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TIGER MOUNTAIN STATE FOREST: West Tiger Mountain Three Loop



KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

LENGTH: 5.1 miles round-trip

CONFIGURATION: Loop

DIFFICULTY: Moderate–difficult

SCENERY: Tradition Lake, summit views, huge boulders and caves at the Talus Rocks area, a section of seldom-used trail on popular Tiger Mountain

EXPOSURE: Mostly shaded

TRAFFIC: High on the way up, low on the way down

TRAIL SURFACE: Mostly dirt, a few sections of gravel

HIKING TIME: 3–4 hours

ACCESS: Hikable year-round; no fee for parking or park access

MAPS: Green Trails—Tiger Mountain 204S; USGS Fall City

FACILITIES: Restroom at trailhead; no drinking water available

IN BRIEF

Although Number Three is the lowest of West Tiger Mountain's triple summits, the view from the top is as good as from any of them. This fun loop takes a direct line to the popular peak, then descends a secluded route through the mountain's lush forests to explore some interesting natural features at Talus Rocks and Tradition Lake.

DESCRIPTION

With more than 80 miles of trails spread over 13,500 acres of land, Tiger Mountain attracts outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds. It is also large and complicated enough that it is possible for visitors to get lost, so it's a good idea to bring a map.

While mountain bikers are mostly restricted to the trails and logging roads in the working forest of East Tiger, hikers tend to stay in the 4,500-acre Natural Resources Conservation Area on West Tiger. Most come to the busy High Point trailhead, bringing families, dogs, and anyone else they can find along with them. High Point provides access to a multitude of trails laid out on the nearby Tradition Plateau, where the linking of countless small segments allows for the creation of many easy loops. The climbs to any of West

GPS Trailhead Coordinates

UTM Zone (NAD27) 10T

Easting 0575772

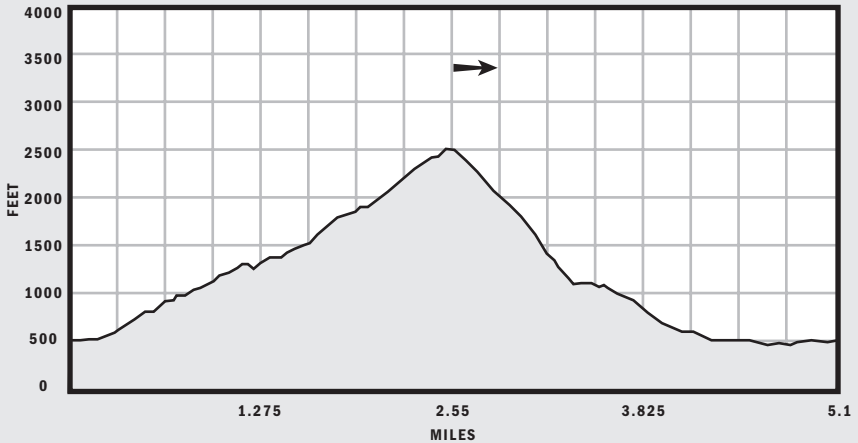
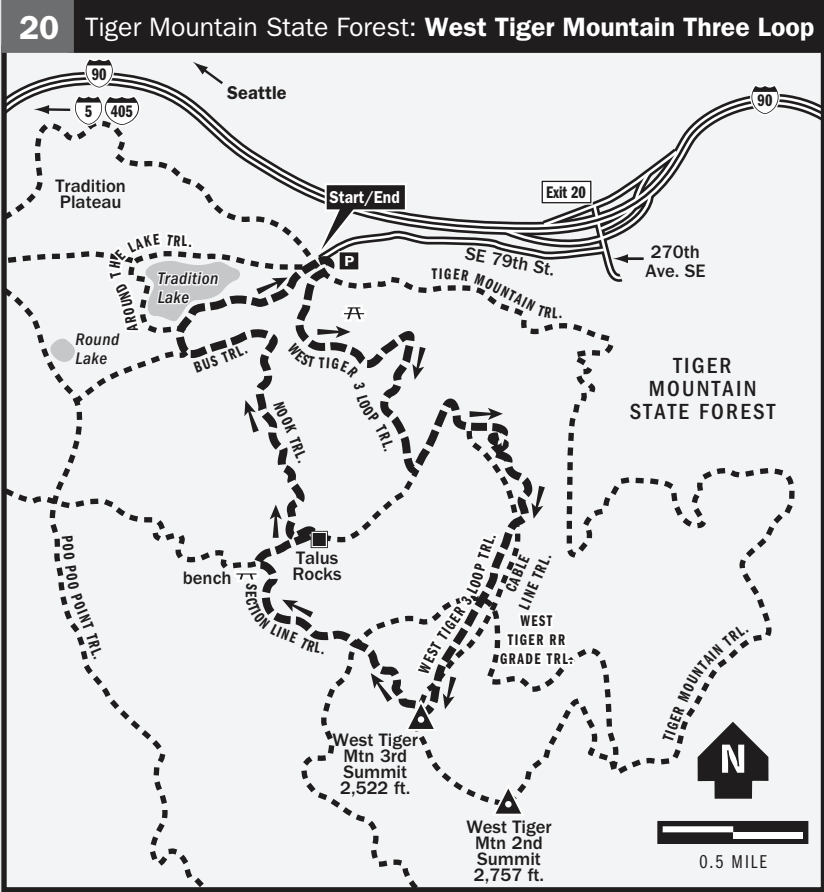
Northing 5264293

