

DAY BACKCOUNTRY SKI OPPORTUNITIES NEAR MISSOULA, MONTANA

The following areas are day ski trips providing excellent backcountry ski opportunities on mostly moderate angle slopes. Most of these have been done by at least one middle-age couple of very modest athletic abilities. Some are of quite short and easy access, while others require a full day. Destinations accessible during midwinter are noted, while a few require early winter or spring road access to make reasonable for a day trip.

1. Bitterroot Peaks on Lolo National Forest:

- a. Carlton Ridge and Lolo Peak via Mormon Peak Road. The road provides good day access in spring after the May 15 road opening and also in November before the road closure on December 1. Large numbers of backcountry skiers and boarders enjoy the open slopes of the north-east slopes of Lolo Peak and the superb glades on the western end of Carlton Ridge.
- b. Carlton Ridge via Mill Creek Trail 1310. This longer day trip is accessible all winter from Mill Creek Road off of Hwy 12, with great glade skiing on the western end of Carlton Ridge.
- c. Lantern Ridge via Trail 1309. This route makes a fine midwinter day trip. It provides great subalpine glade skiing on the upper elevations of the ridge and good open slope skiing on clearcuts of the lower part of the ridge.

2. Bitterroot Peaks on Bitterroot National Forest:

A number of the Bitterroot peaks provide good day trips with varied tree, glade, open slope and chute skiing. Some trips, such as Ward Mountain, are excellent midwinter trips with trailheads starting near the valley floor. Others such as Trapper Peak are generally done as day trips only during the shoulder seasons of late fall and spring. This list is in no way exhaustive of the day skiing opportunities on the ridges and peaks of the east face of the Bitterroot Divide, only representing good trips taken by members of our group.

- a. Sweeney Peak. Because of the lower elevation trailhead, access to ridge of Sweeney Peak is often possible through most of winter.
- b. Point 9033, locally known as Little St. Joseph Peak. Just east of St. Joseph Peak is a long day trip accessible from Bass Creek campground throughout winter and spring.
- c. St. Mary's Peak and adjoining ridges. This area provides good open slope skiing off surrounding ridges and nice open ridge and glade skiing on eastern trail approach. It is often accessible in late fall and in spring once access road to trailhead melts off.
- d. Gash Point. Midwinter access is dependent upon road conditions. It is always accessible in late spring with great subalpine terrain and a great open bowl just to the south of the summit.
- e. The lake basin and ridge northwest of Glen Lake is a short spring trip with fine north and east facing open slopes and glade skiing from the 8800' elevation ridge top down to unnamed lake at head of unnamed fork of Big Creek.
- f. Ward Mountain. Trailhead on plowed Roaring Lion Road makes this a great midwinter day

- trip with alpine to subalpine glade skiing above wonderful tree skiing through 1994 burn area.
- g. Trapper Peak. Excellent spring day trip with extraordinary open alpine slopes above subalpine glades. Also great midwinter overnight trip from West Fork Road.
 - h. Northeast slopes of Trapper Peak from Gem Lake. Nice spring skiing on open slopes and chutes above Gem Lake, once road to Baker Lake trailhead opens.
 - i. Boulder Point is often accessible in midwinter and also provides fine spring skiing on south facing slopes.

3. Other Backcountry Access in the Bitterroot:

- a. Anderson Mountain. This area out of Chief Joseph Pass along the Continental Divide Trail is easy access for good backcountry skiing.
- b. Lost Horse Road. Private or personal snowmobiles can provide access to the Twin Lakes area in Lost Horse Canyon, the skiing is phenomenal.
- c. The Grubstake. Hike or ride the road to the Grubstake Restaurant. Skiing above the restaurant is really good.
- d. Lake Como. The south-facing hill above the lake is very good with easy access.
- e. Little Rock Creek provides excellent access and skiing.

4. Rattlesnake Mountains on Lolo National Forest:

- a. Marshall Ridge. Accessible either by crossing old Marshall ski area and climbing to 7000' ridge top, or via Mittower Road. Great moderate midwinter day trip with fine open skiing along spine of ridge and through glades of old clearcuts on southwest side of ridge down to terminus of Mittower road. Steeper shots down into Johnson Creek.
- b. Wisherd Ridge and Sheep Mountain. Extraordinary series of open bowls and spur ridges along length of Wisherd Ridge terminating in Sheep Mountain. This has been a premier midwinter powder and spring corn skiing area due to abundant snowpack.
- c. Stuart Peak is accessible all winter from the main Rattlesnake trailhead.
- d. The Jenni Lake Basin and the Point Six area. This area is accessible through a gate from Snow Bowl Ski Area. Snow Bowl does not sell one-way ski passes but season pass holders and day pass holders frequent the backcountry in this area during the winter.

