

Pacific Northwest SOTA Newsletter

May – June 2017

Mount Rainer from Tolmie Peak – W7W/RS-035, photo by Darryl-WW7D

Soggy Northwest – If you have wondered why W7O and W7W summits haven't been on the air much this winter and spring, let it be known that Seattle has 'enjoyed' record rainfall and also a record of sun-free days. Seattle measured 44.7 inches (114 centimeters) of rain between October and April, making it the wettest such period since records began in 1895. In Portland, 45.5 inches (116 centimeters) of rain at Portland International Airport since October 1st, making it the second-wettest winter in the city in more than 75 years.

Upcoming Pacific Northwest Events – Here are some events that I would encourage everyone to consider. The SOTA Gathering at SeaPac is especially fun as we have a chance to connect faces to callsigns and share our SOTA stories in person. Please join us!

- **June 2: SOTA Gathering at SeaPac – 6pm at Pizza Harbor, Seaside, Oregon**
- June 3-4: SeaPac in Seaside, Oregon. Our own Andrew-NO6E will be presenting a seminar on SOTA on Saturday at 10am - *"Summits On The Air - In your hiking boots or bathrobe."*
- June 10-11: North America SOTA Summer Activity Weekend + ARRL June VHF Contest

Be the Chaser – Watch out for those Ten Pointers – Or eight pointers, or even some six pointers. Consider those folks that do the serious alpine climbs and might only can carry a HT up the mountain. If conditions aren't perfect, they could really use some help to gather four contacts in the few minutes they have on the summit. So if you have 2m FM on at home, in the car or on another summit you might offer up the QSO that that climbing activator needs for points.

There are currently two of these in the alerts – Jenny-K7GEN on Mount St. Helens for May 7 and Peter-K3OG on Mount Rainier on June 30. Every once in a while I do a text search of alerts on [SOTAWatch](#) for W7O or W7W peaks and see what activators are doing near me. And then I might make a note in my calendar or even plan to be on a summit that can "see" that the top of their ten-point peak.

Summit Resources and Prominence – Occasionally you come across a summit that rises above others nearby, has a great trail and a fantastic view. But it's not a SOTA Summit – what gives? It's because SOTA Summits in the west have at least 150 meters (496 feet) of prominence, or independence, from other summits. The Oregon side of the Columbia River Gorge is a great example – it's a long ridge that tops out at nearly 5,000 feet – but has only three qualified SOTA summits along the river – Larch Mountain, Mount Defiance and off limits Palmer Peak are the only ones that stand out by more than 150 meters along the ridge.

If you've read that some Association Reference Manuals have been updated with a different number of summits and found it confusing – know that the mountains have not moved. Summits are added and removed from the SOTA database because survey techniques are constantly improving and the exact location and elevation of mountains can be updated over time.

John Kirk of www.listsofjohn.com maintains a comprehensive database of all summits in the US. So if you are wondering about the prominence of that “non-SOTA” peak you've been thinking about, you can look it up there. Google Earth is my favorite way to look at SOTA summits – I can see roads and sometimes trails and the proximity to other summits is very clear. Dan-KK7DS has developed a brilliant tool for GPS or Google Earth points that can be found [here](#).

The Internet is My Elmer – Here we have a guest editorial by Brian-N9ADG of the ARRL Contest Update. He points to the way that many of us learn about our hobby these days – but is the Internet our best source?

“We're at the highest number of licensed Amateurs in the U.S., ever. But, if you're on HF on a weekday, the bands seem pretty quiet, and not just because of conditions. According to the licensing statistics, the major growth has been in the Technician license class. So it's easy to rationalize that's the reason we're not seeing people on HF. Yet, most UHF and VHF repeaters don't seem that busy, either, with the exception of some of the DMR talk groups. The UHF/VHF contest participation numbers are not showing growth reflective of those thirty thousand new hams last year. Some recent evidence suggests the growth is coming from those that are using their privileges as part of their interest in emergency preparedness. Whew! Conventional wisdom is that EMCOMM is a “gateway into Amateur Radio” and that a reasonable number of those new hams will eventually discover the fun of other aspects of Amateur Radio, and we'll see them on HF, or in contests, or DX pileups, eventually. But is that really true?

I posit that it's likely that now, people entering Amateur Radio for a particular purpose never will discover all our hobby has to offer - because they don't have to leave the comfort zone of their own special interest, and don't perceive a need for Amateur Radio for anything else.

Back in the old days, AKA pre-Internet, someone entering the hobby likely did so with the assistance of an Elmer, someone with whom they had personal contact. It could have been a schoolteacher, neighbor, relative, someone from a local radio club. That person would have had their own interests, and being a ham, their own opinions, on the kind of Amateur their protégé should become. Sometimes that would help, and sometimes that would hinder someone's journey to getting their ticket...but they'd get exposed to things that their Elmer thought they should know about.

