



AUTO TOUR

AAA Washington Travel Services

Around Mount St. Helens

At 8:32 in the morning of Sunday, 18 May, 1980, Mount Saint Helens volcano erupted with a force that drastically changed the geography of a sizeable chunk of southwestern Washington. That eruption discharged twelve percent of the mountain's mass into the atmosphere, reducing its height by 1,300 feet. An avalanche of ejecta rushed down the volcano's shattered north face, laying waste to some 200 square miles of forest, transforming pristine Spirit Lake into an unrecognizable scene of devastation. Hot gas stripped trees of their leaves and mowed down giant conifers like matchsticks. Virtually all signs of life were obliterated. Nearly sixty people and countless animals perished in the cataclysm. The creeks and streams born in this impact area soon carried a choking flow of hot mud and debris far downstream, causing great loss of property. In recent years the volcano has been quiescent.

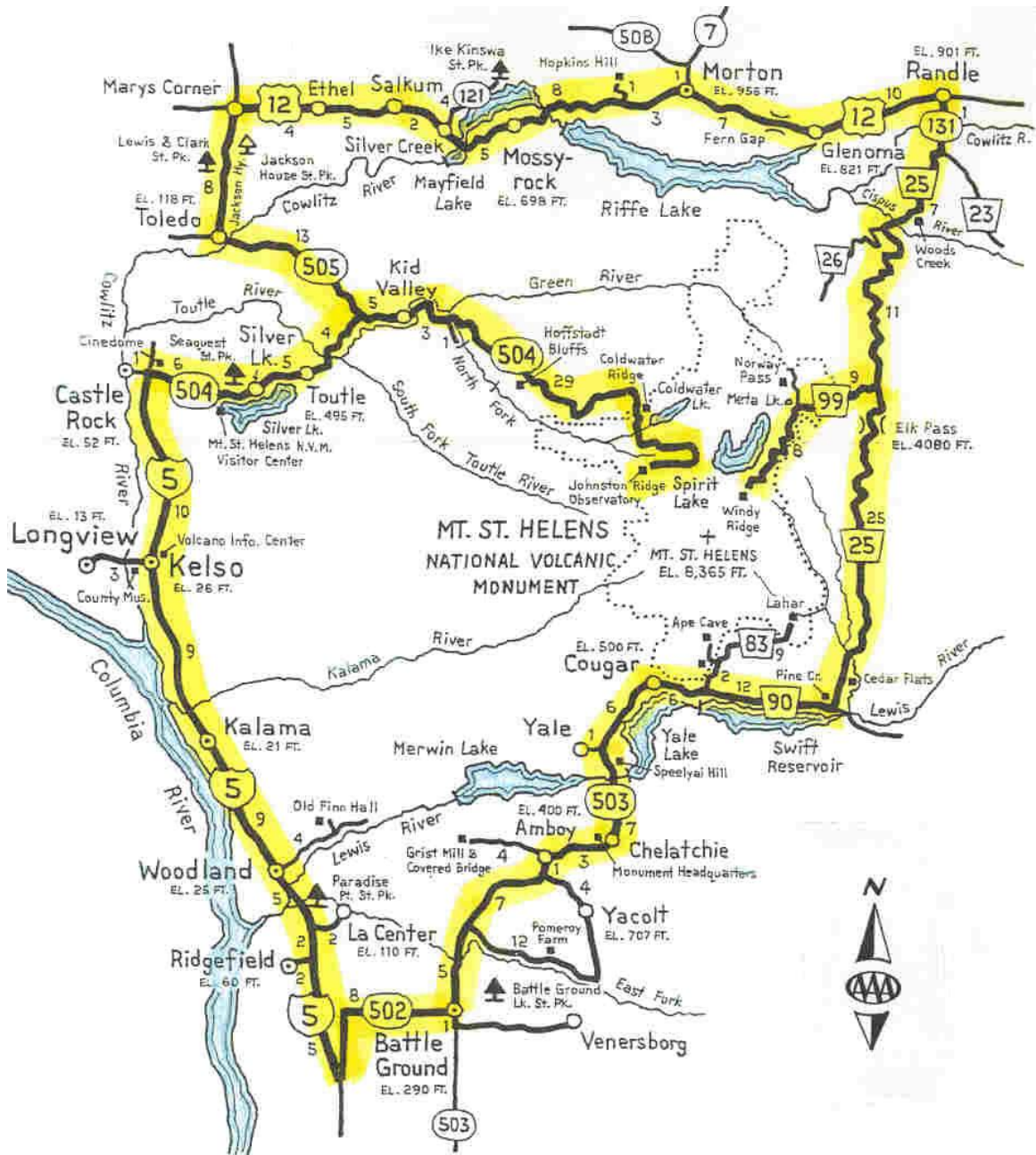


From Loowit Viewpoint on Johnston Ridge, near the end of the Spirit Lake Memorial Highway, the panorama stretches south across a scene of devastation to the crater of Mt. St. Helens.

