



SKI TRACKS

Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club

March 2015 — Volume 13 — Number 3

Inside:
President's Message
March Program:

**Roadless Areas
and Wilderness**

...Our Best Landscapes
by Howie Wolke

Articles:

Mark's 3-Day Chief Joe Area Ski Tour
George's Saddle Mountain Ski Tour

President's Message

Unbelievably, and in spite of receiving relatively small amounts of new snow, skiing on the Chief Joseph Trail System has ranged from good to superb the entire month of February (2015). Many of you, especially our volunteer groomers, will remember the massive amounts of snow the trails received during February only one year ago. With the exception of those groomed by Lost Trail's large PistenBully, it was impossible to keep the trails open for skiing—slogging yes, skiing no! Dealing with 2' to 3' foot snowfalls every few days for an entire month proved to be too much for snowmobile-pulled grooming equipment to handle. What a difference a year makes!

Those huge snowfalls last year led to our Club entering into an agreement with Lost Trail to groom all of the Chief Joseph Ski Trails this winter. Remember this winter's December snowfalls? It was almost a repeat of last February (2014). The PistenBully saved the day and built the base of snow under all the ski trails (*classic and multi-use*) that we are now enjoying.

Based upon comments left on the trailhead sign-in sheets, it must be assumed that skiers are overwhelmingly happy with the trails this winter. However, it appears our volunteer groomers (*using snowmobiles to put the finishing touches on the trails*) are even more pleased. That is what we've been working to achieve, happy skiers and ecstatic groomers!

Some minor details remain to be worked out with grooming schedules and so forth. But overall, most visitors to the Chief Joseph Ski Trails have been happy with the trails this winter. Now, if it will just keep snowing for another month or so....

Over the past several weekends, snowmobiles and motorized snowbikes have encroached on a couple of the classic trails, Vista View and Lost Trail Loop. They have also been running amok around Anderson Mountain (*south side of Hwy 43*). Contact was made with the Ravalli County Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club to gain their help in dealing with this problem. They have agreed to work with us to educate local snowmobile users that such activities are not acceptable. Before next winter rolls around, we will work with their club members to place an adequate number of signs along Gibbons Pass Road indicating that highpointing from groomed trails (*mostly Gibbons Pass Road*) is not acceptable and that such activities should be restricted to the areas around and east of Hogan Cabin.

In the meantime, if you observe snowmobiles and snowbikes highpointing along Gibbons Pass Road or on any of the classic trails, please take a photograph of the license posted on the machines, note the time and date, and send your pictures to me at michael.hoyt@gmail.com. They will be passed on to the snowmobile club and appropriate law enforcement agencies to handle. But, avoid confrontations! That may exacerbate the problem.

Michael Hoyt

Last month's regularly scheduled Ski Club Meeting and Board Meeting were cancelled because of a conflict with Hamilton's Wildlands Backcountry Film Festival scheduled for the same date and time.

Because a large percentage of our Club's members planned to attend that special event, we cancelled our February meetings.

No meeting minutes were generated to include in this newsletter.

Bitterroot Cross Country Ski Club presents:

Roadless Areas and Wilderness ...Our Best Landscapes

Howie Wolke will discuss the public land roadless area issue and the effort to keep designated Wilderness wild. They are the lifeblood of a healthy landscape, the best remaining repositories for native species and evolutionary processes. According to Wolke these wildlands are irreplaceable, with intrinsic values that go way beyond what they are perceived to mean to any user group.



Former Bitterroot resident Howie Wolke has been a wilderness advocate and wilderness guide since the mid-1970s. He leads wilderness trips from Alaska to New Mexico, has authored two books plus many articles on the vanishing American wilderness, and is past President and current Vice President of the national conservation group Wilderness Watch.

7:00 - Thursday - March 12 - Everyone welcome
Presbyterian Church - 1220 West Main Street

February Multi-Day Ski Trip At Chief Joseph Pass

by

Mark Wetherington Jr

Known for its classic cross-country ski trails and charming warming hut, the Chief Joseph Pass area is also an ideal destination for multi-day cross-country ski tours. After looking at maps and getting advice from people familiar with the area, I decided to attempt an ambitious loop using a combination of the groomed and ungroomed roads and trails. On a sunny Saturday afternoon in mid-February I skied out Broadway with my winter backpacking gear, food for three days and a camera on my hip.

