

West Yellowstone & Gallatin Area Ski & Snowshoe Trails



Welcome

Yellowstone offers a variety of enjoyable and challenging trails for skiers. Trails are marked for summer use and may not have ski tracks. On some trails, the difficult sections can be avoided by skiing part way in and returning by the same route. The quality of your experience will depend upon the amount of planning and preparation you do prior to your trip. We suggest that you stop at a visitor center or ski shop and discuss your trip. The staff will be happy to provide current information on weather, trail, snow conditions, and alert you to any special winter hazards.

Backcountry trails in Yellowstone are in the wilderness. These trails are maintained and marked for summer use. Many of them are difficult to find and follow, as they are not well marked for winter. Only experienced parties with appropriate equipment should attempt them. Overnight camping requires a free backcountry use permit that must be obtained in person from the Mammoth or Old Faithful visitor centers, the West Yellowstone Visitor Information Center, or the south entrance station. Wood fires are not permitted.

Trail Etiquette

- Do not snowshoe or walk directly on ski tracks.
- Skiers/snowshoers going uphill yield to those going downhill.
- Fill in depressions in the snow after falling to reduce hazards to others.
- Ski within your ability. If you find the trail too difficult, turn back.

Safety

Trails may have natural hazards such as animals, avalanches, thermal features, downed trees, steep slopes and cliffs. When skiing near thermal areas, stay on marked trails. Approaching thermal features is dangerous and prohibited. The snow in these areas is often icy and what appears to be bare ground may be a thin crust over boiling water.

Winter weather in Yellowstone changes rapidly and can be severely cold and windy. Wear proper clothing layers. Watch yourself and other members of your party for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. For your safety, always ski with someone else. Tell someone where you are going, by what route, and when you plan to return. Carry extra clothing, food, water, map and compass, matches, flashlight, and a whistle.

Consider elevation when deciding on a ski trail. Many ski trails are at high elevation, above 6000 feet (1,829 m) and may require you to move slowly when you are out of breath. Always drink plenty of water.

Avalanche danger: avalanches can occur on any slope and hazards will not always be marked. In avalanche-prone areas carry a shovel, avalanche transceiver, probe, and first aid kit—and know how to use them. Cross slopes one at a time, while others watch from safety.

Wildlife

Do not approach wildlife. Large mammals survive on stored fat and low quality food during winter. Causing them to move will cost them precious calories vital for survival. Park regulations require you to remain *at least* 75 feet (23 m) from bison and other large animals; 300 feet (91 m) from bears and wolves. You are travelling through essential winter habitat. Never approach animals, give them time to move away from you. Travel around a herd, not through it. Always allow animals an escape route through shallow snow or on a packed trail. Pets are not allowed on ski trails or in backcountry areas.

Trail Ratings

Trails are rated by the National Park Service with trail ratings specific to Yellowstone National Park. We strongly encourage all skiers to inquire at a visitor center or Xanterra Ski Shop before beginning their first ski trip. Weather conditions may cause icy trails, deep snow, or barren sections, and in some instances make trails difficult to follow, increasing the difficulty of a trail. Trails are not groomed or checked daily.

Easiest - “Green”

Skiers need basic knowledge and limited experience in the diagonal stride, snow plow, and side stepping. Trails may have short downhill and uphill stretches.

More Difficult - “Blue”

Skiers need to be able to ski varied terrain requiring turning, snow plowing, herringboning, and diagonal stride.

Most Difficult - “Black”

Skiers need to be experienced. Trails are hazardous and terrain is frequently extreme. Turns are often sharp and linked together with no room to snow plow or herringbone.

National Park Service

P.O. Box 168

Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

For emergencies, dial 911

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Trail Descriptions

West Yellowstone Trails

Riverside Trail

Boundary Street to loops: 1 mile (1.6 km)

Downriver loop, full: 3.5 miles (5.6 km)

Downriver loop, short: 2.2 miles (3.5 km)

Upriver loop: 1.5 miles (2.4 km)

Trailhead: In West Yellowstone, east side of Boundary Street at Madison Avenue.

