



Beartooths Montana Hiking Trip Notes

August 10-18, 2012

Amazing mountain range

Amazing as much because I never knew it existed and yet was so near when in Bozeman (after Kalispell, Glacier National Park and Ennis Marathon last July.) I am looking for another excuse to return to still another part of Montana soon.

Billings – one of Montana’s largest cities

We started this six day hiking trip in Billings which I didn’t find to be very exciting but the Beartooth Mountain Range sure made up for it. Billings has a population of about 100,000 whereas all of Montana only has about 1,000,000 and its capital Helena only has 25,000.

Billings was having a major Music Festival (with some big name entertainers) for my first two days and a state fair for my return a week later so it was a very full town of somewhat crazies. It was full of motorcyclists (some left over from the Sturgis rally) and tubbies wearing leathers and rhinestones. I’ve never seen so many old vehicles that wouldn’t have passed NJ requirements ten years ago. They have an interesting historical area called Montana Street with old stores, hotels made into restaurants and of course the requisite art shops intended for tourists. The Saturday morning market was the most interesting with a group something like Mennonites or Amish dominating if not primarily supplying the multi-block area. (They were apparently of the Hutterite clan, a deeply anti-war group broken from Mennonites and disavowing use of any technology.) The Indians were in abundance when the market was closing down when they are apparently used to receiving handouts. There are seven reservations in Montana and two in the nearby areas. There are street corners full of hustlers that appear to be of Indian descent.

Pros to hiking the Beartooths

- ***New area*** that was very exciting to those of us who like to explore. It’s directly north of Yellowstone.
- ***Favorite hiking leaders*** Steve and Nola were our leaders and it had been their suggestion that I explore this area.
- ***Major heights*** - surprisingly high mountains up to 12,000 feet and we hiked at up to about 10,000 feet elevation.
- ***Wide open terrain*** - reminds one that there are still wide open areas in our country.
- ***Scenic highway*** - traversing the famous Beartooth Highway is a must to get there. It’s said to be one of the most beautiful in America. (See more below.)
- ***Educated company*** - fellow hikers are generally those who are well traveled and thus willing to explore something new versus those who are only looking to peer over the edge of the Grand Canyon or find a headliner.

Cons to hiking the Beartooths

- **Tough to get to** - not especially easy to get to, with an expensive flight through Denver, staying in uneventful Billings, then a couple hours more drive over and through difficult terrain.
- **Back country roads** - some hikes require quite a few miles on washboard-gravel roads.
- **Big Bears!** - caution over Grizzly bears is needed though we never saw any and only saw smaller bear scat.
- **Accommodations** are not quite first-rate but comfortable. Maybe one could even say colorful.

Why hike instead of a marathon?

- **Memories!** - Medals and t-shirts are non-existent but memories are top-rated and much more extensive.
- **More exercise** - It's six days of exercise and entertainment versus one day.
- **Balanced exercise** - My trainer agrees it's a balanced exercise and thus he doesn't get after me to do my push-ups, squats and abs work like when I'm off on a one day marathon with related tourist strolling.
- **No finish line** to rush to. You can hike all day and get in as much work-out as six marathons.
- **Easy on the body** - Dirt trails mean there are no sore feet or sore muscles or sore hip joints.
- **Save the muscles** - Can eat all day long and use up all the calories and not worry about using up and breaking down hard-earned muscles.

But that doesn't mean I'm giving up marathons only that I'd like to do more hiking than marathons. I have enough medals, enough t-shirts, and I find more folks who can 'ohm' while hiking than the average on the marathon circuit. Though clearly there are special exceptions.

Private tour of Billings

There was nothing scheduled so the owner of the tour company offered me a private tour in his van for not a lot more money, all of which was perfect so I could see the rock bluffs overlooking the city and various sites beyond the walking tour I'd planned. Just as special was having a long term Billings resident talk about the ups and downs of living in this city. I don't think I could live there but I was glad to visit.

