

History of Paradise

Located in the southwest corner of the park, Paradise is aptly named and there are few locations within the entire national park system that are this stunning. Nestled on the south slopes of the glacier-shrouded volcano at an elevation of 5,400 feet with stunning views of wildflower meadows, Paradise is 19 miles inside the southwest Nisqually entrance of the park.

Getting here is easy but that was not always the case. Most visitors to Mount Rainier in the early 1900's were not content to end their trip at Longmire Springs and wanted to experience the panoramic views and wildflower meadows that have made Paradise the most popular area in the park. From Longmire Springs they took the trail built by Leonard Longmire and Henry Carter in 1892, paying a small toll, and proceeded upwards often stopping at Carter Falls and Narada Falls to rest. In early 1895, a coffee shop called the Paradise Hotel and a tent camp were established providing services to the ever increasing numbers of people visiting the area and in 1898; John L. Reese combined the two operations and name it Camp of the Clouds. Although visitors were generally satisfied with the camp, they wanted nicer accommodations and the demand for better sanitation increased in 1911, the first full season that it was possible to take horse drawn vehicles all the way to the Camp of the Clouds.



Historic Paradise Inn and Annex in background

As the need increased for a hotel and other services in the Paradise area, a corporation of local Tacoma businessmen from Tacoma formed the Rainier National Park Company (RNPC) and began construction of the Paradise Inn. John Reese sold his camp to RNPC in 1916 to house construction crews as they worked on the



President Harry Truman playing the Piano at Paradise Inn

new first-class Paradise Inn. In spite of the short construction season, the crew nearly completed the Paradise Inn during the summer of 1916 at an initial cost of \$91,000 not including furnishings or equipment. Decorative woodwork that still exists today was designed by Hans Frahnke, a German carpenter, who stayed in the inn during the winter of 1919. His craftsmanship includes imposing cedar chairs and tables, a rustic piano, and ornate grandfather clock.

The Paradise Inn was designed by a Tacoma architect and built in the popular style of the period with the building's large timber frame exposed on the interior. The timber used for the interior décor of the building was cut from dead Alaska cedars that had been fire-killed in the Silver Forest just below Narada Falls, and had seasoned to a light grey or silver hue.

The trees were hauled by horses to the construction site and raised into position without the benefit of diesel-powered cranes. The Paradise Inn opened for business in July 1917 with thirty seven guest rooms and a dining capacity for four hundred guests. Platform tent structures were built

behind the Inn to house additional guests and meals were announced when the dining room manager blew a whistle from the back porch. In 1920 with the increased demand for lodging, RNPC completed their first addition to Paradise Inn, a 104-room wing they called the annex. In 1930, the tents surrounding the inn were removed and RNPC built 275 housekeeping cabins and a central service building with a cafeteria, camp store, and 40 guest rooms. The building was called the Paradise Lodge and opened to the public on June 20, 1931.



Housekeeping Cabins at Mount Rainier Paradise Area

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The Great Depression had a mixed effect on people's ability to visit Mount Rainier as well as lodging preferences. Tourists who could not afford a room in the Paradise Inn wanted to stay in the small housekeeping cabins and RNPC was faced with shrinking revenues as the newly redecorated Paradise Inn experienced room vacancies on weekends in July while waitresses stood around with nothing to do in the inn's elegant dining room. A decline of visitation during the war essentially prolonged the economic depression and RNPC closed down Paradise Lodge and operated Paradise Inn on the "European Plan" (substituting cafeteria-style food service for full dining services). In 1943 they sold the housekeeping cabins for \$160 each to real estate companies and the cabins were removed from the park to alleviate housing shortages among war industry worker in the Puget Sound area and migrant farmers in Yakima Valley.



In



Third Green at Mount Rainier

Another development also took place at Paradise in 1930-31. The NPS approved a request by the RNPC to put in a nine-hole golf course. This short-lived experiment completed in 1931 was justified on the grounds that golfing was a form of outdoor recreation and would not detract from the mountain setting.

To further develop day use in Paradise, construction of the Paradise Visitor Center (later renamed the Henry M. Jackson Memorial Center) began in 1964 and was completed in 1966. At \$2 million, it was the most expensive building in the national park system and the modern design of the center was met with mixed reactions. The public's growing concern about the pace of development increased when the Paradise Lodge was burned to the ground in 1965, during the construction of the visitor center, to make way for additional parking. NPS officials assured the public that the Paradise Inn would remain standing and it was later listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is an important part of the park's National Historic Landmark District.



Old Jackson Visitor Center under Construction

A smaller and more efficient visitor center opened in 2008, replacing the original structure. Located within walking distance of the Paradise Inn, it blends better with the surrounding environment and the center's architecture is truer to the area's historic setting.



Wildflower Fields

In spite of the many changes, Paradise Inn remains in its grand old state, barely changed from the 1920's when traveler's came looking for a place to stay amidst the great beauty of grandeur of Mount Rainier. Visitors continue to come from around the world to experience spectacular views of massive glaciers, meadows lush with wildflowers, breathtaking waterfalls, and wildlife all in this glorious mountain "Paradise."