

## BIG HOLE ROUTE

### Bannack, MT

Population: ghosts

Once a wild and booming gold mining town in the 1860s, Bannack was the first capital of the Montana Territory. Clark and his party passed right by millions of dollars of gold in Grasshopper Creek on their return trip in 1806. Too bad they weren't looking for minerals as well as flora and fauna. Bannack was gradually abandoned during the 1900s, until the state park service took it over and started restoring buildings and offering guided tours. Today it is a fascinating collection of 60 buildings that are only partially restored. It is a true ghost town with no commercialization.

Bannack is located 4 miles south of Route 278 about 21 miles west of Dillon. The access road is paved for 3 miles and pretty good dirt for the last mile.


### Jackson, MT

Population: 75

Jackson is an oasis 48 miles west of Dillon and 21 miles south of Wisdom. The tiny town exists to take advantage of the hot springs here, and you can find a room at the lodge and meals at the lodge or across the street at Rose's Cantina. If you missed the chance to get a Stetson in St. Joseph, you can get a custom made cowboy hat from Buffalo Gal in the converted church here.

The Big Hole Valley is a high valley bordered by the Bitterroot Mountains to the west. Although not obvious from the road, this valley is the home of many large and prosperous cattle ranches.

Zip: 59736

 Jackson Hot Springs Lodge, 406-834-3151

*Antelope and  
cattle sharing  
high pasture in  
the Big Hole,  
near Wisdom, MT*



## Wisdom, MT

Population: 135

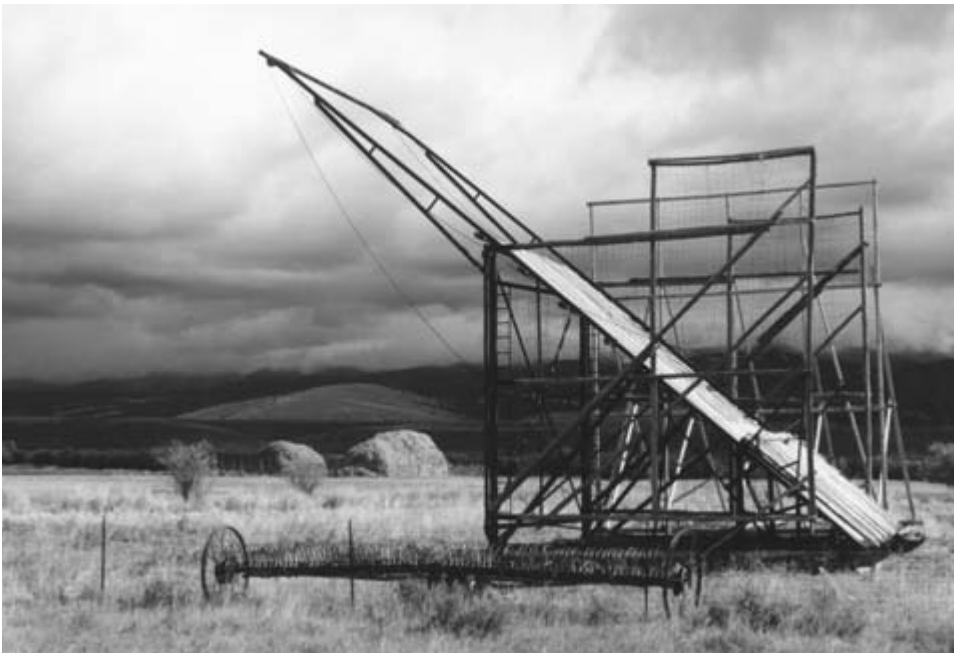
Wisdom is another oasis located 21 miles north of Jackson and 56 miles east of Darby, the next significant town with services. Located at the intersection of two highways, the town has a campground, a small food market, excellent art gallery, motel and restaurants.

