

KRAIG ADAMS

Three Fingers Lookout Hiking Guide

By bike and on foot to a fire lookout on a rock spire in 2 days

2027 season edition · updated October 2026

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Welcome

In October 2023 I flew from New York to Seattle, borrowed a friend's mountain bike, and rode and hiked alone to the Three Fingers Lookout, a 1930s fire lookout bolted to the top of a rock spire in the North Cascades foothills. I spent the night inside it, the only person on the trail and the only one in the lookout, and came back down the same way the next morning. About 17.9 miles up and 16.6 back by my GPS, about 9 miles of each on the bike. It's the trip from my films Hiking to the Three Fingers Fire Lookout and Overnight Alone in the Three Fingers Lookout.

It was very unique, and everything worked out pretty perfectly: the weather, being alone, having the bike, fall colors.

Good to know first (October 2026). Forest Road 41, the only way in, is closed to everyone, on foot and on bikes too, from September 29 to December 31, 2026, for a timber sale. The Forest Service hopes to reopen it for the 2027 season. Even in a normal year, cars stop at a washed-out bridge about 9 miles below the trailhead, so you bike or walk the rest. See Is it open?.

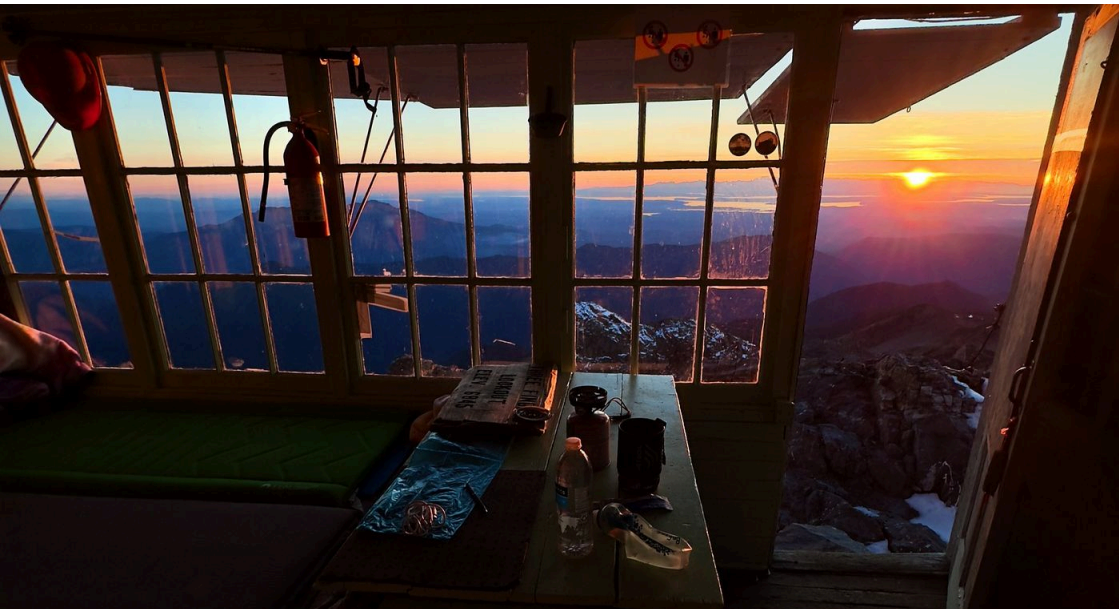
What's inside

- Where things stand in October 2026, and straight answers to the questions people ask about Three Fingers
- When to go, the rules for staying in the lookout and camping, and the drive from Seattle
- Both days: my notes, the route, the bike, where to turn back, maps with elevation profiles, and links to that day in my films
- Other ways to do it, where I slept, food and water, what it costs, gear for this route
- Weather, the climb to the lookout and safety, one page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps in Granite Falls: there's little to no cell service past it. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Rules and prices change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these. Times are Pacific Time. Prices are in US dollars.

