Mount St. Helens

Visitors to Mount Rainier National Park often visit Mount St. Helens. Both mountains are active volcanoes, part of the Northwest's "ring of fire." Comparing the two can give you a new perspective on the pace of geologic change, as well as bring you face to face with the raw power of volcanic forces and their effect on our world.

The Eruption

Many people remember where they were on May 18, 1980, when Mount St. Helens erupted with unexpected fury. The eruption sent enormous amounts of rock, snow, and ice down the mountain's north flank at speeds greater than 200 miles an hour. Part of the avalanche plunged into Spirit Lake, raising the lake's surface level by 200 feet. Part of it surged over the top of a 1,200 foot ridge. Still more debris rushed down the north fork of the Toutle River, filling the river valley to an average depth of 150 feet. Nearly all vegetation and wildlife up to 6 miles north of the volcano were destroyed.

Within hours, an ash cloud rose 15 miles above the summit and spread northeast, turning daylight into night for at least 125 linear miles. Lahars (mudflows) and pyroclastic flows of hot gas and rock surged down the mountain.

Even for those who merely watched the event on television, the images of timber and mud choking the Toutle River and the sky raining gray ash are difficult to forget. Today, a visit to Mount St. Helens offers a chance to relive those feelings of awe at the power of the earth to remake itself. It is also an opportunity to discover how life survived and is slowly returning to the blast zone.

Three Places to Visit

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, operated by the U.S. Forest Service, has 3 main visitor areas:

West Side
Highway 504 takes you to Coldwater Lake and Johnston Ridge Observatory. Here you can see the heart of the blast zone and how life is reclaiming this once barren area.

East Side
Forest Road 99 leads high into the blast zone, passes above Spirit Lake, and ends at the dramatic Windy Ridge viewpoint. Hiking and camping options are along the way.

South Side
Forest Roads 83 and 90 bring you to ancient lava tube caves, canyons, hiking, and camping.

Getting There From Here

From Nisqually Entrance
- Go west on Hwy 706 for 13 miles to Elbe
- Turn left (south) on Hwy 7 for 17 miles to Morton; then . . .

From Morton to the East and South sides:
- Turn left (east) on Hwy 12 for 17 miles
- At Randle, turn right (south) on Road 23/25 and follow the signs to the monument

From Morton to the Northwest Corner
- Turn right (west) on Hwy 12 for 27 miles to I-5
- Go south on I-5 for 19 miles, exit at Castle Rock, and follow the signs to the monument

From Ohanapecosh
- Go south on Hwy 123 for 5 miles to Hwy 12
- Turn right on Hwy 12 (west) for 24 miles to Randle; then . . .

From Randle to the East and South Sides:
- At Randle, turn left (south) on Road 23/25 and follow the signs to the monument

From Randle to the Northwest Corner:
- Stay on Hwy 12 for 44 miles to I-5
- Go south on I-5 for 19 miles, exit at Castle Rock, and follow the signs to the monument

Driving time = 2-3 hours for all trips. Many monument facilities and roads are closed in winter. Call ahead for conditions.

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument Headquarters: 360-449-7800
Johnston Ridge Observatory: 360-274-2140
Mount St. Helens Visitor Center at Silver Lake: 360-274-0962
Gifford Pinchot National Forest Headquarters: 360-891-5000

