

# North Cascades National Park Complex

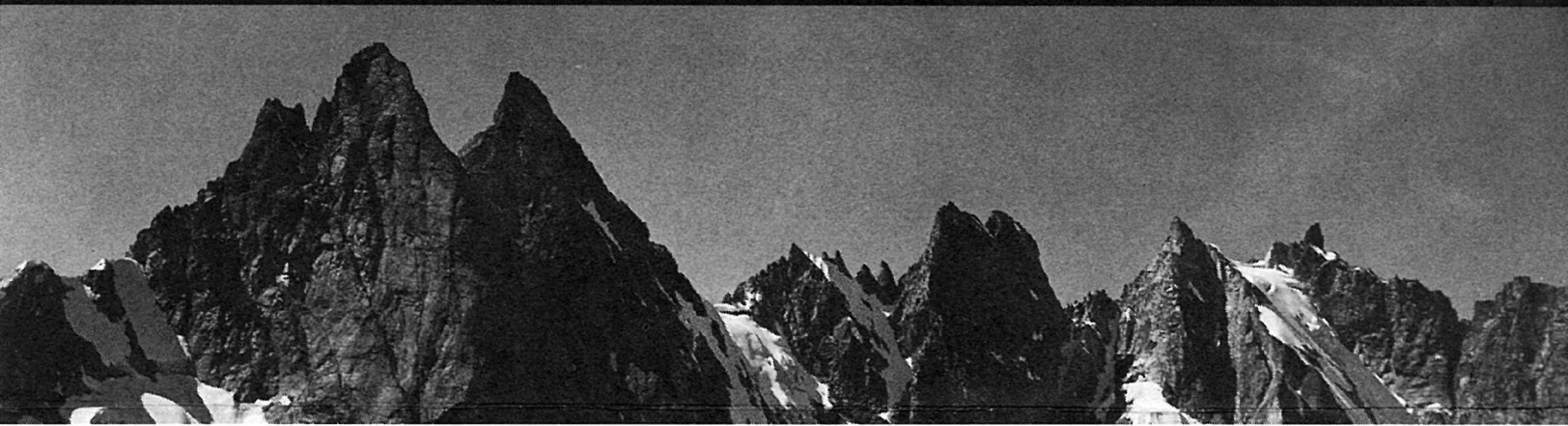
North Cascades National Park

Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Lake Chelan National Recreation Area

Stephen Mather Wilderness

## Wilderness Trip Planner



### PLANNING YOUR TRIP

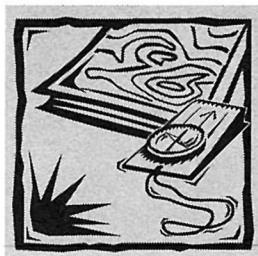
This guide has been developed by experienced backcountry rangers to help you plan a successful trip in the beautiful and incredibly rugged wilderness of the North Cascades.

#### When to visit

The hiking season stretches from April through October, with the drier summer season running from mid-June through September. Higher elevation trails can remain snow-covered into July. The park's winters are wet, and 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 legislated wilderness containing 206 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.

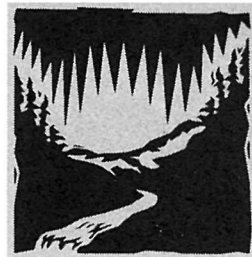
We encourage you to review your plans with a ranger when obtaining the required permit. Rangers can provide current information on weather forecasts, trail and campsite conditions, wildlife activity, stream crossings and other important factors. Because many trails in the park include great elevation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

#### Avoid busy times

Popular areas fill quickly on weekends during July and August. These include Boston Basin, Cascade Pass, Pelton Basin, Sahale, Monogram Lake, Thornton Lakes and the campsites along Ross Lake. If possible, plan your trip to these areas on weekdays or after Labor Day.

#### Subalpine passes

Many of the park's trails cross subalpine passes which can remain snow-covered into August. Always be prepared for snow travel above 5,000 feet elevation. Wear boots with stiff soles and carry an ice axe. 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 crossings

Some stream crossings are not bridged. In high water these can be hazardous. Don't attempt unsafe crossings. Cross streams in the morning (when they're lowest), scout for a safer crossing or turn around.



#### Maps

The park's official map is free and provides a general overview of the backcountry. It is not, however, 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 most current information on the location of trails and camps.
- *Green Trails maps* contain more topographic information and include trail mileages.
- *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.

Maps are available by mail from the park or at ranger stations. If you're planning to travel cross-country, a compass is also recommended.



## Checklist

### Summary of equipment recommended in this guide.

- animal-proof food container or 50 ft. utility cord
  - camp shoes
  - candle lantern
  - collapsible water jug
  - compass
  - extra warm clothing
  - field guide
  - ice axe
  - insect repellent/headnet
  - rain gear
  - sealable plastic bags for garbage
  - small trowel
  - stove/sufficient fuel
  - sturdy boots
  - topo maps
  - water filter or purifying tablets
- \*Not a comprehensive list of necessary equipment.

