Exploring Olympic in Winter

Olympic is a park for all seasons. In fact, hikers can experience several seasons in one outing. A trail beginning on a spring-like day in a forest may lead to a blizzard in the mountains. But hikers ready for unpredictable weather can experience the solitude of winter. It can get very wet here. Snow and rain can swell streams overnight, making crossings treacherous. Camp well above flood plains. Bridges or boardwalks are very slippery when wet or icy. On the coast, storms push tides higher, creating huge waves that easily move beach logs or trap hikers on rocks. Be prepared; always carry the 10 essentials, even for short hikes.

They are: extra clothing, map, extra food and water, compass, flashlight, knife, matches, sunglasses, fire starter/candle, first aid kit.

Don’t let winter chase you inside! Stop at the Olympic National Park Visitor Center or Wilderness Information Center (WIC) in Port Angeles, for maps, tide tables and trail conditions. For you and your pet’s safety, pets are not allowed on trails in the park. If you plan to camp overnight in the park’s wilderness, you can get the required permit, bear canisters and information at the WIC or Visitor Center. May through September some popular spots have limits, including parts of the coast. Call the WIC (360) 565-3100 for details or reservations.

Low-Elevation Hiking

Elwha Valley: Geyser Valley Loop, West Elwha, West Lake Mills, Griffith Creek, Cascade Rock trails and lower parts of the Elwha River trail.

Lake Crescent: Marymere Falls and Spruce Railroad trails.

Olympic: Cape Alava or Sand Point trails; to make a 9.3-mile loop, hike the beach between these two trails.

Mora and La Push: James Pond, Second Beach, Third Beach and Rialto Beach.

Kalaloch: Short trails to beaches and forest nature trail.

Hoh: Hall of Mosses and Spruce Nature trails, or lower Hoh River trail.

Quinault: Nature trails on both sides of the lake, Cascading Terraces and Irvy Lake trails, lower stretches of the North Fork and East Fork trails.

High Country Trips

A trip into mountains blanketed with snow offers a unique wilderness experience. Snow skiing requires a lot of preparation and many safety precautions, but it is a glimpse into a season that few truly experience. Weather can change quickly. Places like Hurricane Ridge and Blizzard Pass earn their names, and whiteout conditions can occur anytime. Be prepared!

Hurricane Ridge offers the easiest access to winter high country. But remember the Hurricane Road is closed Monday through Thursday in winter. For safety, please observe the following rules:

- Overnight campers must get a permit at the WIC, as well as register and check with a ranger at Hurricane Ridge for camping locations.
- Plan trips for Friday or Saturday night, since the Hurricane Ridge Road is closed Monday through Thursday. If a storm forces a road closure at other times, you should carry chains and supplies in case of a snowy descent. Use caution as plow operators may not see you! If you are locked in uphill from the gate, call (360) 565-3000 ext. 0 (before 5:30 p.m.) or (360) 417-2499 after hours, from the pay phone at Heart O’ the Hills.
- Because of the risk of sudden storms, winter overnight parking is not allowed at Hurricane Ridge. You must park three miles below the ridge at Third Peak. Check with rangers at Hurricane for exact locations and to see if a shuttle is available.
- Winter camps must be located away from the Hurricane Ridge parking lot and out of sight of ski/snowshoe trails. Check with a ranger for suggested locations.
- Use a camp stove. Campfires are prohibited.
- Share the trails—avoid walking or snowshoeing in ski tracks.
- In emergencies, dial 911 from the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center foyer.
- Check avalanche conditions and carry beacons (see page four).

To bring back this forest denizen, state wildlife managers studied the feasibility of reintroducing fishers to Washington. They concluded the protected forests of the central Olympic Peninsula offered the best remaining fisher habitat in the state. The state and Olympic National Park explored the possibility of a joint reintroduction program. After input from public meetings and reviews, the final plan was released in late 2007.

Biologists are working with Canadian wildlife managers to obtain at least 100 fishers from western Canada over three years, possibly starting this winter. Each year, about 35 fishers would be released in male-female pairs or small groups in late fall or early winter to allow them to settle in, establish home ranges and find den sites and mates before the spring breeding season.