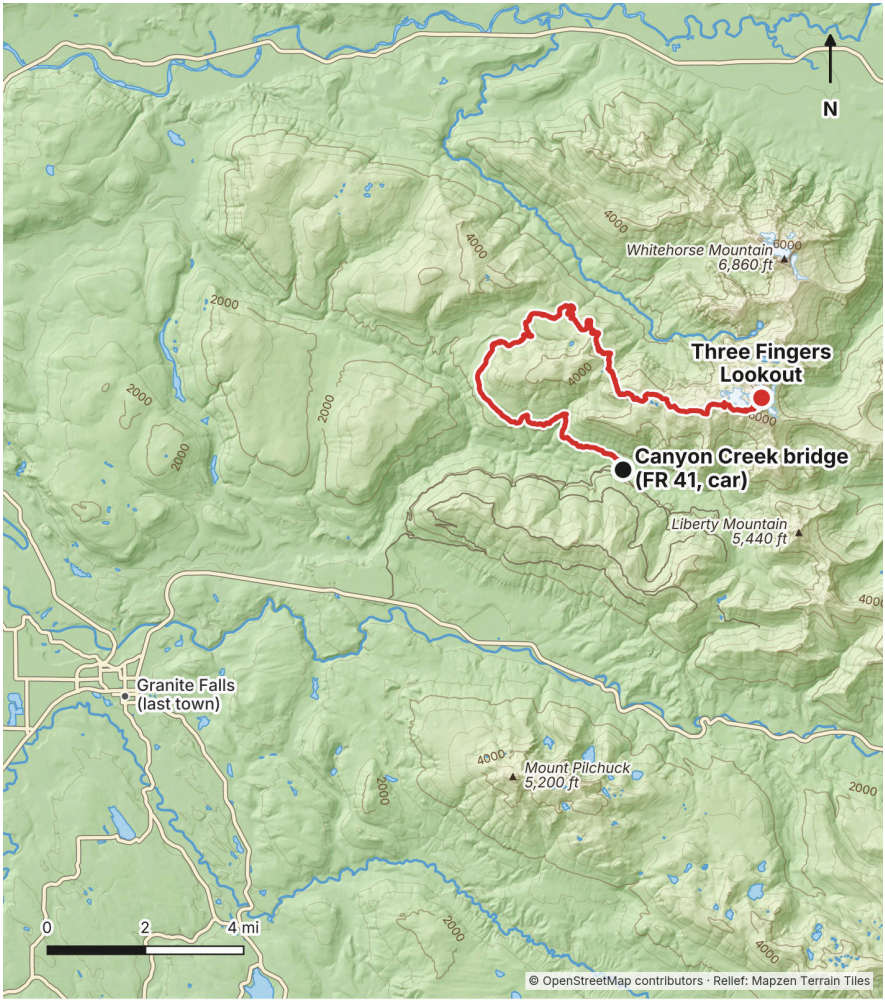


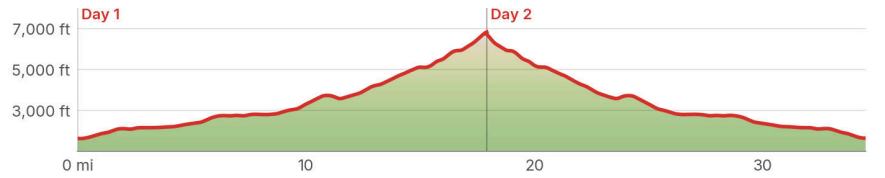
Sunset from inside the lookout, Day 1 at 6:26 p.m.

At a glance

QUICK FACTS	
Distance	34.5 miles (55.5 km) round trip by my GPS: 17.9 up, 16.6 down. About 18 of it is Forest Road 41 by bike, about 16 on foot. The trail alone is about 15 miles round trip
Climbing	About 6,220 ft (1,896 m) up and 6,076 ft (1,852 m) down in all, by my GPS, almost all of it on Day 1
Days	2: a long day up, a morning down
Start and finish	The Canyon Creek bridge on Forest Road 41, where cars stop, about 1,630 ft (498 m)
Trailhead	The end of Forest Road 41 at Tupso Pass, about 3,030 ft (923 m), 9.3 miles up the road by my GPS
High point	The lookout, 6,850 ft (2,088 m) by my GPS; 6,854 ft is the usual figure
Sleep	Inside the lookout: free, first come, first served, room for about 8
Difficulty	Hard. A long, steep day with a rough forest trail, a snowfield, exposed rock and three ladders at the top
Water	Saddle Lake and streams below Goat Flats; little or none higher up. Carry what you need for the night
Permits (2026)	None, and no parking pass

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Canyon Creek bridge to the Three Fingers Lookout	17.9 (28.8)	5,700 / 497	The lookout, 6,850 ft
2	The lookout back to the Canyon Creek bridge	16.6 (26.7)	520 / 5,579	





The drive from Granite Falls up Forest Road 41 to the Canyon Creek bridge, and my route to the lookout. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Is it open? (October 2026)

Checked on the Forest Service's pages for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (the Three Fingers Lookout and Trail 641 pages, the Forest Road 41 alert and closure order, the Boulder River Wilderness rules, and the lookouts page) and the Washington Trails Association's hike page, on October 3, 2026.

Closed for the rest of 2026. Forest Service order 06-05-26-21 closes Forest Road 41 from September 29 to December 31, 2026, unless it's lifted sooner, for the Tupso timber sale. It starts at the Forest Road 4110 junction, about a mile up from the Mountain Loop Highway, and runs to the Canyon Creek bridge. It bans being on the road at all, so walkers and bikes too, and the alert lists the lookout and Trail 641 as affected. The fine is up to $5,000.

2027. A Forest Service note, quoted in a Washington Trails Association trip report in September 2026, said the plan is to finish the sale in 2026 and then have "no interruptions" to Forest Road 41 next season. That's a plan, not a promise: check the alert before you go.

The bridge. In a normal year you drive about 8 miles up Forest Road 41 to the bridge over the South Fork of Canyon Creek and park. The road beyond washed out years ago and is closed to vehicles for good; walking and biking are allowed. The Forest Service is planning to remove the failed bridge and put in a footbridge (project 68475, no dates yet), so where you park and how you cross may change.

The lookout. Volunteers closed it for maintenance twice in summer 2026, for a week each time, and volunteers have recently replaced the ladders, as reported. Check for work-party closures before you go.

What to do. The week before you go, check the Forest Service alert for Forest Road 41 and the Three Fingers Lookout page, and read the latest trip reports on the Washington Trails Association's Three Fingers page for snow at the top.

Straight answers

How hard is it? Hard, and long. This is definitely a full day of hiking: I started driving to the trailhead before the sun was above the horizon and reached the lookout at about 5:30 p.m. The first 9 miles are on the bike, mostly uphill. Then it's about 8.6 miles on foot and 4,100 ft of climbing to the top, the last part over rock and snow and up ladders. The trail itself was pretty straightforward, with good switchbacks: if you get to a spot where there's exposure and it's sketchy, you're probably off the trail.

Do I need a bike? No, you could walk the road, but I would never do this hike without the biking section. Walking it would be a nightmare, super boring. It was the first time I'd ridden a mountain bike with a pack on my back, and it was great. A mountain bike or a sturdy gravel bike works; a road bike doesn't. E-bikes count as motor vehicles to the Forest Service, so they're very likely not allowed past the bridge.

How far is it? By my GPS, 17.9 miles up (9.3 on the bike, 8.6 on foot) and 16.6 back (7.7 on foot, 8.9 on the bike), about 34.5 miles. In my films I say 18 up and 17 down, with 10 of each on the bike. The trail alone is about 15 miles round trip, by the Washington Trails Association.

Can I sleep in the lookout? Yes, if there's room: it's free, first come, first served, with no reservations, and it holds about 8 people, by visitors' reports. It had a bed that could fit two pads easily, and room on the floor for three, maybe four more. It was full even midweek in August 2026, as reported. You don't know who's up there, so always bring a tent and a backup plan: Goat Flats, about 3 miles back down by my GPS, is the place to camp.

