

Marie-Skitwish Creeks Ski Tour: 15.2 kilometers (9.5 miles) Round Trip; 6.4 Kilometers (4 miles) abbreviated trip).

The ski tour into Marie and Skitwish Creeks is about as convenient to Coeur d'Alene as you will find, short of skiing up the trails in Nettleton Gulch. This is a ski tour that will require the use of "skins." For the novice, these are fabric strips that strap and adhere to the base of your skis, allowing you to climb up steep hills from fibers that resist back slip, while providing some limited slide forward. Skins have a second valuable property in braking a downhill descent. The initial climb over a ridge and descent into Marie Creek requires the climbing boost of skins and then their ability to brake the fairly steep descent. The route is over a hiking trail, so there is little room to maneuver as you ski down. If you follow the round trip up Skitwish Creek, skins will be required on this ascent.

The Marie-Skitwish Creek Area is a small patch of roadless terrain in the Wolf Lodge drainage southeast of Coeur d'Alene. To locate the trailhead drive east on Interstate 90 and exit at the Wolf Lodge (HYW 97). Turn left and cross the Interstate and then right onto the old highway. After a little less than a mile you reach the Wolf Lodge Creek Road. Turn left on the road and after about 1.7 miles you will cross Wolf Lodge Creek and come to the Alder Creek Road junction. Turn left up the Wolf Lodge Road and another 1.8 miles will bring you to the Marie Creek Road (FSR 202). Marie Creek passes under the Wolf Lodge Road just prior to the junction with the Marie Creek Road. Turn right up the Marie Creek Road. Proceed another 1.3 miles and you will see the Forest Service trailhead markers and a parking lot below the road. During the winter months this is about the end of practical navigation up FSR 202. This is the Marie-Skitwish Creek trailhead. You may want to pay attention to the traction your vehicle has, because when it is icy the parking lot can be a challenge to exit.

The trail leads out of the end of the parking lot and over a bridge over Searchlight Creek. It then switchbacks up the low ridge separating Searchlight and Marie Creeks. After two switchbacks the trail climbs a serious hill near the top of the ridge (1 km). Although not required for the switchbacks, the hill almost always requires skins to effectively ascend. From the top of the ridge the trail descends fairly rapidly to Marie Creek (0.5 km). Skins will serve as a brake in this situation making your ski down less harrowing.

As Marie Creek is reached at the bottom of the hill, turn left (upstream) along the trail as it follows the valley bottom generally north of the stream. The trail is flat and fairly open. Another half kilometer brings you to Burton Creek and shortly beyond (0.3 km) you reach the opening of Burton Meadows.

The valley bottom remains generally flat on the 1.1-kilometer ski on to Skitwish Creek. At this point skiers can either retrace the 3.2-kilometer route to the parking lot or make the ski up Skitwish Creek to FSR 202. The trail can be followed a short distance up Skitwish Creek, but it soon becomes necessary to side slope up the valley keeping the stream in sight as your guide. As the slope starts to lessen, and the valley swings more easterly, skiers should strike due north. They will soon encounter clearcuts and forest

haul roads linking them. Follow these roads generally north to FSR 202. The trip up Skitwish Creek requires a steep climb over about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles). It should be attempted only by skiers in a group and with members of that group accustomed to navigating in the deep woods.

From where the forest haul roads junction with FSR 202, it is about a 6.4-kilometer (4 mile) downhill ski to the parking area. The grade of the road is sufficient to make this an easy descent.

