

Wilderness Trip Planner

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

North Cascades National Park
Ross Lake National Recreation Area
Lake Chelan National Recreation Area



Planning Your Trip

This guide has been developed by experienced backcountry rangers to help you plan a successful trip in the beautiful and incredibly rugged wilderness of the North Cascades.

When to Visit

The hiking season stretches from April through October, with the drier summer season usually running from mid-June through September. Higher elevation trails can remain snow-covered into July or August. The park's winters are wet. Heavy snowfall greatly limits access from November through March.

Route Selection

Plan a route well in advance of your trip. The backcountry is vast, with 634,614 acres of wilderness containing 136 designated campsites, 360 miles of trail, 230 lakes, and over 300 glaciers. There are countless backcountry routes and possibilities. To clarify your goals consider these questions: How far do I want to travel in a day? Are alpine views my objective, am I seeking old growth forest, or perhaps both? Do I want to stay on trail or venture cross-country? How important is solitude? The best way to research trip options is to study guidebooks and topographic maps. A catalog of these materials is available from the park headquarters.

We encourage you to review your plans with a ranger when obtaining the required permit. Rangers can provide current information on weather forecasts, trail and campsite conditions, wildlife activity, stream crossings, and other important factors. Because many trails in the park include great elevation gains, plan on covering less than your normal trail mileage. For short trips, *Popular Trails of North Cascades National Park* is a good guide to selecting a trail that suits your purpose.



Backcountry Permits

Permits are required for all overnight stays in the backcountry. They are issued in person only, on the first day of the backcountry trip or the day before. The permit process provides an opportunity for rangers and visitors to exchange information important to both parties.

Permits must be obtained at the Wilderness Information Center unless your trip origin does not take you through Marblemount. Wilderness District staff have firsthand knowledge of the backcountry, maintain the most current information on conditions, and can best help you to finalize your trip plans. It is best to obtain your permit during operating hours. If this is not practical, limited after-hours self-registration is provided at the Wilderness Information Center and the Sedro-Woolley Information Center. Note that self-registration is not allowed for heavily used areas such as the Cascade Pass area, Copper Ridge, and Ross Lake.

If your trip does not take you through Marblemount, permits can also be obtained at:
North Cascades National Park Information Center, Sedro-Woolley
Golden West Visitor Center, Stehekin
Glacier Public Service Center, Glacier
North Cascades Visitor Center, Newhalem
Hozomeen Ranger Station
Forest Service ranger stations (Chelan and Winthrop)

Backcountry Requirements

Group Size

Group size is regulated to protect wilderness values. Please note the party size limits listed below:

Use	Group Size
On trails with established camps	12
Cross-country zones near Shuksan, Eldorado, & Forbidden Peaks	12
All other cross-country zones	6

Note: Some camps are too small to accommodate large groups. Write or call for a list of camp capacities, or link to www.nps.gov/noca/bcamps.htm. Flexibility helps in planning an itinerary for your group.

Camping Restrictions

Camping is permitted only at established (designated) camps along trail corridors. Off-trail hiking is difficult in the North Cascades, and is most commonly undertaken by those with mountaineering objectives. If you are travelling cross-country, you must camp at least a half-mile from trails, a mile from designated campsites and 100 feet from lakes, rivers and streams.

Pets

Pets are not permitted on the trails or in cross-country areas within the National Park, although leashed pets are allowed along the Pacific Crest Trail and in the National Recreation Areas. Aid dogs are allowed for persons with disabilities.

Mountain Bikes

Prohibited in the backcountry (including all trails).

Campfires

Fires are discouraged due to the impact caused by wood gathering, fire scars, and wood depletion. Bring a portable stove; they're cleaner and more efficient for cooking. Try a candle lantern rather than a campfire for evening light. If you do choose to build a fire, they are allowed only at forested, lower elevation camps with metal fire grates. Gather only dead and downed wood from the ground; never break living or dead branches off trees. Keep your fire small and make sure it is completely out before you leave camp.

