

IN OUR COMMUNITY

HIKING IN A Winter Wonderland

SUBMITTED BY JOY FOREHAND

When snow is in the forecast, several hikes on the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) offer a trek through a wintery wonderland - Holly trees and other evergreens are bent low with fresh-fallen snow. Ice-covered branches glisten in the sunlight light. Panoramic views of snow-capped mountains in the distance are every hiker's reward. When snow is on the ground and the roads are open, some of the best winter hikes on the BMT are:

Enjoy an easy hike from the Fall Branch Falls Trailhead to the stunning 100-foot falls lined with icicles and surrounded by snow-covered rhododendrons. Hikers can head back to the trailhead or continue on a moderately strenuous climb to the ridgeline, proceeding to where the BMT drops down to Weaver Creek. The side trail to the top of Rocky Mountain features exceptional views of valleys far below. The BMT below Rocky Mountain offers a magical snow-covered landscape.

For those seeking panoramic views and a strenuous work out, another BMT hike departs from the Little Skeenah Creek Trailhead on Hwy 60. It is a two-mile journey to the top of Wallalah where another wintery wonderland awaits. Hikers continue on a ridgeline flanked by awesome long-distance views on both sides. They can turn around at any time or go all the way to the Skeenah Gap Trailhead. Snow-covered mountain laurels line much of the pathway from Licklog to the trailhead on Skeenah Gap Road.

The winter landscapes are exquisite, but hikers do need to watch out for one of the pitfalls of the frigid temps - the potential for hikers to develop hypothermia (the body loses heat faster than it can produce it). Even if the temps have warmed a bit since the initial snowfall, temps of 45 - 50 degrees still can bring on the condition. To avoid developing hypothermia, hikers should:

- Dress in layers to avoid overheating while you hike.
- Minimize sweating by regulating your level of activity.
- Take short breaks to avoid getting chilled.
- Stay well-hydrated -- drink plenty of water or electrolyte-fortified drinks.
- Eat high energy snacks or food to maintain your stamina.
- Of course, watch for any signs of hypothermia.

For more information on the hikes mentioned above, go to bmta.org. If you have any questions, contact Joy Forehand, jforehand@bmta.org.