Other Cross Country Ski & Snowshoe Opportunities along Highway 89

The Little Belt Mountains provide a multitude of opportunities for cross country skiing and snowshoeing. Snow depths near Kings Hill Pass average 96-107 inches annually, and the ski season in higher elevations can run from November through May.

**Elapsed, Marked Trails**

O’Brien Creek Trail 7 miles • Moderately Difficult

Starts at Kings Hill Pass on Highway 89, and traverses the O’Brien Creek drainage to its end in Neihart. A car shuttle is required to ski this trail one-way. Watch for snowmobiles on the lower portion of the trail. Dogs are allowed.

Ranch Creek Trail 10 miles • Difficult

Starts at Kings Hill Pass on Highway 89, climbing Peruhy Peak to the ridge, and then follows Mizpah Ridge, making several steep runs before exiting clearings above Mizpah Bowl. Stay on the Trail – Mizpah Bowl is avalanche prone. The trail proceeds to the head of Ranch Creek, and then drops into Ranch Creek, following a logging road out to Highway 89. A car shuttle is required to ski this trail one-way. Watch for snowmobiles on the lower portion of the trail. Dogs are allowed.

Deadman Ridge Trail 7 miles • Difficult

Starts at Kings Hill Pass on Highway 89, following a forest road behind Kings Hill Creek to Deadman Ridge, along which it proceeds south until it drops into Deadman Creek and reaches the highway. The lower portion of the route is not completely marked, and skiers should travel with someone familiar with the route. A car shuttle is required to ski this trail one-way. Dogs are allowed.

Other Recommended Places

Jefferson Creek Road 287 • Beginner

60 miles south of Great Falls on Highway 89. This road and area are closed to motorized vehicles in the winter and offer ungroomed opportunities for beginner cross country skiers and snowshoers. The trail is a gentle hike along Jefferson Creek road, ending in an open meadow. The round-trip is approximately 8 miles, but users can turn around at any point and shorten their trip. Dogs are allowed.

Crawford Creek • More Difficult

This moderate trail starts behind the Belt Creek Ranger Station and crosses back and forth across the creek as it climbs approximately 2 miles west. Please leave gates as you find them, and do not cross the private land at the top of the trail without permission. Dogs are allowed.

Memorial Falls • Beginner

60 miles south of Great Falls on Highway 89, this is a short 1/2 mile hike to a picturesque waterfall. The Memorial Falls Trailhead might not be plowed in this case; park at the Jefferson Creek Road parking area 1/2 mile south of Memorial Falls Trailhead. Dogs are allowed.

Area History

The Silver Crest Ski Area is on the historic Kings Hill Scenic Byway, US Highway 89, the 71-mile route between Arlimenton Junction on US 87 and US 12 near White Sulphur Springs. By 1899 much of the old route was completed. At that time, the Little Belt Mountains were part of the Jefferson National Forest. The photo below shows the county line at Kings Hill Pass in 1925.

The names of the trails at Silver Crest reflect the last 130 years of mining and timber history in the area.

**Ski Trails**

Silver Dyke is a mine in the Neihart Area, and refers also to veins of silver deposits. **Wu Tang’s Way** is named after a Chinese laundry in Neihart that served miners for decades. **Gold Run** is a mine in the Barker-Hughesville area. **Borealis** is an exclamation miners made when they struck gold. A **sluice box** is a device used in placer mining that has riffles on the bottom to catch the heavier gold as water flushes material from one end to the other. **Quicksilver** was a commonly used name for mercury, which was used in the processing of gold and silver. **Piper** refers both to U.S. Highway 89 and gives a nod to a significant period in the history of Neihart and Kings Hill. **Homestead Meadow** refers to the homesteaders who made their claims in the area. **Neihart Flats** refers to the trail, often called the “Flat Trail,” that supplies, materials, and passengers to and from Great Falls to Neihart for over 50 years.

**Snowshoe Trails**

**Springboards** were flexible platforms on which early loggers stood to fell a tree. **Cruisers** survey timber stands and estimate the quality and amount. **Chasers** are loggers who unhook logs from skidders or cables.
Cross Country Ski Trails

Using Ski Trails: Use of groomed and un-groomed trails is free to the public. No dogs, snowshoes, or other forms of transportation are allowed on groomed ski routes in order to keep the groomed surfaces in good condition for skiing and to keep the trails safe.

Silver Crest Groomed Ski Trails

All trails are two-way travel. The ski trails are identified on the map by loop B, C, D, E and by trail name. The distance between major junctions is marked on the map.

Snow Shoe Trails

There are three loops designated for snowshoe use inside the Silver Crest Cross Country Ski Area. You can also travel the outside of all of the loops for a longer loop. The trails are marked with red diamonds to distinguish them from the cross country trails. When snowshoe trails cross groomed ski trails, please cross in the shortest distance possible. Snowshoeing is not allowed on the groomed Silver Crest ski trails.

Avalanche Safety & Awareness

What are the RED FLAGS of unstable snow pack?

- Recent avalanche activity
- Wind
- Heavy Precipitation
- Cracks in the snow surface
- Rising temperature

Be Informed, Be Trained!

The Forest Service National Avalanche Center website has online avalanche awareness & skills training:

http://www.fsavalanche.org/

The Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center in Bozeman offers classes and more local information:

http://www.mtnavalanche.com/

Know the Forecast! Check the weather and forecast before you go, and be prepared for changes. This QR Code will take you to the National Weather Service Current Condition and Forecast page at the nearby Porphyry (FHYM8):

Lat: 46.835278°N 110.7175°W, Elev: 8232 ft.