

ROAD TRIP!

An Opinionated Guide to Groomed Nordic Skiing Destinations in the Northwest

John Sarich - December 2015

What we are going to talk about...

- 32 good or great places you can drive to in a day
- 4 destinations for longer road trips
- 4 splurges to take for special trips!

Disclaimers, and explanations

- All opinions are my own
- Miles are the driving distance from Bellingham as estimated by Google maps. Winter driving conditions may vary wildly.
- Elevation, price and trail lengths are taken from the most recent websites available - They may not be accurate or current by the time you actually get there. Elevations are for the main trailhead or parking lot.
- Driving distance is given in miles, elevation in feet and trail distance in kilometers.
- When the price for a trail pass varies by day or age, the price shown is for a weekend adult pass. Canadian dollars are used for Canadian sites.
- My recollections are based on my most recent visits, which may be a few years ago.
- Not all facilities are open or groomed every day - check their websites if you want to go in the middle of the week

Salmon Ridge

- 50 miles from Bellingham
 - 2000 feet elevation
- 23 kilometers of groomed trails
- Yearly Sno-Park permit required - \$40 per vehicle





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GOOD:

- Close to Bellingham
- Beautiful Scenery

BAD:

- Groomed most weeks, if conditions are good
- Low elevation with inconsistent weather and snow conditions

Hollyburn

- North of Vancouver on Cypress Mountain
- 75 miles, 2600 feet, 19 kilometers, \$20

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GOOD

- Close enough for a day or evening ski
- Canada's "most popular" nordic ski area

BAD

- Can be very crowded
- Inconsistent snow and weather
- Is often icy, especially on hills

Manning Park

- East of the Fraser Valley on BC Highway 3
- 120 miles, 4500 elevation, 40 kilometers, \$21







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GOOD:

- Closest overnight to Bellingham
- More consistent snow, usually drier, than on the coast
- Great cabin accommodations for an inexpensive trip
- Nordic pass includes a free ride up the T-Bar lift
- Free shuttle from the lodge to the far end of the trail
- New trails and day lodge in the last few years

BAD:

- Not very extensive or challenging terrain

Whistler Olympic Park

- Site of the Cross-Country, biathlon and ski jump for 2010 Olympics
 - 130 miles, 2800 feet, 55 kilometers, \$25
 - Adjoins Callaghan Lodge trails
- Can stay in Squamish (45 minutes) or Whistler (30 Minutes)









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GOOD:

- Beautiful area, custom designed to be a world-class cross-country venue
- Also includes many easy and recreational areas
- Very nice day lodge
- A full slate of available services - rentals, lessons, snow shoeing, biathlon, food
- Always lots of snow (except for last year!) and exceptional grooming

BAD:

- Can be crowded on weekends
- No lodging on-site

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Also Nearby - Whistler Village Trails (Lost Lake Park) - 2200 feet, 32 kilometers, \$20

Stevens Pass Vicinity

1. **Stevens Pass** - 5 miles east of summit - 130 miles, 3000 feet, 28 kilometers, \$20
2. **Lake Wenatchee Sno-Parks** - 150 miles, 1900 feet, 46 kilometers, Sno-Park permit **with special grooming sticker (\$40 year)**
3. **Plain Hardware Store** - 155 miles, 1900 feet, 11 kilometers, \$10
4. **Leavenworth** - 160 miles, 1200 feet, 23 kilometers in 3 areas, \$18









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GOOD:

- These are all very nice areas which provide good skiing under the right conditions
- Several areas close together give you lots of options
- There are also several more backcountry and ungroomed options in the Lake Wenatchee area
- Leavenworth has a great old CCC day lodge near the site of an old ski jump
- Plain makes a great stopover ski when driving to Methow or Chelan

BAD:

- Leavenworth is very low elevation so check conditions carefully
- We have experienced very marginal grooming in the Lake Wenatchee Sno-Parks
- Stevens Pass is basically an up-and-back route following the power lines

Echo Ridge

- On a ridge outside the city of Chelan - 220 miles, 3400 feet, 25 kilometers, \$10









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GOOD:

- A beautiful, high elevation area
- Very uncrowded, low key and friendly
- Many options for food and reasonably priced accommodations
- After skiing, there are several great wine-tasting options on the way back to town

BAD:

- Doesn't seem to get as much snow as other areas
- Grooming is not as frequent as other areas and it's sometimes hard to determine the snow and grooming conditions from the website

Methow Valley

- Around the towns of Winthrop and Mazama, Washington
 - 275 miles, 1700-2900 feet, **200 kilometers!**, \$24







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GOOD:

- Largest network of trails in the US
- Exceptional, daily grooming
- A wide range of types of trails from flat to very hilly
- Multiple trailheads give you many options, even if there is little snow in the valley
- Many lodging and eating options
- Remote huts available for ski-in lodging
- We have had good experiences taking lessons here

BAD:

- Highway 20 is closed in the winter so you have to drive all the way south via Stevens Pass on Highway 2.

