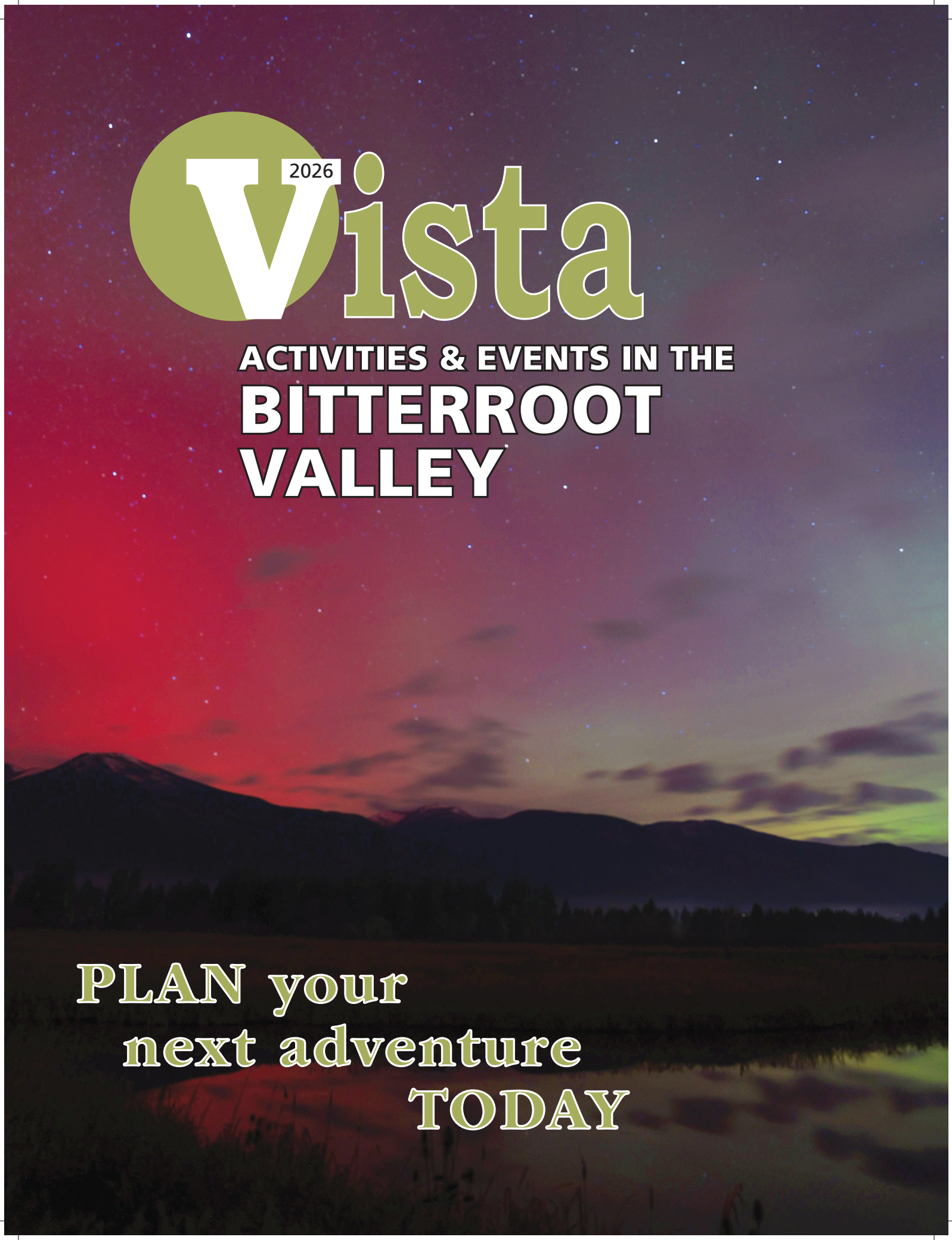


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Florence to Sula



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

The Bitterroot Valley is located in Ravalli County and sits in the southwest corner of Montana, alongside the rugged Bitterroot Mountains separating Idaho and Montana to the west and the Sapphire Mountains in the east.

Here you can find the very first establishment in Montana in Stevensville or follow the trail of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, who explored the area more than two centuries ago.

The scenery includes snow-capped peaks, the Bitterroot River and picturesque Bitterroot National Forest. Driving south from Missoula along U.S. Highway 93, you can take scenic drives that explore more than 90 miles of the beautiful Bitterroot Valley.

Recreation opportunities abound across the 1.6-million-acre Bitterroot National Forest, including camping at 24 developed campgrounds and five group sites, hiking on more than 1,600 miles of trails, fishing for brook and rainbow trout in crystal-clear alpine lakes, boating, biking, horseback riding and more.

The Bitterroot is home to many species of wildlife including deer, elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats and moose, plus many varieties of smaller animals and birds.

The Bitterroot Mountains offer many choices for both avid hikers to those just looking for a relaxing day hike. Some of the more popular trails include Blodgett Canyon, Bear Creek Trail and Overlook, and St. Mary Peak — home to an active fire lookout.

Hamilton is the Ravalli County seat, and home to the county fairgrounds, county historical museum and government offices. There are five other towns in the Bitterroot offering a little something for everyone with hiking trails and recreational activities as well as festivals, historic sites and world-renowned fly fishing.

Come visit to experience the wildlife at Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge in Stevensville, or fish on the Bitterroot River from one of several recreational access sites. The valley also offers several golf ranges, including the Hamilton Golf Club that celebrates 101 years of play this year.

For history buffs, the valley has multiple museums including the Darby Pioneer Museum, a block from the county's first Forest Ranger Station known as the "Gateway to the Wilderness." Visit Hamilton for a stop at the historic Daly Mansion, the home of Hamilton's founder, Marcus Daly, the Copper King of Montana. In Stevensville, you can visit St. Mary's Mission, the first church and permanent establishment in the Pacific Northwest.

Perhaps the greatest feature of the Bitterroot Valley though, are the people that call it home. Be sure to give the oncoming driver a two-finger wave and don't hesitate to talk to locals. Maybe you will become one, too.

Whether you are a local, a fifth-generation rancher, or a passerby on vacation — whether it is a one-day hike or a week-long trip, welcome to the 'Root.



Florence

The town of Florence, named for the wife of lumber titan A.B. Hammond, sits at the northern edge of Ravalli County along U.S. Highway 93. The prominently Irish-settled area had previously been referred to as One Horse.

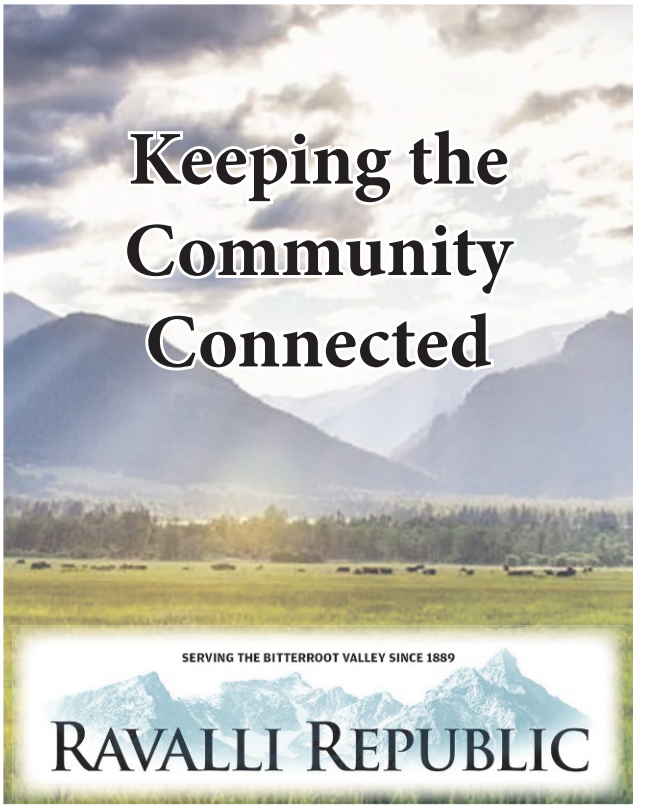
Hammond was instrumental in the development of the timber industry in the Missoula and Bitterroot valleys and also brought the railroad into the area. The town of Florence was established in 1888. It later merged with a northern neighbor called Carlton. Today, the school district is called Florence-Carlton. During its heyday as a farming area as many as 100 carloads of wheat a day were shipped out of Florence.

