

Introduction to Snowshoeing

By Steve Dougherty

7:00 PM—Introduction

Instructor

The instructor is Steve Dougherty. Steve joined the Chemeketans in 1992. He has served as a climb leader since 1999, club president for three years and also instructs the club's annual Route Finding School. Steve has led over fifty climbing trips for the club and has summited all 18 of the Northwest's highest peaks.

Why offer an Introduction to Snowshoeing class?

I presumed that there would be sufficient interest and it would be a great way to introduce more people to the sport. I have been delighted with the enthusiastic response. We have had a full house every year since I started it in December 2010.

Who are the Chemeketans?

The Chemeketans were founded in 1928 following a climb of Mt Hood that was sponsored by the YMCA. We have over 800 members and we provide a wide variety of outdoor trips including hiking, backpacking, climbing, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, and canoeing.

The club has some note worthy annual events:

Annual Route Finding School (February)

Annual Climb School (April)

Annual Two Week Outing (August)

The club maintains a large cabin on Forest Service land off Whitewater Road above the town of Detroit. It has no running water or electricity but can accommodate groups as large as 25.

Chemeketan Retail Discounts

Salem Summit 246 State St, Salem. 503-990-7304. 10% (rents snowshoes)

Oregon Mountain Community, 2975 NE Sandy Blvd, Portland. 503.227.1038. 10%.

The Mountain Shop, 1510 NE 37th, Portland. 503.288.6768. 10%.

Next Adventure, 426 SE Grand, Portland. 503.233.0706. 10%.

US Outdoor Store, 219 SW Broadway, Portland. 503.223.5937. 10%.

Peak Sports, 207 NW 2nd, Corvallis. 541.754.6444. 10%.

Redpoint Climbers Supply, 8283 11th St, Terrebonne. 800.923.6207. 10%.

Why Snowshoeing?

Exhilarating: Snowshoeing extends your hiking season into winter and winter can be a beautiful time of year. There is something magical about a fresh blanket of snow and the crisp cold air.

Easy: "If you can walk, you can snowshoe!" You will need to widen your stance to avoid stepping on the snowshoe frames. We'll go over some technique points for going uphill, downhill, and traversing.

Inexpensive: A \$100 pair of snowshoes, waterproof boots and cold weather hiking clothes is all you need.

Fitness: Snowshoeing offers low-impact, aerobic exercise and is a great way to stay in shape during the winter.

When you can't Ski: When the snow conditions are poor or the terrain is too difficult, you can always snowshoe.

7:15 PM - Snowshoe Equipment

Two Basic Types

Aluminum-frame snowshoes come in multiple sizes. Composite snowshoes come in one size and offer the option of adding tail extensions to increase floatation.



Cost

Stores like REI offer a wide selection of snowshoes and you can spend over \$200 on the more expensive models. Entry level snowshoes can be purchased for less than \$150. The best deal I found was a \$100 snowshoe package at Costco (includes poles and snowshoes manufactured by Yukon Charlie's).

Renting

Salem Summit, Sports Authority, REI, Peak Sports all rent snowshoes. I have a limited number of the MSR Classic snowshoes that I rent for \$10 a pair.

What size?

Each size has a recommended load rating. Recommended loads are based on light, dry snow conditions. In Oregon, we can get by with smaller snowshoes because of our wet snow conditions. A snowshoe's floatation is really important when you are breaking trail. Followers can get by with a more compact snowshoe. Those planning to carry more than a day pack in the backcountry will need extra floatation for the increased load.



Steve's Recommended Practice – Buy an entry level snowshoe. Get the smallest snowshoes that will support your weight for the snow conditions and terrain; they're lighter and easier to maneuver.

Bindings

Snowshoes secure to your boots with bindings. Two types are common: rotating and fixed.

Rotating bindings pivot at the point where they attach to the decking—under the balls of your feet. The amount the bindings pivot varies among models. The pivot point allows the tails of the snowshoes to fall away as you step, reducing leg fatigue. The downside of rotating bindings is that they can be awkward when you need to climb over logs or back up.

Fixed bindings are connected with heavy-duty rubber or neoprene bands and don't pivot as much. This type of binding causes the snowshoe tails to snap back with each step. This also makes stepping over obstacles and backing up easier. The downside of fixed bindings is that they tend to kick up snow on the backs of your legs.

Footwear

You don't need to buy special footwear to go snowshoeing. Most snowshoe bindings are built to accept a variety of footwear styles. Any waterproof hiking boot or insulated winter boot will work. If I will be hiking in sub-freezing temperatures, I like to wear neoprene socks in my leather hiking boots.

Traction Devices

Snowshoes feature tooth-like crampons or cleats for greater grip. Recreational-style snowshoes will typically offer moderate amounts of traction, while backcountry snowshoes will generally have more aggressive crampons for steep, icy conditions.

