

Pacific Crest Trail

National Scenic Trail • Mexico to Canada



Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
California/Oregon/Washington

U.S. Forest Service
Department of Agriculture



Welcome

Zigzagging 2,650 miles (4,265 kilometers) from Mexico to Canada, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) spans three states and crosses national monuments, national parks, national forests, Bureau of Land Management land, federally designated wilderness, state and county parks, and tribal lands. Along the way, it ascends more than 50 major mountain passes and skirts the shores of innumerable bodies of water. Diversity is a hallmark of the PCT. For example, on its route, temperatures can top 100° F in the deserts and drop below freezing in the mountains.

The trail's lowest point is 180 feet above sea level at the Columbia River Gorge between Oregon and Washington; its highest point is 13,153 feet at Forester Pass in California's Sierra Nevada. In all, the PCT encompasses the greatest elevation range of any national scenic trail, traversing six of North America's seven



Mojave Desert near Tehachapi, CA

ecozones: alpine tundra (above timberline); subalpine forest; upper montane forest; lower montane forest; upper Sonoran (oak woodland, chaparral/grassland); and lower Sonoran (Mojave/Sonoran Deserts). Wildlife is abundant as the PCT weaves through the habitat of rattlesnakes, salamanders, eagles, roadrunners, coyotes, marmots, bear, elk, mountain goats, bobcats, cougars and other species. The trail is designated for pedestrian

and equestrian traffic. Bicycles and motorized vehicles are not permitted.

Within a three to four hour driving distance of San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Portland and Seattle, the PCT is easily accessible and passes through magnificently untamed country. From yucca and cactus in southern California to alpine lichen in the Sierra Nevada; from lava flows in Oregon to glaciers in Washington; the PCT provides a unique opportunity to experience the range of terrain, flora and fauna that characterizes the western United States.



Glacier Peak Wilderness, WA



Crater Lake, OR

History

Clinton C. Clarke, Harvard graduate, successful oilman and avid Boy Scout leader, dedicated his life to preserving a slice of the American West for future generations. His vision, first articulated in the 1930s, was a border-to-border trail along mountain ranges in California, Oregon and Washington "traversing the best scenic areas and maintaining an absolute wilderness character." It would take millions of dollars, 60 years and thousands of hours of labor, but eventually Clarke's dream would be realized. To create the PCT, Clarke recommended linking several existing trails: Washington's Cascade Crest Trail, Oregon's Skyline Trail and California's John Muir and Tahoe-Yosemite Trails.

In 1932, Clarke founded the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference to lobby for and plan the trail. Founding members of the Conference included the Boy Scouts of America, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and a young photographer named Ansel Adams. During the summers of 1935 through 1938,



PCT sign in Washington being taken back by nature



Visionary Clinton Clarke with early trail pioneer and explorer Warren Rogers



The Trail Today

The U.S. Forest Service has overall responsibility for the PCT but trail operation is also shared by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, California State Parks and the PCTA, as well as managers of the tribal, provincial, state and county lands through which the trail passes. For more information, contact the Pacific Crest Trail Program Manager, U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Regional Office, 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, CA 94592.

The PCT is open to foot and horse travel and closed to motorized and mechanized travel (i.e., bicycles). There are a few locations where the PCT is routed on the shoulder of highways and across bridges with motorized travel. In these instances, recreationists should use extreme caution by traveling only in daylight and wearing bright clothing.

In some areas, the trail passes through privately owned lands. Although travel on the trail is not restricted, users need to respect the rights of the landowners.

Wilderness permits are required for most of the congressionally designated wildernesses through which the trail passes. In cooperation with federal agencies, the PCTA issues wilderness permits for trips of 500 or more continuous miles in a single trip on the PCT. Trail users planning to stay in developed campgrounds may be able to reserve campsites in advance. For detailed information on a particular location, please contact that recreation site directly.

Community, Magic and Culture of the PCT

The PCT is not simply a footpath from Mexico to Canada; it is a trail that connects landscapes, communities, and people. Each year, thousands of people from all over the world and from all walks of life embark on PCT journeys. These journeys may last a few hours, a few days, or a few months.

