekends the small parking area fills quickly so you may have to park back along the road. At road's end a trail leads to the lake edged with small meadows and groves of trees. At another trailhead you can hike a two-mile portion of the Wonderland Trail south east passing **Spray Falls** (elev. 5,148 ft.). If you are worn out, this is a good place to turn around. The next two miles of the trail wind steeply up to ridge top meadows at **Spray Park** (elev. 5,994 ft.), where the grand view of Rainier and its garland of glaciers more than compensates for the arduous hike.



Mowich Lake



Spray Falls



Spray Park

The northern branch of the road follows the Carbon River through **FAIRFAX** (alt. 1,345 ft.), once an important mining and lumbering center at a railhead, now little more than a string of summer cottages. Sixty coke ovens operated here in the early 1900s.

The road continues along the river to the park boundary. Beyond the Ranger Station the Park Service has converted the route into a trail after floods repeatedly washed out the road. The upper Carbon River area is now a backcountry site – only bicyclists and hikers are allowed on the five-mile former roadway leading to **Ipsut Creek Campground**.



From the campground a trail continues 3½ miles up to **Carbon Glacier**, said to be the lowest elevation reached by a glacier in the Lower 48 states (3,800 feet). The Carbon River bursts forth from the glacier's debris-covered snout.

From a distance the glacier is hard to discern – its surface is dark with rock and debris. The Carbon River bursts forth from the glacier's debris-covered snout. Downstream from the terminus piles of rock brought down by the glacier line its former path.

The Carbon River emerges from the terminus of the glacier amid a chaotic jumble of rock and dirty ice

Back on Highway 410, **ENUMCLAW** (pop. 11,660, alt. 742 ft.) is a pleasant small city of comfortable homes, well-tended lawns, a prosperous business district and an enviable view of Mount Rainier. It serves as trading center for a rich agricultural plain dotted with dairies and horse farms. Farmers homesteaded in the area starting in the mid-1850s, and the town developed with the coming of the Northern Pacific Railroad in the early 1880s. Its name derives from a Native American word meaning *home of evil spirits*. Local Indians evidently avoided the area because of violent thunderstorms in the nearby Cascades. The **Enumclaw Plateau Historical Society Museum**, at 1837 Marion Street, is the repository of local artifacts.

Just east of Enumclaw Highway 410 enters the forested foothills of the Cascades. Two miles beyond the sprawling site of a former lumber mill, a road branches south to **Mud Mountain Dam**, featuring a viewpoint, picnic area, playground and hiking trails. The highway now follows the White River whose pallid hue springs from its glacial origins on Rainier's upper slopes. Seventeen miles east of Enumclaw the road passes through **FEDERATION FOREST STATE PARK** (*Discover Pass required, see p.4*). This cathedral-like old growth grove stands in marked contrast to the heavily logged landscape typical of the area. The interpretive center exhibits Washington's diverse natural history life zones. The park also has picnic tables and hiking trails.

Observant travelers will note subtle changes in the natural vegetation as we gain elevation. Campgrounds, summer cabins and recreation areas dot the route between **GREENWATER** (pop. 70, alt. 1,650 ft.) and **SILVER SPRINGS** (alt. 2,675 ft.). Beyond Greenwater the highway is officially known as the **Mather Memorial Parkway**, a federally-designated National Scenic Byway. A roadside pullout, 9½-miles beyond Greenwater, offers a distant view of 150-foot **Skookum Falls**.



The Mount Rainier Gondola is a comfortable way to get to one of the best views of Mount Rainier.

At Silver Springs a paved road leads seven miles up to **CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN** (pop. 30, alt. 4,380 ft.), a resort community set at the base of its 7,000-ft. namesake peak. The ski area opened in 1962. With ten lifts, this is the largest ski resort in the state. While downhill and cross-country skiing draw most visitors, Crystal also offers summer hiking and horseback riding. The resort has condominiums, and several hotels and restaurants, including the mountain-top **Summit House** restaurant, Washington's highest dining establishment.