Avoid Busy Times

Popular areas fill quickly on weekends during July and August. These include Boston Basin, Sulphide Glacier, Copper Ridge, Pelton Basin, Sahale Glacier, Monogram Lake, Thornton Lakes and the campsites along Ross Lake. If possible, plan your trip to these areas on weekdays or after Labor Day. Be flexible; have alternatives in mind.

Subalpine Passes

Many of the park's trails cross subalpine passes which can remain snow-covered into July or August. Always be prepared for snow travel above 5,000 feet (1524 meters) elevation. Wear boots with stiff soles, carry an ice axe and know how to use it. Snow cover can make route-finding not only a challenge, but a hazard as well. Don't plan a trip that takes you through terrain that is beyond your skills and equipment.



Stream Crossing

Some stream crossings are not bridged. In high water these can be hazardous. Don't attempt unsafe crossings. Cross streams in the morning (before the heat of the day adds more snowmelt), scout for a safer crossing, or turn back.



Maps

The park's official brochure map is free and provides a general overview of the backcountry. The map on the reverse shows the names and locations of designated campsites and cross-country zone. *Neither, however, is adequate for route planning and navigation.* The following topographic maps provide the scale and detail required for safe and efficient travel in the backcountry:

- *Trails Illustrated* topo map covers the whole park and includes the location of trails and camps. (Scale 1:100,000)
- *Green Trails maps* contain more detailed topographic information and include trail mileages as well as camp and trail locations. (Scale 1:69,500, 15 minute maps)
- *USGS maps* provide the most detailed topographic information. Although campsite and trail information are often outdated, these are the preferred maps for mountaineering and cross-country travel. (Scale 1:24,000, 7 1/2 minute maps)

Maps are available by mail from the Northwest Interpretive Association or at ranger stations. Call or write for a brochure. In addition to a good map, carry a compass and know how to use it.

Plan for Harsh Weather

Check the forecast before leaving home, but remember that the weather in the North Cascades changes very quickly. Always be prepared for cold, wet weather by carrying extra clothing and effective rain gear. Dress in layers so you can regulate your temperature by bundling up or peeling down. In wet weather, wearing cotton next to the skin can be dangerous, because it holds moisture and promotes heat loss. Synthetics or wool perform much better.



Hunting

Hunting is permitted in Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas in season. Hunting is never permitted in North Cascades National Park. Hikers planning trips in the National Recreation Areas during the August through December hunting seasons should wear bright clothing as a safety precaution.

Fishing

Fishing is allowed under Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife regulations. Fishing licenses are required and should be obtained before arriving at the park. They are not available at ranger stations. Although there are fish in the park, many creeks run too fast to provide good fishing opportunities. Avoid trampling stream banks and fragile lakeshore vegetation in your search for a good fishing spot.



Safety

Leave Word at Home

Tell someone at home your trip plans including route, where your car will be parked, estimated date/time of return and actions to take if you don't return as planned. This information can be critical in initiating a search or rescue.

Mountaineering Safety

Voluntary Climbing Registers are maintained in Marblemount, Sedro-Woolley, Glacier, and Stehekin. The information recorded in these registers can be valuable for search and rescue purposes. Climbers completing the registers agree to sign in upon their return, avoiding unnecessary and expensive search responses.

Electronic Communication

Don't rely on cellular phones and programmable radios in the backcountry. Rugged terrain and the lack of repeater antennas greatly limit their usefulness.

Leave No Trace

The National Park Service participates in a nationwide program called Leave No Trace (LNT). LNT skills and ethics help backcountry visitors leave minimum impact while enjoying the nation's wildlands. Many of these techniques have been incorporated into this guide. Your backcountry permit is a signed contract between you and the National Park Service. It's an agreement to treat the wilderness with respect by practicing LNT techniques. Keep in mind that Leave No Trace camping goes beyond following the rules; it requires thoughtful judgement for each situation that comes up. For more information on LNT, call 1-800-332-4100 or go to www.LNT.org.



