

Wildflower Trails in the Tri-Cities Area

Hikes and walks to see the diversity of plants and animals living in the shrub steppe surrounding our rapidly growing community.



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Columbia Basin Chapter
WA Native Plant Society



Badger Mountain Centennial Park (a Benton County park). There are currently two trails up Badger Mtn. The trails meet on top of Badger Mtn., where you can see all of the Tri-Cities, Mt. Adams and Mt Hood on a clear day, and look up and down “the Rattles”, a line of hills (Red Mtn, Candy Mtn, Badger Mtn, and Thompson Hill) that form a line south from Rattlesnake.

The hiker-only Canyon Trail (1.25 mile one way) is accessed by taking I-182 Exit 3A (Queensgate), then turn left in 0.5 mi onto Keene Rd. Drive 0.6 mi and turn right onto Shockley Rd. up the hill to the parking area on White Bluffs St. to the right. The trail switchbacks twice before leveling out into a more gradual climb through native grasses and wildflowers.

The Skyline Trail (2.25 mile one way) is multiple-use (hikers, bicycles, horses) and climbs more gradually through native grasses and some of the remaining patches of shrub steppe. To get to the trailhead, follow the directions above, but turn right onto Keene Rd, turn left onto Kennedy, and left again onto Dallas Rd. Drive 1.1 miles, under the I-82 overpass, and turn left to follow the dirt road next to the orchard to the parking area. A new multiple-use trail will be constructed in 2010 connecting the two existing trails..

Amon Basin (2.2 mile loop) (a City of Richland park). This park has both shrub steppe and riparian areas side by side, where you can find ducks and beavers as well as coyotes and jackrabbits. The trail is a fairly gentle loop starting at Claybell Park in Richland. From Highway 240, take the Columbia Park Trail exit and go 0.7 mi west. Turn left onto Leslie Rd and drive 1.8 miles to Broadmoor St., turn left again and drive 0.6 mi to Claybell Park. Follow the dirt road at the east end of the parking lot to the trail.

The best time to see wildflowers is usually between mid-March and mid-June. Many of these areas have few shrubs, the result of wildfires that have killed the shrubs but not the native grasses and wildflowers.

The plants and animals have evolved to survive our hot, dry weather, but they aren't as good at surviving people. You can see the scars left by unofficial trails crossing the face of the hills. The organisms that keep the soil intact are easily trampled and killed, allowing erosion and ultimately killing other vegetation.

PLEASE STAY ON THE OFFICIAL TRAILS AND HELP PRESERVE THE BEAUTY OF THE SHRUB STEPPE NEAR THE TRAILS.

Trail Etiquette and Safety

- Be aware of your surroundings. There may be bad weather, snakes, insects or people shooting targets in the vicinity.
- Dress appropriately and carry water.
- Downhill traffic should give way to uphill traffic.
- Hikers should give way to bikers and horses.
- Step to the side of the trail to let others past. To let horses past, step several feet off the trail, preferably with your entire group on the same side and if possible on the downhill side, and talk normally.
- Bikers and hikers coming up on horses, especially from behind, should talk normally to let the rider and horse know they're there.



Rattlesnake Ridge Unit of Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area (a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recreation area). You can walk as far or as little as you want on this multiple-use (hikers and horses) trail, but within 1.5 miles you'll be rewarded with sweeping views of the grass-steppe with Rattlesnake Mountain to the north and the line of small hills called "the Rattles" extending past Kennewick to the south beyond the Yakima River. The lower flat area has been disturbed and is a bit weedy but native plants are dominant further uphill along the old dirt road. Fires have burned off the shrubs here, but the bunchgrasses are beautiful and the lupine and other wildflowers are starting to return in full force.

From I-82, take the Benton City exit and drive about 7.4 miles through Benton City on Highway 225 to a small gravel parking lot on the left.
From Richland, drive north 8.3 miles on Highway 240, turn west onto Highway 225 and drive 4.2 miles. The gravel parking lot will be on the right side of the road, just past the Tri-Cities Shooting Range. A WDFW access permit, available online or at sporting goods stores, may soon be required to park here. Dogs should be leashed from April to July, and target practice is not allowed.

Horn Rapids Park (a Benton County park). A corner of Horn Rapids Park is a sandy area at the "horn" of the Yakima River with plants like bitterbrush, Indian ricegrass, evening primrose and wallflower that live in shifting sand. A mulched trail climbs up the dune past huge bitterbrush and wanders 0.5 miles through this distinct sandy community where coyote and lizard tracks are common. From Richland drive north 8.3 miles on Highway 240, turn left onto Highway 225 and look for the entrance to Horn Rapids Park in 0.8 miles.

Horse Heaven Hills / McBee Grade near Benton City (Bureau of Land Management area). Take the Benton City exit from I-82 and drive south 0.7 miles through Kiona on Webber Canyon Road to the graveled McBee Road. Turn onto McBee Road and drive 0.5 miles to a small parking area on the left. Park here and follow a small trail for 100 ft to a very obvious track to the right that climbs steeply to the top of the ridge (0.75 mi one way), or you can turn left and walk 350 ft along a less obvious old road to an abandoned dirt road that wends along the foot of the Horse Heaven Hills before switchbacking up to the top of the ridge (2.75 mi one way). This area burned recently, and most of the shrubs have been killed. However, the native grasses are glorious and in some areas the wildflowers seem to outnumber the grasses.

If you don't want to hike to the top of the Horse Heaven Hills you can continue to drive (carefully) up McBee Road to the top of the ridge. Park along the edge of the McBee Road and walk along old gravel and dirt roads in either direction along the crest of the ridge. The plants here are usually close to the ground in response to the harsh environment. It's amazing to see the ground covered in color when the plants are so small, and the view will take your breath away, with Mt. Hood visible on a clear day and miles of scenery in every direction.