The **Mount Rainier Gondola**, completed in 2010, transports skiers and sightseers almost 2,500 vertical feet to the summit of Crystal Mountain for a spectacular panorama of Mount Rainier and four other Cascade volcanoes.

2. East Side of Park – Sunrise & Stevens Canyon

Just south of Silver Springs we pass beneath a wooden arch that marks the entrance to **MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK**. Captain George Vancouver sighted this magnificent mountain in May 1792, naming it for British Rear Admiral Peter Rainier, the grandson of French Huguenot refugees. Over the years there have been numerous proposals to change the peak's name, especially in view of Rainier's anti-colonial role in the Revolutionary War. Some early suggestions were Harrison and Lincoln (for U.S. presidents). In the 20th century most proposals called for restoration of a Native American name. While different tribes had varying names, the most common is *Tahoma*, meaning "the mountain", "snowy mountain" or "near-to-sky".

Note the striking change in the landscape inside the park, untouched by logging and commercial development. At White River Junction, a road branches west, running along its namesake stream through a lush forest of Douglas-fir, western red cedar and western hemlock. At the **White River Campground**, set in a deep, glacier-carved valley, the **SUNRISE ROAD** begins an eleven-mile, serpentine climb of 3,000 vertical feet through an alpine forest of spruce and fir. Completed in 1929 and later augmented by early efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the road was one of the first master-planned roads in the National Park System. The Sunrise Road area is normally open only from June through mid-October.

Stop at **Sunrise Point** for a sweeping panorama of Rainier's sister Cascade volcanoes – Glacier Peak and Mount Baker to the north; mounts Adams, St. Helens and Hood lie to the south. Here at timberline, scattered stands of pyramidal Engelmann spruce mingle with alpine meadows at their peak bloom in July and August. The road ends at the **Sunrise National Historic District**, a series of seven buildings, erected in the 1930s and 40s. Located at an elevation of 6,400 feet and set amidst meadows known as Yakima Park, this is the highest point accessible by paved road in the state.

The **Sunrise Visitor Center** has exhibits of natural history. Nearby **Sunrise Lodge**, built in 1931 as the first wing of a planned hotel, today offers food and beverage service. A complex of housekeeping cabins formerly bordering the lodge was removed in the 1940s. A variety of trails traverse an alpine wonderland of meadows and groves of trees, offering stunning close-hand views of Mount Rainier's glaciers. The **Burroughs Mountain Trail** climbs above the timberline into an alpine tundra.

From White River Junction, Highway 410 climbs gradually up to the 4,630-foot summit of **Cayuse Pass**. Stop for a great view of Rainier just south of the junction. At Cayuse Pass SR-410 continues its ascent to the Cascade crest at Chinook Pass (see AAA Washington's *Mount Rainier - East Auto Tour* for a description of the park from the east side). Continuing south from Cayuse Pass, we follow SR-123, which drops steeply into the valley of the Ohanapecosh River. At the **Grove of the Patriarchs** a loop trail leads through a stand of thousand-year-old Sitka spruce. Several miles down the road, **Ohanapecosh** features a visitor center and campground. In the early 1900s there was a popular hot springs resort here.



Looking into the narrow defile of Box Canyon [Photo: Tony Mayer]

The next leg of our Mount Rainier circle trip follows the **Stevens Canyon Road** across the southern part of the park. It climbs out of the Ohanapecosh Valley ascending Backbone Ridge, then drops down to the Muddy Fork of the Cowlitz River. At **Box Canyon** it spans a narrow gorge, 115 feet deep and only thirteen feet wide.

To the west it runs through Stevens Canyon proper, a treasure trove of alpine glacial features. The canyon itself bears the U-shape profile characteristic of glacial erosion. To the southwest the **Tatoosh Range** lifts its rugged profile. This type of feature is known as an *arête*. Individual peaks of the ridge are called *horns*; their intervening passes are *cols*. Oval basins at the base of these peaks, gouged out by the erosional force of long-receded glaciers, are known as *cirques*. Lakes that form in such basins are *cirque lakes*. Sometimes they form a chain, and are known as *pater noster lakes*, for their resemblance to beads on a rosary.