The skiing out to Gibbons Pass was nothing short of outstanding as the road had been groomed only a few days prior. The gentle descent for most of the route, perfect weather and magnificent views from the Overlook Trail were an excellent beginning to the trip. Gibbons Pass was an ideal destination for the first night, especially given my afternoon start and the added effort of skiing with a pack.

I set my tent up in a small clearing in the pines a few hundred feet off the road just as the cloud cover and dimness of dusk began to replace the blue skies and sunshine that had been present for most of the afternoon. Shortly after dark the silence of the forest was interrupted by the dull roar of my stove as I melted snow and cooked dinner. Stars appeared, twinkled and disappeared as the clouds drifted along through the night sky; meanwhile the hearty meal of pasta, spinach, mushrooms and tuna in my pot simply disappeared. After sipping some hot chocolate and reading a Jack London short-story (“Love of Life”), I prepped camp for the night and skied from the “kitchen” over to my tent for bed. A few snowflakes fluttered purposelessly through the silent air as I zipped up the door and slid into my sleeping bag.



I awoke shortly after sunrise, acutely aware that my only obligations were to pack up camp, ski all day, and then set up camp wherever I ended up. Not a bad list of “chores” to base a day around. While sipping coffee and packing up camp I had the incredible good fortune of hearing wolves howl for the first time in my life, which was one of the singularly most enchanting and exhilarating experiences I’ve ever had. Needless to say, my day was off to a good start. Blue skies and sun, snow and conifers; each helped to distract me from the noticeable but not nagging weight of my pack as I glided down Trail Creek Road toward Hogan Cabin.

The meadow around the picturesque cabin was sublime as I skied across it shortly before noon. I took an extended lunch break—made some tea, strung my sleeping bag between my skis so it could catch the sun and dry out any condensation, chatted with a skate skier and two snowmobilers—before attempting what would be one of the more difficult sections of my intended route. Shoofly Trail, an ungroomed trail that would take me to Hwy 43 and allow me to connect with Cabinet Creek Trail, had been described to me as difficult to find and as I skied through the meadow to the forest’s edge I kept my eyes open for any indication of a trail. Other than a sign noting that the area was closed to snowmobiles I was unable to locate any clues or ski tracks to follow.



I took a deep breath, a compass bearing, and once I felt I was properly oriented I skied through the forest on a just-supportive-enough crust with tentative hope that I would hit the trail. After an hour of slow-paced but methodical effort, I was lucky enough to stumble onto a narrow road that I followed to Hogan Run. Recognizing the limits of my navigational and physical abilities, I decided to re-route and head back toward Gibbons Pass and camp at the first spot off the trail with room for my tent and a decent view. I'd seen several places that fit my not overly discerning criteria on the way in the previous day and began the climb up Hogan Run feeling inspired rather than defeated. By the time I arrived at a likely campsite I was tired. Spent. Exhausted. Worn-out. But as I looked toward the sun setting over the mountains adjacent to Lost Trail and breathed in the crisp air at 7,000 feet, I felt refreshed.



With my tent pitched, ski boots exchanged for down booties, sleeping pad aired up and sleeping bag spread out, my evening was free to spend on dinner, reading and stargazing. Out of those three, I looked forward to stargazing the most—which is saying something, as I tend to devour books and food with equal voracity. Eager to enjoy the stars for as long as possible, I put on all my insulating layers and sipped hot chocolate to stay warm as the temperature dropped.

The brilliantly bright dots punctuated the dark canvas of the sky and my eyes transmitted a scene to my brain that was so vast and magnificent it almost made my head hurt. As much as I wanted to soak up the sensory feast of a starlit winter's night in the mountains, my tired body and the chilly air conspired to drive me into my sleeping bag much earlier than I would have liked and I was asleep by 10 p.m., feeling like a child who wasn't able to stay up long enough to watch a much-anticipated TV show.