Heel Lifts

These wire bails can be flipped up under your heels to relieve calf strain when climbing a long uphill stretch.

Trekking Poles

Poles are optional but most people enjoy the extra stability they provide. The poles should be adjustable. Buy poles with lever locks and test them for holding power. Trekking poles outfitted with large snow baskets work well. Shorten the poles when going uphill and lengthen them when going downhill.

7:35 PM—Checklist for a Winter Day Trip

Cotton Kills: Avoid wearing cotton clothing because it absorbs moisture. Use wool or polyester clothing instead; it tends to wick moisture away from the skin.

Pack Light: By choosing lighter weight items you can reduce your pack weight and increase your enjoyment. Buy lightweight rainwear that you can ventilate and rain pants with full side zips. Expensive Gortex gear weighs considerably more and I've never been very impressed with its breathability. This year I'm experimenting with lightweight nitrile work gloves that provide good dexterity. I can wear my windproof fleece gloves over the them for a lightweight and warm combination.

Be Prepared: You want to be able to produce that safety pin, piece of cording, chunk of wire, length of duct tape or needle and thread to make a repair in the field. I use the term "handy bag" to describe the bag that organizes all of my little items.

Checklist for a Winter Day Trip

Food & Water

- sack lunch
- water bottle, 32oz.

Clothing

- base layer pants (synthetic)
- base layer top (synthetic)
- boots, waterproof
- gaiters
- gloves or mittens, warm
- gloves, fleece
- hat, warm
- jacket, rain
- pants, rain
- socks, liner
- socks, thick wool
- sweater, fleece
- warm synthetic jacket

Miscellaneous

- Sno-Park Permit (\$25/yr or \$4/day)
- ski poles (optional)
- snowshoes
- day pack

Dress in Layers

Managing your body temperature is very important in the winter. This is done by adding and subtracting layers as needed. Don't let yourself get overheated because damp clothing will cause you to cool rapidly when you stop moving.

Handy Bag

- bandana
- camera (optional)
- duct tape
- first aid kit
- head lamp
- lip balm (optional)
- matches & fire starter
- pocket knife
- sunglasses/sunscreen
- tissue paper
- topo map & compass
- whistle
- repair kit

Group Gear

- GPS
- Talk-About Radios (chan10 code 5)

Winter Travel

- chains that fit your vehicle
- ground cloth
- jumper cables
- road flares
- shovel

Remove layers before you start hiking. It is a common practice for leaders to offer a “clothing adjustment” break shortly after starting. When you stop for a rest break, put on extra layers before doing anything else; you will have less trouble staying warm during the break.

Sun Protection

The winter sun can be brutal on the skin and the eyes due to the snow’s reflective nature. Applying sun screen before you start and reapplying during the lunch break is a good practice. Protect your eyes with sun glasses that cut out 100% of UV rays.

Breaks

Leaders should arrange for a short rest break about every hour. Don’t be afraid to ask for one if you need to adjust clothing, tend to a hot spot or if you need to eat or drink.

Food & Water

Don’t wait until you are thirsty or hungry before you eat or drink. Keeping your body fueled and hydrated will improve your performance and make you less vulnerable to the cold. Carrying water bottles upside down will keep the lids from freezing. Have some trail snacks available that you can eat on the go. You can carry these close to your body to keep them from freezing.

Change Bag

It’s nice to change into some clean dry clothes for the drive home. A little duffel bag works great and keeps your things from getting mixed up with other persons riding in the vehicle.

8:00 PM - Refreshments

Fifteen minute break to stretch, use the restrooms in the hallway or get a snack. Good time to ask questions about climb school or the route finding school.

8:15 PM - Winter Sports Etiquette

Coexisting with Skiers

Skiers may take great offense to snowshoers who walk on an established ski track; make your own trail next to it. Step off the trail when resting. Yield to cross-country skiers; particularly those skiing downhill since they have less control.

Dogs

Dogs are generally not welcome on popular winter trails. They present a collision hazard and their excrement defiles an otherwise crystal clean trail. If you do bring your dog along, you must keep the dog under control and be prepared to remove their excrement from the trail. Dogs are generally not allowed on Chemeketan trips.

Snowmobiles

The Forest Service has provided winter trails for snowmobiles and other trails for skiers and snowshoers. Use caution when crossing a snowmobile trail.

8:20 PM—Snowshoe Technique

Foot Placement in the Binding

Your foot should be centered with the ball of your foot over the pivot point of the snowshoe.

Use of Poles

Most snowshoers use ski poles for better balance. Poles are most beneficial on challenging terrain. Poles on beginner trips are strictly optional. Collapsible trekking poles work well if they are fitted with snow baskets. Adjust pole length so that the elbow flexes at about 90 degrees. To grip the pole slip the hand through the strap from below and then grasp the pole, sandwiching the straps between your hand and the grip. This grip allows one to use the stronger shoulder and arm muscles instead of the weaker muscles of the hand.