Do I need a permit? No permit and no parking pass. The rules of the Boulder River Wilderness apply from the trailhead up (see The rules and staying in the lookout).

Is it scary? The ladders are intimidating at first, but they're really nothing too crazy: go slow and always keep three points of contact. Past Tin Can Gap the route runs above real drops in places. I stuck to the easy line and kept away from anywhere with exposure.

Is there water? Low down, yes: Saddle Lake and streams below Goat Flats. Up high there wasn't much: I'd have had to hike down a bit to get snowmelt, and that changes through the season. Carry all the water you need for the night at the lookout.

Can I fly a drone? No. Drones aren't allowed in the Boulder River Wilderness, which includes the trail and the lookout.

Can I have a campfire? No. Fires are banned from Saddle Lake to the lookout and at Goat Flats. Bring a stove.

Is there a phone signal? Plan on none from Verlot on. Carry a satellite messenger, or a phone with satellite texting, and leave your plan with someone.



The ladders, just below the lookout, Day 1 at 5:03 p.m.

When to go

Mid-October. I went on October 12 and 13, 2023, and had fall colors, a little dusting of snow up on the top, and no need for spikes or any equipment for snow. Mid-October was a great time to go. I'd say a week or so later, maybe October 20 to 30, the colors might be popping more, but then you're also risking snowfall or colder temperatures, so it's a little tricky to say the best time. I was happy with when I went.

The season. The Forest Service says its lookouts are usually snowbound until mid to late summer. In 2026, trip reports found about half the route above Goat Flats under snow, with ice at the ladders, in mid-June; very little snow by late August; and fresh snow and a little ice by the ladders in late September. Late July to late September is the usual window. The first real snow at the top usually comes in mid to late October, and about one year in four before mid-October.

Pick a weather window. I looked at mountain-forecast.com and waited for a good window of clear to partly cloudy skies with little to no chance of rain, and that's why I pulled the trigger to go. The National Weather Service's point forecast for the area is a good second check, but its grid sits at about 4,970 ft, so take off 6 or 7 °F for the lookout.

Weather at the lookout. Modeled averages at about 6,850 ft (ERA5 reanalysis, 2011 to 2025, research estimate):

MONTH	HIGH / LOW °F (°C)
July	55 / 36 (13 / 2)
August	56 / 37 (13 / 3)
September	49 / 31 (9 / -1)
October	38 / 23 (3 / -5)

The Boulder River Wilderness gets more than 150 inches of rain and snow a year. In October it was very cold and windy at night.

Light. On October 12, 2023 the sun set at about 6:20 p.m. and rose at about 7:20 the next morning. In summer it sets around 9 p.m. (mid-July) to 8:20 (mid-August). From the lookout you get 360 degrees of mountains, and the sunset and the sunrise both.

The rules and staying in the lookout

These were checked on the Forest Service's pages for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest on October 3, 2026.

No permit, no fee. The Forest Service lists no fee for the lookout, and the Washington Trails Association lists no parking pass. I found no wilderness permit requirement for the Boulder River Wilderness. Sign a trail register if you find one.

The lookout. Built in 1930 to 1933 by blasting the top 10 to 15 feet off the South Peak, staffed in summers until 1942, and on the National Register of Historic Places. The Everett Mountaineers have looked after it since 1986, and the volunteer group Friends of Three Fingers Lookout does the hands-on work, with hand tools only. It's not rented: first come, first served, free. The Forest Service's rules for its lookouts: bring a tent in case it's full, stay no more than two nights (its recommendation), fill and light stoves outside, keep food in the rodent-proof containers, pack out all your garbage, and replace what you use. Volunteer work parties come first, with notice at the trailhead. When I got there I opened all the shutters, read the rules and followed them, and checked out all the stuff that's inside.

What was inside. A bunch of extra blankets and pads, and a bed that could fit two pads. Other visitors report a logbook and the original fire finder. What's left up there changes: bring your own sleeping bag and pad.

Camping. There's nowhere to camp at the top. Goat Flats has existing campsites and a pit toilet: use only the existing sites, because the meadow is fragile. No camping within 200 ft of Saddle Lake.

Fires. Banned from Saddle Lake to the lookout, within a quarter mile of the trail above Saddle Lake, and in the Goat Flats area. Bring a stove.

Human waste. There's no toilet at the trailhead or above Goat Flats. Carry a WAG bag for the alpine part.

The wilderness. The trail is in the Boulder River Wilderness from the trailhead up: no bikes, carts or other wheels past the trailhead, no drones, groups of 12 or fewer, and nothing left unattended for more than 48 hours. Keep food away from bears at Goat Flats.

Getting there

My way in, 2023. I flew over to Seattle from home in New York City and rented a car at the airport, an SUV big enough for a mountain bike. Friends let me crash at their house north of Seattle, set me up in the guest room, cooked me breakfast really early the next morning, and lent me their mountain bike, which meant I didn't have to rent one. Then it was about an hour to an hour and a half's drive out of the city into the mountains, with views of the peaks at sunrise, up a little mountain road to the bridge. As I drove in, a construction crew was closing the road behind me, so I had the place entirely to myself. I set off from the bridge at 8:26 a.m.



Forest Road 41 at the Canyon Creek bridge, Day 1 at mile 0.

Flying in. Seattle-Tacoma (SEA) is about 2 hours from the bridge without traffic, and downtown Seattle about 1.5 to 1.75 hours (route estimates). Weekday traffic on I-5 can add 30 to 60 minutes.

The drive. I-5 north, then State Route 92 east to Granite Falls, the last town: fill up there, because there's no gas between Granite Falls and Darrington. Follow the Mountain Loop Highway east to about milepost 7, where Forest Road 41 turns off to the left (north) at the top of a hill, by two big telephone poles: it's the easternmost of three roads there. From the Verlot Public Service Center, it's 3.9 miles back west. Stay on the main road uphill, keeping left past the side roads, about 8 miles to the bridge over the South Fork of Canyon Creek. In 2026 trip reports called the road potholed but fine for any car. The bridge is at 48.1487, -121.7491.