Our self-guiding *Auto Tour* traces a suggested itinerary around Mount Saint Helens -- offering a unique opportunity to view this region where nature's awesome power and dynamic for regeneration are ever evident.

NOTE: Many Forest Service roads are not maintained during the winter months, roughly November through April, and should be considered closed to tourist travel. Many of these roads are also narrow and winding; some are unpaved. Keep right on curves and watch out for logging trucks.

DRIVE CAREFULLY. There are no filling stations or lodgings along roads in the eastern side of the monument between Randle and Cougar.



Our auto tour itinerary begins at I-5 exit 49 near **CASTLE ROCK** (pop. 2,135, alt. 52 ft.). East of the interchange **SPIRIT LAKE MEMORIAL HIGHWAY** (SR-504) climbs into thickly wooded hills. Six miles up the road and across from **SEAQUEST STATE PARK** (camping, picnicking) is the **MOUNT SAINT HELENS SILVER LAKE VISITOR CENTER**. The 16,000 square foot facility contains extensive exhibits of area natural and human history, including a walk-through volcano. Its theatre screens films of the peak's eruptions. A ¼-mile trail leads down to the marshy shore of Silver Lake. In clear weather Mount St. Helens is visible on the eastern horizon. The center is a good orientation to the volcano and is open daily. Admission.

Highway 504 skirts the reed-lined fringe of 2000-acre Silver Lake. Several miles beyond the rural community of **TOUTLE** (pop. 300, alt. 495 ft.) the road bridges the Toutle River. A massive flow of muddy water choked this stream following the May 1980 eruption – you can still see the thick deposits of mud along the riverbank near the bridge.

The highway continues along the North Fork Toutle River, scene of major flooding in the aftermath of the 1980 eruption. Massive jams of logs and mud pushed downstream devastating homes, roads and a logging camp, tossing railroad cars

around like toys. Three-and-a-half miles east of the hamlet of **KID VALLEY** (alt. 775 ft.) we reach the end of the pre-eruption route of the state highway. The old route, now buried beneath landslide and mudflow debris, followed the river upstream to Spirit Lake. The new highway, opened in October 1992, climbs a ridge north of the river, then continues eastward well above the valley floor. Along the 22-mile route to Coldwater Ridge are eleven bridges and four viewpoints offering perspectives of the volcano and the devastated upper Toutle River drainage. The highway climbs into the winter snow zone reaching elevations above 3,000 feet. The Department of Transportation keeps the road open as far as Coldwater Lake throughout the year (winter motorists should carry chains or traction devices).

At **Hoffstadt Bluffs**, located at milepost 27, you'll find a visitor center, restaurant, rest rooms, summer helicopter tours, short trails and a picnic area. This vantage offers the first panoramic view stretching up the devastated river valley to the volcano. The Army Corps of Engineers built the two sediment retention structures across the valley floor to protect downstream areas from avalanche debris flows.

Three miles beyond SR-504 crosses the **Hoffstadt Canyon Bridge**. The 2,340-foot long span stands 370 feet above its namesake creek. The **Forest Learning Center** (open May-October) stands at the North Fork Ridge Viewpoint at milepost 33.5. Exhibits depict the forest before and after the eruption and underscore the importance of conservation.

East of here the highway begins a long climb around the ridge of Elk Rock, reaching an elevation of 3,600 feet at **Elk Rock Viewpoint**. Here stands the entry station to the **MOUNT SAINT HELENS NATIONAL VOLCANIC MONUMENT**. Congress established the 110,000-acre reserve under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service in 1982. Its mission is to protect this unique geological region and to develop representative areas for public access and scientific research. The view extends up the devastated Toutle River to the volcano. Five miles beyond is **Castle Lake Overlook** with another perspective of the devastated area including blown down timber.

