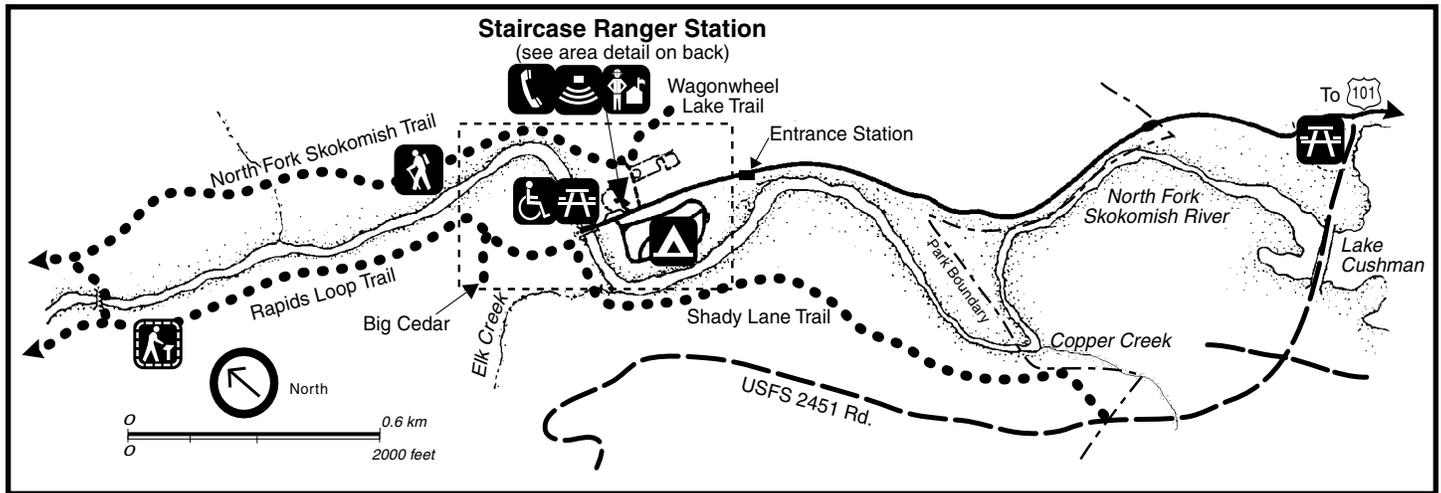


# Olympic



Olympic National Park

## Staircase Area



## A Legacy of Fire

Enormous trunks reach for the sky, lacy limbs stretch to the sun, grooved bark is sanctuary to tiny creatures in the vast cathedral of Douglas-firs that dominate the forests on this side of the Olympic Peninsula. A tree that grows best on bare mineral soil with loads of sunlight, the Douglas-fir's survival depends on that most fearsome but respected of forces—fire. The eastern Olympics experience large scale natural fires every 300-400 years. Thick bark protects mature trees, so they can survive to produce seeds that repopulate burned areas. Flames burn away organic forest floor debris, giving Douglas-fir seeds access to the soil they need. Fire also kills understory plants that may intercept the young sapling's sunlight.

Along with death for some forest plants, fire brings life for the system as a whole. In a national park, preserving natural processes like fire is an important goal. Without it, the Douglas-firs would leave no heirs and be replaced by shade-tolerant hemlocks, not Douglas-firs. The forest structure would change; the cathedral pillars would crumble.

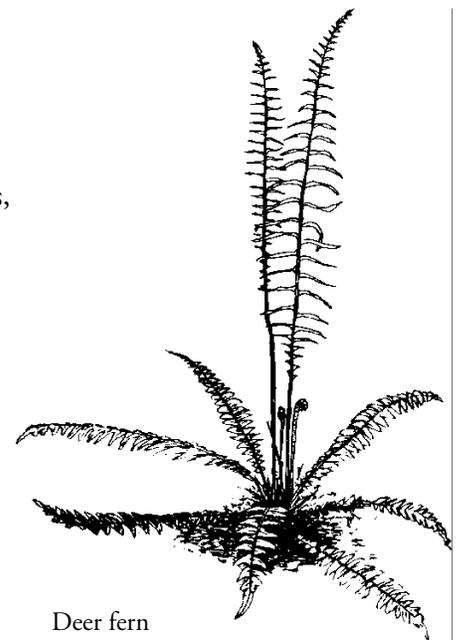
### Staircase Information

**Facilities:** **Staircase Road:** open year-round weather permitting. If snowy, may be gated at park boundary (about 1 mile from end). Call (360) 565-3131 for status.

**Staircase Ranger Station:** open in summer when staffing allows, with information, exhibits, wilderness permits, bear canisters, map sales and wheelchair available for checkout. Stock corral, trails and accessible restroom and picnic area nearby.