Stake Lake

- South of Kamloops, BC, at the northern summit of the Coquihalla Highway
 - 200 miles, 4300 feet, 60 kilometers, \$14







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- They do an amazing job of grooming even with little snow
- An extensive trail network
- New washrooms are now open!

BAD:

- No lodging on-site

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Also nearby - Logan Lake - 3500 feet, 36 kilometers, very cheap.

A smaller, club facility with more marginal snow and grooming.

The only place I've ever skied where wild horses have tracked up the groomed trails





Sun Peaks

- A downhill resort and ski village north of Kamloops, BC
 - 240 miles, 4200 feet, 34 kilometers, \$18





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GOOD:

- Ski-in, ski-out accommodations available in the village
- Good consistent snow conditions and grooming
- If you want, you get a free ride up a chair lift with your nordic ticket and a dedicated nordic trail to go down on

BAD:

- Not as long of a trail system as other similar sites

100 Mile House

- On the Cariboo Highway going to northern BC and Alaska
- Two separate, very cleverly named, ski areas, 99 mile and 108 mile
 - 260 miles, 3000 feet, 114(?) kilometers, \$10

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GOOD:

- Very uncrowded and low key
- I would categorize this as more of a high desert than mountains, so the trails have more of a feel of a tour through rolling countryside

BAD:

- Since it is a high desert it is consistently cold, but they do not always get a lot of snow. Check conditions carefully before you go.

Mt Washington

- A downhill resort and village near Comox, BC on Vancouver Island
- 190 miles plus 2 hour ferry ride, 3600 feet, 54 kilometers, \$21





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GOOD:

- A relatively short and easy drive
- We have always found very nice condos to stay at in the village
- Nice terrain, great scenery, varied trails and a nice day lodge
- Free ride up one of the downhill lifts
- Lots of snow

BAD:

- The long ferry ride makes it seem like a long and expensive trip
- This area gets hits with storms coming right off the Pacific Ocean so can have some **extremely** windy days

Snoqualmie Pass Vicinity

I-90 East of Seattle

1. **Summit at Snoqualmie (Downhill area)** - 135 miles, 3000 feet, 50 kilometers, \$21
2. **Cabin Creek and Crystal Springs Sno-Parks** - 145 miles, 2500 feet, 36 kilometers, Sno-Park permit with grooming sticker

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GOOD:

- Easy to get to, on the main highway
- At The Summit you get two rides up the chairlift with a great, long nordic trail to come down on
- There are several more ungroomed Sno-Parks in the area

BAD:

- Crowded
- At the Summit, most nordic trails are at the top of the chair lift so a chair lift ride is required

Mt. Tahoma Trail System

- Near Ashford, Washington, west of Mt. Rainier National Park
- 165 miles, 2400 or 3300 feet, 32 kilometers, regular Sno-Park permit



© Images in Light 2013



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GOOD:

- A beautiful and extensive trail system run by the nordic club from the Tacoma area
- No-fee huts and yurts available for overnight stays on the trails
- Many more miles of ungroomed trails
- More ungroomed trails in nearby Mt. Rainier National Park

BAD:

- Grooming is done by club volunteers so may not be done as consistently or as often as other areas
- The area seems susceptible to storms - snow, rain or wind
- Get your reservations early for overnight stays

White Pass

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 - 230 miles, 4400 feet, 18 kilometers, \$15

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GOOD:

- Highest elevation of any western Washington area
- Also several ungrooved snow-parks nearby
- Even though it is run by the downhill area, it is across the highway from the downhill area so is very quiet and uncrowded

BAD:

- Only 18 k of trails makes it hard to justify a trip from Bellingham just to go to this area

Nickel Plate

- Out of Penticton in the BC Okanagan, above the Apex downhill area
 - 230 miles, **6200 feet**, 56 kilometers, \$15









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GOOD:

- At over 6000 feet has the most reliable snow of any area
- They claim "one of the longest ski seasons in the western hemisphere"
- Very pretty area with varied terrain, a nice clubhouse and complete rental facilities

BAD:

- Lodging at Apex always seems expensive for what you get, and is still 4 miles away - The other option is to stay in Penticton, 40 minutes away and much cheaper
- At over 6000 feet, this may not be the best choice for the first trip of the year for those of us who are completely out of shape

Silver Star and Sovereign Lake

- 2 Adjoining areas in the BC Okanagan outside of Vernon
- Silver Star is a downhill resort and ski village, Sovereign is a club venue
 - 270 miles, 5200 feet, 105 kilometers, \$23 for both venues















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GOOD:

- Usually the first area to open, always skiable by US Thanksgiving
- Reliable snow
- Extensive, varied trail system
- Ski-in, ski-out accommodations available at Silver Star
- Chair lift rides available on nordic tickets

