AUTO TOUR
### AAA Washington Travel Services

Snohomish County Mountain Loop

Our **Mountain Loop Auto Tour** traces a 112-mile itinerary from the Puget Sound Lowlands into the Cascade Range, all within the boundary of Snohomish County. The route includes 15 miles of gravel roadway (condition of unpaved section of roadway depends on how recently it has been graded and maintained). The upper portion of the Mountain Loop between Silverton and Darrington is closed in winter, usually from late November or December into March or April, depending on winter snows.
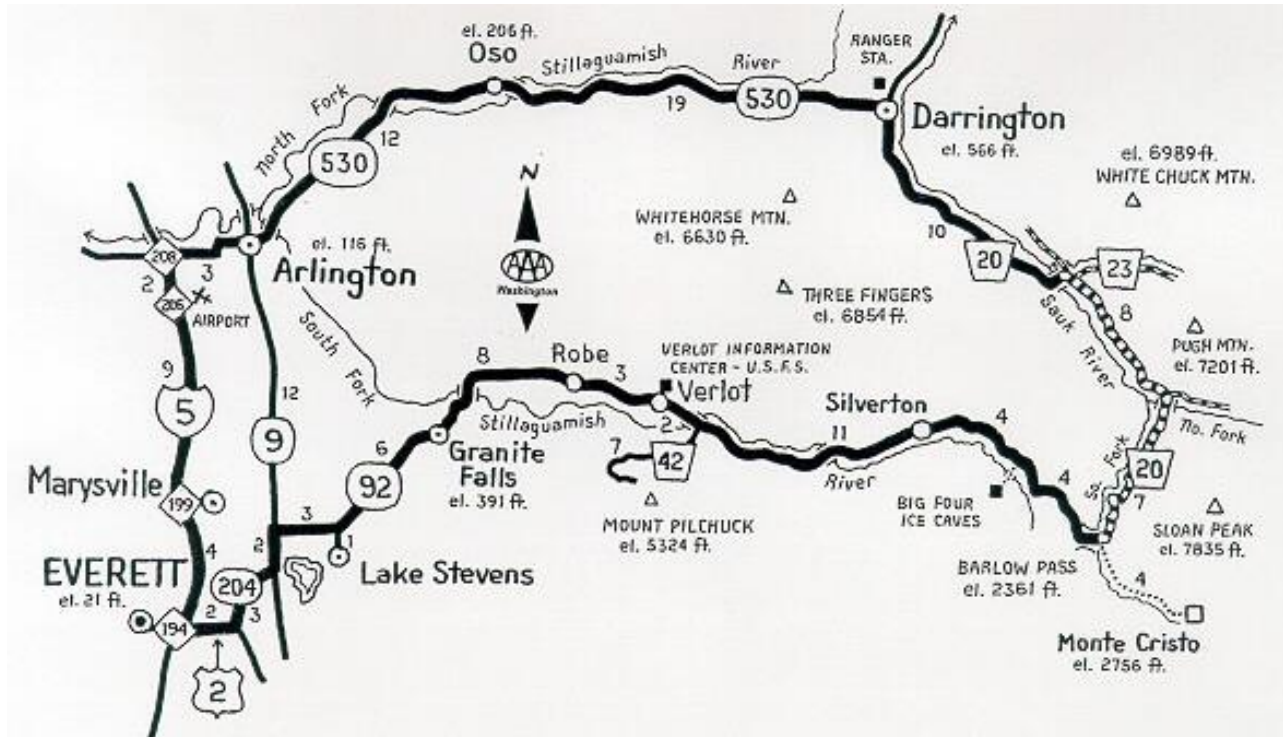
Allow approximately 3½ hours for the drive alone.

EVERETT (pop. 111,200, alt. sea level to 450 ft.) is an important industrial city and port occupying a hilly peninsula on Port Gardner bay. Captain George Vancouver, exploring the Northwest waters for the English crown, visited the area in 1792. A plaque commemorating Vancouver's landfall and "discovery" of Everett is located in **Grand Park**, at Grand Avenue and 19th Street. Eastern capitalists selected the deepwater harbor as a site for a major industrial center in the early 1890s. The panic of 1893 dashed their dreams, but by 1900 Minnesota timber entrepreneur Frederick Weyerhaeuser had established a sawmill on the fledgling town's waterfront – within a decade it became the world's largest. Labor disputes plagued the mills in the early 20th century, culminating in the Everett Massacre of November 5, 1916, when seven men were shot and an unknown number drowned.