Highway 504 reaches the **Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center** (alt. 3,110 ft.) overlooking its namesake lake and the Upper Toutle valley. The crater of Mount Saint Helens cradling its steaming lava dome lies eight miles distant. The center closed permanently in November, 2007. Interpretive trails radiate into the surroundings.

The highway drops down to Coldwater Lake (trails, boat rentals) which formed behind a debris dam after the May 1980 eruption. Beyond Coldwater Lake the road is not maintained in winter – it is generally open from May through October. The road continues in a long loop around Johnston Ridge. At **Loowit Viewpoint** the panorama extends over the chaotic landscape created by the force of the blast. The roadway ends at the **Johnston Ridge Observatory** (alt. 4,200 ft.), five miles from the crater's lava dome – the closest point accessible by motorists. The observatory's exhibits focus on the geological aspects of the volcano. The view is awesome.

To continue our auto tour retrace the route 37 miles back to the junction with SR-505. Turn north on Highway 505, which traverses wooded country interspersed with modest farms. The town of **TOLEDO** (pop. 685, alt. 118 ft.), founded in 1879, straddles the Cowlitz River at the head of 19th-century steamboat navigation. Each August Toledo hosts Washington's largest Bluegrass music festival. The town is a dairying center and celebrates Cheese Days in July. Turn north of Jackson Highway, formerly the route of US-99. Several miles north of town turn west on Spenser Road to **Saint Francis (Cowlitz) Mission**. Established in 1838, this was one of the first Roman Catholic missions in the Pacific Northwest. The original building burned to the ground in the late 1890s.

Jackson Highway continues north through a varied landscape of second-growth woodland, open prairie and scattered farms. Just west of the highway **Lewis & Clark State Park** offers camping, picnicking and hiking trails through a stand of virgin Douglas fir. Nearby **Jackson House State Park** features a mid 19th-century structure which has served as an inn, country store, post office and the first U.S. District Court north of the Columbia River.

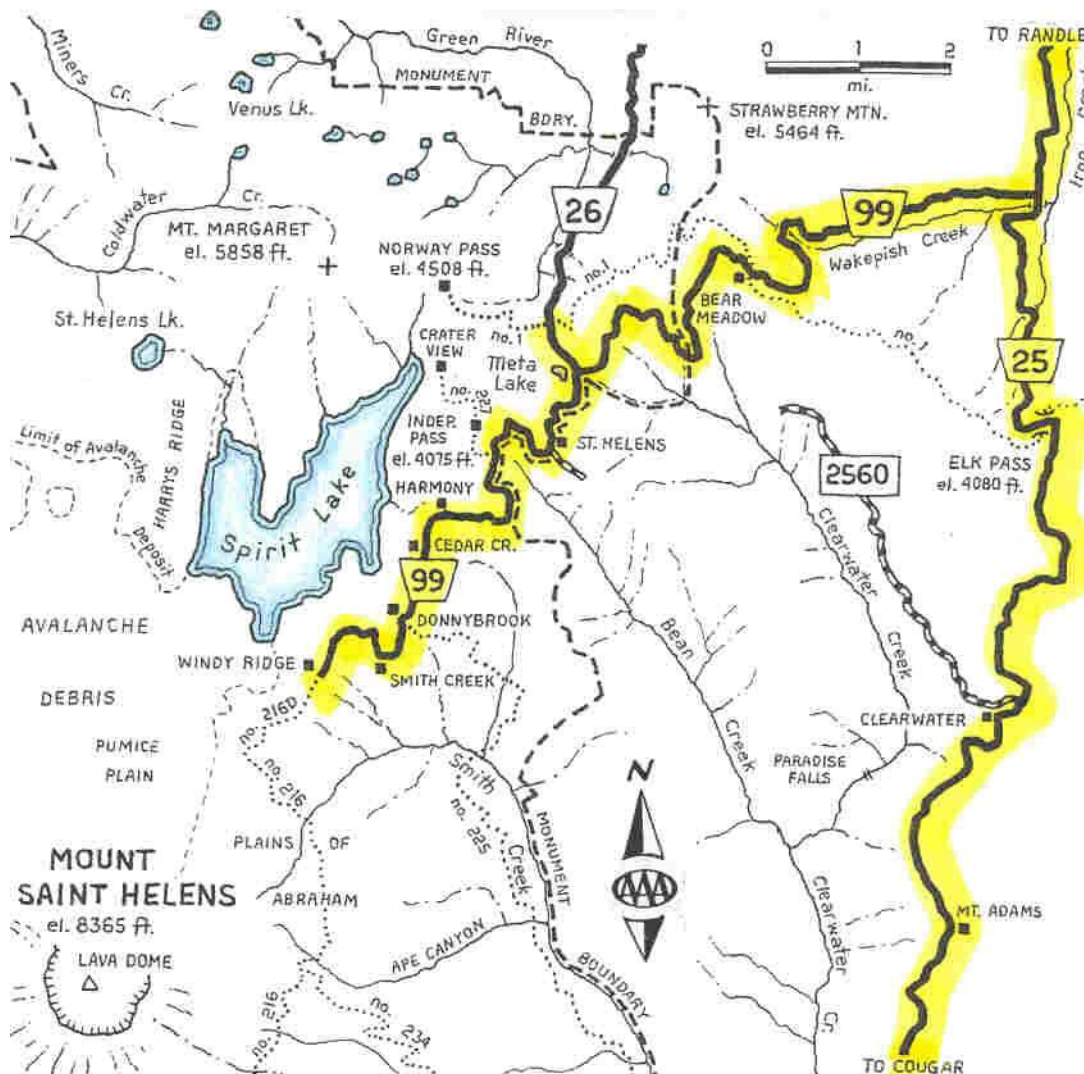
Turn east on US-12, which runs through rolling woodland with patches of prairie. South of **SALKUM** (pop. 320, alt. 562 ft.) Spenser Road runs down to the Cowlitz River where Barrier Dam is a popular fishing site. Thickly forested hills close in on Highway 12, which soon spans **Mayfield Lake**, a 13-mile long reservoir formed behind Mayfield Dam (built in 1963). Popular recreation areas along its 33-mile shoreline include **Ike Kinswa State Park** on the north shore, and **Mayfield Lake County Park** on US-12. Both parks offer camping, picnicking, hiking and water recreation. East of the lake the highway runs through a district noted for its flower growing where fields of daffodils, tulips and gladiolus delight springtime visitors.

