

A WHOLE NEW SIDE OF ADVENTURE

# EASTERN MONTANA

—Four Road Trip Itineraries—

Experience  
Eastern  
Montana's Best

- + Trails, Rivers, and Parks
- + History and Culture
- + Drinks, Dining, and Lodging
- + And Much More

**Outside** MONTANA

A custom guidebook in partnership with the  
Montana Office of Tourism and *Outside Magazine*



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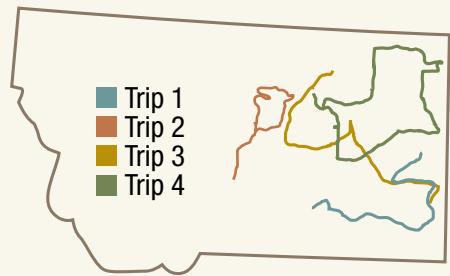
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Follow the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers on a loop packed with history and adventure.



**M**ontana is one of those places with boundless outdoor adventure cred. Its high glaciated mountains, broad rivers, welcoming small towns, and rich history have earned it a rightful spot atop the bucket lists of travelers from around the globe. As its nickname implies, Big Sky Country is as vast as it is astounding, and its best-known gems like Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks are just the beginning when it comes to outdoor adventure. In fact, visitors who venture eastward—into rugged badlands, meandering rivers, secluded mountain ranges, and vast prairie—will be rewarded with an unexpected and wholly different kind of Montana experience. The opportunities to fish, hunt, hike, ride, eat, and learn are practically endless. Not sure where to start? Follow one (or all!) of these road trip routes to discover a new side of adventure in Eastern Montana.

[Click here to access digital maps, videos, and even more Eastern Montana inspiration.](#)



### Road Trip Pro Tips

**Get the most out of your Eastern Montana adventure**

#### Fuel Up

You came for the vastness of this place. Just be sure to plan your pit stops accordingly, as long distances can separate service stations.

#### Go Offline

Dark skies and cellphone reception don't always mix. Download your route map for offline use before leaving town each day.

#### Watch for Critters

In Eastern Montana, you can spot wildlife at any time—including while driving. So use extra caution, especially at night.

# Badlands and Battlefields

Follow this meandering point-to-point tour through Southeast Montana's most otherworldly and storied landscapes

**Distance:** Approximately 500 Miles | **Days:** 4–5



Billings Rimrocks,  
Zimmerman Park (top);  
wood-fired pizza and  
craft beer at Diamond X  
Beer Co. (below).

A trip through Southeast Montana is like traveling through history. Here, wide-open roads transport you from Billings, a thriving modern city, to as far back in time as you want to go—from old western cattle-trading towns to Native American battlefields to otherworldly landscapes where dinosaurs once roamed. Along the way, opportunities for adventure and cultural immersion abound.

## Billings

Situated on the banks of the Yellowstone River, Montana's most populous city is also its cultural and economic hub. Translation: it's the ultimate place to start, end, or spend an entire Southeast Montana getaway. Find your bearings with a hike or mountain bike ride along Billings's iconic **Rimrocks**—sandstone cliffs that rise hundreds of feet above the city—starting from [Zimmerman Park](#). Because

the trailhead is located *on top* of the Rimrocks, visitors will find the views of five nearby mountain ranges, the Yellowstone River Valley, and downtown Billings as easy to come by as they are stunning—especially at sunrise or sunset.

Nearby, at [Pictograph Cave State Park](#) (open Wednesday through Sunday), follow the three-quarter-mile-long interpretive trail past three caves adorned with more than 100 pieces of the park's namesake artwork, the oldest of which dates back more than 2,000 years.

Come prepared with binoculars for the best look at these ancient artworks, which are believed to have been created by nomadic hunters.

Back in downtown Billings, steep yourself in the town's unique blend of Old West and modern cultures. When it opened in 1964, the [Yellowstone Art Museum \(YAM\)](#) was the first museum in the region to focus its collections on contemporary art. That tradition continues today, with an extensive permanent collection and

**30,000**

Number of ancient artifacts found and excavated at Pictograph Cave State Park



rotating exhibitions by contemporary artists from the American northwest and northern Rockies. For the most immersive experience, book a guided group tour led by one of YAM's docents (60 minutes, from \$5). And don't miss the ➔



Cap Rock Trail,  
Makoshika State Park.

Visible Vault, an innovative detached facility where visitors can admire YAM's permanent collection.

**EAT, DRINK, AND STAY:** Start your day with a chorizo burrito and coffee at Rail Line Coffee. Later, order a quenching Staycation IPA and catch some live music at Thirsty Street Brewing Company @ the Garage (a stop along Billings's Walkable Brewery Trail). For a taste of what's in season, pop into Fieldhouse, a scratch kitchen with a menu featuring locally sourced ingredients and a focus on freshness. Bed down at the recently restored Northern Hotel, which has been offering Billings visitors a healthy dose of "unpretentious luxury" since 1904.

