

# North Cascades

National Park Complex  
Washington

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

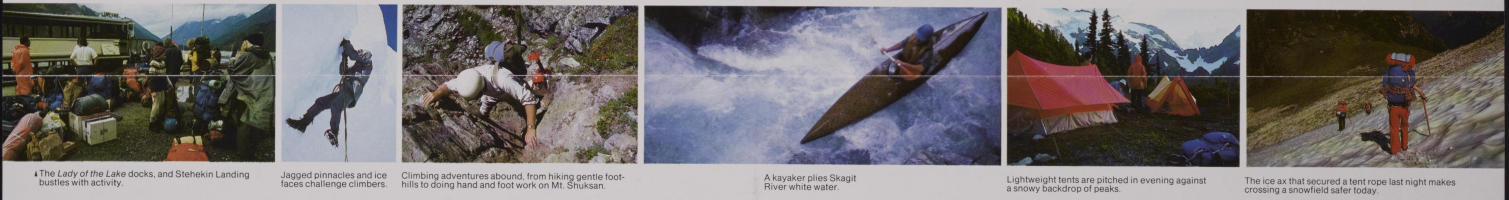
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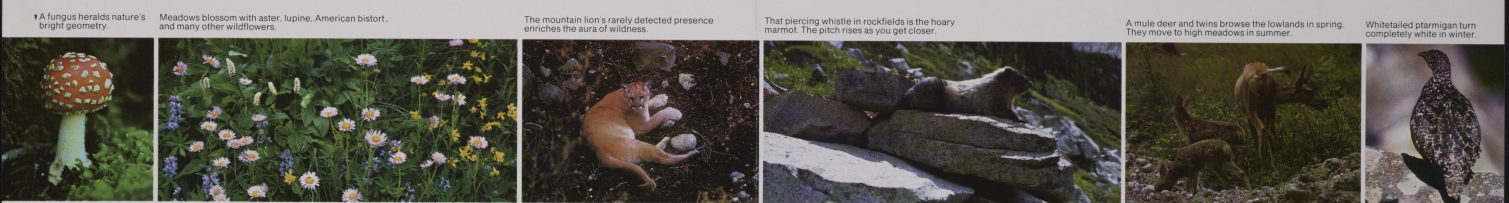
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Looking north from Sahale Peak, from a 360° photograph by Will Landon, using a #10 Cirkut panoramic camera.



1 The Lady of the Lake docks, and Stehekin Landing bustles with activity. Jagged pinnacles and ice faces challenge climbers. Climbing adventures abound, from hiking gentle foothills to doing hand and foot work on Mt. Shuksan. A kayaker plies Skagit River white water. Lightweight tents are pitched in evening against a snowy backdrop of peaks. The ice ax that secured a tent rope last night makes crossing a snowfield safer today.



1 A fungus heralds nature's bright geometry. Meadows blossom with aster, lupine, American bistort, and many other wildflowers. The mountain lion's rarely detected presence enriches the aura of wildness. That piercing whistle in rockfields is the hoary marmot. The pitch rises as you get closer. A mule deer and twins browse the lowlands in spring. They move to high meadows in summer. Whitelaited ptarmigan turn completely white in winter.

"No where do the mountain masses and peaks present such strange, fantastic dauntless and startling outlines as here," wrote Henry Custer, who worked his way through the North Cascades as assistant of reconnaissance for the International Boundary Commission in 1859. He strung together several adjectives and comparisons, but words finally failed him. This wildly mountainous region, he admitted, "must be seen, it cannot be described." Though Custer felt tongue-tied, he was the first to extol this region in writing. In subsequent years a few others were captivated, too, by the terrain. But the area was not set aside as parkland until the establishment in 1968 of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, composed of North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas (see map). Today, these three adjoining areas complement each other as park and recreation lands.

The Cascades rank among the world's great mountain ranges. Extending from Canada's Fraser River south beyond Oregon, they contribute greatly to shaping the Pacific Northwest's climate and vegetation. The North Cascades National Park Complex sits deep in the wild, nearly impenetrable northernmost reaches of the Cascade Range in northwestern Washington. Few people were familiar with the wonders of this area before the parklands were established.