Surrounded with stunning scenery, the Florence area has ample opportunity for outdoor recreation, including hunting, hiking, biking and wildlife observation.

Bass Creek Recreation Area

The 1,600-acre Bass Creek Recreation Area south of Florence provides a number of options for getting outdoors. More than 50,000 people visit the area annually. Bass Creek contains six trailheads, ranging from quarter-mile loops to longer routes over 7.5 miles long.

The trails are also a popular destination for horseback riders. It is the perfect stop to use the picnic tables for a meal while enjoying the stunning nature of the Bitterroot. The Charles Waters Campground has 26 paved campsites, electric hook-up, water and vault toilets for those wishing to stay overnight.



Bass Creek Recreation Area is located 4 miles south of Florence on U.S. Highway 93. Call 406-777-5461 or drop by a ranger station for more information.

Chief Looking Glass Fishing Access

Visitors to the Bitterroot area are always looking for a way to enjoy the Bitterroot River. The Chief Looking Glass fishing access northeast of Florence is just one of the easy and convenient ways to get to the water.

Whether putting in to float, swim, fish, or just looking for a place to take a break, Chief Looking Glass is a convenient way to do it. Just turn off on Chief Looking Glass road north of Florence on U.S. Highway 93 at mile marker 77.

There are 25 campsites, toilets, water (May through September), and a boat launch available. There is fee and a seven-day stay limit. Another fishing access is located just east of Florence on the Eastside Highway just before crossing the bridge.

Hideout Mountain Park

Hideout Mountain Park, located at 5458 Florence Carlton Loop, is a playground in Florence. Children can climb up into turrets, run across bridges connecting different areas of the park, or use slides to let loose some pent-up energy.

A water park feature is also open during the spring and summer months, and in the winter, there's a free-to-use ice skating rink. Hideout Mountain is a great place to stop for a rest, picnic, or just to let kids run around. Scenic backdrops and plenty of shade mean parents will enjoy the stop as well.





JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

A Victor barn is decorated with a giant American flag in the days approaching the Fourth of July holiday. Please visit ravallirepublic.com for a list of Independence Day celebrations planned throughout the Bitterroot Valley.

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Whitetail Golf Course

The Whitetail Golf Course is nearly surrounded by the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge between Florence and Stevensville. It is a nine-hole course with more than 2,800 yards of fairway. The course has panoramic views of the Bitterroot and Sapphire mountain ranges. It also has cart and club rentals. Call 406-777-3636.

Kootenai Creek Trail

Kootenai Creek Trail dips back and forth along its namesake and is one of the more popular in-and-out hiking trails in the region. The creek has several small pools of water along the way, making Kootenai Creek Trail a perfect fit to walk and stop to put your feet in the water before heading back to the trailhead.

The trail ends at the Kootenai Lakes, nine miles in, but the journey there is spectacular. Walk as much as you like. The last six miles get steeper.

To get to the trailhead, take Kootenai Creek Road west from U.S. Highway 93 south of Florence, just before the cutoff to Stevensville. Go up the road two miles to reach the start of the Kootenai Creek Trail. Ranger stations have maps of other hikes in the Bitterroot.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Fisherman soak up the tail end of the season along the Bitterroot River near Bell Crossing fishing access site on Tuesday, Oct. 15.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

A group of recreationists fish the Bitterroot River near Hamilton on Tuesday, June 24.

Threemile Wildlife Management Area

The Threemile Wildlife Management Area sits east of Florence. It contains nearly 6,500 acres of natural habitat for everything from elk and deer to grouse and black bears. It's a popular spot for hunting and wildlife observation in the Bitterroot.

Threemile is open from May 15 until the start of December. It is an excellent place for hiking, biking, or horseback riding, and of course, nature and bird watching. It is also a great place to camp or to set up a quick picnic. Just remember, if you pack it in, pack it out. Hunting is allowed in the Threemile Area, which also has limited access for two-wheel drive vehicles when the weather is dry.

To reach the Threemile Wildlife Management Area, take the Eastside Highway from Florence for 6 miles, before turning onto Threemile Creek Road. Call 406-542-5500 or visit fwp.mt.gov for more information.

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Stevensville



The crew at Bitterroot Springs Ranch outside of Stevensville bails up their last alfalfa field of the season.
JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

The town of Stevensville lies along the sparkling Bitterroot River, tucked between the beautiful Bitterroot and Sapphire mountains, and bordered by the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. It abounds with hiking and biking trails for all ages and abilities, plus fishing, floating, wildlife viewing, golf and fun activities for kids.

The community hosts frequent festivals and activities, especially through the summer, bursting with friendly, small town charm. Enjoy ice cream at the local soda fountain, your choice of delicious restaurants from fine dining to family fare, outstanding micro-breweries, libation establishments, and many unique shops featuring local art, gifts, furnishings, foods, and everyday items.

As Montana's first pioneer settlement, Stevensville is noted for the state's first grain crops, first grist and saw mills, first raised cattle and pigs, the first water right, and the first registered marriage. The area's earliest inhabitants, the Bitterroot Salish tribe, lived here for thousands of years and continue to honor the entire Bitterroot Valley as their homeland. Whether this is your first visit, or you live here, every day in and around Stevensville offers a chance for a "first" — what is yours?

For more information and event details, visit www.mainstreetstevensville.com or call 406-777-3773.

St. Mary's Mission and Living History Center

St. Mary's Mission is likely the most historic location in all of the Bitterroot. Its extraordinary story began with repeated trips made by the Salish and Nez Perce tribal members to invite "Black Robe" missionaries from St. Louis. In response, Fr. Pierre DeSmet and his fellow missionaries founded St. Mary's

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Larry Weeks plays bird calls as bird-watchers take turns looking through a spotting scope at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Mission in 1841. Fr. Anthony Ravalli arrived in 1845 and is the namesake of our county. Experience living history at St. Mary's Mission. Guided tours are available 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. until mid-October, Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, visit saintmarysmission.org or call 406-777-5734.

Fort Owen State Park

The original site of St. Mary's Mission was sold in 1850 to John Owen, who developed it as Fort Owen. At present day Fort Owen State Park, you can imagine a bustling trading post as you view interpretive displays and remnants of the original adobe and log fort. The site now contains period furnishings and artifacts that have been put on display in the restored east barracks. In 1863, the town's first store was built. Stevensville is named after Isaac Stevens, who had been the governor of the Washington Territory at the time. Fort Owen is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. Fort Owen State Park is located just north of Stevensville. Call 406-542-5500 or visit stateparks.mt.gov/fort-owen for more information.

Bitterroot Trail

The Bitterroot Trail is a 50-mile paved path that connects Missoula and Hamilton — and the quaint towns along the way — following U.S. Highway 93 and the rugged Bitterroot Mountains. A paved path connects downtown Stevensville with the Bitterroot Trail, beginning at Veterans Park and following the Stevensville Cut-Off Road 1.5 miles northwest to U.S. Highway 93.

Stevensville Historical Museum

Photographs, artifacts and displays illustrate the unique history of Stevensville and the surrounding area. Learn about the early history of the Bitterroot Salish tribe's homeland, Lewis & Clark's journey, Fort Owen, local schools, the historic Creamery Picnic, and the era of the Apple Boom. For details, visit StevensvilleMuseum.com.

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

For walking on developed nature trails, birding, biking, and wildlife viewing, visit the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge right on the edge of Stevensville. The Refuge is home to diverse wildlife from warblers to wapiti.

Established in 1963 for the management of migratory birds and focused on waterfowl and waterbirds, the refuge hosts more than 235 species of birds, 37 species of mammals, and 17 species of reptiles and amphibians.

Abundant opportunities to observe and photograph wildlife, learn about native and managed habitats, hike, hunt, and fish are available at the refuge and its visitor center.

For information about the refuge and updated events, time and dates visit www.fws.gov/refuge/lee_metcalf.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Kids keep cool at the Trout Sprout Splash Pad at Lewis and Clark Park in Stevensville.



A young girl rides through the bowls at the skate park in Stevensville.
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Lewis & Clark Park

Lewis & Clark Park, on 2nd Street two blocks from Main Street, features the town's swimming pool, picnic tables and shelters, the Bear Mountain playground, a splash pad and skate park. For details, visit TownofStevensville.com/parksrec.

North Valley Public Library

The North Valley Public Library opened in 1904 as a public library. The library offers a variety of programs including story time, crafting, role playing games and educational events for adults and children.