## Pompeys Pillar and Little Bighorn Battlefield

Just 30 minutes east of Billings is one of Montana's most historically significant points: [Pompeys Pillar National Monument](#). This 120-foot-tall sandstone tower, now a protected national monument, bears the markings of the Indigenous peoples who utilized it as an observation point and ritual site for the past 11,000 years and to whom it remains an important spiritual site today. On July 25, 1806, William Clark and his team stopped here during their Yellowstone River exploration. Clark inscribed the pillar with his name—the carving, still visible today, is believed to be the last remaining physical evidence from the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The natural monolith, which Clark is said to have named for Sacagawea's son, whose nickname was "Pomp," is known to

7th Cavalry Memorial, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (left); Miles City Saddlery (right).

### Explore the Monuments

Watch a video of Pompeys Pillar and Little Bighorn Battlefield.

[CLICK HERE](#)

the Apsáalooke (Crow) people as Ishiiha Anaache, or Place Where the Mountain Lion Dwells.

A short drive south of Pompeys Pillar is [Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument](#), another site that tells the complicated history of America's western expansion and displacement of Indigenous peoples. The monument commemorates the infamous battle in which warriors from multiple northern plains tribes defeated the U.S. Army's 7th Regiment of the Cavalry—known today as the Battle of Little Bighorn.

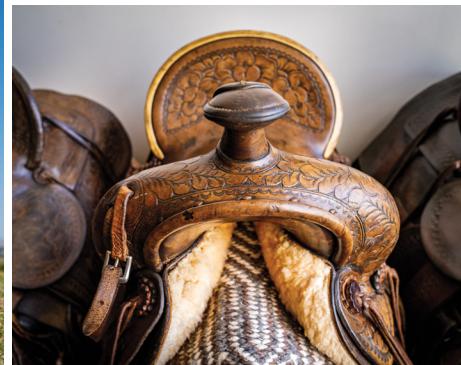
During your visit, try to catch one of two ranger-led historical presentations (these talks are unscheduled but typically take place midmorning and midafternoon) before visiting the park's two main memorials: the Indian Memorial and the 7th Cavalry Memorial. For the most immersive experience, book a guided tour in advance through Apsáalooke Tours (available Memorial Day through Labor Day).



## Medicine Rocks State Park

A visit to [Medicine Rocks State Park](#) is like a trip to another planet. Out-of-this-world formations—sandstone deposits left by a retreating inland sea that covered the northern Great Plains some 60 million years ago—jut up from a ponderosa-dotted ridgeline in what today is a vast ocean of grassland prairie. The park's seclusion makes it one of the best places in the country to view dark skies (see the Dark Skies and Wildlife road trip, on page 12, for more info). But it's also an incredible venue for serene nature hikes, birding, wildlife photography, family camping, and more. However you choose to explore the park, plan your outing around sunrise and sunset, when low-angle light brings out the pockmarked texture of Medicine Rocks and casts long shadows across the landscape.

**EAT AND STAY:** On your way from Billings to Ekalaka, stop for a slice or a sandwich at Seabeck Pizza and Subs in Broadus. In Ekalaka, just 20 minutes south of Medicine Rocks State Park, grab a burger at Dawg House Pub, part of the Southeast Montana Burger Trail, and stay at the Midway Motel or Guest House Motel.



## The Route

**DISTANCE:** Approximately 500 Miles | **DAYS:** 4–5

Billings to Pompeys Pillar (I-90 to Fly Creek Road) to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (I-90 to U.S. 212) to Broadus (U.S. 212) to Ekalaka (U.S. 212 to State Hwy 323) to Medicine Rocks State Park (Montana 7) to Miles City (Montana 7 to U.S. 12) to Terry (I-94) to Glendive and Makoshika State Park (I-94)

Click here for a digital map of this route.

### Two-Wheel Traveler?

Check out the MonDak Motorcycle Loop, an epic tour of Southeast Montana's most idyllic byways and charming small towns.





## Miles City

Miles City is the ideal image of a Western town. It's a community rooted in the livestock industry, where weekly cattle auctions continue today. (Nonbidding visitors are welcome to drop in.) It's a place where you can have a pair of cowboy boots or a saddle custom made to your specifications. On Main Street, experience that legacy of leatherworking for yourself—head upstairs at **Miles City Saddlery** to view the store's centuries-old collection of saddles, or pop into **Moran's Custom Leather** to see where custom saddles and boots are still made today.

**EAT AND DRINK:** Pay a visit to the Montana Bar, the historic saloon attached to Tubb's Restaurant on Main Street and a stop along the Southeast Montana Burger Trail, and order a stuffed burger: the toppings and cheese are built right into the Grade A beef patty. Afterward, grab an award-winning beer at pinball-themed Tilt Würks Brew House or a glass of wine at Tongue River Winery.