About three to four inches of snow fell overnight, clinging to the trees and banking against the windward walls of the tent. Eager to ski on this fresh snow, I packed up camp quickly and set out shortly after 9 a.m. on my route back to the Chief Joseph parking area. Skiing through the forest for the third day in a row was a great feeling, especially on a crisp morning with fresh snow. I made good time on my way back to the parking lot, only seeing a few others skiers who had gotten early starts on my way in.



As usual with outdoor adventures, I arrived back at my car feeling like I'd been enriched much more than I'd expected. I'd encourage anyone with the proper gear and experience to consider a multi-day tour of the Chief Joseph area; various loops for all skill levels are possible in this excellently maintained winter wonderland of Montana.

Check out the remaining pictures from Mark's trip here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mvweth/>

Saddle Mountain Tour

by
George Corn

This is the classic tour for views in the Lost Trail /Chief Joseph area. That's not unexpected, as for the most part the route is along, or just below, a ridge crest and ends up on the highest peak in the area at approximately 8,500'. The route starts at the Lost Trail Ski Area and follows a snow-covered Forest Service road (*FR 5734*) to

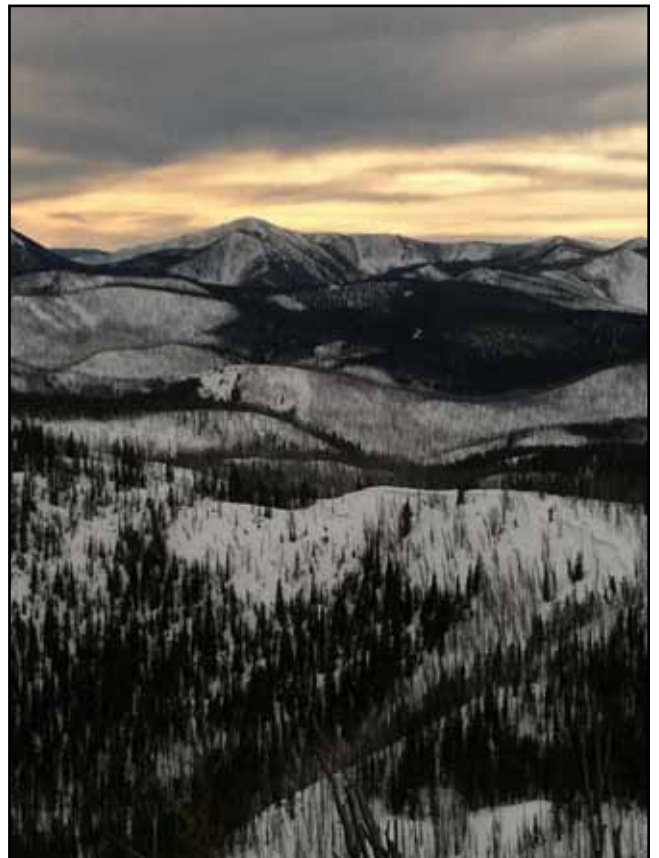


SADDLE MOUNTAIN (RIGHT OF CENTER) FROM THE OVERLOOK TRAIL

the saddle between the two horns of Saddle Mountain. Undoubtedly, you've seen the mountain before as you wind your way up HWY 93 to Lost Trail Pass. The first good view of this peak occurs as you pass the turnoff to Lost Trail Hot Springs. Looking to the right, you can see the north side of the mountain's ridgeline creating a southern, wide bowl with dramatic chutes and steep glades. The mountain is visible again a few miles up in the first expansive view available to the right. The summit and east face of Saddle Mountain appear just to the right of Lost Trail Ski Area.

The route to Saddle Mountain begins from the Lost Trail Ski Area Lodge and follows a maintenance road to the top of Chair 2 and then continues uphill until reaching the ridge that marks the west boundary of the ski area. From there, the route follows a marked run for a short distance before heading west (*left*) at signed junction. The route is relatively level or slightly downhill until the south side of the mountain is reached. Even then, it's only a 600' climb to the top. Much of the climbing takes place on the Forest Service road that reaches the saddle on the ridge line just below the summit.