### 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 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. Toss the wash water by throwing 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 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 supply catalogs and the Wilderness Center in Marblemount has several for free loan.
- Another option is to hang food and scented items 10 feet above the ground and 4 feet out from the tree trunk. Bring at least 50 feet 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 other 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 pit toilets. 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 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 horses know you are there.



## Leaving The Backcountry

If you end a trip early, notify a ranger to cancel your permit so other backpackers can take your place. 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.

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



## 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 and Glacier. 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.

## For More Information

### MAY - SEPTEMBER:

North Cascades National Park  
Wilderness Center  
728 Ranger Station Rd  
Marblemount, WA 98267  
(360) 873-4500

### OCTOBER - APRIL:

North Cascades National Park  
2105 Highway 20  
Sedro Woolley, WA 98284  
(360) 856-5700

### SELECTED READINGS:

Popular Trails of North Cascades National Park  
100 Hikes in Washington's North Cascades National Park Region (Spring/Manning)  
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)  
Mountain Flowers (Manning/Spring)  
Mountaineering - The Freedom of the Hills (Peters)

## LEAVE NO TRACE

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 judgment for each situation that comes up. Several LNT publications are included in the book list.

### 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 light-weight field guide (see book list) to identify them. Some of these plants, such as the low-growing mountain heather, are also very fragile. If you can't identify it, we have a patch at the Wilderness Center in Marblemount for viewing. Although heather can withstand extreme weather, its woody stems are easily broken when trampled or camped on. Such trampling often leads to new trails, bare ground and erosion. Recovery requires laborious transplanting of heather seedlings by revegetation staff and volunteers. If you're interested in our revegetation program, ask at the Wilderness Center. Grasses and grass-like sedges are the only vegetation that can readily withstand being walked and camped on.



### Tread lightly

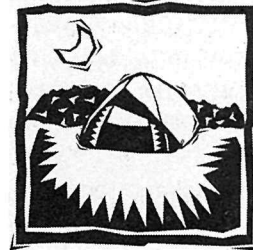
Sneakers, sandals or water sport slippers are a welcome change at camp after a day in heavy boots. They also cause less damage to fragile vegetation around campsites, especially in cross-country zones, and they're often useful for wading streams as well.



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 stream beds and dry grass or sedge meadows. Routes through heavy brush or 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 pine 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. 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.
- Consider packing out used toilet paper in double ziplock 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 ziplock bags.
- Urinate on rocks or gravel 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.



### Drinking water

Purify drinking water by one of the following methods:

- Portable water filter
- Full boil for one minute
- Water purifying tablets

## Leave No Trace

The National Park Service is part of a nationwide program called Leave No Trace (LNT). Leave No Trace 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. For more information on LNT call 1-800-332-4100, or ask at the Wilderness Center in Marblemount.



## BACKCOUNTRY REQUIREMENTS

### Group size

We regulate group size to protect wilderness values. The following chart outlines the various limitations:

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: Camps have been designed to accommodate a group size of 3-4 persons. If your party is larger than 6, check with us to find camps with enough tent sites.

### Camping restrictions

Camping is permitted only at established (designated) camps along trail corridors. Cross-country travelers must camp at least a half mile from trails, a mile from designated campsites and 100 feet from lakes, rivers and streams.

### Pets

Dogs are not permitted on the trails or in cross-country areas within the national park, although leashed dogs are allowed along the Pacific Crest Trail, and in the National Recreation Areas.

### Mountain bikes

Prohibited in the backcountry.

### Campfires

We discourage fires due to the impact caused by wood gathering. 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.

### 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 lake shore vegetation in your search for a good fishing spot.



### Hunting

Hunting is permitted in Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas in season; it is not permitted in North Cascades National Park. Hikers planning trips in the recreation areas during the September through December hunting seasons should wear bright clothing as a safety precaution.

### Backcountry permits

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

The best place to obtain permits is the Wilderness Center in Marblemount. Wilderness Center staff are very familiar with the backcountry, maintain the most current information on conditions and can best help you finalize trip plans.

We strongly encourage you to obtain your permit during operating hours. If this is not practical, limited after-hours self-registration is provided at the Wilderness Center and the Sedro Woolley ranger station. Note that self-registration is not allowed for heavily used areas such as Cascade Pass and Copper Ridge.

Permits can also be obtained at:

North Cascades National Park Service Headquarters, Sedro Woolley  
Golden West Visitor Center, Stehekin  
Glacier Public Service Center, Glacier  
North Cascades Visitor Center, Newhalem  
Hozomeen Ranger Station  
Forest Service ranger stations (Winthrop, Early Winters, Chelan & Twisp)

### 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.