This valley is also known as the Land of 10,000 Haystacks. Many areas in the world have their own ways of stacking and storing hay, and the Beaverslides of this area are unique. The movable racks lift hay onto the top of a large stack, and then a fence is built around the stack.

Zip: 59761

🏠 Nez Perce Motel (\$), 406-689-3254

- ▲ 1) American Legion Park, 0.3 flat mi. west of town, open, no shade, water, pit toilet
- 2) May Creek NFS Campground, 17 mi. west on Route 43, pleasant high elevation wooded campground with water and pit toilets, 406-689-2431



*Beaverslide and the breadloaf-like mounds of hay it builds,  
near Wisdom, MT*

## BIG HOLE NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

Located ten miles west of Wisdom on Route 43, the visitor center run by the National Park Service is definitely worth an hour or two. This is the place where Chief Joseph and his “non-treaty” Nez Perce were camped in 1877 near the end of “the Indian Wars” when they were surprised by General Gibbon’s army. After the U.S. Army slaughtered many women and children in a surprise early morning attack, the Nez Perce fought bravely—shocking the army by winning the battle. But they eventually lost the war—massively outmanned and outgunned.

The whole story of the Nez Perce, including their kindness to Lewis and Clark in western Idaho, their banishment to a barren reservation, the 90% reduction in size of this reservation when gold was discovered on it, the rabid pursuit of the “non-treaty” group who refused to be mistreated, and their final banishment to an alien reservation in Oklahoma is fascinating, tragic, and moving.

For more information: Box 237, Wisdom, MT, 406-689-3155, [www.nps.gov/biho](http://www.nps.gov/biho)

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## RESUME: COMBINED LEMHI PASS AND BIG HOLE ROUTE

### Sula, MT

Population: 10

Sula is located at the head of the Bitterroot Valley, 13 miles and 2,000 feet below Lost Trail Pass and the Continental Divide. Today downtown Sula is a compact community that includes a general store, restaurant, campground, and cabins.

Sula was originally known as Ross’ Hole, named after Ursula Ross, the first white person born in this area. This is the place where Lewis and Clark met a very different kind of Indian. Their lighter complexion and strange Salish dialect suggested they might be the mythical “Welsh Indians,” led to America in 1170 by the Welsh Prince Madoc. Like the myth of the Northwest Passage, the myth of the Welsh Indians took a long time to die. The captains mistakenly called these Indians the

*Gorgeous campsite  
on the Bitterroot River  
reserved for bicycle tourers,  
near Sula, MT*



“Flatheads,” even though they did not press their foreheads into a flattened shape, as Indians farther west on the Columbia actually did.

The view from the Jake Wetzsteon pioneer home in Sula can be seen in the large Charlie Russell mural of “Lewis and Clark Meeting the Flathead Indians at Ross’ Hole” in the Montana Capitol building (see Helena).

Zip: 59871

- 🏠 1) Lost Trail Hot Springs Resort, 6 mi. south (east) of Sula, cabins, motel, restaurant, hot mineral pool, hot tub, sauna, 800-825-3574.
- 2) Camp Creek Inn B&B, 3.5 mi. south (east) of Sula, cabins and rooms in historic ranch house, 406-821-3508.
- ▲ 1) Sula KOA, cabins, cottages, tent sites, hot tub, camp store, restaurant, 800-KOA-9867
- 2) Spring Gulch NFS Campground, 3 mi. north of Sula, private grassy and wooded sites on the Bitterroot River with water and pit toilets, special area next to river for bicycle campers! (See photo on previous page)

## Darby, MT

Population: 800

The Lewis & Clark Trail runs north along the Bitterroot River, and both traffic and population increase as you proceed towards Missoula. Wilderness turns into civilization pretty quickly near Darby. Land is no longer cheap, as people from Missoula and a few rich and famous Californians have spread up this beautiful valley.

