

Snowshoeing gains in popularity across region

By RICH LANDERS
The (Spokane)
Spokesman-Review



Rich Landers /The Spokesman-Review via AP

In this photo taken on Jan. 2, Margaret Bowers, right, and Holly Weiler join a snowshoeing group exploring the McKenzie Conservation Area above Newman Lake, Wash.

SPOKANE, Wash. — Explaining the growing popularity of snowshoeing, Mark Beattie of Mountain Gear retail store in Spokane says it all comes down to a 10-step program for learning the sport.

“All you have to do is strap on modern snowshoes and by the time you walk 10 steps you’re pretty much an expert,” said Beattie, who’s been selling snowshoes for 24 years.

While he still treasures a classic pair of five-foot long cedar-rawhide models, the smaller, ultralight, no-maintenance models being sold today get the credit for the giving the sport its traction for growth.

Perhaps the biggest snowshoeing misconception is that a lot of extra gear is required, he said.

Teamed with gaiters, the waterproof shoes or boots one uses for hiking will work just fine for most snowshoe day hikes. “And newcomers to the sport tend to overdress and get too hot,” he said.

Snowshoes range from simple small flotation platforms ideal for traipsing around a snowy city park to larger models with more flotation and crampons for navigating deeper snow and icy conditions one might encounter stamping into Chimney Rock.

“Size typically is based on body weight,” he said. “Bigger people need bigger snowshoes, with some exceptions. At 180 pounds, I technically would go for a 30-inch snowshoe. But I have

a short inseam, so I opt for 25-inchers. I sink about an inch more in the snow but I don’t have to alter my stride, which is more important.”

Although many experienced snowshoers will keep their hands free in reasonable terrain, adjustable length poles with snow baskets are highly recommended for balance and to aid in getting up in a fall, he said.

Snowshoe bindings come in several models. MSR, for instance, makes bindings with multiple straps that readily accommodate wider boots. The Atlas Endeavor models have two straps that might not work for such a wide range of boots, but they’re simple.

“In most cases, I think simple is good,” Beattie said.

Once geared up for snowshoeing, the larger question is

where to go.

New devotees to snowshoeing — and there are legions of them — have finally been finding plenty of places this winter to use the truck loads of snowshoes purchased in recent years from retailers ranging from outdoor specialty shops to Costco.

In the past four weeks, there’s been enough snow to make tracks from the city lowlands to the top of Mount Spokane and beyond.

Spokane County Conservation Areas, secured through the voter-approved Conservation Futures property tax levy, have been popular winter destinations.

People were quick to be out after the December snow storms and break trail at a half dozen or more of the larger conservation areas,

said Paul Knowles, County Parks planner.

“I think there’s justification to start calling the (Mount Spokane) snowmobile parking lot the snowshoe parking lot,” said Holly Weiler, a Spokane Mountaineer and Washington Trails Association leader who helped lead more than 40 people on the First Day Hike on Jan. 1 at Mount Spokane State Park.

“Two years ago for the first New Years Day hike, we had two leaders but just one snowshoer showed up,” she said.

Plowed roads and parking access is a consideration at many winter destinations.

“We try to get conservation area trailheads plowed out at some point, but it depends on available resources,” Knowles said. “But snow

Snowshoeing tips

Snowshoeing burns a lot of calories and can lead to dehydration, even on frigid days. Hot coffee, hot chocolate, tea or soup in a warmer bottle is a great mood lifter to chase away chills.

- Bring basic safety equipment in a daypack in case of an emergency — including a map, compass, headlamp, extra clothing, weatherproof fire-starter and a space blanket. A GPS and cell phone are other options, but cold weather can quickly drain batteries.
- Wear layers of clothing that can be peeled off as needed to avoid overheating.
- Get an early start. Daylight doesn’t last long in winter. A late start invites an encounter with darkness if something goes wrong.
- Leave an itinerary with someone trustworthy.
- Watch the weather. Blizzards can cause white-outs that erase tracks and make route-finding difficult even on marked trails. Temperatures also can drop drastically during winter.
- Dogs aren’t equipped to handle all snow conditions. Some will flounder and wear out quickly in deep snow or breakable crust. Plan trip distance according to conditions and the dog’s ability. Frequently check for ice buildup between the dog’s toes. Bring dog booties.
- Gaiters keep snow out of boots and add warmth.

really generates interest. I’ve seen a huge up-tick in snowshoer use this winter.”

