

Hike Moran

Moran State Park would be just another nature preserve without more than thirty miles of well-maintained trails that cover a majority of the park's terrain features and natural attractions. All trails are of natural composition, except for the occasional wood plank bridge, and are maintained by a combination of park staff and volunteer efforts. All trails are open year round to hikers and have seasonal openings for bikers and equestrians.

The highly diverse terrain of Moran State Park provides a full range of hiking experiences for visitors. Popular lakeside trails are considered the most picturesque and generally the easiest, requiring little preparation and suitable for all ages. Longer hikes are available for more dedicated hikers and backpackers up the slopes of Mount Constitution and nearby Mount Pickett.

Park trails have been plotted to provide maximum access to the natural attractions that Moran has to offer. Lake trails circumvent the lakes closely, allowing for picnicking, seasonal fishing, and swimming at any accessible point. Trails leading to Cascade Falls or to Mount Constitution provide close-up access to some of Orcas Island's most famous sights. Explore the largest and most popular park in the San Juan Islands.

CASCADE CREEK TRAIL

One of the best paths through the wooded southern section of Moran State Park runs along Cascade Creek, the stream that helps feed Cascade Falls. Traditionally starting at the South Campground of Cascade Lake, the Creek Trail winds through some of the oldest growth on Orcas and brings hikers past many man-made and natural landmarks including the south entrance bridge and the Lower Falls. Hikers can opt to enjoy themselves by the Falls, or continue the trail into the woods and meadows that hem the Creek up to the spillway at Mountain Lake. This trail features some switchbacks, but otherwise is quite easy to handle and a wonderful chance to see undisturbed natural growth and wildlife in the heart of Moran State Park.

CASCADE FALLS TRAIL

.25 mile. 130 feet elevation loss

The perfectly and naturally framed Cascade Falls are some of Moran State Park's most well-known and popular natural wonders. The trail to the falls begins just off Mount Constitution road, where parking is available, and leads quickly to the Upper Falls. These smaller falls give a taste of what is to come and serve as the source for the gentle stream that flows along the trail down to the Lower Falls. Several promontories above the falls provide excellent photo opportunities and the spray comes all the way up to the trail during the rainy seasons. The trail ultimately winds down to a bridge over the stream, where primitive trails wind through the brush directly to the falls. The water is cold, but when the stream runs low visitors can walk out right under the falls. This sometimes steep but short trail is a wonderful chance for all ages to enjoy natural water wonders on Orcas Island.

CASCADE LAKE LOOP

2.7 miles. Slight elevation gain and loss

With panoramic views of Cascade Lake and the surrounding hills this trail is the perfect introduction to the beauty and grandeur of Moran State Park. Parking is available at the Day Use Area, by the South End Campground, or at the western boundary off Rosario Road. The loop is a family friendly hike with wide, easily marked trails and numerous lookouts for photo shoots or for just taking a break. The trail runs by each Lake Campground and campers can enjoy daily walks to different sections of the lake. A classic style wood bridge crosses a quiet lagoon on western side of the lake; a popular spot for swimming and fishing. Trails to Sunrise Rock and Cascade Creek join this trail at the South End Campground; pack a backpack lunch and explore the verdant interior of the San Juan's largest park. The Cascade Lake Loop is open year round to hikers only.

COLD SPRINGS TRAIL

4.3 miles. 2058 feet elevation gain

Cold Springs Trail connects the Cascade Lake Day Use Area with Mount Constitution Rd. and is the trail most often used for training by prospective mountaineers. The trail climbs up the west side of the mountain with numerous switchbacks, creeks, and vistas looking out towards East Sound. Start at the trail head on top of the mountain beside a picnic shelter and head down for an easier route; or commence your hike from the Day Use Area for a rigorous journey that locals use to prep for hiking in the Cascade Mountain Range. This hike can take a few hours going up or down, and several flat promontories are great for snack breaks and picnics. Hikers can travel from the trailhead across Mt. Constitution Rd. to the Little Summit/Mount Constitution trail for further mountaintop adventures. Biking is permitted during the off season.