The library is located at 208 Main St in Stevensville. They are open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the first, third, fifth Saturdays of the month. For more information go to northvalleylibrary.org.

Stevensville Playhouse

Stevensville Playhouse is a community theater located at 319 Main St. in Stevensville.

The Stevensville Playhouse 2026 lineup includes "A Rock Sails By," Feb. 6-15; "Moana Jr." May 1-17; "Coal Country" June 26-28; "The Shark Is Broken" Oct. 9-18; "Every Little Crook and Nanny" Dec. 11-20.

To purchase tickets or for more information visit stevensvilleplayhouse.org.

First Fridays in Downtown Stevensville

The First Friday Art Walk Series runs from May through October and is on the First Friday of every month. Businesses sign up to host an artist and the artist displays their work and can sell their work and is only required to actively be performing their talent and invite friends, family and followers of their work. There is music and food and fun at this family friendly event. Stores and Restaurants are open late and ready to welcome First Friday visitors. For more information call 406-777-3773 or visit mainstreetstevensville.com.

Stevensville Farmers Market

Every Saturday from May through the second weekend in October (weather permitting) 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on 3rd Street adjacent to Main Street. Local food and art producers set up tables and booths to sell their wares.

Wandering the farmers market is a great way to see the people, grab a quick lunch, and take home a memento of what makes the town unique.



Scarecrows of all kinds line the streets of Stevensville for the annual fall Scarecrow Festival.
JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Scarecrow Festival

Beginning the First Friday in October, the annual Scarecrow Festival is a premier art event — and tons of fun! Families, businesses, and organizations create scarecrows that line Main Street. Visitors of all ages vote for their favorites.

Kids also enjoy a straw bale maze, bouncy houses, and a pumpkin decorating contest. Saturday afternoon and evening, "big kids" enjoy Oktoberfest featuring local brews and music. Scarecrows are kept on display for a week. For details, visit StevensvilleMT.org.

Stevensville Creamery Picnic

The Creamery Picnic, held the first weekend in August, is one of Stevensville's biggest celebrations of the year.

In 1907 a group of local dairymen formed a cooperative creamery in Stevensville. When a fire destroyed the creamery in June of 1911, manager John Howe vowed that if the community could rebuild the business within 30 days he would host the biggest celebration the town had ever seen.

The town rebuilt the creamery in 39 days, barely missing the deadline, but Howe stayed true to his word and held the first Stevensville Creamery Picnic. The tradition is carried on today by the local civic club as a reminder of Stevensville's heritage.

The event features the county's annual firefighter games, pig wrestling, live music, a street dance, parade, beer garden and vendors selling food, drink and handcrafted local wares. There are activities for kids including bouncy houses, firefighter "keg" challenge and a kiddie parade.

For more information please visit creamerypicnic.com.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Eight-year-old Logan White and his little brother Dane, 5, of Stevensville, spray people with squirt guns during the Creamery Picnic Kiddie Parade down Main Street in Stevensville.

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A group of bighorn rams gather along the banks of the East Fork river near Sula.
JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Victor

The town of Victor, originally named Garfield after President James Garfield, changed it's name in December of 1881 to honor Chief Victor of the Bitterroot Salish tribe. The new name came when the town attempted to establish a post office only to find the name Garfield was already taken.

The town was founded in part by A.S. Blake and his Native American wife, who came to the area in the 1860s. Blake was later elected the first state legislator of Missoula County, a part of which would later become Ravalli County.

In any direction from Victor, there is something to do, from a horseback and hiking trails, to river access and more. Visit the Victor Heritage Museum, stop by a farmers market, or stay at one of the many lodges and bed and breakfasts near the town.

Victor Heritage Museum

The Victor Heritage Museum is located in a building at the corner of Blake and Main that had once been the Victor train depot. Originally built in 1928, it was moved to its current location in 1990. It now houses the history of the region told through artifacts of Native Americans, the railroad, churches and agriculture.

The museum gives a tangible look at what the lives if the people who had lived in the area were like, from school to the mines, ranching to the expansion of the telegraph lines. A gift shop sells books that were written about the history of the area and in some cases penned by its inhabitants. This includes the Bitter Root Trails series, chronicling the history of area pioneer families.

Open Memorial day through Labor Day, from 1-4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The annual Ice Cream Social will be held the end of August and the Chocolate Tasting Party and Silent Auction will be the first Monday in December. More information can be found online at victorheritagemuseum.org or by calling 406-642-3997.

Victor Days

Looking for a fun filled family event to attend? Victor Days, Aug. 7-8, is a fun-filled, two-day event full of family activities. Victor Park, one block off U.S. Highway 93, will be filled with a vendor market, live music, face painting, food vendors, beer gardens, bouncy houses, miniature RC races, stick horse races and more. The event will also feature a classic car show this year. For more information go to www.MtVictorDays.com

Highway 93 Bike Path

A paved bicycle path connects Hamilton to Missoula in a 45-mile stretch that runs along Highway 93. The bike path is relatively new and is kept in great shape.

The path is a smooth ride for anyone who prefers road bikes over mountain bikes. The Eastside Highway that connects Florence to Hamilton is another fantastic option for seeing the Bitterroot on a bike. Ride through the valley, experiencing the rugged peaks of the Bitterroot Mountains, the serene waters of the Bitterroot River, or the rolling fields and hills to the east.

Make a full day of it and head from one end to the other, stopping in towns like Florence and Victor along the way. During the summer in particular, dozens of bikers take to the path each day to enjoy being outdoors in the Bitterroot.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Arrowleaf balsamroot blooms in the Eight Mile Creek area near Florence on a blue-bird Tuesday afternoon while snow caps Carlton Ridge in the background.

Local bike stores are a great place to get more information or to inquire about renting bikes. Contact Chad DeVall at Red Barn Bicycles 406-363-2662 or Randy Leavell at Valley Bicycles & Ski 406-363-4428 both in Hamilton.

Lifeline Farm

Lifeline Farm in Victor is an organic and biodynamic dairy with a herd of about 350, dual purpose (beef and dairy), Brown Swiss, cows, calves, heifers, steers and bulls. Started in 1978, the dairy was added in 1980. All milk produced is used to make cheese, bottled milk and butter at their Creamery.

Lifeline's dairy products, grass-fed beef, sausages and "whey good" pork can be found at various locations throughout the state. Farm tours can be arranged by calling ahead. Lifeline's Creamery and Farm Store is located at 2427 Meridian Rd. in Victor. Call 406-642-9717 or visit lifelinefarm.com.

Rocking L Alpacas

Tour an alpaca farm at the Rocking L Ranch, located just off the highway between Victor and Hamilton. With more than 30 alpacas, the Rocking L is a great place to bring kids to learn about these unique animals.

Alpacas, South American animals that look similar to a small llama, are friendly creatures whose fleece is used in the textile in particular as a popular fabric similar to wool.

To reach the Rocking L Ranch, turn west off Highway 93 at mile marker 56 (Bear Creek Road) and go down the road about two miles to Red Crow Rd. Call 406-642-3085 for more details, or see the Rocking L Alpacas Facebook page.

Bear Creek Overlook Trail

The Bear Creek Overlook Trail southwest of Victor provides scenery that is unforgettable, especially in the summer. The views of the Bear Creek drainage and the Bitterroot Mountains should not be missed.

The 2.8-mile round-trip has a slight elevation gain but with only a moderate degree of difficulty, it's a good choice for a simple day hike.

To get to the trailhead, take Bear Creek Road west from Highway 93 a few miles south of Victor. Turn north at Red Crow Road and continue until heading west on Pleasant View Drive. Almost four miles down Pleasant View, look for the marked junction with forest road 1325, which ends at the trailhead.

Stop into a ranger station for maps and other hikes. The Bear Creek Trail in the same area is another good pick for a day hike, or for the more adventurous, there is the four-mile hike to the summit and fire lookout at St. Mary's peak.

Sweathouse Creek Climbing

The Bitterroot is quite a destination for rock climbers in the area. Sweathouse Creek west of Victor is no exception, containing dozens of large rocks perfect for short boulder routes.

To get to Sweathouse Creek, go west on 5th Street in Victor. When the street hits a junction, take a right, then turn on to Sweathouse Creek road and follow it to a designated parking area.

Lost Horse Canyon south of Hamilton, as well as Blodgett, Kootenai and Mill Creek canyons are also very popular for their climbing. Whether testing your own limits or just watching others chalk up and hold on, these climber favorites are worth the trip.