After being called Doolittle and then Harrison, Postmaster James Darby renamed the town after himself in 1888, and the name stuck. Darby has experienced several different booms and busts during its history. In the late 1800s it was first a fur trading post and then a mining town. In the early 1900s there was a logging boom for the copper mining industry and then an apple boom. Later came growth in agriculture, ranching, and timber; and more recently outdoor recreation in all seasons. Today Darby provides a surprising amount of services for a population of only 800.

Zip: 59829

- 🏠 1) Wilderness Motel (\$), 308 S Main, 800-820-2554
- 2) Bud & Shirley’s Motel (\$\$), 406-821-3401
- 3) Honey’s Motel (\$), 406-821-3111
- ▲ 1) Lick Creek CG, 6 mi. north on Route 93, grass, shade, showers, laundry, 406-821-3840
- 2) Bitterroot Family Campground, 8 mi. north on Route 93, 406-363-2430

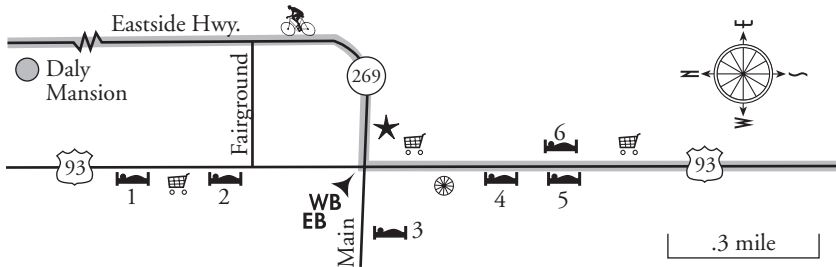
## Hamilton, MT

Population: 3,000

The history of Hamilton is very different from most towns in this area. During the 1880s the “immigrant copper king,” Marcus Daly, bought several sawmills in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley and decided to design and build a town here. The town was named after James Hamilton, one of the developers Daly brought in from Minnesota.

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever was first detected here in 1873, and the Rocky Mountain Laboratory researched this disease for many years. It took 33 years to discover the disease was spread by ticks and then develop vaccinations and medicines to control it.

As traffic and population continue to increase on the approach to Missoula, it is pleasant to get off the main highway (Route 93) and ride down the Eastside Highway between Hamilton and Florence. Two miles north of Hamilton on the Eastside Highway, Marcus Daly built himself a 42-room Georgian mansion with gorgeous views in all directions. The Daly Mansion is worth at least a quick stop to look around, and perhaps a more detailed tour.



**Hamilton, MT** — Zip: 59840

- ★ **Bitterroot Valley Chamber of Commerce:** 105 E Main, 363-2400, [www.bvchamber.com](http://www.bvchamber.com), [localinfo@bvchamber.com](mailto:localinfo@bvchamber.com)
- 🏠 1) Super 8 Motel (\$\$), 1325 N 1st, 800-800-8000
- 🏠 2) Comfort Inn (\$\$), 1113 N 1st, 800-442-INNS
- 🏠 3) City Center Motel (\$), 415 W Main, 406-363-1651
- 🏠 4) Deffy's Motel (\$), 321 S 1st, 800-363-1305
- 🏠 5) Best Western Hamilton Inn (\$\$), 409 S 1st, 800-426-4586
- 🏠 6) Bitterroot Motel (\$), 408 S 1st, 406-363-1142
- ▲ Angler's Roost, 3.5 flat mi. south of Hamilton, next to river, poor grass, good shade, clean bathrooms with showers, camp store.
- 🚲 Valley Bike & Ski, 219 S 1st, 406-363-4428

## Stevensville, MT

Population: 1,300

About halfway between Hamilton and Missoula, Stevensville is the home of St. Mary's Mission Church, the first church established in Montana. After several Flathead delegations to St. Louis requested that "the black robes" come to their area, the Jesuits responded by sending Father deSmet to build a mission in 1841. Although things went well for almost ten years, the fathers never quite realized that they were primarily wanted for their magical powers to help the Flatheads succeed in hunting and fighting other tribes. When things went sour for the Flatheads, they gradually drove the missionaries out of the area. The church is well worth a quick visit—only a few blocks west of our route on 4th Street.