BAD:

- Some of the Silver Star trails cross the downhill skiers' paths

Smaller BC Okanagan areas

1. **China Ridge** - near Princeton - 160 miles, 4000 feet, 20 kilometers, \$10
2. **Telemark** - near West Kelowna - 220 miles, 3300 feet, 50 kilometers, \$14
3. **McCulloch Lake (Kelowna Nordic)**- near Kelowna - 250 miles, 4100 feet, 75 kilometers, \$10
4. **Larch Hills** - near Salmon Arm - 280 miles, 3300 feet, 30 kilometers, \$10



CHINA RIDGE
CROSS COUNTRY
SKI CLUB

WELCOME SKIERS

- Keep to marked trails
- Yield to skiers coming downhill
- Do not take dogs on trails
- Pack out what you pack in
- Sign register each day you ski

Meritt
Forest District

This cabin was constructed by
China Ridge Cross Country Ski Assoc.
in co-operation with Ministry of Forests,
Meritt Forest District.

PLEASE TREAT IT WITH RESPECT

- Report any damages to Ministry of Forests,
Pinetown Field Office: 295-6499 or
Meritt Dist. Office: 1-800-665-1511

Ministry of Forests
China Ridge
Cross Country
Ski Association



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GOOD:

- All these venues are very inexpensive, uncrowded and friendly
- China Ridge makes a great stopover while driving to Nickel Plate but can also be a great weekend destination on its own
- Telemark makes a great stopover while driving to or from Penticton or Silver Star

BAD:

- China Ridge is infrequently groomed and hard to determine the grooming status
- Telemark and Larch Hills are low so check conditions before you go

Mt. Spokane

- Sno-Park area outside the city of Spokane
- 390 miles, 4600 feet, 60 kilometers, Sno-Park with grooming sticker





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- Highest elevation of any Washington area
- They will have good snow even in years that most areas in Washington do not (like 2013-14 or 2014-15 winters)
- Extensive trails, good terrain and a nice lodge

BAD:

- A long way to drive (but it is almost all freeway)

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Also nearby - Schweitzer Mountain Resort near Sandpoint, Idaho
440 miles, 4700 feet, 32 kilometers, \$15







West Kootenays, BC

Four areas close to each other in southern BC, roughly north of Spokane:

1. **Castlegar** Nordic - 350 miles, 4100 feet, 45 kilometers, \$10
2. **Black Jack** - near Rossland - 360 miles, 3900 feet, 40 kilometers, \$15
3. **Nelson** Nordic Ski Club - 400 miles, 2800 feet, 25 kilometers, \$13
4. **Whitewater** Resort - near Nelson - 400 miles, 5300 feet, 15 kilometers, \$8

PAULSON CROSS COUNTRY RECREATION SITE

Welcome



50 meters →

Trail user fees in effect. Pay at Viking Centre

MUD LAKE PARKING LOT





BLACK

JACK

SKI CLUB

INTERIOR SIGNS & PAINTING

ENTRANCE
→















Whitewater NORDIC CENTRE

Whitewater
These cross country ski trails were designed and constructed in a joint partnership between the forest and tourism industries.
Kaiserlul Lumber and Whitewater Ski Resort planned and developed the trails together. Kaiserlul Lumber harvested the area while carefully maintaining both its visual and ecological integrity. This leading example of environmental stewardship will benefit the recreation community for many years into the future.
We also thank Kaiserlul Lumber for donating the materials for this Nordic centre kiosk.

Whitewater
NORDIC CENTRE

TICKET BATES	RENTALS
ADULT TRAIL	SKIING
ADULT TRAIL	SKIING
ADULT TRAIL	SKIING
ADULT TRAIL	SKIING

FOR THE
W/ UP
Kiosk





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GOOD:

- Beautiful areas with consistent snow and plenty of sunshine
- Inexpensive and uncrowded
- All of these areas are close enough that they can easily be done in the same trip

BAD:

- A long drive (but can be combined with a Spokane trip)

Ready for more?

Here's some ideas for longer trips!

- Bend, Oregon - 440 miles
- McCall, Idaho - 550 miles
- Sun Valley, Idaho - 740 miles
- Canmore, Alberta - 520 miles

Don't want to drive? Four fantastic splurge trips

1. Amtrak to Essex, Montana





Don't want to drive? Four fantastic splurge trips

1. Amtrak to Essex, Montana
2. Royal Gorge, California





Don't want to drive? Four fantastic splurge trips

1. Amtrak to Essex, Montana
2. Royal Gorge, California
3. Spring Break in Anchorage







Don't want to drive? Four fantastic splurge trips

1. Amtrak to Essex, Montana
2. Royal Gorge, California
3. Spring Break in Anchorage
4. Yellowstone!









