



A skier traverses trail in a SnoPark. The SnoPark system features 40 sites across the state, with an abundance of winter recreation opportunities. With proper preparation and more information, you can get even more out of your pass.

Getting the Most from Sno-Parks

Now that passes are going up, how to get more for your money

BY MICHAEL GRUSKIN

If you've bought a Sno-Park this year, you're paying 50 percent more than in previous years (see "Raising SnoPark Fees" on page 4). It's time you get a little more out of your pass.

When Purchasing Your Pass

When you buy your pass you'll also receive a Sno-Parks Brochure detailing rules, tips and locations of all the sites across Washington. Get a couple. Put one in the car and keep one at home. Trust me on this.

Armchair Skiing

Fire up your computer and visit www.parks.wa.gov/winter/nonmotor.asp. Bookmark this page. Click on Non-Motorized Sno-Parks. While you're warm and imbibing a liquid refreshment of your choice, you can peruse

maps of the ski trails and find the area and exact trail you want before you go. Click on the link under the descriptions for a detailed, printable map. Isn't that better than, "I wonder where this one goes?" Most of the trailheads have no maps. Now you will be one of the few on the trail who has one. Make sure to bring a good topo map, too. Print your own from National Geographic's TOPO or buy a Green Trails map at your local gear store or ranger station.

Up-to-Date Grooming Information

Don't put on your long-underwear and jump out the door just yet. You'll also find a grooming report on the same page with the printable map link. This is when they expect to do the grooming. But the truth is, and we are sharing the truth here, is that the Sno-Park web folks in Olympia don't know if the groomer actu-

ally made it to work this morning at Lake Wenatchee. Even if the webmaster was called with the information it wouldn't matter. He's not there on weekends.

Because you are a clever WTA member (you wouldn't be reading this article unless you were clever) you'll instead find the phone number of the Ranger District where you're headed (this info can be found for each site listed in the Sno-Park brochure). You call them and get the skinny for great skiing. Aren't you glad you kept one brochure in the house and one in the car? You're already a few steps ahead and you haven't even arrived at the Sno-Park.

Now you're ready to grab the chains and your equipment and get out there.

The Best Sno-Parks for Skiing Snoqualmie Pass

If you've ever been cross-country skiing or snowshoeing near Snoqualmie Pass

you've been to Cabin Creek. Everyone does. It's the first place they groom, so it has the most consistently reliable grooming. But it's crowded and way overused.

The best skiing near Snoqualmie is at Crystal Springs. There are charming trails along a stream with a little bridge to ski over. There's Roller Coaster Trail for fun little ups and downs. And there is "The Challenge." Enough said. The parking experience is awful enough to keep down the crowds.

Leavenworth/Lake Wenatchee

Try the Leavenworth area. You can stay at Kahler Glen Resort, ski out your door and connect to Lake Wenatchee State Park and miles of routes in that system.

Mount Spokane

Mount Spokane has an active group of users making sure the trails are great—plus, it's over 1,000 feet higher than Snoqualmie Pass.

Mount Adams

If you're willing to make a little longer drive, give Mount Adams a try. Stay in the cute little town of Trout Lake and then head out to Pineside and Smith Butte. You'll find lots of uncrowded skiing, and you may spot elk wandering around on the road as you return home.

Secrets of Sno-Parks

For years I really did not know how Sno-Parks worked. There seemed to be State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, WSDOT and private contractors doing similar things at different places. I had no idea who to call if things weren't right.

Here's the deal. The Sno-Park system is a self-sustaining system run by the Washington State

Parks. It collects money for the passes and then contracts out the snow removal and grooming to a public or private entity. Sometimes they are contracting to a State Park. The trails themselves can be on any land; private or public.

How to Make It Better

If things aren't right you must let someone know. You're the quality control system. It's better that way. It's cheaper to have skiers and snowshoers themselves letting State Parks know what's working and what needs fixing. If a particular Sno-Park or trail needs work, e-mail Winter@parks.wa.gov. Let them know what action they should take. Send a copy to the chair of the state's Winter Recreation Advisory Committee: LewPersons@comcast.net.

You can also call State Parks about problems at a Sno-Parks, but remember that:

1. No one is there on weekends.
2. A written record is better. State bureaucracy needs paperwork to show that a change is warranted.
3. Someone will be there on Monday.

Getting More with Free Money

Sno-Parks operate a grant system that has given millions of dollars to user groups that want to create new Sno-Parks or improve existing ones. What's a user group? WTA is a user group. The grant application can be found online, as of this writing, at www.parks.wa.gov/winter/grants/default.asp. Get one now to become familiar with it. It must be in before May. It is voted on in August. This is the way new facilities happen all over the state.

There are many great summer trails that could also work for winter recreation—these are good potential projects for grant money. The state also needs more sledding hills. Maybe we need a Sno-Park for ice-climbing in this state. Let the Sno-Park administrators know what you'd like to see more of. State Parks officials do listen. They have worked to increase opportunities in places like the Snoqualmie area specifically because users made their voices heard.

So go out there and have a full-fun winter by getting the most out of your Sno-Parks.

Michael Gruskin is a member of the Sno-Parks Winter Recreation advisory board. ♦



Mount Adams from Trout Lake. If you're looking for uncrowded skiing, head for the Pineside and Smith Butte Sno-Parks near Trout Lake.