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## Places - Escapes



Kayakers can paddle from the shores of Everett to Jetty Island at the mouth of the Snohomish River.

### Mountains to Sea

Discovering the highs and lows of sprawling Snohomish County

By Sharon Wootton and Maggie Savage

*Photos courtesy of Snohomish County Tourism Bureau*

Snohomish County is a sprawling area that climbs into the Cascades to the east and slips into Puget Sound on the west.

The county's geography is a recreational magnet: a share of Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and the Cascades; four mountains (highest: Glacier Peak, 10,541 feet); four rivers and nine major bodies of water.

#### Rafting

Paddle your raft on a meander down the lower Skykomish River or take the challenge and run the main section of the Skykomish River on a guide-led rafting trip. This is not for the truly faint of heart but, what the heck, life is short. Get your adrenaline rush where you can.

The most famous section is through Boulder Drop with its house-size boulders, said to be the toughest river challenge in the North Cascades. How tough? Guides will stop their rafts to scout conditions before running the rapids of Boulder Drop.



#### Hiking

A surprising number of waterfalls (21, in fact) can be reached by trail. Some can be seen from Highway 2 and the Mountain Loop Highway. All are at their impressive best in spring when mountain snow is melting.



Waterfalls make a good destination hike, especially for children who often need a carrot at the end of the trip. Reaching waterfalls can be short and easy walks or long and sometimes steep climbs.

Wallace Falls near Gold Bar is the best-known waterfall in the county and one of the best cataracts in the state. The series of drops fall more than 350 feet, with the top section spilling 265 feet into a pool. The hike is an easy-to-moderate 5-mile round trip.

Other waterfalls to consider exploring are Bridal Veil Falls, Explorer Falls, Twenty-two Creek Falls, Twin Falls and Suattle Falls.

A more-difficult hike with terrific views and a scramble (you must be in good shape) at the end is 7,188-foot Mount Pugh, rising from where the White Chuck River meets the Sauk River. Hikers gain about a mile of elevation if they

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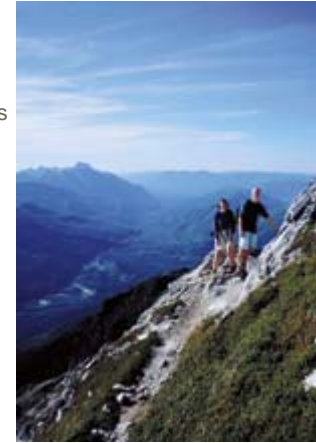
reach the top, but if scrambling is not for you, be content with the views at the top of the alpine cirque.

The Heybrook Mountain (near Index) fire lookout is another spring destination. The one-mile hike with an 800-foot elevation gain ends on the observation deck of the restored lookout. Views include Mount Index, Baring Mountain and Mount Persis. Thank the Everett Mountaineers Club for restoring and maintaining the lookout.

The closest, easiest and most accessible peak in the Cascades is Mount Pilchuck near Granite Falls. It rises nearly a mile, providing views of Rainier, Baker, Puget Sound, the San Juans and the Cascades.

The moderate-to-difficult six-mile round-trip hike gains 3,100 feet. But like almost all mountain hikes, slow and steady means 10-year-olds and "elders" can make it. At the end is the lookout, maintained by the Everett Mountaineers.

This is a late spring or early summer hike because snow can linger, wipe out parts of the trail and create slippery conditions. If that's the case, inexperienced hikers should choose another destination.



### Biking



Take a brisk ride or a slower family pedal on the paved 17-mile Centennial Trail that stretches from Snohomish to Arlington on an abandoned railroad right-of-way. Pack a lunch and take advantage of several picnic spots.

Or you can bike and hike. The county has an extensive guide that includes routes to several trailheads and a hiking guide.

Stevens Pass Ski Area has applied to the U.S. Forest Service for a permit to create the state's only lift-access mountain-bike park. It

would use existing ski runs and start with five trails covering seven miles. It's expected to open this summer.

### Urban Recreation

One of our favorite paddles is from Langus Riverfront Park on the Snohomish River, the entry point into visual, auditory and historical insights in the estuary.

Paddle upstream under I-5 to Steamboat Slough, past abandoned boats and other relics. The urban noise fades, replaced by the sound of your paddle cutting into the water, the cry of a hawk, the annoyance voiced by a great blue heron, and bird song.

Watch for muskrats, beavers and otters, too, while appreciating the significance and abundance of an estuary of about 20 square miles with more than 350 species of birds. Paddlers can also venture out on Everett's Port Gardner Bay from the 10th Street Boat Launch. One paddling destination is Jetty Island, a skinny two-mile-long island immensely popular in the summer and it's only a 10-minute ferry ride away.

The more adventurous types will hit adrenaline highs on a white water rafting trip with Outdoor Adventures (formerly Wave Trek), home-based along the Skykomish River in Index. Sharon Wootton and Maggie Savage are freelancers living on Shaw Island in the San Juans and authors of "Off the Beaten Path: Washington."

### IF YOU GO

**Snohomish County Visitor Information Center:**  
(888) 338-0976; [www.snohomish.org](http://www.snohomish.org).

### Forest Service:

Skykomish Ranger District, (360) 677-2414; Darrington Ranger District, (360) 436-1155.

**Washington Trails Association:** [www.wta.org](http://www.wta.org).

**Green Trails Maps:** [www.greentrails.com](http://www.greentrails.com)

**Everett Mountaineers:** [www.everettmountaineers.org](http://www.everettmountaineers.org).

**Guides:** Snohomish County publishes "Bicycling in Snohomish County" and "Hiking Snohomish County," two good guides to many options. The latter can be downloaded from [www.snohomish.org](http://www.snohomish.org).

**Book:** "Hiking Snohomish County" by Ken Wilcox.

**Outdoors Adventure Center:** A commercial rafting company out of Index. (800) 543-7971, [www.wavetrek.com](http://www.wavetrek.com).

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