

## **A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR SHORT HIKES ON THE BEARTOOTH RANGER DISTRICT**

There are many miles of trails in the Beartooth Mountains and the Wilderness Area. Most of these trails vary in elevation from about 5,000 feet to over 10,000 feet above sea level. Visitors from lower elevation areas should consider this before taking any strenuous hikes.

### **SOME SHORT DAY HIKES** (Off the Beartooth Highway)

The Lake Fork Road (Road #346) is off to the right of the Beartooth Highway (US Highway #212) as you travel south out of Red Lodge (approximately 10 miles) and well before coming to the switchbacks. A sign saying "Lake Fork" warns you of the turnoff. The road crosses Rock Creek going up Lake Fork Creek about 1.25 miles to the trailhead of the Lake Fork Trail. From this trailhead you can either head upstream or down-stream. Upstream about 5.0 miles is Lost Lake and about 1.5 miles farther up is Keyser Brown Lake. The trail continues over the Sundance Pass and into the West Fork of the Rock Creek. Go as far as you want to before returning to the trailhead. Downstream (from across the foot bridge at the trailhead) the trail parallels the creek and goes to the Lions Camp (about 1.2 miles). When you get to the camp, make a sharp left turn, cross the bridge and you are again on the Lake Fork Road.

As you continue up Highway #212 on the Beartooth Highway, turn right into the campground area (this is approximately 12 miles from Red Lodge). There you will find Parkside, Limber Pine, and Greenough Campgrounds and the Parkside picnic area. About 100 yards up from the Limber Pine Campground turnoff is a road that makes a sharp turn to the left (which continues up to the Hellroaring Plateau). On your right you will see a little-traveled trail heading down the valley. This trail parallels the Main Rock Creek going downstream about 2.5 miles to the Lake Fork Road. You can come back along the highway or have someone meet you at the Lake Fork Road.

A trail that begins at the Parkside Picnic Area is the Parkside National Recreation Trail. This 2.2 mile trail heads north up the canyon, past Greenough Lake and up to M-K Campground. At this point you will have to decide whether to follow the road or take the trail back to your vehicle.

From the up-stream end of the Greenough Campground, park and walk the 0.2 miles to Greenough Lake (another access to the Parkside National Recreation Trail). The small, shallow lake is stocked and is a favorite fishing place for children.

The road to Glacier Lake starts just after the Limber Pine Campground. Drive 7 miles up this Rock Creek Road to the trailhead. The last few miles of this road are narrow and rocky, but passable for a high wheel base vehicle. **DO NOT** tow a trailer on the last few miles. From the trailhead the trail climbs quite steeply some 2.0 miles to Glacier Lake. This is a beautiful area and well worth the hike. Take a lunch and be sure to take drinking water.

Just beyond the start of the Glacier Lake Road is the Hell Roaring Plateau road. **DO NOT** try to tow a trailer on it. The road is steep in spots, rough, narrow and with numerous tight switchbacks. Part way up you will find on your left a small, heavily-treed pond nestled in a pocket. **Beautiful!** Further on you will see signs of mining for Chromium ore (from the 1940's). The road ends as you break out onto the Hellroaring Plateau at the Wilderness Boundary. **DO NOT** drive beyond this point even though you can see car tracks wandering over the alpine plateau. Those tracks pre-date the establishment of the Wilderness Area and at that elevation nature is slow to heal old scars.

If the higher elevations do not bother you, drive up the Beartooth Highway. Views from the switchbacks are great. At the top of the switchbacks is the Vista Point visitor area. Walk out on the short path to the overlook for a spectacular view of the Rock Creek Valley and Hellroaring and Silver Run Plateaus across the valley.

Up the road about 3 miles from Vista Point you will take a left hand turn. There is a parking lot and a trail, an old jeep trail to Line Lake (close to the state line). It is approximately a 2 mile hike to this little lake.

Farther up the highway (just after you cross the Wyoming State Line) you will see a vast, steep downsloping meadow on your right. Park at the small parking area. Down in the tight pocket below the meadow lie the jewel-like Twin Lakes. You cannot see the lakes from that parking spot but a little farther along the highway is a “Twin Lakes” sign and pull-off parking area. You may want to look at the lakes from there before returning to the parking area above the steep meadow. Hiking down is easy, but realize that you will have to hike up again. There is room to wander through the woods and along the lakes. Wild alpine flowers flourish. Again, carry drinking water, a picnic lunch, sweater and rain gear.