Today, one can realize they need a license to further their goal to say, fly a high-altitude balloon around the globe and track it via the Internet. But, with thousands of information sources available via their web browser on how to quickly get their license, they don't get exposed to anything other than the minimum. They don't even need to talk to anyone except the Volunteer Examiner.

For all of these new specific-use-focused licensees, how are they going to learn about the breadth and depth of opportunity that their license represents?”

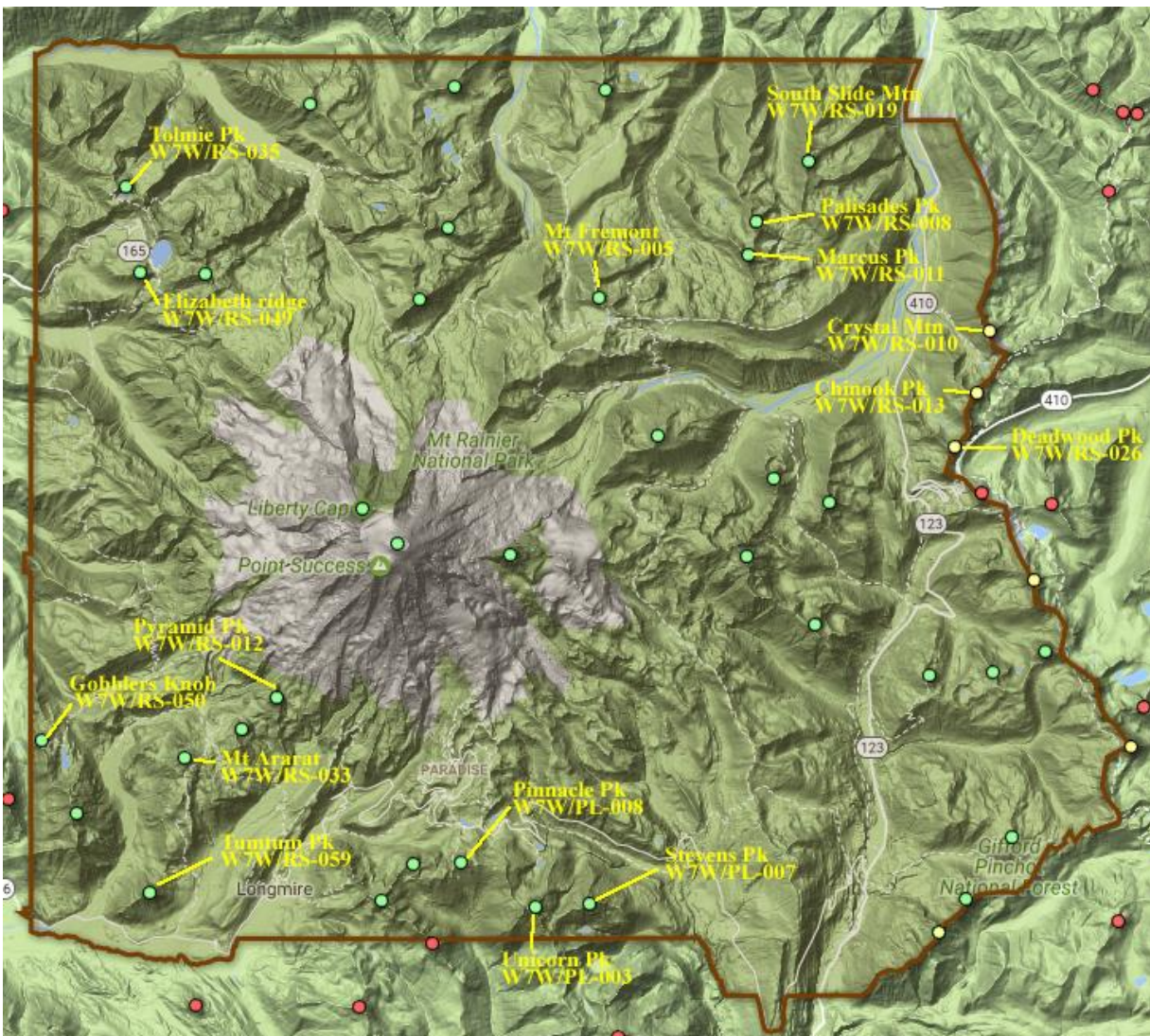
(Credit to the ARRL Contest Update of April 19, 2017)

Taking SOTA to Mt. Rainier National Park by Darryl-WW7D, AM for W7W

Washington has the great fortune to have three large national parks, and all three are packed with SOTA summits. Mount Rainier National Park is perhaps the most accessible of the three. One thing that makes the park quite interesting is Mt. Rainier itself, the most prominent summit in the continental U.S. *The Mountain*, as she is known, has three SOTA summits, and all three involve an advanced level of climbing for conditioned climbers. Even if Mt. Rainier isn't on your bucket list, *The Mountain* makes for a spectacular backdrop from the many more accessible summits in the park. On a clear day, a view of Mt. Rainier in your face is a splendid reward for climbing and activating one of the other park summits.

