

With its sparkling lakes and big vistas, the Goat Rocks earned high marks from PCT hikers. Photo by Doug Diekemma.

Best of the Crest

HIKE IT»

Shoe Lake

Round Trip Miles: 14

Elevation Gain: 2,600'

Snowgrass Flat

Round Trip Miles: 41

Elevation Gain: 8,940'

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Hikers weigh in on their favorite day hikes and backpacks on Washington's Pacific Crest Trail

Few trails epitomize the phrase “the journey is the destination” as well as the Pacific Crest Trail. The trail winds 2,650 miles from Mexico to Canada—from California’s high deserts and grand Sierra Nevada, across the volcanic badlands of Oregon, and through the glacier-capped Cascades of Washington. Yet, as many PCT hikers have proclaimed, “It’s not just about getting to Canada.” One doesn’t need to take on the entire trail to experience the wonder and solitude of hiking this iconic route. There are plenty of shorter trip options available to give you a taste of what the PCT is all about.

To present you with some of the best locations for day hiking and backpacking on the Pacific Crest Trail, we turned to the seasoned pros: the big-mile thru-hikers who have thousands of PCT miles under their pack straps, who know all the ins and outs, and who can recall in glorious detail every feature along Washington’s 380-mile portion. With their suggestions and advice, we’ve identified some of the best day hikes, loops and point-to-point sections the PCT can offer as shorter trips. And by using easy access points on many of the east-west highway passes, you can stop thinking PCT and start hiking PCT.

“Don’t think you have to be a thru-hiker to experience the beauty and solitude of the PCT.”

—Sonya “Sawin’ Ya” Rodgers

When asked what the most scenic stretch of trail is, the majority of our Pacific Crest Trail hikers named the **Goat Rocks** as one of the most striking areas within the Washington section. The Goat Rocks region is noted for its rugged volcanic landscape—the remnants of an ancient volcano, now eroded into a series of jagged peaks and knife-edge ridges. That scenery abounds here is good news for weekend hikers, as many of the Goat Rocks trails are easily accessible from Highway 12. For a good day hike, pick up the PCT near the White Pass Ski Resort, and head south to **Shoe Lake**. This 14-mile round trip climbs through forest and meadows to the narrow ridge of Hogback Mountain, before descending on Trail 1119 to sparkling, horseshoe-shaped Shoe Lake. Camping is no longer permitted at Shoe Lake, but to turn this hike into an overnight, continue south on the PCT a half-mile to Hidden Spring Camp.

Want more? Make it a multiday trip by

continuing south on the PCT to **Snowgrass Flat**. Along the way, you'll make a steady descent from Shoe Lake to Tieton Pass, rounding tiny Lutz Lake and into the McCall Basin. From there, the trail turns west to Elk Pass, then south again, skirting Packwood and McCall glaciers. For peak-baggers, look to the east and the 7,920-foot summit of Old Snowy Mountain—a fave among PCTers. This moderate, nontechnical scramble gets you above the highest point of the PCT in Washington. From the top, soak in a 360-degree view of Rainier, Adams, and St. Helens, as well as the Goat Rocks Massif. From there, descend to the wide wildflower meadows and gurgling creeks of Snowgrass Flat, replete with an abundance of nice campsites. Be sure to pack a camera, as this is a photographer's wonderland.

“The range of the PCT in Washington is truly staggering—rugged ups and downs, ever-changing weather, ubiquitous wildlife and those gorgeous North Cascades peaks!”

—Katie “Little Engine” Lorah

Despite their rugged glacier-carved peaks, lush forested valleys and wide alpine meadows, **North Cascades National Park** and the **Pasayten Wilderness** continue to be listed as some of the least-visited wilderness in the country. Fortunately for hikers, the Pacific Crest Trail runs right through the heart of both. And according to a majority of our PCT hikers, these areas are definitely worth a visit—and not just because they are found near the end of the 2,650-mile journey.

For day hikers, check out the 5-mile hike to **Cutthroat Pass**. Starting at Rainy Pass on State Route 20, the PCT heads north along the flanks of Cutthroat Peak, gently gaining in elevation as it ascends Porcupine Creek. Along the way, you'll traipse through rock gardens and heather meadows, as big views of the jagged North Cascades ridges start to open up. From the pass, you'll look down on Cutthroat Lake 2,000 feet below. If you continue another 1.5 miles to Granite Pass, you'll enjoy views into the Swamp Creek Valley and sweeping vistas of more North Cascades and Pasayten peaks.

Backpackers can take on the **Holman Pass Loop**, starting at the Hart's Pass trailhead at the top of Forest Road 5400, out of the small town of Mazama. This moderately undulating section of the PCT travels through high meadows along Tamarac Peak and the Devil's Backbone, weaves between six mountain passes, and offers stunning views of the sur-

rounding country. Look for superb campsites in Oregon Basin, and if you're hiking this area in September, your camp neighbor might just be a PCT thru-hiker who can regale you with stories of their previous 2,600-mile journey. At Holman Pass, leave the PCT and head east on Trail 472A, descending to a junction on the West Fork Pasayten River. Turn south, and follow the river on Trail 472, passing beneath Pasayten Peak and the Gold Ridge, and skirting Haystack Mountain and Slate Peak as you climb back to your starting point.



