

Sherwin Hill Ski Tour: 15.5 Kilometers (9.7 miles)

The ski over Sherwin Hill is fairly far afield from the Coeur d'Alene area, being located between Clarkia and Bovill, Idaho. However, should you visit the Palouse Divide or Elk River Park N' Ski Areas, you may just want to give this ski along the West Fork of the St. Maries River a try. The route is quiet and secluded, because it is along the St. Maries River Railroad grade. The grade follows a route separate from Highway 3 over the divide between Clarkia and Bovill. The grade is not plowed by the railroad during the winter months and seldom receives snowmobile use. The Sherwin Hill part of the railroad is located in a heavy snow zone typically allowing for good ski conditions from December through March. It is well off the beaten path, so use of this route is very limited.

The ski trip can be made from the Clarkia or Bovill sides of the divide. Both starts have easy access from Highway 3. The Clarkia side start is from the railroad crossing on Forest Service Road (FSR) 301 no more than a quarter mile off Highway 3. The Bovill side start is from where Highway 3 crosses the grade about 3.5 miles north of town.

About 2.5 miles south of Clarkia on Highway 3, you will encounter FSR 301 to the left. The road crosses the railroad grade within sight of the highway junction. Ski south along the railroad grade. It will not be plowed or groomed. The grade makes a gentle curve away from Highway 3 behind a few houses. A fairly long straight section (1.3 km) brings you to the end of the open pastureland and into the forest along the West Fork. The grade curves back and forth as it follows the river and bends generally west towards Keeler Meadows. The grade crosses the river on wooden trestles three times along this section of the route. Typically, the river is cloaked in snow, but remarkable golden sands can be seen in its bed as you cross the trestles.

About 3.5 kilometers after entering the forest, you will reach the opening of Keeler Meadows. Corrals used in summer grazing operations are passed, but any vestiges of the town of Keeler are long gone. A road through the meadows from Highway 3 may be active. The meadows are 0.8 kilometers across.

The grade climbs from Keeler Meadows towards the top of Sherwin Hill. Another 3.2 kilometer ski brings you to the top of Sherwin Hill, which is the divide between the St. Maries and Potlatch drainages. A railroad marker, some sidings and the lack of any perceptible grade mark the spot.

From the top of Sherwin Hill the grade turns south. After about 1.2 kilometers, it crosses the very upper reaches of the Potlatch River and swings west again towards Highway 3. The grade approaches Highway 3, but remains well back in the forest. Many animal tracks are observed on this part of the route. After 2.1 kilometers the grade swings southwest on a long straight section angling ever nearer to Highway 3. Then after a 2.6 kilometer ski the grade intersects Highway 3, terminating the trip.

