



Itinerary: Windy Ridge

Length: 74 miles

Time to Allow: 4 Hours

Open Season: The route is usually snow-free by the end of May and remains open through October. The road closes each year due to winter snowfall from November to May.

Driving Directions: From Randle travel south on State Route (SR) 131 until the road forks (1 mile). Stay to the right, traveling on SR 131 which becomes Forest Road (FR) 25 (1 mile). Travel south on FR 25 to FR 99 (19 miles). Turn right on FR 99 and drive until it terminates at Windy Ridge (16 miles). Return to Randle via the same route.

Immerse yourself in the heart of the Mt. St. Helens Blast Zone and experience the stark contrast between the lush old-growth forest and the blown-down forest. To experience the many beautiful and fascinating hikes in the area, a Northwest Forest Pass is required for parking.

Start: This journey begins in the small mountain community of Randle located on Highway 12. Restaurants, car services and campgrounds are available.

Stop 1: Woods Creek Watchable Wildlife Trail

One of many short and family friendly hikes along this route is the Woods Creek Trail. This scenic and serene 1.5 mile loop travels through five habitat areas, offering hikers an opportunity to learn about the wildlife and their habitats. This path passes through a mixed hardwood conifer forest, breaks into the bright openness of a meadow, follows a beaver pond and enters a hardwood forest that offers a burst of color in the fall. A favorite area for bird watching, bring a guidebook along and name the many feathered friends that call this area home. This interpreted trail was built to barrier free standards. It is four feet wide with compacted gravel surfacing. The area also offers a day-use picnic area and restrooms.

Stop 2: Iron Creek Campground & Picnic Area

Located along Iron Creek and the Cispus River, stop a moment to soak in the surrounding beauty at popular Iron Creek Campground day-use area. From the picnic area, enjoy a walk along the 0.3 mile signed Iron Creek Old-Growth Trail. Weave through old-growth forests of fir, cedar and hemlock while following the scenic Cispus River. For a longer hike, continue for 1.5 miles on the Iron Creek Campground Trail. This trail is a barrier-free trail designed for everyone, including people with disabilities, families and anyone else looking for a wide, level trail. The first half of this trail continues to follow the stunning Cispus River. There are occasional benches and turnouts so stop a moment and listen to the sounds of the forest and river. See the remains of an old railroad trestle over the riverbed. The trail leaves the river on the northwest corner of the loop through magnificent stands of Douglas fir and Western Red Cedar. Just a few miles further on FS 25, stop for a short nature walk to view Iron Creek Falls. One of the prettiest waterfalls in the area, it pours powerfully off a cliff and into a large clear pool. Downstream from the falls is a great place to let the kids splash around and play in the creek.

Stop 3: Wakepish

Following the twists and turns of this scenic route, next stop is Wakepish. A sno-park in the winter, this area offers a campground, parking, a picnic area and restrooms. The perfect place to drop off a trailer or RV before heading up to Windy Ridge.

Stop 4: Bear Meadow

Making your way to the volcano, stop at Bear Meadow. The vistas are both dramatic and thought-provoking. See grand views of Mt. St. Helens and ponder the vast transformations in this area. It was at this location the morning of May 18th, 1980 that photographer Gary Rosenquist took the famous, four quick-succession photos of the mountain's explosive eruption. After shooting the pictures, he and his friends made a harrowing drive to escape. These four pictures are now reproduced on the interpretive sign at the viewpoint. This stop also offers access to the 32 mile Boundary Trail. Climb gently through old-growth forest, along babbling streams, eventually entering the blast zone. Notice the surreal landscape of gray, the decapitated trees and the carpet of pumice beneath you. Restrooms are also available at the viewpoint.

Stop 5: Blast Edge Viewpoint

The last stop before entering the National Monument, stop and marvel at the standing dead trees that mark the edge of the blast zone, 6.5 miles west of 25/99 junction. Look for a Forest Interpreter at this site at various times during the day. Program times are posted on the information board.

Stop 6: Miner's Car & Meta Lake Viewpoint

Witness Mt. St. Helens' fury at this stop, still nine miles from the volcano. Coming to rest at this very place is a car that was hurled 60 feet into the air and then flattened during the eruption. The car's owner and two family members tragically perished in a miner's cabin

nearby. Be sure to stroll or roll the easy, paved 0.25 mile trail to emerald Meta Lake. This interesting path leads through downed timber to a small mountain lake that was only moderately disturbed by the eruption. Look for the survivors -- the small evergreen trees, fish, and frogs that lived through the blast buried beneath the snowpack. Search for signs of life that has since returned to the area after the eruption. After leaving the viewpoint, watch for views of Mount Adams, 28 miles to the east.