“There are amazing and beautiful sections that demand to be hiked again and again, offering different wonders each time and each season.”

—Judy Roberts

Clearly, thru-hikers love the meadows and lakes in the South Cascades and the ruggedness of the North Cascades. Any love for the **Central Cascades**? Yes, indeed. There's plenty of trail and scenic wonder to be had as the PCT winds past Mount Rainier, over Snoqualmie and Stevens Passes, and through the Alpine Lakes and Glacier Peak Wilderness areas. It's in these regions that PCT veterans have identified some of the best day hiking and backpacking options within easy travel distance from the Seattle/Tacoma areas.

From the Snoqualmie Pass on Interstate-90, the trail to **Kendall Katwalk** makes an ideal day trip, offering limitless views of the Central Cascades lake country. Pick up the PCT

HIKE IT»

Cutthroat Pass

Round Trip Miles: 10

Elevation Gain: 2,400'

Holman Pass Loop

Round Trip Miles: 27

Elevation Gain: 5,200'

Looking southwest from Cutthroat Pass. Hike here during autumn to catch both larches and thru-hikers. Photo by Brett Walton.

Approaching Kendall Katwalk.
Photo by Abby Wolfe.



heading in a northeasterly direction, making large, gradual switchbacks out of the Commonwealth Basin and up the western flanks of Kendall Peak. Top out north of the peak and proceed another half mile along the narrow ridge of Kendall Katwalk for views of Red, Alta, and Alaska Mountains, and the Silver and Gold Creek valleys to the east. If you're backpacking, continue another 6 miles to the Park Lakes. The PCT continues north, past Alaska and Huckleberry mountains, high above

Alaska and Joe Lakes, then turns eastward, skirting Chikamin Peak and the Four Brothers. Divert south onto Trail 1331 for a short descent to the **Park Lakes** basin, with the Three Queens to the north and Hibox Mountain to the south.

If you have a thirst for alpine country, try the 37-mile **Spider Gap and Buck Creek loop** in the Glacier Peak Wilderness. Normally, this fantastic hike only uses a short stretch of PCT, but after the PCT was damaged a few years back, the detour route travels up Buck Creek, making half of this loop "official" PCT. At the top of Phelps Creek Road 6211, north of Lake Wenatchee, hike an easy 8 miles on Trail 1511 to the sprawling Spider

Meadows, beneath Phelps Ridge and Red Mountain. Continue north over Spider Gap and descend along the Lyman Glacier to Lyman Lake. Turn west on Trail 1256 and climb to Cloudy Pass, then drop through Suiattle Pass to a junction with the PCT and mind-numbing views of Glacier Peak. Turn south on the PCT for 2 miles to a junction with Trail 789, now PCT detour, and continue south to another junction at Buck Creek Pass. Divert onto Trail 1513, following Buck Creek south to close the loop.

HIKE IT»

Kendall Katwalk

Round Trip Miles: 11

Elevation Gain: 2,600'

Spider Gap Loop

Round Trip Miles: 37

Elevation Gain: 7,200'

"Day, section, or thru-hiker, get out there and enjoy yourself. See the sights that few get to, and take care of the trail so it can continue to take care of you."

—Bill "Troll" McCarty

In the end, the Pacific Crest Trail has something for everyone, whether you're a day hiker, backpacker, section hiker, or long-distance thru-hiker. And regardless of your mileage covered or elevation gained, it offers a chance to walk a path of unparalleled beauty in the footsteps of those who came before—and leaving your own for those to follow after—along the trail that celebrates the most magnificent landscapes that the Pacific states possess. And afterwards you just might find yourself enchanted by the Pacific Crest Trail, eagerly looking for where your next (longer?) hike might take you. As the renowned naturalist and conservationist John Muir proclaimed, "In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."♦

In addition to Washington Trails Association members, we polled the members of the Pacific Crest Trail Association and the American Long Distance Hiking Association-West. Special thanks to Tom Magee of ALDHA-West and Chris Caviezal of the Mountaineers for their help recruiting qualified survey participants.

Have you hiked on the PCT?

We need Hiking Guide entries for many stretches of the PCT. Help educate and inspire fellow hikers by filing a hiking guide entry online at www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes.

Recommended Resources

To help you plan your outings, the go-to guidebook for PCT hikers is the **Pacific Crest Trail: Oregon and Washington**, published by Wilderness Press. This comprehensive directory of all things PCT through Washington will help you find the trail access points, local services, permit regulations, and elevation and mileage info. It also contains a section on the geology, plants and animals through each trail section.

Also, pick up the **U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Crest Trail maps**, available in southern and northern Washington sections. These oversized maps contain a bounty of useful information for each section of the PCT, including access points using major highway crossings and lateral trails.