Even on a day that is only partly clear, the views from the site of the old lookout are stupendous. Even with my sketchy knowledge of the ranges, one day earlier this year, I counted ten ranges starting on the north with the Rattlesnakes (*over 100 miles away*). Clockwise around the compass, were the Sapphires, the Pintlers (*including views of Warren Peak and West Goat*), followed by the East Pioneers (*which seemed close enough to touch*), the Beaverhead's gaggle of high peaks (*on the west side of the Big Hole*). In the distance to the southeast were the Lemhi and Lost River Ranges, and to the southwest, what must have been the Big Horn Crags and the unknown ranges on the south side of the Salmon River in the Frank Church Wilderness. Rounding the compass were the Bitterroots sweeping far west toward Idaho and the Selway country and then marching north up the valley toward the Rattlesnakes. It was a glorious view of ranges, ridges and valleys for hundreds of miles in all directions, topped with a smattering of cirrus clouds shadowing the sun that highlighted the enormous relief between the peaks and valleys. On my second trip this year, the views were equally as grand with recent sheep or goat tracks marking the foundation of the old lookout site on the summit. On both trips I heard at least one band of mountain chickadees as well as the occasional Clarks Nut Cracker.



This is certainly a tour that can be (*and has been*) done many times on Nordic touring gear. In general, to be fun the tour requires well developed intermediate Nordic skills, including edge control. Downhill skills, such as a snowplow, step turn, and hockey stop are extremely helpful but can be compensated for with a set of rope brakes. That being said, this is not the place for your first ski tour.

The tour is best done in spring on a **corn**-snow (*no pun intended*) day or in winter on a moderate-powder day. Take your wider touring skis; this is not the place for skinny track skis. Metal edges are very helpful since there can be a lot of side hilling as the roadbed is mostly below the ridge crest and is usually rounded over for long stretches.

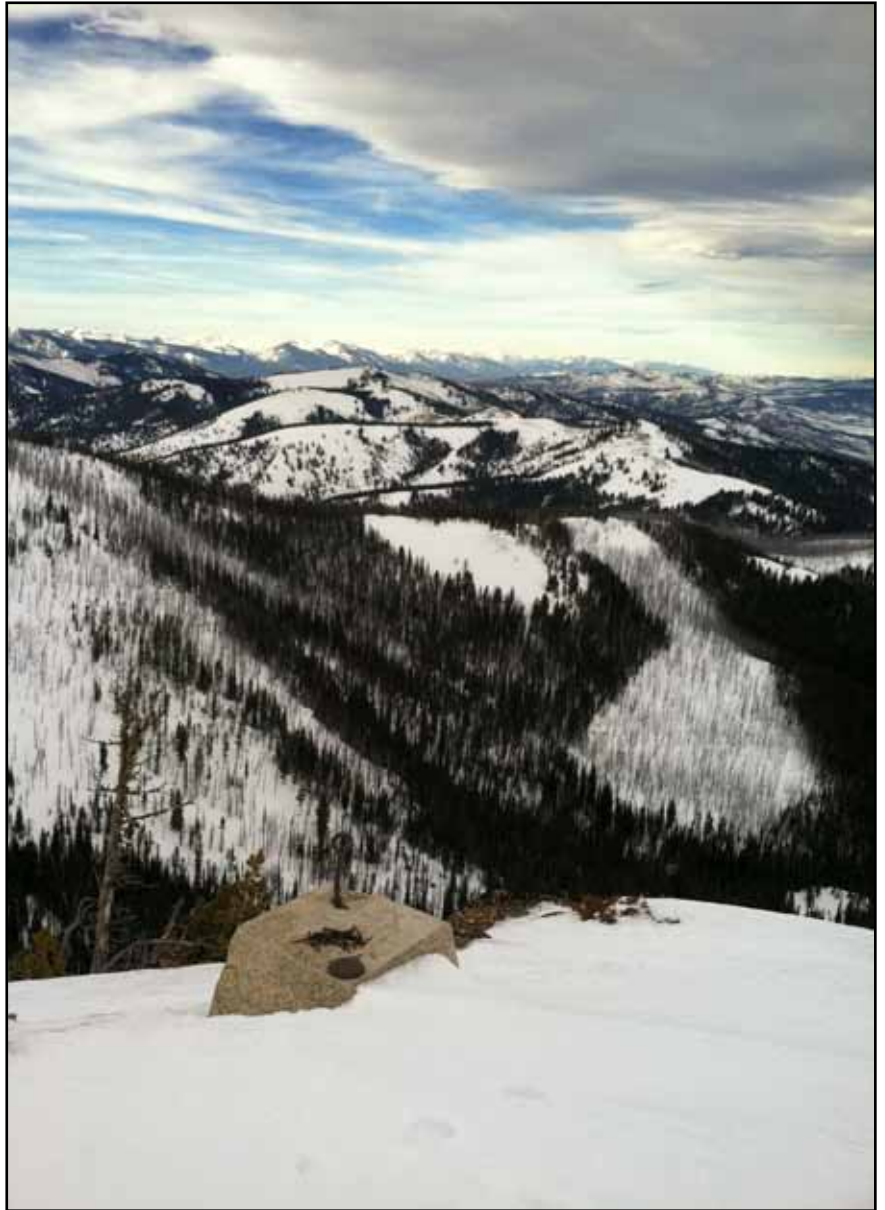
I've seen the mileage for this route calculated several ways. My one-way distance guesstimate is between four and six miles. My trips this year have taken about five and six hours (*round trip*) and have included lots of stops for views, pictures, and long lunches on the summit.