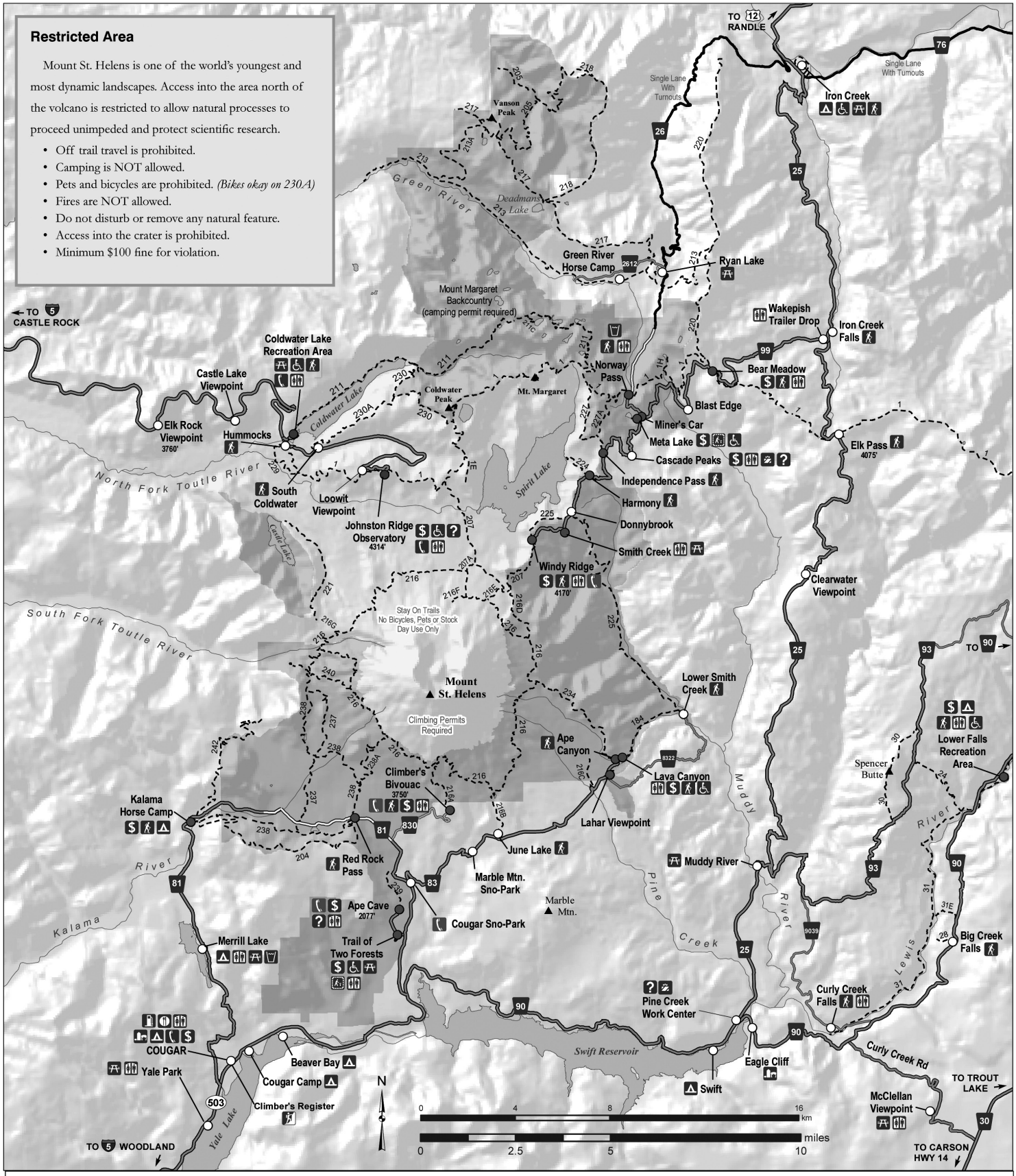
12/18

MOUNT ST. HELENS NATIONAL VOLCANIC MONUMENT

Restricted Area

Mount St. Helens is one of the world's youngest and most dynamic landscapes. Access into the area north of the volcano is restricted to allow natural processes to proceed unimpeded and protect scientific research.

- Off trail travel is prohibited.
- Camping is NOT allowed.
- Pets and bicycles are prohibited. *(Bikes okay on 230A)*
- Fires are NOT allowed.
- Do not disturb or remove any natural feature.
- Access into the crater is prohibited.
- Minimum $100 fine for violation.



Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument
Restricted Area
Free Use Site
Recreation Day Pass Required
Monument Pass Required

Information
Passes Sold
Barrier Free
Campground
Trail Access
Picnic Area
Interpretive Trail
Telephone
Restrooms
Water
Food
Emergency Call Box
Fuel
Gift Shop
General Store

For updated information and status of repairs:
http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/recreation/current-conditions/
or call (360) 891-5000

Elevations are in feet

Paved Road
Single lane Road, Paved with turnouts
Gravel Road
Road Closed by Flood Damage
Trail