Recent historic exploration began in 1814 when Alexander Ross crossed the present national park's southern limit. The handful of explorers who followed Ross also commented on the region's rugged, isolated nature. Miners prospected for gold, lead, zinc, and platinum here from 1880 to 1910. They recorded moderate strikes, but transportation proved arduous and profits so limited that mining was abandoned. Some logging and homesteading occurred around 1900. The electricity-generating potential of the Skagit River was early recognized. Between 1924 and 1949, Seattle City Light built three dams on the river.

Mountains do not stop at the park boundaries. The park complex is flanked on the south, east, and west by national forest lands and on the north by provincial lands of British Columbia, Canada. West and south lies the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. To the south is the Wenatchee National Forest. To the east are the Okanogan National Forest and the Pasayten Wilderness. The Glacier Peak Wilderness covers parts of Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie and Wenatchee National Forests. Only an invisible boundary separates the two national park units from the two national recreation areas and the adjoining national forest lands.

Even though early Indians and their ancestors left some imprints on the land, history has touched little of the park complex. Readily reached areas are heavily visited, but some remote locations have yet to feel the boots of today's backcountry traveler. Forest giants of western red cedar and Douglas-fir dot the deep valleys. Off the trail, tangled growths of vine maple, stinging nettles, and devil's club still defy cross-country hikers. Glaciers scored by crevasses; permanent snowfields; and sheer-walled cliffs, spires, and pinnacles challenge the mountaineer. From the North Cascades Highway, on clear days, you may get glimpses of alpine wonders that lie just beyond.

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



### Breathtakingly Beautiful Mountain Scenery

North Cascades National Park contains some of America's most breathtakingly beautiful scenery—high jagged peaks, ridges, slopes, and countless cascading waterfalls. Hiking, backpacking, and mountaineering are the most popular activities in the park. The park's 204,000 hectares (505,000 acres) encompass some 318 glaciers—more than half of all glaciers in the lower 48 states. There are few roads into the park, but views into the park can be had on clear days from the North Cascades Highway at Goodell Creek, Diablo Lake Overlook, and other places. The Cascade River Road, 40 kilometers (25 miles) of improved dirt and gravel, gives summer and fall access into the park and to the Cascade Pass Trailhead.

From many park trails endless views unfold of glacially sculpted valleys, glaciers, and snowfields. Rumbling sounds frequently interrupt the sub-alpine stillness as icefalls crash into the valley floor from glaciers that seem precariously perched on steep mountain slopes. At Cascade Pass, over which Alexander Ross is presumed to have traveled, flower-sprinkled hillsides and meadows enhance spectacular views of the Cascade and Stehekin Valleys. Here, as at other passes and high elevation viewpoints, you can best see the rock ridges, glaciers, snowfields, cascading waterfalls, and other alpine and sub-alpine features against their occasional backdrop of deep blue sky.

Most hikers enter the national park from trailheads along the North Cascades Highway. Others enter from trailheads along the Cascade River Road, the Stehekin Valley, and via U.S. Forest Service trails surrounding the park.

Camping is popular throughout the park complex. Backcountry permits are required for all overnight use. The permit system helps prevent overcrowding and destruction of the fragile mountain environment. Climbers should register before attempting any ascents or other technical mountaineering procedures.

### Corridor for the Scenic North Cascades Highway

Ross Lake National Recreation Area divides the two units of the North Cascades National Park. Its 44,000 hectares (107,000 acres) encompass all three of Seattle City Light's power projects and provide the corridor for the popular and scenic North Cascades Highway. This scenic route across the Cascade Mountains affords travelers many recreational opportunities. From trailheads, hikers may head off into the park's far reaches. At roadside locations are self-guiding trails, exhibits, and information and camping facilities.