## Terry

Follow Interstate 94 and the Yellowstone River 40 miles northeast to Terry, where iconic badlands dominate the town's northern horizon. Hop on

Mountain biking in the Terry Badlands (top left); Bloom and Vine, Glendive (below left); the historic Kempton Hotel, Terry (below right).

your gravel or mountain bike and ride six miles of empty two-track to the [Terry Badlands Overlook](#), where you can watch the sunset from atop the sand castle-like cliffs. Or, if you have a high-clearance four-by-four, venture into the badlands on the [Calypso Trail](#) (impassable during periods of wet weather). Back in town, thumb your way through the extensive and eclectic book collection in the bookstore at the historic [Kempton Hotel](#), Montana's oldest continuously operating hotel.

## Makoshika State Park and Glendive

**Makoshika** (pronounced *Ma-ko'-shi-ka*), Montana's largest state park, often flies under the radar. But one visit is all it takes to see why the park is regarded as a crown jewel of Eastern Montana. Here, a landscape of otherworldly badlands and rugged coulees can be explored by foot, wheel, or hoof on an extensive trail system. Hike or run the rolling [Hungry Joe Trail](#) to a scenic overlook above Makoshika and Glendive (2.5 miles one way) before exploring the stunning [Cap Rock Trail](#) (0.5 mile round-trip), which leads to a natural bridge and past many of the park's iconic toadstool-shaped hoodoos. Kids, families, and dinophiles alike might find it difficult to venture past the park's visitor center, which is loaded with educational interpretive exhibits and prehistoric fossils, including a complete triceratops skull. And that's just the start—the park also offers camping, disc golf, and an archery range on site.

Looking for even more local history? Back in Glendive, head to the [Frontier Gateway Museum](#) and stroll along a replica of 1800s Merrill Street, Glendive's "Main Street." On modern-day Merrill, pop into [Hell Creek Music and More](#), a quirky shop that's part instrument emporium, part music museum (multiple guitars autographed by Kiss band members are on display), and part dinosaur exhibit—a complete, 38-foot-long T. rex skeleton looms above the registers. ☀

**EAT AND DRINK:** At Bloom and Vine, a specialty coffeehouse, café, and wine bar, order an agave wine margarita and a fresh salad, then make a beeline for the establishment's inviting courtyard.



A stuffed burger at Montana Bar, Miles City.



## Southeast Montana Burger Trail

Montana has a long history of cattle ranching, and nowhere is that culture stronger than in the state's southeast corner.

The best way to experience it for yourself is to explore the **Southeast Montana Burger Trail**, a culinary tour of the region's best burger joints—from modern breweries to small-town saloons.

The best part? This road trip puts you within striking distance of them all.

Click here to share your favorite burger photos using #SEMTBurgerTrail.

# Prairie to Peak Adventure Loop

Take an epic tour of the sweeping prairie and secluded mountains of Eastern Montana

Distance: Approximately 335 Miles | Days: 3–5



**M**ontana is synonymous with mountains. But the state's topographic prominence is overwhelmingly concentrated in its western half. To the east, vast expanses of prairie unfurl to the horizon. There are pockets of Eastern Montana, though, where the Great Plains thrust dramatically upward into rugged island ranges, so named for their geographic isolation, far from the continental backbone to the west.



These mountainous clusters—including the Judith Mountains, the Little Rockies, and the Snowy Mountains—offer much of what the state's western peaks are revered for, with an added dose of solitude. The best part? The surrounding prairie and river country are every bit as impressive—and this road trip takes you through all of it.

## Lewistown

The first thing to know about Lewistown, Montana, is that the second “w” in its name definitely is *not* silent. (Locals, welcoming as they are, will be sure to remind you of that should you let a “Lewiston” slip during your visit.) The second, more important thing to know about this hamlet at the geographic center of Montana is that it’s the coolest little mountain town you’ve never heard of. It’s a choose-your-own-adventure kind of place. Feel like fly-fishing or floating? Cast for trout in Big Spring Creek, which runs clear and cold right through the ➔



Fly-fishing Big Spring Creek, Lewistown.

heart of town. Want to log some trail miles? The town is laced with a network of paved, gravel, and singletrack trails perfect for running or riding. Searching for some elevation? Drive 20 minutes north into the Judith Mountains for a mountain bike ride on the [Limekiln Trail](#), a seven-mile loop with 1,000 feet of elevation gain through pine forest that culminates with an expansive view of Lewistown.

**EAT AND STAY:** In town, order a Reuben and a Mayfly Rye Pale Ale at Central Feed Grilling Co. and Big Springs Brewing, located in the historic Mercantile Building on Main Street. After your ride or hike in the mountains, check into the Judith Mountain Lodge, a rustic log cabin-inspired hotel and restaurant conveniently located adjacent to the Limekiln Trailhead. For a closer-to-town option, reserve an updated room at the historic Calvert Hotel, just one block off Main Street in downtown Lewistown.

## Upper Missouri River Breaks

North of Lewistown, the Missouri River carves a vast channel through some of the most wild and scenic country in North America. For 149 river miles, from the town of Fort Benton to [James Kipp Recreation Area](#), the Missouri is protected as a national monument spanning some 380,000 acres of shoreline, forest, prairie, badlands, and coulees—all of it home to countless species of wildlife and plants. One visit is all it takes to understand why these areas surrounding the Missouri River are known as “breaks”—as you approach the river, the undulating prairie seems to break away all at once, revealing rugged badlands and cliffs that

### Explore the Breaks

Watch a video of the Missouri River Breaks.

