

50 Miles within 50 Miles

With a growing weight problem, 60% of children overweight by 2015, it is up to programs like scouting to tackle this problem head on, and to teach our scouts the importance of exercise in any weather.

Washington is blessed with the largest Rails to Trails system in the United States. We have more miles and terrain than any other state in the lower 48. Many of our 850 miles (one way) are paved, and at no more than a 2% grade. From cities to lush mountain forests, from rivers to oceans, our trail system is a prize worth taking advantage. Journeys on these remarkable trails by bike or foot, can lead to productive exercise, fulfillment of merit badges and a taste of history that many never get to see or participate.

There is no way we can cover even a ¼ of these wonderful trails, so tonight we are going to focus on a few of my personal favorites, yes this discussion is heavily biased 😊. Peppered though out this topic we will discuss different activities that will get your troop involved and riding the rails in no time, and keep them riding.

Foothills Trail:

This trail starts just east of the Vanluep Tulip farm in Sumner. A paved trail that goes all the way to South Prairie, before becoming an off road experience. The total trip one way is 28 miles, Sumner to Buckley, for a total of 56 miles. Trail is an easy 2% grade.

This trail passes through rich farmlands and through historical Orting. Once you reach the outskirts of Orting, you will have a bit of stop and go, as there are many driveways and roads. Get past here and you travel next to the Puyallup, Carbon and White Rivers with no stops. The trail follows the tranquil South Prairie Creek, where during the summer you can watch inner tubers, and trout and salmon swimming along its banks. Stop in South Prairie for a BBQ in one of their two parks, or grab an ice cream. Your troop can also simply park and walk to the REI wetland and marsh research grounds, where your troop can see at least two Bald Eagles nests, beavers, muskrats, ringtail ducks, wood ducks, Canadian geese, mallards and an occasional deer. Perfect place to work on Nature, Bird Watching, Mammal Studies.

Chehalis Western / Yelm Tenino Trail:

Starting in Olympia within eyesight of the Puget Sound and wandering through open forests and along the back edge of the Mima Mounds preserve, sits a trail that when traveled, you feel as if you are miles away from civilization. This trail will take you 35 miles one way into the town of Rainier, for a total of 70 miles round trip. Pass through pastures and forests, one section of the trail passes

through trees so dense, that even in the brightest sunshine you feel as if it is twilight. The trail also follows along the banks of the Deschutes for several miles, a perfect place to stop and cool off from a long ride. Come face to face with history as you pass by the old Chehalis Western train depot, some of the old box cars still standing guardian. Along the way you will pass the sculpture gardens, stop in and take a look around, the artist will more than likely stop by to say hello, and answer any questions you might have.

This is a great trail for your troop to conquer the 50 mile requirement for Cycling merit badge or even the 50 and one twenty or fifty and two tens, oh, you get what I am saying!

This trail is a good trail for Forestry Merit Badge collections and nature studies as well.

King County Interurban:

Get urban! Go Interurban. The Interurban trail is a 25 mile one way, 50 mile round trip that takes you through the heart of the Auburn and Kent Valley. Starting in Pacifica and ending on the outskirts of Tukwila, this trail offers ample opportunity for urban studies without cars constantly surrounding you. Although the Interurban has many stop and goes, some crossing extremely busy intersections, one in Auburn and another next to the Supermall, it is still a fantastic trail to take a group of boys either riding or walking. In Kent leave the Interurban and go on the Green River Trail, where scouts can work on their Fishing, Fly Fishing and Fish and Wildlife Merit Badges. This trail passes many parks, were a troop could start and during the trip have different stations that are manned by parenting teams for cycling merit badge. Or, perhaps, a troop could do a marathon, running, walking, biking and boating. Boating? Yes, a portion of the Green River is open to Kayaks and Canoes!

Boys love to eat, and there is a plethora of restaurants along the trail where a hungry Troop could stop and munch.

Boys will pass next to a major train transfer station along the way, great time to nick a few of the requirements for Railroading Merit Badge!

The trail also passes the horse track. No working on gambling merit badges, but a troop can contact the stables for a tour, and the ability to mark off a few of there requirements for Horsemanship!

Cedar River Trail:

How does one get from Renton to North Bend on trails at only a 2% grade, plus stay next to a scenic river the entire time! Easy, the Cedar River Trail! The first 12 miles of this trip are paved, the rest are ballast, but do not let that stop you, it

is a fantastic ride along a beautiful trail. The trail is 17.5 miles one way or 35 miles round trip.

Stop and enjoy a late afternoon BBQ, or work on Photography Merit Badge, recording the trestles along the way.

Snoqualmie Valley Trail:

Visit quiet peaceful towns, beautiful falls, wonderful farms and dark forests all on one trail. The SVT is 31.5 miles long, or 63 miles round trip. The surface is crushed ballast so this is not wheelchair friendly. This beautiful trail starts in North Bend and travels all the way to Duvall, passing thorough the towns of Snoqualmie and Carnation as well. Lush forests surround you as you travel at a gentle 2% grade the entire trip. Rivers and streams are abundant. Scouts can also make a quick side trip to Snoqualmie Falls, or enjoy a lunch break at Remlinger Farms where during the summer they can munch on some berries or in the fall and winter, crunch into a sweet apple.

This trail also crosses over several restored train trestles, always a blast for scouts.

The trail winds along the mountains sometimes one feels lost in here, alone with their thoughts. The SVT connects to 15 separate trail systems, including the Cedar River and Iron Horse!