The most popular accessible snowshoeing destinations this winter have included the Slavin, Dishman Hills, McKenzie, Antoine Peak, Haynes, Liberty Lake and Mica conservation areas, he said.

Washington Sno-Park areas such as Sherman Pass are dependable destinations for finding plowed parking and good snow. Mount Spokane trails are probably the most popular in the region. Vehicles must display state Sno-Park permits at these sites.

Warming huts especially for snowshoers have been installed by state park rangers and volunteers at Mount Spokane. At Fourth

of July Pass, two shelters are maintained by the Panhandle Nordic Club.

The Little Pend Oreille Wildlife Refuge southeast of Colville is a peaceful destination for snowshoeing, along with Turnbull Wildlife Refuge south of Cheney.

Changing conditions must be factored into every trip. The route off Mineral Ridge overlooking Lake Coeur d’Alene’s Wolf Lodge Bay was excellent with rewarding views for snowshoers around the New Year, but portions of it have transformed.

When a snowy trail has been tramped and the weather turns it to ice, the best option may be to leave the snowshoes in the car, fit Yaktrax or MICROspikes onto your boots for traction and simply go for a winter hike.

Spring chinook season set on Columbia

By GEORGE PLAGEN
East Oregonian

Spring chinook fishing season is set on the Columbia River in Oregon and Washington.

Anglers will be able to keep salmon from March 16 through May 6 on the river above Bonneville Dam. Fishery managers expect a recreational harvest of about 900 fish.

This year’s season should see returns of 299,200 spring chinook, including 188,800 upriver salmon. That’s down compared to last year’s banner run of 415,200 springers, but still beats the 10-year average of 285,000 fish.

Below Bonneville Dam, the recreational season will run from March 1 through April 9, with two days off to allow for commercial fishing.

From the dam to the Oregon-Washington border, the daily bag limit will be two fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination. Of those, no more than one can be a chinook. Oregon rules also allow for up to five fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

The fishery will be managed for up to 1,000

upriver chinook, and could be extended or shortened based on that quota. Anglers will not be allowed to fish for salmon or steelhead from boats between Bonneville Dam and the Tower Island power lines, located approximately six miles downstream from The Dalles Dam.

From March 1 through April 9, boat fishing will be allowed all week from Buoy 10 at the mouth of the Columbia up to Beacon Rock, about four miles below Bonneville Dam. The recreational fishery will close on March 29 and April 5, both Tuesdays, for commercial fishing. Bag limits are the same.

Special rules for fishing within Youngs Bay in northwest Oregon and Blind Slough-Knapa Slough are listed in the 2016 regulations booklet.

“We’re looking forward to another year of good spring chinook fishing,” said Chris Kern, deputy administrator of the fish division for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Contact George Plagen at gplagen@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.



Submitted photo

Rhino cannonball

Pendleton resident Andrew Clark, who works often in Africa, recently traveled to the Khama Rhino Sanctuary in Botswana. While sitting down to lunch, Clark said this black rhino “sauntered by, took a drink out of the swimming pool, lay down for a bit of rest, and then went on his way.”

SKI REPORT

Spout Springs
Tollgate, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 6” fell
Jan. 24.
Conditions: Lots of snow, open regular schedule

Anthony Lakes
North Powder, Ore.
New snow: None, storm Thursday
Base depth: 55”
Conditions: Fast groomers, good coverage, clear skies

Ski Bluewood
Dayton, Wash.
New snow: None
Base depth: 71”
Conditions: Machine groomed, wet snow off-piste

Ski Fergi
Joseph, Ore.
Depth: 25” on top
Conditions: Open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Mt. Hood Meadows
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: Rain/snow mix mid- to late-week
Base depth: 91”
Conditions: Wet, rain-streaked groom.

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