The first mile (1.6 km) is through forest to the loop trail junctions above the Madison River. The upriver loop (right), provides panoramic views of the Madison River and the Gallatin Range. The downriver loop (left), crosses open forests and meadows along the river. A cutoff trail shortens the trip by 1.3 miles (2.1 km). Return to the trailhead via the approach trail. Look for elk, bald eagles, and waterfowl.

The first 2 miles (3.2 km) may be occasionally groomed for classic ski tracks.

Gallatin Area Trails

Gneiss Creek Route

14 miles (23 km), one way

Trailhead: 9.5 miles (15.2 km) north of West Yellowstone, along US Highway 191.

Ski across rolling meadows and through open forests on this lightly-used trail. Trail crosses several creeks – use caution. Return the same way or ski back along the snow road from Seven Mile Bridge to West Yellowstone (7 miles /11.3 km) - arrange for a shuttle back to your car.

Bighorn Pass Route

10.5 miles (17 km), one way

To Fawn Pass Cutoff: 4.5 miles (7.2 km)

Fawn Pass Cutoff to Bighorn Pass: 6 miles (9.7 km)

Trailhead: 20.5 miles (33 km) north of West Yellowstone, along US Highway 191.

Avalanche Danger: Extreme in the last 2 miles (3.2 km) to Bighorn Pass.

Cross the Gallatin River on a narrow bridge about 0.5 miles (0.8 km) east of the highway—use caution. Trail crosses meadows with little elevation change from the trailhead to Fawn Pass Cutoff. (The cutoff trail switchbacks uphill 1 mile (1.6 km) to Fawn Pass Trail.) The trail then climbs for 6 miles (9.7 km) to Bighorn Pass. Return the same way.

Fawn Pass Route

11 miles (17.7 km), one way

To Bighorn Pass Cutoff: 5 miles (8 km)

Bighorn Pass Cutoff to Fawn Pass: 6 miles (9.7 km)

Trailhead: 22 miles (35.4 km) north of West Yellowstone, along US Highway 191.

Avalanche Danger: Moderate in the last 6 miles (9.7 km) to Fawn Pass.

After crossing several fingers of the Gallatin River, the trail gradually ascends 700 feet (213.4 m) in 5 miles (8 km) to the Bighorn Pass Cutoff. (The cutoff trail switchbacks downhill 1 mile (1.6 km) to Bighorn Pass Trail.) The trail then climbs for 6 miles (9.7 km) to Fawn Pass. Return the same way.

Specimen Creek Route

8 miles (12.9 km), one way

Trailhead: 26.5 miles (42.6 km) north of West Yellowstone, along US Highway 191.

Avalanche Danger: Moderate to severe on the Shelf Lake Trail portion.

This popular route follows the north side of Specimen Creek for 2 miles (3.2 km) through rolling forests to the Sportsman Lake Trail junction on the south (right). (Sportsman Lake Trail is not recommended). Follow the trail to the left along the north fork of Specimen Creek, ascending for 4 miles (6.4 km) through forests and meadows to the Shelf Lake (Crescent Lake trail junction). Shelf Lake lies 2 miles (3.2 km) north and Crescent Lake is 2 miles (3.2 km) east. Snow cover ranges from sparse to marginal on the lower reaches. The last mile of each trail is extremely steep; climbing skins are recommended.

Black Butte Route

7 miles (11.3 km), one way

Trailhead: 28.8 miles (46.3 km) north of West Yellowstone, along US Highway 191.

The trail follows Black Butte Creek with many short, steep sections, gaining 769 ft (234 m) in elevation between the trailhead and Daly Creek Cutoff (2 miles/3.2 km). From the junction with the Daly Creek Cutoff, the trail climbs for 4 miles (6.4 km) to Bighorn Peak. The last 2 miles (3.2 km) are not recommended. The trail becomes extremely steep and hard to follow, and is dangerously exposed. The Daly Creek Cutoff (2.2 mi/3.2 km) can be used to connect to the Daly Creek Trail.

Daly Creek Route

6 miles (9.7 km), one way

Trailhead: 28.8 miles (46.3 km) north of West Yellowstone, along US Highway 191.

Trail rises through meadows for 2 miles (3.2 km) to Black Butte/Daly Creek Cutoff Trail. The trail continues about 4 miles (6.4 km) to the Sky Rim Trail and park boundary. The Daly Creek drainage lies in a snow shadow, resulting in minimal snow cover.

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