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Corvallis

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

A cow moose forages in a pond at Teller Wildlife Refuge in Corvallis. The refuge supports many species of wildlife that call the Bitterroot Valley home. The 1,300-acre refuge also offers numerous educational opportunities including field trips, summer camps and the popular Youth Expo.

Corvallis was first settled by Elijah and Margaret Chaffin, who named the area Chaffinville. Explorer John Mullan had previously used an area near Corvallis as a location for a winter base. The town was later renamed Corvallis after a town in Oregon in 1866.

Corvallis has a long history in agriculture, with some of the most fertile land in the region, and is home to the Western Montana Agricultural Research Center. Numerous old farmhouses dot the roadside of the Eastside Highway.

The town of Corvallis is home to the Teller Wildlife Refuge, which sits along four miles of the Bitterroot River. Head north out of town for a chance at seeing wildlife, or grab a quick meal at the Wild Mare.

Drive the Eastside Highway

If you are approaching Corvallis from the north, you have already seen the stunning landscape. If you are coming up from the south, you're in for a treat. The Eastside Highway offers some of the best views in the Bitterroot. It's worth turning off the highway if you are in the area to sightsee.

Prior to the construction of U.S. Highway 93, Eastside Highway was the main road between Hamilton and Florence.

Turn off in Florence or in Hamilton to experience the majesty. A number of historic locations and buildings, listed in the National Registry of Historic Places, dot the landscape, including St. Mary's Mission, the Brooks Hotel, Fort Owen and Tammany Castle, which was once the stables of Marcus Daly.

Teller Wildlife Refuge

In the heart of Western Montana's Bitterroot Valley, near the small town of Corvallis, lies the Teller Wildlife Refuge, a 1,300 acre river bottom and farmland dedicated to conservation, education, and recreation. Teller, encompassing a three-mile stretch of the Bitterroot River, provides habitat for wildlife, a veritable outdoor classroom for visitors of all ages, and diverse recreation opportunities. The Teller Trail is located at the north end of the Woodside Fishing Access. The 1.5 mile trail is open to the public year round.

Fishing Around Corvallis

There are ample fishing opportunities in the Bitterroot River. Woodside Bridge, just west of Corvallis, is one of the favorite places to put in or fish. Another is north of town at Tucker Crossing. Fishing shops can give maps of the area with special recommendations on the best fishing spots.



Willow Creek #300 Hiking Trail

A great hike in the Corvallis area is the Willow Creek #300 trail east of Corvallis.

The 3.5-mile trail starts as an old jeep road and follows along the side of the creek. It goes past cliffs and rock spires, making it great for photography buffs. It's also right in the middle of the Rocky Mountain goat habitat.

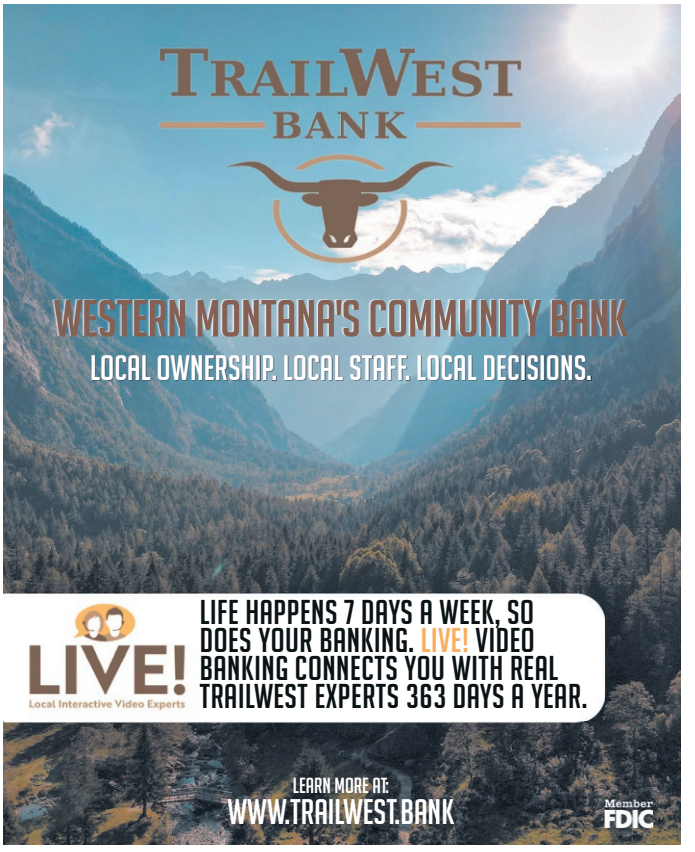
The trail is located at the Willow Creek trailhead. To reach it, take Willow Creek Road east from Corvallis and travel for 11 miles to the first switchback and the trailhead. Stop by a ranger station for maps or suggestions for more day hikes in the area.

Swanson's Mountain View Apple Orchards

The Swanson's Mountain View Apple Orchards, just northeast of town, connect visitors with the tradition and history of the Bitterroot Valley and its apples, as well as making some very tasty cider that is for sale.

During the apple season, usually running from August until December, the orchard is open from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. seven days a week, and is open to the public to see all of the process behind making the cider. Visitors can view everything from picking and grading the apples to the actual pressing and bottling of the apple cider.

If you are planning on stopping by, call ahead at 406-961-3434 to make sure someone will be there to greet you when you arrive. More information can be found at Swanson's Mountain View Orchard's Facebook page.



Hamilton



Crowds gather at the Ravalli County Fairgrounds in Hamilton for the annual Fourth of July fireworks display.
JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Hamilton is the largest town in the Bitterroot Valley and the hub of its activities.

In the early 1890s, Marcus Daly, who made a fortune in copper mining in Butte, brought in two town planners to lay out what would become the town of Hamilton. The town was named after one of the planners, James Hamilton. The other planner, Robert O'Hara, became the town's first mayor.

In 1886, the mining magnate purchased the Anthony Chaffin homestead and had it remodeled by the time Montana became a state in 1889. The mansion's grounds are the setting for several events during the year as well as being open for tours.

Hamilton holds events all year round, but their frequency and size ramp up during the summer. The Ravalli County Fair brings in more than 20,000 people each year. Hamilton has a lively downtown, a strong arts community, and is the perfect jumping off point for a trip in the Bitterroot.

Blodgett Canyon

Blodgett Canyon is one of the most picturesque areas of the Bitterroot. To get a great view of it and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, hike the three-mile round trip Blodgett Overlook Trail. Blodgett Canyon is often referred to as Montana's Yosemite.

To get to the trailhead, go west on Main Street in Hamilton past where it becomes West Bridge Road. Turn left of Blodgett Camp Road and look for the signs for the Canyon Creek Trailhead.

Bitterroot Public Library

Since 1903, the Bitterroot Public Library has been dedicated to providing materials, services, programs, and technology to meet the needs and interests of the community. The current library was built in 1916 and was one of the 17 Carnegie libraries built in Montana. The building was expanded in 1988 to serve the growing community of Hamilton and its surroundings.

The library provides WiFi, public access computers, printing, copying and the ability to scan or fax documents. Two meeting rooms are available to reserve for groups and individuals. The library offers many programs including children's story times, after school kids' programs, book clubs, movie nights, take home kits, and craft classes. All events at the library are free.

The Bitterroot Public Library is located at 306 State St. in Hamilton. They are open 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. They are closed on Sunday.

For more information please visit bitterrootpubliclibrary.org.

Bitter Root Humane Association

The nonprofit Bitter Root Humane Association (BRHA) is a no-kill shelter providing homes for abandoned animals, and promoting population control. It is the sole animal shelter in the Bitterroot Valley, providing caring, compassionate shelter and enrichment for homeless companion animals.

The shelter works to reunite lost pets and owners, find loving lifelong homes for pets and advocate for all animals. They are located at 262 Fairgrounds Road in Hamilton.

For more information call 406-363-5311 or visit bitterroothumane.org.

Circle 13 Skatepark

Constructed in the fall of 2018, the Circle 13 Skatepark is a wonderful addition to Claudia Driscoll Park, located at 200 N 10th Street in Hamilton. The park provides a healthy, active space for skaters of all ages and abilities. Located next to a playground, picnic tables, and open space, it's a great space for families.