Among the most inspiring PCT journeys are those that encompass the trail's entire 2,650-mile length. Around springtime, at the PCT's southern terminus near Campo, CA, several hundred northbound hopefuls begin the adventure of a lifetime: a thru-hike. A thru-hike is a continuous journey along the length of the PCT – a walk or horseback ride from Mexico to Canada, or from Canada to Mexico. Along the way, thru-hikers and thru-riders experience the serenity and fullness of life at nature's cadence and meet residents of nearby communities, who sometimes perform acts of profound generosity (called trail magic).

For many PCT users, trail magic is tangible evidence that the trail brings people together

in unique ways and has a culture all of its own. Usually the term "trail magic" is used to describe the kindness of strangers, who sometimes come to be known as "trail angels." Trail magic may be as basic as the gift of a cold drink at a road crossing, or a ride into town from a trailhead. It may be a home cooked meal, a clean pair of socks, or a soft bed to sleep on for the night. It may be anything that infuses a hiker or rider with gratitude and faith in the human spirit.

Another core aspect of PCT life is the adoption of "trail names." Thru-hikers, thru-riders and others who trek long distances along the PCT often give themselves (or are given) new names – names that convey personal characteristics, personify the PCT's wonders, have a spiritual meaning, or are simply funny. Regardless of their origins, trail names are another way that trail users forge a community and make connections – with nature and each other.

To communicate up and down the trail, hikers and riders often use trail journals or registers.

Notebooks for this purpose can be found in special boxes on the trail itself, at trailheads, or in the businesses or post offices of local towns. In addition to serving as a trail grapevine, the notebooks are used to record feelings and aspirations, frustrations and fears, and more. Similarly, many PCT hikers and riders post writings on Internet sites, available for all trail enthusiasts to enjoy. Thus there is a continuous written record of trail life, penned by many authors.



Kings Canyon National Park, CA



"Cucumber Boy" near Mount Baden-Powell, CA

Join us for a peek into trail journals:

"The fact that a footpath exists that stretches from Mexico to Canada for 2,650 miles through mostly untrammeled wild landscape still astonishes me. That I was able to walk it (over 4 months and 6,300,000 steps!) seems like a dream. But the fact that my experiences on the PCT, and subsequently with the PCTA, changed the course of my life is a day-to-day reality."
– Angela "Foxtail Pine" Ballard, author

"So many dreams start from this unassuming spot [the PCT's southernmost point, Campo, CA]. I had expected to feel the spirits of hikers past... but instead I feel the spirits of those who have yet to start their journey. Good omen, my altimeter reads exactly 2915', the same elevation listed on the monument. I am in sync. Now how about a little hike to Canada."
– Mark "Cuddles" Votapeck, concert cellist

"The forest this morning reminded me of an over-sized playground. [Crater Lake, OR] Logs lay fallen across the earth as though two giants had just begun a game of Pickup Sticks. Electric-colored mushrooms exploded from beneath the dirt in purple, yellow, and red. The trees, their trunks covered in knobs, resembled boa constrictors finishing a recent meal. The pines swayed and creaked in the breeze, groaning like old, arthritic men. It was a landscape fertile for the imagination."
– Sharon "Cloudspotter" Allen

"There it was, a small, three-foot cement-rock monument, marking the PCT's 1993 completion [Soledad Canyon, CA]. The trail's intersection with Soledad Canyon is the PCT's equivalent of the Transcontinental Railroad's Promontory Point. A circular brass survey marker tops the mini-obelisk, and I take my stub pencil from my 'ten essential' ditty bag and make a trace drawing. Then I hike on."
– Barney "Scout" Mann, lawyer, hiking to fulfill a forty-year-old dream

"We finished! At last I'll be warm and dry. I kissed the monument [at the Canadian border] and we set up camp just inside Canada. I will be home soon."
– Mary "Scrambler" Chambers, completed her PCT thru-hike when she was ten years old

"Today was one of my favorite days on the PCT. You find yourself in forest one moment and on steep granite walls the next [in Northern CA]. This section is full of variety, all fascinating and



Survey marker etching, Soledad Canyon, CA

beautiful. Many times I was reminded of the opening scene from The Sound of Music. Water is plentiful and it is a joy to drink as much as I want."
– Suzanne "Tailwinds" Finney