Touring the Heritage Museum in the old stone library helped put the pieces together as did the museums of the old train depot and a book about Montana residents. It's always good to see the farmers markets and chat my way through some of the businesses all of which resulted in lots of local foods and a local Western Swarovski Crystal jacket intended for future travel wear.



The Hutterites were out in droves at the Saturday morning market and two weeks later in the Canadian Rockies I'd hear more about the Hutterite bacon and ways of living in colonies. They'd also moved into Canada and were

not exactly popular. Billings meanwhile had collections of mountain goats as well as horses done in an art-competition manner such as Chicago's original cows. Where else might you find a big shop exclusively for repairing cowboy hats? The heritage museum had collections of Ralston's art works as well as some of his studio and even full replica of mountain lodges.

Red Lodge – the town

If I were to choose a city to focus on and stay in, I believe it would be the tiny historical town of Red Lodge. We stayed about 5 miles away but that's maybe one of the only better places for accommodations, other than the old historically significant Pollard Hotel downtown. I'd have stayed there but it wouldn't have worked well for a tour group.



In this wee city with a population of about 2,000, I wandered into a corner bar and one of those experiences that you want to stay and you want to return and know more about. My tour group was meeting for dinner shortly but I sent word that I'd be late. I'd walked in and asked if the tin roof was original and sure enough it was. It not only was but the bar patrons wanted to tell me its history from mid-1800s and how the bar and woodwork was all original (and it looked it.) It was for sale for a mere \$850,000 which the cute little female (gay) bartender and both patrons offered was a wildly high price but we soon learned that there were plenty of eastern and western coastal folks showing up in town with money that allowed them to way overpay for their pony ranches or whatever else suited their fancy. Someone's fancy would want a historically significant bar.

From a couple of delightful folks I learned some good and some bad about the town and about the state of Montana too. It was lovely and if you hunted or hiked or fished full time that was good but it could be lonely and the best way to find a mate was to import them. The cute bartender had been stationed at Earle Naval Depot, practically out my doorway. She'd returned but with mixed emotions as had one of the fellows because he owned family property. Both loved it but lamented the lost opportunities of the big city.

Weather

It is a challenge to pack for 96 degree Billings, then Cooke City (just up from Yellowstone) with a low of 32. Hindsight would say that the 32 degrees is short lived and one jacket for just the early mornings would be enough since the temps would rise to mid-50s and low-60s. We only had one day of light rain and lucked out that it was on a lesser hiking day and not the headlined one. The Billings area had suffered drought with less than five inches of rain all year and thus one couldn't help but be glad when sprinkles erupted. Upon my arrival in 96 degree Billings the mist came which cooled it off considerably. On my last day (after the hike) it was only 87 degrees but that was the day I was burning up with a fever so it felt hotter yet. (If you've got to get ill, the last day is the day to do it. I was fine within 36 hours.) The rains also helped settle the smoke said to come from the Northern California wildfires.

Accommodations

Billings best is an old Crowne Plaza that used to be a Sheraton, then the Best Western Clocktower. Neither would one be willing to choose in any large city. Red Lodge is the name of a sweet little historical town a couple hours west of Billings. It would be the largest town for miles and about five miles further west of Red Lodge was Rock Creek Resort was where we stayed for the first three nights. It was really fine for the area; assisted by my arranging for a small studio at a tiny additional fee so I was very happy there. It included a cathedral beamed ceiling, full kitchen, a huge deck/balcony hanging over a rushing stream, sofa and chairs, dining table and a big murphy bed. Imagine listening to the rushing stream all night? It must sound ungrateful and I'm almost sorry to report that it just reminded me of the sounds of an in-room air conditioning system. Moving through Wyoming and back into the bottom southwest section of Montana just above Yellowstone was this tiny town called Cooke City without even cell service and with very little by way of accommodations. There were seven hotels in total listed and I saw one of them that appeared to have been abandoned for many years. Our motel was reasonable but again, one wouldn't have stayed in it while in a big city.