In this article, I'll highlight a number of park summits that are available to SOTA activators of all levels. These are summits that have had SOTA activations and have some good information available to would-be activators.

Mount Rainier National Park falls within the Rainier—Salish SOTA region (W7W/RS-xxx), although a few of the southern summits in the park are included within the Pacific Lewis region (W7W/PL-xxx). The park itself has 42 SOTA summits, including a number of that are right along the park border. The park itself is accessible from several directions, so I'll describe groups of summits according to how they are accessed. In many cases, it is feasible to activate more than one summit in an outing.



Let's start at the northwest corner. Mowich Lake Road, also known as Highway 165, turns into a gravel highway about 10 miles before it ends at the Mowich Lake park entrance. From there it is another five miles down a dirt road to Mowich Lake. The road frequently has long stretches with nasty potholes, but is usually accessible to all but the lowest clearance vehicles. There is plenty of parking at the lake and along the road, but it still fills up on a busy hiking day. Early in the year, check the [road status](#)...in some years, the entrance doesn't open until July.

- Tolmie Peak (W7W/RS-035) is a spectacular destination with a fire lookout near its 5942' summit. The 7 mile (round trip) hike takes you past Mowich Lake, and climbs to a rim and back down into a bowl with the idyllic Lake Eunice. From there a series of switchbacks take you to the lookout at the west end of a narrow ridge. An easy ¼-mile scramble east lands you on the true summit. On a clear day, the view is unbeatable. Mark-K7MAS has a helpful [trip report](#).
- Elizabeth Ridge (W7W/RS-049) lies 1.5 miles south of Tolmie Peak, just on the south side of the road. The summit is a short (1/3 mile), steep scramble through the woods that is best done on snowshoes in the winter (although this requires snowshoeing or skiing an additional 5 miles from the park entrance). A warm weather hike should be possible, but there are no trials (or reports), so be prepared for some bushwhacking for the 400' ascent. Here is my winter [trip report](#).

A number of interesting summits are found on the northeast side of the park. The first three are accessible from a Palisades Lake trailhead that starts at the hairpin parking lot on the way to Sunrise and the last one is accessible from the visitor's center.

- South Slide Mountain (W7W/RS-019) is accessed from near the end of the trail with a short, steep near-scramble up Brown Peak. From there you have an easy traverse across a ridge with several false summits. The round trip is 9.5 miles (round trip) and about 2,500' of elevation gain. My [activation report](#) has more details.



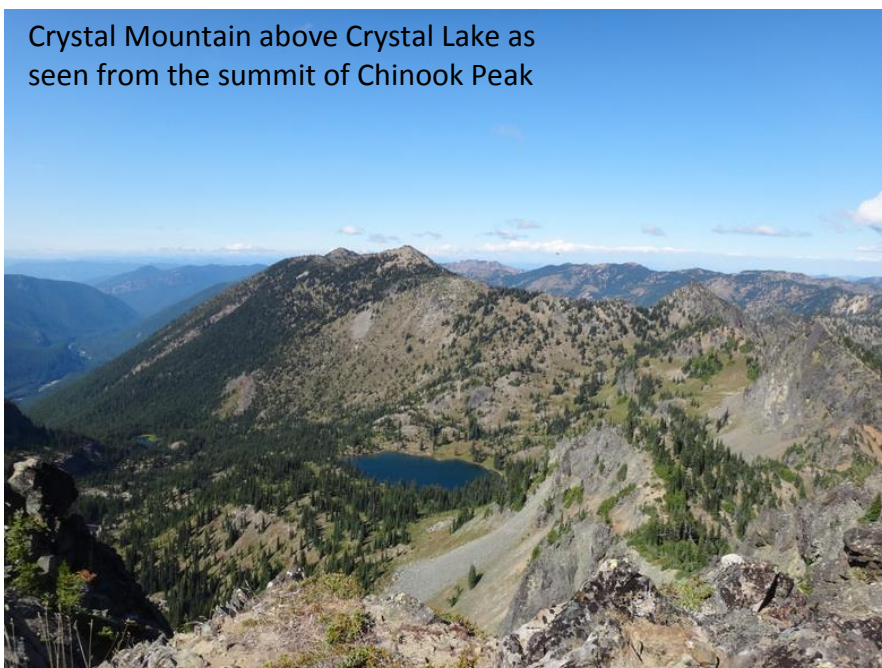
- Palisades Peak (W7W/RS-008) is a spectacular formation of columnar basalt that towers over Hidden Lake. To get there, head up the Hidden Lake trail and to the west end of the lake. Follow the steep boot path to the saddle 400' above the lake. The Palasades is to your right and Marcus Pk is to your left. Don't try reaching the Palasades directly from the ridge or you will be thwarted by difficult cliff bands. Rather descend into the open grassy area, hike north, and ascend directly east up to the summit. From this summit, you will feel on top of the world. Check out the excellent [activation report](#) from Rich-KR7W.