Fragile Vegetation

July through September, when the high country is most accessible, the meadows are filled with wildflowers. To heighten your enjoyment of the park, carry a lightweight field guide to identify them. Some of these plants, such as the low-growing mountain heather, are very fragile. Although heather can withstand extreme weather, its woody stems are easily broken when trampled or camped on. Grasses and grass-like sedges are the only vegetation that can readily withstand being walked and camped on, and these, too, will eventually be impacted. In addition, trampling of vegetation often leads to new trails, bare ground, and erosion. Recovery requires laborious transplanting of heather seedlings by revegetation staff and volunteers. The Wilderness Information Center in Marblemount maintains patches of alpine plants for viewing and identification. If you're interested in the park's revegetation program, ask at the Wilderness Information Center.



Tread Lightly

Sneakers, sandals, or water sport slippers are a welcome change at camp after a day in heavy boots. They also cause less damage to fragile vegetation around campsites, especially in cross-country zones, and they're useful for wading streams as well. You can also help protect heather and other fragile vegetation by staying on the trail. When traveling cross-country, choose resistant surfaces such as rocks, snow, gravel covered streambeds and dry grass or sedge meadows. Routes through sparsely vegetated forest areas are good choices too. If you must cross fragile vegetation, spread out to avoid creating a new trail. Don't mark a new route with blazes or litter the backcountry with flagging tape.



Pitching Camp

On trail: Camping is allowed only in designated sites. Pitch your tent on established tent sites and not on undisturbed vegetation. Never dig a trench around a tent.

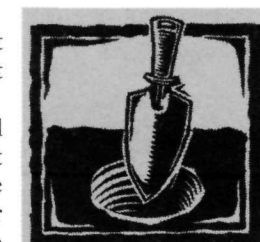
Cross-Country: You may select your own campsite following LNT techniques and the restrictions listed above. Rock, snow, sedges and forest duff are the best surfaces to camp on. Do not alter your campsite by digging out rocks, moving logs or building windbreaks. Try to tuck your camp out of sight of others. Remember, brightly colored tents announce your presence, whereas earth-tone tents blend into the landscape.



Backcountry Sanitation

Pit or composting toilets are located at most designated campsites. When these facilities are not available, do the following:

- Choose a spot at least 200 feet from water and trails. With a small trowel or ice axe, dig a cat hole 6-8 inches deep for fecal waste. To promote decomposition, choose a site in organic rather than sandy mineral soil. After use, fill in the hole and replace the sod plug.
- Pack out used toilet paper in double re-sealable bags. Sanitary napkins and tampons should never be buried; they are slow to decompose and are frequently dug up by animals. Pack them out in re-sealable bags.
- Urinate on rock or bare ground well away from camp. Salt-starved deer and mountain goats can cause dramatic damage as they paw up soil and defoliate plants looking for newly deposited salts.
- In the alpine, digging a sufficient cathole is difficult or impossible. In these areas, the best method of waste disposal is to pack it out, using a "blue bag" or other double-bag system. Blue bags are available at the Wilderness Information Center, the Sedro-Woolley Information Center, and some other stations. Staff can advise you on use and appropriate disposal methods for the bags.



Drinking Water

Purify drinking water by one of the following methods:
• Portable water filter
• Full boil for one minute (increase time with increasing elevation)
• Water purifying tablets

Cooking and Clean-up

Bring a portable stove to cook your meals. Stoves give you maximum flexibility and ease of cooking, particularly in bad weather, and they avoid the impacts caused by gathering wood for campfires. Repackage food into reusable containers or plastic bags. This not only saves weight and space in your pack, but also reduces the amount of trash to carry out.

Bring a collapsible water container to transport water to your campsite for cooking and washing. This minimizes the number of trips made to the water source and allows you to wash dishes well away from lakes and streams. Carry water at least 100 feet (30 m) from lakes and streams to wash your dishes. Scrape off food scraps and pack them out with your garbage. Hot water and perhaps some sand for scouring eliminate the need for soap. Dispose of the wash water by tossing it over a wide area away from campsites.



