

Tilly Jane Ski Trail Nomination Description

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail gains approximately 1900 feet in elevation over the course of 2.7 miles as it climbs in a southwesterly direction from the southwestern corner of the Cooper Spur Ski Area to the Tilly Jane Cabin or from the present day Tilly Jane park area below the ski area. The general compass bearing of the Tilly Jane Ski Trail as it climbs is 225 degrees. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) widened the Tilly Jane Ski Trail when it built the Tilly Jane Cabin in 1939. At that time the CCC also cleared the 1889 wagon road to open it up for ski descent. During the snow season the trail has traditionally provided winter backcountry recreational enthusiasts with direct access to the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District and to points beyond, such as Cooper Spur and the Elliot Glacier. This narrative describes the ascent of the Tilly Jane Ski Trail. The width and lay of the Tilly Jane Ski Trail evidence an aesthetic cut for backcountry ski and snowshoe ascent and descent.

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail leaves the Cooper Spur Ski Area at an elevation of 3920 feet. When the trail was widened in 1939 it originated at the ski area's predecessor, a small non-mechanized jump hill that forms the present day ski area except that it has one ski lift. The ski trail quickly leaves behind any trace of development as it enters eastside-westside transition zone Douglas fir/western hemlock old growth forest. The forest here is also noted for its lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine and grand fir. In one-third of a mile at 4100 feet the trail intersects with a trail built to maintain the integrity of the backcountry experience by allowing travelers to avoid the Cooper Spur Ski Area. The second trail leaves the Tilly Jane Snow Park below the ski area. From this intersection the ski trail widens slightly as it climbs gently on sidehills above Doe Creek where it enters open slopes with skiable terrain. The forest consists of Douglas fir, mountain hemlock, three-foot and greater diameter ponderosa pine with a park-like and generally open understory.

At 4380 feet the Tilly Jane Ski Trail becomes wider, and alternates between flat stretches and slopes varying between 10 to 25 degrees in medium density forest. The trail crests the ridge at 4780 feet. The gently rounded ridge provides an open park like setting with widely distributed clusters of mountain hemlock, whitebark pine, subalpine fir and an occasional ponderosa pine. Travelers are treated to spectacular natural and undisturbed views to the east and south toward Lookout Mountain across the valleys of Hood River and east fork of Hood River, and north to the Polallie Canyon and Ridge.

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail follows the center of the broad open ridge at a slope of 5 degrees with open ski terrain to the south. At 4860 feet the trail begins a long 20 degree climb up a sidehill traverse until regaining the crest of the ridge at 4960 feet. The descent of the sidehill traverse is often a series of linked garlands along the wide trail. The trail again follows the broad rounded crest of the open ridge at a grade of less than 10 degrees until reaching a knoll at 5060 feet where a lone ponderosa pine stands that is approximately 4-foot in diameter. The open slopes in this area provide many ski opportunities. A 25 degree pitch leads to a flat open ridge top in a park land setting with

clusters of three foot diameter mountain hemlock, subalpine fir and whitebark pine. The trees are clustered because snow deposition on the ridge prevents seedlings from growing in open areas and favors ones layering in the protection of existing trees. A 25 degree pitch leads to the start of a long flat traverse where Mt. Adams and Mt. Rainier can be seen to the north.

The trail crosses the small headwaters of the east fork of Tilly Jane Creek at 5400 feet and after three pitches tops out at 5720 feet in a flat dense stand of mature mountain hemlock where the A-frame structure of the Tilly Jane Cabin is visible 150 feet ahead. The forest understory is open with a variety of routes leading to glade and alpine skiing above. From the Tilly Jane Cabin the trail crosses the flat bench above Tilly Jane Creek and in close proximity passes the 1938 American Legion Cookhouse and amphitheater before crossing a bridge over Tilly Jane Creek and ascending to the flat bench with the Tilly Jane Guard Station and campground. From there, the Cloud Cap Inn and Snowshoe Club can be reached from the Guard Station by trail or road.