[CLICK HERE](#)



Lewis and Clark Hut, Judith Landing.

cascade hundreds of feet down to the river.

The ultimate way to explore the monument is by canoe or kayak on a single- or multiday float. While such trips can be done self-supported, it's best to hire a guide who has knowledge of the area. **Hole in the Wall Adventures**, based in Lewistown, has been guiding fully supported canoe and powerboat outings on the river for decades. Regardless of how or when you decide to float, be sure to pick up one of the BLM's Boater Guides for the most comprehensive information about exploring the river. Hard copies (\$4) are available at most public lands visitor centers in the area; you may also download a digital copy at [BLM.gov](#).

Floating on the river may be the main draw of the [Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument](#), but it's far from the only way to explore these protected lands. If you'd prefer

to stick to solid ground, hundreds of miles of remote dirt roads beg to be bikepacked. Or consider driving the Missouri Breaks National Back Country Byway, an overland trip from the river at James Kipp Recreation Area to Winifred, through badlands, coulees, forested uplands, and rolling prairie. With proper planning and a high-clearance four-by-four, a trip on this byway is one of the best ways to explore the monument's “inland” splendor, offering ample opportunities for wildlife viewing, camping, hiking, biking, and more. Utilize the BLM's interactive story map to learn more and plan your trip.

## Lewis and Clark Hut

Situated on a bluff just above the Missouri River near Judith Landing, 60 miles north of Lewistown, the **Lewis and Clark Hut** is the ultimate adventure base camp in the Missouri

### The Route

**DISTANCE:** Approximately 335 Miles | **DAYS:** 3–5

**Lewistown to Upper Missouri River Breaks**  
(U.S. 191) to Zortman (Ervine Ridge Road to Montana 66 to U.S. 191) to Crystal Lake (U.S. 191)

Click here for a digital map of this route.





River Breaks. The striking modern hut, which can be reserved from April to December, sleeps eight and features solar power, a kitchen, a covered deck overlooking the river, and a detached outhouse. Guests are responsible for bringing sleeping bags, pillows, groceries, and potable water. A four-by-four vehicle is recommended for access to the Lewis and Clark Hut. Learn more and make reservations at [americanprairie.org](http://americanprairie.org).

## Zortman and the Little Rocky Mountains

Nestled into the Little Rocky Mountains, 90 miles north of Lewistown, Zortman is a historic gold-mining town. Though small—a sign in front of the Zortman Motel & Garage reads “Population: 50. 48 nice people and two grousers”—Zortman is alive and well. In addition to its auto repair and services and comfortable accommodations, the aforementioned business offers gold-panning excursions on its claims in a nearby gulch. Panning for precious metals is just one of many

**8,681'**

Elevation of Greathouse Peak, the Snowy Mountains' highest summit

ways you can spend your visit in this time capsule of a town high in the Little Rocky Mountains. Visit the one-room Saint Joseph Church, snap a picture in front of the Zortman Jail—a tiny building, right on the main street, about the size of a shed—or hike to Lookout Cave for a view back at town.

**EAT AND STAY:** If you happen to be visiting on a Friday, don't miss the prime rib dinner at Miner's Club Cafe. When it's time to retire for the night, walk across the street to the Zortman Motel & Garage.

## Crystal Lake, Snowy Mountains

The southern and final leg of your journey leads you high into the Snowy Mountains, the most prominent of the region's island ranges. Here, densely forested drainages abruptly ascend to bald, plateau-like peaks, the tallest of which, Greathouse Peak, reaches nearly 9,000 feet above sea level. Just an hour south of Lewistown is **Crystal Lake**, a turquoise alpine tarn and the jumping-off point for all kinds of recreation. Launch your SUP or kayak for a scenic paddle around the lake's perimeter, head out for a technical mountain bike ride (locals recommend climbing the [Grandview Trail](#) and descending the [Ice Caves Trail](#)), or set out for a hike to the Snowy Mountains' iconic ice caves. This moderately difficult hike ranges between ten and 12 miles round-trip, depending on your chosen return trail, and gains roughly 2,000 vertical feet. The payoff—a 100-foot-wide limestone cave containing columns of ice and a skating rink floor—is well worth the effort. Afterward, grab one of 28 first-come, first-serve campsites at [Crystal Lake Campground](#), or book ahead to reserve the primitive Crystal Lake cabin. ☺



Zortman (top left and center); Candy Kalal (top right); Judith Landing, Missouri River (bottom left).