Parking. A small lot and roadside parking at the bridge, about 1,630 ft by my GPS. No toilet, no water, no pass needed.

The bike. Bring your own, borrow one, or rent one, but read the rental terms: one Snohomish shop (Bicycle Centres, about $95 a day for a full-suspension mountain bike in 2026) bans using its bikes to reach hiking trails "such as the Three Fingers hike." A Seattle shop rented mountain bikes for about $130 a day, plus about $60 a day for a hitch rack, in 2026; check its terms too. A car with room for a bike, or a rack, is the easy way.

Verlot Public Service Center. About 11 miles east of Granite Falls on the Mountain Loop Highway, (360) 691-7791: maps and current conditions. It's seasonal: in fall 2026 it was open Friday to Monday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., until October 31, then Fridays and Saturdays until December 12; call ahead. The Darrington Ranger Station, (360) 436-1155, manages the trail.



The Three Fingers and the glacier from Tin Can Gap, Day 1 at mile 16.3.

DAY 1

Contents

The Canyon Creek bridge to the Three Fingers Lookout

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
17.9 mi (28.8 km): 9.3 by bike, 8.6 on foot	**5,700 ft** (1,738 m)	**497 ft** (151 m)	**9.2 hours** (8:26 a.m. to 5:37 p.m.), about 7.5 of them moving: 2.5 hours to the trailhead, 6.7 from there to the top

HIGH POINT

the lookout, 6,850 ft (2,088 m)

ON THE WAY

the trailhead (mile 9.3), Saddle Lake (12.1), Goat Flats (14.4), Tin Can Gap (16.3)

SLEEP

the Three Fingers Lookout

WATER

Saddle Lake and streams below Goat Flats; little or none higher up

My day

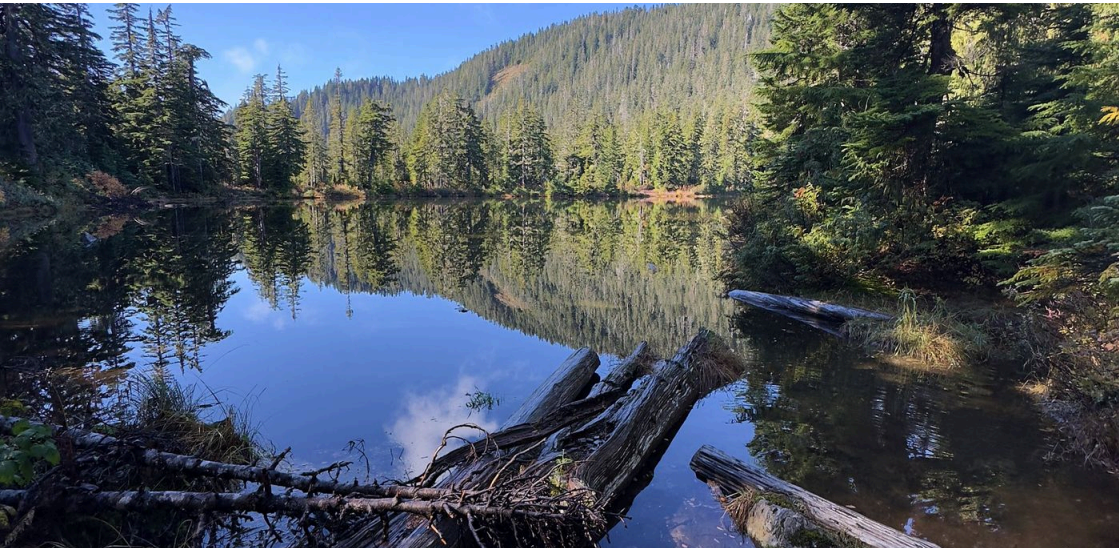
The bridge is where I'm saying my hike started: the parking lot for the car, trailhead number one, I guess. I rode the bike all the way up the road from there. It's a very overgrown small road, slightly paved, slightly dirt: I could picture a car getting through in places, definitely an SUV, but it was perfect for biking. Really pleasant, and there was no one up there.

The climb took a while, but it was really fun, and I liked it. I stopped for a salt and vinegar pistachio break, of course, steaming and sweating so much. I eventually made it to the actual walking trailhead later that morning, at about 11 a.m., found a nice, quiet, hidden spot to stash the bike, and started hiking.



The bike, hidden in the woods at the trailhead, Day 1 at mile 9.4.

The trail is pretty overgrown and lush in this first area. Then the trails link up, and you get a really good view of the Three Fingers. It's really cool to be able to see the little speck of the lookout in the distance, and with each new vantage point the speck grows a little bigger. It just seems so far away and so steep, unattainable. But it is attainable.



Saddle Lake, Day 1 at mile 12.1.

Around here you start to pop out of the trees and have more views. This slope was one of my favorites: really good fall colors, a little alpine slope meadow.



Fall colors on the slope above Goat Flats, Day 1 at mile 15.1.



The trail above Goat Flats, Day 1 at mile 15.0.

The saddle up here, Tin Can Gap, was a great view of the Three Fingers, and you also get views of the glacier: just a ton of snow and ice. There was a little dusting of snow on top, but the trail was pretty straightforward, with no exposure, and the switchbacks were good. I was pretty happy with the maintenance of this trail: a lot of people take care of it. By the gap I knew it was a full day, and I had to push to get to the top before sunset. I did.

There was a snowfield near the top, and I did a little back and forth on it to get shots. I know some people go up and down the snowfield, but I skirted off to the side, because it's much easier for me to jump on the rocks instead. At one point I went up a little hill and turned back: you'll understand if you're up there. Just don't go anywhere with exposure, and stick to the easy route.



Rock below the lookout, Day 1 at mile 17.2.

Then you reach the ladders. It was lovely going at my own speed, with no one else on the trail: very isolating, but very peaceful, to finally reach the hut, at about 5:30 p.m. I opened all the shutters, cooked a meal, and had 360-degree views of the mountains in the distance and the sunset. The volcanoes really stand out: I thought I saw Rainier, St. Helens and maybe Mount Hood. On a clear day Glacier Peak, Mount Baker and Rainier are plain to see, and Adams and St. Helens show faintly; Hood is probably hidden behind Rainier, by research for this guide.



