



## Family Friendly Hiking along the Beartooth Front

2018

Hikes are listed in a counterclockwise direction from south to north around the Beartooth Front.

### 1. Beartooth Highway/Beartooth Plateau

**Beartooth Butte:** Hike to Beauty Lake. Fairly level and fairly short; very popular. 4 miles RT.

**Line Lake:** Parking lot is down to your left just before you come to the Montana/Wyoming border sign, just above the switchbacks on the Beartooth Highway. Follow the Line Creek Plateau Trail for a mile and a half then cut off to Line Lake. Slight bit of off-trail. 4 miles RT.

### 2. Main Fork of Rock Creek:

Approximately 12 miles south of the town of Red Lodge, before you start heading up to the gate that closes the Highway in winter time, there's a sign that says "Campgrounds" to your right. If you enter into Greenough Campground there's a short trail called the Parkside National Recreation Trail to Greenough Lake and beyond, that's an easy walk. It leads ultimately up to M-K Campground. Return as you came.

**Hellroaring Plateau.** Past the campgrounds, the dirt road forks in two. Sharply to your right is the fabulous Hellroaring Road. If you have a true 4WD vehicle you can make a nice, bumpy, hour-long drive up to the Hellroaring Plateau. There's parking here where the road ends at the Wilderness sign. But you can continue on foot along an old road (now a foot trail) that stays atop the ridge to the west that looks down on a drainage full of lakes. The hiking is easy atop this ridge and you can hike it for miles. You can drop down to visit the many lakes below, but this makes the hike then considerably more challenging. Return as you came. High elevation here!

**Glacier Lake:** Instead of going up the Hellroaring Road, the dirt road to your left is the road to Glacier Lake. It was improved in 2017, but is still a rough dirt road requiring a high clearance vehicle (at least a Subaru Outback) to the very end. At the end of this road (about 40 minutes), is the trailhead to Glacier Lake. Although only 2.5 miles to the lake, it's pretty steep the whole way. The payoff is a really pretty high alpine lake with an amazing backdrop and ice floats in it. Not a long hike, but not a beginner hike. Doable with tougher kids!

### **3. Lake Fork of Rock Creek:**

As you head up the Beartooth Highway, 10 miles from Red Lodge, you encounter a sign on your right that signals the Lake Fork of Rock Creek. Turn here and immediately on your left across a bridge is a large parking lot, the old Richel Lodge location. Park here. There's an easy trail that runs along the Main Fork of Rock Creek called the **Rock Creek Streamside Trail**. It ultimately comes out on the backside of Parkside Campground.

If you head up the main Lake Fork road to its end (about 2 miles), there's an excellent parking lot and toilet marking the Lake Fork Trailhead. The **Lower Lake Fork Trail** parallels this road to the trailhead. It runs from the Lions Camp to the Lake Fork Trailhead. You'll see it in places down below you to the left as you drive in. This is a good one for young kids. There's good XC skiing in here in winter along the road and the trail.

**Silver Falls/Lost Lake:** The main trail is fairly easy and not too steep all the way to Lost Lake, 5 miles in. If you Hike the main trail up about a mile, to a mile and a half, you'll come to a clearing in the Forest and a sandy beach along the creek to your right. From here, if you look up to your left you can make out Silver Falls. For really adventurous hikers/families, there is a fainter trail leading up to the falls. Towards the top there's some climbing and scrambling to get to the falls. Supervision is a must for younger kids.

**Lost Lake** is a moderately easy 10-mile day if you're up for more miles as a family, but still be on an easy trail.

### **4. Main Fork of Rock Creek/Outside Red Lodge:**

**Palisades Campground:** As you drive up the West Fork Road as if you were driving up to the Ski Area, well before the ski area is the turnoff to Palisades Campground. Drive approximately 1.5 miles up this road which curves around onto Forest Service land. Park by the toilet. At the back of the campground is a trailhead for two fairly new trails right on the outskirts of Red Lodge, the **Willow Creek Trail**, and the **Palisades Trail**.

**Willow Creek Trail:** This trail is family friendly but a little steeper, so a little more strenuous. It follows the creek for 2 miles all the way up to the Lower Parking Lot of the ski area at Red Lodge Mountain. This is also a nice snowshoe hike in winter time. Return as you came in. Bit more of a workout, but a nice little hike on a less used trail.



**Palisades Trail:** This is one of the truly new trails on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. It was built largely by volunteers working for the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Foundation and the Montana Conservation Corps. It runs from Palisade Campground along the edge of Red Lodge Mountain for about 3.5 miles and emerges at the very end of Fox Road which runs west from the Red Lodge cemetery. You can hike, mountain bike, or horseback ride this trail which features flowery meadows, aspen groves, wildlife and great views to the east. Hike along the fairly level trail for as long as you want, then turn around and head back, or leave a shuttle vehicle at the end of Fox Road. Bears and mountain lions, moose and elk, have all been sighted in the area fairly regularly, so hike as a group of two or more and carry bear spray. Don't let small children hike unattended.