In 1863 John Winslett and J.K. Houk established a store here. A year later the settlers named the town after Isaac Stevens, the first governor of the Washington Territory. Are you surprised to learn that this area was once part of the Washington Territory?


## Lolo, MT


Population: 2,800

Although technically a town, Lolo appears more like a series of strip malls at a major intersection on our route. This has always been an important intersection—the start of the trail (now highway) over Lolo Pass. Although it's possible to find most of the services you need in Lolo, I think it's worth it to ride the ten relatively easy miles into Missoula to enjoy that very special town.

Lolo was an important stop for Lewis and Clark. They camped here on September 9 and 10 and named it Traveller's Rest, as they rested and made final preparations for their journey over the mountains. This is where they learned that the Indian hunting parties travelled to the eastern plains using a route directly eastward through Missoula. The Indians told them they could get to the Gates of the Mountains (just downriver from Helena) in four days. Although you can imagine how Lewis and Clark must have felt—having just travelled 52 days from the Gates of the Mountains, and now facing winter conditions in the Bitterroots—there is no mention of disappointment or discouragement in their journals.

Zip: 59847

 Day's Inn (\$\$), 406-721-2121

 Bitterroot Gateway RV Park, mostly permanent RVs, off highway, grass, shade, showers, 406-273-6034

## Missoula, MT

Population: 52,000

Missoula is both the cultural and commercial center of western Montana. The hometown of the University of Montana attracts many well educated people who want to take advantage of both the university and the myriad of year round recreational opportunities here. The area still produces timber and paper products, and some light manufacturing and medical companies have grown up around the university.

Although Missoula is not directly on two of our bicycle routes, it is only a ten-mile relatively flat side trip from Lolo, and well worth the effort if time permits. In fact, it's a great place for a rest day. There is good camping, a wide variety of lodging and restaurants, and many bicycle shops. If you have any suspicions about your equipment, this is the place to get it checked or fixed. It's a long way in either direction before you will see this level of expertise and availability of parts.