Lost Trail sells one way tickets for \$5.00. If you're going when the downhill ski area is open and are comfortable unloading from the lift, this is by far the best option. Take Chair 1 and after unloading look for the road leading to the ridge. You'll find it just south and west of the ski patrol shack. I'm uncertain of Lost Trail's uphill policy so, if you plan to tour when the area is open but don't plan to take the lift, be sure to call before you go to find out what's permissible.

Maps: As you probably know, this area is a fantastic area for mountain biking. Accordingly, the best electronic map I've found is from the ridesalmon.com website at <http://idaholosttrails.blogspot.com/p/lost-trail-pass.html>. The Bitterroot National Forest Map is also good and is handy to have along. The USGS map (*either loaded on your GPS or the paper version*) is fun and a great teaching tool because the terrain features are so easily correlated to the map.

Like any ridge tour, weather can make this trip a character-building experience. So, be prepared, carry the essentials, check the weather, tell someone where you're going, and stick to your route. Although very unlikely, if you stay on route, you enter avalanche terrain. If you have any doubts about avalanche conditions, your ability to access them, or how to travel in such territory, don't go. Remember, being this close to the Lost Trail Ski Area can give a false sense of security. But once you leave the area's boundary, you are on your own, just as if you were heading down the trails on Anderson Mountain. Act accordingly.

That being said, this is a marvelous tour. Get after it!



Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club Officers

President Michael Hoyt michael.hoyt@gmail.com 406-360-3803	Vice President Kelly Zeiler krz-inc@live.com 406-363-8631	Treasurer Reine Hilton hilton@mcn.net 406-375-1952	Secretary Marrea Mathews mmathews5@aol.com 406-381-8377
Trails & Grooming Mel Holloway tromper@bitterroot.com 406-381-1334	Programs & Map Jim Greenfield jkgreenfield@q.com 406-363-2110	Webmaster Currently Vacant	Membership Data Earl Philips philips@montana.com 406-961-0101
	Youth Coordinator Richard Stone rcstone@msn.com 406-642-9648	Ski Lessons George Corn gcorn@bresnan.net 406-363-1163	

Membership Renewals / Dues

Annual Memberships Expire on November 1st of each Year

Please Renew Your Membership Now

Family - \$25

Supporting Family - \$40

Individual - \$15

Supporting Individual - \$30

Mail To: Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club, PO Box 431, Corvallis, MT 59828-0431

Name (families, please include childrens names): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zipcode: _____

Email (to receive monthly newsletters): _____

Type of Membership (see above): _____

Amount Enclosed: \$ _____