Hanging valleys form beneath tributary glaciers – the cliffs at their base are often a springboard for waterfalls. **Fairy Falls**, well north of the road and beyond our view, is the park's highest with a total drop of 700 feet. Its flow

varies greatly at different times of year. Our route skirts several *tarns*, or alpine lakes. Two such features – **Louise Lake** and **Reflection Lake** – offer hiking trails.

3. West Side of Park – Paradise & Longmire

Beyond Reflection Lake the road winds up to **PARADISE** (summer pop. 300, alt. 5,557 ft.), located at timberline amid splendid alpine meadows on the volcano's southern flank. The historic **Paradise Inn**, a sprawling lodge of wood and stone built in 1917, offers seasonal lodging and dining. The inn and five other structures form the **Paradise Historic District**. Note the 1920 Guide Service Building with its distinctive gambrel roof. The **Paradise Visitor Center** features displays of the park's natural history. A network of trails branch out from Paradise – most lead upwards, through meadows dotted with trees; some climb above the tree line to snowfields and glaciers. The views are magnificent. The wildflowers are at their best in July and August. Due to the melting of the glaciers in the area, the famous Paradise Ice Caves no longer exist. In winter visitors can practice Nordic skiing, take snowshoe hikes and enjoy the **Paradise Snow Play Area**.



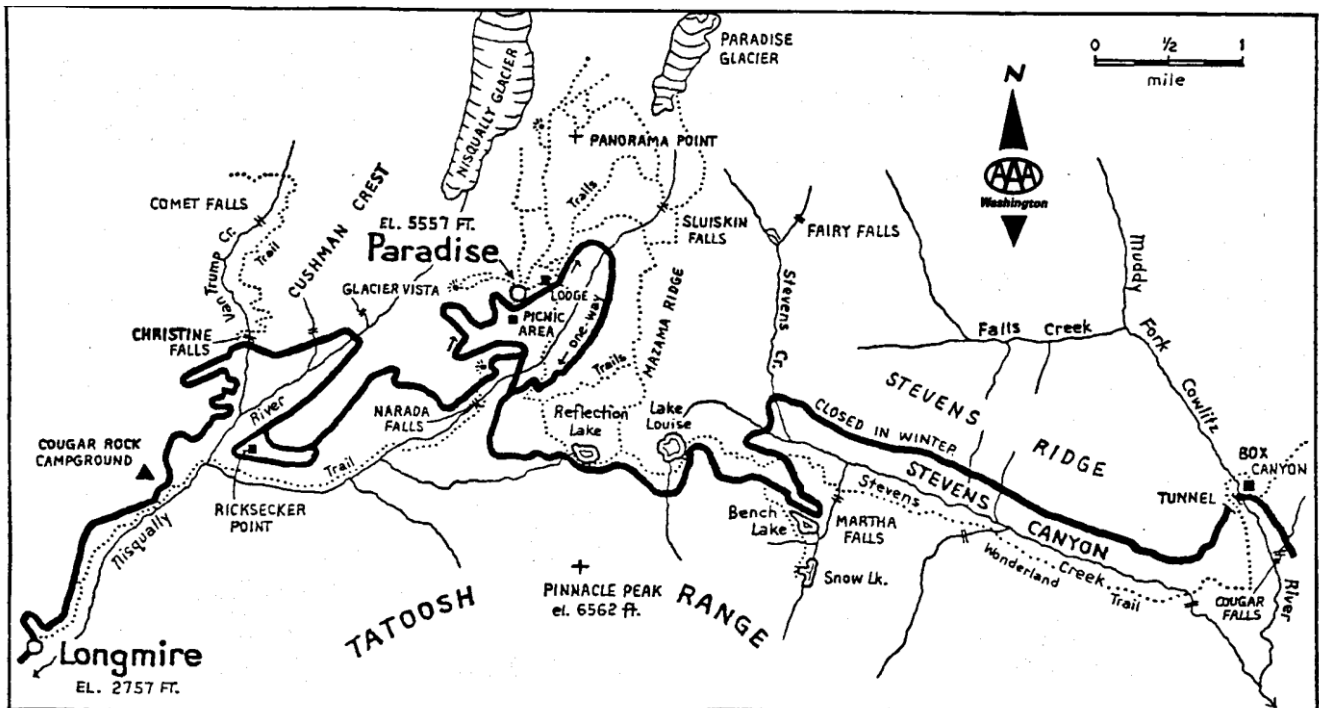
The colorful wildflower meadows near Paradise are a riot of color in summer.