## Local Legend: Candy Kalal

Candy Kalal never planned to live in Zortman. But soon after earning a degree in veterinary technology from Dawson College in Glendive, that's exactly where she found herself when her husband, John, decided to join the family business. Forty-six years later, she can't imagine living anywhere else. "It's one of those places—it's almost anointed with peace," Kalal says. In 1979, the family expanded its business, building the Zortman Motel & Garage, of which Kalal is still the proprietor today. In addition to her responsibilities at the motel, Kalal is the town's amateur historian; she and her husband coauthored *The Golden Era of the Little Rockies*, a self-published record of the region's mining history. Her adoration of Zortman is infectious. If you're looking for an activity recommendation during your visit, poke your head into the motel—Kalal will have ideas. "People always ask me, 'Aren't you bored up there?' and I say, 'How could I possibly get bored in a place like this?'"

# Dark Skies and Wildlife

Venture into a pristine world where wildlife roams by day and the cosmos comes completely alive by night

**Distance:** Approximately 564 Miles | **Days:** 3–5



The Milky Way above James Kipp Recreation Area (top); Slippery Ann Wildlife Viewing Area (below).

Studies have linked the feeling of awe with myriad psychological and physiological benefits, and nothing is more awesome than the natural world. So it's no wonder that a trip through Eastern Montana—where the night sky is impossibly dark, offering some of the best stargazing in the country, and where megafauna like bison and elk roam immense landscapes—can leave you feeling changed. That's what this trip is all about. Slow down and revel in the sense of wonder as you traverse some of the state's most breathtaking country, experiencing a secluded dark-sky sanctuary and vast wildlife refuges along the way.

## Medicine Rocks State Park

In 2020, the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) designated this 330-acre state park in Southeast Montana a **Dark Sky**

### Explore the Rocks

Watch a video of the Medicine Rocks in motion.

[CLICK HERE](#)

**Sanctuary**, defined as “the most remote (and often darkest) places in the world whose conservation state is most fragile.” Translation: Medicine Rocks State Park is a stargazing haven. The best way to experience the park’s superb night skies is to snag one of its 12 first-come, first-serve primitive campsites on a clear, moonless night. Better yet, time your visit to coincide with a free dark-sky event at the park. Organized by the **Carter County Museum**, in nearby Ekalaka, these gatherings are great opportunities to learn about astronomy and the region’s natural and cultural history and to connect with the local community.

The allure of Medicine Rocks State Park isn’t limited to the hours between sunset and sunrise—the park’s iconic rock formations are a marvel to behold during daylight hours, too, so allow enough time during your visit for a



hike, ride, or run. (See Trip 1: Badlands and Battlefields, on page 4, for more.)

**EAT AND DRINK:** Before heading out for a night of stargazing, grab a bite at one of three Southeast Montana Burger Trail stops in Baker: Heiser’s Bar & Casino, Corner Bar, and Big Game Casino Tavern & Steakhouse. ➔



Medicine Rocks  
State Park.

## Medicine Rocks to Hell Creek Recreation Area

The drive to **Hell Creek Recreation Area**, your next stop, takes you through some of Southeast Montana's most scenic country and coolest small towns. Your first stop is Baker, just 30 minutes north of Medicine Rocks. Stretch your legs on the paved path at the south end of Baker Lake before popping into **Compass Coffee** for an espresso drink and a pastry.

En route to Miles City, 80 miles west, keep your eyes peeled for pronghorn antelope as you traverse rolling agricultural land, wooded hill country, and sculpted badlands. In town, swing by the **Range Rider's Museum** for a trip into Miles City's western heritage. Resupply before heading north toward Hell Creek Recreation Area.

## Hell Creek Recreation Area

If you look at a dark-sky map of Montana, the shading around Hell Creek Recreation Area indicates excellent conditions for stargazing. That's because it's a long way from pretty much everywhere—Jordan, the closest town, 25 miles to the south, has a population of less than 500. And just like at Medicine Rocks, jaw-dropping views of the Milky Way's galactic center are just one part of the experience at Hell Creek. The recreation area campground and boat launch are located on the scenic south shore of **Fort Peck Lake**, an immense reservoir of the Missouri River, and are managed by the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Launch a canoe, kayak, or SUP to explore the many secluded coves nearby. Or link up with a local fishing guide for an excursion on the lake in search of walleye, lake trout, Chinook salmon, or northern pike, depending on



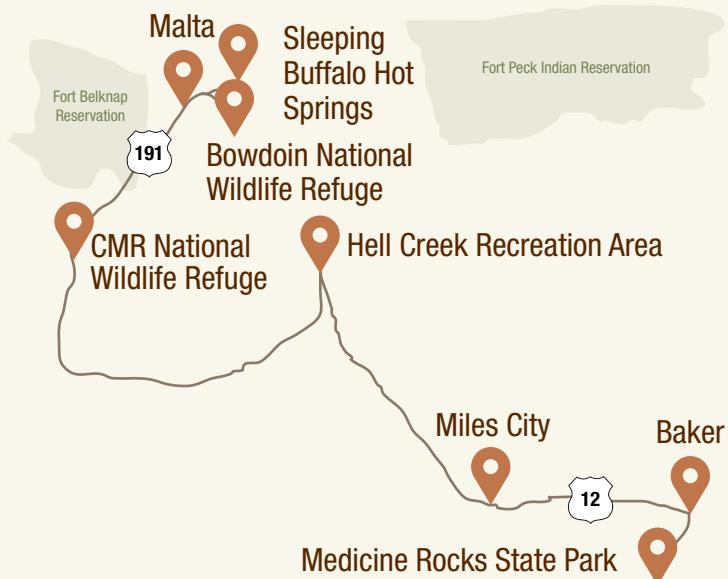
Fishing on Fort Peck Lake.

