

# Life *in the* Valley

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A snowshoe route follows the upper North Santiam River near Marion Forks.

## Roadside snowshoeing

### Snow transforms forest service road into snowshoe path with views of Santiam and Jefferson near Marion Forks

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**DETROIT** — The best thing about this year's low-elevation snowpack is that it opens a huge swath of mountain terrain for exploring.

Little-known forest service roads become winter pathways when a white blanket covers the 3,500-foot range, as has happened this season.

These unofficial routes offer a shorter drive from Salem along with a better chance at solitude than at nearby Santiam Pass sno-parks.

Last week, I checked out one of these unofficial routes beginning on Parrish Lake Road, southeast of Detroit and Marion Forks in the Cascade Mountains. The route follows the North Santiam River to views of Mount Jefferson on a peaceful and moderately difficult journey.

The idea for the trip came from Lee Slattum, longtime trip leader and snowshoe chair for the Salem-based outdoor club The Chemeketans.

"The North Santiam snowshoe is an easy-access snowshoe for those who want relatively flat terrain through a winter wonderland usually undisturbed by others," Slattum said.

The route was 4 miles round-trip, with 400 feet of climb to a viewpoint for Mount Jefferson. I'd call it a moderately difficult outing, since you'll likely be breaking trail. The amount of downed trees make it best for snowshoes, rather than skis or a snowmobile.

I started at Parrish Lake Road, just past milepost 73 on the side of Highway 22. A decent-sized parking pullout is normally plowed, opening up space for about three or four cars.

With snowshoes on, I began hiking up the snow-covered road, and in a short distance, I arrived at a bridge over the North Santiam River. The source of Salem's drinking water looks pretty different covered in snow and ice, and it makes a nice moment to start the trip.

Just over the bridge — at mile 0.3 — I arrived at a junction with little-traveled Forest Service Road 400, branching off to the right. There's no sign marking the road, but it's easy to see and follow.

It's difficult to imagine what the road looks like in summer, but in win-



A pullout on Parrish Lake Road begins a snowshoe route along the North Santiam River.

ter, it's very narrow, with snowy trees bending inward as you hike. It feels more like a trail than a road. There are views of the Santiam for a while, but eventually, you're just following the road.

For the next 1.5 miles, I broke trail in deep powder. The road is never steep, but you can tell you're hiking uphill.

One of my favorite things about snowshoeing in fresh powder are the animal tracks. Snowshoe hare, deer and animals you can't identify can be followed by their footprints in the snow. I

saw numerous tracks, including one animal, probably a deer, whose legs post-holed some 2 feet deep into the snow.

Poor fella. The viewpoint for Mount Jefferson is a little tricky to find.

After 2 miles, I came to an opening on the road, with wide space on the right that probably serves as a turnaround for vehicles in the summer.

On my left, above the road, was a lightly forested ridgeline heading gently uphill. I scrambled up the ridgeline

#### North Santiam Snowshoe

**In a nutshell:** A snowshoe route that follows the upper North Santiam River to views of Mount Jefferson begins at a pullout on Parrish Lake Road and follows little-traveled Forest Service Road 400.

**Permit required:** No

**Trailhead elevation:** 3,101 feet

**Upside:** Views of snowy North Santiam River, quiet snowy forest, solitude, easy-to-follow road and Mount Jefferson views

**Downside:** Occasional noise from Highway 22, low elevation means good snow isn't a given, plus you'll likely be breaking trail, which is more work

**Distance:** 4 miles to Jefferson viewpoint

**Climb:** 400 feet

**Map:** Willamette National Forest, Detroit district

**Directions:** About 1 hour and 25 minutes from Salem. Follow Highway 22 east from Salem past milepost 73. Park on the side of Highway 22 at a pull out in Parrish Lake Road. Once you reach Marion Forks, it's about 9 miles. There's room for three to four cars in the pullout.

**Trailhead coordinates:** N44 31.529 W121 59.668

and almost right away could see views of Jefferson, stark and bright white to the east. It made a nice spot for lunch.

The road continues for a few miles, but I used the Jefferson viewpoint as the turn-around spot.

The upside of this route is clear — views of the North Santiam, quiet snowy forest, an easy-to-follow road and Jefferson views. The downside is occasional traffic noise from Highway 22 and the occasional boredom of snowshoeing up a road.

Overall, I'd call it a trip worth taking.

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