5. Montana – Idaho Stateline Divide on the Lolo, Bitterroot, Coeur D'Alene and Clearwater National Forests:

- a. Stevens Peak. Midwinter day trip accessible from Mullin, Idaho with fine skiing on the west ridge and off the south side of the peak. Also great spring corn skiing on steeper faces of slopes above Upper Stevens Lake on north side of the peak.
- b. St. Regis Basin. A wide variety of terrain is easily accessible from the parking lot at Lookout Ski Area. Though heavily used by snowmobiles, the area offers both glade and bowl skiing with plenty of season and late-season snow. More terrain is now accessible from Lookout's newest ski lift, which offers a one-ride pass.
- c. Hoodoo Pass. As soon as Trout Creek Road is drivable to Heart Lake trailhead there is easy access to wonderful open slopes on both sides of Stateline Divide.

- d. Elk Meadows. There are a number of fine peaks accessible from Elk Meadows including Rocky Point and Point 8261, with great moderate to steeper open slopes.
- e. Lolo Pass area peaks. There is very easy access from Highway 12 at the pass to wonderful open slopes and glade skiing on Point 6052, known locally as Mt. Fuji, and Point 6372 just to the east. The north south running ridge just to the west of Pack Creek also has wonderful open slopes. Other good opportunities with short access are west of Highway 12 near the pass. More of this area needs to be designated for backcountry skiing and snowboarding, and made off limits to snowmobiles.
- f. Lost Trail Pass. Located about 30 miles south of Darby, MT on highway 93, the Lost Trail Pass/ Chief Joseph pass area offers exceptional opportunities for backcountry skiing. Several trails are routinely groomed. Skiers can pick their terrain...from flat to fairly steep. Good parking is available and the area can accommodate many people. This is a popular wintertime recreational area managed by the Forest Service.
- g. Lost Trail Powder Mountain. The area offers a \$5.00 one-way lift pass to anyone who wants to access the high country for back country skiing. Many folks and recreational groups from Missoula take advantage of this lift pass every year. Miles of Forest Service land are accessible from the top of Chair 2 or Chair 4 at Lost Trail.

6. Reservation Divide on Lolo National Forest:

- a. Burnt Fork Pinnacle. The slopes above Burnt Fork Pinnacle to the divide have open glades.

7. Graves Creek Divide on Lolo National Forest:

- a. Blue Mountain and Petty Mountain, in good snow years, make good ski day trips.

8. Mission Mountains on Lolo and Flathead National Forests:

- a. North Jocko Peak. This area has very good open tree and glade skiing with some open slope skiing off top of peak.
- b. Lindy Peak. This area has excellent steeper open bowl and ridge skiing in late spring once road 79 to Bunyon Lake is clear.
- c. East St. Mary's Peak. Though it is a steep climb at the bottom, it is wonderful skiing off the summit and on the upper 2700 vertical feet of south ridge of peak.
- d. Grey Wolf Peak. The peak has great skiing around the lake and in the north-facing chute.

9. Swan Range on Lolo and Flathead National Forests:

- a. Holland Point Lookout. This is a wonderful midwinter day trip with trailhead at Holland Lake. Upper elevations are open ridge and glade skiing with skiable trail for remainder of trip.
- b. Mt. Aneas in Jewell Basin Hiking Area. This area provides good spring skiing on open slopes and ridges once Jewel Basin Road 5392 opens.
- c. Pyramid Peak. This trip requires snowmobile access along closed Forest Service road. Great alpine and sub-alpine skiing.

10. Continental Divide:

- a. Roger's Pass. Rogers Pass is located about 90 miles east of Missoula on highway 200. Elevation is about 5600 feet; snow is generally good from mid-December through March. Parking is somewhat limited at the pass. Good skiing is found along the Continental Divide west of the pass to Lewis and Clark Pass. Wide, open vistas greet the adventurer; elk can often be seen even in wintertime because some of the open meadows are windswept.
- b. MacDonald Pass. This area is located about 100 miles east of Missoula. Winter sports here, including snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing, are managed by the Forest Service. Wide open vistas and huge meadows punctuated by glades of conifer trees make this an interesting area to visit. A wide variety of terrain is available, from flat to steep.
- c. Stemple Pass. A popular snowmobile use area is accessible in the winter for skiing.
- d. Discovery Basin – Georgetown Lake area. Forest Service land adjoins the lake in several spots and affords some moderate terrain with open glades that make skiing very interesting. The road to Discovery Basin Ski Area intersects highway 1 about mid-way along the lake. Besides offering some of the very best downhill skiing in the northwest, the lower terrain adjoining the ski area offers some outstanding cross-country skiing. Terrain is flat-to-rolling, mostly forested with interspersed meadows and small open glades.