

# Trail Notes

## North Idaho Winter Backcountry Tours



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# NORTH IDAHO SKI / SNOWSHOE TOURS

Prepared by the University of Idaho Outdoor Program staff as a local resource. These are very brief descriptions to assist recreationists in familiarizing themselves with the Moscow / Pullman area in selecting local trails that meet their skill level. **Use these descriptions only in selecting an appropriate trip for your skill level and seek more detailed information.**

*It is the reader's responsibility to ensure they have sufficient skill and fitness to participate in the activities safely. The authors or Outdoor Program assumes no liability or responsibility to any person or entity for injuries, death, loss or damages which are caused by the information contained in this article.*

## **Safety Guidelines**

- Let someone know where you will be skiing/snowshoeing and your estimated return time.
- Learn avalanche safety procedures if you are skiing/snowshoeing in an area that is prone to avalanches.
- On longer trips, carry a backpack with food, drink, extra clothing, first-aid kit, wax and repair kit.
- Carry a map of the area and a compass.
- Only ski/snowshoe on trails that are within your ability level.
- Understand that skiing/snowshoeing alone exposes you to greater risks.
- Avoid skiing/snowshoeing on lakes, streams or rivers, as the ice under the snow may be unsafe.
- Learn the rules of cross-country skiing/snowshoeing etiquette (when to yield, moving to give others room to pass, who has the right of way and so on.)
- Dress in layers and choose clothing that will wick moisture away from your skin.
- Remember that you have to ski/snowshoe back the distance you skied out. Don't over extend and get caught as night is falling.

\*Avalanche advisories, forecasts, and reports on snow conditions are offered through the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center.

## **Groomed Skiing Areas -XC skiing –Snowshoeing**

The areas are arranged according to distance from Moscow.

### **Palouse Divide**

Located 40 miles North-East of Moscow, this Nordic ski area has good access right off Highway 6. From Moscow travel North on Hwy 95 for approximately 16 miles, then travel East on Hwy 6 for approximately 23 miles. Keep driving until you see Dennis Mountain Road, turn right and follow this road for ¼ miles and a left at the fork and continue for half mile. This is an Idaho Park n' Ski area and requires a sticker which can be purchased at Hyper Spud Outdoor Shop in Moscow. The loop trails that leave the alpine ski area are good for beginning and intermediate skiers. The trails on the west side of Highway 6 (East-West Dennis and Sampson Jeep Trail) are more for intermediate to advanced skiers if the conditions are icy, as the descent can be quite fast. The area is "groomed" by a snowmobile so don't expect dual tracks or prompt packing after a snowfall. Information can be obtained from the old North/South ski area, now called Palouse Divide Lodge.

### **Sampson Jeep Trail**

To access this trail, turn left onto East Dennis Mtn. Road, on the East side of Hwy 6 (White Pine Dr.). Near the beginning of the East Dennis tour (refer up above) is a left fork just across from the large

clear-cut. This pleasant narrow trail leads up, down, and around for about a mile and then drops three miles down to the Meadow Creek road junction with Highway 6 as well. Either you will need a car shuttle, or reverse the route.

### **Elk Creek Falls Area**

Located approximately 53 miles from Moscow; this area has great access directly from the town of Elk River or off highway 8. This is a beautiful place and a good area for beginning and intermediate level day tours. The trails are marked but the signs are somewhat confusing to the first time visitor. There are a number of loop trips to be done of varying lengths, all of which are easy and excellent touring. This is an Idaho Park n' Ski area and requires a sticker which can be purchased at Hyper Spud Outdoor Shop in Moscow. To get there from Moscow, drive 53 miles East on Hwy. 8, passing through Troy, Deary, and Bovill. In Bovill take a right in order to stay on Hwy. 8. Now, follow the Hwy. 11 miles and take a right on Elk Creek Falls Rd. Follow this until you see FS Road 1452 and take a right. In a couple miles, there will be a recreation area parking lot.

### **Fields Spring State Park**

Fields Spring State Park is a 792-acre, forested park open year round. Located in the Blue Mountains of Southeastern Washington. A Discover Pass is required for vehicle access to state parks for day use. To get there, take US Hwy. 95 33 miles to Lewiston. From here cross the river into Clarkston, and follow signs towards Asotin, WA. You should find yourself on WA 129 S, and you will follow this Hwy. a total of 30 miles from Clarkston, through Asotin, and to the state park entrance.

