

On Trail

Brave New Trails

Looking for a new trail to hike in 2011? You got it!



From Republic and Oroville to the Columbia River Gorge, the San Juan Islands and points between, public land managers have been busy planning recreation opportunities for hikers. Here is a look at seven brand new hiking trails that have recently opened or will open very soon.

IN THE NORTHEAST

Enjoy a picturesque drive through idyllic rolling mountains that harbor a rich wildlife population as you wind your way up to two new trails, the Whistler Canyon Trail and the Similkameen Trail. Both trailheads are accessed from U.S. Highway 97—a designated scenic

byway—north of Tonasket and 3 miles south of Oroville. Another new route outside Republic, the Gibraltar Trail, will wind through open, sun-soaked country.

The **Whistler Canyon Trail**, located on the flanks of Mount Hull, didn't come easily. Previously blocked by a privately-owned quarry, this new trailhead and access to this portion of the 1,200-mile-long Pacific Northwest Trail (PNWT) are the result of intricate real estate acquisitions and other negotiations between Okanogan County Public Utilities Department, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, the Pacific Northwest Trail Association and the Backcountry Horsemen.

Stroll a new route along the Similkameen River. Photo by Ted Murray.

Kim Brown

Kim is a volunteer writer for the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Public Affairs Office.



Above: The view from Whistler Canyon (photo by Gene Wyllson and a resident bighorn sheep (photo by Ted Murray). Below: Hiker on the Cape Horn Trail (photo by Ryan Ojerio).

Mount Hull is a Rocky Mountain Big Horned Sheep management area; you may also spot wild turkeys, grouse, quail, partridge and bears in the area.

M.J. "Eb" Eberhart, author and American Long Distance Hiking Association award recipient, recently hiked the entire PNWT. After entering Whistler Canyon from the east, Eb, known on the trails as "Nimblewill Nomad," wrote the following in his online journal, "[We hiked] to one of the most remarkable overlooks—providing us vantage across the Okanogan Valley. Below can be seen the most lush of valleys, the meandering Okanogan River glistening and showing its life-giving path. John and I stop, drop our packs and just take it all in. Ah, and is it not another perfect day to enjoy such fine trail—a true blessing."

This area melts out early. In most years, it is possible to visit Whistler Canyon as early as March.

The **Similkameen River Trail** is found on the west side of US 97. This rail-trail follows the Similkameen River. According to Ted Murray, in the Okanogan County office of Planning and Development, this trail will eventually feature historical information boards describing the human and natural history of the river. Okanogan County plans to work with local historical societies and students for that project. More trailheads are planned in the Oroville area, providing

easy access to historical Enloe Dam, Similkameen Falls, a railroad bridge high above the river and the ghost town of Nighthawk. What a great backpacking adventure that will be!

By combining Whistler Canyon with the Similkameen River Trail, a hiker can easily enjoy two days of exploration in this area. The trailhead for the Similkameen River Trail is open now; look for the Whistler Canyon trailhead to be completed sometime in spring or summer 2011.

The new **Gibraltar Trail** will be a great place to relax and enjoy the views of the spectacular, open country near Republic.

Thanks to a grant from the Spring Trust for Trails foundation, this long-awaited trail is now a reality. WTA, Conservation Northwest, Spokane Mountaineers and Ferry County Trails Association are collaborating with the Colville National Forest to build this multi-use trail outside of Republic. Hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians will enjoy traveling through grasslands dotted by old-growth ponderosas and rolling hills on this 18-mile-long trail. Small portions will also be shared with motorized users as they access existing motorized trails.

In early spring, this trail's beautiful rocky outcroppings will be bristling with wildflowers. Stay a few days and explore several other trails in the Republic area. You can stay at a nice campground 10 miles south of Republic on the lovely San Poil River.

IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

WTA has been working on the new **Cape Horn Trail** for quite some time now, and it's turned out to be wonderful.

"This trail has everything that a trail should have," says Ryan Ojerio, WTA's Southwest Washington regional coordinator. "Just about every quarter mile there is some new beautiful thing to see. Either a great view of the Gorge, a huge Douglas-fir, a misty waterfall or emerald green mossy talus slopes, and unlike most other Gorge hikes, it doesn't have punishing steep climbs and descents. ..."

Ryan adds, "The lower section is closed from January 1 to July 1 for peregrine nesting, but don't let that stop you from visiting the trail." Luckily, the trail closure comes after the prime viewpoint. Hike counterclockwise to avoid the closed lower portion of the loop. After enjoying the views, return the way you came. You can do the complete loop when the wildlife closure is lifted on July 1.

As far as best seasons go, take your pick.

Spring offers bountiful wildflowers and the fall colors are grand too.

What's notable about **Catherine Creek Trail** are the beautiful garry oak forest and the array of rare wildflowers. Much of Catherine Creek is still in the planning stages. However, the newest book in *The Mountaineers' Day Hiking* guidebooks series, *Day Hiking: Columbia River Gorge* by Craig Romano, which is due out this spring, will provide details on current Catherine Creek trails.

IN THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS

A short ferry ride from Anacortes to Guemes Island will land you on a new trail to the **Guemes Mountain** summit. WTA volunteers are building a brand new mile-long trail in collaboration with the San Juan Preservation Trust and the Skagit Land Trust. The summit is a beautiful broad vista with views of Mount Baker and the San Juan Islands.

Check WTA's website for work parties here, including weekend opportunities, and presuming everyone works hard, look for this trail to open to hikers in the first half of 2011.

OFF HIGHWAY 2, NEAR SKYKOMISH

I've been sworn to secrecy about the exact location and name of this one, but I can tell you that this **top secret new trail outside Skykomish** will offer views of the Monte Cristo range, Glacier Peak and Baring from a lovely summit which pokes out over a graceful old-growth forest. OK, I'll confess—a portion of the aforementioned vista is based purely on hearsay and a careful study of the map. I have hiked this trail four times—you know, for research purposes only (wink)—but due to rain, fog, snow

or a combination thereof, I have yet to see more than the lower 3 inches of Glacier Peak. I guess that just means I must go back—all in the name of research, of course!

This lovely hike begins on a quarter mile of recently closed logging road and continues another very pleasant half mile on another, older closed road. After pausing for views at a small clearcut, the trail enters virgin forest. One can't help but whisper upon entering this old-growth forest of silver fir, Douglas-fir, and mountain hemlock, soaring above a lush forest floor studded with mushrooms in fall.

This trail is 6.9 miles round trip, and its gentle grade is perfect for families. Views open up near the top as the trail nears a small, rocky summit. This trail was born a concept in the late 1980s and the hope was to build and open this trail "someday." Lucky for us, "someday" has finally arrived! The trail is built; the Forest Service is waiting on the delayed installation of an outhouse to complete trailhead construction. According to Tom Davis, trails coordinator for the Skykomish District of Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, the outhouse manufacturer was flooded with new orders this year, and they became—pardon the pun—backed up. Look for this trail, and its spiffy new outhouse, to open in summer 2011. You can check WTA's website for its exact location.

Exploring the near and far reaches of Washington just keeps getting better. ♦



Where's this? Sorry, we're sworn to secrecy! Photo by Kim Brown.

MORE TRAIL NEWS

It's not a new Skykomish District trail, but the road to **Evergreen Lookout** is open once again, and maintenance on Evergreen Lookout will be completed this summer. Starting in September 2011, you can log onto www.recreation.gov/ to make reservations for an overnight trip. (For information on other fire lookout rentals, see [www.fs.fed.us/r6/recreation/rentals.](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/recreation/rentals/))

Grass Widows near Catherine Creek. Photo by Ryan Ojerio.