Bears and Other Wildlife

There are black bears and a few grizzly bears in the park. While bears are potentially dangerous, rodents and deer are the chief threat to your equipment and food supply. To keep bears and other animals away from your campsite:

- Store all food and scented toiletries in lightweight animal-proof containers. These containers are available from a number of backpacking retailers. They are also available for free loan at the Wilderness Information Center in Marblemount and other stations.
- Another option is to hang food and scented items at least 15 feet (4.5 m) above the ground and at least 5 feet (1.5 m) out from the tree trunk. Bring 50 feet (15 m) or more of utility cord. Since trees with large limbs are not always available, this technique can require time and ingenuity. Avoid trampling fragile vegetation in your search for a tree.
- Keep a clean camp. Avoid bringing greasy, odorous foods into the backcountry. Seal leftovers and garbage in airtight containers or plastic bags and store with food.
- Cook well away from your sleeping area. Keep food and scented items out of your tent.
- Never feed wild animals. Handouts disrupt natural feeding behavior and can create bothersome, even dangerous pests.
- Don't throw food into any toilet. Pack out all food scraps and garbage.



Beware: Deer, mountain goats, marmots and other rodents are attracted to urine and sweat, and they can chew holes in clothes, boots, and camping gear left unattended. Mosquitoes and flies can be very annoying in some areas during July and August. Bring insect repellent or be prepared to cover up with lightweight clothing and perhaps a headnet.

Pack Stock

Access to trails is limited, yet pack stock have the right of way on all trails where they are allowed. Hikers should yield to the downhill side of the trail where they are easily visible to stock and riders. Speak to the riders as they approach to let the animals know you are there. For more information on stock access to the park, ask for a copy of the North Cascades National Park Stock Use brochure, available at most ranger stations.



When You Leave

If you end a trip early, notify a ranger to cancel your permit so that space is available for other backpackers. Park rangers are very interested in your comments, unusual wildlife sightings, trail conditions or incidents. If you find litter, please pack it out. If there is more than you have room for, tell us where it is and we'll pack it out. Leave natural objects and cultural artifacts where you found them.

Have a great adventure and thanks for your partnership in protecting the wilderness in your national park.

For More Information

MAY - SEPTEMBER
North Cascades National Park
Wilderness Information Center
7280 Ranger Station Road
Marblemount, WA 98267
(360) 873-4500 ext. 39
More information is available on-line at: www.nps.gov/noca