### **Fish Creek Meadow**

Located approximately 8 miles south of Grangeville on Forest Service Rd. 221, this Park n' ski area is run by the Department of Parks & Recreation and requires a sticker. There are numerous trails that are well marked for length and difficulty. An added benefit is the warming shelter that provides a haven for a rest-stop and lunch. For further information and maps contact the Clearwater Ranger District, Nez Perce National Forest. To get there follow US 95 to Grangeville. Once in town, turn South onto Mt. Idaho Grade Rd. from Main St. Continue South onto Grangeville Salmon Rd. (FS Road 221). This becomes Fish Creek Rd. and will take you to the campground.

### **English Point**

Located 2 miles North of Hayden Lake this area was the first established Nordic trail system in North Idaho. The trails are marked, signed, and groomed by the U.S. Forest Service. To reach the trailhead drive North on U.S. 95 past Hayden Lake and turn East on E. Landcaster Rd., and then turn South on English Pt. Rd. The trailhead is a total of 5 miles from Hwy. 95, and the trails are gentle and suitable for beginners. Approximately 95 miles from Moscow.

### **Farragut State Park**

Located approximately 25 miles North of Coeur d'Alene, between Athol and Bayview this is a popular skiing area with many finely groomed trails near the shores of Lake Pend O'reille. This is probably the finest groomed area around and as such has become a favorite of Nordic racers, in fact there are numerous races held here every year. The snow conditions are variable, but even a few inches are sufficient for skiing on the relatively flat terrain. This is an excellent area for beginning skiers. Conditions and other information can be obtained by contacting the Park Headquarters. From Moscow follow US 95 102 miles north, and exit onto ID 54. Follow this Hwy. 4.4 miles.

## **Backcountry Day Tours**

### **Moscow Mountain**

**TAMERACK TRAILHEAD** At over 5,000 feet, Moscow Mountain receives the most snow in our vicinity, but access can be tricky during winter months. The best access for snow sports is via Tamarack road. It is plowed to about 3,500 feet most winters. This fits the “go east-up 1,500” rule well. Drive East on Idaho 8 to Troy. At the entrance of Troy, turn left onto Randall Flats Road, then take a right onto Tamarack Road. Follow Tamarack Road until it’s no longer plowed. Tours follow snowbound roads and logging trails to the top of Moscow Mountain. The Giant Cedar Grove is about 2.5 miles out the main road (which is currently hard to follow with recent logging activity).

**HEADWATERS-** From Moscow take highway 95 North for 3 miles. Turn right on Lewis Road. At the fork take a left onto Foothill Road. In 200 yards on the right you will see the parking. This area is popular for mountain biking, however many people use it as cross country ski and snow shoe access.

### **Hobo Pass**

Located approximately 6 miles North-East of Clarkia this area offers the intermediate to advanced skier some great skiing in an alpine environment. Take road number 301 that originates in the center of Clarkia and follow it to the junction with road number 321. Take road 321, which follows Merry Creek, and follow the signs to Hobo Pass. Park by the power line. Ski opportunities exist all around, but the best skiing is on the North side of the pass. The North side can be reached by following the road to the North, paralleling the power lines, and then contouring around further to the Northern aspect of the peak. The Hobo Pass road is usually plowed, but beware after big dumps. For further information contact the Clarkia Ranger Station. It is approximately 60 miles from Moscow.

### **Fourth of July Pass**

Located approximately 14 miles East of Coeur d'Alene on I-90, take exit 28; this ski area is good for beginning skiers with many opportunities for side trips. At the Fourth of July summit on I-90, park at the Mullan Tree which is just east of the summit. The trailhead begins on the South side of the interstate at road #614. The loop trail is six miles long and follows logging roads, which may be plowed if logging operations are ongoing; if so watch for trucks. For more information contact the Forest Service Supervisor's Office in Coeur d'Alene.

## **Long Day Tours and Extended Trips**

### **Freezeout Ridge**

Just East of Clarkia is a road leading up into the high St. Joe country. The road number is 301 and it begins in the center of the town of Clarkia. Follow it past the school house to a left fork (it's probably the only one plowed). Continue driving out for several miles. It eventually will junction with road #382. At that junction road 301 heads to the left and sharply uphill. You may have to ski from this point. This is snowmobile country so don't be surprised if you have to get out of someone's way. The road climbs steeply for three miles and then levels at White Rock Springs where there is a picnic table and outhouse on your right. The main road also forks right here, but you continue through the forest and up a gentler incline. It is about four more miles to where the road breaks out of the timber and you see the flank of Marks Butte. There is a short steep section leading to a traverse of the butte on the south side. It is a short ski from this point to the summit at about 6,000 feet in elevation. Often the snow is good at this elevation when it is wet below. Marks Butte is open and only timbered on the North side enabling good downhill running and telemark practice. It can be a long tour in if the snow is poor; so many parties will do an overnight trip. The snow can get very deep at this elevation giving

opportunities for snow cave construction. In fast snow the run out is fast and delightful. There is avalanche potential, so be prepared. (Refer to the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Advisory).