### The Route

DISTANCE: Approximately 564 Miles | DAYS: 3–5

Medicine Rocks State Park to Baker (Montana 7) to Miles City (U.S. 12) to Hell Creek Recreation Area (Montana 59 to Hell Creek Road) to Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (Montana 200 to Montana 19 to U.S. 191) to Malta (U.S. 191) to Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge (U.S. 2) to Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs (U.S. 2)

Click here for a digital map of this route.





the season. Pick up bait, tackle, a fishing license, and camp essentials at the marina's general store. Reserve your campsite in advance; both RV and tent sites are available.

## Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge

It's hard to grasp the sheer size of the **C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge**, which protects more than a million acres of critical animal habitat surrounding the Missouri River and Fort Peck Lake. Snag a campsite at [James Kipp Recreation Area](#), then head across the river to the [Slippery Ann Wildlife Viewing Area](#) an hour before sunset. (From Highway 191, follow the CMR Auto Tour Route for 3.5 miles.) Herds of elk come here each year in late August and early September during the rut (mating season), and the spectacle is unlike anything else on earth. Find a turnout, set up your camp chairs, and enjoy. Remember to keep at least 75 feet between you and the elk, and never approach

Interpretive display at Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge (top left); Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs (below).



wildlife. In the morning, consider completing the Auto Tour Route (19 miles total) en route to Malta.

## Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge

If your timing was right at C.M. Russell, you will by now have spied some charismatic megafauna. At [Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge](#), birds are the name of the game—hundreds of avian species flock to the refuge's wetlands and lake, once an oxbow of the Missouri River during the pre-glacial period. In spring, catch the northbound migration of Canada geese and mallards. During summer months, grassland songbirds fill the air with musical calls as they establish mating territories. Come fall, sandhill cranes can be spotted as they fly south for winter. 

**EAT AND STAY:** On your way from James Kipp, grab breakfast at Crossroads Coffee & Bistro in Malta. If you have time, check out one or both of the town's Dinosaur Trail facilities: the Great Plains Dinosaur Museum and Field Station, and Phillips County Museum. After exploring Bowdoin, head to Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs to unwind. Spend the night in a cabin or suite onsite, or head back to Malta to stay at Great Northern Hotel.



## Stargazing 101

With a little planning and know-how, it's easy to take your next dark-sky experience up a notch. Here's how, according to Sabre Moore, an advocate for dark-sky preservation and executive director of the Carter Country Museum in Ekalaka.

### FIND YOUR SPOT

The International Dark-Sky Association ([darksky.org](#)) maintains an extensive list of dark-sky places—communities, parks, reserves, and sanctuaries.

### NAIL THE TIMING

"The best stargazing happens during the hour before and after astronomical twilight," Moore says. You can find astronomical twilight times for your location in most weather apps, which you'll also want to watch for periods of clear atmospheric conditions.

### DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE MOON

Check the lunar calendar before heading out—the moon, while amazing to view on a clear night, can outshine many stars, so plan your outing during the periods immediately preceding, during, or after a new moon, if possible.

### ESSENTIAL GEAR

A red-light flashlight or headlamp—which, unlike white lights, preserves your night vision—is essential. Come prepared with plenty of snacks, water, a comfortable camp chair or blanket, and warm layers.

