



Featured Landscape » Napeequa Valley

Savor the View From Little Giant Pass

"If I had wings, and I could fly, I know where I would go." —Bob Dylan

Perhaps, in another life, I was a bird. You see, I've never been content looking up at something. I was born compelled to look down on things. I love bridges, building rooftops, mountain summits and high alpine passes. It's all about the view ... unencumbered, expansive, bird's-eye. Thing is, I'm not a bird. I can't fly directly to where I get my views, so I frequently find myself struggling up just so I can look down.

There's a hidden valley in Washington's Glacier Peak Wilderness that some have likened to Shangri-La, the fictional utopia of James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon*. Hilton's Shangri-La was an earthly paradise ... beautiful and nearly inaccessible to the outside world. Washington's Shangri-La is the Napeequa River Valley. And perhaps the best place to look down on the Napeequa is from Little Giant Pass.

To get the view, one of the finest of the Cascades, you gotta do some leg work first. Your first obstacle is just a few feet from the parking area—a bridgeless crossing of the Chiwawa River. You're not a bird, so you must wade the river. September is a great time to cross, as the river is at its lowest flow of the year and shouldn't be higher than knees or thighs, but always be on the lookout for water currents and depth. From there, the 5-mile trail to Little Giant Pass isn't far, but it is a bit steep. In season, berry breaks help temper the work, and soon enough you'll see it, the lovely Napeequa Valley. The long valley sprawls out beneath you ... as deep as it is isolated, as lush and green as it is wild. The icy Clark Mountain, a peek at Glacier Peak, the steep walls of Chiwawa Ridge and the snaking course of the Napeequa River all help complete the visual explosion. It doesn't get more idyllic than this, so sit back, drink in the view and imagine your own Shangri-La.

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Little Giant Trail

Glacier Peak Wilderness

Distance: 10 miles

Elevation Gain: 4,000 feet

High Point: 6,400 feet

Map(s): Green Trails Holden 113

Permits: Northwest Forest Pass

More Info: *Day Hiking: Central Cascades* (Craig Romano, The Mountaineers Books)

—Story and photograph by Dave Schiefelbein