Paradise Inn reflects an alpine variant of the National Park Rustic style of architecture.

From Paradise the road twists down the Nisqually River valley, passing numerous viewpoints. Two miles west of Paradise Junction, a short walk leads to a view of **Narada Falls** (168-ft. drop). Six miles farther down the road, an excellent viewpoint offers a grand perspective of the massive **Nisqually Glacier**, spilling down the upper reaches of its steep valley. A further two miles along the road is **Christine Falls**, which cascades beneath an ornamental stone bridge. Just beyond is **Cougar Rock Campground**, the largest camping facility in the park.

In the dozen miles between Paradise and Longmire we drop nearly 3,000 feet. The park's administrative headquarters are at **LONGMIRE** (pop. 50, alt. 2,757 ft.). Here too is a **Visitor Center** and the **Longmire Museum**, housing natural and human history exhibits in the park's former headquarters building. It's said to be one of the oldest national park museums in the country. The historic Longmire Gas Station has a modest display of transportation in the park. Lodging is available year round at the **National Park Inn** (built in 1926).



The 1911 log cabin nearby hosts a gift shop and general store. These structures reflect the architectural style known as National Park Rustic and the **Longmire Historic District** contains 58 structures, including four on the National Register of Historic Places. log cabin nearby hosts a gift shop and general store. These structures reflect the architectural style known as National Park Rustic and the **Longmire Historic District** contains 58 structures, including four on the National Register of Historic Places. There are a number of hiking trails in the

vicinity, including the **Trail of the Shadows**, which loops through a meadow where the Longmire Resort once stood. Other trails ascend nearby ridges for excellent views.

Three miles west of Longmire the highway crosses the path of the **Kautz Mudflow**. Torrential rains on 2 October, 1947, sent a flush of mud and debris down Kautz Creek. Note the stand of western red alder – this was the first tree species to colonize the area after the mudflow tore out the original coniferous forest. Another three miles down the road, the **West Side Road** branches north. This gravel road leads into the seldom-visited west side of the park. Vehicular traffic is halted at milepost 3. The road continues another nine miles north, but is closed to motor vehicles due to recurring mudflows – hikers are welcome to follow the old alignment to several trailheads. In the early twentieth-century this formed the western end of a never-completed road that was to encircle the mountain.

Just inside the park boundary is **Sunshine Point Campground**, the only campground in the park open all year. Passing beneath the wooden arch, we leave Mount Rainier National Park.

4. Ashford to Puyallup (via Highways 706, 7 & 161)

Our route continues as SR-706, running along the north bank of the Nisqually River. The community of **ASHFORD** (pop. 220, alt. 1,775 ft.), just outside the park boundary, was settled in the 1880s. First a sawmill town, it became the main gateway to Mount Rainier National Park when the Tacoma Eastern Railway (later part of the Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad) reached the town in 1904. In the early days most park visitors came by train. Passenger train service continued until 1926, the same year the road leading to the park was paved. Today, Ashford has a collection of comfortable lodgings and bed & breakfast properties. **Mount Tahoma Trails**, north of town, is a 50-mile network of trails for cross-country skiing and horseback riding. With a trio of rustic lodgings, this is the country's largest hut-to-hut trail system. A mile west is the village of **NATIONAL** (pop. 50, alt. 1,605 ft.), formerly a lumbering center. In the early 1900s its large mill specialized in cutting long timber.