Ravalli County Museum & Historical Society

The Ravalli County Museum in Hamilton contains many exhibits featuring local history and beyond. The Ravalli County Museum has a three tiered focus of art, local history and natural history. There are a total of twenty-eight galleries and chambers. Nine are exhibition rooms, with six permanent displays that are created from the Museum's extensive collections.

The building that houses the museum was was designed by Montana architect A.J. Gibson in 1900 and served as the county courthouse until 1979. The brick building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Signature events include Ernst Peterson Photo Contest, Bitter Root Day, McIntosh Apple Day, Liquid Cider Night, Ghost Tours: Paranormal Investigations, Veteran's Day Ceremony, Gallery of Trees and A Cowboy Christmas.

For more information visit ravallimuseum.org.



MICHELLE MCCONNAHA, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

The Bitterroot Public Library was built in 1916 as one of the 17 Carnegie libraries built in Montana and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.





Salish dancers perform on the lawn of the Ravalli County Museum during the annual Bitter Root Day celebration on Saturday, June 8, in Hamilton. The Bitterroot Valley is the ancestral home of the Salish Tribe. The annual event is a celebration of the Montana state flower, the Bitterroot, as well as the Salish people and their culture.

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Bitter Root Day

Bitter Root Day, June 13, is a festival centered on the Montana state flower, the Bitter Root, and the Salish People — the indigenous tribe native to the Bitterroot Valley.

The Ravalli County Museum's Annual Bitter Root Day festival features arts, crafts and food vendors, live music, and a celebration of both the Bitterroot plant and the Salish People. Members of the Salish Tribe share their cultural heritage through authentic Salish drumming and dancing.

Apple Blossom Night takes place later in the evening on June 14 from 5-9 p.m. Enjoy an evening of live music, food trucks and plenty of locally sourced hard apple cider (and hopefully beer as well!) on the museum lawn. Gather your friends and family to welcome spring with delicious cider. Everyone is welcome, must be 21 years or older to drink ciders.

For more information visit ravallimuseum.org.

McIntosh Apple Day

McIntosh Apple Day, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., on Oct. 3 is called the Biggest Bake Sale Under the Big Sky and features produce from local farmers as well as food arts and crafts from around the Bitterroot and beyond. Highlights include a bake sale including more than 600 made-from-scratch apple pies, apple butter, apple chutney, caramel apples, apple cider, and fresh apples.

Liquid Apple Night, from 5-9 p.m. on Oct. 3, is the relaxing and refreshing evening under the stars to close out Apple Day. Sample delicious hard cider created by cider makers from the Rocky Mountain northwest, while enjoying local food and music. You must be 21 or older to participate. This is a ticketed event.

For more information visit ravallimuseum.org.

Daly Mansion

In 1886, Marcus Daly, an Irish immigrant turned mining Copper King, bought a homestead and built a home for him and his wife just east of Hamilton. The mansion was part of Daly's 22,000 acre Bitter Root Stock Farm.

After Daly's death, his wife Margaret renovated the mansion, with the help of famed Montana architect A.J. Gibson, to its present Georgian-Revival style. The 24,000 square foot, three story mansion has 25 bedrooms, 15 bathrooms and seven fireplaces. The house was boarded up when Mrs. Daly died in 1941, but was reopened to the public in 1987 after more than $2 million of renovation work was done to the property and grounds.

An arboretum and garden houses more than 400 trees over 26 acres of land. The mansion and grounds now serve as an educational and cultural hub for the preservation of one of Montana's biggest names.

Tours of the Daly Mansion, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, are available and the historic grounds are regularly used for community events such as the Bitterroot Celtic Games and Gathering, Bitterroot Brewfest and Daly Days.

For more information visit dalymansion.org.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Vendors lined the streets surrounding the Ravalli County Museum on Saturday, Oct. 5 during the 45th annual McIntosh Apple Day celebration in Hamilton.

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks will return to Hamilton this summer on Saturday, August 29, with their performance of "The Merchant of Venice." The performance will take place at at 5 p.m. on the lawn at Sapphire Lutheran Homes, so make sure to bring a a lawn chair or blanket. This performance is free and open to the public.

The Merchant of Venice explores justice, mercy, prejudice, and the longing to belong in a divided world. As Bassanio seeks Portia's hand and Antonio enters a dangerous bond with Shylock, the young Jessica risks everything to leave her father's house in search of love and freedom. Through romance and courtroom drama, Shakespeare examines the cost of exclusion and the transformative power of mercy.

Sapphire Lutheran Homes is located at 501 North Tenth Street in Hamilton. Call 406-363-2800 or visit sapphirelutheran.org for more information.

Hamilton Playhouse

For many community members the summer is only complete if it includes a high quality production by the Hamilton Players in their 168-seat intimate community theater. With their mission of "Putting the spotlight on education, inspiration, and community through the performing arts" the playhouse has two full-length summer productions, camps and workshops for kids.

The Hamilton Players' 2026 season includes performances of "My Fair Lady" Feb. 13 through March 1; "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" June 12-28; "Greater Tuna" Aug 21-30; "Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella" Youth Edition, November 13-22.

For more information go to hamiltonplayers.com.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Bitterroot Valley residents dance to the sounds of the Big Sky Mudflaps on Main Street in Hamilton on Saturday during the Rhythm & Roam music festival.

Rhythm & Roam

Rhythm & Roam will take over downtown Hamilton on Saturday, June 27, and you don't want to miss it! Main Street will be closed to traffic for maximum fun. Hamilton's Main Steet will be packed with live bands, wiener dog and Big Wheel races, food trucks, chalk art, street vendors, sidewalk sales, family fun and more.

Mark your calendars, grab your crew, and get ready to shop, eat, dance and celebrate summer in the Bitterroot like never before.

For more information visit https://rhythmandroam.visithamiltonmt.org/



Bitterroot Aquatic Center

Bitterroot Aquatic Center is a year-round facility, providing fitness classes, competition, water safety and recreational opportunities. Bitterroot Aquatic Center is at 59 Kurtz Lane in Hamilton.

For more information and an up-to-date schedule visit www.bitterrootaquaticcenter@yahoo.com or call 375-8200.

31st annual Bitterroot Brewfest

The Bitterroot Chamber of Commerce will hold its annual fundraising event, Bitterroot Brewfest, on July 25 at the Daly Mansion from 3-9 p.m. Attendees can expect a wide array of breweries showcasing their finest creations, ranging from hop-forward IPAs to rich and malty stouts.

The event also offers a unique opportunity to engage with local brewers and learn about their brewing techniques and inspirations. Whether you're a seasoned beer connoisseur or just starting to explore the world of craft beer, the Bitterroot Brewfest promises an unforgettable experience filled with great flavors and camaraderie.

Live music is provided. Beyond the stellar beer selection, the Bitterroot Brewfest offers much more than just libations. Live music sets the stage, creating a lively ambiance and adding to the festive spirit of the event.

Local food vendors serve up a mouthwatering variety of bites, perfectly paired with the diverse beer offerings. The event coincides with the annual Daly Days celebration.

More information can be found online at bitterrootchamber.com or call 406-363-2400.

Bitterroot Celtic Games and Gathering

The annual Bitterroot Celtic Games and Gathering bring together Celtic musicians, athletes, dancers, clans, friends and families at the historic Daly Mansion in Hamilton Aug. 15 and 16.

BCGG is the largest sanctioned Highland Athletic Competition in Montana with kilted athletes from across the region. Contests include caber toss, sheaf toss, weight over bar and weight for distance, hammer toss, and stone put.

Live music and dance will be presented throughout both days on two stages, while bagpipes and drums play at every corner of the mansion grounds throughout the weekend.

Vendors sell Celtic-oriented items such as jewelry, clothing, gifts and decor. The Bitterroot Celtic Society will have souvenirs and gifts featuring BCGG commemorative items. Plenty of food and drink is also available from festival vendors. The event includes ticketed Scotch versus Irish whiskey tasting sessions, along with beer and mead from local breweries for sale.

For more information about the Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering visit bcgg.org.

Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival

The 17th annual Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival, 10 miles south of Hamilton, takes place July 24-26. This will be the festival's last year according to organizers Mike and Tari Conway. This year's festival features 12 bands including the Johnny Campbell Band, 93 North, Ladd Canyon Ramblers, Song Dog Serenade, Montana Standard and Pinegrass to name a few.