Latitude North 47° 31.767"

Longitude West 121° 59.676"

Directions

From I-5 south of downtown Seattle, go east on I-90. Take Exit 20, High Point, and turn right onto 270th Avenue SE. Immediately turn right again onto SE 79th Street and continue past the end of the paved road through a gate (closes at dusk). The West Tiger Mountain High Point trailhead parking area is on the left about 0.5 miles up the gravel road from the gate.



Tiger's numbered peaks attract plenty of traffic as well, especially to West Tiger Three, the closest summit to the trailhead. However, it is possible to escape the crowds on this hike with an alternate route on the descent.

The start of the hike can be confusing, with a small maze of trails running between an educational shelter, a picnic area, a latrine, and an informational kiosk on the southern side of the parking lot. The true trailhead can be found by following various signs to the trails below the power lines at the western end.

At a four-way intersection, head south through a wooden split-rail fence, signed as West Tiger Three Trail, and start hiking on a gravel surface lined with wooden planks. Moments later, head off the gravel to the left and pass through another gate to follow a muddy dirt track wide enough to be a reclaimed road, also signed for West Tiger Three Trail.

Stay straight at an intersection with Tiger Mountain Trail (TMT) to continue on West Tiger Three Trail, which soon begins to climb in earnest. The footing becomes rougher, with many rounded stones set in the ground.

About 0.8 miles from the trailhead, the trail crosses a creek and intersects with the Connector Trail, branching to the right. Stay left, continuing to climb through a bright-green forest of ferns and moss. The forest is perpetually damp here, keeping the track muddy at all times. Even though the Issaquah Alps do not scrape as much rain from the clouds as the higher Cascades farther east, the western side of Tiger gets plenty of year-round precipitation, which falls almost exclusively as rain at this elevation.

Head sharply to the right just above 1,300 feet to mount a short ridge. West Tiger Cable Line Trail comes up the steep slope from the left and runs with the main trail for a short distance before exiting again on the right. Cable Line Trail runs straight up to the summit, forgoing switchbacks and crossing West Tiger Three Trail many times. It is possible to follow the unmaintained Cable Line, although it is considerably rougher and steeper than the main trail.

In the next mile, the trail swings through a series of switchbacks and enters a glade of tall evergreens. Tiger Mountain was once extensively logged for its western red cedars, so few remain on the lower-elevation slopes. Although this section has also been harvested in the past, it nonetheless gives a better idea of what the mountain's original forests once looked like. Enjoy the easier grade through the trees, the last significant break before the ascent resumes on the far side of the flats.