Three blocks of prime forested habitat—Queets/Quinault, Hoh/Bogachiel, and Elwha/Sol Duc—would receive the initial reintroduction. These lowland valleys, especially on the west side of the Peninsula, once supported high densities of fishers. A biologist who surveyed area mammals in the mid 1990s, recorded that two trappers took 37 fishers in the 1920 winter season in just the lower Queets River valley!

Biologists will monitor the reintroduced fishers as they explore their new home by tracking movements, determining survival and reproduction, and assessing their diet. Fishers have been successfully reintroduced in 10 states, including neighboring Oregon and Idaho.

So as you explore Olympic National Park this winter, you could be entering a subtly different place. The ocean will still crash ashore, snow will again blanket peaks, and winter wrens will still flit about the forest. But look more closely, a long-abandoned resident may have left its 5-toed track along a muddy forest trail, or curious dark eyes set amid glittered brown fur may be peering down from a branch high above. ‘Log—along it scampers’ is coming home.
A winter visit to Olympic National Park’s mountains, coast and forest can be magical, but it takes planning as fewer services and facilities are available. Roads and facilities normally open may close due to snow, high water, downed trees, or staffing. Call (360) 565-3131 for road and weather updates.

**Port Angeles Area**

**Olympic National Park Visitor Center:** Open 10-4 Thursday through Monday (as well as December 26 and January 1) with exhibits, movie, book sales and staff to help you plan a visit. On Saturdays and Sundays it will be open 9-4. Most ranger stations do not have regular winter hours; please call (360) 565-3330 for general park information.

**Wilderness Information Center (WIC):** Open daily early April through late October for wilderness camping and hiking information, wilderness permits and fees, bear canisters, and map and book sales. Permits and canisters available only at main visitor center when the WIC is closed.

**Hurricane Ridge Road**

Open Friday through Sunday and holiday Mondays, as well as December 20 and December 26 to January 1, weather permitting. Closed Monday through Thursday from November 19, 2007 through March 30, 2008. Call (360) 565-3131 for a 24-hour recording or tune to 530 AM in the Port Angeles area for current information. (See page 4 for details.)

**Hurricane Ridge Area**

**Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center:** Open 9:30-5 when the road is open, with restrooms and a warmup area. Call (360) 452-2789 (message only) or see http://www.hurricaneridge.com. Hurricane Ridge Snow Snack Bar & Rental Shop: December 15, 2007 to March 30, 2008, food service and ski/snowshoe rentals will be available 10-4 weekends, holiday Mondays and January 26 to January 1. Hurricane Ridge Downhill Ski Area: When fully operating there are two rope tows and a Poma lift, for beginner to advanced skiers. Vertical rise is 665 feet. Weather permitting, tows operate 10-4 weekends from December 15, 2007 through March 30, 2008, as well as December 27, 28, January 1 and 21, and February 18. A full day pass for all tows is $25.00, half-day $22.00. For rope tows only, full and half day rates are $20.00 and $18.00. The area is operated by the Hurricane Ridge Winter Sports Club. For more information see www.hurricaneridge.com or call (360) 457-2879 (messages only). Cross country skiers using the ski area must use ski leashes.

**Equipment Rentals:** Packages include skis, boots and poles. Hurricane Ridge Ski Shop requires a driver’s license to rent equipment.

**Location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-Country</th>
<th>Downhill</th>
<th>Snowshoes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Ridge</td>
<td>$20/day</td>
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<td>(1/2 day rates available)</td>
<td>($30/day w/ helmet)</td>
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**In Port Angeles**

Brown’s Outdoor
- (360) 457-4150
- none
- none
- $8/additional day

**North by Northwest Surf Co.**
- (360) 452-5144
- Snowboards & boots $30/day
- ($25/additional day)

**Equipment Maintenance**

- Snowshoe with a Ranger

Join a park ranger at Hurricane Ridge to experience the wonders of winter on snowshoes. If you can walk, you can snowshoe! The National Park Service provides snowshoes and instructions on this ranger-led program. A $5.00 donation per participant helps the park provide these snowshoe walks and funds snowshoe repair and replacement. Participants should be prepared for the rigors of winter, including cold, snow, wind or even rain. Skis, boots and layers of clothes can be added or removed. Warm, waterproof boots and bring hats, mittens, sunscreen and sunglasses. If the Hurricane Ridge Road is closed, walks are cancelled.

