

RAIL TRAIL ADVENTURES

In the early twentieth century Washington had nearly 6,200 miles of railroads. Changing economies have diminished the total mileage to less than 3,700. All around the state, hundreds of miles of former railroad right of way have been converted into public recreational trails. These are generally open to hiking, bicycling, mountain biking and cross-country skiing, but closed to motorized vehicles. Some are open to equestrian use. Here is a selection of rail trails in AAA Washington territory . . .



Directional signs guide trail users

Website: <http://www.trailink.com/trail/burke-gilman-trail.aspx>

The **Burke-Gilman Trail** is one of the country's oldest rail trails; its first dozen miles opened in 1978. The Burke-Gilman follows the route blazed by the Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern Railway in 1885, and is named for two of its founders. Northern Pacific (later Burlington Northern) acquired the SLS&E in 1901. Trains last ran on this line in 1971.

Seattle's longest dedicated right-of-way recreational trail extends 17 miles from Ballard along the Ship Canal through Fremont and the University of Washington campus to Bothell where it connects with the **Sammamish River Trail** (primarily a levee trail) to Bothell and Redmond, which in turn links with the **East Lake Sammamish Trail** on to Issaquah. More trails follow the corridor to Preston, Snoqualmie, North Bend and Duvall.

The Burke-Gilman is extremely popular and can in pleasant weather seem like a bicycle freeway, with all the attendant congestion and traffic hazards.

The remainder of the Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern Railway corridor has been repurposed as recreation trails.

The Sammamish River Trail (<http://www.trailink.com/trail/sammamish-river-trail.aspx>)

East Lake Sammamish Trail (<http://www.trailink.com/trail/east-lake-sammamish-trail.aspx>) follows the 11-mile route of the SLS&E Railway from Redmond along the shore of its namesake lake to Issaquah. The five middle miles of the trail have a crushed rock surface, the remainder is paved.

Issaquah-Preston Trail (<http://www.trailink.com/trail/issaquah-preston-trail.aspx>) is 4.8-miles long with a paved and gravel surface.

Preston-Snoqualmie Trail (<http://www.trailink.com/trail/preston-snoqualmie-trail.aspx>) extends 6.5 miles (paved surface).



Fall colors along the Interurban Trail in Tukwila

Interurban Trail (South) is a paved 18-mile recreational route from Tukwila (near Fort Dent Park) to Pacific, passing through Kent, Auburn and Algona in the Green River Valley. Two unconnected segments follow the old railway corridor in nearby Edgewood and Milton. While some of the route skirts industrial and urban districts there are rewarding views of Mt. Rainier weather permitting. This trail uses the former alignment of the Puget Sound Electric Railway which operated passenger trains between Tacoma and Seattle from 1902 to 1928. The trail's name recalls the Interurban, a type of commuter railway popular in the early 1900s.

Website: <http://www.trailink.com/trail/interurban-trail-south.aspx>



Interurban Trail (North) is a 24-mile trail connecting Seattle with Everett, via Shoreline, Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood. The paved path follows the right-of-way of the Seattle-Everett Traction Company, which ran electric trains on the route from 1910 to 1939. The Seattle trailhead is at N. 110th Street and Fremont Avenue N. Everett's trailhead is at 41st Street and Colby Avenue. There are several gaps in the trail with detours via bike lanes, local streets and sidewalks (follow directional signs). The Lake Ballinger Station trailhead features a historical exhibit of the railway. Heritage Park, east of the trail on 200th Street S.W. at Poplar Way in Lynnwood, displays Interurban Car. No. 55.

Website: <http://www.trailink.com/trail/interurban-trail-%28north%29.aspx>



On the trail in Orting you get a grand view of Mt. Rainier.

Foothills Regional Trail winds through the Carbon River Valley southeast of Tacoma. Completed paved sections include 15 miles from Meeker (east of Puyallup) to South Prairie Creek and a 2 mile section in Buckley. Highlights include unobstructed views of Mt. Rainier beginning in Orting and following the Carbon River through farm-land and forest. When complete, the trail will be more than 28 miles in length.

Website:

<http://www.americantrails.org/NRTDatabase/trailDetail.php?recordID=3773>



An idyllic scene along the Snohomish County Centennial Trail

Snohomish County Centennial Trail extends 30 paved miles from Snohomish to the Skagit County line. En route it passes farmland and patches of woodland, running along creeks, lakes and crossing the Stillaguamish River on the former railroad trestle. The trail connects the towns of Snohomish, Lake Stevens and Arlington.

At Snohomish a short branch of the trail leads into the heart of this historic town. Several miles north of Snohomish, the Machias Trailhead features a rest stop built to replicate the 1890s railroad depot that once stood on the site. This is one of the most popular multipurpose trails in Western Washington, used by cyclists and rollerbladers, joggers and dog walkers, even horse riders.

Website: <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/Facilities/Facility/Details/Centennial-Trail-33>.