Cross a junction with West Tiger Railroad Grade Trail and continue uphill, following a sign to West Tiger Three. After several more intersections with the Cable Line, the trail emerges from the trees on an open ridge with views out to the northeast, including I-90, Mount Si, and the nearby radio towers of West Tiger Two.

The summit lies just beyond at 2,522 feet, a clearing with a broad view over Tiger Mountain State Forest. To the south, Mount Rainier rises above the trees on the West Tiger Two ridgeline, and Squak and Cougar mountains can be seen

in front of downtown Seattle and the Olympic Mountains to the west. For the ambitious, a trail continues from the far side of the clearing to climb the forested ridge to the other two West Tiger summits, each a few hundred feet higher.

To start the descent, head downhill on the unsigned Cable Line Trail, the widest route leaving the summit to the north, just west of West Tiger Three Trail. After only about 50 yards on the rocky surface, the single-track Section Line Trail drops off to the left. The start of the trail is neither signed nor obvious, so be sure to look carefully. If there is snow on the ground, the trail can be particularly hard to find and follow at the top, so a better option may be to descend the way you came until you reach the junction with West Tiger Railroad Grade, then head west (a left turn when traveling downhill) a half mile until you reach the signed junction with Section Line Trail.

The path drops steeply on a narrow and tricky surface of roots, mud, and fallen needles, but the quiet of the forest more than makes up for it. Although the Section Line Trail is unmaintained, there is minimal undergrowth in the area, making the route easy to travel. The sounds of birds singing are the rule here, rather than the loud voices and dog barking typical at the summit.

After a drop of about 500 feet in 0.4 miles, reach a junction with the wide West Tiger Railroad Grade Trail, which provides another way to reach this point (as described above). Continue straight down the hill, signed as Section Line Trail, losing another 800 feet in a steep drop over the next half mile.

Take a sharp turn to the right at a wooden bench, signed for Talus Rocks Trail and Nook Trail, and leave Section Line Trail. The connector runs only about 0.25 miles before meeting Nook Trail.

A quick side trip to the right, signed as Talus Rocks Loop Trail, is well worth the minimal effort required. The loop's name does little to illuminate its destination; talus typically refers to a pile of small, loose rocks at the base of a cliff or steep slope, but this trail actually runs through a series of giant glacial erratic boulders. The rocks are covered in ferns and moss, with some shallow caves, alcoves, and overhangs underneath, all suitable for exploration. The trail itself travels an inventive route, climbing over some of the boulders and squeezing through small gaps between others.

Return to the previous junction and head downhill on the signed Nook Trail, which follows a gradual descent about 0.8 miles before ending at a T-junction with Bus Trail. Head left on the wide, gravel Bus Trail, likely joining other hikers there.

A flat 0.25 miles leads to the trail's namesake, an old, rusted-out bus frame laying on its side in the woods to the right and looking like a forgotten war-zone relic. Just past the bus, continue on the gravel trail (signed as Connector Trail) as it bends around to the right. After another 500 feet, turn right, on the signed Around the Lake Trail.

The waters of Tradition Lake are visible through the trees, although it is difficult to actually reach the shore. Access used to be easier, but it was restricted



Tree on Around-the-Lake Trail

in the early 1990s to protect nesting birds in the wetlands from being disturbed by frequent human traffic. Around the Lake Trail is dead flat and circles around the lake heading east about a half mile before returning you to the High Point trailhead, where you began.

NEARBY ACTIVITIES

The Gilman Town Hall Museum provides a good look into pioneer life in Issaquah, dating back to when the settlement was known as Gilman. The restored building looks as if it was lifted straight off a Western movie set, and the original concrete jailhouse out back is complete with iron bars on the windows. To reach the museum, head west on I-90 to Exit 18 and follow E Sunset Way into Issaquah. The museum is at 165 SE Andrews Street, one block south of Sunset Way, between First and Second avenues. For more information, contact the Issaquah Historical Society on the Web at www.issaquahhistory.org or call (425) 392-3500.