

Life *in the* Valley

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Bill Sullivan is seen at the edge of Hogg Rock.

Skiing the Hogg

Across from Hoodoo ski area is a trail that leads past Santiam Lodge to an abandoned railroad and up Hogg Rock

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SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Hogg Rock, the cliff-edged plateau you skirt as you drive up Santiam Pass, has been an obstacle to navigation since Colonel T. Egerton Hogg attempted to build a transcontinental railroad around its slopes in 1877. In winter, the icy-walled mesa looms more forbidding than ever.

But a relatively easy, if unmarked, snowshoe route from the Santiam Pass Sno-Park allows adventurers to explore the circular summit. Along the way, you can expect breathtaking views, snowed-under ponds, gnarly snags, a derelict lodge, a vanished railroad trestle and the faint growl of tractor-trailer rigs grinding up the grade below.

Like Hayrick Butte on the other side of Santiam Pass, Hogg Rock is a lava flow that erupted underneath a glacier in the Ice Age, leaving a flat-topped mesa.

Most of the winter traffic to Santiam Pass these days heads for the Hoodoo ski area or the neighboring Ray Benson Sno-Park. That's where the groomed or marked snow trails are.

Adventurers, however, prefer the Santiam Sno-Park, almost directly opposite the Hoodoo entrance road at the top of the pass. This plowed parking area has a restroom and a snow play area where kids careen on sleds and Boy Scouts build snow caves. It is also the jumping-off point for treks into the snowed-under Mt. Jefferson Wilderness and Hogg Rock. Remember to bring a Sno-Park permit, available at outdoor stores.

An old lodge

Most people begin at the snow play area at the east end of the parking lot. For Hogg Rock, start at the west end. No trail signs or markers guide the way, but if you parallel Highway 22 to the west for about 0.2 mile, you'll discover Santiam Lodge.

This boarded-up, shake-sided relic was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939 at the same time as the original lodge at Hoodoo. When I was a child, I recall Presbyterian Church retreats at Santiam Lodge, with voices echoing in the bunkrooms, crowds lining up for dinner in the low-ceiling dining hall and fires blazing on huge stone hearths.

Santiam Lodge survived the 1968 forest fire that burned the lodge at Hoodoo. Santiam Lodge also withstood the B&B Fire of 2003 because fire-



Santiam Lodge is covered in snow at Santiam Pass. This boarded-up, shake-sided relic was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939 and plans are in the works to restore the building.

fighters quickly wrapped the entire wooden building in Kevlar sheeting.

Abandoned for decades, Santiam Lodge would cost millions of dollars to restore, and yet spunky developers are now planning with the Forest Service to do exactly that.

A railroad gamble

From Santiam Lodge, a snowmobile trail heads briefly west alongside Highway 22 before turning north at the base of Hogg Rock. Where the trail turns away from the highway, you might bushwhack left a few hundred yards on a route that traverses the slope of Hogg Rock just above the highway. This is the railroad grade built by Colonel Hogg's legions of Chinese and Italian laborers.

The rail bed is most obvious at a roadcut blasted through rock. To the west of this cut, the grade vanishes in a rockslide. To the east, it leads to the embankment of a vanished trestle.

Hogg had dreamed of building a railroad from Newport to New York. But he ran out of money after building the line east from the Willamette Valley

as far as the hamlet of Idanha. His government contract required that he complete a crossing of the Cascade Range before he could claim land grants along the right-of-way.

In a desperate gamble, Hogg stopped laying track at Idanha and instead built 11 unconnected miles of track here at Santiam Pass, around Hogg Rock. Then he hauled a disassembled boxcar through the woods, put it on the track and hitched 14 men to pull it back and forth across the summit.

Straight-faced, Hogg announced to the government that he had succeeded in running a train over the pass.

But he went bankrupt anyway.

View from the top

After inspecting the abandoned railroad grade, return to the snowmobile trail and follow it up to the north for 0.2 mile to a rocky quarry. Snowmobiles sometimes zoom about this rock amphitheater. But they can't get up to the summit of Hogg Rock. To do that, zigzag up the steepish slope to the left (south) of the rock quarry. After

about 300 feet of elevation gain, the route opens up onto the summit plateau.

My skiing partner insisted that I should warn readers not to venture too near to the cliffs that surround Hogg Rock on three sides. I think this warning is unnecessary. Any healthy person who snowshoes or skis to the lip of this precipice will recognize that the world ends here. You cannot lean out to see the trucks on the highway below because then you would plummet down to join them.

Instead, stand back from the cliff edge and admire the peaks along the horizon. The view sweeps clockwise from Black Butte in Central Oregon to the spire of Mount Washington, the ski lifts of Hoodoo, the distant fire lookout atop Sand Mountain's double cinder cone, the corniced ridge of Potato Hill and the hoary crags of Three Fingers Jack.

The only way to return from this viewpoint is the way you came. Be safe. Remember Santiam Lodge and Colonel Hogg's railroad — dreams that have struggled and sometimes failed at Hogg Rock.