

Clark Fork Riverfront



Historic Missoula along the Riverfront

Much of Missoula's history is connected to transportation. The valley and its main river served as a corridor for game and later, humans. Native Americans crossed through the valley on the way to hunt bison east of the Continental Divide. As white settlers arrived, many of the original trails turned into roads and eventually highways. Railroads often paralleled these roads, and bridges were built to traverse the rivers. Historic markers follow what was at one time the main line of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad and describe much of the physical and cultural history of the Missoula Valley. The Millstone public art installation at the east end of Caras Park signifies the beginning of commercial Missoula.

Take a ride on Dasani Blue Bikes

Check out a free Dasani Blue Bike at Currents Aquatics Center in McCormick Park and explore Missoula's Riverfront Trail System and Missoula's downtown. The single-speed "cruiser" bikes are available to anyone—a bike ride is a great way to explore Missoula's natural world. Pick up a guided bike tour map of the Riverfront Trail system when you rent your bike.

To check out a Blue Bike, you will need to be 18 and have a credit card; a legal guardian can check out a bike for kids. The bikes are available daily during Currents Aquatic Center's hours of operation. (Visit or phone 721-PARK) Blue Bikes cannot be used overnight, but there is no limit on the number of days you can borrow one. If you have family or friends visiting, this is a great way to show them around. Or be a smart commuter and park your car in McCormick Park and ride to work!



River and Creek Access

The city of Missoula derives its name from the Flathead word Im-ul-e-tiku which means by or near the cold, chilling waters. Even before recorded history the water and rivers of this area were of central importance to those who traveled through and lived here. The Clark Fork, Bitterroot and Blackfoot Rivers are important parts of Missoula's history and daily life.

Remember to stay away from rivers, streams and irrigation ditches during high water conditions, like spring runoff. Never swim alone; always use flotation devices. Access the Clark Fork River at the boat launches in Bess Reed Park and Silver Park and from the Tower Street Open Space, Tom Green Park, Greenough Park and the Rattlesnake Greenway provide river access points to Rattlesnake Creek. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>) offers numerous swimming, boating and fishing access points on all three rivers and most of western Montana's waterways and lakes.

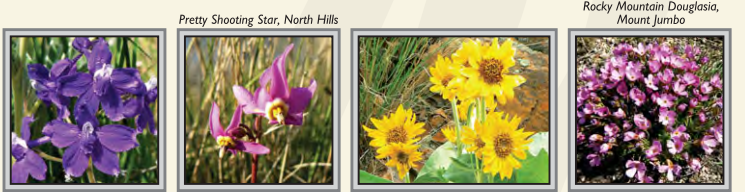
Glacial Lake Missoula



About 12,000 years ago, the valleys of western Montana lay beneath a lake nearly 2,000 feet deep. Glacial Lake Missoua formed as the Cordilleran Ice Sheet dammed the Clark Fork River just as it entered Idaho. The rising water behind the glacial dam weakened it until water burst through in a catastrophic flood that raced across Idaho, Oregon, and Washington toward the Pacific Ocean. Thundering waves and chunks of ice tore away soils and mountainsides, deposited giant ripple marks, created the sandbars of eastern Washington and carved the Columbia River Gorge. Over the course of centuries, Glacial Lake Missoua filled and emptied in repeated cycles, leaving its story embedded in the land.

Today, geologists continue to study Glacial Lake Missoua and the Missoula Floods in hopes to further understand the colossal event. The horizontal lines etched into the hillsides of Mount Jumbo and Mount Sentinel are evidence that a prehistoric lake once filled the valley. The parallel lines represent the ancient shorelines of Glacial Lake Missoua. The highest known shorelines are found at an elevation of 4,200 feet. If the lake existed at this level today, the top of Mount Jumbo would be an island, and the city of Missoua would sit beneath 950 feet of water.