Stop 7: Cascade Peaks

Pull in at Cascade Peaks and enjoy a bite to eat and peruse the souvenirs at this pretty viewpoint. The Mt. St. Helens Concessions at Cascade Peaks viewpoint offers, food, drinks, recreation passes and a gift shop. Services are available at this site from late June through September.

Stop 8: Independence Pass Trail

Now it's time to strap on your walking shoes and enjoy the stunning volcanic landscapes and high country views along scenic Independence Pass. Just a short 0.25 mile hike and you're rewarded with a striking view of Mount St. Helens, the crater, the lava dome and Spirit Lake. Witness the dramatic change in landscape that offers new insights into the ever-changing nature of our planet. Be amazed at the rapid return of life to this once gray and seemingly bleak land. The trail continues into the blast zone another 3.25 miles to a view of towering rock pinnacles revealed by the shattering force of the blast.

Stop 9: Harmony Basin Viewpoint & Trail

This is the place to look out upon famous Spirit Lake and Harmony Basin. A dramatic lake view, much of the surface of Spirit Lake is still covered by a mat of floating logs and debris from the blast. The day of the eruption, in nearly an instant, a massive landslide hundreds of feet thick, sent waves 850 feet high across Spirit Lake, scouring its shores and pulling timber into its basin. Looking across the lake today see Harry's Ridge and the popular Mount Margaret Backcountry. For a closer look, hike three miles round trip to the shores of Spirit Lake and see the effects of the 1980 eruption and marvel at the recovery. This is the only hike leading to its shores. Along this route, see what is left of Harmony Falls, a popular pre-eruption hiking destination. Once at the lake, view Mt. St. Helens' crater and the impressive, growing lava dome.

Stop 10: Cedar Creek Viewpoint

Just a short drive down the road, look out onto the recovering Spirit Lake. Only one hike leads to the lake, and to the dismay of many anglers, fishing is not allowed. Strong populations of rainbow trout live in its waters today. A surprise to many as some thought this lake would never support life again. Choked with avalanche debris, the water temperature increased nearly 100 degrees Fahrenheit during the eruption when pyroclastic flows emptied into the lake. However, it was within five years after the blast that life had returned to the lake. The trees still float there today as a reminder of the mountain's fury. Take time to read the interpretive sign at this astounding sight.

Stop 11: Donnybrook

Each stop offers a unique look at the dramatic landscape of the area. From Donnybrook Viewpoint, enjoy an impressive view of Spirit Lake with Mt. St. Helens looming in the background. The trees that now drift in the lake were pulled into the lake off the surrounding hills by a huge wave triggered by the eruption. Enjoy the interpretive signs explaining the geology of this dramatically altered area.

Stop 12: Smith Creek Trailhead

If you have the time to even hike part of nine mile Smith Creek Trail, it is worth your while. A bit longer, but it showcases spectacular views of the blast zone. Descending steadily to Smith Creek, marvel at the immense impact the eruption of Mount St. Helens had on this creek as a giant mudflow poured through its banks during the eruption. Try to imagine the forest setting of this area before the eruption, over 25 years ago. The trail follows sections of old roads at times, so be sure to watch for the wooden post route markers. See the masses of logs carried by mudflows to their resting place along the river. Watch for the distant views of waterfalls as they plunge off rock cliffs. Notice the healing landscape and nature's resilience.

Stop 13: Smith Creek Picnic Area

A great place for a quiet picnic lunch with friends, family and the mountain, this stop offers excellent close-in images of the volcano.

End: Windy Ridge

You've arrived at Windy Ridge. This is the top location along the route to view the devastation of the 1980 eruption. Nearly everything in view is within the area decimated by the eruption. Encounter the blast's full impact as you transition from green forest to standing dead forest to blown down forest. Look out upon Spirit Lake's immense floating forest. The landscape in this area is littered with sand and gray rocks from that event. For the best view possible, walk the 361 steps on the hill above the parking lot and feel as if you are looking directly into Mt. St. Helen's crater just five miles away. Take a moment to imagine the mountain's fury the day of the blast. Around 90% of the missing mountain is laid out before you as part of the avalanche resulting from the eruption. During the summer season, Forest Interpreters at the Windy Ridge Outdoor Amphitheater relive the incredible power unleashed on May 18, 1980.

All roads in this itinerary are windy and many have steep drop-offs on the either side. Always drive with caution and expect wildlife. Please check local ranger stations for winter road closures.

For more information on the White Pass Scenic Byway, please visit our website at

www.whitepassbyway.com