Just east of the farming and logging town of **MOSSYROCK** (pop. 490, alt. 698 ft.), the highway crosses a deep gorge, 255 feet above the Cowlitz River. Rounding a bend, the massive concrete face of **Mossyrock Dam** (built in 1968) comes into

view. Rising 606 feet, this is Washington's tallest dam. The **Hydrovista Visitor Center** overlooks 23-mile long Riffe Lake. **Mossyrock Park**, on the lake's southwest shore, offers camping, picnicking and boating.

Highway 12 continues east through forested hills. A narrow, paved road branches north one mile to the crest of **Hopkins Hill**. Here the view stretches 25 miles south to the crater of Mount Saint Helens. Field glasses will greatly enhance the vista. Densely forested peaks surround **MORTON** (pop. 1,140, alt. 956 ft.), an archetype lumber town, settled in the late 1800s (railroad ties were an early specialty). Present-day lumberjacks demonstrate early 20th-century logging techniques during the annual Logger's Jubilee the second weekend in August. You can learn about local history at the **Old Settler's Museum**, located in Gus Backstrom Park. A former logger's skid house is next to the museum. East of town US-12 swings through Fern Gap and at **GLENOMA** (pop. 320, alt. 821 ft.) offers a glimpse of Riffe Lake to the south. A side road leads to **Dog Mountain** on the north bank of the Cowlitz, a popular hang gliding spot.

RANDLE (pop. 850, alt. 901 ft.) is a small logging community. A sawmill was set up here in 1866, although permanent settlement did not begin until the early 1880s. Many of the homesteaders in this district came from southern Appalachia. The **U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station** east of town on Highway 12 provides information on recreation activities and road conditions in the surrounding Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument. SR-131 leads south from Randle into dense woods. After a mile it becomes Forest Service Road (FR) 25. In the lowlands west of the Cascade crest the great North American coniferous forest reaches its maximum development. Where untouched by logging, needle leaf evergreens such as Douglas fir, western red cedar and western hemlock tower over 200 feet. Moss-draped bigleaf maple and red alder form mixed stands. Graceful vine maple and giant fern carpet the forest floor.



