

42 Centennial Trail

DIFFICULTY: moderate
TOTAL TIME: allow 4 hours
TOTAL DISTANCE: 47.5 miles
TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN: 620 feet

Driving directions: From I-5 in Everett, travel east on US 2 toward Wenatchee. Take third exit off US 2 into Snohomish. Turn right onto 92nd St. SE, then right onto Pine Ave. Turn right onto Maple Ave., which becomes S. Machias Rd. Pilchuck trailhead is on the right in approximately 2 miles.

This is a flat, relaxing ride, mostly in the country, on a trail that's been much expanded recently to create a great link between the towns of Snohomish, Lake Stevens, and Arlington. If you start your tour in Snohomish and loop the entire distance, switching to roads for most of the last few miles into Arlington, you'll put in about 50 miles (half a century, in cycle-event lingo). But for better access to parking and services, I suggest starting at the Pilchuck Trailhead, which is just north of Snohomish off US Highway 2.

Head north as the trail runs close to the Pilchuck River. There's only a portable toilet at Pilchuck, but there are seasonal services at Machias Station, which is your first stop, just 3 miles ahead. The converted rail depot now has a snack shop, water, and restrooms, and in the summer of 2005 they began renting bicycles and in-line skates. With picnic tables and a covered shelter, it's a nice place to stop and a great meeting point.

Next you skirt the edge of the town of Lake Stevens (detour at 20th Street for a side trip to its town center) and pick up the new section of the trail, noticeable by the lack of tree roots that can heave the asphalt under your tires (for an example of this, see Burke-Gilman Trail, Tour 1). At about 10 miles you reach Lake Cassidy, on the eastern edge of Marysville, which has trail access to a dock and wetland interpretive area. There are picnic tables here as well. The trail continues north through denser tree cover, and as it nears Arlington, you begin to get views west through the valley.



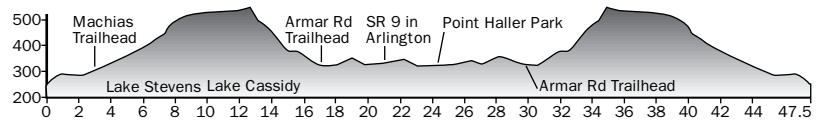
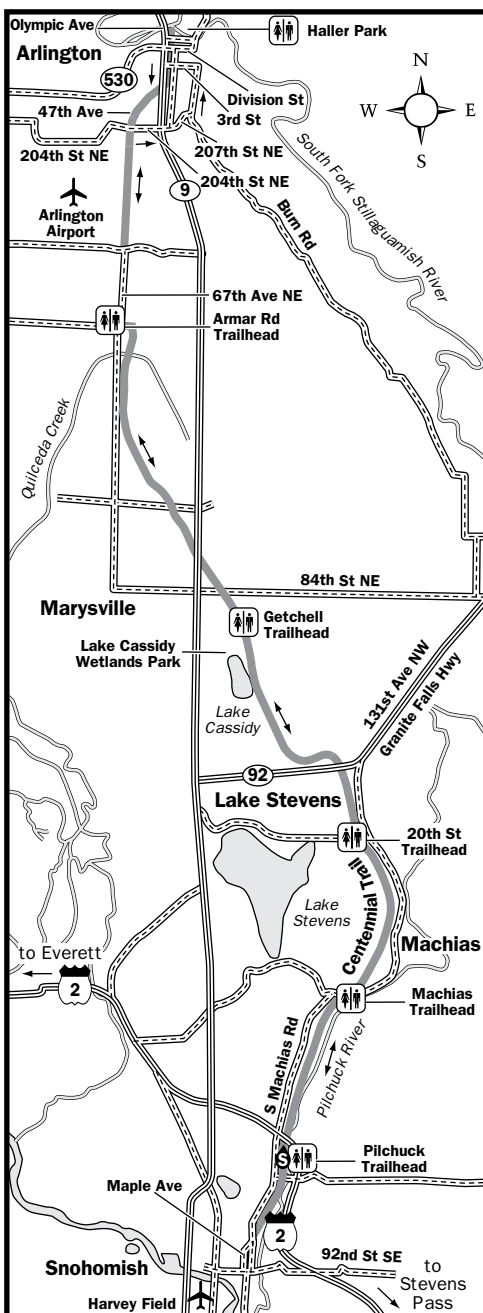
An equestrian trail parallels the flat, rural Centennial Trail.

You do make a bit of a climb over the entire course of the trail, but it's so gradual you might not notice it until you reach the end, where you cross Quilceda Creek and coast down to the Armar Road Trailhead. If you sought just an easy off-street pedal, reverse course here and return to Pilchuck for a 34-mile ride. The trailhead has a portable toilet but no other services. This tour continues another few miles into Arlington for restrooms and refreshments.

To visit Arlington, turn right onto 67th Avenue NE (also known as Armar Road) and pedal north. You spend 1 mile on this moderately busy, shoulderless road before picking up another section of the trail, a 12-foot-wide sidewalk that takes you into town. This short trail section ends at Cemetery Road. Turn right onto 204th Street NE and ride two blocks to the well-equipped Haagen's Supermarket to sample its deli selections and facilities. Continue 4 miles on city streets into Arlington, using a short bike lane through downtown Arlington that parallels its main street and connects to riverside parks. The county has plans to finish the trail into Arlington, then link these sections and extend the trail north to the Skagit County line.

On the return, after the initial climb from Armar Road you begin to notice the downhill slope, as you find yourself coasting along or really picking up speed. The trail has a posted speed limit of 15 miles per hour, which is mostly a concern on the busy sections or where you reach a crossing with cars, pedestrians, and horses.

A bridle trail parallels the bike and pedestrian trail, mostly set a few feet away on a dirt path in the adjacent ditch. However, equestrians do join the trail at bridges and other crossings, and it's a good idea to leave plenty of space and approach at a moderate speed. At one point, Snohomish County was the dairy capital of the state, but today the closest you'll get to livestock near the trail will be seeing well-groomed, well-behaved horses. As with many communities in the Interstate 5 corridor, the towns along this trail are sprawling into the rural landscape. If that process continues, the Centennial Trail will become another two-wheel commuter link, but for now it's mostly a recreational trail that offers at least the feel of a country ride.



MILEAGE LOG

- 0.0** Left onto trail from Pilchuck Trailhead.
- 3.2** Arrive at Machias Trailhead. Restrooms, water available.
- 9.0** Arrive at town of Lake Stevens.
- 9.9** Arrive at Lake Cassidy picnic area, dock.
- 17.0** Arrive at Armar Rd. Trailhead.
- 17.1** Right onto 67th Ave. NE, also known as Armar Rd.
- 18.1** Cross 172nd St. onto sidewalk bike path on east side of road.
- 20.5** Right onto 204th St. NE, which crosses SR 9, then curves left to become 207th St. NE.
- 21.7** Left onto Stillaguamish Ave.
- 22.4** Left onto 3rd St.
- 22.9** Right onto downtown trail just past Olympic Ave.
- 24.2** Arrive at Haller Park. Restrooms available. Reverse route to return through downtown.
- 25.5** As trail ends, right onto West Ave.
- 25.9** Left onto NE 47th Ave.
- 26.9** Cross 204th St. NE to rejoin trail adjacent to 67th Ave. NE.
- 30.3** Rejoin Centennial Trail at Armar Rd. Trailhead.
- 37.4** Pass Lake Cassidy picnic area.
- 38.3** Pass town of Lake Stevens.
- 44.3** Pass Machias Trailhead.
- 47.5** Arrive at Pilchuck Trailhead parking to end tour.