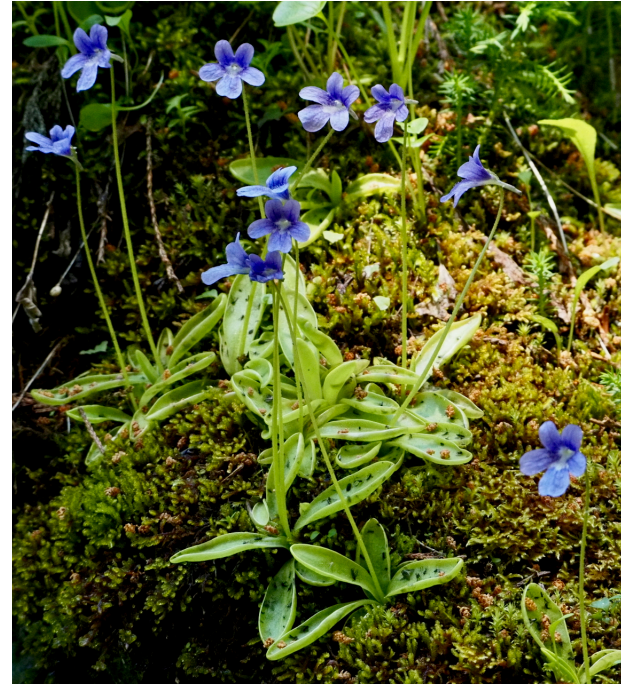


Natural History Society Newsletter

September 2025



Switchback Trail by Ken Wilson

Along the road to Hurricane Ridge, and three miles before the ridgetop parking lot, is the Switchback trailhead. For those of us who know the Olympics, the Switchback Trail to Klahhane Ridge is a gem of a day hike. It's an easy drive to the trailhead on a paved road, and it quickly takes hikers to stupendous views. The crowds are absent. You get wild solitude. You look north to Port Angeles and the Strait and south to panoramic views of the Olympic Mountains. And there is the dramatic immensity of that striated vertical wall of rock on the side of the 6,450 feet summit of Mount Angeles. In good weather, one can sit for an hour, enjoying the wild tranquility, the views, and the ravens soaring effortlessly in the updrafts.

But it's not an easy hike. This trail switchbacks the entire way, gaining a substantial 1,500 ft in 1.5 miles -- a fairly steep gradient. It is the effort required that keeps most visitors away. But we're in no hurry, as we hike slowly with rest breaks through a variety of vegetation zones and ecologies. First, we'll see the inconspicuous butterwort, an insectivorous plant with a sticky leaf surface to capture tiny insects for their nutrients. A small trickle of a stream presents its own miniature ecosystem of plant species. With the flexibility of their branches, yellow cedars and Sitka alders dominate the slopes where avalanches have prevented other tree species from thriving. Higher up, there is little shade but much subalpine plant growth. We will look for wildflowers and colorful lichens adapted to the harsh environment of rock crevices and intense sunlight, the multitude of mountain beaver or Olympic marmot holes with mounds of upturned soil, and maybe a small flock of songbirds that migrate for a short number of weeks to higher elevation food sources in late summer and fall. Enjoy the distraction of a chipmunk or two with their beady eyes or discover a hawk on its southward migration.

Outing: Olympic Mountain Hike

Join the Natural History Society on **Friday, September 19**, to hike the Switchback Trail. We will meet at 7:30am at the Four Corners Park and Ride, and carpool to the Switchback trailhead. This is a steep 3-mile out-and-back hike with an opportunity to hike further. Weather is **USUALLY** still good in September. Our outing leader is Ken Wilson, a well-known Port Townsend naturalist. Expect also to be treated to the varied expertise among outing participants, who are always happy to share. For details and signups, please RSVP to Eileen at ecooney49@earthlink.net.

Book Club Selection

The Natural History Book Club will meet at the Land Trust's Illahee Preserve on **Monday, September 22, from 3:00 to 4:30** to discuss *Chanterelle Dreams*, *Amanita Nightmares* by Greg Marley. Find more information about the Book Club at: olympicnature.org/book-club/ Directions and information about the Illahee Preserve: <https://saveland.org/protected-properties/illahee-preserve/>

Editors: Wendy Feltham & Dave Rugh

Photo credits: *Neotamias amoenus ssp. caurinus* (Olympic Chipmunk) and *Pinguicula macroceras* (Horned Butterwort)
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