Inside the lookout, Day 1 at 5:39 p.m.

The route

Forest Road 41, by bike (miles 0 to 9.3). From the bridge, about 1,630 ft, the old road climbs about 1,400 ft to the trailhead at Tupso Pass, about 3,030 ft, in long, mostly gentle grades, gravel and broken pavement with brush closing in. My first mile was slow, about 3 mph. Riders in 2026 took about 1 to 2 hours up. There's a turnoff partway up with a steep trail that cuts off a section of the road: if I were walking, I'd definitely take that. Leave the bike at the trailhead, out of sight: bikes aren't allowed in the wilderness, and nothing may be left unattended there for more than 48 hours.

The forest to Saddle Lake (miles 9.3 to 12.1). The trail climbs through dense forest, rough and rooty, often wet, with brush and downed trees in places in 2026. Saddle Lake, about 3,760 ft, is about 2.8 miles from the trailhead by my GPS (2.5 by the Forest Service). The trails link up near here: the route over Meadow Mountain joins from the west.

Up to Goat Flats (miles 12.1 to 14.4). Out of the trees into meadows, ponds and fall color. Goat Flats, about 4,870 ft by my GPS, is the camping area, with existing sites and a pit toilet. There's a stream about three quarters of a mile past Saddle Lake, and small ponds near Goat Flats that can dry up by late August.



A tarn in the meadows below Goat Flats, Day 1 at mile 13.7.

Goat Flats to Tin Can Gap (miles 14.4 to 16.3). Better trail, open slopes, then steep switchbacks to the gap, about 5,740 ft. The Forest Service calls it Tin Pan Gap; most hikers say Tin Can. There's no good water on this stretch: fill up before. From the gap you see all three fingers, the glacier below them, and the lookout on the south one.

The gap to the lookout (miles 16.3 to 17.9). The hardest part. The route follows the ridge with a long drop to the glacier on one side in places, goes down a steep gully, and crosses a permanent snowfield, about 6,350 ft, where the path disappears: follow the cairns and your GPS. In recent years the glacier has shrunk, and late in the season a ledge or boot path goes around it. Then a steep rock scramble to three wooden ladders, with a rope between the second and third in 2026, as reported, and the last rock up to

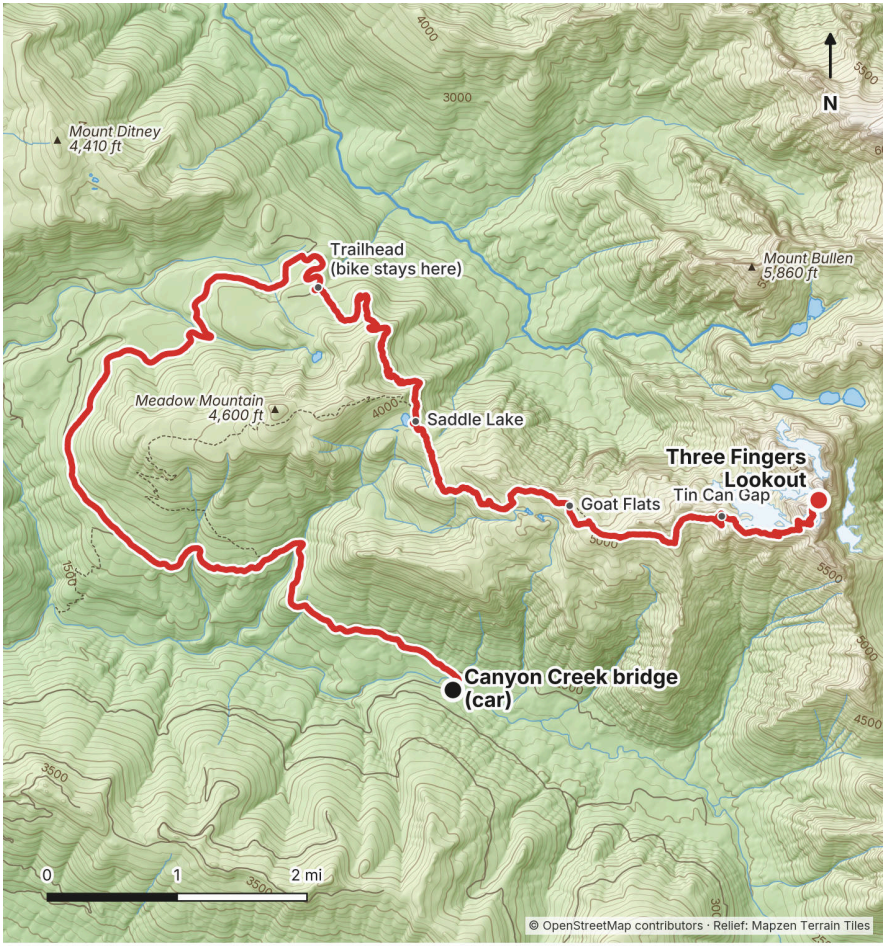
the lookout. The Forest Service calls this last half mile mountaineering, with real exposure, and says everyone has to judge for themselves whether the climb is safe.

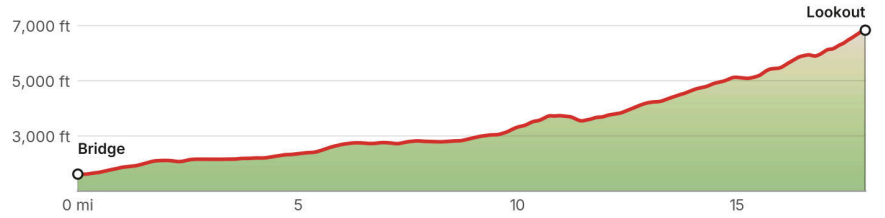
Where to turn back

At Tin Can Gap, if it's late, the weather is turning, or there's more snow or ice ahead than you're ready for. Past the gap there have been several search and rescue missions. Leave enough daylight to reach the top, or to get back to Goat Flats to camp if the lookout is full: plan to arrive early. If you're on the bike and short of time, the day is too long: camp at Goat Flats and go up to the lookout in the morning.

