

# Google Earth View of the PCT



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As every reader of the *Communicator* knows, the PCT is the jewel in the crown of America's scenic trails, spanning 2,650 miles from Mexico to Canada through three western states. It reveals the beauty of the desert, unfolds the glaciated expanses of the Sierra Nevada, and provides commanding vistas of volcanic peaks and glaciers in the Cascade Range. Thousands of hikers and equestrians enjoy this national treasure each year. Some only travel a few miles, while others complete every mile in a single season!

Now, more information than ever is available about the PCT, information that can provide the seasoned user with specific data or the novice with inspiration to experience the trail firsthand. One such new PCT information source is **Google Earth**, an online tool that allows us to gaze upon the PCT from a new perspective.


Google Earth is a free computer application that provides an aerial view of the entire planet. The user can pan from side to side and zoom in to any location on Earth. Features such as roads, towns, and favorite Mexican restaurants can be turned on or off by the viewer. One of our **U.S. Forest Service** cartographers,

**Daniel Spring**, has created a PCT file (in the Google Earth KML format) that overlays the trail on aerial photos. PCT enthusiasts can follow the trail from the sky above as it winds its way through mountains and valleys. Another feature creates a "fly through" effect showing the terrain in 3-D.

These features on Google Earth can be downloaded from the Web free of charge from <http://earth.google.com/>. Start the program on your computer and add the PCT file from <http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/showthreaded.php/Cat/0/Number/215852/page/>.

Features can be turned on by checking boxes in the *Places* and *Layers* menus on the left side of the Google Earth screen. For instance, turn on the volcano layer and you'll see how many volcanoes are near the PCT.

For those interested in the technical side of this data, the geographic information system (GIS) files from which this KML originates are maintained and updated by the Forest Service. The line work originates from various sources, including Forest Service Cartographic Feature Files (CFF), USGS Digital Line Graphs (DLG) and in some places Global Positioning Systems (GPS). This file is continuously being reviewed and updated by the Forest Service, and although all efforts are made to produce the most accurate digital representation of the PCT, the product presented on Google Earth may not perfectly reflect the true location of the trail.

For more information regarding the PCT and the Forest Service, please visit the Forest Service's PCT website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/pct/>. And, of course, the PCTA Web site ([www.pcta.org](http://www.pcta.org)) is always available as a resource as well. Visit *What's New* on the PCTA site for links to Google Earth and the Google Earth PCT file listed above. 



The red line on this Google Earth screen shot represents the PCT. Log on to follow the trail from above or to "fly through" its terrain.