After crossing the Cispus River, FR-25, a good two-lane highway, winds eleven miles along the west bank of Iron Creek, gradually gaining elevation. Turn right at the junction with FR-99 – this road follows Wakepish Creek up to the crest of a ridge where the lush forest suddenly gives way to the blast zone, the area devastated by the May, 1980 eruption. The contrast is startling. The severity of damage varied depending on the orientation of the terrain to the volcano. In protected areas, pockets of trees survived. At **Bear Meadow Viewpoint** Gary Rosenquist snapped the famous time-lapse photographs of the eruption showing the explosion and collapse of the volcano's north flank.

At **Meta Lake** (alt. 3,617 ft.), FR-26 (a single-lane, paved road) joins from the north. A mile up FR-26 is **Norway Pass Trailhead**. Here a two-mile trail (number 1) leads west along a ridge to the 4,058-foot pass where views open up across the blast zone to the rugged Mount Margaret backcountry area. Below lies Spirit Lake, and the crater and lava dome of Mount Saint Helens loom off to the south. This is the closest public viewpoint on the monument's east side from which you can gaze directly into the crater.

Back at Meta Lake lie the ruins of a miner's car, abandoned in the cataclysm. FR-99 skirts a ridgeline, offering periodic viewpoints over the upper reaches of Clearwater and Smith creeks, with the Cascade crest on the eastern horizon. A short trail leads west to **Independence Pass Viewpoint** (alt. 4,075 ft.) for a panorama of Spirit Lake. FR-99 ends at **Windy Ridge** (alt. 4,120 ft.), five miles from Saint Helens' crater. A short trail leads to a striking panorama of devastation stretching from the steaming volcano across the pyroclastic flow of Spirit Lake. An 11.8-mile trail leads south, traversing the volcano's lower eastern flanks, through the Plains of Abraham, skirting Ape Canyon, to the Lahar Viewpoint near the end of FR-83.

Retrace the route back down FR-99. Turn right at the junction with FR-25. This two-lane paved road climbs up to the 4,080-foot summit of Elk Pass. Beyond, the road runs along a ridgeline with views alternating east to the Cascade crest and west over the upper Clearwater impact area to Saint Helens. Steadily losing elevation, FR-25 reaches **Muddy Creek**, the site of a mud flow. Large boulders strewn about attest to the power of the flow. Two miles south, the road skirts **Cedar Flats Research Natural Area**, where a hiking trail leads through a stand of old-growth Douglas fir, western red cedar and marshland.

Forest Road 25 ends at the Lewis River Road (FR-90), which turns west, hugging the steep, forested shore of Swift Reservoir.

Twelve miles west of the FR-25 junction turn right on FR-83, which leads to points of interest in the southern part of the monument. Two miles up the road FR-8303 branches west, traversing a lava flow dating back to 85 A.D. The **Trail of Two Forests** (rest rooms, picnic area) offers a loop hike across the lava field. Of interest are the lava casts, left behind when lava cooled and hardened around tree trunks. At **Ape Cave** (alt. 2,080 ft.) you can explore the longest lava tube yet discovered in North America – 12,810 feet. The Forest Service recommends two light sources, sturdy shoes and warm clothes. Lanterns are available for rent during summer at the small interpretive center.

Return to FR-83 and turn left. This road strikes east along the volcano's lower east flanks. About nine miles along we cross **Pine Creek** – note where a mud flow swept down the stream course. Just over a mile further, FR-83 ends amid a cluster of points of interest: **Lahar Viewpoint**, **Ape Canyon** and **Lava Canyon**. Interpretive signs explain these geologic features.

Follow FR-83 back to FR-90 and proceed west. The **Swift Dam Overlook** offers a good view of the southern face of Mount Saint Helens. FR-90 passes several campgrounds along the upper reaches of Yale Lake and soon enters **COUGAR** (pop. 100, alt. 500 ft.), the closest settlement to the volcano. It was spared the injurious effects of the 1980 eruptions, save an occasional dusting of ash. Cougar is the outfitting point for excursions into the southern sections of the monument.

Highway 503 leads south from Cougar, runs along the shore of Yale Lake, and passes a picnic area. At the SR-503 "Y" junction, turn left. The road winds over the wooded shoulder of Speelyai Hill. At the crest of the ridge pull off the road for an excellent view back to the volcano's truncated cone. Consider that before the 1980 eruption disfigured the peak, Saint Helens' near-perfect symmetrical cone was known as the "Mount Fiji of the Northwest."