LITTLE SUMMIT TRAIL

2.2 miles. 430 feet elevation gain/loss

Little Summit rests above Mountain Lake on the eastern side of Mount Constitution. The Little Summit Trail starts at one of the best picnic vistas in Moran State Park, with several tables for visitors to relax on as they enjoy views of Mount Pickett and the south sound. The trail continues along the sloping ridge of the mountain towards the summit through variable terrain populated by switchbacks, ant hills, and ancient Lodgepole Pine growth. Several vantage points along the trail offer breathtaking views and photo opportunities of eastern Orcas Island, including Mountain Lake and Twin Lakes, and the waters of the Salish Sea. Take the mid-way cutoff towards the Cold Springs Trail for further hiking or continue the ascent towards the summit and see the best view in the San Juan Islands.

MOUNT CONSTITUTION LOOP

6.7 miles. 1,490 feet elevation gain and loss

For a great exploratory trek across Mount Constitution's steep eastern face try the Mount Constitution Loop trail. Park at Mountain Lake to commence a steep climb towards the crest of the mountain where the trail will join with the Little Summit to Mount Constitution Trail. Follow the route through wooded hills, with marvelous views of Lummi Island and the Salish Sea, towards the summit and stone tower lookout. Once at the summit the trail crosses the parking lot and continues down to Twin Lakes, then running south for a shaded woodland hike through the park's largely undisturbed wooded interior back to Mountain Lake. Ambitious hikers can continue on the Mountain Lake Loop Trail, or cut straight back to the camping area. Make sure to come well prepared for this long, invigorating hike through some of Moran State Park's most variable and primal terrain.

MOUNT PICKETT TRAIL

7 miles. 900 feet elevation gain and loss

The Mount Pickett Service Road and Trail runs through Moran State Park's Natural Area Preserve which is one of the oldest undeveloped areas in the San Juan Islands. The parking at the Cascade Falls trail head is the quickest route to the Service Road that leads towards Mount Pickett. An alternative starting point is the picnic shelter and parking at Mountain Lake; follow the trail to the southern end of the lake and continue east-southeast to the Mount Pickett trail.

In addition to the undisturbed natural beauty of the area, Mount Pickett is also one of the most remote hiking locations on Orcas Island. Featuring a Natural Area Preserve; the densely wooded trail takes hikers away from roadways and campsites into the rustic woodland beauty that the Pacific Northwest is known for. Pack and prep for a challenge; Orcas Islanders use this trail as a test for their hiking and climbing endurance.

MOUNTAIN LAKE LOOP

3.9 miles. Slight elevation gain and loss

Mountain Lake Loop circles Moran State Park's largest lake and second highest lake. The trail itself is easy with only gentle increases and decreases in elevation along with many sun-warmed vantage points that are great for picnicking and swimming from. The path continues through thick woodlands, rocky hills, and even along tree-lined marshlands for a comprehensive look at Orcas Island's wild interior. The spillway on the southern edge of Mountain Lake is adjacent to a large clearing with rare views of Mount Constitution's eastern side. Parking is available next to the campgrounds; hikers can start at either end of the trail, although the best experience is found by starting at the northern entrance. Trailheads that join the loop include Twin Lakes and the path to Cascade Falls and the Southern Boundary trails.

NORTHERN BOUNDARY LOOP

5 miles. 1200 ft. elevation gain

Northerly views of Orcas Island are generally marked by heavily forested hills with the Cascade Mountain Range as distant shapes on the horizon; and the best place to see these picturesque vistas is the Northern Boundary Loop in Moran State Park. Park at the Cold Springs trail head and follow the trail to a sharp cutoff that leads north-northwest towards the northern boundary of the park. The best views will be as the trail winds east along the northern face of Mount Constitution. A quick descent towards Twin Lakes shakes the hike up for the climax. From Twin Lakes hiking options include continuing south towards Mountain Lake or Mt. Pickett for further adventures; or taking the steep, winding trail up Mount Constitution towards the Summit for the quickest route back. This relatively long loop can present a challenge to some hikers; an even more difficult route reverses the trail by starting at the Summit and heading towards Twin Lakes, then proceeding on a gradual ascent up the northern face of the mountain and following the North Trail backwards towards Little Summit.