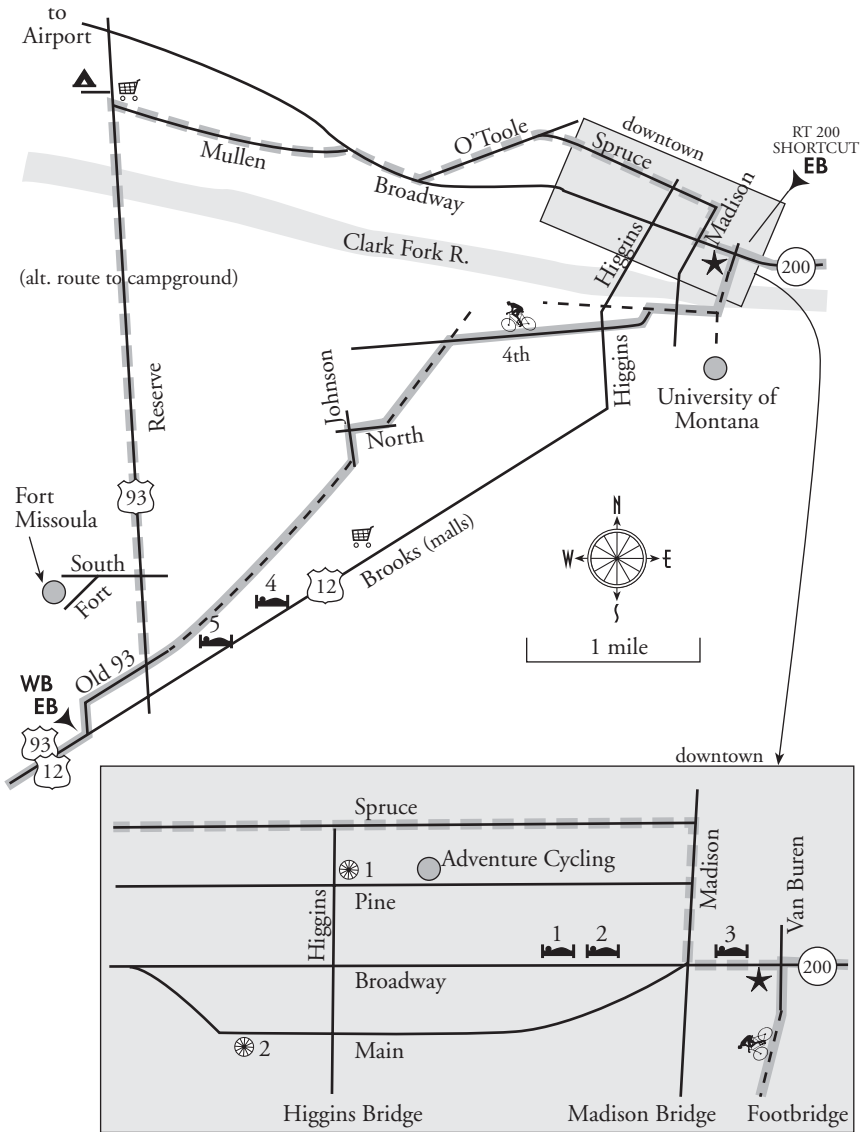
The city is flat, but it's large enough that you will want your bike for getting around. Although traffic can be heavy on the main roads, there are many opportunities to take parallel roads with much lighter traffic. The older and very pleasant downtown area just north of the river contains some inexpensive motels and a wide variety of good restaurants, bars, and shops. Entering town from the southwest, Route 93 turns into Brooks, where there are several newer motels, malls, chain restaurants, and stores. The University of Montana campus and residential area are on the east side of town, just south of the river.

Check the Visitors Bureau for many interesting things to do in town. A few ideas: The U.S Forest Service offers tours of the Smokejumper's Center just beyond the airport on Route 93. Ride and walk around the University and hike up to the "M" for some exercise and a great view. Visit Adventure Cycling's headquarters in an old church on Pine St. downtown. Check a bike shop to learn about mountain biking in Rattlesnake Canyon just north of town. Do laundry!

To learn more about the history of the area, visit the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula. The U.S. Army arrived in Lolo to try to stop Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce in 1877 (see Fort Fizzle, page 176). They then constructed Fort Missoula at the current more strategic location. In the late 1890s this fort was the home of a black army bicycle corps that rode 2,000 miles to St. Louis to demonstrate the effectiveness of infantry troops on bicycles. The army was not impressed.

In earlier pre-history this convergence of five valleys was once the bottom of Lake Missoula, covered by 2,000 feet of water. That's well above the "M" on the hill by the university.

Although Clark never made it to Missoula, Lewis passed through what is now the downtown area on his eastbound return trip. On their westbound trip they went down the Bitterroot River and camped for two days at Traveller's Rest (now called Lolo) in preparation for the dreaded trip across the Bitterroot Mountains. Today it is one of the most beautiful sections of our route.



