

HIKING

The choices are endless. Below are descriptions of the two easily most popular hikes within close proximity of Seattle. If you have time for just one hike, do one of those; choose according to your fitness level. Check the Washington Trails Association <http://www.wta.org/> for more information on these and many other hikes in the area.

Rattlesnake ledge. You won't find better views anywhere else this close to Seattle. Rattlesnake Ledge is a monolithic block of rock on the eastern end of Rattlesnake Ridge, towering high over the cool waters of Rattlesnake Lake and the Snoqualmie River valley. Looking up from the trailhead, the site is daunting--the rock face looks sheer and impregnable. Fortunately, the cliff face isn't too broad, and hearty Washington Trails Association volunteers have carved a path through the steep forests flanking the rock face. Indeed, the original trail, which was daunting in its own right, has been largely replaced with a new, more secure pathway.

From the parking lot, round the gate and walk the old road 0.25 mile to a grassy swath on the west side of Rattlesnake Lake. A well-signed path leads off to the right. The rebuilt trail climbs steeply from the get-go, gaining more than 1000 feet in just over 1.5 miles. Of course, the old trail made that gain in just 1 mile, so please keep the complaints to a minimum as you slog up the switchbacks. Those new hairpin turns add a little distance to the hike, but they also level the trail a tad, making it a bit easier on the thighs.

After a seemingly endless upward march, you'll suddenly burst out of the forest onto the snout of the rock ledge. The views are unbelievable. Peer southeast into the rarely seen Cedar River watershed, with Chester Morse Lake dominating the close-in scenery. This big lake supplies Seattle with a significant portion of its drinking water. The rest of the watershed is filled with untrammelled forest--the watershed is closed to most human access to ensure that the water remains uncontaminated. Look farther east and you'll see the peaks leading to Snoqualmie Pass and, of course, massive Mount Si is just across the valley.

Statistics: Roundtrip 4.0 miles; Elevation gain: 1160 ft; Highest point 2078ft.

Difficulty level: Moderate

No pass or permit required.

Driving Directions: From Seattle drive 32 miles east on I-90 to exit 32 (436th Avenue SE). Turn right (south) on 436th Avenue SE (Cedar Falls Road SE) and drive about 4 miles to the well-developed Rattlesnake Lake parking area on the right.

Mount Si. Mount Si should be experienced at least once by every hiker. In fact, a significant number of Puget Sound residents do just one hike per year, and these annual hikers almost invariably turn to Mount Si every time. In the early spring, mountain-loving backpackers and climbers use the trail as a tune-up for the coming season. Others come because the trail is one of few that become snow-free early in the year. Land managers estimate that Si draws between thirty thousand and fifty thousand visitors a year, making it the most heavily used trail in the state. As a result, on any sunny summer weekend the trail will be crowded--almost to the point of having to take a number and get in line. Really, it's not that bad, and the steep trail soon separates the serious hiker from the casual mall walker. Si's payoff is incredible: views of the Upper Snoqualmie Valley, the Puget Sound basin, and far beyond.

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From the broad parking lot, the trail climbs moderately for 1 mile to the first views of the long hike. Here, at around 1600 feet, you'll find wonderful views from atop a rocky bluff on the side of the mountain. Hikers short on time and stamina could turn around here for a modest 2-mile outing.

As you near the 1.8-mile mark, you'll sweep alongside a small brook, with grassy banks on which to rest. This is Snag Flat--the site of an old burn, as evidenced by the blackened scars on the trunks of many of the old Douglas-firs in the area.

The trail then pushes on, never wavering from its steep ascent, until you finally crest the last slope and step out into the wildflower-filled meadow at the summit, or rather, the summit basin. The true summit of Si is atop the big rock "haystack" that towers over the edge of the meadow. The haystack does sport a scramble path to its summit, but the route is tricky, with incredible exposure (one slip and you'll plummet hundreds--thousands?--of feet). It's best not to attempt the Haystack, especially considering the added danger of other people kicking loose rock down, creating deadly missiles from above. Besides, the views atop the rock are no better than those you'll enjoy from the meadows at its base.

Statistics: Roundtrip 8.0 miles; Elevation gain: 3150 ft; Highest point 3900 ft

Difficulty level: Difficult

Discover pass required (sold at gas stations Mt. Si Chevron or Mt. Si Shell or online, \$5)

Driving Directions: From Seattle drive east on I-90 to exit 32 (436th Avenue SE). Turn left (north) over the freeway and drive 0.5 mile to North Bend Way. Turn left (west), and in 0.25 mile turn right (north) on Mount Si Road. The large trailhead parking lot is on the left, 2.5 miles down the road.

Mt. Rainier National Park. If you want to see the major attraction of the area, take the time to drive to Mt. Rainier National Park. The two standard entry points to numerous hiking trails of all difficulty levels are [Paradise](#) and [Sunrise](#). Use google maps to get directions to *Paradise, WA 98304* or *Mt Rainier, Sunrise Rim Trail, Ashford, WA*. Once there, stop by the Visitor's center for local hiking trail maps and friendly advice on which trails to take and the snow coverage level. Get up early – it's a long drive (about 2.5 hours one way) but totally worth it!

Entrance fee: \$15 per car plus \$5 for each visitor, payable at the entrance to the park.

Car Rentals

[Enterprise.](#) 5715 Roosevelt Way Northeast
Seattle (206) 729-4580

[Budget.](#) 6000 Roosevelt Way Northeast
Seattle, WA 98115 US
(206) 525-2534