SR-503 twists down to the Lewis River. Look upstream (right) to the high, earthen face of Yale Dam. The road winds through forested, hilly terrain, emerging onto a small farming valley at **CHELATCHIE** (pop. 30, alt. 505 ft.), where a ranger station houses the administrative headquarters of the Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument.

Just down the highway is the farming community of **AMBOY** (pop. 370, alt. 400 ft.). Eight miles west of town on County Road 16 is the **Cedar Creek Grist Mill**. Erected in 1874, this is the oldest structure of its kind in Washington and is listed

on the National Register of Historic Places. The nearby **Cedar Creek Covered Bridge** was built in 1995 on the site of an earlier covered span.

An alternate route heads four miles south from Amboy, to **YACOLT** (pop. 1,370, alt. 707 ft.) nestled among the foothills. The Yacolt Burn, part of a series of disastrous forest fires in 1902, encouraged the development of coordinated fire fighting efforts including a fire lookout system. The **Chelatchie Prairie Railroad** offers excursion train rides on selected weekends and holidays from March into December. County Road 16 swings around Moulton Falls County Park to the **Pomerooy Living History Farm**, an authentic 1920 homestead hosting periodic theme events. You can continue west on the Lucia Falls Road to SR-503.

From Amboy Highway 503 swings south through increasingly open farming country – dairy pastures, fields of corn and berries, orchards and vineyards alternate with woody patches of oak and fir. After crossing the East Fork Lewis River (Lewisville County Park is a nice spot for a picnic) a sign points east to **Battle Ground State Park**, offering camping, picnicking and lake swimming. The 28-acre lake occupies the caldera of an ancient collapsed volcano. The nearby city of **BATTLE GROUND** (pop. 16,240, alt. 290 ft.), founded in 1888, trades with one of the most fertile farming districts in western Washington. The town's name derives from an 1870s dispute between settlers and Native Americans that never developed into actual battle. The railway running through the heart of town once carried logs to area mills. The **VENERSBORG** (alt. 504 ft.) district, six miles east of town via NE 199th Street, settled originally by Swedes, has a historic school and general store, both built in 1912.

From Battle Ground proceed west on SR-502 through productive farming country. At the junction with I-5 head north – Mount Saint Helens is visible on the north horizon. The farming community of **RIDGEFIELD** (pop. 3,680, alt. 60 ft.) stands several miles west of I-5, overlooking a bayou and the fertile floodplain of the mighty Columbia River. **Lancaster House** dates back to 1850 and is one of the state's oldest structures. Browse through **Ridgefield Hardware**, an authentic early 1900s mercantile. The **Ridgefield National Wildlife Area** (headquarters in town) stretches across the flats beyond the bayou. It protects habitat for a variety of waterfowl, especially Canada geese. The $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile **Oak Grove Nature Trail** begins a half-mile north of town via Main Street. The **Cathlapotle Plankhouse** is a replica of a Chinookan structure.

Near **Paradise Point State Park** (camping) I-5 drops down a bluff to cross the East Fork of the Lewis River. Several miles upstream, the town of **LA CENTER** (pop. 2,440, alt. 110 ft.), east of I-5 exit 16, was a bustling river port in the late 19th century. The remains of one of the old sternwheelers sits in the river just west of the bridge. The town hosts a farmer's market on summer Saturdays.

WOODLAND (pop. 4,960, alt. 25 ft.) straddles the Lewis River two miles above its confluence with the Columbia. Dikes protect the flood-prone farmland which gives the area its prosperity. Many Finns settled this district in the early 1900s. A park, four miles east of town on SR-503 marks the site of **Old Finn Hall**, a Finnish social center erected in 1916. In town watch for signing to the **Hulda Klager Lilac Gardens**, a 4.5-acre estate off I-5 exit 21. The 1889 Victorian farmhouse is open during the mid-April to mid-May bloom season.