- Marcus Peak (W7W/RS-011) requires some scrambling. As with the Palisades, once you are at the saddle over Hidden Lake, descend into the bowl rather than following the ridge line to the left. From the base of the summit, one option is to scramble up the NE gully in extremely loose matrix. Once on the ridge, you must scramble over bare rock (mostly class 2) into the activation zone. Reaching the summit itself would be a class 3 affair. A second approach, slightly longer, but easier, is up a gully on the NW side. So far, Peter-AF7GL, is the only SOTA activator. Here is a Summitpost [description](#).
- Mt. Fremont (W7W/RS-005) is a popular SOTA destination with 15 activations to date. The trick here is to leave the trail and ascend the true summit before reaching the lookout on a false summit. The trip is under 5 miles with an elevation gain of 900'. Mark-K7MAS, provides an excellent [write-up](#) of his activation.

Circling around to the east, we have three interesting peaks. The first two are short (but not necessarily easy) hikes accessed from the Chinook Pass parking area, with a bit of travel along the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). The last summit is most easily accessed from the Crystal Mountain ski resort.

- Deadwood Peak (W7W/RS-026) is accessed directly from the PCT about a half mile north of the Pass. The rest of the trip is pretty much off-trail. Rich-KR7W, [details](#) the only activation of this summit to date.
- Chinook Peak (W7W/RS-013) is an interesting challenge that starts on the PCT. But, the bulk of the trip is off-trail or, at best, following game trails. The trip is only 5 miles (round trip) and 1,900' of gain. And on a clear day, the views are splendid. I've written up my activation [here](#).
- Crystal Mountain (W7W/RS-010) has been climbed from all directions. Perhaps the easiest ascent is from the Crystal Mountain ski resort parking lot (see the [report](#) from Mark-K7MAS) with a free gondola ride back to your car. Alternatively, it can be climbed from the west (see the [report](#) from Rich-KR7W). I understand it is even possible to reach it from the base of the Chinook Peak summit block.

The south central side of the park includes several summits for more adventurous activators.



Crystal Mountain above Crystal Lake as seen from the summit of Chinook Peak

- Pinnacle Peak (W7W/PL-008) is a popular climb that includes some adrenaline-pumping class 3 (and, maybe class 4) scrambles. The ascent starts at the Reflection Lakes parking area and is 5.5 miles with a bit over 2,000' of elevation gain. Here is a [write-up](#) by Rich-KR7W.
- Unicorn Peak (W7W/PL-003) and Stevens Peak (W7W/PL-007) are described by Etienne-K7ATN, as beyond a hike, and much more of a committed alpine climb. Proper preparation is essential for these summits. For more information, check out Etienne's write-ups for [Unicorn Peak](#) and [Stevens Peak](#).

The southwest part of the park has a number of long or steep summits for the adventurous activator.



- Gobblers Knob (W7W/RS-050) is a somewhat strenuous hike along a trail. Hikers are rewarded with spectacular views and a fire lookout at the summit. For more information check out the [trip write-up](#) by Paul-W6PNG, and the [access write-up](#) Guy-N7UN, from their SOTA/NPOTA activation late last year.

- Tumtum Peak (W7W/RS-059) is a steep, off-trail ascent off of the Kautz Creek trail. The roundtrip is 6.25 miles with 2550' of elevation gain. Peter-AF7GL has a nice [write-up](#) of his winter Tumtum Peak activation.

- Mt. Ararat (W7W/RS-033) is about a 10 mile 3,600' gain adventure starting from the Kautz Creek trailhead. The most popular route includes scrambling up a couple of steep gullies. For more information on access and the hike itself, check out the very nice [write-up](#) and the accompanying [photo set](#) by Rich-KR7W.

- Pyramid Peak (W7W/RS-012) is a strenuous non-technical hike to one of the tallest summits (6,936') in the south part of the park. One starting point is the Longmire Wilderness Center, and that makes for a 20 mile hike with 4,800' of elevation gain. Rich-KR7W, has [written up](#) and produced a nice [photo set](#) for his adventure to Pyramid Peak.

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