"The three of us watched in silence as the last sliver of the sun slipped below the horizon [Mount Whitney, CA]. We talked as it fell, but at that moment, as if on cue, our words disappeared, lost in the awe, stolen by the beauty. Sometimes you simply stare."
– Daniel "Out of Order" Alvarez, Yale Law School graduate, wore his PCT hiking clothes under his graduation gown

"You may think one would get tired of so much scenery, day after day, but June and I will never get tired of the outdoors, the scenery or the clean mountain air out here. We may get bone weary and tired, from pushing so hard to make a schedule, but not of the scenery, horseback riding or outdoor life. We have a lot of fun when people we meet ask us where we are going, or where we rode in from. I just say, Canada, or Mexico, and grin, waiting for the next question, which isn't long in coming. It takes about five minutes before some of them believe us. Many are the hours that we have ridden in silent awe, as we look on nature wonders. When you ride across some of these meadows, no sound breaks the stillness, except the dull thud of the horses' feet, an occasional bridle chain tinkling and the creak of saddle leather."
– Don Mulford, thru-rode the PCT with his wife June 1959



Hopi Horse near North Cinder Peak with Mount Jefferson in the background, Mount Jefferson Wilderness, OR



Goat Rocks Wilderness, WA with Mount Rainier in the background



Glacier Peak Wilderness, WA



Evolution Lake, CA

Volunteering

The PCT was built with the sweat and determination of volunteers and government agencies sharing passion for a superior trail experience and the belief that building a trail from Mexico to Canada would benefit generations to come. It is this same passion that drives volunteers today. Whether it's building new sections of trail, enjoying incredible vistas and panoramas with friends, or giving back to the land and providing an experience for others, all volunteers play a critical role in strengthening the PCT.

Why we need your help: Heavy trail use, floods, fires and overgrown vegetation can cause tread erosion, trail blockage and, in some cases, permanent damage. The PCT is in constant need of maintenance and monitoring due to increased demand for recreation

opportunities and the loss of open space.

Working with agency partners, volunteers are the lifeblood of the trail. Each year volunteers through the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) provide support for more than 2,650 miles of trail annually through major rehabilitation projects, routine maintenance and additional administrative assistance.

How you can help: Whether you're an outdoor enthusiast and enjoy getting your hands dirty, or show your support behind a desk, ample opportunities exist for volunteering. The PCTA's coordinator of volunteer programs will put you in touch with local volunteers, leaders and projects near you. Contact the PCTA online at www.pcta.org or by phone at 916-285-1846.



Volunteers south of Ebbetts Pass, CA



NAACP youths from Vancouver, WA, help re-build an eroded section of the PCT

Safety and Administrative Information

Know how to navigate: The PCT is not a blazed trail and may remain under snow much of the year. Users should be proficient in backcountry navigation and travel with appropriate topographic maps as well as a compass or GPS.

Plan for your trip: Knowledge of the area, weather, terrain and your limitations, plus a little common sense, can help to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip.

- Leave a copy of your itinerary with a responsible person. Include such details as where you are planning to travel, the equipment you're bringing, the weather you've anticipated and when you plan to return.
- Travel with a companion.

- Be aware of natural hazards in your environment. Be cautious and alert for falling snags (dead trees) along the trail and in campsites and picnic areas. Avoid camping in areas with large numbers of dead trees.

- Be weather wise. Avoid bare ridge tops, exposed places, lone trees, streams and rocks during lightning storms. Find shelter in a densely forested area at a lower elevation. Even in the summer, exposure to wind and rain can result in hypothermia.

- Think before you drink! No matter how clean or pure stream-water looks, it's likely to contain water-borne parasites and microorganisms that can cause discomfort and sometimes serious illness. Pack your water in, filter it, or purify it with chemical treatment.

Bears and Food Storage



Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)

Be aware, human carelessness can spell death for bears. When bears repeatedly obtain human food and garbage, they quickly learn to seek more. They become destructive and dangerous, and often must be killed. Regulations in some areas mandate proper food storage and prohibit feeding of any wildlife. Approved food storage canisters are required in many areas and are strongly recommended in others. For food storage requirements in the Sierra, visit www.sierrawildbear.gov.

Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace (LNT) is a national education program to lessen the effects people have on public lands, especially wilderness areas. LNT principles are guidelines to follow at all times to reduce the impact hundreds of thousands of visitors can



Glacier Peak Wilderness, WA

have on natural resources. One poorly located campsite or one hiker cutting a trail switchback may not seem significant, but thousands of such instances seriously degrade the outdoor experience for all. This means that practicing LNT is everyone's responsibility.

LNT Principles:

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

For further information on the LNT program, please visit www.lnt.org.

National Trails System



National Scenic Trails

- 1 Pacific Crest Trail
- 2 Pacific Northwest Trail
- 3 Arizona Trail
- 4 Continental Divide Trail
- 5 Ice Age Trail
- 6 North Country Trail
- 7 Natchez Trace Trail
- 8 Florida Trail
- 9 Appalachian Trail
- 10 Potomac Heritage Trail
- 11 New England Trail

The threats of commercial development and concern for recreational opportunities prompted Congress to pass the National Trails System Act in 1968. Today the National Trails System includes 11 national scenic trails (shown on the map). There are also 16 national historic trails and more than 900 national recreation trails (not shown on the map).

For more information about the National Trails System and a list of all national and historic trails, visit www.nps.gov/nts.

Information and Publications

Working with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and California State Parks, the PCTA is the primary non-profit champion and steward of the trail. The PCTA's mission is to protect, preserve and promote the trail for future generations. As part of this mission, PCTA volunteers donate thousands of hours each year to trail maintenance.

The PCTA is also the central clearinghouse for information regarding how to access the PCT, plan a trip on the PCT, trail conditions, and more.

Contact: Pacific Crest Trail Association, 1331 Garden Highway, Sacramento, CA 95833; 916-285-1846 or visit at www.pcta.org.

Trail conditions: Visit PCTA's website or call toll-free 888-728-7245 (1-888-PC-Trail). This service is supported by the U.S. Forest Service and is an excellent resource for current conditions including wildfire closures.

Guidebooks: The Pacific Crest Trail vol. I, II & III from Wilderness Press by Jeffrey P. Schaffer, Ben Schiffrin, Thomas Winnett, and Ruby Johnson Jenkins and the Pacific Crest Trail Data Book by Ben Go. Other guidebooks are available for purchase.

Maps: The PCT Map Series, at a scale of one inch to the mile, can be obtained by ordering from the PCT Store (shop.pcta.org), from the National Forest Store map sales (406-329-3024), or www.fs.fed.us/recreation/nationalforeststore, under "Special Area Maps." The maps also are available at select outdoor recreation retail stores.

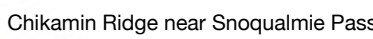
Websites: Pacific Crest Trail Association: www.pcta.org
U.S. Forest Service: www.fs.fed.us/pct

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tion section of the trail has several high passes and ridges. The highest (elevation 7,126') is the highest and is located only eight miles from the international border. A number of Alaskan and Canadian plants, including spruce, fir, cedar and grand fir, are found in Washington. When visiting this area, visitors will be treated to brightly colored patches of western red cedar. As the season progresses, the needles turn bright yellow providing a colorful conclusion to the trip.



Oregon • 458 Miles

Like the prominent volcanoes, many lakes in this section lure travelers on water. There are many opportunities to visit lakes in the Sky Lakes and Diamond Peak Wildernesses. The trail traverses Crater Lake National Park, where a side trail leads to the rim for a spectacular view of this magnificent lake. More small lakes and ponds are found in the Three Sisters Wilderness, Mount Jefferson Wilderness and the adjacent Olallie Lake Scenic Area. In northern Oregon, the PCT has fewer lakes, although it provides views of several sizable reservoirs.



