

The Great Outdoors by Bus

Think a car is the eleventh essential? Reaching trailheads by public transit may be easier than you think

A point-to-point hike without doing the two-car shuffle? A day trip without a stop at the gas station? Getting out into the woods without a car? It's all possible. Both King County Metro Transit and Sound Transit offer easy, reliable bus access to and from several popular destinations in the Issaquah Alps.

One of my favorite bus-accessible hikes is **West Tiger #3 Summit**. The 5-mile round-trip hike up Tiger Mountain's west side winds along a wide, well-maintained trail that climbs 2,100 feet through forest and fern with breakthrough views down to the valleys below. The last half mile climbs steeply up a rougher, narrower path, but the views from the top are worth the effort. Puget Sound glimmers in the distance with the snowcapped Olympic Mountains as a backdrop. Cougar and Squak Mountains fill in the foreground.

The West Tiger #3 Summit is an excellent choice for a quick up-and-down hike. It is well used year-round by trail runners, seasoned and neophyte hikers, dogs and their people, and those looking for a solid conditioning route. On summer weekdays, it's popular as an after-work stress reliever. When I have a little extra time, I like to tack on an easy stroll around the calm waters of Tradition Lake or relax in one of the many byways along the wide, flat trail.

If West Tiger trails don't suit your fancy, you can hike the 7.5-mile round trip to **Poo Poo Point** from the West Tiger trailhead. Though not the typical starting point for Poo Poo, the trail is just as enjoyable and roughly the same distance as from the more popular trailhead at Issaquah High School. Take Bus Trail past the turnoff to

Story by Leslie Leber

West Tiger #3 Summit and continue to the junction with Poo Poo Point and High School Trails. Wind your way up through the forest, keeping your eyes peeled for stumps with springboard notches, which give you some hint as to the history of the area.

Most days, hikers who reach the top of Poo Poo Point are rewarded by the colorful sight of parasailers and hang gliders launching from the wide-open, grassy hillside and spiraling slowly earthward on wind currents down to a landing field far below. There is plenty of room to sit, relax and enjoy a mesmerizing show.

Poo Poo Point also offers amazing natural sights in addition to the more daring human variety. On a hazy day, the views of Issaquah and Maple Valley are noteworthy, and on a clear day, nothing can beat looking out over Lake Sammamish, the valleys and, if you're lucky, Mount Baker.

Metro Route 209 provides easiest access to trailhead at West Tiger Mountain. The bus stop at exit 20 off Interstate-90 is just 0.80 miles from the main parking lot, located at the end of the frontage road to the southwest of the stop. From the parking lot, follow Bus Trail—named for the rusty skeleton of a bus long ago abandoned in the woods—about 0.25 miles to the well-marked turnoff for the summit.

An alternate way to the trailhead is via Sound Transit Route 554. Ask the driver for the stop at East Sunset Way and Rainier Boulevard at the far end of downtown Issaquah. Walk several blocks east to a nondescript parking lot near the freeway overpass. From there, a trail climbs steeply up the hillside under the utility lines, but levels out within half a mile or so. Follow the trail to Tradition Lake and the West Tiger Trailhead.

When you are ready to return home, you have several options for reconnecting with a bus. Follow the utility line trail down to East Sunset Way and the #554, or head down from the trailhead to I-90 at exit 20 for the westbound #209. If you have time and energy, consider walking the 2.5 mile High Point/Issaquah Creek Trail from the north side of Exit 20 into downtown Issaquah, or up a spur trail to the Issaquah Highlands Park and Ride. The beauty of riding the bus is that you can add to your hike or change your route without being tied to getting back to your car at the end of the day.

It takes a little bit of planning to put a bus-hike journey together, especially if you aren't a frequent rider. But with Metro's online trip planner and a sense of adventure, taking the bus can provide flexibility to your day. Noting two or three options for return bus routes and connection times will help ease any anxiety about hiking by bus. The best part? You can nap on the ride home. ♦

What's the best trail to take public transit to? The Bus Trail, of course.



Michael O'Connell



Jennifer Michelson

You don't see paragliders from many trails, but they are a common sight when you hike to Poo Poo Point.



Alan Bauer

Taking the Bus Into the Alps

Metro Route 209 Issaquah/North Bend

Runs weekdays from 5:20 am to 9:40 pm and on Saturday from 7:30 am to 9:30 pm

Sound Transit Route 554 Seattle/Issaquah

Runs weekdays from 5:30 am to 12:20 am and on weekends from 7 am to midnight

For more information on hiking by bus, check out WTA's new How-To section online, www.wta.org/hiking-info/how-to.

Leslie is a WTA Fireside Circle member. She gets her insider transit tips from her husband, who drives for Metro.