The downtown area has several buildings of interest – the **Snohomish County Court House** (Rockefeller between Wall and Pacific) was built in 1910 in the California mission style. The **Everett Theatre** (on Colby between Hewitt and Wall) dates from 1901. Another historic structure is the restored 1925-era **Monte Cristo Hotel**, on Wall between Colby and Hoyt. Kids of all ages enjoy the interactive spaces at the **Imagine Children's Museum** (1502 Wall Street).

The city has pleasant residential neighborhoods overlooking the bay, the Olympics and the Cascades. Many of the large homes lining Rucker and Grand avenues north of the downtown area were formerly owned by timber barons.

Everett has several large parks. At the north end of town, where the Snohomish River makes a broad turn to empty into Port Gardner bay, **Legion Memorial Park** contains the 2.4-acre **Everett Area Arboretum**, with a collection of native and exotic plants. At the southern end of Everett, **Forest Park** features a children's zoo and water playground. Down on the waterfront visit the **Everett Marina Village** with its collection of shops and eateries. Just south of here is the large **Naval Station Everett**, established in the early 1990s. The base is home to several naval vessels including the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln.* Just offshore lies **Jetty Island**, a wildlife refuge, home to seabirds and a colony of California sea lions – the Everett Parks Department operates a free shuttle boat from the marina to the island during the summer.

Everett's economy, once dependent on forest products, is today dominated by service industries, aerospace and the military. Boeing selected an abandoned air force base south of the city as the site for its 747 manufacturing plant in the mid-1960s. The **Future of Flight Aviation Center and Boeing Tour**, off SR-526, offers outstanding aviation displays and weekday tours (reservations recommended) of its plant, including a visit to the world's largest volume building where 747, 767 and 777 aircraft are assembled – phone (800) 464-1476. The nearby **Flying Heritage Collection** displays rare, meticulously restored World War II fighter planes.

From downtown Everett head east on Everett Avenue – this becomes US-2 at the interchange with I-5. At the eastern edge of town it bridges the Snohomish River, then speeds across the fertile farmlands of Ebey Island via an elevated causeway – a few spots on the island are actually below sea level, the lowest land elevation in the state. During winter and spring Snohomish floodwaters occasionally inundate the island.

Watch for the turn-off for SR-204, which climbs from the river floodplain to a rolling, forested plateau dotted with lakes. Head north on SR-9, then after a few miles watch for the junction with SR-92. This road marks the beginning of the officially designated Mountain Loop. Just to the south is the city of **LAKE STEVENS** (pop. 32,570, alt. 215 ft.) fronting its namesake body of water, named in 1859 for Washington's first territorial governor Isaac Ingalls Stevens. It started as a lumbering center, then became popular for its lakeside cabins and summer homes. There is a **Covered Bridge**, built in 1998, on Catherine Creek, and the small **Lake Stevens Historical Museum** at 1804 124th Avenue N.E.

Highway 92 continues eastward through a landscape of mixed woodland with scattered farms to **GRANITE FALLS** (pop. 3,390, alt. 391 ft.), "Gateway to the Mountain Loop," at the edge of the Cascade foothills on the banks of the Pilchuck River. The town, first settled in 1884, is named for a series of rapids on the nearby South Fork Stillaguamish River. It prospered as a lumbering center, and from 1892 as a station on the railway that connected Everett with the Silverton and Monte Cristo mining districts. The small **Granite Falls Museum** (109 E. Union Street) has historical displays.

The snow clad ramparts of Whitehorse Mountain tower more than 6,000 feet above lush pastures beside Highway 530 a few miles west of Darrington.

The state highway ends at Granite Falls; at the second traffic signal in town, turn left and continue east on the signed "Mountain Loop Highway." The 55-mile section from Granite Falls to Darrington is designated as a National Scenic Byway. Just north of town and west of the bridge over the Stillaguamish River (locals call it the "Stilly") look for the sign for **Granite Falls** – a short trail leads through the woods to the falls and the adjacent old fish ladder.