North of Woodland a rocky ridge pinches out the farmland – the freeway skirts its base, overlooking the broad Columbia. The town of **KALAMA** (pop. 2,105, alt. 21 ft.) fronts the river and its busy shipping channel. The local economy has depended on the river since 1870 when the Northern Pacific Railroad made it the site of a train ferry on the Seattle-Portland mainline. A large riverside grain terminal south of town exports the golden harvest of the vast wheat-growing district east of the Cascades. **Marine Park** (picnicking, marina) has the world's tallest single-tree totem pole (149 feet). Kalama's central business district sports a collection of antique shops. Its pleasant residential neighborhoods climb the wooded heights above the river. Kalama was the site of the state's first fish hatchery, replaced by two newer facilities east of town.

I-5 continues north to **KELSO** (pop. 11,840, alt. 26 ft.), straddling the Cowlitz River, noted for its late-winter run of smelt. The planned city of **LONGVIEW** (pop. 35,710, alt. 13 ft.), established in 1923, adjoins Kelso to the west. Attractions in the twin-cities include the **Volcano Information Center**, off I-5 exit 39; **Cowlitz County Museum**, west of the freeway on Allen Street. Across the river in Longview take a look at the historic **Monticello Hotel**, built in 1923. A plaque in a park at 18th, Maple and Olympia avenues marks the site of the "Monticello Convention." Here in 1852 settlers petitioned Congress to create a new territory from that portion of Oregon lying north of the Columbia. Just up Olympia Avenue is the unique **Nutty Narrows**, a bridge offering squirrels safe passage above the traffic. Longview's waterfront is a major port for forest products. Huge ships load wood chips and logs for export largely to the Far East. Behind the piles of wood giant mills process pulp into paper.

North of Kelso I-5 follows the Cowlitz River. Green hills frame its narrow valley. After the May, 1980 eruption clogged the Cowlitz with mud, huge dredges labored for months to clear the channel. The result is visible all along the river from just south of Kelso to where I-5 crosses the Toutle River north of Castle Rock. Brush and grass now cover these dredge spoils.

MOUNT SAINT HELENS NATIONAL VOLCANIC MONUMENT

The Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument, established by Congress in 1982, is a 110,000-acre preserve dedicated to protect the scenic geologic features in the volcanic impact area for public recreation, interpretation, education and research. The monument is administered by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

A number of visitor centers operate around the monument. The **MOUNT ST. HELENS SILVER LAKE VISITOR CENTER** is five miles east of I-5 exit 49 at Castle Rock. It provides pictorial and interpretive exhibits, including video programs and a working seismograph. The center, operated by Washington State Parks, is open daily. Phone (360) 274-0962

The **COLDWATER RIDGE VISITOR CENTER**, 47 miles east of Castle Rock via SR-504, perches on a ridge overlooking the devastated area along the upper Toutle River, Coldwater Lake and the crater of Mt. St. Helens. This facility closed until further notice in November, 2007.

JOHNSTON RIDGE OBSERVATORY, 7 miles beyond Coldwater Ridge, overlooks St. Helens's crater and lava dome. Exhibits focus on the geology of the volcano. The observatory is open daily 10am to 6pm, from May to October, weather permitting. Phone (360) 274-2140.

There are no accommodations and few campgrounds within the monument. AAA recommended lodgings are available in Castle Rock, Salkum, Morton, Packwood, Woodland, Kelso and Longview. Check current AAA *Oregon-Washington TourBook* and *Northwestern CampBook* for more information.

ADMISSION - Visits to some developed sites in the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument require a fee. A Monument Pass (\$8 for over age 15), or Northwest Forest Pass (\$3 per vehicle) is required at Johnston Ridge. The Northwest Forest Pass is required at sites on the east and south side of the monument. The America the Beautiful-National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Passes are also valid at the above mentioned sites.

PETS - Pets should be kept under control and supervision at all times.

CLIMBING INFORMATION - Mount St. Helens can be climbed from the south. All climbers must register and a permit is required for travel above the 4,800-foot elevation on the volcano. A quota season limiting the number of climbers to 100 per day is in effect from April through October. For more information, phone the Climbing Hotline - (360) 449-7861.

SIGHTSEEING - Helicopter flights are offered at Hoffstadt Bluffs late May through September; phone (360) 274-7750. Seattle Seaplanes offers scenic flights to Mt. Rainier and Mt. St. Helens from Seattle's Lake Union; phone (206) 329-9368 or (800) 637-5553.

ADDRESS -
Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument
42218 NE Yale Bridge Road,
Amboy, WA 98601 – Phone (360) 449-7800.

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