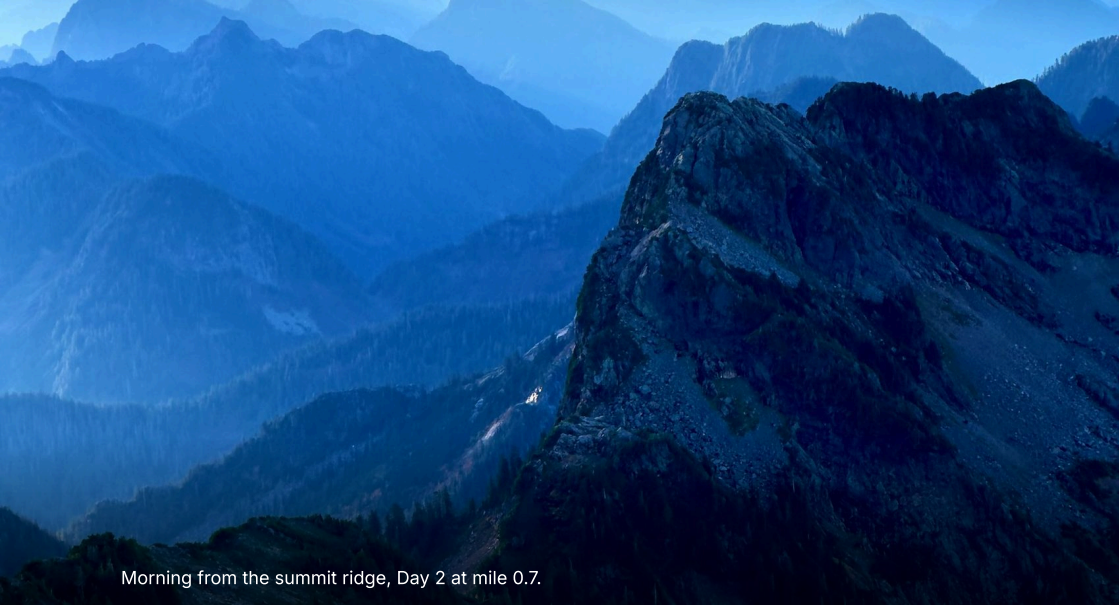
Watch this day

Day 1 in my film · Inside the lookout (from 5:04) · My guide video: the drive and Day 1 (from 1:13)





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Morning from the summit ridge, Day 2 at mile 0.7.

DAY 2

The lookout back to the Canyon Creek bridge

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
16.6 mi (26.7 km): 7.7 on foot, 8.9 by bike	**520 ft** (158 m)	**5,579 ft** (1,701 m)	**3.7 hours** (8:03 a.m. to 11:43 a.m.): 2.9 hours on foot to the trailhead, 0.7 on the bike

HIGH POINT

the lookout, 6,850 ft (2,088 m)

ON THE WAY

Tin Can Gap (mile 1.4), Goat Flats (3.0), Saddle Lake (5.1), the trailhead (7.6)

FINISH

the Canyon Creek bridge, about 1,630 ft (498 m)

WATER

streams below Goat Flats and Saddle Lake

My day

The next day was the same thing in reverse. It was very windy at the top, descending, but I quickly made it back down to the meadow and back to the bike.



The snowfield below the lookout, Day 2 at 8:06 a.m.



The meadows on the way down, Day 2 at mile 2.0.



Red huckleberry below Goat Flats, Day 2 at mile 3.6.

The ride back down to the car was so fun. It was almost always downhill, and I was going pretty fast for some sections. But 10 miles downhill on a mountain bike is pretty exhausting, with the hand grips and constantly braking: it's surprising how tired I was without doing much pedaling, just standing there on the bike. I was back at the car at 11:43 a.m., put the bike in, drove back to my friends' house, and made sure to clean the bike before leaving it with them.

The route

The same way back. On foot it's 7.6 miles from the lookout to the trailhead by my GPS, almost all downhill: take the ladders and the scramble slowly, facing in, and cross the snowfield with care in the morning, when it can be hard and icy. On the bike it's 8.9 miles back to the bridge, nearly all downhill: my ride took 44 minutes. Keep your speed down on the loose gravel and the broken pavement, and watch for hikers and other riders.

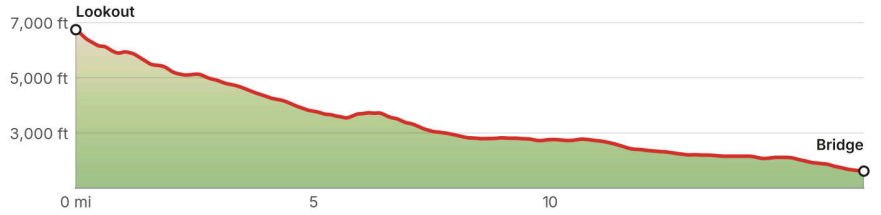
Where to turn back

You're heading out, so the question is when to wait. If it's icy at the ladders or the snowfield, wait for the sun to soften it. If a storm comes in, stay in the lookout until it passes, away from the lightning rods and the metal. If someone is hurt, use your satellite messenger: there's no signal.

Watch this day

Day 2 in my film (from 8:23) · My guide video: Day 2 and my tips (from 10:05)





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

Camp at Goat Flats

The easier plan, and the safe one when the lookout is full: bike and hike to Goat Flats (about 14.4 miles from the bridge by my GPS), camp there, go up to the lookout and back without your big pack, and head out. A third day makes it relaxed.

Without a bike

Walk the road: about 34 miles round trip, so three days is better than two. I wouldn't do it, but people do.

Over Meadow Mountain

A trail leaves Forest Road 41 near Saddle Creek, about 2.3 miles above the bridge, and climbs over Meadow Mountain to join the main trail near Saddle Lake, as reported: about 9.7 miles from the bridge to Goat Flats, with more climbing than the road. It's the walker's route, and shorter on foot than the road.