CASCADE LAKE TO CASCADE FALLS TRAIL

1.5 miles, 200 feet elevation gain

Catch several of Moran State Park's famous natural wonders on the trail from Cascade Lake to Cascade Falls. This trail technically commences at the Day Use Area by the lake, but parking is also available at the Park Office next to the lake's South End Campground. Hike past the cutoff to Sunrise Rock and follow the trail through gentle wooded hills along Cascade Creek towards the falls. The trail continues across the road just past the southern entrance bridge and road to Olga. The overlook above the Lower Falls marks the end of this trail, and other trailheads leading to the Upper Falls, Mountain Lake, and the Southeast Boundary can all be accessed nearby for further woodland hiking opportunities.

SOUTHEAST BOUNDARY TRAIL TO MT. PICKETT

4-8 miles

The Southeast Boundary Trail, also serving as the Southern Boundary Trail, is one of the most heavily wooded trails in the park, covering over five miles of forest land with markedly less hill elevation than the rest of Moran State Park before reaching Mt. Pickett. The trail does not possess a proper trail head and can be accessed from the parking at the Park Office located near the South End Campground of Cascade Lake. From there the trail winds east crossing Olga Road by the southern exit of Moran State Park. Spaces may be available for parking across the bridge, but there is no official parking.

Two routes proceed towards Mt. Pickett; one turns northeast directly towards the mountain and the other route continues towards the Park's eastern boundary before heading north towards the mountain. Mt. Pickett is a rapid ascent with heavy woodlands; it also takes hikers further from civilization than any other trail in the park; backpack supplies are highly recommended. Trails leading towards the parking lots for Cascade Falls and Mountain Lake adjoin the Southeast Boundary Trail at several points for a quick hike back.

SUNRISE ROCK

.7 miles. 300 feet elevation gain

One of the shortest and most difficult trails in Moran State Park also leads to some of the best views of Cascade Lake. Follow the trail from the South End Campground on Cascade Lake towards Cascade Creek. The Sunrise Rock Trail branches off almost immediately and takes hikers on a short but very steep switchback route through dense tree cover. The trip is wearisome but worth it; Sunrise Rock presents unmatched views of the western Park and face of Mount Constitution. As per its name, Sunrise Rock is also an excellent viewpoint for early sunrises over the crest of the mountain.

TWIN LAKES TO MOUNT CONSTITUTION

1.5 Miles

The remote natural sanctuary called Twin Lakes is only accessible by hiking trail, so hikers are in for a trip if they attempt this adventure. Reaching the lakes from Mount Constitution requires descending along the mountain's northern face with some steep paths and tight switchbacks. Tree cover is heavy but there are some views of northern Orcas and the water. The trail circles both of the Twin Lakes and their quiet glen is noted as a peaceful place to relax, snack, and swim. The lakes themselves are fairly shallow and warm quickly in the sunlight. Returning to Mount Constitution directly involves backtracking up the trail, a good endurance test for any hiker. Another trail continues south to Mountain Lake as part of the challenging Mount Constitution Loop, which will also eventually bring hikers back to the Summit of the mountain.

WEST BOUNDARY LOOP

5.6 miles. 1,620 feet elevation gain

Featuring one of the most popular mountain biking routes in Moran State Park, the West Boundary Trail is notable for its very steep climbs and it is the only route that covers the northwestern portion of the park. The swiftly ascending trail follows the power line service road up the mountain's northern face before levelling out in old growth forest. Most of the trail lies in heavily wooded areas with no promontories so views are scarce, but it is a very peaceful arboreal hike with a higher chance of spotting local wildlife. Biking is permitted in the off seasons and hikers are advised to stay vigilant for downhill bicyclists. The Loop connects with the North Boundary Loop and Colds Springs Trail, giving long distance hikers a wide variety of options for continuing their explorations, and concludes at the Day Use Area by Cascade Lake.