Centennial Trail:

The Centennial Trail passes through urban areas in the Town of Snohomish through forested and agricultural areas crossing pristine creeks on built bridges. This trail allows scouts to go from urban to agricultural centers in a matter of minutes. Lazy streams allow scouts to cool their feet off, while easily accessible parks make easy stops for BBQ's and work stations. A wonderful riding experience, a total of 35 miles, all paved, round trip.

Cascade Trail:

How do you get away from all the people? Take the Cascade Trail. A little used 24 mile one way, 48 round trip that takes you along the Skagit River. But this is no picnic ride, it is often not maintained well, and blackberries have been known to overgrow this trail. Some of the trail passes closely to Hwy 20, but if you can get past this, you are in for a real treat. The river sparkles as it pushes its way along, and it is not uncommon to see black bears and deer along this trail. Bring the boys to work on Fishing and Fly Fishing Merit Badge, or stay over night at two campgrounds within three miles of the trail and work on Nature or Mammal Studies Merit Badges. This trail would also make a fantastic weekend service project for maintenance and trail repairs!

Iron Horse:

Washington's best bike or foot trail along an old rail grade. Iron Horse is an 82 mile, one way, 164 mile, round trip marvel that rivals all other Rails to Trails adventures in Washington State. A crushed ballast trail takes you through Snoqualmie Pass, along lush forests, roaring rivers and tranquil creeks. Get your fill of views, because there are literally thousands of opportunities to enjoy nature at its finest. On the west side of the trail, there are two maintained campgrounds along the trail, and the east side offers three maintained, and six "wilderness desert" experiences.

If that is not enough to get your troop on this trail, how about 30 large train trestles over deep canyons, or 4 tunnels.

How about the longest non-motorized tunnel in the continental United States, Dark Passage. A 2.3 mile journey through pitch black depths, under the Cascade Mountains. You will need headlights to do this one!

For new scouts I would suggest a day trip to Dark Passage, and allow the older scouts to make a ride down the mountain for a pick up at Rattlesnake Lake Park for a 24 mile downhill run.

West side of Iron Horse has some great climbing walls as well, where a scout could work on Climbing Merit Badge.

This is the one trail in Washington where I have seen bears consistently, and have had the great privilege to see a cougar.

A trip across pass allows the scouts to see the transformation of landscapes from a wet mild climate, to a dry desert climate. The transformation is amazing, and the difference in plant and insect species is spectacular. So, this trail would do great for Plant Studies and Insect Studies Merit Badges as well!

Spokane Centennial Trail:

What words can express the beauty of a trail that is 37 miles long, 74 miles round trip, that is perfectly paved, and rarely goes above a 2% grade? I can not. The trail meanders along the banks of the river, moving from the heart of downtown Spokane, to the rugged wilderness of Nine Mile Falls Park. There are canoe launch points along the river as well, so another fantastic trail for multi events. Something my family has done, is take the trail one way, then stay at one of many hotels along the route, enjoy some dinner, then wake up and ride the 37 miles back to where we parked the car. This trail can be broken down into segments for marathons, or time relays. The weather in the summer is pristine but hot.

Route of the Hiawatha / Trail of the Coeur d' Alenes:

This is the granddaddy of all paved bike routes in the Northwest. RoH is 15 miles along a ballast trail, TCA is 72 miles of paved heaven which connects to the SCT for a route of 124 miles one way, 109 miles of paved biking and walking paradise.

RoH actually starts on the Idaho / Montana border. This is where I would start this marathon run, as 75% of the 124 miles is on a downhill run, with some uphill jaunts. The trail takes the adventurous soul through 9 tunnels, one 1.8 miles long, The Taft. You also cross seven high, and I mean high, railroad trestles. You are surrounded by high mountain peaks the entire time. Certain days, you are the only one on the trail. The beauty of this ride is hard to explain as you stare down into the valley's far below from your vantage point of the trestles. This is a trail that the boys will not soon forget. RoH also offers shuttle service that takes you from the bottom of the trail back to the top for \$15 per passenger

Trail of the Coeur d' Alenes picks up where the RoH leaves off. Continue your journey through these rugged mountains. Stop and learn in the mining towns that still dot the trail along the way. Enjoy a long lunch in some of the old towns eateries and hear stories of its past from some of the citizens that still call these wonderful old towns home. You will cross over at least 40 bridges, follow the beautiful silver river, and what I think is the most incredible part of the trip, ride or walk across Lake Coeur d' Alenes on the floating bridge. View swamps and estuaries, forests and valleys, rivers and streams, and never get bored!

50 Miler Award

Note the following information we have received from the BSA, in regard to a query as to whether the 50 miles may be done on bikes, or on horseback (particularly since the new version of the patch shows a bike wheel and horseshoe):

According to the camping and conservation service, horse and bicycle are (and "have always been") acceptable modes of travel for the fifty-miler award.

There's a note in the publishing files for the award application and requirements book - so that "on horse" and "on bicycle" will be specifically included in descriptions of the fifty-miler requirements in the future.

The 50-Miler Award is presented to each qualifying individual for satisfactory participation in an approved trip. In order to qualify for the award the group of which the individual is a member must fulfill all of the following requirements.

1. Make complete and satisfactory plans for the trip, including the possibilities of advancement.

2. Cover the trail or canoe or boat route of not less than 50 consecutive miles; take a minimum of 5 consecutive days to complete the trip without the aid of motors. (In some areas pack animals may be used.)
3. During the time on the trail or waterway, complete a minimum of 10 hours each of group work on projects to improve the trail, springs, campsite, portage or area. If after checking with recognized authorities, it is not possible to complete 10 hours each of group work on the trail, a similar project may be done in the unit's home area (There should be no unauthorized cutting of brush or timber.)
4. Unit or tour leader must then file a [50-Miler Award application](#) with the local council service center. This application gives additional details about planning the trip.