Highway 706 continues west to the town of **ELBE** (pop. 25, alt. 1,211 ft.), named by an early settler for the river valley in his native Germany. The **Little White Church**, built in 1906 for a German-speaking Lutheran congregation, measures a diminutive 18 by 24 feet. Its six rows of pews can accommodate up to 50 cozy worshippers. The **Ashford Art Museum**, in Ashford Creek Pottery & Gallery at 30510 SR 706 East, features exhibits by Northwest artists from 1895 to the present, displays of historic photographs and a collection of 500+ vintage Mt. Rainier postcards. **E-Z Times Outfitters**, 18703 SR 706 East, offers one- to two-hour guided horseback rides.

During the summer months, the **Mount Rainer Railroad & Logging Museum** offers steam-powered train trips from Elbe to the former lumber camp at **MINERAL** (pop. 202, alt. 1,770 ft.), a 12-mile round trip. In Mineral you can visit the **Western Forest Industries Museum** featuring buildings from the country's last operating rail logging camp and a collection of steam locomotives and rail cars. Railfans will enjoy a visit to the Restoration Shop.



Mount Rainier Railroad offers excursion rail trips weekends from late May through October [Photo: MRR]

A two-story lodge beside Mineral Lake, built in 1906, is an impressive example of log architecture. Giant trees were characteristic of these forests. A local record holder, a 393-foot Douglas-fir known as the Mineral Fir, was one of the tallest trees ever measured in the United States. A 1930 windstorm felled the giant. Core sampling fixed its age at 1,000 years.

West of Elbe, Highway 7 winds along the shore of **Alder Lake**. Several places along the lake offer camping, boating, boat rentals and picnic sites. A roadside viewpoint overlooks Alder Dam and the gorge downstream. Just north of the hamlet of **LA GRANDE** (pop. 100, alt. 940 ft.), named for the "grand" 400-ft. cliffs lining the Nisqually River, is **Pack Forest**, a research station operated by the University of Washington's College of Forestry. From the roadside interpretive center a seven-mile drive/trail loops through the forest, passing an arboretum and stands of trees of varying ages, including a 42-acre patch of old growth cedar, fir and hemlock.

Continue north on SR-161 to **EATONVILLE** (pop. 2,955, alt. 800 ft.), once an important lumbering center, founded in 1889. Its name recalls pioneer settler Thomas C. Van Eaton. After the railroad arrived in 1904, large-scale milling began. Eatonville retains the ordered, well-tended look of a company town and has a pleasant main street business district. On the north side of town, 2½ miles west on Ohop Valley Road, is **Pioneer Farm Museum**. This 1880s homestead offers visitors a glimpse into rural life in the late 19th century. The site also includes an **Ohop Indian Village**.

NORTHWEST TREK, six miles north of Eatonville on SR-161, is a 600-acre wildlife preserve. Electric trams carry visitors through natural habitats showcasing animals from the northwestern region of the continent. There are also walk-through exhibits and a zipline adventure course.

Highway 161 continues north, crossing rolling, wooded country dotted with lakes. Occasionally you catch glimpses of Mount Rainier off to the southeast. Subdivisions and heavier traffic signal the southern suburbs of Puyallup, part of the sprawling Puget Sound urban area and the end of our Auto Tour.

Note: As of July 2011, a **Washington Discover Pass** is required for admission to day-use areas of state parks, as well as areas administered by the state Department of Fish & Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources.

The fee is \$10 per car for a one-day pass, or \$30 for an annual pass. Purchase the pass from any State Parks regional office or at the park itself when staff is available. Discover Passes can also be purchased as part of vehicle license renewals.

Click www.discoverpass.wa.gov for details on other methods of purchase, including over 600 locations where hunting and fishing licenses are sold (transaction fees apply). A \$99 fine can be levied against drivers of street-legal vehicles caught without a Pass.

Overnight campers in state parks need not purchase the Discover Pass for the nights they're camping.



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