Outdoor Activity- Staircase Rapids Trail
Submitted by Melissa Grant & Patty Suskin in Health Promotions

Forest hikes rarely get better than this. This delightful and popular trail leads to beautiful scenes. The route is entirely in the deep forest, which consists of fir, hemlock, and western red cedar. The huge trees rise above lush undergrowth that is almost as luxuriant as that in the rain forests.

The trail begins at the end of FS Road 24 across the river from Staircase Ranger Station at the edge of the clearing that was formerly occupied by the Staircase Resort. Near the trail's beginning, a side path leads to the remains of a giant western red cedar that fell in January 1999, apparently from old age. About 14 feet in diameter, it was one of the largest trees in the valley and estimated to be eight hundred years old.

The trail then comes out onto the banks of the Skokomish. The crystal clear stream, every rock on the bottom visible, flows rapidly here, the rushing water muffling the birds that dwell in the forest.

The climax of the walk is Staircase Rapids, a series of regularly spaced terraces over which the river spills. This is easily one of the Olympics' most scenic stretches of river and well worth a visit. The name Staircase derives from The Devil's Staircase, after a visitor called it that after returning from a trip up the river. The path at that time was largely a staircase of roots to which one had to cling when climbing up and down the bluff. Eventually the place became simply known as Staircase, and the name was later given to the rapids.

Highlights: History, wild birds, alpine glacier, deep forest, river
Distance: 3.5 miles roundtrip
Hike Time: 2 hours at a good pace
Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Directions: Take U.S. Highway 101 to Hoodsport and turn off onto Lake Cushman Road. Pass Lake Cushman State Park and drive to the end of the road, where there's a junction. Turn left onto Forest Service Road 24 and drive 6.6 miles to the Staircase Ranger Station and trailhead parking.