This festival is a family friendly event hosted on private land at the end of Forest Hill Road (424 Forest Hill Rd, Hamilton, MT 59840) about 15 minutes south of Hamilton. Food vendors on site. Bring your lawn chairs. Bluegrass Gospel on Sunday morning. All dogs must be on leash.

For more information call 406-821-3777 or visit hardtimesbluegrass.com.

Hamilton Farmers Market

The Hamilton Farmers Market operates from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Saturday, May to October, rain or shine. The market is located on Bedford Street and N. 2nd Street and N. 3rd Street in downtown Hamilton. Celebrate local farmers, ranchers, artisans and producers from Florence to



Local favorites Lochwood headlined the night's pickin' and grinnin' on the homemade stage at the 2023 Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival.

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC



Bagpipers form a circle as they get in tune in preparation for the day's festivities at the Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering on Saturday, Aug. 16, at the Daly Mansion in Hamilton.

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Sula, right here in Ravalli County.

The Hamilton Farmers Market Cooperative is committed to providing the community with fresh locally grown fruits, vegetables, meats, locally made foods, flowers and unique craftsmanship.

For more information please visit hamiltonfarmersmarket.org.

Ravalli County Fair

The Ravalli County Fair is the signature end of the summer celebration for the Bitterroot. It is also the largest annual event in the area, drawing in more than 20,000 people every year. The Ravalli County Fair will be held Sept. 2-5.

This real-deal, old-fashioned family-friendly fair is a showcase event for the strong agricultural 4-H programs in the valley, with barns and buildings filled with livestock projects. There is something for everyone at the fair, including carnival rides and food vendors, with sales going to benefit nonprofit organizations in the community. The fair features a large display of quilts, photography, baked and canned goods, arts and crafts, as well as a building filled with horticultural and floral displays.

On Friday and Saturday night, it's usually standing room only during the full gamut of rodeo events, which include a youth invitational, bull riding, team roping, and cowboy bronc rides. The rodeo is included in the gate fee for the fair. To make sure the event is as family-friendly as possible the fair is a dry event.

See https://ravalli.us/200/Fairgrounds for more details, or call 406-363-3411.

17th Annual
Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering
Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering
August
15th & 16th, 2026
Daly Mansion - Hamilton Montana
Tickets available on-line or at the gate.
www.bcgg.org

Darby



Bronc riders, barrel racers and bull riders from across the region lined up for two nights of fast-paced, high-stakes competition at the Twisted Nut Rodeo in Darby. The rodeo is an annual fundraiser to support the fight against testicular cancer.

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

The towns of the Darby, Sula and Conner occupy a region at the lower end of Ravalli County commonly called the South Valley area.

Darby contains some of the oldest buildings in the Bitterroot, including the museum, which was one of the first hand-hewn cabins built in the region. The quiet town of slightly less than 1,000 is also the home of the National Museum of Forest Service History.

Conner is a small community located off U.S. Highway 93 south of Darby, and sits on the edge of the Bitterroot National Forest. Trapper Peak, the highest peak in the Bitterroot Mountain range stands nearby, with a summit of 10,157 feet.

Sula is the place where the Lewis and Clark expedition first encountered the Native Salish tribe in 1805. The tribe outfitted the explorers with horses and helped guide them through the Bitterroot Mountains. Sula is named for the first white child born in the area, Ursula.

A painting by Charlie Russell of a view near Sula hangs in the Montana State Capitol Building.

The South Valley area has some of the best boating and fishing in the region, including Lake Como to the north and Painted Rocks State Park to the south. To the south is the Lost Trail ski hill and hot springs. Visit darbymt.net for more information.

Darby Farmers Market

Every Tuesday from May 30 through August 29, local growers bring their wares into town and set up for a farmer's market that lasts from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The farmer's market is the best way to grab local produce as well as handmade sweets and artistic goods. The Darby farmers market is located right in the center of town, in the park next to city hall on Main Street.

Darby Pioneer Memorial Museum

This pioneer museum houses home life and business artifacts of historic Darby, as well as early photos showing the history of Darby and its inhabitants.

The building that houses the museum was one of the first hand-hewn cabins in the area, originally built in 1886. In 1958, it was moved from its original location at Tin Cup to its current location in Darby. The museum contains photos of the cabin at its original location. It also has handwritten letters, deeds, and documents from schools and churches to give a glimpse into the everyday life of the Darby area's past.

The museum opens for the season on Memorial Day and remains open through Labor Day on a volunteer basis. It is located behind City Hall just off Main Street in Darby. Call for information at 406-821-3753.

Darby Community Public Library

The Darby Community Public Library, unique in its interior architecture with small diameter roundwood beams and trusses, is a hub for activities in the Southwest corner of the Bitterroot Valley. Along with the tradition book services, WiFi and free computer access, the Library has a free meeting room for group use and the library puts on several recurring community-wide events all year.

The library offers a weekly Preschool Storytime/Circle Time with songs, stories, felt board activities, and crafts for your preschooler, a Homeschool Meet-up and a recently renovated children's Discovery Room. The library also offers a Summer Reading Program where kids are encouraged to log their reading and enter for a variety of prizes. Each week throughout the summer (Tuesdays at 11:00 a.m.) there are activities and crafts based on a new theme each year.

The Darby Library also hosts a Book Club for teens and adults, along with a Drawing Group, Mah Jongg, Fiber Arts Group and Travel Series.

The library is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. They are closed on Monday and Sunday. The library is located at 101 S. Marshall Street in Darby.

Visit darbylibrary.net or call 406-821-4771 for more information.

Last Fridays in Darby

Enjoy art, local vendors, hometown pours and great music from 5-8 p.m. on the Last Friday of June through August in Darby's Main Street Park. To host a booth or sponsor the event, contact Darby Parks and Recreation at 925-405-2811.

Strawberry Days

Strawberry Days is an annual celebration and fundraiser hosted by the Darby Fire Department in Main Street Park with fresh strawberry shortcake, music and entertainment for all. Hosted on the third Saturday of July each year. All proceeds from the festival will go toward purchasing equipment for the fire department. Come out, have some fun, and help support your local volunteer firefighters.

Darby's Pocket Park

In 2017, the South Valley Civic Group worked with an artist to commission a bronze statue of Sacagawea to be placed in the new pocket park. The park is located in the center of town, and is a wonderful place to sit down and enjoy a break from strolling historic downtown Darby.

Darby Skate Park





Mikki Douglass from Cle Elum, Washington competes in the Darby Dog Derby at Lost Trail Pass.
PERRY BACKUS, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Constructed in spring 2017, this park is a great community resource. It is located behind the rodeo grounds and accessible from the Darby Trail. There is an annual Skate Park Jam in September for riders of all ages and abilities.

Darby Trail

For over 10 years, a group of local trail enthusiasts have worked to build a lovely loop trail in Darby. It follows the roads, winds down to the river, and up by the school, skatepark, and rodeo grounds. This 3.5 mile loop is a great way to take in the sights of Darby whether you run, walk, wheel, or skip. Maps available at Town Hall and other community businesses.

Darby Rodeo Association

The Darby Rodeo Association will host several events in one of the best rodeo arenas to get close to the action. The Richard Cromwell Memorial Rodeo Grounds is located on the west side of U.S. Highway 93, just north of Darby.

"Those horses buck around sometimes only about five feet from (spectators)," said Darby Rodeo Association president Cal Ruark.

The Broncs and Bulls are, of course, behind a fence, but the rodeo events never disappoint. Signature events include the Dutton Ranch Darby Xtreme Bareback Event June 6-7, Twisted Nut Rodeo July 10-11, Wild West Rodeo July 31-Aug. 1, First Annual Darby Sho' Down Barrel Race Aug. 21-22, Darby Xtreme Bulls Aug. 23, and Broncs, Bulls & Barrels Sept. 18-19.

The Darby Rodeo Association arena is also the home arena to the Ravalli County Jr Rodeo Club, the Bitterroot Valley Gymkhana Club.

To learn more, go to www.darbyrodeo.org, or look them up on Facebook.

Woodtick Music Festival

The Woodtick Music Festival will take place July 17-18 at a ranch two miles up Chaffin Creek Road in Darby, 1/4 mile past Crystal Brook Ranch.

Musicians include Marisa Anderson, Sand Duney, Sasha Bell, Miss Massive Snowflake, Les Duck, The Skurfs, Cass McCombs, Von Wildenhaus, Flask, Apocalipstick, The Gated Community, Ex-Cocaine and Bedeviled.

