

Fernan Saddle Skate Ski Opportunities

Fernan Saddle is about ten miles northeast of Coeur d'Alene. From the end of Sherman Avenue follow the road, around Fernan Lake, to its end in the winter months at the Fernan Saddle parking lot. The saddle is 4,000 feet in elevation, a full 1,000 feet higher than Fourth of July Summit. The snow cover is typically held all winter at and above the elevation of the saddle. Fernan Saddle is a major snowmobile trailhead, serving travel into the Coeur d'Alene Mountains.

The snowmobile users and the groomers typically tolerate Nordic and skate skiers, because their use has little impact on the groomed trails and skiers, even skate skiers, move relatively slowly as compared to snow machines. You do want to keep in mind that the snow machine users pay for the grooming and are rightly concerned about safety along the trails. It is best to be very courteous when using these trails by getting over to the side out of the way as snow machines approach and pass. Snowmobile trails are broad and snow machines are loud, allowing plenty of opportunity to hear them and get to one side. It is also best to restrict your use of the trails to non-peak use periods, such as early morning and weekdays. Holidays and weekend should be avoided especially between 9:30 AM and 4 PM. You and the snowmobilers will both have a better experience.

The groomed snowmobile trails make for excellent skate skiing, especially right after grooming. The sooner that you are out behind the groomer, the better the skate skiing will be. Trail grooming off Fernan Saddle follows a schedule from year to year. The skiing is better if you can figure that routine out.

Fernan Saddle to Five Finger Saddle: 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) round trip

The skate ski from Fernan Saddle to Five Finger Saddle follows the main snowmobile route east (FSR 612) from the parking lot. The route climbs 300 feet over two and a half miles to Windy Ridge. As you approach the west end of Windy Ridge, three groomed trails diverge at a junction. Follow the groomed trail to your right. This trail will take you across Windy Ridge. The route across the ridge for the first three quarters mile fluctuates little in elevation. After this first section, you arrive at a second junction, which is signed. The groomed trail to your right leads to Wolf Lodge Mountain, Skitwish Warming Hut and eventually to the Fourth of July Snowmobile Trailhead, if you make all the correct turns. According to the sign it is 23 miles (37 kilometers) to the Fourth of July Trailhead. The trail straight ahead leads generally downhill to Five Fingers Saddle. It is 4.8 kilometers (3 miles) from this point to Five Fingers Saddle with an 850 feet loss in elevation. Keep in mind that the further you go out and down, the further you must climb back up on the return. At Five Finger Saddle, two roads are groomed and both lose elevation quickly.

Fernan Saddle to Burnt Cabin Summit: 18.9 kilometers (11.8 mile round trip) Alternate Return 21.8 kilometers (13.6 miles)

The initial part of the ski to Burnt Cabin Summit follows the same main snowmobile trail out of the east end of the parking lot (FSR 612). Ski to the trail junction at the west end of Windy Ridge, where the three trails diverge. Follow the groomed trail furthest to the left. The trail remains fairly level for the first mile, rising and falling slightly. The trails loses elevation slowly after this as it wends it way generally northward towards Burnt Cabin Summit. As you approach the summit, the trail will be decline in elevation

noticeably. The route loses 470 feet of elevation from the high point at the west end of Windy Ridge. The return from Burnt Cabin Summit can be made by the same route resulting in an 18.9 kilometer round trip.

An alternate return is possible by FSR 1535, if this is groomed. At the summit, three groomed trails are typically available, in addition to the one you followed. The trail to the northwest, if groomed, will follow the Ohio Match Grade to the northern end of Hayden Lake. The route to the east follows the Ohio Match Grade down Burnt Cabin Creek to the Little North Fork. The road to the west (left), if groomed, will return you to Fernan Saddle via Horse Ridge-Yellowbanks Road. The route runs generally west out Horse Ridge. About 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) along the route it rounds Horse Ridge and proceeds south into the upper Yellowbanks Creek drainage. The route loses 450 feet as it goes down to and crosses upper Yellowbanks Creek. It then climbs again beyond the creek in a generally westerly direction. It rounds a point and proceeds south, still climbing. It rounds a third point and proceeds east. As it crosses the ridge on the third point, it enters the upper Fernan Creek drainage. From this point the trail proceeds east and up hill 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) back to and entering the Fernan parking lot area from the west. As this final leg is skied, you will see the Fernan access road below you on the slope. This route is 12.4 kilometers (7.75 miles) and results in the 21.8 kilometer (13.7 mile) round trip. Before attempting this route as described, check the snowmobile trail to the west for grooming before skiing out on the trail to the east. If other end of the trail is groomed at Burnt Cabin Summit, you can be sure this route is groomed.

Several other skate ski tours over longer or shorter distances can be made from Fernan Saddle simply by skiing parts of these routes or other available groomed trails.

