

Self-Guided Tours

The Loop Trip Two lanes have never looked this good!

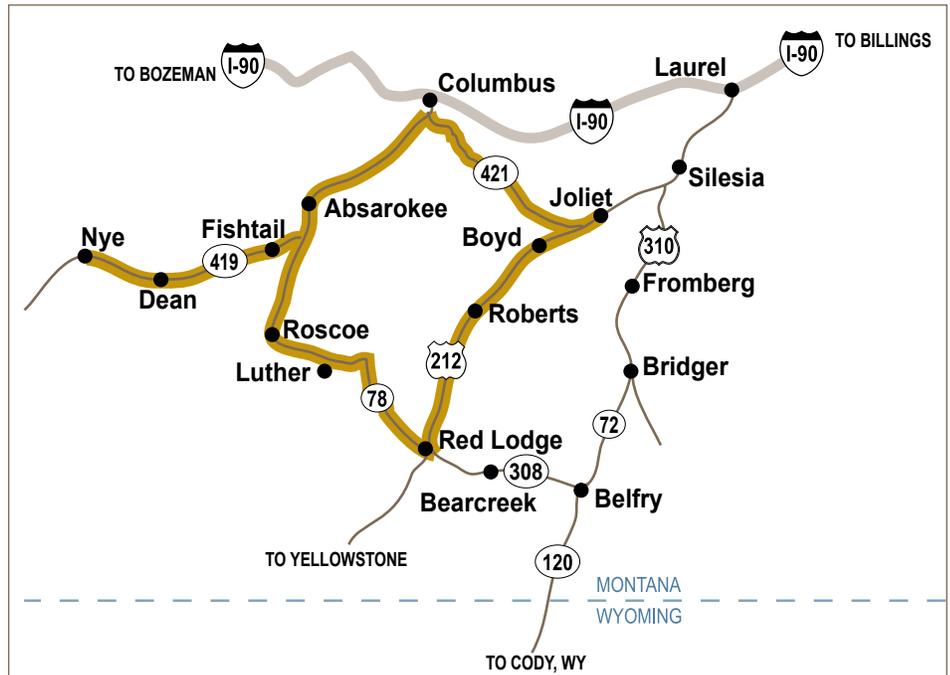
Beginning and ending in Red Lodge, “The Loop” follows two-lane highways and byways through some of the region’s loveliest scenery.

Imagine rolling green hills dotted with cows, horses and sheep, wide open spaces, sparkling rivers and streams – all against the grand and wild backdrop of Montana’s highest peaks. Along the way, you’ll find interesting historical markers and museums, funky galleries and antiques shops, and plenty of cafés and saloons.

The Loop follows Highway 78 west from Red Lodge. The route eventually takes you north along the Stillwater River to the Yellowstone River valley. From there it travels east to Highway 212 and the Rock Creek watershed and finally to Red Lodge again. It can be driven in just over two hours, but don’t rush. This is the stuff of postcards.

From Red Lodge, follow Highway 78 past the tiny community of Luther to Roscoe, home of the famous Grizzly Bar—a popular watering hole and eatery amongst locals and visitors alike. Roscoe is also home to noted potters Janet Hero Dodge and Julie Dickinson. Visit their downtown Roscoe gallery, Pioneer Pottery, at 11 Aspen Lane. If you have time to spare, follow the signs from Roscoe to East Rosebud, a stunning alpine lake set against towering rock walls.

Continuing north and west on Highway 78, you’ll wend your way along the Rosebud and Stillwater river valleys. Three miles before you reach Absarokee, you can detour west to Fishtail, Dean, Nye, Woodbine Campground and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area. This region is rich in history, with the Bozeman Trail, the original Crow Indian Agency and over 100 years of mining activity.



Or drive on to Absarokee, home of the National Old Timer’s Rodeo. Here you can book a float trip on the Stillwater River or wander the shops and cafés in the community’s quaint downtown. Don’t miss the Dew Drop Inn with its delicious burgers, fries and shakes made from real ice cream scooped by hand.

From Absarokee, continue north along the Stillwater River to Columbus. Nestled against the Yellowstone River, Columbus is a bustling community. It is also a wonderful place to drop a line into the Yellowstone or picnic in one of the town’s lovely parks. Go bowling, or visit the Stillwater County Historical Society’s Museum of the Beartooths.

To get to Joliet, you’ll need to backtrack from Columbus following Highway 78 south one mile to Highway 421. This is the road less traveled. It wanders past farms and ranches and through plenty of open space to Highway 212. It’s about a 45-minute drive from Columbus to Joliet, 43.5 miles from start to finish.

In Joliet, you’ll find old-time cafés, a brand new community center and the Charles Ringer Studio and Gallery.

Chuck is known far and wide for his kinetic steel sculptures. Outside Joliet, his work is displayed at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., the Art Institute of Chicago, and The Whitney Museum in New York City. Marked by an 18-foot metal sculpture known locally as The Creature, Ringer’s gallery, studio and gardens make for a fascinating stop.

From Joliet, follow Highway 212 south. In Boyd, stop for a pick-me-up at the Boyd General Store, follow the signs to the refreshing waters of Cooney Dam, or continue on to Roberts.

Nicknamed “Bob” by most locals, Roberts is home to The Red Star Gallery, where you’ll find the work of Kevin Red Star, the renowned artist who draws on his Crow Indian heritage for his inspiration. You’ll also find the eclectic and charming Hayseed’s Antiques, and the Roberts Café, serving up biscuits and gravy and other fine Montana fare. Finally, before you leave beautiful “Bob” for Red Lodge, make a stop at the Lost Village Saloon for Jimmy’s delicious homemade pizza, live music and great people watching.