The climbers' route

There's a steep, flagged route up from another forest road, for experienced navigators only, as reported. I don't describe it here.

Where I slept, food and water

Where I slept

NIGHT	WHERE	HEIGHT
Before	Friends' house north of Seattle	
1	The Three Fingers Lookout (Day 1 mile 17.9)	6,850 ft (2,088 m)
After	Back to my friends' house	

The lookout. A one-room cabin about 14 feet square, with windows all around and wooden shutters you prop open. It had a bunch of extra blankets and pads and a bed that could fit two pads easily. On the floor you could definitely have three, maybe four people, so six is probably the maximum you'd be comfortable with; visitors report a limit of 8. Mice have been reported: keep your food sealed and the place clean.



The lookout room, Day 1 at 5:40 p.m.

Always have a backup. You can't just depend on sleeping in the hut. In October it was very cold and windy at night, and it would have been a nightmare to be in a tent up there. It wouldn't be as windy down at Goat Flats, but be prepared: bring a tent and plan to arrive early enough to go back down if the lookout is full.

Food and water

Food. Salt and vinegar pistachios, of course, and a hot meal cooked at the lookout.

Water. There wasn't much water up there: you'd have to hike down a little way to get snowmelt, and that changes throughout the season, so you can't depend on it. Pack up all the water you need for the night at the hut. Fill up at the stream past Saddle Lake or the ponds at Goat Flats; hikers in 2026

found no good water from Goat Flats to the gap, and snowmelt only below the last snowfield. Plan on 3 to 4 liters for the long day, plus what you need at the top. Filter or treat everything.

What it costs

I didn't keep a list of what this trip cost me. I borrowed the bike and stayed with friends, which saved a lot.

For your budget (US dollars, as checked in October 2026):

ITEM	COST
The lookout, permit and parking	Free
An SUV from Sea-Tac, 2 days	About $120 to $300, plus 25 to 40% airport fees and taxes
Gas, Seattle to the bridge and back	About $35 to $60 (Washington averaged $5.53 a gallon in late September 2026)
A mountain bike, 2 days	About $190 to $260, if the shop allows it (see Getting there), plus a rack
A WAG bag	A few dollars

That's about $350 to $650 for two days, before flights, a night in Seattle, and food; much less with your own car and bike.

Gear for this route

What this hike needs

- A mountain bike or sturdy gravel bike, a helmet, a lock or a hidden spot, and a spare tube
- A sleeping bag and pad for the lookout, and a tent in case it's full
- Warm layers, a windproof jacket, a hat and gloves: it freezes at night from September
- A stove (no fires), a WAG bag, and food sealed against mice
- Water capacity for the night at the top, and a filter
- Microspikes and an ice axe early or late in the season, or after fresh snow; the Washington Trails Association still advises an axe past Goat Flats
- The offline map and GPX files, a charged phone, a backup battery, a satellite messenger and a headlamp

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One night in the lookout, with a borrowed mountain bike for the road. Here's what I carried in 2023, what I'd take now and what I filmed with.

What I carried in 2023

From my films and their description. I have no full gear list for this trip.

- **Bike:** a borrowed mountain bike. Hidden at the trailhead. The first time I rode a mountain bike for a hike, with a pack on my back.
- **Pack:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear Southwest 2400 (Hyperlite)
- **Sun hoodie:** Amazon Essentials Quick-Dry Tech Hoodie (Amazon)
- **Shoes:** Salomon Speedcross (Amazon). No spikes or snow equipment needed in mid-October 2023.
- **Water:** Katadyn BeFree AC · 1L (Amazon). There wasn't much water up at the lookout.

- **Snacks:** Noka smoothie packets (Amazon). The company sent me a few packets to try, plus salt and vinegar pistachios.
- **Navigation:** the AllTrails app. It recorded both days.

What I'd take now

My current kit for what this hike needs.

- **Sleeping bag:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear 20° Mummy Bag (Hyperlite). It freezes at night from September.
- **Sleeping pad:** Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite NXT (Amazon)
- **Tent:** NEMO Hornet Elite OSMO 1P (Amazon). In case the lookout is full: it sleeps about six.
- **Puffy:** Arc'teryx Cerium Hoody (Arc'teryx). It was very cold and windy at night in October.
- **Wind shell:** PATH Projects Tensor Wind Shell (PATH Projects)
- **Hat:** PATH Projects Hoyt Merino Beanie (PATH Projects)
- **Gloves:** Unigear Touchscreen Liner Gloves (Amazon)
- **Stove:** Jetboil Stash (Amazon). No fires from Saddle Lake up.
- **Microspikes:** Yatta Life Ice Spikes (Amazon). Early or late in the season, or after fresh snow.
- **Headlamp:** Nitecore NU20 Classic (Amazon)
- **Power bank:** Nitecore NB20000 (Amazon). No cell service from Verlot on.
- **Navigation:** AllTrails+ (AllTrails, 30% off). Import my GPX files and download them offline before Verlot. Offline maps need the paid plan.

Filming kit

From the film's description. My setup is smaller now (below). Drones aren't allowed in the Boulder River Wilderness: see Straight answers.

- **Camera:** Sony a7S III (Amazon)
- **Lens:** Sony FE 20-70mm f/4 G (Amazon)
- **Mic:** Rode VideoMic GO II (Amazon), now the GO II Helix
- **Tripod:** a tripod

- **Phone:** Apple iPhone 14 Pro

What I film with now

Since September 2026 I film with a smaller setup: the Pocket 4 and the Mic 3 on the trail, and the Mini 5 Pro in the air.

- **Camera:** DJI Osmo Pocket 4 (Amazon)
- **Mic:** DJI Mic 3 · 1 TX + 1 RX (Amazon). It pairs with the Pocket 4.
- **Drone:** DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon)

Weather, the climb and safety

Emergencies. Call 911 if you can get through, or text 911 when a call won't connect; plan on no cell service from Verlot on, so carry a satellite messenger. Snohomish County Sheriff's search and rescue covers the area, and rescues here have taken many hours, even a day or more. The nearest hospitals are Cascade Valley Hospital in Arlington and Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett (a trauma center), each about 30 minutes from Granite Falls. Leave your plan, your route and your return time with someone at home.