### BE RESPECTFUL

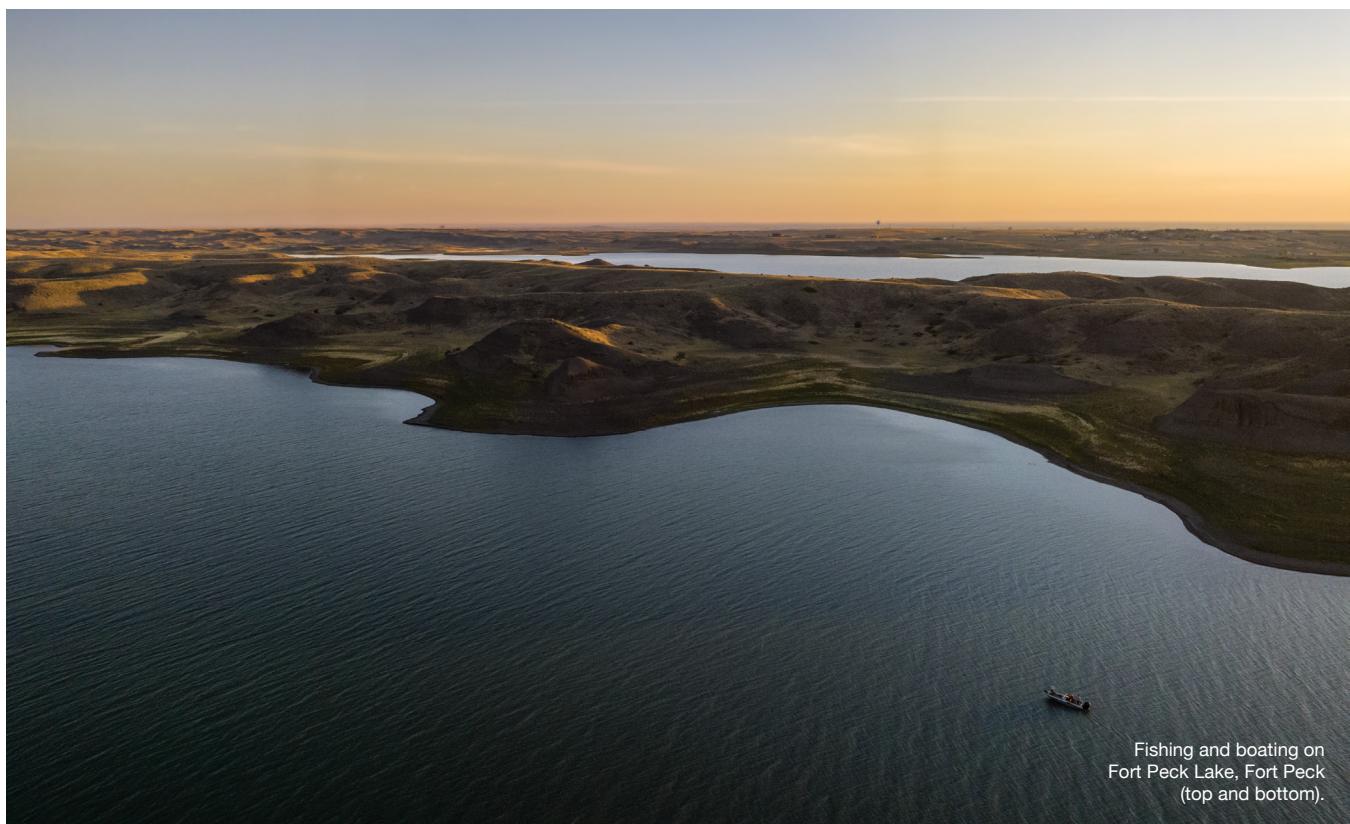
Maintain distance from other groups, and limit your use of white light-emitting electronics and car headlights.

**Stargaze in Eastern Montana:**  
Click here to learn where and how to get the best views.

# River Country Roamer

Follow the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers on a loop packed with history and adventure

**Distance:** Approximately 500 Miles | **Days:** 4–5



Fishing and boating on  
Fort Peck Lake, Fort Peck  
(top and bottom).

Northeast Montana is a place where vast expanses of prairie are punctuated by badlands, river breaks, and welcoming small towns. Two mighty waterways—the Yellowstone and the Missouri—course through the region, offering boundless opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and historical immersion.

## Glasgow

According to a mural painted on the facade of one of its buildings, Glasgow is in “the middle of nowhere.” That may be true, but it’s also the gateway to the best of Montana’s Missouri River Country. The town, which grew as a result of the nearby **Fort Peck Dam** project during the Great Depression, oozes Americana—its Art Deco buildings, grain silos, and railroad tracks transporting you to that era. Traveling with kids? Head to the hands-on exhibits at the [Children’s Museum of Northeast Montana](#).

**EAT AND STAY:** You’d expect to find choice steaks and burgers in a place like Glasgow. But authentic



thin-crust pizza? Prepare to be pleasantly surprised at Eugene’s Pizza. If you’re thirsty afterward, drop by Busted Knuckles for a local craft brew. Stay at the Cottonwood Inn and Suites and experience genuine Montana hospitality.

## Fort Peck and Fort Peck Lake

Western towns tend to fall into one of a handful of buckets. There are cow towns, industrial centers, railroad hubs, trading posts, and so on.



Fort Peck, built by the Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1930s to house its employees during construction of the Fort Peck Dam, is an outlier. Though originally designed to be temporary, Fort Peck lives on today as both a thriving year-round community and a vacation destination.

Head first to the **Fort Peck Interpretive Center** for a deep dive into the construction of what was then the world’s largest earthen dam. (It’s still the largest such dam in the country.) ➔



Paddleboarding at Brush  
Lake State Park.

The project, which at its height employed more than 10,000 workers, was the subject of *Time* magazine's inaugural cover story in 1936. But that's just one of many exhibits at the Fort Peck Interpretive Center. There's also a full-size model of Peck's Rex, a nearly complete T. rex fossil found in the area; floor-to-ceiling freshwater aquariums housing native fish species; and ecology displays showcasing some of the many wildlife species found in the C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, which surrounds much of Fort Peck Lake.

