



**Mount Rainier:
Natural History on and Around the Northwest's Tallest Mountain
July 25 – August 1, 2020**

Leaders: Mark Garland and Gary Mozel

Mount Rainier is a massive, simmering volcanic mountain that dominates the landscape of western Washington. Its peak is over 14,400 feet high, its upper slopes are covered by massive glaciers, its base harbors magnificent conifer forests, and near tree line there are meadows that fill with wildflowers every summer. Mount Rainier was protected as one of the first US National Park in 1899, with only Yellowstone, Sequoia, and Yosemite Parks established earlier. Our journey is designed as a broad-based study of natural history on and around this great mountain. We'll watch for birds and other wildlife, identify many flowers, trees, and shrubs, and discuss the region's geology, ecology, and human history.

The trip starts and ends in Portland, Oregon, and on our way to and from the park we'll have opportunities to visit other sites, including the Columbia River Gorge and Mt. St. Helens. An overnight at Olympia gives us a morning to visit the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, where the Nisqually River meets the salt water of Puget Sound. From here we'll follow the Nisqually upriver to its beginning as the Nisqually Glacier on the southern face of Mt. Rainier. We'll spend the next four nights based at the historic Paradise Inn, located on the southern slope of the mountain at an elevation of 5400 feet. Subalpine forest and wildflower meadows surround the Inn, giving the location a true alpine character, and yet the summit is an astonishing 9,000 feet higher! We'll explore a variety of locations in the Park, mostly on short nature walks, but there will be opportunities for moderate hikes. Even the short walks are somewhat strenuous, as there are very few flat areas on this enormous mountain.

The following day-to-day itinerary represents an outline of our plans. Details and sequences may be changed by the leaders for any reason they deem to be in the best interest of the group.

Saturday, July 25

The trip begins with arrival into Portland, Oregon, with overnight at a hotel near the airport. We'll gather late in the day for a short introductory meeting. Overnight Portland.

Sunday, July 26

We offer an optional early morning visit to Multnomah Falls, a spectacular waterfall within the dramatic Columbia River Gorge. Steller's Jays are often conspicuous here, and sometimes American Dippers can be seen feeding at the water's edge. We next head north into Washington, with time for one or two natural history stops. We'll pass by Mt. St. Helens along the way – if the day is clear, we may head toward this mountain for views of its gaping crater and to observe the regrowth of forest in areas that were devastated by the great eruption of 1980. We finish up at Washington's small capital city, Olympia.

Monday, July 27

The day starts with an optional early morning visit to the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, where an impressive riparian forest lines the Nisqually River as it meanders into Puget Sound. The Refuge also preserves wetland habitat where we're likely to see birds, turtles, dragonflies, butterflies, and other wildlife. Later in the morning we head east and into Mt. Rainier National Park, where we'll see the Nisqually Glacier, where the Nisqually River begins. We'll check into the Paradise Inn, our home for the next 4 nights, and stroll along trails near the lodge, meeting some of the common wildflowers, birds, and mammals that we'll be seeing throughout our stay at the park.

Tuesday, July 28

We have three full days to enjoy Mt. Rainier National Park, and we may switch the sequence of daily activities, based in large part on the weather. On each day there will be options to head off on your own or with a small group for a longer hike, perhaps 4 – 5 miles, and if there's enough interest one of the leaders can also go along on a hike. Shorter nature strolls will also be offered each day. One day will be centered around Paradise and the famous Paradise Meadows, where wildflower displays should be at their peak. The meadows are also home to hoary marmots, golden-mantled ground squirrels, Sooty Grouse, Clark's Nutcracker, and lots of other wildlife, not to mention (clouds permitting) great views of the upper slopes of Mt. Rainier and, to the south, the volcanic peaks of Mt. Adams and Mt. St. Helens.

Wednesday, July 29

On one of our days in the park we plan to drive around to Sunrise, an access point on the drier east side of the park where the road climbs to 6200 feet. Here in the rain shadow of the mountain we'll find plants better suited for the drier climate, along with views to different peaks and ridges of the Cascade Range and a different face of Mt. Rainier. Our drive to Sunrise takes us by the Grove of the Patriarchs, a magnificent stand of ancient conifer trees. We'll stroll through this amazing forest and discuss the ecology of the northwest conifer forest ecosystem.

Thursday, July 30

One day we'll plan to visit Longmire, a lower elevation spot near the southwestern entrance to the National Park. There's a lot of interesting human history here, along with a lowland ecosystem with many plants and animals that we won't have seen at the higher elevations. There are a number of interesting short hikes between Paradise and

Longmire, and we may choose to visit waterfalls, forests, or to return to the Paradise Meadows for more of the alpine and subalpine habitats. There will surely be time to visit the Park's visitor center, to enjoy a ranger-guided program, or just to relax for a while surrounded by the stunning scenery of this magnificent mountain.

Friday, July 31

We'll head back to Portland this day, but there will be plenty of time for nature explorations in addition to the travel. If we didn't visit Mt. St. Helens on the way north we may choose to visit this day. We might choose to linger at Mt. Rainier until lunchtime. We finish the day back in Portland, where we'll plan to gather in the evening to reflect on what we've experienced during the week.

Saturday, August 1

Shuttle to the Portland Airport for flights home or head off on independent explorations – let us know if you'd like suggestions for other spots to visit and we're happy to offer suggestions.

Leadership:

Mark Garland has been leading nature travel programs for the Audubon Naturalist Society for more than 35 years, running the program for 28 of those years. He received the ANS Paul Bartsch Award in 2019. He has also led tours for New Jersey Audubon, Massachusetts Audubon, the Smithsonian Associates, and other organizations. He teaches Road Scholar birding programs in Cape May. Early in his career he worked as a naturalist at Olympic National Park, where he and Gary Mozel worked closely together.

Gary Mozel grew up in Olympia, Washington and graduated from The Evergreen State College with a degree in biology-ecology. His career has included teaching high-school science and history, working as a naturalist at Olympic National Park, leading tours for Smithsonian Associates, writing natural history articles for magazines and newspapers, and being Lead Naturalist at Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo. Now semi-retired, his main focus is teaching about forests and working for their conservation.