The festival will feature food trucks, vendors, on-site camping and more in a low-key setting. For more information on tickets, head to woodtickfest.com.

Painted Rocks State Park

Painted Rocks State Park on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River, offers boating and fishing opportunities with the Painted Rocks Reservoir.

The park is named for the colored lichen that covers the rocks walls, giving them green, yellow and orange hues. Bighorn Sheep can often be seen on the cliffs surrounding the park. There are also 25 campsites, with fire pits and picnic tables, offering an ideal place for both swimming and overnight stays.

To get to Painted Rocks, take the West Fork Road from Highway 93, north of Conner. More information can be found online at stateparks.mt.gov/painted-rocks or by calling 406-273-4253.

Lake Como Recreation Area

The Lake Como Recreation Area is the most popular outdoor spot in the Bitterroot area. Lake Como features beaches with roped off swimming areas, and a boat launch and picnic area. It also has the Rock Creek Trailhead, with several hiking trails available. Snow-covered mountains, whose melt off feeds the lake, rise up sharply at the end of the lake.

Camping options for overnight stay are available, including hookups for RVs. The historic Woods cabin, located on the lake shore, can be rented year round (call 1-877-444-6777 or visit recreation.gov).

Summer weekends are busy at Lake Como, with plenty of swimmers, motorboats and jet skis on the water. In the winter, Lake Como is a great place for snowshoeing and ice fishing,

and has several groomed cross country skiing tracks.

Lake Como is located four miles up the paved Lake Como Road off U.S. Highway 93 between Hamilton and Darby. From Memorial Day through Labor Day, all vehicles at Lake Como must have a recreation pass, which can be purchased at the recreation area. See fs.usda.gov/recarea/bitterroot/recreation for more information.

Lost Trail Powder Mountain

Spring and summer in the Bitterroot is beautiful, but it's during the winter when one of the real gems of the South Valley is available for use. Lost Trail Powder Mountain is south of Darby at the border between Montana and Idaho.

Named after the trail where Lewis and Clark became lost on the way to the Continental Divide, the ski hill has something for beginners and experts alike. The summit is 8,200 feet, the lodge is at 7,000 feet and the base is 6,400 feet. Five chairlifts and three rope tows provide easy access to the more than 60 marked trails on 1,800 acres of skiing terrain.

Lost Trail gets more than 300 inches of snow annually and is known in the area for its low ticket prices and short lift lines. With more than 50 marked trails from bunny hill to glades, a ski and boarding school for first timers, and equipment rentals, Lost Trail Powder Mountain is a perfect winter destination. Visit losttrail.com for details.

Lost Trail Hot Springs Resort

Lost Trail Hot Springs Resort south of Sula at the base of Lost Trail Pass provides lodging, dining and a natural, chemical-free outdoor hot springs swimming pool and hot tub. In the winter, the pool area is covered by a dome, so guests can continue to enjoy it at any time. During the winter, Chief Joseph Cross Country Trails just to the east provides more than 25 miles of groomed trail and the hot springs, as well as snowmobile routes.



Bryan Dufresne prepares to land after taking a run through Darby's skatepark.
PERRY BACKUS, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Big Hole National Battlefield

The Big Hole National Battlefield is a bit of a journey, but worth it to see one of the most historic places in the state. To reach the Big Hole National Battlefield travel south from Darby to the Idaho border then head east in MT-43 for 17 miles.

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A Trapper Creek Job Corps crew makes its way to the next obstacle on the Trapper Creek Trail on the Bitterroot National Forest. Last year, the crew cleared over 120 miles of trail on the national forest.

PERRY BACKUS

Hiking in the Bitterroot Mountains

MICHAEL HOYT
for the Ravalli Republic

Over the past 15 years, I've hiked almost every trail in the Bitterroot Mountains and climbed to most of the mountain summits. Some of my favorite hikes include a couple of summits, a spectacular over-look into Wilderness, a couple of waterfalls, and a high mountain lake. I hope this taste of what the Bitterroot Mountains has to offer inspires others to want more.

Blodgett Creek Trail

This is one of the most visited canyons accessible from the Bitterroot Valley. Historically, this canyon and Blodgett Pass were used by tappers to gain admittance to the Idaho side of the Bitterroot Mountain crest. In modern times, the canyon is visited most often by hikers, backpackers, equestrians, and people who ascend the many established traditional climbing routes on the cliff faces and spires that populate the north side of the canyon.

This trail is used year long. During the winter when the trail is sometimes covered with hard-packed snow and ice, those who need to get outdoors follow the trail on backcountry skis or snowshoes. When the late winter snowmelt begins and ice covers portions of the trail, hikers put ice cleats on their boots so they can use this popular trail.

This canyon is home to mountain goats. Although they may be spotted year round, during the winter when pushed down

from the heights by heavy snow, goats are often seen perched on narrow rock ledges high above the north side of the trail.

Trailhead

- In Hamilton MT, drive west on Main Street (out of the downtown area) until you reach the bridge over the Bitterroot River.
- Just past (west of) the bridge, turn right (north) onto Ricketts Road and drive for .5 miles.
- At the intersection (3-way stop), turn left (west) onto Blodgett Camp Road.
- Stay right at the intersection with FS 735 in about 2.5 miles. Continue for another 1.5 miles to the Blodgett Creek Trailhead and Campground area.

Trail Description

The trail (19) begins at the southwest corner of the parking area and climbs a small hill before heading west along the south side of Blodgett Creek. You can find the trailhead sign-in box and a granite memorial for Don Mackey, a Bitterroot Hotshot firefighter, along the trail a few hundred yards from the parking lot.

Approximately one mile from the trailhead is a pool formed by beavers, on the north side of the trail. There are a couple of places to pitch a tent here, but they are seldom used except for families with small children who are unwilling to hike farther. This small pool is a terrific destination to take little kids who like to play in shallow water under the watchful eyes of their parents.

As the trail progresses farther into the canyon, it passes three large spires on the north side of Blodgett Creek. The Flathead Buttress, Shoshone Spire, and Nez Perce Buttress have many traditional climbing routes established that attract technical climbers from far and wide.

Three miles from the trailhead, the tread crosses to the north side of Blodgett Creek on a well-built bridge that is kept in good condition by the Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen. Immediately after crossing the bridge there is a small camping area north of the trail. About one hundred yards farther along the trail is another spot, this time to the left (south), that can accommodate a few tents.

While near the bridge, look southwest, close to the top of the canyon ridge. You will see a stone arch. This large granite arch appears to be referred to by several different names. But the most common is the Horsehead Arch, simply because the arch looks like the head of a horse. Freestanding arches composed of granite are quite rare, and, as far as I know, this is the only one in the Bitterroot Mountains.

A small waterfall above a deep pool in the creek is about 4 miles from the trailhead. There is an open area above these falls that provides a good place to pitch tents. Less than a half a mile farther up the trail is a larger waterfall. If you happen to visit during the right time of year, the area near these two waterfalls is an excellent place to find huckleberries.

Slightly before reaching the seven-mile mark, the trail passes into official Wilderness; the Wilderness Boundary is farther from the mouth of Blodgett Canyon than is the case in most other Bitterroot Mountain canyons. There is a small campsite practically on the Wilderness Boundary.

Right before entering an open meadow, the results of a long-gone avalanche, is a good campsite in a small grove of trees close to the north side of the trail. It is so close to the seven-mile mark that this camp is called the 7-Mile Camp. I consider


PERRY BACKUS

it to be the best campsite along the Blodgett Creek Trail.

Nine and a half miles from the trailhead is another place to camp. It's referred to as the 9-Mile Camp. Not as nice as the 7-Mile Camp, it is still quite serviceable but closed to use by livestock.

The trail reaches another junction 10.1 miles from the trailhead. The less-used trail (19) on the left continues to Blodgett Lake. The right fork (310) climbs to Blodgett Pass. Following the trail to the pass provides access to Idaho and Big Sand Lake. From the pass it is possible to climb Blodgett Mountain. The moderate climbing route is described in Hikes and Climbs to Bitterroot Mountain Summits.

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After a particularly bad avalanche a few years ago almost demolished the trail to Blodgett Pass, the Forest Service rebuilt the trail and its switchbacks up to the pass. It remains a fairly steep climb. But I will point out that, if you visit at just the right time, you will find some of the largest huckleberries you have ever seen growing in the profusion of setbacks. Multiple stops to pick and eat along the way to the pass make the climb seem quite easy!

