

## Skating the Snowmobile Trails

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In a search for more skiing variety, I have been skate-skiing on snowmobile trails for more than 20 years. Snowmobile grooming tends to be less frequent than ski grooming, but the snowmobile groomers have top-notch equipment, and skiing on a freshly groomed snowmobile trail is great skiing. Most of my skiing has not been on freshly groomed trails, and conditions have varied from excellent to poor.

Remember that you are skiing on trails groomed by funds provided by snowmobilers, and so you are their guest. I always try go to the side of the trail when snowmobiles pass. I have never had an unfriendly incident, but I have heard others report such incidents.

Here are some of the trails that I have skied. I will start with the Lolo Pass area. A map of the snowmobile trails is available at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/clearwater/VisitorInfo/Assets/pdfs/snow\\_missoula\\_draft2009.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/clearwater/VisitorInfo/Assets/pdfs/snow_missoula_draft2009.pdf). A grooming report for these trails is at <http://www.missoulasnowgoers.org/Pages/Trails.html>.

The Moose Ridge loop around Mt. Fuji probably the most popular snowmobile trail for Missoula skiers. Ski the short trail from the visitor center to the road, and then go right on the road. After about 2 ½ miles, go left at the junction crossing the creek. The trail descends for a mile or so, then climbs to the top of the ridge. There is a moderately steep descent to the junction with the Elk Meadows road. Turning left on the Elk Meadows road takes you back to the visitor center. The whole loop is about 14 miles. For a longer ski, go right on the Elk Meadows road. Elk Meadows is 14 miles from this junction, and you can go out and back as far as you want.

Another loop from the Lolo Pass visitor center is the Lost Park loop. Ski out the Elk Meadows road through Packer Meadows to the 3 mile marker (which is where the ski trails come close to the road). The snowmobile trail climbs steeply (skating is challenging) up forest road 5952. After about 2 miles, the trail reaches the top of the ridge. Soon after reaching the top, there is a not-very-well packed trail to the snowmobile shelter that I have not skied. Soon thereafter you reach junction F. To the right is a well-packed trail that goes to the snowmobile shelter. To the left the trail goes about 2 miles downhill to junction D. At this junction, turn left to go over the ridge back to the join the Elk Meadows road about 2 miles from the visitor center. I am guessing that the loop is about 15 miles without the side trip to the shelter.

It is also possible to cross the road from the Lolo Pass visitor center and ski to about 6 miles to Granite Pass. From Granite Pass, one can either return to Lolo pass, or ski down Granite Creek eventually ending up at the Fish Creek trailhead at about mile 6 of Highway 12. Of course, this can be skied in the other direction.

I used to ski to West Fork Butte Lookout from the work center at about mile 14 of Highway 12, but in recent years conditions on this trail have not been good. Once I skied past the lookout and ended up at Lolo Pass.

The Skalkaho pass road east of Hamilton is groomed, and Annie Creighton often posts conditions under the "Other Locations" topic of the Snow/Grooming page.

The Seeley Lake area also has many trails to ski. See <http://www.driftriders.org/files/snomotrail2.pdf> for a map. Over the years, several of these have been used as the OSCAR race course. The Rice Ridge loop was the course for the last 2 years (and also over 20 years ago). The Augie cutoff can be reached from the ski trails (see the map), and the Rice Ridge loop can be skied in either direction. Another former OSCAR course is the Lake Marshall loop on the other side of the valley which starts and ends at junction K. The 50K OSCAR did this loop twice. I have also skied to Lake Elsin.

The road from Highway 200 to Garnet Ghost Town is also groomed after Jan. 1. (It remains open to vehicles until then.) The turnoff to the parking lot is just before you reach Lubrecht coming from Missoula, and Garnet is 11 miles from the parking lot. The first 5 miles is a challenging climb. The Missoula SnowGoers also groom this road, so check their grooming report (above).