Covering nearly 250,000 acres, Fort Peck Lake is like an ocean in the middle of Montana—it's the fifth largest artificial lake in the United States. And with more coastline than California, the lake offers an abundance of secluded coves to fish, waterski, paddle, or just explore. Don't have a boat? Hook up with a local guide who can put you on the fish—the lake has an abundance of walleye, Chinook salmon, pike, and other sought-after species. If you prefer a more DIY adventure, rent a pontoon boat at **Rock Creek Marina**, located on the lake's Dry Arm, 40 miles south of Fort Peck. For camping, head to the **Pines Recreation Area**, a secluded area 30 miles southwest of Fort Peck.

Cruise back to dry land to catch the sunset from the **Milk River Observation Point**, one of the highest places in Northeast Montana. After a short hike, take in panoramic views of Fort Peck Lake, the dam and spillway, and the confluence of the Milk and Missouri

1st Dredge Swimming Area, Fort Peck (top); Fort Peck Interpretive Center, Fort Peck (bottom).

### Explore Fort Peck

Click here for a video showcasing Fort Peck and the surrounding area.

[CLICK HERE](#)



38'

Length of Peck's Rex skeleton

### The Route

**DISTANCE:** Approximately 335 Miles | **DAYS:** 3–5

Glasgow to Rock Creek Marina (Montana 24) to Scobey (Montana 24 to Hwy 248) to Brush Lake State Park and Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Montana 5) to Sidney (Montana 16)

Click here for a digital map of this route.





Rivers. Lewis and Clark first visited this area in the spring of 1805; an interpretive sign atop the viewpoint details their record of the visit.

Back in Fort Peck, catch a show at the historic **Fort Peck Theater**. The sizable auditorium, with seating for 1,200, was built during the Great Depression to entertain crews from the dam project and is today the beating heart of the theater community in Eastern Montana.

**EAT AND STAY:** Grab a table on the deck at the **Gateway Club** for sweeping views of Fort Peck Lake. Order the house specialty: panko-breaded, beer-battered walleye fingers. At the **Fort Peck Hotel**, built in 1936, enjoy a nightcap at the bar or settle into a rocking chair on the historic lodge's front porch before turning in for the night.

## Scobey

Fifty miles north of Wolf Point, the Great Northern Railroad has its terminus at the small town of Scobey. The town's principal draw is the **Daniels County Museum and Pioneer Town**, a 20-acre re-creation of a period western town, complete with a courthouse, general store, post office, saloon, and more.

## Brush Lake State Park

In the far northeastern corner of Montana—just a stone's throw from both North Dakota and Canada—Brush Lake State Park is an oasis on

the prairie. Here, the lake is the main attraction. Its deep, clear waters offer the antidote to summer heat. Utilize the park's boat ramp to launch a kayak, SUP, or ski boat and explore the roughly mile-long lake. The lake's relatively high alkalinity gives it an almost ocean-like appearance, with aquamarine hues and great visibility. On shore, relax on the white-sand beach, watch for waterfowl like mallards and geese, or take a stroll on the trails surrounding the lake. For the ultimate experience, snag one of the park's 12 campsites, perched on a hill above the lake, and watch the sun drop into the vast surrounding prairie before being replaced by billions of stars. If your timing is right, you may even spot the northern lights.

## Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Just south of Brush Lake is another water feature worth a visit: **Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge**. The lake at the center of the refuge was created by the Missouri River, which flowed through the area before the last ice age. Today it's a haven for hundreds of species of migratory birds, including American white pelicans and great blue herons, as well as land mammals like pronghorn antelope and white-tailed deer.

## Sidney

Sidney, "The Sunrise City," gets its nickname from its location at the far eastern edge of the state—it's the first place in Montana to see the sun each day. On your way through, cast for warm-water species or search for birds along the Yellowstone River, browse the **Mondak Heritage Center** for more early-1900s western history, or pop into **Meadowlark Brewing and Public House** for a Badlands Extra Pale Ale and a burger. □

Meadowlark Brewing, Sidney (top left); Historic Fort Peck Theater, Fort Peck (inset).



## By the Numbers: Fort Peck Dam and Lake

**It's difficult to grasp the true scale of the Fort Peck Dam until you see it in person. Even then, especially when you consider that it was constructed in the 1930s, the dam and resulting lake are staggering.**

**27**

Number of recreation areas located around Fort Peck Lake.

**32.05 Pounds**

Weight of the largest Chinook salmon caught on Fort Peck Lake, a state record set in 2020.

**376 Square Miles**

Surface area of Fort Peck Lake when filled at average capacity.

**21,026 Feet**

The dam's length—nearly four miles.

**1.1 Billion Kilowatt-Hours**

The average amount of electricity generated by the dam's power station each year—enough to power a town of about 100,000 people.

**65,900 Cubic Feet Per Second**

The largest release of water through the power station and spillway during a flood event in 2011.

**310,000 Cubic Feet Per Second**

The dam's maximum water release rate.

**125,628,000 Cubic Yards**

The amount of material comprising the earthen dam.



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