### **MORE SHORT DAY HIKES** (Off the West Fork of Rock Creek Road—Road #71)

West Fork of Rock Creek Road #71 is west off Highway #212 on the south side of Red Lodge (before you get to the Red Lodge Beartooth Ranger Station). Approximately 3 miles west on Road #71, the road turns sharply left. A road sign lists Wild Bill Lake. The right fork leads to the Red Lodge Mountain ski area. Note: The ski area is closed May through October.

The Silver Run Trail is located about 4 miles from Red Lodge on the West Fork of Rock Creek Road #71. This trail will take you up to the Silver Run Plateau, then it will give you a choice to walk across the plateau to connect to the Timberline Trail or over to the Bear Trap Trail (which is off Highway #212 just south of the lake Fork Road turnoff).

Wild Bill Lake is a barrier-free picnic area visited by wheelchair and other mobile-handicapped people. A gentle, smooth, 5% grade trail that leads up on a hard path to the lake and continues along the north side of the lake. There are two barrier-free decks over the water so that even wheelchair bound people can fish. We ask that non-handicapped people do not monopolize the fishing decks. At the picnic area adjacent to the parking area there are two barrier-free toilets and barrier-free picnic tables.

This area was developed with the help of the Youth Conservation Corps and a local Seabee Naval Reserve Unit. The lake is stocked with fish by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. A Montana State fishing license is required to fish. Note: Fishing License for both Montana and Wyoming can be purchased locally at the Red Lodge True Value located at 101 North Broadway Avenue.

There are no overnight camping facilities or sites at Wild Bill Lake – it is a day-use picnic area only. There is no developed water supply and there is no fee charged for day use. For camping, continue on 1 mile up the road to Basin Campground.

There are other undeveloped paths around the lake for visitors that are not wheelchair bound.

The trailhead for the Basin Creek Lakes Trail (Trail #61, a National Recreation Trail) is just beyond Wild Bill Lake on the left side of the road about 6 miles from Red Lodge. This trail is a good “conditioning hike” before a person tackles more rigorous and longer hikes. It is about 2-1/2 miles from the trailhead

up to the lower Basin Creek Lake and another 1-1/2 miles beyond that to the upper Basin Creek Lake. The upper lake lies in a glacial cirque. There are no developed campsites and no tested water sources so you must practice the "Leave No Trace" Outdoor Ethic and carry your drinking water or boil surface water. Be absolutely sure to pack out ALL your trash.

The route follows an old logging road, then old and new sections of switchback trail up the tight Basin Creek valley. A quarter mile before you get to the lower lake, you will come upon the remnants of an old logging camp left over from the horse-logging days of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Later a forest fire heavily burned the area and much of it now is second or third growth timber. After the lower lake the trail goes around the south side of that lake, climbs a ridge, and joins Basin Creek again for the last steep 3/4 mile.

The Basin Creek Lakes Trail is **closed to horse use** except during the fall big-game hunting season.

If you want to continue up the West Fork Road, the Beartooth District map will show you where to access the East Rosebud, the West Rosebud, the main Stillwater and the West Fork of the Stillwater roads and dead-end at the trailheads into the Wilderness. All of these areas are worth exploring.

## **LONGER HIKES**

As shown on the Beartooth District map and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness map, there are many trails in the Beartooth District and over half of them access the Wilderness. In most cases these begin at one trailhead and end at another many miles away. This necessitates your arranging to be picked up at the end of your hike or leaving a vehicle at the exit trailhead before you start. The Rangers do NOT make such pickups or car deliveries.

Some longer hikes include the East Rosebud to Cooke City Trail, the Stillwater Trail to Cooke City. These trails can be a 26 or 28 miles hike, depending on the trailhead you end your trip (or begin) with. These are not loop trails.

For local information, please contact the Beartooth Ranger District of the Custer National Forest at (406) 446-2103. They are located 3 miles south of Red Lodge on Highway #212.