The Beartooth Highway



The first picture is about the best anybody did to get the actual "Bear Tooth" and that took a big zoom lens. The next is an internet air-shot giving an idea of the switchbacks required to get up to over 10,000 feet. The last from Wikipedia and showing how some of the roads meet themselves coming.

From Wikipedia: The Beartooth Highway is an All-American Road that has been called "the most beautiful drive in America," by late CBS correspondent Charles Kuralt. Because of heavy snowfall at the top, the pass is usually open each year only from mid-May through mid-October. [It is] the section of U.S. Highway 212 between Red Lodge, Montana and Cooke City, Montana. It traces a series of steep zigzags and switchbacks, along the Montana-Wyoming border to the 10,947 ft high Beartooth Pass. The approximate elevation rise is from 5,200 ft to 8,000 ft in 12 mi in the most daring landscapes. When driving from the east to the west, the highest parts of the Beartooth Highway level off into a wide plateau near the top of the pass, and then descend to where the Beartooth Highway connects to the Chief Joseph Scenic Byway near Cooke City, which forms the northeast gateway to Yellowstone National Park. En route, one passes numerous lakes typical of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area which borders the highway along much of its route. The highway officially opened June 14, 1936. Because of the high altitudes, snowstorms can occur even in the middle of the summer and the pass is also known for strong winds and severe thunderstorms. Drivers should plan on a driving time of at least



two hours for the 69-mile (111 km) long trip from Red Lodge to Cooke City. The Beartooth Highway passes through portions of Custer National Forest, and Shoshone National Forest and near the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Several large mudslides and rockslides in 2005 damaged or destroyed the Montana side of the Beartooth Highway in a dozen places. An estimated 100,000 cubic yards of rock were removed from a half-mile section of the highway near the top of the switchbacks, and construction crews drilled down to solid bedrock to create new supports for the road.

Hiking Itinerary

Sunday - Day 1

We were shuttled from Billings to Red Lodge where we'd reside for 3 nights. First hikes are generally short but this one was longer and along Lake Fork of Rock Creek to Broadwater Lake.

7 miles in 4 ½ hours with 1,000' of elevation climbing to a height of 7,000 feet. Tough on us sea level folks and our breathing showed it.

Monday - Day 2

The hike to Timberline Lake (no relationship!) gave views of Timberline Glacier and Silver Run Peak 9 miles in 6 ½ hours with 2,000' of elevation climbing to a height of near 10,000 feet. Our lungs are starting to acclimate.

Tuesday - Day 3

Rotten and long drive over washboard roads for far too long but one can't know if these roads will be in good or poor condition. We didn't luck out. The hike was worth it. West Rosebud Trailhead, the Beaten Path to Rimrock and Rainbow Lakes

8 miles in 5 ½ hours for a total gain of 1,000' of elevation climbing to a height of near 8,000 feet.

Note that there's always a lot of up and down so we always did much more than the 1,000 or 2,000 feet of elevation gain.

Wednesday - Day 4

Hike through various waterfalls along the river to Quinnebaugh Meadows which not all of us got to but close. I oftentimes thought I could keep up with the couple fast boys ahead but then I missed far too much: too many pictures, flowers, views, stops to look behind me, and find animals or animal tracks. 10 miles. Darned if I can remember how long it took us but fortunately it was only 1,000' of gain up to near 9,000 feet. We would drive the Beartooth Pass for the first of two times this day.

Thursday - Day 5

This was why I came. Leader Nola was right that this was the highlight: Beartooth High Lakes trail with views of Lonesome Mountain and Beartooth Butte and just one lake after another. One huge mushroom after another. Just super! 9 miles of a loop for one long but glorious day, climbing at least a total of 2,000' but much more up and downs and going to a height of 10,100 feet.