Beyond here the Mountain Loop Highway follows the north bank of the South Fork Stillaguamish River into heavily wooded foothills. Much of this landscape has been logged, some of it twice. Just past the 3-mile marker is a great view of the snowcapped crags of Three Fingers (alt. 6,854 ft.). The valley widens through the community of **ROBE** (pop. 200, alt. 890 ft.) with its scattered homes. Beyond Turlo Creek we enter the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

At the scattered hamlet of **VERLOT** (pop. 170, alt. 980 ft.) is a **U.S. Forest Service Information Center** where you can inquire about road and trail conditions as well as recreation activities in the area. This is also the place to pick up the National Forest pass required to legally park at trailheads and in recreation areas along the route ahead. The federal Recreation Lands Pass is also accepted. A few miles east, Forest Road 42 branches to the right, winding seven miles up **Pilchuck Mountain** to a Forest Service picnic ground on the site of a former alpine ski area. Unreliable snows caused the ski area to close in the early 1970s. A 2½-mile trail climbs up to the 5,300-foot summit.

Back on the Mountain Loop, the valley narrows to a canyon. Moss cloaks the trees. The highway passes dozens of Forest Service recreation areas – trailheads, picnic areas and campgrounds – most are closed in the late fall, winter and early spring. Along this stretch you'll glimpse old mine tunnels, the route of the long-abandoned railroad and remnants of ghost towns, all indicative of the gold, silver and copper mining boom that swept the canyon in the 1890s. **SILVERTON** (pop. about 25, alt. 1,475 ft.), founded in 1891, was an important silver and copper mining camp. Its brightly painted buildings, some dating back to the late 19th century, dot the hillside north of the highway.

Just east of Silverton at Deer Creek the Mountain Loop Highway is gated in winter. Four miles down the road is the site of **Big Four Inn**, a popular resort opened in 1920. By 1924, 6,000 visitors per year were riding the train from Everett up to the resort where they could golf, hike, dance, attend conventions or just relax amid the mountain scenery. Fire destroyed the resort in 1949 and concrete foundations are all that remain. An easy one-mile trail leads to the **Big Four Ice Caves**. This unusual feature forms where a stream emerges from a perennial snowfield at the base of Big Four Mountain. The peak towers above the site, soaring to over 6,100 ft., keeping the north-facing site in constant shade. A cool microclimate exists in the environs of the snowfield and many sub-Arctic plants thrive, despite the low elevation (1,900 ft.). Note: it is very dangerous to approach the snowfield; debris often

falls down the precipitous slope making the proximity hazardous. <mark>Do not under any circumstances enter the ice caves!</mark>

The Mountain Loop continues climbing between high peaks, reaching the 2,360-ft. summit of **Barlow Pass**. This marks the watershed between the Stillaguamish, which we have just traced up to the pass, and the Sauk, which flows north to the Skagit River, which in turn empties into Puget Sound.

At the crest a branch road strikes off to the east, reaching the former gold mining town of **MONTE CRISTO** (no permanent pop., alt. 2,756 ft.), spectacularly set amidst 6-7,000-foot snow clad peaks. This was a wide-open mining town of 2,000 people in the 1890s. Today the remains of its buildings are crumbling ruins. Mine workings can be seen on the surrounding mountainsides – ore was transported down to the townsite on tramways, then loaded onto the railway for transport to the smelter in Everett. Mining dwindled in the early 1900s; the last mine closed in 1920. Monte Cristo continued to be a popular recreation destination, accessible by train. This ended in 1936 when the railroad was abandoned. Floods seriously damaged the Monte Cristo access road in December, 1980. It remains closed to vehicles but is a relatively easy 4-mile hike following the railroad right of way from Barlow Pass.

*The gravel section of the Mountain Loop, hugs the South Fork Sauk River, north of Barlow Pass.
[Photo: U.S. Forest Service]*

At Barlow Pass the Mountain Loop Highway becomes a narrow gravel road. There are usually some sections of washboard surface, but normally the road is fairly well maintained during the summer and early fall months and is easily passable by a passenger car. Speeds on the gravel section average 25 to 35 mph – watch for oncoming traffic on curves.

North of the pass the road winds along the South Fork Sauk River. This section of roadway was closed by washouts from fall 2003 until fall 2007. There are several primitive recreation sites along this stretch of the loop and tantalizing glimpses of the nearby high peaks.

