
Take a nature walk, eat a picnic at Rainbow Falls

What: Rainbow Falls State Park

Where: Right on state Route 6, 17 miles from Chehalis.

To do: Rainbow Falls -- named for the rainbow that is often visible over a small falls on the Chehalis River -- has 3,400 feet of bank access to the river. The park is popular for swimming, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, bird watching, camping, picnicking and wildlife watching. Right now, the Chehalis River is low and slow, and the bedrock areas in the park are great for swimming -- but be careful, as there is no lifeguard. Anglers can find trout in the river, but the mornings and late evenings are best. There are several trails that wind through a dense old-growth forest. A half-mile interpretive trail is popular with visitors.

Rainbow Falls offers overnight camping and day-use areas. The park is very busy on summer weekends, as many people like to swim in the river and sun on the rocks.

Look for: Pileated woodpeckers, huge old trees, fish in the river and the now-closed suspension bridge across the river. The suspension bridge was closed because it has structural weaknesses. Blacktail deer and some elk sometimes show themselves to hikers.

Swimming: Don't jump into the river from the closed suspension bridge or the larger bridge just downstream. There are shallow spots in the river, and jumpers risk serious injury.

Camping: There are 45 tent spaces and eight spaces with recreational vehicle hookups. Camping is first-come, first-serve, so try to arrive early if it's a summer weekend. Tent spaces are \$15 a night, and spaces with hookups are \$21 a night.

Hiking: A short, quarter-mile trail follows the Chehalis River on the campground side of the park. Across Route 6, the park offers 10 miles of hiking trails, including a popular, half-mile interpretive trail. Biking and horseback trails are also in this area.

Equipment: Good hiking boots, rain gear, sunscreen, picnic supplies, fishing tackle, cameras, binoculars, bug spray and warm clothing.

Parking: There is plenty of parking at the day-use area, which has a large picnic area, field and softball diamond. Day-use visitors must pay a \$5 parking fee.

Directions: From Olympia, take Interstate 5 south to Exit 77. Turn right at the top of the exit ramp onto Route 6. Follow Route 6 through beautiful rolling countryside for about 17 miles to the park entrance. Turn right into the park.

Restrooms: There are bathrooms for visitors and campers.

Safety: Watch children swimming or wading in the river. Don't jump off the bridges into the river. The trails have steep sections.

More information: call 360-291-3767 or visit www.parks.wa.gov.