Flora and Fauna



Wildflower buffs shouldn't miss the North Hills Ridgeline Trail in the spring and early summer, when phlox, bitterroot, shooting star and scarlet paintbrush are in bloom. In May and early June, Missoula's Open Space lands are bursting with color from the sunny yellow arrow-leaf balsamroot. The wildflower spectacle continues into the summer on the cooler and shadier Mount Jumbo North Loop and parts of Jumbo's Backbone Trail.

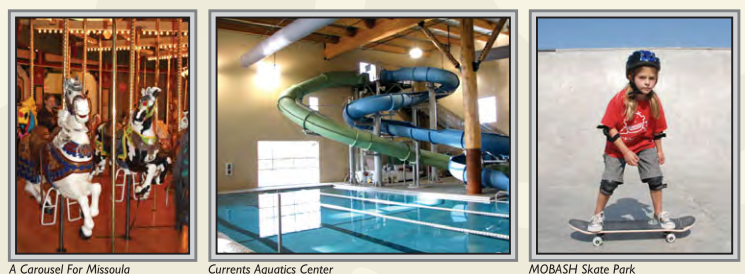
Bird lovers will find more than 100 species on City-owned open space lands, including Western meadowlark, bluebirds and the beautiful blue lazuli bunting. In addition, Missoula's open space is home to elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, red fox, snowshoe rabbit, coyote, porcupine, Columbian ground squirrel, black bear, weasel and badger.

Fitness Trails

Playfair Park, Fort Missoula and Big Sky Parks offer flat, natural surface fitness trails for walkers and joggers. Playfair Park features a series of looping trails, about 3 miles in total, that offer a variety of options for trail users. The perimeter trail is 1.4 miles. Dogs are welcome on the trails but must be leashed, and owners must remove their pet's waste. Access the trails from parking lots on Bancroft and Pattee Creek Drive. Fort Missoula's fitness loop is just under 1 mile and also offers access to the paved South Avenue trail. Access from the South Avenue or Fort Missoula Road parking lots. Big Sky Equestrian Park features a 1.7-mile loop for walkers and equestrians and is located near Big Sky High School off of South Avenue.

Great For Guests

The M trail on Mount Sentinel, a steep 1.5-mile climb at the University of Montana, affords great views of the city and is a Missoula tradition. The Ron MacDonald Riverfront Trail, originating downtown on both the north and south shores of the Clark Fork River, features history, culture, and nature, plus connections to many parks and Missoula's favorite family attractions. Along the trail you'll find A Carousel for Missoula, MOBASH Skate Park, Currents Aquatics Center, Missoula Children's Museum and the Montana Natural History Center.



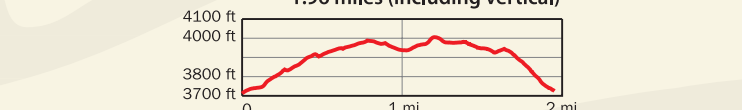
Missoula's Mountain Backdrop



Mount Jumbo Saddle Loop

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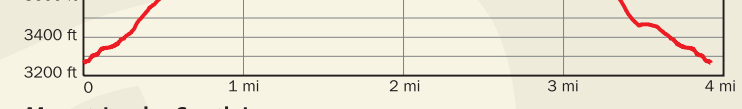
Mount Jumbo Saddle Loop - 1.95 miles (horizontal), 1.96 miles (including vertical)



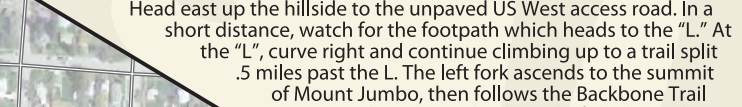
Mount Jumbo South Loop - 3.92 miles (horizontal), 3.98 miles (including vertical)



Mount Jumbo North Loop - 4.27 miles (horizontal), 4.30 miles (including vertical)



Mount Sentinel Advanced Loop - 7.91 miles (horizontal), 7.98 miles (including vertical)



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Mount Jumbo South Loop

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