

Northwest Explorer »



Above: The view south near the summit of Mount Daniel. Inset: Hike members (left to right) Bill Chapman, Karen Daubert, Sally Jewell, and Bob Olson on the summit of Mount Daniel. This is a great late-summer scramble for experienced hikers.

Photo by Karl Forsgaard

Scrambling Daniel

A scramble up King County's highest peak offers astounding views

As a destination in the Central Cascades, Mount Daniel has much to offer. Located in the heart of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Mount Daniel is the highest point in King County. It provides fine views of peaks in all directions, from Baker to Rainier. The Pacific Crest Trail passes close by. A well-maintained trail takes you most of the way there, and experienced hikers will enjoy the cross-country hiking and scrambling higher up. The route passes through beautiful wild country with diverse ecosystems—from dry-side old growth forest through high meadows, alpine terrain and ridge-walking.

Many people climb Mount Daniel as an overnight backpack, camping at Peggy's Pond—while others make the climb a long day trip. Our group of five chose the latter approach, a 17-hour day with 12 hours of hiking. Mount Daniel is also a high point of the Mountains to Sound Greenway, and there were three of us from the Greenway Trust Board (Bill Chapman, Sally Jewell and myself), plus Karen Daubert who runs the Seattle Parks Foundation, and

Bob Olson, a lawyer and trails advocate. We left Mercer Island at about 4:30 a.m. and returned at about 10 p.m. after stopping for dinner.

I've taken this day trip twice, both times in late September, when the route is mostly snow-free (and bug-free), with colorful foliage, ripe blueberries, and benign weather. Take an ice axe. Crampons may also be useful but we did not need them. Wilderness permits are required but they are self-issued (there is no trail quota).

There is plenty of reference material for this scrambling route, including *Cascade Alpine Guide* by Fred Beckey, *Selected Climbs in the Cascades* by Jim Nelson and Peter Potterfield, and *75 Scrambles in Washington* by Peggy Goldman. The approach hike to Peggy's Pond is also described in hiking guidebooks, including *100 Hikes in the Alpine Lakes* by Ira Spring, Vicky Spring and Harvey Manning.

Cathedral Rock Trail ascends through forest, passing Squaw Lake at 2.5 miles, followed by ridgetop subalpine forest and meadows. At

Karl Forsgaard

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**Peggy's Pond and Cathedral rock, seen from the approach to Mount Daniel.
The 16-mile trip up Daniel can be done either as an overnight or a long day trip.**

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about 4.5 miles is a junction with the Pacific Crest Trail; take it south a short distance to Cathedral Pass (elevation 5,500 feet), itself a worthy hiking destination with good views.

From Cathedral Pass, continue hiking on the southbound Pacific Crest Trail a short distance to another junction at a switchback, and turn northwest onto Trail 1375 (don't descend the Pacific Crest Trail to Deep Lake). Trail 1375 traverses to Peggy's Pond by contouring around the west side of Cathedral Rock. This trail has been described as a "goat path," "a good climber's trail," and "primitive and nervous-making," but it's relatively easy for experienced hikers.

We reached Peggy's Pond, a pretty place tucked beneath Cathedral Rock, and rested.

Mount Daniel has five summits, and the highest is the West Summit (its elevation is listed variously as 7,960 or 7,986 feet). From Peggy's Pond there are two main routes to the summit. You can follow unmarked way trails up the Southeast Ridge, or you can ascend a creek into the boulder-filled moraine valley that leads to the Hyas Creek Glacier. We elected to ascend via the Hyas Creek Glacier and descend via Southeast Ridge for a nice loop.

Hyas Creek Glacier is now just a small remnant of a glacier, an ice mass that some would describe as a snowfield. You can pass it by circling its margins, or proceed directly across it toward the East Peak. Above it are rock slabs that we scrambled up (many routes are possible). Above the rock was another, softer snowfield to climb. Above that we crossed over the ridge in a saddle just south of the East Peak, getting views to the south, including Venus Lake and Spade Lake just below us, and Mount Rainier in the distance. From this

point we stayed high, following a climbers' path in the talus on a long traverse across the upper slopes. We crossed the southwest side of the East Peak, to the saddle between it and the Middle Summit, then traversed south of the Middle Summit, to a short scramble route on the south side of the West Summit (the true summit). This route skirts the upper margins of the Daniel and Lynch Glaciers but does not go onto those glaciers.

As you cross these high slopes and ridgelines, many peaks, lakes, glaciers and snowfields can be seen in all directions. To the north are Mount Baker, Sloan and the Monte Cristo peaks. To the east is Mount Stuart. To the south along the Pacific Crest Trail are the many pointed spires of Bears Breast, Summit Chief, Chimney Rock, Lemah Mountain and Chikamin Peak north of Snoqualmie Pass. To the west are nearby Mount Hinman, and aptly-named Pea Soup Lake at the bottom of the Lynch Glacier. Beyond are Necklace Valley and the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River.

We had lunch on the West Summit at 1 p.m., and lingered to enjoy the wide-ranging views. For our descent to Peggy's Pond, we returned to the saddle just south of the East Peak, then we walked down the Southeast Ridge, with broad views down both sides of the rocky ridgewalk—on the south side is Circle Lake, and on the north side is the valley we had ascended including the Hyas Creek Glacier. Further down the ridge there was less rock and more heather, and way trails to follow. Once we returned to Peggy's Pond, we were back on well-established trails, and returned to the trailhead. From Cathedral Pass it's almost entirely downhill, which was good news for sore legs. On the way home we stopped for dinner at Village Pizza in Roslyn, tired and happy from our spectacular day on Mount Daniel. ♦

More Scrambles

Experienced hikers can get to summits with knowledge of routefinding and how to use an ice ax. Consider taking the Mountaineers' scrambling course. For more info, refer to Peggy Goldman's book *75 Scrambles in Washington*.

Mount Angeles

A faint way trail leads to the summit of this peak off of the Klahhane Ridge Trail in Olympic National Park.

Trappers Peak

Most of this hike is on trail to Thornton Lakes—only the last half-mile or so is a scramble up a well-marked boot path that occasionally requires using your hands.

Labyrinth Mountain

Take the trail to Minotaur Lake, and then do an easy off-trail scramble to the top of this 6,376-foot peak.

Carne Mountain

Once snow has melted, there's a fairly distinct trail most of the way to the summit of Carne Mountain (7,085 feet).