Friday - Day 6

Before driving over Beartooth Pass again and this time not being fogged in, we headed for our hike to and through various lakes - Island and Night Lakes. I was getting steadily ill and had to delay my hiking start, make pit stops, and lost all my breakfast. It was miserable but fortunately by mid-day the following day it was all gone. Anybody who knows I missed two meals will know how ill I was.

4 miles that were rather easy going along a lake. It was the drive along Beartooth Pass that I mostly missed by working hard on keeping settled. I visited a pharmacist in Red Lodge while others ate a

hearty Mexican meal and was asked if I'd consumed any of the water but I hadn't. That night in Billings I tried to figure out what I was going to do being so sick but by mid-morning I was fine.

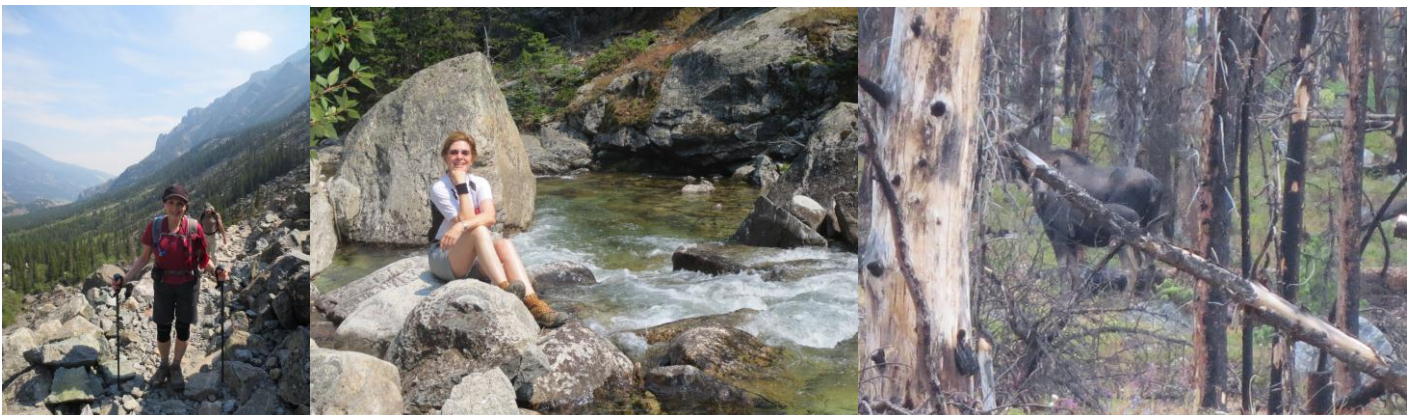
There is more description of the hikes within the Itinerary below and also along with the photo captions.



Favorite hiking leaders Steve and Nola are a great combination. Steve is a multi-Ironman as well as multi-professional resume but he chooses to lead hikes. Nola has a unique ability of making us slow hikers do much more than we think we can. There were a multitude of creek crossings and they did everything possible to get us across – sometimes successfully and sometimes not exactly so.



There were usually short and leisurely picnics during the way, having fixed our lunches and packed them into our daypacks that morning. Here is Steve even getting in the water to help us comfortably cross a stream. Oh, that's the \$850,000 tin ceiling bar I wandered into while in Red Lodge and didn't want to leave. They said some Easterner would pay up for this historically significant bar from the mid-1800s.



Barbara from San Antonio was my usual hiking partner as we were similar speeds. I think she was soaking her feet in the stream bed when this second picture was taken. See momma and baby moose? This was our only spotting.



This liquor store was a tiny corner of a country store. They sold what we'd later drink: "3 Blind Moose" pinot grigio. The country store in Cooke City was on the historical register and run by a couple for the last 14 years who bought it from the original family of multi generations. They still had the old cash registers and bins for oolong, gunpowder, etc. all side by side. The last picture is the town of Cooke City that sits just above Yellowstone and is quite remote. That's our quaint (smile) hotel.