At the **White Chuck Viewpoint**, just south of the junction with Forest Road 23, the panorama stretches across the White Chuck River to the craggy heights of its namesake mountain. The name derives from the milky color of this stream born on the slopes of 10,541-foot Glacier Peak, out of sight to the east – *chuck* is a Chinook Jargon word meaning "river."

Just past the FR-23 junction we're back on pavement. The valley widens and it's a smooth ten-mile drive into the old logging town of **DARRINGTON** (pop. 1,400, alt. 566 ft.). The 6,600-foot peak of Whitehorse Mountain towers over the town to the southwest. Settlement dates back to the 1880s when the area was known first as Sauk Portage, later as The Burn (local Native Americans traditionally set fires to patches of woodland, which subsequently grew back as berry fields). In 1891 residents opted to name their community Barrington, but the moniker was misspelled when the new post office was established in 1894. Darrington started out as a way station on the wagon road to the Monte Cristo mines, then prospered as a logging center and railhead. A number of Tarheels (people from North Carolina) settled here in 1914-1916. Many of their descendants still live in the area and although their regional accents have largely disappeared, some of their traditions are kept alive during the Bluegrass Festival held each July.

From Darrington take SR-530 west. The highway passes scattered homes and farms. There are

great views of Whitehorse Mountain off to the south across lush pasturelands. Its flanks host some of the lowest-elevation glaciers in the 48 states. The highway follows the North Fork Stillaguamish River, passing a string of almost-forgotten hamlets, former stations on the now-abandoned railway. The community of **OSO** (alt. 206 ft.) was settled as Allen in the 1880s. The name was changed to the Spanish word for 'bear' in the 1890s to avoid confusion with the Mason County town of Allyn.

On 22 March, 2014, a rain soaked mountainside north of the river collapsed. A slide of mud and debris buried the highway and temporarily blocked the river. Forty-three people lost their lives in the disaster. Highway 530 had to be rebuilt and raised up to 20 feet in some sections. The road reopened in early October, 2014.

Olympic Avenue leads through Arlington's pleasant business district.

ARLINGTON (pop. 19,300, alt. 116 ft.) stands just below the confluence of the north and south forks of the Stillaguamish. Settlers homesteaded on the rich valley soils in the early 1860s. Railroads arrived in the 1880s and a station was established here under the name of Haller City. An adjacent town site was also platted as Arlington, named for the national cemetery near Washington, DC. Residents voted to consolidate the two settlements under the name Arlington in 1903. The town prospered as a lumbering center and once ranked among the top producers of shingles. The **Stillaguamish Valley Pioneer Museum**, 20722 – 67th Ave. N.E., has exhibits on the area's history.

Highway 530 leads 3 miles west through farmland to busy Interstate 5. Just east of I-5 exit 206 is **Arlington Airport**, a busy general aviation field. The airport was a World War II-era Naval Air Station and each July hosts a nationally-renowned experimental aircraft fly-in.

Back on I-5 continue south to **MARYSVILLE** (pop. 67,040, alt. 15 ft.), founded as a trading post in 1877 on Ebey Slough, a branch of the Snohomish River. Named for the California town on the Yuba River, Marysville preserves the **Gehl House**, built with hand-hewn cedar in 1884, in **Jennings Park** (north of SR-528 on Armar Road). The park also has a seasonal petting zoo and the Washington State University extension service demonstration garden. The city celebrates its agricultural roots with the annual *Strawberry Festival* each June.

The **Tulalip Indian Reservation**, established by treaty in 1855, and the site of the earliest Roman Catholic mission on Puget Sound (1849), adjoins Marysville on the west. Just west of I-5 exit 200 the **Tulalip Casino** beckons gamblers. **QUIL CEDA VILLAGE**, located on the tribe's business park just west of I-5 exit 202, is the state's first municipality organized and administered by Native Americans. Just west of I-5 exit 202, **Seattle Premium Outlets** beckons shoppers with more than 100 outlet stores.

Just south of Marysville I-5 bridges Ebey Slough, then traverses the floodplain of the Snohomish River. Dikes and levees protect the fertile farmland from regular flooding, although some of this low-lying country is usually under water each winter. The freeway rises to span the Snohomish River and we're back in **EVERETT** where our Mountain Loop tour began.

jpk – 28 August, 2018