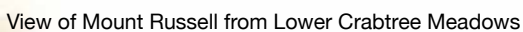
Northern California • 409 Miles

North of Donner Summit (elev. 7,989'), old volcanic flows and sediments bury most of the ancient bedrock of the Sierra Nevada crest. Beyond the North Fork of the Feather River, the Sierra Nevada yields to the southern Cascade Range. Rich in nutrients, the volcanic soils here are at the optimal elevation to receive sufficient rainfall to produce lush forests. Other plants include lupine, paintbrush, larkspur, columbine, gooseberry and manzanita. Animals include raccoon, marten, mink, badger, fox, bobcat and the ever-present deer and black bear. In the fall, skies are often filled with migrating birds on their journey south along the Pacific Flyway. The PCT traverses Lassen Volcanic National Park and crosses Highway 89 midway through the southern Cascade Range. Nearby is Mount Lassen at elevation 10,457 feet.

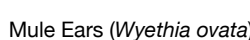


Central California • 586 Miles

Starting from this section's lowest point at Walker Pass (elev. 5,246'), the trail enters a roadless and scenic area, hugging the relatively dry crest through the Chimney Peak Wilderness before reaching the South Fork of the Kern River near Kennedy Meadows. The route alternates between expansive meadows and conifer forests, and then embarks on a 3,300-foot ascent to Cottonwood Pass. To the north is the majestic, glaciated High Sierra. The glaciers formed shallow basins that filled with water to create thousands of lakes and tarns. In Sequoia National Park, the popular John Muir Trail descends from nearby Mount Whitney (elev. 14,494') to join the PCT. The two trails merge and share the same path for most of the way to Highway 120 in Yosemite National Park's lush Tuolumne Meadows (elev. 8,690'). Along this stretch, the route repeatedly descends deep canyons only to ascend to high saddles. The PCT crosses eight named passes above 11,000 feet in this section, the first being Forester Pass (elev. 13,153'), the highest point on the entire trail.

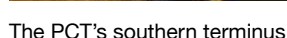


North of the park, the PCT follows the extremely dry Hat Creek Rim toward majestic Mount Shasta, which dominates the skyline. The PCT turns west towards greener lands and drops to cross the Sacramento River (elev. 2,130') at Interstate 5. It then enters Castle Crags State Park and the Trinity Alps Wilderness. The trail reaches 7,600 feet in the mountains connecting the inland Cascade Range with the coastal ranges, winding north through the Marble Mountain Wilderness before descending to the Klamath River (elev. 1,370'). It climbs again to the crest of the Siskiyou Mountains and traverses east, entering Oregon near this section's end at Interstate 5 near Siskiyou Summit (elev. 4,310').



Southern California • 697 Miles

The PCT begins on a low hill near Campo (elev. 2,915'), a small town near the Mexican border. It then passes through Lake Morena County Park, unrubs beneath Interstate 8, and climbs through chaparral, scrub oak and pines to the rim of the Laguna Mountains. The trail dips into Anza-Borrego Desert State Park at Scissors Crossing, and then winds through the San Felipe Hills and lesser mountains of the Cleveland National Forest before crossing Highway 74 at 4,900 feet and climbing the backbone of the San Jacinto Mountains. It reaches its highest point in this section at 9,030 feet shortly before it plunges to its lowest point, crossing beneath Interstate 10 at broad San Geronimo Pass (elev. 1,190').



From here, the PCT climbs steeply to the crest of two east/west-oriented ranges, San Bernardino and San Gabriel ranges, often under welcome forest shade. It passes near Big Bear Lake and Lake Arrowhead before crossing Interstate 15 at Cajon Pass near Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area. The vistas from the trail in these mountains include the Los Angeles Basin and Mojave Desert. To the west of Mount Baden-Powell and the Angeles Crest National Scenic Byway, the trail descends to Highway 14 at Agua Dulce, and then traverses the often brushy landscape of the Sierra Pelona. It continues north for a typically hot and dry hike across the San Andreas Fault Zone and western arm of the Mojave Desert before climbing into the Tehachapi Mountains, where it crosses Highway 58 and enters the Sierra Nevada.

Flora encountered generally include desert scrub, chaparral or oak, with forests only at the higher elevations. Trailside water is often scarce in this section, particularly in summer, when temperatures range from the 80s to the low 100s.



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|---|---|
|  | National Park /
National Park Wilderness |
|  | Tribal Lands |
|  | State or Provincial Park* |
|  | County/Municipal Areas* |
|  | Other Designated Area* |

*These areas are shown on this map only if they fall on, or are close to, the PCT.