One of the many lakes we found up high. As noted, there were many steam crossings and this one, despite Steve being in the middle to help, didn't end so well but through no fault of our leaders who had jumped through hoops every time one of us balked at crossing. Here they are on the last day up high in Beartooth Pass.

Next up?

I'm home very few days before leaving to the Canadian Rockies for more hiking. Then an unusual whole week at home before Tom and I depart to a nostalgia trip to our beloved Switzerland. We'll have 8 days in Grindelwald for hiking, 5 days in Luzerne and 4 days in Zurich – all big time favorites. I think this trip happened when Tom said he was going, with or without me. That made it easy. I generally have the thought "you can't go home again" but he disagreed and I think this a second Swiss effort to "go home again" with the last one being a winter trip to Zermatt and Luzerne.



Early October we will venture to Argentina where I have a marathon in Buenos Aires, followed by a hiking trip in Point Reyes National Seashore again with www.timbertours.com with an add on

marathon just south of San Jose in Morgan Hill before heading home for a very few days pre another hiking trip, this time to Tucson's mountains. Mid-November it's to Peru for a few days in Lima and an 8 day hike centering on Machu Picchu . December brings marathons in Dallas plus "The End of World" and Day After End of World" (for optimists) in Houston before our big trip with Marie to Vienna December 23-January 5.

I could use some ideas for 2013. Looking at Hawaii again in February if daughter Alayna will go: Jerusalem's marathon in March along with a couple weeks touring; Paris with Tom and Marie in March for spring break; San Luis Obispo Marathon in April along with a week in Santa Barbara area and then Los Angeles, all with Tom; Vancouver Marathon and touring with Tom in May just before the Capon Valley 50K in WVA if they let me participate again; and Madagascar's marathon in June.

That's it folks – for now.

Itinerary

Fri Aug 10

8:50am Depart Newark EWR via UA#1643
11:13am Arrive Denver for plane change with 1:27 connect time
12:40pm Depart Denver DEN via UA#6143
2:05pm Arrive Billings BIL

Hotel has shuttle service; no breakfast provided but oftentimes huge cinnamon buns are offered complimentary in the morning.

Hotel Best Western Plus Clocktower Inn (Downtown) – 2 nights
2511 First Avenue North US, Billings, MT 59101 Tele: 406 259 5511
Yes free Wi-Fi, coffee and refrig

Sat Aug 11

Private tour of city and area; morning market; afternoon festival; restaurants near and on premises

2:00pm Walking tour of Calamity Jane's Stomping Ground – 1 ½ hours for \$25 from Historic Moss Mansion Home at 914 Division Street

Billings was a pretty lively town in the old days. There were shooting, robberies and hangings. Some of those events lead to underground tunnels, a floating bar during prohibition, and a haunted historic hotel. How does a Ghostly Face on the Rimrocks, a Boothill Cemetery and an Indian Burial Ground site become part of the 7th Cavalry legend? Guided tour of unforgettable, fun filled, learning experience of Billings. You will travel the Historic Home District, Historic Montana Ave. with stops at Boothill Cemetery and Swords Park to view the city and the Yellowstone River from the sandstone rock formation that surrounds the city on two sides, called the "Rimrocks". Discover the stories and sites associated with Calamity Jane, Buffalo Bill Cody, Liver eating Johnson and Yellowstone Kelly. These are few of the West's Wild and Wicked characters that made their impact in Billings and became featured in Hollywood movies.

