

Trails Groomed for Hiking and Biking

By Kristen Smith

June is the kick-off to a summer of great hiking and biking opportunities in the Methow Valley. One of the most accessible and all-encompassing areas for these activities are the multiuse trails surrounding Sun Mountain.



Sun Mountain trails are popular with mountain bikers.

Patterson Mountain Hike

This four-mile round-trip hike gives adventurers the opportunity to get a perfect 360-degree view of the Methow Valley. This trail begins across the road from the Patterson Lake boat launch and climbs via either the South Loop or the North Loop trails.

While both trails climb to the summit, the South Loop trail will take you there more gradually. Along the way, you will pass through groves of aspen trees and under the canopy of a few striking ponderosa pine trees.

The trail is well groomed and dotted with wildflowers. The views from the 3,500-foot summit are worth the effort. Mount Gardner, Goat Peak, the North Cascades and the Chelan Sawtooths dominate the skyline. Below, the town of Winthrop

is visible and you can scan the Methow River from the top of the valley to the bottom.

As you descend from Patterson Mountain, return via the opposite loop trail for a different perspective. While the total elevation gain is 1,100 feet, this hike is not out of reach for children, especially when taken slow.

To reach the Patterson Mountain Trailhead from downtown Winthrop, drive south, cross the bridge and veer right onto Twin Lakes Road. At about 3½ miles, turn right onto Patterson Lake Road and follow the signs to Sun Mountain. Continue four miles to the Patterson Lake boat launch and parking lot. A state Fish and Wildlife Department permit is required to park at the lake, but there is room for a couple of cars just past the lot on the left. More parking pullouts are available just down the road.

Mountain Bike Sun Mountain Trails

Sun Mountain has more than 35 miles of mountain biking trails. These shared-use trails are maintained year round by the Methow Valley Sport Trails Association. Trails offer riders of all abilities perfectly flowing, extremely well-maintained trails.

The Sun Mountain trails pass through dense forests, open meadows, along the lake shore and to the mountain top. All of the trails have easy-to-follow signs, with a master map at the Chickadee parking area. You can pick up a summer trails map at Sun Mountain Lodge or at the Winthrop Visitor Center.

To reach the Chickadee parking area, which accesses all of the Sun Mountain trails, drive south from downtown Winthrop, cross the bridge and veer right onto Twin Lakes Road. At about 3½ miles turn, right onto Patterson Lake Road and follow the signs to Sun Mountain. Continue about six miles, turn left and park at the Chickadee Trailhead parking area. ■

Sport Trails Association

- ▶ The Methow Valley Sport Trails Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing and promoting environmentally sound recreation on or near the trail system in the Methow Valley.
- ▶ The trail system includes about 125 miles of groomed trails and is recognized as one of the finest trail systems in North America for cross-country skiing, off-road biking and hiking.
- ▶ Learn more at www.mvsta.com.