The climb to the lookout. Past Tin Can Gap there's a snowfield, exposed rock and three ladders. Go slow, keep three points of contact, hold on to stuff that doesn't move, and stay on the easy line: if it's exposed and sketchy, you're probably off route. Early and late in the season the snowfield and the rock by the ladders can be icy: bring microspikes and an ice axe and know how to use them. Wear a helmet if others are above you.

Lightning. The lookout sits on the highest point around and has lightning rods. Watch for thunderstorms in July and August, and don't be on the ridge or the ladders when one is building.

Cold and wind. Even after a sunny day it was very cold and windy at night in October. Expect freezing nights from September.

Navigation. The forest trail is rough and brushy in places, and the path fades past the gap. Have the GPX on your phone.

Wildlife. Black bears visit Goat Flats: keep food away from them. Mountain goats, deer and cougars live here too. Mice live in the lookout: Washington's health guidance is to air the cabin out and never sweep up droppings dry (hantavirus).

The road. On the bike, the descent is fast, loose and long: keep your speed down and your brakes working.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
three-fingers-day-1.gpx	Day 1: the Canyon Creek bridge to the lookout, 17.9 mi (9.3 by bike)
three-fingers-day-2.gpx	Day 2: the lookout back to the bridge, 16.6 mi (8.9 by bike)
three-fingers-full-route.gpx	Both days in one file, with waypoints for the bridge, the trailhead, Saddle Lake, Goat Flats, Tin Can Gap and the lookout

The tracks show where I actually went: a record of my trip. On Day 1 I went back and forth for shots near the top and up one little hill I turned back from, so follow the trail, not every wiggle of my line.

AllTrails: on alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import (offline maps need a paid plan). **Gaia GPS:** open the file on your phone and choose Gaia GPS, or Import on gaiagps.com. **Garmin:** Garmin Connect on the web, Training, Courses, Import, then send it to your watch. **Organic Maps** (free): download the offline map for Washington, then open the GPX file with it.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Is it open?

- The Forest Service alert for Forest Road 41 (the 2026 timber closure ends December 31, 2026, unless extended) and the Three Fingers Lookout page
- Whether the Canyon Creek bridge is still the place to park, or the footbridge project has changed it
- Lookout closures for volunteer work parties
- The latest trip reports for snow and ice above Goat Flats

Getting there

- A car with room for a bike, a full tank in Granite Falls
- A bike, and a rental shop whose terms allow this ride

Your stuff

- A sleeping bag, a pad and a tent; a stove, a WAG bag and water for the night
- Warm layers, and microspikes and an axe if there's snow
- Offline maps and the GPX files on your phone, a satellite messenger and a headlamp
- A good weather window (mountain-forecast.com and the NWS point forecast)

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
1	17.9 (28.8)	Canyon Creek bridge to the lookout	The lookout, 6,850 ft	Bike to the trailhead (mile 9.3), then Saddle Lake 12.1, Goat Flats 14.4, Tin Can Gap 16.3, snowfield and ladders. Water to Goat Flats
2	16.6 (26.7)	The lookout back to the bridge		On foot to the trailhead (mile 7.6), then 8.9 miles downhill on the bike
Total	**34.5 (55.5)**			**About 6,220 ft up, 6,076 ft down**

Miles, climbing and heights are from my GPS; the trail alone is about 15 miles round trip by the Washington Trails Association. Peak heights on the maps are OpenStreetMap's.

Places: Granite Falls (last gas) · Mountain Loop Highway milepost 7 · the Canyon Creek bridge on Forest Road 41, about 1,630 ft · the trailhead at Tupso Pass, about 3,030 ft · Saddle Lake, about 3,760 ft · Goat Flats, about 4,870 ft · Tin Can Gap, about 5,740 ft · the Three Fingers Lookout, 6,850 ft

Status (October 2026): Forest Road 41 closed to everyone September 29 to December 31, 2026, for a timber sale; reopening hoped for 2027. Cars stop at the Canyon Creek bridge; bikes and walkers only beyond.

Permit (2026): none. No parking pass. The lookout is free, first come, first served, about 8 people.

Rules: no fires from Saddle Lake up or at Goat Flats, no drones, no bikes past the trailhead, existing sites only at Goat Flats, groups of 12 or fewer, pack out all garbage, WAG bags above Goat Flats.

Water: Saddle Lake and streams to Goat Flats. Little or none above. Carry the night's water to the top.

Emergency: 911, with a satellite messenger: no cell service from Verlot on.

About this guide

Three Fingers Lookout Hiking Guide: by bike and on foot to a fire lookout on a rock spire in 2 days, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated October 2026.

I made this trip alone on October 12 and 13, 2023, and made two films about it: Hiking to the Three Fingers Fire Lookout and Overnight Alone in the Three Fingers Lookout - Hiking Guide. Everything in first person comes from that trip: the films and their descriptions, my GPS recordings and my photos. In the guide video I say October 13th; my GPS recordings say October 12 and 13, so that's what this guide uses. Rules, access and safety facts were checked on October 3, 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

Paid links, no sponsors. The gear links in this guide are paid links: I earn a commission if you buy through them, at no extra cost to you. Nobody paid for a mention in this guide, and it isn't sponsored.

Safety. The Three Fingers Lookout has real risks: a long day, exposed rock, snow and ice, ladders, lightning, cold, a fast descent on a bike, and no phone signal. This guide describes my trip, not current conditions. Check with the Forest Service, carry what you need, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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Credits. Photos are from the trip, taken by me; the cover is my film's YouTube thumbnail. GPX files are my own recordings. Maps © OpenStreetMap contributors, openstreetmap.org/copyright (ODbL). Relief: Mapzen Terrain Tiles. Facts from the USDA Forest Service (Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest), the Washington Trails Association, Washington State's Department of Health, AAA, and the businesses named.