

A Winter Outing: The Silence of Forestdale Road

Gay Havens

Now that snowmobiles have been banned on the Forestdale Road when there is enough snow for them on Blue Lakes Road, cross-country skiers and snowshoers can enjoy a wonderful day of play and skill building in this area. Forestdale Road from Red Lake into the Forestdale Divide offers a marvelous place for intermediate skiers to hone their skills and practice their turns.

Park along the road to Red Lake off of Hwy. 88 (a couple of miles east of Carson Pass and just east of the lake itself). Forestdale Road starts with a bit of a downhill; don't be shy about putting your skis on at the bottom of this little hill. The road then goes gently up and down for about two miles, a perfect place to practice your kick-and-glide technique. At about the 2-mile point you will come to the bridge crossing Forestdale Creek. Intermediate skiers should turn off the road at this point and follow the stream up to a beautiful open bowl. You can go up either side of the stream, but I prefer the right (east) side because it is more open. In about a quarter of a mile you will find yourself in an open bowl, a perfect spot for practicing your turns! This bowl offers slopes of varying steepness and all with a lovely, non-threatening, flat run-out at the bottom. There are very few trees on these slopes so it is really ideal for those just learning to turn. One can climb up a little way, ski down, get more confidence, climb up a bit higher, practice more turns, and on and on. In good conditions, this bowl can look like a groomed ski slope! When you stop for a rest, be sure look up at the cliffs above the south end of the bowl. Sometimes they are coated with blue ice—a very beautiful sight!

You can ski back home along the road, or, if you have increased your skills and confidence enough, you can come back along the "high" route beneath Elephant's Back. To do this, start at the north side of the bowl at the break in the slope above the bottom of the bowl. Continue to parallel the road, climbing a little uphill but staying below the steeper slopes above. You will cross a drainage and after climbing out of this drainage, you will come out on another broad open slope that you can ski down back to the road. There are some gorgeous, old juniper trees on this slope, so be sure to slow down and appreciate them!

For more advanced skiers, you can continue up Forestdale Road from the bridge. The road gets steeper, and you will probably need skins. You can continue all the way up to the pass at the top of the road (Enjoy the view!) and come downhill through the higher bowls back to the first bowl I mentioned above, or you can decide to not go so far and ski off the road down slopes to the right side of the road. These routes also drop down to the open bowl previously described.

Snowshoers will enjoy walking along Forestdale Road and can practice their hill techniques at many spots along the way. They will also enjoy just walking around Red Lake itself. Watch for beaver activity!

One caveat: if we are lucky enough to have deep powder, the two miles in from the road will be slow going. The most ideal condition is, of course, a smoothly packed base with powder still on the slopes. But whatever condition you find, you will truly love skiing in this beautiful area - now free of snowmobiles!