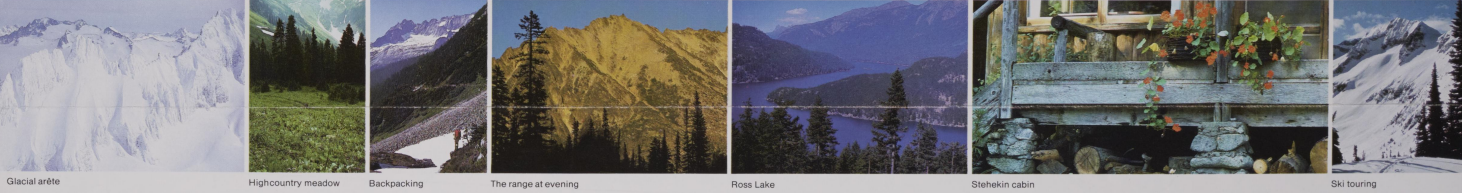
Seattle City Light sponsors regular, scheduled tours of Diablo Lake and Ross Dam hydro facilities. The reservoirs provide spectacular water gateways to the more remote areas of the park complex. Ross Lake, 39 kilometers (24 miles) long and 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) at its greatest width, covers about 4,900 hectares (12,000 acres). Diablo Lake is 370 hectares (910 acres) and Gorge Lake 85 hectares (210 acres). Food, lodging, gas, boat and motor rentals, tackle, licenses and basic camper supplies are available in the recreation area.

### A Natural Lake, Threshold to Backcountry Wilderness

You can hike, boat, or fly to Stehekin, at the head of Lake Chelan, but you can't drive there in your car. This wilderness community, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) uplake from Chelan, Washington, is popular with hikers and backpackers. It is the threshold to a magnificent wilderness. The Stehekin Valley, surrounded by towering mountains, enjoys a rich history of fur trapping and mining, both short-lived, and homesteading and recreation. It was recognized early this century that the Stehekin area's greatest importance lay in its recreational and scenic values. About 1900, hotels and summer cabins began to be built. The few year-round residents at the time depended on fruit farming, timber, and recreation for making a living.

Travelers find refreshment in the coolness and beauty of Rainbow Falls. A touch of nostalgia surrounds the log school house, still in use since its construction in 1921, and the historic Buckner Farmstead. In season you can take the shuttle bus to up-valley campgrounds, or to the valley road's end within the North Cascades National Park. Most people take the commercial uplake boat trip to Stehekin from Chelan. The four-hour trip provides shoreline views of private residential and farming development on the lower lake; rugged mid-lake shorelines and national forest lands; and the lake's upper 6.5 kilometers (4 miles), within the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. Charter floatplane service is available from Chelan.

Lake Chelan, a natural lake, rests in a glacially carved trough. At 460 meters (1,500 feet), it is one of the nation's deepest lakes, and its bottom lies about 120 meters (400 feet) below sea level. A dam built at Chelan in 1927 raised the lake 8.5 meters (28 feet) to increase power production. Lodgings and meals, postal service, and some basic supplies for campers are available at Stehekin Landing.



Glacial arête. Highcountry meadow. Backpacking. The range at evening. Ross Lake. Stehekin cabin. Food display. Ski touring.

**About Your Visit**  
Seasons Lower-elevation trails and lakes along the Skagit River drainage, and trails along Ross Lake and Lake Chelan are usually accessible from early April through mid-October. Higher elevation trails are generally open mid-July through late September. More than 580 kilometers (360 miles) of maintained trails take you into the park and recreation areas and into adjacent national forest lands. Weather The North Cascades' western side gets more rain and has more lakes and streams and more abundant vegetation than the eastern side. Expect cooler weather and more cloudy days. East of the Cascades, in the rainshadow, you find more sunshine and higher temperatures, and the vegetation thins out noticeably.

**Accommodations** Find overnight accommodations in both recreation areas and in larger nearby towns and cities. **Facilities** Ask about both National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service facilities at the North Cascades Information Center in Concrete, Washington, or at any of the NPS/USFS information or ranger stations at Marblemount, Chelan, Stehekin, or Early Winters. Major campgrounds with vehicle access on the North Cascades Highway are at Newhalem, Goodell Creek, Colonial Creek, Lone Fir (USFS), Klipchuck (USFS), and Early Winters (USFS). Group campsites (reservations required) are located at Goodell Creek in the Ross Lake recreation area and at Harlequin and Bridge Creek in the Lake Chelan recreation area.