**Missoula, MT — Zip: 59801**

- ★ **Convention and Visitor's Bureau:** 825 E Front, 406-543-6623, [www.missoulachamber.com](http://www.missoulachamber.com)
- 🏠 The Visitor's Bureau lists 41 motels and 5 B&Bs. A small sample in convenient locations:
  - 1) Bel Aire Motel (\$\$), 300 E Broadway, 800-543-3184



- 2) City Center Motel (\$), 338 E Broadway, 406-543-3193
- 3) Creekside Motel (\$\$\$), 630 E Broadway, 800-551-2387
- 4) Brooks Motor Inn (\$\$), 3333 Brooks, 800-538-3260
- 5) Super 8 Motel (\$\$), 3901 Brooks, 888-900-9022
- ▲ Missoula KOA, 3695 Tina (off Reserve), 800-562-5366
- ⊗ 1) Bike Doctor, 420 N Higgins, 721-5357
- 2) Missoula Bicycle Works, 113 W Main

**ROUTE 200 SHORTCUT ROUTE****Augusta, MT**

Population: 300

Although it adds 21 miles to the distance between Great Falls and Lincoln, some people may want to detour through this small town to break up the trip and avoid some hills and traffic.

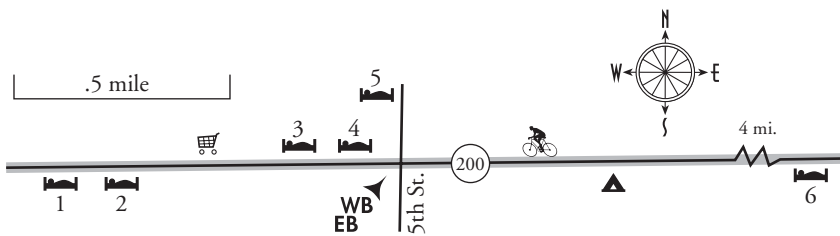
Zip: 59410

- 1) Wagons West Motel (\$), 406-562-3295
- 2) Bunkhouse Inn (\$), 406-562-3780

**Lincoln, MT**

Population: 530

At an elevation of 4,500 feet, Lincoln is a cool oasis about halfway between Great Falls and Missoula. If you're not camping, it's a "must" overnight stop, and fortunately, it's a good stop for everyone. This is a "western" town designed for both residents and tourists who enjoy an active outdoor life—hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding. Many buildings are solid and rustic log cabin style, and restaurants serve hearty steak dinners—32-ounce T-bone and 16-ounce filet mignon.

**Lincoln, MT** — Zip: 59639

- ★ **Lincoln Valley Chamber of Commerce:** Box 985, 406-362-4949
- 1) Leeper's Ponderosa Motel (\$), 888-362-2976
- 2) Three Bears Motel (\$), 800-838-9771
- 3) Blue Sky Motel (\$), 800-293-4521
- 4) Snowie Pines Inn Motel (\$), 800-809-2463

5) Hotel Lincoln (\$), 877-362-8814

6) 7-Up Ranch and Supper Club (\$), cabins, motel, and restaurant 5 mi. east on Hwy. 200, 406-362-4255

▲ Hooper Park and Campground, quiet off road, shady, satisfactory restroom, no shower

### Special Events

Rodeo, July 4

Fine Arts Festival, early August

Fiddler's Contest, late August

Golf Tournament, Labor Day

## Ovando, MT

Population: 100

It's possible to spend a night in this tiny town a half mile off the main highway. When you make reservations, I recommend checking the hours of the one restaurant in town.

Zip: 59854

🏠 Blackfoot Commercial Co. B&B (\$), 406-793-5555

▲ Camping is allowed behind the museum. There is an outhouse, and water is available at Blackfoot Commercial Co. across the street.

## **Bicycle Guide to the Lewis & Clark Trail**

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The author and publisher of this book, and the government agencies on whose roads you bicycle, are not responsible for your riding habits, bicycle condition, and any accidents which might occur while following this route. They urge users of this Guide to wear a certified bicycle helmet, wear highly visible clothing, use reflectors and lights, obey all traffic laws, watch for pedestrians and motorists, and generally use good common sense and courtesy.

Road and trail conditions change. The routes suggested in this book may be altered due to road and trail maintenance, changes in state and local roads, and road and trail surface conditions. Surface conditions of roads and trails may change due to weather, construction, and other local factors. Every effort has been made to provide accurate information in this book at the time of publication.

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