**Nichols Creek Trail:** This is a BRAND-NEW trail, also built by volunteers of the ABWF. End to end it is about a 4.25 mile-long trail that connects the lower parking lot of the ski area to a tiny trailhead along the West Fork Road, just slightly past the junction of Ski Run Road and the West Fork Road. It is highly sought after by mountain bikers, but is a great hiking trail, too! Drive to the ski area and park in the Lower Parking Lot. The trailhead is about 50 feet up and to the left above the bottom of the stairway that links the Lower Parking Lot to the Lodge of the ski area. This is a cool trail! Look for the lower end of the trail where it comes out on an old logging road about ¼ mile past the junction of the West Fork Road and Ski Run Road. Currently there's only about 2 parking spots. Black bears have been spotted in the area.

**Silver Run Trails:** Further up the West Fork Road, but before you come to Wild Bill Lake, there's a left hand turn at a sign designating Silver Run Trails. Cross a bridge and park, then walk up the road past the outhouse and the gate which is closed in winter time. A short distance up the road, right as the road curves dramatically to the left, there's a trail sign marking the beginning of the Silver Run Trails. The trails are a series of four nested loops that roughly follow along Rock Creek. Loops 1 through 4 are well-marked. Loop 1 is about 2 miles in length. Loop 2 is approximately 3 miles long and a bit more uphill. Loop 3 is a little over 4 miles in length, and loop 4 is almost 6 miles total. So you can gauge how much mileage you want to tackle on your hike. It's also a fairly popular mountain biking and dog-walking trail for the citizens of Red Lodge.

**Quinnebaugh Meadows:** At the end of the West Fork Road, which is roughly 12 miles from Red Lodge, is a large parking lot and toilet. This is the Trailhead for Quinnebaugh Meadows, a popular destination about 5 miles up the trail on a fairly moderate trail, suitable for families. For a lot of families, Quinnebaugh is a favorite first backpacking destination. It's not a difficult 10-mile round trip day hike either. If you want to just wander up the trail a few miles, Sentinel Falls is just a couple of miles in on pretty easy trail. Very nice for families. Earlier in the season, two grizzlies were feeding on a moose carcass, which is the first I've ever heard of grizzlies in this area. Always carry bear spray and know how to use it when hiking anywhere around here.

## 5. Outside Red Lodge:

**Face of the Mountain Trail:** As you drive all the way south through Red Lodge, just past the West Fork turnoff to the ski area, and just before you come to the Beartooth Ranger Station, there's a road veering off at an angle to your left, with a sign saying "Meteteetsee Trail". Turn and Follow this road for 4 miles, up onto the East Bench, then steeply down through a rural housing area and out onto the rolling plains/sagebrush country. The road can be pretty rough for low clearance vehicles, but otherwise not too bad. When you wonder where in the world you are along this meandering country road, you will come to a sign on your right and a parking area, marked as The Face of the Mountain Trailhead. The mountain in question here is Mt. Maurice which you are on the flank of. Park here and hike the very nice, 3-mile open country hike which crosses Bear Creek and continues on up a set of switchbacks to a saddle overlooking the Clark's Fork Basin. Great trail in the early season as it melts out sooner than others. Be vigilant for Grizzlies and black bears which have been seen in this area.

## 6. The East Rosebud Area:

From Red Lodge, Drive Highway 78 for 19 miles to the town of Roscoe. Follow the signs outside of Roscoe up the E. Rosebud. It's about a 30-minute drive from Roscoe to E. Rosebud. At Alpine veer left to get to the E. Rosebud Trailhead.

**Elk Lake:** From the Trailhead it is a 3-mile hike into E. Rosebud Lake. It's never super steep, but it is continuously uphill to the lake, making this one challenging for kids, but not out of the realm of possibility. Halfway along is a pretty falls. 6 miles round trip.

## 7. The Main Stillwater:

Just south of the town of Absarokee, is a large gas station and the turnoff (County Rd 419) to the west of the road to Fishtail and Nye, and ultimately the enormous Stillwater Mine. Go beyond the Mine a few miles and you'll come to Woodbine Campground and the end of the road at the Stillwater Trailhead.

**Woodbine Falls Trail:** Less than a mile to the falls, but uphill, this is a good short family hike. Starts from the back of the Woodbine Campground.

**The Stillwater Gorge/Sioux Charley Lake:** Go straight instead of turning into the campground and a short distance ahead is the parking area for the Stillwater Trail. It's less than a half mile hike through the gorge where the Stillwater River rages out of the mountains. Definitely an exciting highlight to walk along! Keep close eye on small kids. Turn around and go back, or continue on the level trail all the way to Sioux Charley Lake, which is probably the easiest lake destination to get to on the Beartooth Front. 6 miles round trip. Family friendly.



*Prepared by David Kallenbach of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Foundation*

## **8. The Boulder River:**

**Natural Bridge and Falls:** Drive to Big Timber on I-90. In the heart of Big Timber turn south on McLeod Street on county road 289 and stay on it for 16 miles to the town of McLeod. Stay on 289 for a few more miles past McLeod till you come to the Natural Bridge and Falls on your left. There are some short pathways to viewpoints of the falls, so not a lot of hiking, but it's a neat place to see with the family.