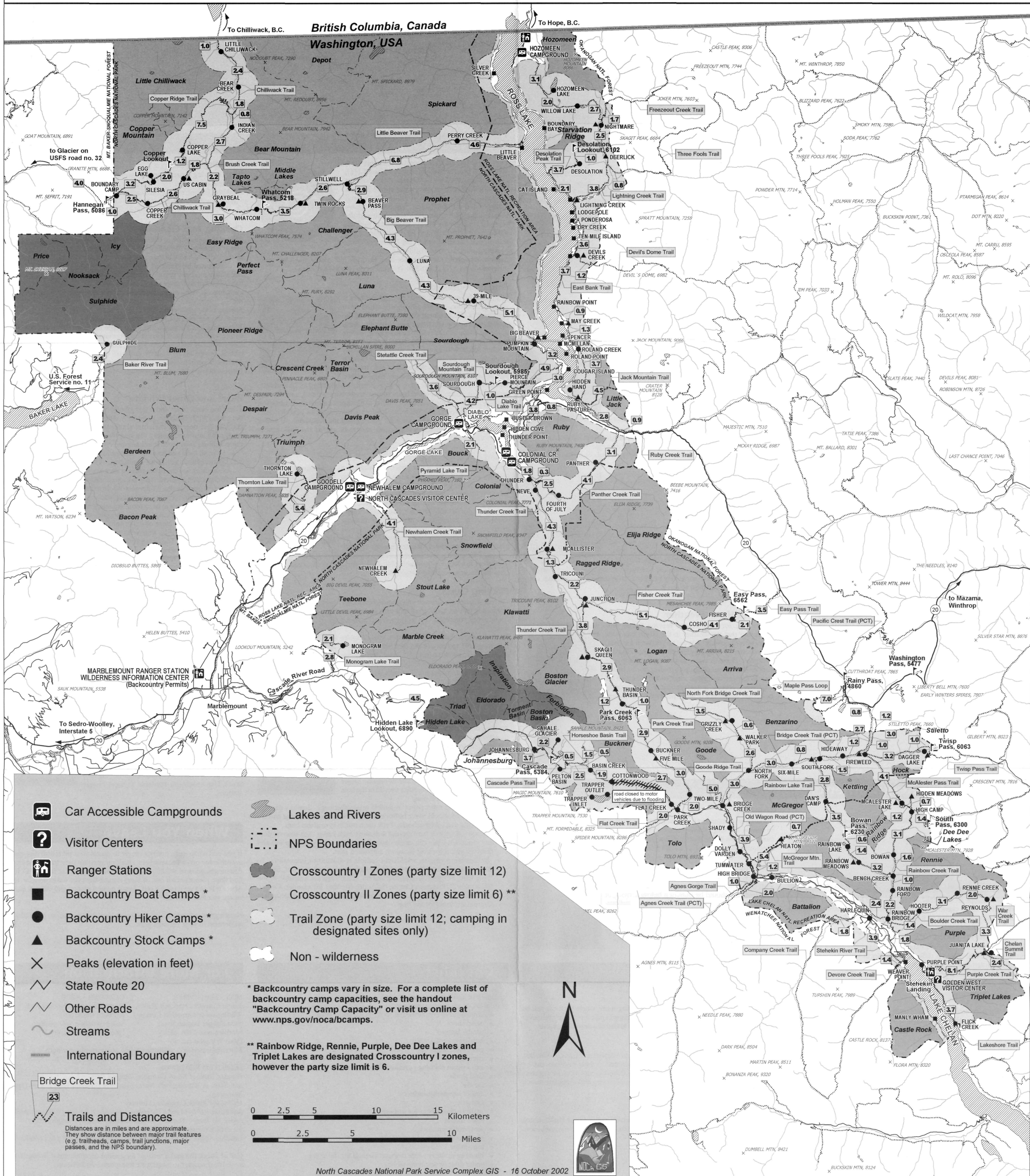
OCTOBER - APRIL
North Cascades National Park
810 State Route 20
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284
(360) 856-5700 ext. 515

SELECTED READINGS:
Popular Trails of North Cascades National Park
100 Hikes in Washington's North Cascades National Park Region (Spring/Manning)
Hiking the North Cascades (Molvar)
Soft Paths - How to enjoy the wilderness without harming it (Hampton/Cole)
Leave No Trace - Outdoor Skills and Ethics (Pacific Northwest)
Cascade-Olympic Natural History (Mathews)
Cascade Alpine Guide: Climbing and High Routes, Books 2 & 3 (Beckey)

Call or check the park's website for a more comprehensive listing of items available through the Northwest Interpretive Association.

North Cascades National Park Service Complex: Backcountry Camps & Crosscountry Zones

ABOUT THIS MAP: This map is for general reference only and is not intended for navigational purposes. Locations and mileages may vary. Individual crosscountry zone boundaries generally follow ridgelines and streams. Special camping conditions exist in certain areas. These may include grazing or stock restrictions, special food storage concerns, prohibition of fires and/or composting toilet facilities. Contact the Wilderness Information Center in Marblemount for further information.



- Car Accessible Campgrounds
- Visitor Centers
- Ranger Stations
- Backcountry Boat Camps *
- Backcountry Hiker Camps *
- Backcountry Stock Camps *
- Peaks (elevation in feet)
- State Route 20
- Other Roads
- Streams
- International Boundary
- Lakes and Rivers
- NPS Boundaries
- Crosscountry I Zones (party size limit 12)
- Crosscountry II Zones (party size limit 6) **
- Trail Zone (party size limit 12; camping in designated sites only)
- Non-wilderness

* Backcountry camps vary in size. For a complete list of backcountry camp capacities, see the handout "Backcountry Camp Capacity" or visit us online at www.nps.gov/noca/bcamps.

** Rainbow Ridge, Rennie, Purple, Dee Dee Lakes and Triplet Lakes are designated Crosscountry I zones, however the party size limit is 6.

Trails and Distances
 Distances are in miles and are approximate. They show distance between major trail features (e.g. trailheads, camps, trail junctions, major passes, and the NPS boundary).

