



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



## Route of the Hiawatha

*Idaho*



## Route of the Hiawatha

Idaho

*Note: Route of the Hiawatha is operated by Lookout Pass Ski Area under a special-use permit of the U.S. Forest Service. Trail users*



Note: Route of the Hiawatha is operated by Lookout Pass Ski Area under a special-use permit of the U.S. Forest Service. Trail users must obtain and display trail passes, which cost \$10 for adults and \$6 for children aged 6-13 years. Group rates and seasonal passes are also available. For more information, please visit the [organization's website](#).

What is today the Route of the Hiawatha was also known as one of the most scenic stretches of railroad in the country. When the Milwaukee Railroad was operating, the trains traversed through eleven tunnels and over nine high trestles, covering a 46-mile route that crossed the rugged Bitterroot Mountains between Idaho and Montana. The Route of the Hiawatha's most well-known feature is the long St. Paul Pass, or Taft Tunnel, which

burrows 8,771 feet (1.6 miles) under the Bitterroot Mountains at the state line between Idaho and Montana.

The Idaho section opened the first 13 miles in May 1998 for hikers and wilderness biking. This stretch of the trail between Roland and Pearson currently goes through eight tunnels and travels over seven high trestles, following the mountainous terrain along Loop Creek drainage. Between Moss Creek and Pearson the trail is open only to non-motorized traffic. The ride from Roland just below the West Portal of the St. Paul Pass (Taft Tunnel) to Pearson is gentle along a gravel road. The grade is an easy 1.7%, from 4,160 feet at the West Portal to 3,175 feet at Pearson, over 13 miles. If you don't want to ride up hill from Pearson to Roland, a shuttle bus provides transportation for riders and their bicycles.

The Taft Tunnel, a dark 1.6 miles, is popular with trail goers; motorized vehicles are not permitted. If you want to explore this area, the main parking area is at the East Portal, 2 miles from Taft Exit 5 off I-90; follow the signs. Midway through the tunnel an interpretive sign indicates the Idaho-Montana state line and discloses which crew reached the center of the tunnel first in 1907. Look for the beautiful waterfall at the West Portal of the tunnel. If you want to bypass Taft tunnel, drive up and over the tunnel for 5 miles along Forest Service Road 506 and Roland Summit and park at the Roland trailhead. It's about 15 miles from the East Portal trailhead to Pearson.

From Lookout Pass to the East Portal the trail follows the old Northern Pacific railroad grade approximately 10 miles to the Taft site. Along the way the trail crosses the St. Regis River three times, passes through one tunnel and goes under Interstate 90 twice before arriving at Taft. From Taft, the trail rises gently at an about 2.1% grade for 2 miles to the East Portal of the Taft tunnel.

Another 31 miles of trail—known as the [Route of the Olympian](#)—stretches from Taft to St. Regis, Montana, and includes one



# Route of the Hiawatha

Idaho

**States:** Idaho

**Counties:** Shoshone

Length: 15miles

**Trail end points:** East Portal of St. Paul Pass Tunnel (MT/ID border) to Moon Pass Road (Pearson)

**Trail surfaces:** Gravel

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

**Trail activities:** Mountain

Biking, Walking, Cross Country Skiing

## Parking & Trail Access

The main parking area is at the eastern end near the Taft tunnel (East Portal), 2 miles from Taft Exit 5 off I-90 in Montana. Signs will direct you. Or you can drive up and over the tunnel for 5 miles on Forest Service Road 506 and park at the Roland Summit trailhead, a good option if you want to bypass the tunnel.

Trailheads are also found at Moss Creek, off FS Road 506; off of FS Road 326 (Loop Creek Road); and at Pearson off FS Road 456.



