



ON BEING IN MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK

Mt. Rainier National Park is a nice place to be.

It is a current event in geology and a laboratory of the plate tectonics that produced what you see here. It is the largest single-peak glacier system in the United States, outside Alaska, and the greatest of the volcanos in the Cascades chain. The landscapes for tens of miles were shaped by ashfalls and lavas. Its mudflows have reached as far as Puget Sound. Quiet now for many centuries, the top and insides of the mountain are still hot, but on its flanks nature's gentler forces soften and reclaim the naked rock.

Over all the awesome bulk of Mt. Rainier, everything else is sorted out by elevation—the plants, the animals and the weather. Here you can clearly sense nature's efficient, uncluttered systems—feel an understated power and purpose, and a pervading presence. There are places in this park so quiet you can hear nature at work. In a still place it sounds like the far, far distant rushing of a great wind. You will find a splendid profusion of life arrayed in an orderly progression as you climb the mountain. The forests, in steady-state maturity, are special places, different from other forests you have known. The meadowlands above them are a summertime celebration of color, their broad vistas cool and remote, with majestic sweep and singular purity of line and form. There is always excitement near the rising snow line, where spring happens all summer long. In August, tiny alpine ecosystems flourish at the toes of the ice fields.

Mt. Rainier National Park is a fun place to be. There are roads to follow, trails to learn, lakes and streams to be found, and a thousand enchanting places to discover. You can rest and nourish your body, think about important things, or just play and celebrate the joys of freedom and space and serenity in one of America's most magnificent natural environments.

DID YOU KNOW?

Fifteen hundred elk are the number one resource management problem at Mt. Rainier. Introduced into the Cascades in the 1920's, the elk migrate into the park each spring and remain until very late fall. With habits like domestic cattle, they selectively over-browse forest and sub-alpine meadow species all summer. There is no predation, so the herds grow. They threaten irreversible damage to an ecosystem not designed for elk.

Each year more than 2 million people visit, mostly in summer. Fewer than 100 permanent park employees provide the 368-square-mile park's resource management and administration, aided by about 150 summer workers. Construction and maintenance for 150 miles of roads and scenic overlooks, 13 water systems, 5 electrical systems, 6 campgrounds, 5 picnic areas and 140 roofed structures must be done during the summer-fall season, when public facilities and services are most busy.

About 16,000 visitors hike into the backcountry; four thousand go to climb Mt. Rainier. All travel parts of 300 miles of tender trail systems. Trail maintenance is an intense 8-week effort. On some heavily used routes erosion scars are miles long and knee deep. Today, a helicopter bucket of fill dirt equals 40 mules packing for two days, but there is a fifteen million dollar backlog of restoration work. A Backcountry Use Permit and Reservation System is in use to minimize and balance these impacts on the land.

At Paradise, where average annual snowfall is over fifty feet, the snowfields are playgrounds for 35,000 winter visitors who share the highways with big dozers and 28-ton push-plows that pile the snow. Then, spectacular 600 Hp rotarys spray 2,000 tons per hour out onto banks tens of feet high. Several feet of new snow may fall overnight for weeks at a time from December through March!

Specially trained Ranger-Naturalists are assigned at park entrances, visitor centers, campgrounds and overlooks. Their business is to communicate information and provide services visitors need to understand and enjoy Mt. Rainier National Park. They want to meet you.



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