**Snowshoe Walk:** Snow permitting, this easy to moderate walk is offered at 2:00 on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays, holidays (January 21 and February 18, 2008) from December 29, 2007 through March 30, 2008, as well as December 26 to 28, 31, and January 1). The walk lasts 1.5 hours and covers less than a mile. Group size is limited to 30 people. Sign up starts at the Hurricane Ridge information desk 30 minutes before the walk.

**Snowshoe Walks for Community Groups:** Clubs, youth groups or schools can schedule a reserved snowshoe walk. Walks for groups of 7 to 30 people are offered at 10:30 a.m. on Saturdays, Sundays and holiday Mondays (January 21 and February 18) from December 29, 2007 through March 30, 2008 as well as January 1, 2008. Walks last 1.5 hours and cover less than a mile. Reservations MUST BE MADE IN ADVANCE. Call (360) 565-3136 for information or reservations.

**Downhill Skiing/Snowboard Lessons:** Hurricane Ridge Winter Sports Club offers lessons for ages four and up starting January 12, 2008. Private lessons are available with 24 hours notice. For more information call (360) 452-2789 (message only) or see http://www.hurricaneridge.com.

**National Park Campgrounds**

The following park campgrounds are closed this winter: Alttair, Deer Park, Fairholme, South Beach and Staircase. Others are sometimes closed by storms, high winds or downed trees. Several have primitive winter camping, with pit toilets, no running water, and no fees. Most campgrounds fully open by May (see park website at www.nps.gov/olym for specific dates). The fee at most campgrounds with facilities is $12 a night, but ranges from $10 to 18 depending on facilities and season. Check at the Visitor Center or call (360) 565-3131 for current status. The following campgrounds usually have some loops open year-round.

**Quinault:** Graves Creek (primitive in winter) and North Fork (primitive year-round)

**Kalaloch:** Kalaloch Campground (reservations can be made for Kalaloch campsites between June 20 and September 1, 2008 by calling (877) 444-8777 or www.recreation.gov no more than 6 months ahead.)

**Hoh:** Hoh Campground

**Mora:** Mora Campground

**Ozette:** Ozette Campground

**Elwha area:** Elwha Campground and only (primitive in winter)

**Hurricane area:** Heart O’ the Hills Campground (walk-in if it snows)

**Rocks**

Some park roads regularly close in winter and others may be closed temporarily by weather conditions. Deer Park Road is closed at the park boundary. Roads to the area are closed due to landslide risks from a 2006 fire. Queets Road is closed 7 miles from Highway 101 due to a washout, an alternate route may open by late winter. The Sol Duc, Hoh, Mora, Ozette, and Elwha and Quinaut valley roads are open year-round weather permitting.

**Other Park Facilities**

**Hoh Rain Forest Visitor Center:** Open 10-4 Friday through Sunday, daily starting May 23, 2008. Exhibits, information, wilderness permits and book sales. (360) 374-6925.

**Olympic National Park/Forest Recreation Information Center in Forks:** Open 10-4 Friday through Sunday (except lunch), daily starting May 23, 2008. Information, wilderness permits, bear canisters and book store, (360) 374-7766.

**Lodging in the Park**

**Lake Crescent Lodge:** Roosevelt Cabins open weekends in winter (no food service). Lodge fully open May 9 to October 13, 2008 with lodging and food service, (360) 928-3211, www.lakecrescentlodge.com.

**Log Cabin Resort:** Closed in winter. Open May 23, 2008 with lodging, food service and store, (360) 928-3325, www.logcabinresort.net.