Note: Eastern Washington also has a **Centennial Trail**, although most of it is not a rail trail. The Spokane area's 37-mile multi-use recreational trail follows the Spokane River from Nine Mile Falls at the north end of Riverside State Park upstream through the downtown area and Spokane Valley. At the Idaho border it continues as the North Idaho Centennial Trail an additional dozen miles to Lake Coeur d'Alene.





Trestle west of Sequim

Olympic Discovery Trail is a recreational trail on the northern Olympic Peninsula – much of it follows former rail lines. Starting in Port Townsend, it runs westward around Discovery and Sequim bays, through Sequim across the Dungeness Valley, a four-mile run along the shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, through Port Angeles to the Elwha River. West of the Elwha it follows roads to Lake Crescent, then hugs the lake's north shore following a former logging railway. The path crosses five trestles (including one that is curved). A log building in the village of Joyce was the former Milwaukee Road depot.

About 70 miles of the Olympic Discovery Trail are currently open (just under 35 are paved). Ultimately you'll be able to travel on a dedicated trail all the way to Forks and the Pacific Ocean at La Push, 126 trail miles from Port Townsend.

Website: <http://olympicdiscoverytrail.com/>



Tokul Trestle

Snoqualmie Valley Trail connects Rattlesnake Lake outside of North Bend and ends at McCormick Park in Duvall, a distance of 31.5 miles (crushed-rock surface). The trail follows an extension of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad that linked the Milwaukee Road's mainline with Everett. Along the way, travelers are treated to numerous trestle crossings, historic towns, views of mountains farmland, and a roaring waterfall. The relocated Milwaukee Road depot is restored nearby at Stephens Street and Railroad Avenue in Duvall's McCormick Park.



Website: <http://www.trailink.com/trail/snoqualmie-valley-trail.aspx>



West of the Cascades the trail uses several former railroad trestles

Palouse to Cascades Trail State Park is Washington's longest rail trail, following the 300-mile route of the former Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, popularly known as the Milwaukee Road, across the state. It has also been designated a National Recreation Trail.



The western section, administered by Washington State Parks as Iron Horse State Park, is more developed with a maintained surface, trailheads and signage. From Rattlesnake Lake near North Bend, it traverses the Cascades just south of I-90, crossing a series of high trestles and passing through the 2.3-mile Snoqualmie Tunnel.

It continues along the scenic Yakima River (look for the South Cle Elum Rail Yard National Historic District) and across the Kittitas Valley through Ellensburg. East of Kittitas it traverses the Ryegrass Ridge (the former rail bridge over I-90 is not usable). There is also a break in the trail at the Columbia River south of Vantage where the former railroad's Beverly Bridge has not been upgraded for trail use.

The trail's eastern section, managed by the Department of Natural Resources, is more primitive, crossing irrigated farmlands and desert country to Tekoa on the Idaho border.

Website:

<http://www.americantrails.org/NRTDatabase/trailDetail.php?recordID=3305>



East of the Cascades the route traverses semi-arid sage steppe



Website: <http://www.irongoat.org/>

Iron Goat Trail follows 9 miles of an abandoned Great Northern Railway on the west side of Stevens Pass. Early steam-powered locomotives were called “Iron Horse” and the trail’s name combines that moniker with the mountain goat – the mascot symbol of the former GN. From the Iron Goat Interpretive Site, located in a former Great Northern caboose on US-2, ten miles east of Skykomish, the trail passes remnants of snowsheds, tunnels and abandoned townsites. The trailhead is 60 miles east of Seattle on US-2.



The north trailhead of the Chehalis Western Trail is at Woodard Bay on Puget Sound

Chehalis Western Trail passes through a variety of urban and rural districts in Thurston County. The all-paved trail follows the 22-mile route of its namesake logging railroad which operated from 1926 into the 1980s. It provides access to over 170-acres of park land including nearly two miles of frontage along the Deschutes River, and includes access to Puget Sound, Chambers Lake, wetlands, forests, farmland, creeks, prairies, and other habitats.

Website: <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/parks/trails-chehalis-western.htm>



South of Yelm the trail passes through a tunnel of trees

Yelm-Tenino Trail is a 14½-mile ribbon of asphalt following the Northern Pacific’s former Prairie Line, linking Yelm, Rainier and Tenino. This historic rail line opened in 1869. Train service ended in the late 1980s. The trail traverses forest and agricultural lands, creeks, wetlands and other habitats along SR-507, offering views of the Deschutes River west of Rainier and of McIntosh Lake near Tenino. The Yelm trailhead is near City Hall; the southern trailhead is as Tenino City Park. Look for the historic sandstone buildings (the town is noted for its sandstone quarries), including the former Tenino Depot, now housing the local history museum.

Website: <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/parks/trails-yelm-tenino.htm>



Pine groves border meadows along the trail

Website: <https://parks.state.wa.us/490/Columbia-Plateau-Trail>

Columbia Plateau State Park Trail follows the 130-mile route of the former Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway between the Columbia River at Ice Harbor Dam and Fish Lake near Cheney.