### **St. Joe Baldy**

Located approximately 7 miles Northeast of St. Maries on the St. Joe River road #50, which is paved (head for Avery). Drive up river about 7 miles until you reach Phillips Draw. There are signs here directing one towards Tingly Springs and St. Joe Baldy. The approach is around 8 miles and the road is steep, with many switchbacks. However, there are some permanent residents up the draw so you may get lucky and have a shorter distance to ski. An alternative, and less steep ski in, is to approach the peak from the North, from off I-90. This is accomplished by turning South off the interstate at Cataldo and driving up Latour Creek (about 13 miles) to the Rochet Divide Road. The road is usually plowed to here, but the distance to the top of the divide will, of course, depend on how far up you can drive. At any rate, this is a much more scenic and enjoyable approach if you don't mind the extra driving time. For information of the roads and maps of the area contact the Bureau of Land Management in Coeur d'Alene. This is high mountain terrain, be aware and prepared for avalanches. The area offers unlimited potential for downhill skiing with slopes that all levels should find exciting.

### **Lookout Pass**

Approximately 65 miles from Coeur D'Alene, off of I-90 East; the tours begin near the Lookout Pass Ski Area. There are many skiing possibilities to be found in the vicinity and there is terrain to suit all levels of experience. In fact, one of the best beginning tours in the region can be found here as the terrain is forgiving and the scenery superb. The tours can easily be done in a day from the Lookout Ski Area and there is potential for more extended trips as well. The St. Regis Lakes area is a great destination, but remember that this high alpine valley possesses significant avalanche hazard, so be prepared. For information on conditions and trails contact the Lookout Ski Area.

### **Lolo Pass**

Located off U.S. 12 near the Idaho/Montana border. Turn into the Lolo Pass Visitor Information Station where a large lot provides the parking. A Park n'Ski sticker is required. A number of ski trails are available from the information station and many are well suited for the beginning skier. More difficult and intermediate trails can be found, but these are rated more for length than difficulty. Backcountry skiing can be found in the area, but be aware of avalanche potential. For more information on trails and conditions contact the Powell Ranger District, Clearwater National forest, Lolo, MT.

### **Wallowas, North East Oregon**

Located in Northeastern Oregon, approximately 7 miles East of Enterprise, the Wallowa Mountains offer some of America's finest skiing. Located within the Wallowa Whitman National Forest, the Eagle Cap Wilderness area offers unlimited skiing terrain, suited to all ability levels, provided that you are in good physical condition. Always obtain the current weather and avalanche reports from the Wallowa/Whitman Ranger Station in Joseph, Oregon. This is a high alpine environment with a history of avalanches, so be aware and prepared for such emergencies.

In recent years a winter snow park has added access to the Wallowa at Salt Creek Summit. The road is plowed to about 6,000 feet ending at a parking area and warming hut shared by skiers and snowmobilers. This gives good access to the wilderness area, which is restricted to snowmobiles, around the wing ridge area. To get there; travel to Joseph Oregon, turn east on state road 3 drive, about 7 miles. Turn right on forest service road 39 (sign to Halfway), follow this to the Parking area.

### **Salmo Pass, Canada**

Located just over the border in British Columbia, Canada, this area is great alpine touring terrain. The skiing is well suited for all ability levels and does not require a high level of physical conditioning. There is a hut that is open to the public for use. The hut and pass area is a 5 hour drive from Moscow and is found between Nelway and Creston on Highway 3. Drive to the summit of Salmo Pass there a small lake and highway department buildings will be found. Park at the small turnout on the North side of the highway, cross the road, and ski the South tending Forest Service road. Once you attain the top of the ridge (around two miles) ski for two hundred yards and then look for a spruce tree with two white squares. Leave the main road and ski past the tree about 100 yards and look for the cabin. The huts are run by the Creston Ski Club and it is a courtesy gesture to contact the club's director to ask for permission as well as gaining current information on use and conditions. Contact Alex Nelson, home phone (604)428-4960, or work (604)428-3232 (he is the Sr. Health Inspector). The club's members are friendly people, and will go out of their way to help you, so show them similar consideration.

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**Local Ski Areas Map:**