Uphill

Shorten your poles when going uphill. Your step cadence must slow down to accommodate the increased effort of climbing. For long uphill travel, you can utilize a “rest step”. One simply locks out the trailing leg and rests on it momentarily before transferring weight to the uphill leg. On hard packed snow you want to firmly plant the traction devices built into the snowshoe on each step. On softer snow you will want to kick your toe into the snow forming steps. If the snow is too steep, you will need to change direction and seek out a more suitable route.

Downhill

Lengthen your poles when going downhill. Lean back slightly and keep your knees flexed. In soft snow we use a “plunge step” planting our heel firmly with each step. Do not allow the snowshoe’s tail to swing out from under you. Keep the tail in contact with the snow surface. If the snowshoe should slip forward when you weight it, simply sit down in the snow. If you are close to the bottom of a slope and slip, you can run out of it.

Side Hill

When traversing a side hill the uphill pole will be shorter and the downhill pole will be longer. Kick the uphill side of the snowshoe into the slope and make the shoe track level and properly spaced so that others can improve your tracks as they progress. On hard packed slopes you will want to utilize the traction devices fully by keeping your weight directly over your feet (don’t lean into the slope).

Trading Leads

It takes considerably more effort to break trail. Rotate the leader periodically, so that everyone can experience what it is like to break trail and to prevent any one party member from becoming excessively fatigued.

How to Recover from a Fall

Falls are common place when cross country skiing. Falls rarely occur when snowshoeing, especially on beginner terrain. If you do fall, simply remove your poles from your wrists and lay them on the snow to your side. Grasp the poles near their center with one or both hands and roll towards the poles onto your knees. Now you can stand up.

8:30 PM—Beginner Trip Logistics

I have planned two beginner snowshoes for this winter. Both are less than four miles in length and have an elevation gain of less than 1000 feet. Generally, one can hike twice as far as they can snowshoe. Based on this, persons who can hike seven miles in summer conditions should be fit enough for either of my beginner trips.

Since we will be not be traveling inside a wilderness area, our party size is not limited. For organizational purposes, we will allow participants to hike at their own pace. Stay behind the leader and in front of the sweeper. If you need assistance you can communicate your need to one of the assistants. The leaders will all be carrying Motorola two-way radios and communicating on channel 10 code 5. Please do not deviate from our route without informing the leaders.

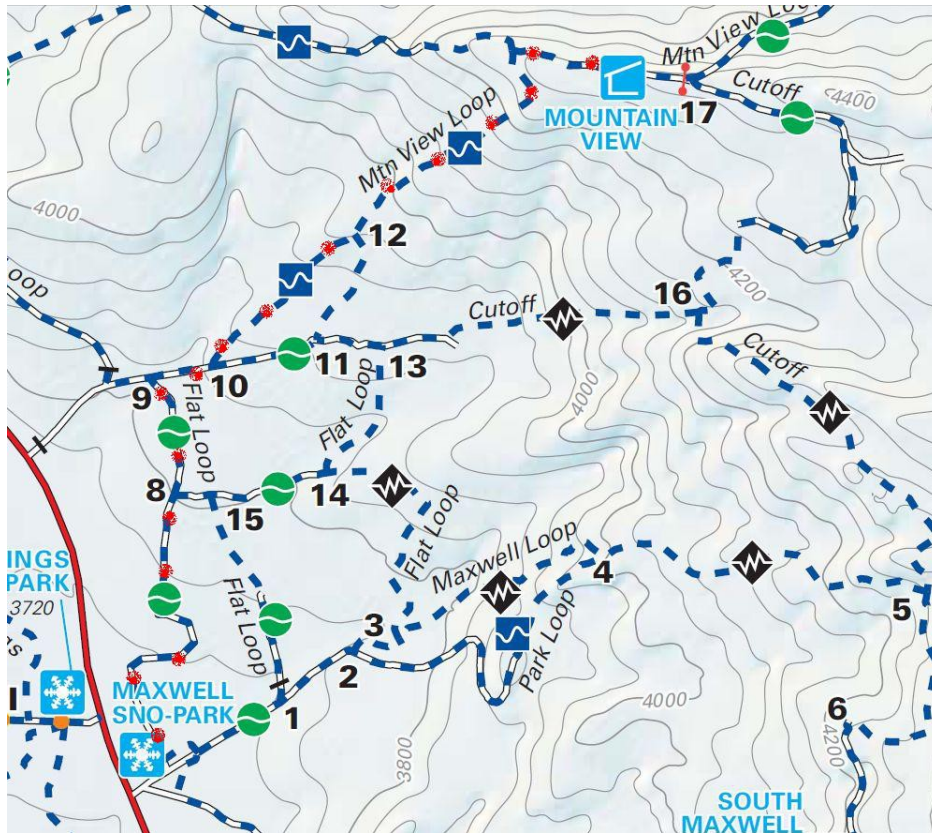
Participants can sign-up on my website (www.cascadeadventures.net). I encourage participants to review the itinerary and use the checklist to make sure they are adequately prepared. Participants will meet at the State Motor Pool Park and Ride to arrange car pools. Arrive early, so that participants can depart by 8 am. I will be joining the group at “The Maples” Rest Area just east of Gates at 8:40 am. Those persons who volunteer to drive should carry tire chains and know how to put them on or have studded tires. I also encourage drivers to carrying a shovel, jumper cables and road flares. Each passenger is expected to reimburse your driver nine cents per mile