**Kalaloch Lodge:** Lodging and food service open all year, (360) 962-2271, www.vistkalaloch.com.

**Lodging and Food Service Outside the Park**

Local communities provide lodging and food service all year. Contact local Chambers of Commerce or the North Olympic Peninsula Visitor and Convention Bureau at 1-800-942-4042, www.olympicpeninsula.org.
Cross-Country Skiing & Snowshoeing

With its easy access and over 20 miles of trails and routes, Hurricane Ridge is the focus of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in Olympic National Park. Though winter explorers of all abilities can enjoy the area, flat, easy beginner ski terrain is limited to the meadows above the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center. Backcountry skiers can explore several slopes and bowls in the area. None of the trails are groomed or marked; however, several use unpaved roads and can usually be followed. Before heading out on any trip remember to register at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center and check the current avalanche conditions. Below are descriptions of routes in the Hurricane Ridge area.

NOTE FOR SNOWSHOERS AND SNOWBOARDERS: Skiers, snowshoers and snowboarders can safely share this area. Please stay to the left to avoid damaging ski tracks on trails, and do not snowshoe or walk through the downhill ski area.

### Hurricane Ridge Area Diagram

- **Wolf Creek Trail**
- **Sunrise Ridge**
- **Waterhole-Obstruction Route**
- **Hurricane Hill Road**
- **Hurricane Hill Route**
- **Small Children Snowplay Area**
- **Mt. Angeles**
- **Road to Port Angeles**
- **Obstruction Point Rd.**

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**Ski, Snowshoe and Snowboard Safety**

Before heading anywhere away from the groomed ski area, check at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center for avalanche conditions. Wear avalanche beacons, carry a snow shovel and the 10 essentials (see pg. 1), and avoid avalanche terrain such as cornices and steep lee slopes.

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**Easiest**
- **The Meadows**
  - The meadows above the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center offer gentle, easy terrain for everyone and excellent views in fair weather. Because the meadows are exposed to the wind, they are sometimes icy or wind-packed.

**More Difficult**
- **Hurricane Hill Road**
  - 1.5 miles one way: Beginning just west of the visitor center, this trail first descends then follows the rolling, moderate ridge line along the snow-covered Hurricane Hill Road. Experienced skiers can use this trail to reach the Hurricane Hill Route (see Most Difficult), as well as several bowls good for backcountry skiing. In clear weather, there are good views to the north and south, especially at the trail's terminus at the Hurricane Hill trailhead. Much of this ridgetop trail is sheltered by a subalpine forest, making it a good choice in windy, inclement weather or when there is elevated avalanche hazard.

- **Wolf Creek Trail**
  - 8 miles one way to Whiskey Bend: This route begins 0.5 miles west of the visitor center along the unpaved Hurricane Hill Road (see above) and follows an old road through meadows and forests into the Elwha valley. There are several south-facing slopes near the beginning which are good for backcountry skiing. The Wolf Creek Trail is seldom snow covered at lower elevations and skiers must often walk the last several miles. Check at the information desk for current conditions.

- **Obstruction Point Road: To Waterhole**
  - 3.5 miles one way: This route begins at the midway point on the unpaved Obstruction Point Road. In the first 0.5 mile the route climbs steadily 900 feet to above treeline. In clear weather, views can be spectacular but steep sidehills and exposure to storms make this a difficult route. It is recommended only under good conditions, advanced skiers will find this a rewarding trip with very nice views and some nice bowls on the north side of the ridge. Check with the information desk before venturing out.

- **Hurricane Hill Route**
  - 1.5 miles one way: This route starts at the end of the Hurricane Hill Road and climbs 700 feet to the summit of Hurricane Hill. There are several very steep sidehills, so use extreme caution under icy or avalanche conditions. As an alternative, skiers can follow the ridge line. Be careful to stay off cornices. Under good conditions, advanced skiers will find this a rewarding trip with very nice views and some nice bowls on the north side of the ridge. Check with the information desk before venturing out.

