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## Mount Si may be crowded but it sure comes in handy

By KAREN SYKES [BIO](#)  
SPECIAL TO THE POST-INTELLIGENCER



Some hikers are finding this spring very frustrating, with a snowpack that might last well into summer.

The lack of snow-free trails has dampened my motivation, with many access roads to favorite hikes still closed. Other than desert hikes, there's not much available east of the mountains, either. The Olympics aren't much better. The Hoodspout Ranger Station reports that many trails and roads at lower elevations are still covered by snow.

Excuse my whining -- I had to get it out of my system before I could write about Mount Si.

Seasoned hikers may yawn or grumble at the mere mention of Mount Si, but others new to the Northwest know little of this handy mountain so close to home. As for me, Mount Si is always good medicine, rain or shine.

The mountain, situated within the Mount Si Natural Resources Conservation Area, was named for Josiah Merritt ("Uncle Si"), a settler in the area; the Indians called it "Kelbts."

We are trying to get back in shape after a long winter and Mount Si is the ideal destination for those so inclined. It was May 15 -- another cold, rainy day. Though we got an early start, we were surprised at how many hikers were already on the trail; it seems Mount Si is busier than usual because so many other trails are inaccessible.

Though conditions were wintry, we were grateful for the early flowers that graced the first mile of trail -- trilliums, bleeding hearts and salmonberries. The vine maple was leafing out; at least it looked like spring.

We have many favorite spots along the trail, but I always enjoy reaching Snag Flats, a plateau where I can recover from the steady uphill climb. Snag Flats is often dark and damp but is an ideal place to cool down on a hot day. In 1995, an interpretive boardwalk was built in the flats with the help of volunteers who hauled in the lumber.

Mileage signs jump out at you every half-mile to let you know how fast (or slow) you are ascending. The trail is steep but easy to follow and generally suitable for everyone in the family, at least partway. Regulars can't take more than a few steps without running into someone they know.

Though generally safe, Mount Si can be hazardous when there is ice on the trail, and there have been injuries (on May 15 there was 8 inches of snow at the top and it was still snowing). One New Year's Day I descended the trail inch by inch, scooting and sliding, using trees as handholds. Many hikers I met that day were wearing crampons.

Mount Si is not a trail for those seeking solitude. It is the uphill version of Green Lake and just about as crowded. About the only time we've been alone on Mount Si is when we hiked it after work in January and February. We'd hike until it got dark, turn around and descend by headlamp. We usually made it to Snag Flats before darkness set in, which gave us a respectable workout.

Though far from a wilderness experience, it is fun to people watch -- trail users come in all ages, shapes and sizes. You'll see mountaineers in training carrying enormous packs, long-legged runners with bright fanny packs and shoes, families with dogs and children (sometimes local dogs wait at the trailhead to select the most promising hiker in terms of edible treats), aging boomers and young couples. Once I met a survivalist with a Volkswagen-size pack who was going up Mount Si to "live." I wonder what happened to him.

Not everyone makes it to the end of the official trail and most hikers shouldn't climb the Haystack (the summit). I've climbed the Haystack but it's harder than it looks and there have been fatalities. Near it is a monument placed in memory of a youth who fell to his death. There is always the danger of rockfall, a couple of difficult moves

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