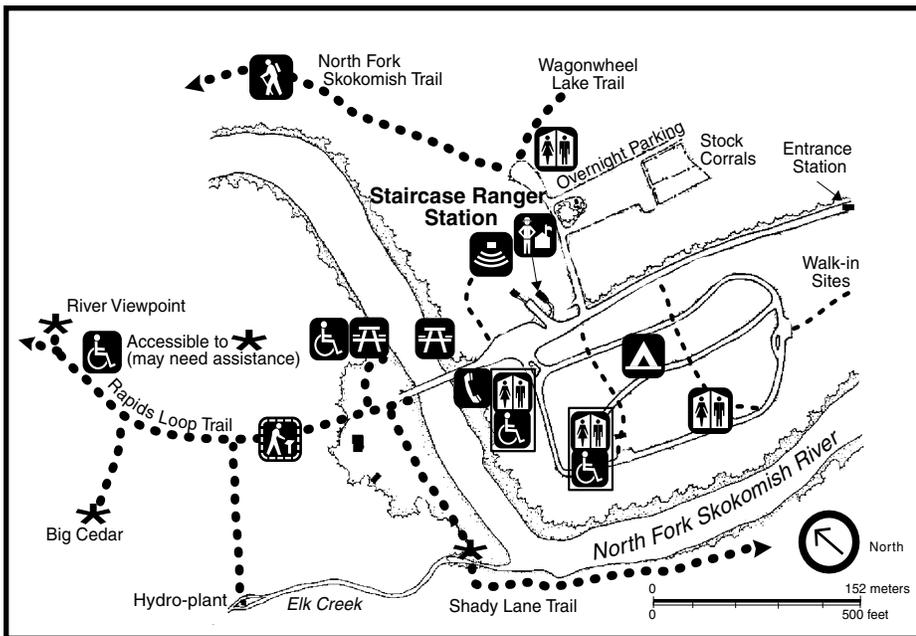
**Camping:** 50 sites, picnic tables, fire rings, accessible restrooms, potable water, animal-proof food lockers. Pit toilets and no water or trash collection mid fall into May. Snow may limit RV access.

**Regulations:** Pets and bicycles are not permitted on park trails. Wilderness permits are required for all overnight hikes in the park and are limited for Flapjack Lakes. See [www.nps.gov/olym](http://www.nps.gov/olym) for more information about permits and reservations. Above 3,500 feet fires are not allowed; stoves only.



Deer fern





## Final Frontiers

In 1890, Lieutenant Joseph P. O'Neil led the first exploratory expedition across the entire southern stretch of the Olympic Mountains. His group of soldiers and scientists surveyed the watersheds and peaks of nine rivers and their tributaries. They cut a 5-foot swath of trail across 93 miles of wilderness. More than 100 years later, you can follow their lead and hike part of that same trail into the wilds along the North Fork Skokomish River.

In an era when exploitation went unchecked in the northwest, O'Neil set a camp rule—no animal was to be shot unless it was needed for food. He worked hard to uncover the mysteries of this vast wilderness, and his one wish for the future was that it retain its wild character. A place with animal populations and ancient forests still intact. A place where people could come, forever, to gaze upon magnificent, unaltered beauty.

*It has no geysers but every other requisite for a national park, as many wonders and natural beauties as can be found in any localities....*

Lt. Joseph P. O'Neil, 1890

## Day Hikes Around Staircase

- Staircase Rapids Loop:** This easy 2-mile trail winds through old growth forest to a bridge over the North Fork Skokomish River with only a 200-foot elevation gain. A spur trail leads to a huge fallen cedar. The 0.6 miles to the Big Cedar, and the 0.5 mile section to a river viewpoint are accessible with assistance.
- Four Stream:** Pass Staircase Rapids Bridge on southwest side of river and hike 1.2 miles to Beaver Flat, a swampy section of red alder and redcedar forest where Four Stream meets the river. Elevation loss 100 feet.
- Wagonwheel Lake:** 2.9 miles, with an elevation gain of 3,365 feet. Strenuous hike up forested slopes, with occasional mountain views.
- Shady Lane:** Flat 0.9 mile to Four Stream Road and Lake Cushman. First 0.1 mile is accessible to wheelchair users.
- Flapjack Lakes:** 7.8-mile one-way hike with a 3,115 foot elevation gain; a day hike only for very strong hikers.
- North Fork Skokomish River:** Dayhikers can walk the valley part of this 15.1-mile trail that leads eventually to the Duckabush River.

### How Staircase Got Its Name

You will see no staircase at Staircase today. In 1890, when Lt. O'Neil and his crew blazed their trail through the Skokomish wilderness, the rock bluff across the river from the campground was a major obstacle. To get over it they built a cedar staircase. Until the Shady Lane Trail was built in 1911, the *Devil's Staircase* was the only path over the bluff. The name, and O'Neil's legacy, remains.

