



QUINULT RAIN FOREST

The Quinault Valley contains an excellent example of a temperate rain forest community. Mild temperatures, summer fog, abundant rainfall and a long growing season help make this forest one of the most fertile in the world. The loop road up the Quinault Valley and around Quinault Lake allows the visitor to view an interesting cross section of this temperate rain forest from their vehicle (large RVs and trailers are not advised). Approximately thirty-one miles around, the trip can be completed in about an hour and a half. Extensions of the loop road above the bridge on both sides of the river invite continued exploration.

A naturalist's paradise, the rain forest is nature's varied garden of myriad representatives of the plant kingdom. Growing organisms occur everywhere. Where mineral soil is bared, it is quickly occupied by spore, seed or hungry rootlet. Even rocks, when undisturbed, support botanical life.

Most impressive of the rain forest growth are the trees, some of the largest of their kind growing in this valley. Festooned with mosses, lichens and ferns, one host tree can offer hours of plant study. Some of the fallen trees, now nurturing many new plants, have earned themselves the title of "nurse log".

The ferns which typify the temperate rain forest so aptly, are not the same as those in the equatorial rain forest where there are no defined seasons. Many of the Pacific Northwest ferns are deciduous, dying back in the fall to emerge again with spring.

Saprophytic and parasitic plants abound in this environment. There is as much dead or dying material in this vast garden as there is living, providing a perfect couch for saprophytes, most notably mushrooms. Of the thousands of kinds occurring in the rain forest, some are still unidentified, unnamed and unclassified.

The rain forest community also includes animals. Eagles in the trees, swans on the lake (only in winter) and blue herons in the lowlands are some of the larger birds to be seen. Smaller birds are hosted by the trees along the river and high in the forest canopy. The flowing waters provide a playground for ouzels, kingfishers and ducks.

Deer and elk are often close by or seen crossing the road. An attentive person may observe many other mammals which reveal themselves at times. Squirrel, chipmunk, pack rat, mole, mouse and shrew are some of the more familiar smaller ones, but an occasional raccoon, coyote, cougar or bear may make an appearance. With patience, the intent seeker may be rewarded with the sight of a beaver in the pool behind his expertly built dam.



QUINULT TRAILS

Graves Creek Campground Nature Trail - (1 mile) This trail is a circle beginning and ending near the river adjacent to Graves Creek campground and provides the casual visitor an opportunity to experience the rainforest without great effort.

Enchanted Valley Trail: This is a heavily used trail beginning at the end of the South Shore Road, 1/2 mile past the Graves Creek Ranger Station. Check on status of bridges first. The road, in years past, extended two miles further up the valley but since the road was closed to vehicle use, it now has become part of the trail. An old picnic table still remains at the end of the old road section. Many day hikers elect to follow the trail only as far as Pony Bridge (2-1/2 miles), a scenic spot and good turn around point for those with a limited time schedule. From this point on, the trail basically follows the river, terminating at the chalet, a two-story log structure built in 1930, now partially used as the backcountry ranger station. There are several good camping sites along the way. It is possible to continue beyond the chalet trail to Anderson Pass or O'Neil Pass and even on to follow the Duckabush or Dosewallips rivers out to the other side of the park.

Low Divide (17 miles): Beginning at the North Fork Ranger Station, the trail follows the North Fork of the Quinault to the Low Divide which is the pass between the Quinault and the Elwha. It is one of the main "through the park" trails as one can travel 27 miles beyond Low Divide to the Whiskey Bend Trailhead on the Elwha. There are several camp spots along the way to Low Divide, and the day hiker often elects to go the first 2-1/2 miles to "Wolf Bar".

Irely Lake (1.2 miles): This is an easy 30 to 45 minute walk beginning on the North Fork Road, approximately 1/4 miles before the campground entrance. The day hiker is able to enjoy the handy work of beavers along the way and spot a variety of bird life, including Osprey, which often nest at the lake. This is a good hike for a camera buff.

Three Lakes (7 miles): The trail climbs 500' in the first four miles to Big Creek bridge, crossing, then climbs 2000' the last 3-1/2 miles to the lake area. The three lakes are small shallow alpine lakes and the surrounding area is excellent amphibian habitat. Average hiking time is four to six hours.

Skyline Route (31 miles): This route follows the Queets/Quinault Divide, beginning at Three Lakes and ending at the Low Divide. It is a late-summer, early-fall trail and difficult at times for even the experienced hiker. Map and compass navigation skills are a must.

Maple Glade Rain Forest Trail (.5 mile): This trail, adjacent to the visitor center, passes through a portion of a temperate rain forest that is a diminishing part of our world. Mild temperature, summer fogs and some 140 inches of annual rainfall allow trees and other vegetation to grown vigorously here.



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