

Olympic National Park and Mount Rainier

by Photographer Raymond Klass

The state of Washington contains some of the most impressive and diverse landscapes that I've ever seen. During my summer trip across America, I was lucky enough to have scheduled several weeks to explore two of the true gems of the state, Olympic National Park and Mount Rainier.

It was always a childhood dream of mine to visit the rainforest of Olympic National Park. The moss covered logs, old growth forest, and abundance of life make this an amazing place.

If you're traveling there, be prepared for rain. After all, Olympic is partly located in two distinct rainforests, the Hoh Rainforest, and the Queets Rainforest. During my trip, I explored the Hoh extensively, but the roads to the Queets had recently flooded, and they weren't allowing visitors at the time. It doesn't matter if the sky looks blue, pack a raincoat and bring a rain cover for your camera bag because foul weather can strike at any time here.

There are some definite highlights to this park, which covers some of the most diverse ecosystems of any single park in the National Park Service. Two easily reached waterfalls are Sol Duc Falls and Marymere Falls. Both of these are on the North side of park, and accessible by dedicated trails no more than ½ mile. They are both viewed best in overcast weather, and remember your polarizer to pop out greens and get those deep colors.

The west side of the park is really where the majority of the action is – it's my favorite part of the park. The main road, Route 101 bisects two distinct biospheres here – the coastal beaches, and the



temperate rainforest. Driving along the road you'll get a good sense of just how diverse this area really is. One minute you'll be in a full downpour of rain, and then next you might be sitting on a sunny beach. The climate is unpredictable to say the least.

On the East side of Route 101 will be the entrance to the Hoh Rainforest. Make sure to stop by the visitor center, and at least walk the short trail loops outside of the visitor center. These give you a great



introduction to the landscape and provide for some amazing opportunities to photograph the moss and old growth.

South of the entrance to the Hoh Rainforest, on Route 101, are the entrances to several beaches along the coast. These are great sunset locations. Personally I prefer Ruby Beach, the first stop south of the entrance road to the Hoh Rainforest, but the others are also worth exploring. Don't be concerned if the weather at the Hoh seems like rain – it's still worth trying for a sunset at Ruby Beach – Olympic National Park has several distinct biomes, and thus the weather can vary greatly in just a few miles.

If you're planning on staying in this area, and I'd highly recommend it, you should know that the choice of stores are limited. There are several stores around the coastal area. The largest is a place called

Forks Outfitters located on Route 101 just North of the entrance to the Hoh Rainforest. They sell just about anything, from food to clothing, camping gear to automotive paint. They were invaluable for providing me mouse-traps to catch the mice that had made their way into my car during my trip. They also have good coffee and friendly servers there. Olympic National Park is a diverse place with a plethora of photographic opportunities.

Mount Rainier provides an amazing contrast to the rainforest of Olympic National Park. I visited Mount Rainier in late August, and was treated to an unimaginable display of wildflowers. For me the experience literally redefined what I think of as a "field of wildflowers".

Late August is the perfect time to visit. Be prepared for two basic types of photography, wide vistas (if Mount Rainier shows itself), and intimate close-ups.





way. It is a long trail – almost 100 miles, and is typically completed in 10-11 days. Backcountry camping reservations must be made for all nights you will be camping.

I choose two shorter hikes – Mystic Lake and Mirror lakes. These were both incredible hikes, though for the latter I would have been better off if I brought bug spray, as the mosquitoes can be rampant this time of year.

Plan to be out photographing before dawn, and at least 15 minutes after sunset, as the alpine glow at this elevation provides some unique opportunities. Mount Rainier is an incredible location with many opportunities throughout.

The state of Washington has many amazing spots to photograph, Mount Rainier and Olympic National Park are just two highlights to explore. Arrive with an open mind, and a zest for creativity, and you can take home your interpretations of one of the most wild places left in America. Approach your photography with a desire to be original and to communicate your vision, and you'll be successful in sharing your vision of this great wilderness.

Mount Rainier can sometimes be hidden for days or weeks, as the peak is high enough to create its own weather patterns.

Start your exploration at the Paradise Visitor Center. Explore the various trails here, though if you're looking to photograph I would advise starting early, as the trails will become crowded by mid-morning. The loops of varying length have great views of the peak of Mount Rainier, its glaciers, and the abundant fields of wildflowers.

If you're inclined to hike, there are some amazing day and multi-day hikes available here. The Wonderland Trail winds its way around the base of Mount Rainier, providing exquisite views along the