<http://www.montanafunadventures.com/index.php/information>

Also: August 9-12 is Magic City Blues - Montana's Urban Music Festival - a music festival filled with four days of world-class music.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1	Group assembles in Red Lodge; van shuttle from Billings; hike along Lake Fork of Rock Creek to Broadwater Lake	7 miles
Day 2	Hike to Timberline Lake; views of Timberline Glacier and Silver Run Peak	9 miles
Day 3	West Rosebud Trailhead, the Beaten Path to Rimrock and Rainbow Lakes	7 miles
Day 4	Hike through Quinnebaugh Meadows	10 miles
Day 5	Beartooth High Lakes trail, views of Lonesome Mountain and Beartooth Butte	9 miles
Day 6	Beartooth Pass: Island and Night Lakes	4 miles

Total Hiking Mileage - 46 miles

Sun Aug 12 – Day 1

8:30am Meet to begin hike at host hotel

Summary from Timberline: From our earliest days, Beartooth Pass, straddling the rugged Montana/Wyoming border, has been the cornerstone of many of the cycling and hiking programs that we have developed in the Yellowstone Country. In so many ways, the Beartooths symbolize the concept of adventure that is the heart of our program. We are a group with an enormous appetite for high mountain adventure; we cherish each and every alpine encounter that we have embraced in our program since our earliest beginnings. But for us, let there be no doubt, Beartooth is without equal—it is the best! Situated northeast of the Northeast Entrance to Yellowstone National Park, the Beartooths, for the most part, are contained within the vast Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The rugged terrain, high elevations and somewhat remote location are factors that conspire to preserve the pristine quality of this region.

Our program will assemble in Red Lodge, eastern gateway to the Beartooths, mid-morning on Day 1 and we'll provide a short van shuttle from Billings. We'll hike along the Lake Fork of Rock Creek to Broadwater Lake and then head for Rock Creek Resort, where we'll spend our first of three overnights (7 miles).

Hotel Rock Creek Resort for 3 nights upgraded to studio at a small and reasonable cost
6380 Highway 212 South, Red Lodge, MT 59068 Tele 406 446 1111
Yes coffee, refrig and Wi-Fi; weather cooler at 7800' elevation; a/c not needed; fans yes

Mon Aug 13 – Day 2

We'll shuttle along the West Fork of Rock Creek for an engaging 9-mile introduction to the wilderness as we hike to Timberline Lake. The views from the lake are magnificent, including Timberline Glacier and 12,500' Silver Run Peak.

Tues Aug 14 – Day 3

Early morning we're headed through Roscoe to the East Rosebud Trailhead for our trek along The Mystic Lake trail. This day's adventure, though, does not end with our return to the trailhead. We're headed for dinner at the incomparable Grizzly Bar in Roscoe, but be forewarned, some of last year's guests have threatened to return this season if only to be part of another Grizzly Bar experience.

Wed Aug 15 – Day 4

We'll climb moderately along the cascading West Fork of Rock Creek to beautiful Quinnebaugh Meadows, passing Calamity and Sentinel Falls along the way (10 miles). We'll then shuttle over awesome Beartooth Pass on the famous Beartooth Highway (yes, it has re-opened!) to Cooke City, where we'll spend our final two nights at the Alpine Lodge.

Hotel Alpine Lodge – 2 nights
P.O. Box 1030, Main Street, Cooke City, MT Tele: 406 838 2262
Yes refrig and Wi-Fi; request coffee maker; elevation at 7700' with cool nights

Thu Aug 16 - Day 5

We're headed for Beartooth Butte and a spectacular encounter with Beartooth High Lakes. Much of this 9-mile hike in the Beartooth high country is at or above timberline with breathtaking views of

countless high alpine lakes and the dominating presence of Lonesome Mountain and famous Beartooth Butte.

Fri Aug 17 – Day 6

We'll bid farewell to the magnificent Beartooths as we hike leisurely to Island and Night Lakes (4 miles), re-visit Beartooth Pass and return to Billings

Hotel same as pre tour

Sat Aug 18

1:25pm Depart Billings BIL via UA#406

2:55pm Arrive Denver DEN for plane change with 1:01 connect time

3:56pm Depart Denver DEN via UA#469

9:33pm Arrive Newark EWR