Its northern end passes through Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. The first 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ -miles from Fish Lake are asphalt, followed by 19 miles of crushed gravel. At the southern end, the first 15 miles (crushed gravel) follow the Snake River. The middle 100 miles are unimproved, traversing remote, rolling terrain of scattered woodlands, meadows and grasslands. No services are available along this part of the trail.



A new bridge spans the Chehalis River between Dryad and Doty

through the Willapa Hills with stands of Douglas-fir, Western red cedar, and alder. Look for deer and other wildlife in this remote section. A missing trestle just west of the hamlet of Lebam requires a short detour on Robertson Road. The east trailhead is southwest of I-5 Exit 77, south of Chehalis.

Web site: <https://parks.state.wa.us/1023/Willapa-Hills-Trail>

Willapa Hills State Park Trail is a 56-mile-long recreation trail connecting Chehalis and South Bend in Lewis and Pacific counties. It follows the former Northern Pacific Railway line through remote farm and forestland. The trail has two asphalt sections: 5.3 miles west from Chehalis; and 5.2 miles through Raymond and South Bend. The 45-mile middle section has a variety of surfaces including packed and loose gravel, ballast, and grass. The middle section features many century-old trestles.

West of Pe Ell, the trail winds for a dozen miles



Klickitat Trail follows its namesake stream.

Klickitat State Park Trail is a non-motorized multiple-use trail, following the first 31 miles of the former Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway branch line that connected Lyle and Goldendale in Klickitat County from 1903 to 1992. The trail starts in one of the country's only National Scenic Areas, follows a federally designated Wild & Scenic River, and finally traverses a remote, beautiful tributary canyon. The Klickitat Trail is now managed cooperatively by Washington State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Klickitat Trail Conservancy (KTC).

The gently graded gravel trail starts at a trailhead with lovely river views in Lyle, Washington, at the confluence of the Klickitat and Columbia Rivers, then

follows the designated Wild and Scenic Klickitat River 13 miles through oaks and pines to the old mill town of Klickitat. After a few more miles at the Wahkiacus trailhead, the trail turns up Swale Creek into the remote and beautiful Swale Canyon, ending in the high, open ranch country of the Goldendale

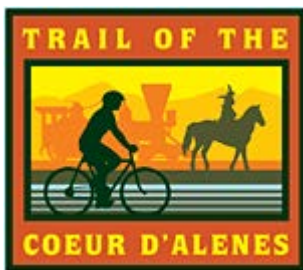
Plateau. Note the wooden dip-net fishing platforms in the along the Klickitat River. Native Americans have tribal rights to fish here in this manner.

A missing trestle a mile north of Klickitat prevents through use in this section, so those wishing to hike or bike the entire trail must detour via SR-142 for the 3+ miles between the town of Klickitat and the Wahkiacus trailhead. The 2+ mile section of trail going from Wahkiacus toward Klickitat is a lovely hike, but dead-ends at the missing trestle.

NOTE: The Swale Canyon section of the trail is closed during fire season, approximately 1 July -1 October.

Web sites: <http://www.klickitat-trail.org> / <https://parks.state.wa.us/869/Klickitat-Trail>

North Idaho has three world renowned rail trails . . .



The **Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes** is a paved 72-mile recreation trail extending from Plummer to Mullan. It crosses Lake Coeur d'Alene on a 3,100-foot long bridge/trestle, follows the Coeur d'Alene River through the Silver Valley, passing Kellogg and the historic mining town of Wallace. The trail ends at Mullan, at the base of Lookout Pass near the Montana border. Here you can continue on the mostly gravel Nor Pac Trail into the Treasure State.

Website: http://friendsofcdatrails.org/CdA_Trail/#.Vw_LI9pwW1s



The 1.66-mile St. Paul Pass or Taft Tunnel [Photo: Ride the Hiawatha]

The 15-mile **Route of the Hiawatha**, in the Bitterroot Mountains south of Mullan, features tunnels and high trestles. The trail has a crushed rock surface. Its name recalls the *Olympian Hiawatha*, a streamliner operated by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad between Chicago and Seattle/Tacoma from 1947 to 1961.

The trail is open daily 8:30am-5:30pm (shuttles available at trailheads) from Memorial Day weekend to late September.

Website: <http://www.ridethehiawatha.com/>



A relative newcomer in this area is the **Nor Pac Trail**. This 25.6-mile, mostly gravel path follows the former right-of-way of the Northern Pacific's Wallace Branch which connected the Silver Valley with Montana.

It starts at the end of the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes in Mullan, winds up over Lookout Pass, skirts the East Portal of the Route of the Hiawatha and ends at the hamlet of Saltese, Montana (I-90 Exit 10).

Website: <http://www.traillink.com/trail/norpac-trail.aspx>