

A DRIVE THROUGH THE QUINAULT RAIN FOREST

The Quinault Valley contains an excellent example of a temperate rain forest community. Mild temperatures, summer fog, abundant rainfall, and a long growing season help make this forest one of the most fertile in the world. The loop road up the Quinault Valley and around Quinault Lake allows the visitor to view an interesting cross section of this temperate rain forest from their vehicle (large RVs and trailers are not advised). Approximately thirty-one miles around, the trip can be completed in about an hour and one half. Extensions of the loop road above the bridge on both sides of the river invite continued exploration.

A naturalist's paradise, the rain forest is nature's varied garden of myriad representatives of the plant kingdom. Growing organisms occur everywhere. Where mineral soil is bared, it is quickly occupied by spore, seed or, hungry rootlet. Even rocks, when undisturbed, support botanical life.

Most impressive of the rain forest growth are the trees, some of the largest of their kind growing in this valley. Festooned with mosses, lichens, and ferns, one host tree can offer hours of

plant study. Some of the fallen trees, now nurturing many new plants, have earned themselves the title of "nurse log".

The ferns which typify the temperate rain forest so aptly, are not the same as those in the equatorial rain forest where there are no defined seasons. Many of the Pacific Northwest ferns



are deciduous, dying back in the fall to emerge again with spring.

Saprophytic and parasitic plants abound in this environment. There is as much dead or dying material in this vast garden as there is living, providing a perfect couch for saprophytes, most notably mushrooms. Of the thousands of kinds occurring in the rain forest, some are still unidentified, unnamed, and unclassified.

The rain forest community also includes animals. Eagles in the trees, swans on the lake, and blue herons in the lowlands are some of the larger birds to be seen. Smaller birds are hosted by the trees along the river and high in the forest canopy. The flowing waters provide a playground for ouzels, kingfishers, ducks, and geese. The river and side channels are home to spawning salmon, otter, and mink.

Deer and elk are often close by or seen crossing the road. An attentive person may observe many other mammals which do reveal themselves at times. Squirrel, chipmunk, pack rat, mole, mouse, and shrew are some of the more familiar smaller ones, but an occasional raccoon, coyote, cougar, or bear may make an appearance. With patience, the intent seeker may be rewarded with the sight of a beaver in the pool behind his expertly built dam.

A few hours or days are not enough time to take in this magnificent forest. To learn about it all is impossible. The visitor may want to return to this unforgettable rain forest.



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