**Naturalist Activities** Enjoy nature trails, evening programs, and conducted walks in summer at Colonial Creek and Newhalem Campgrounds, Hozomeen, and at Stehekin. Ask a park ranger for details. **Water Activities** The cold waters of Ross, Diablo, and Gorge Lakes and Lake Chelan are not good for swimming or water skiing, but provide boating and fishing. **Boating** Find boat launch ramps for Diablo Lake at Colonial Creek Campground and Diablo Lake Resort. Ross Lake has one launch ramp at Hozomeen. Gorge Lake has a small ramp near the town of Diablo. Rent fishing boats and motors at Diablo Lake Resort, Ross Lake Resort, and North Cascades Lodge at Stehekin. Upper Skagit River raft trips (year-round) begin at Goodell Creek Campground and terminate near Bacon Creek. Ask for current information. Find boat access to Lake Chelan at Chelan; at the state parks at First and Twenty-Five Mile Creeks; and at Manson. **Sport Fishing** is popular throughout the park complex. Many streams and mountain valley lakes, some easy to reach, challenge both novice and experienced anglers. Rainbow, Dolly Varden, brook, and golden trout are the principal game fish. Lake Chelan has Kokanee salmon. **Hunting** is permitted in season in both the Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas. Washington State hunting or fishing licenses are required and State laws apply. **HUNTING IS NOT PERMITTED IN NORTH CASCADEN NATIONAL PARK.**

**Publication Sales** The nonprofit Pacific Northwest National Parks Association sells books, maps, and pamphlets at park headquarters and at ranger and information stations. For a sales list, write the association at 800 State Street, Seattle, Washington 98104.



# North Cascades

**Administration**  
The National Park Service Complex is administered by a superintendent whose address is 900 State Street, Sedro-Woolley, Washington 98284.

**Regulations**  
Pets are prohibited in the national park except on the Pacific Crest Trail where they must be on a leash. Pets are permitted overnight boat-in camping areas, but they must be leashed. Fires are permitted only at authorized locations. Only dead and down wood may be used for fuel. Overnight backcountry camping and

## Driving in the Park Area

Access to reach the North Cascades, drive Washington State Route 20, the North Cascades Highway, from Burlington on the west and Twisp on the east. Or take Washington 542 from Bellingham. Stehekin is reached by boat, floatplane from Chelan, or by trail. Vehicle access to Ross Lake is by unimproved road from Canada only.

The North Cascades Highway crosses the park complex along an old rail and truck route originally intended for building and servicing Skagit River power projects. Proposals to extend the highway and create a northern cross-state route dated back many decades. With establishment of the park complex in 1962, the State unimproved construction, and the most scenic mountain drive in Washington\* was dedicated in 1972.

The highway passes Gorge, Diablo, and Ross Lakes, all

within Ross Lake National Recreation Area, but only Gorge and Diablo are accessible by vehicle. Stop at Diablo Lake Overlook for superb views of Diablo Lake, Sourdough Mountain, Davis Peak, Colonial Peak, Pyramid Peak, and spectacular features of the Skagit River drainage. Find wayside exhibits, views of Ross Lake, and other points of interest at roadside turnouts in Ross Lake recreation area.

Rainy and Washington Passes in Okanogan National Forest to the east provide rest stop and picnic facilities. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail crosses the highway at Rainy Pass, elevation 1,481 meters (4,860 feet). The Rainy Lake National Recreation Trail begins near the Rainy Lake rest stop. This 1.5-kilometer (1-mile) walk to a sub-alpine lake accommodates wheelchairs. At Washington Pass, elevation 1,670 meters (5,477 feet), near the rest stop and picnic area, an overlook

provides one of the most breathtakingly beautiful close-up views available of the rugged Cascade Mountains. Forest Service campgrounds lie along or near the highway east and west of the park complex. The Baker Lake area of Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest offers camping, boating, fishing, hiking, backpacking, and picnicking.

Speed limits posted along the highway are often lower than the statewide limit. Roadside turnouts are provided for scenic viewing. Drive cautiously and watch for pedestrians and hikers on the road shoulders, rocks in the roadway, wildlife, and careless drivers. Bears are attracted by food odors and can open or damage ice chests. Lock foodstuffs and ice chests in your vehicle at night. Cold waters from glacial runoff and melting snowfields make swimming and other water-contact

activities dangerous. They are not recommended because of the danger of hypothermia, rapid loss of body heat. Sudden summer storms can also lead to hypothermia if you are not properly dressed. Cross unbridged streams with caution, especially during spring runoff. Slippery stream bottoms and swift currents can knock you down and sweep you away. Before drinking any water from a mountain stream, treat it to destroy an organism that causes backpacker's diarrhea. Preferably, boil it at least one minute, although you can use commercial purification tablets.

DO NOT USE THIS MAP FOR HIKING.