**Most Difficult**
- **Sunrise Ridge**
  - 3 miles one way: Begin this route by crossing below the intermediate rope tow and climbing to the right of the ski hill (right of the trees). From the top of Alpine Hill, above the downhill ski slope, this route follows a narrow ridge toward the south side of Mount Angeles. The path crosses avalanche prone areas at several points and is not recommended under unstable conditions. Be especially careful to stay off cornices along the ridge. Several nice slopes on the east side of the ridge descend to the Hurricane Ridge Road.

**Other Areas**

Depending on the snow level, other roads and trails in both the park and in Olympic National Forest may be snow covered. Check at the visitor center for current snow levels. The Deer Park Road may provide skiing or snowshoeing opportunities. For safety, this steep, narrow road is closed at the park boundary, 9 miles from Highway 101, at about 2,000 feet elevation. The road climbs steadily about 9 more miles from the park boundary up to Blue Mountain. If the snow level is low enough the road may be skiable from the boundary; but users will probably need to hike several miles before reaching snow. For information on other routes on the Olympic Peninsula, refer to Cross-Country Ski Tours: Washington’s South Cascades and Olympics, by Tom Kirkendall and Vicky Spring, or Snowshoe Routes: Washington by Dan Nelson.
Emergencies
In an emergency to report a crime dial 911. For non-emergency help call (360) 565-3000 ext. 0 between 7 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. during winter.

Visitor Information

Snow Play
Snow sliding is a favorite pastime for some, but it is also one of the most dangerous activities at Hurricane Ridge. Serious injuries, even permanent disability or fatalities, can occur when people collide with trees or other sliders. For your safety, sliding is permitted only in designated areas. The Sunrise Family Snow Play Area, one mile below the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center, will be managed as a children’s and family snow sliding area. The Small Children Snow Play Area (for children eight and under only) is near the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center.

If conditions become too dangerous or there is inadequate staff to manage the sliding areas, they will be closed. The Sunrise area is supervised only on weekends and holidays from late December through March. For the safety of participants, metal or hard plastic runner sleds and wooden toboggans are not permitted. Compressed air for fogging inlets is not available. To be safe as possible, please observe the following rules:

- Slide only in the designated Sunrise or Small Children Snow Play areas. Note: the area designated for small children may vary due to snow or weather conditions. Check with a ranger. Sliding is not allowed anywhere else in the Hurricane area or along the Hurricane Ridge road.
- For your safety, be sure the run is clear before starting your slide. Collisions can result in serious injury.
- Start only at the designated point. Descend one tube at a time and do not put more than one person on a tube.
- At the Sunrise Family Snow Play Area park only on the uphill side of the road. Be careful getting out of your car as the road may be icy and cars may not be able to stop.
- Follow directions of snow play area staff and pay attention to all area signs. If you don’t, you can be ejected from these areas.
- Pets, snowboards and skis are not allowed in the snow play areas.

Avalanche!
The Olympic Mountains’ terrain and weather create ideal conditions for avalanches. Before heading out, call the Northwest Avalanche Center at 360-565-2100 or check, at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center for current conditions. Wear beacon and carry a snow shovel. Vehicles over 10,000 pounds GVW and buses must have chains installed when traction tires are required. Chains are not allowed on paved roads.

Tips to Keep Warm
The wet snow, wind and cold of the Olympic Mountains can easily rob a body’s warmth. Excessive loss of body heat, called “hypothermia,” often helps cause outdoor accidents. Hypothermia can progress from uncontrolled shivering to loss of consciousness and death. It is very significantly more serious and painful than a cold. For your safety here are tips to help you hypothermia and another winter hazard, frostbite:

- Wear wool or synthetics like fleece or polypropylene. They insulate even when wet. Avoid cotton clothing.
- Avoid wind. Wind robs your body of heat at any temperature.
- Wear a hat! Over half of your body’s heat is lost through your head.
- Take breaks and snack frequently to maintain warmth and energy.
- Dress warmly and in layers to shed or add more as needed.
- Stay dry. Moisture robs your body of heat.