Each car must have a Sno-Park Permit. These can be purchased for the season (\$25) or for the day (\$4) at Dick’s Sporting Goods, located at 275 Lancaster Drive in Salem.

I encourage participants to mark their gear, especially poles and snowshoes, to avoid mix-ups. The trip ends once everyone has departed the sno-park. Drivers can organize rest stops and/or meals with riders in their cars.

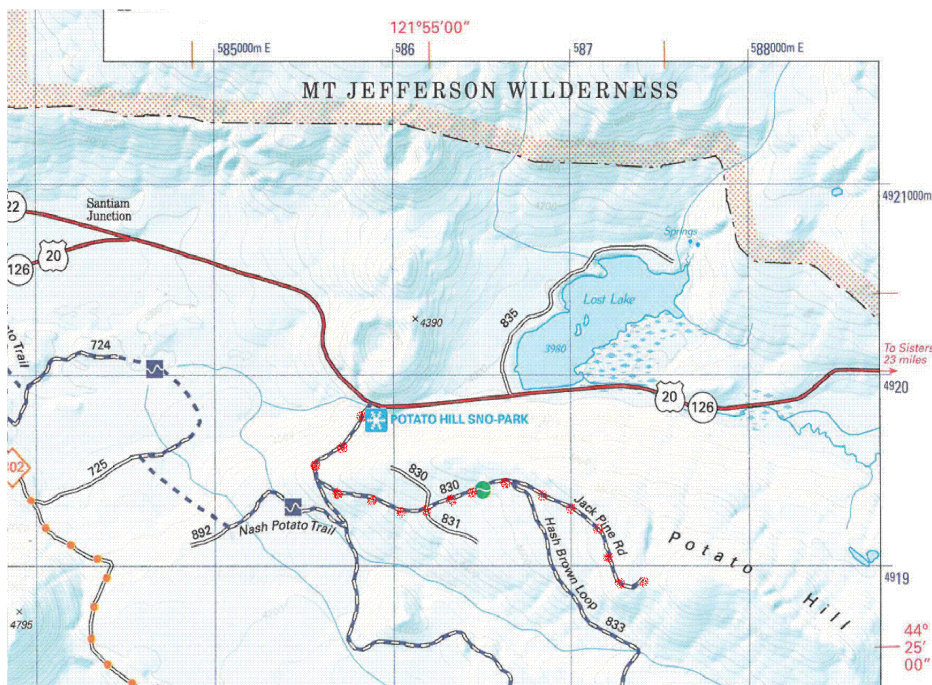
Maxwell Beginner Snowshoe Saturday Dec. 14, 2013

Round trip distance is 4.0 miles with 700 feet of elevation gain.



Potato Hill Beginner Snowshoe Saturday Jan. 11, 2014

Round trip distance is 3.5 miles with 900 feet of elevation gain.



8:35 PM—How to Register for a Chemeketan Trip

The Chemeketans offer a wide variety of trips. The leaders are club members who volunteer their time. Trip leaders advertise their trips in the club's monthly bulletin. Pay particular attention to the trip's difficulty rating, the round trip distance and the elevation gain so that you know if the trip is a good fit for you.

If you find a trip that fits your schedule and your ability, then contact the leader by phone or email to request participation. Give the leader some background on what kind of trips you have done. The leader will accept or reject your request based on your experience, fitness level or space availability.

8:40 PM—Club Membership

Membership Application

One may apply for membership after completing two "qualifying trips" with the club. A qualifying trip is any Chemeketan-sponsored outdoor activity. One can download a membership application from the club's website at www.chemeketans.org/membership.htm. Return the application and fee to the Membership Secretary.

Dues

Annual membership dues are \$20 for each adult, (\$3 for those under 18).

Free Two Month Club Bulletin Subscription

Prospective members may request a free two month bulletin subscription on the membership page of the club's website.

8:45 PM – Dismiss