Saint Mary Peak

One of the most lofty in the Bitterroots, Saint Mary owns one of the most-easily-reached summits. Because it is so accessible and holds one of the Forest Service's still-operational fire lookout towers, Saint Mary may be the most-visited summit of all the Bitterroot Mountains.

Trailhead

- From Victor go north on US Hwy 93 for four miles to Indian Prairie Loop. Turn left (west) and travel 1.3 miles to St. Mary road. Turn right (north) and go for .5 miles, then turn left (west) onto FR 739.
- In less than a mile the road forks. Take the right (north) fork onto St. Mary Peak Road. Follow it for 10.3 miles to its end.
- You will pass a couple of unsigned turns before reaching the end. Stay to the left both times.
- The trailhead has restroom facilities and ample parking.

Trail Description

- Trail Length – 3.5 miles (one way)
- Effort Required – moderate
- Elevation Gain – 2,506'
- Appropriate Uses – hiking, horse-back riding, families

Although this is a comparatively short trail, there is enough elevation gain that many find hiking to the summit rather strenuous. Hiking at a slower pace keeps this trek pleasurable.

The trail (116) to the summit is well defined, maintained and heavily used.

The first portion of the extremely obvious trail consists of long, well-engineered switchbacks.

Just over a mile from the trailhead is a small spring a bit left (south) of the trail, a spot where you can replenish water supplies if necessary or simply rest on the bench for a few minutes.

The middle mile of the trail traverses to the west, close to the crest of the east ridge through a large area containing excellent specimens of ancient Whitebark Pine.

Continuing west, the trail moves away from the ridge crest as it completes a couple of long switchbacks before moving onto the crest of the ridge and turning north-northwest.

The trail makes several additional, short switchbacks, first

through closely spaced krummholz then onto open wind-swept scree and talus as it passes a distinctive rock outcrop on your right (northeast).

The trail makes one final switchback and turns southwest before reaching the fire lookout on the broad summit.

Sweathouse Creek Waterfalls

This trail receives heavy traffic during weekends. Because the trail has a gradual incline and is not long, it attracts families with small children.

Trailhead

- From Victor, MT, drive west on 5th Avenue.
- At the "T", turn right (north) onto Pleasant View Drive.
- Go about .5 mile then turn right (west) onto Sweathouse Creek Road.
- Follow the road 3 miles to the trailhead.

Trail Description

- Trail Length – 2.3 miles (one way)
- Effort Required – easy
- Elevation Gain – 1,379'
- Appropriate Uses – hiking, running, families with small children

This trail is an ideal place for a day-hike. The gradually inclined trail (121) offers plenty to see along the way. At the end of the trail are two picturesque waterfalls separated by one quarter mile of easy hiking. Families with young children could hardly ask for a better place to spend the day.

The initial portion of the trail goes directly west through a small rock quarry, still in use, before continuing along the north side of the creek to the northwest.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST

The St. Mary's Peak lookout initially was constructed on a pole foundation, but that was replaced with a stone base after the original "cap" – or structure – blew off in 1951 during a windstorm.

As the tread meanders along the stream, there is an abundance of wild-flowers to enjoy. When in season, Thimbleberries and Huckleberries are available for snacks.

The first and larger waterfall is 2.1 miles from the trailhead.

The second but wider waterfall is at the end of the useable trail, slightly less than one quarter mile above the first falls.

Both falls are picturesque and well worth visiting.

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PICASA

Bear Creek Overlook

Given the easy incline and the short length of this trail, I find it amazing it is not visited more often. The views from the area near the overlook are nothing short of stupendous!

Trailhead

- From Highway 93, turn west onto Bear Creek Road and drive 2.3 miles.
- Turn north (right) onto Red Crow Road and drive 2 miles.
- Turn left (west) onto Pleasant View Road and drive (through several 90-degree turns) for 1.8 miles to the end of the payment.
- Turn left (west) at the junction 2.25 miles from the end of the pavement onto FR 1325. This turn is not always marked, so pay close attention.
- Drive the last 3.6 miles to the trailhead at a Forest Service gate.
- Parking is limited so arrive early.

Trail Description

- Trail Length – 2.2 miles (one way)
- Effort Required – easy
- Elevation Gain – 1,170'
- Appropriate Uses – hiking, running, families with small children, mountain biking

This may be the Bitterroot Mountains best trail for families with small children. It is an easy trail to negotiate, there is plenty to see from the overlook, and, in season, a profusion of Huckleberries grows along the trail.

This is also a good trail for hiking with your low-land visitors and giving them that "wow" moment.

Mountain bikes are allowed on the trail all the way to the overlook.

The Bear Creek Overlook Trail is well engineered and the tread obvious.

The trail (126) begins on the uphill (west) side of the parking area by climbing steeply for 4 or 5 feet before beginning a gentle grade which is maintained all the way to the trail's end.

The tread passes through an open wood of Lodgepole Pine and Spruce.

During the spring and early summer months, there is a profusion of blooming wildflowers, some years including vast numbers of Beargrass blooms.

Despite the good condition of the trail, some people feel the need to cut the switchbacks. Such activities cause erosion: don't do it!

Just before reaching the overlook, the remains of an old log cabin lie beside the trail.

Western views from the overlook and nearby rock outcrops include both forks of Bear Creek and Sky Pilot.

Trapper Peak

Trapper Peak, at 10,157' the highest of the Bitterroot Mountains, is 11.7 miles (as the crow flies) south-southeast of Darby, Montana. This peak is probably the most well-known mountain in the Bitterroot Range.

Trailhead

- The trailhead is about 20 miles southwest (by road) from Darby, MT.
- To reach it, drive from the south side of Darby, MT, about 4 miles on Hwy 93 then turn right (west) onto Montana 473, also known as the West Fork Road.
- Continue on the West Fork Road to a point just past the 11-mile marker and turn right (north) onto FR 5630-A at Laverne Creek. There is a sign for Trapper Peak Trailhead at the road junction.
- In about .6 miles, stay left at the first junction (signed). Continue on switchbacks for 6.5 miles to the signed trailhead (trail 133).
- There are no restroom facilities, but parking for several vehicles is available.

Trail Description

- Trail Length – 4.2 Miles (one way)
- Effort Required – Moderate
- Elevation Gain – 3,794'
- Appropriate Uses – hiking

From the trailhead, hike north-northwest up the clearly defined trail through the open forest. The trail stays close to the crest of a long ridge which proceeds toward Trapper's summit plateau.

The terrain along the trail slopes gently down to the right (east) and more precipitously to the left (west) into Boulder Creek Canyon. In sev-eral places the trail is close enough to the edge (on the left) to provide some excellent views into the Boulder Creek drainage.

At around .4 miles from the trail-head the track turns more directly to the north, then meanders left and right of due north for the next 2.5 miles.

Near 8,800' the route turns northeast through an ever-thinning mixed forest of Whitebark Pine and Alpine Larch as it proceeds toward tree-line approximately .75 miles from the summit.

From tree-line to the base of the boulders near the summit, the trail is evident (thanks to the boots of many hikers) and well marked with cairns. Follow the track upward toward the west-northwest and the saddle just west of Point 9928 (East



PERRY BACKUS

Wilderness ranger Jack Ader looks out over Baker Lake toward Trapper Peak on a recent morning. In 2016, the Bitterroot National Forest banned campfires at two small lakes further up the mountain after people began cutting down old-growth Whitebark pine snags and green trees to feed their fires. Ader is seeing the same kind of damage occurring at the popular destination on the edge of the wilderness.

Trapper). Rather than go directly to the saddle, stay on the trail as it turns almost due west.

As you proceed, there is a gigantic boulder pile which, at first, appears to be the summit. It is not! To limit me-andering and lessen the amount of up and down climbing required to reach the summit, do the following: When you reach the boulder pile (a mix of boulders and talus), begin a climbing traverse along its left (south) side. Your path should gradually climb, just not too quickly.

There are many trails across the boulders marked with small cairns. Trying to follow them is a waste of time and energy as they take you too far right (north) and cause you to climb directly over the top of the pile—totally unnecessary.

Eventually, after you traverse far enough around the boulder pile, you will be able to see a shallow saddle and the summit just beyond. Change your direction-of-travel directly toward the saddle.

Once you reach the saddle, it is a short, easy climb up stable talus and boulders to the summit.

Descend by reversing this route to the Trapper Peak Trailhead.

Ravalli County Museum

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Housed in a historic courthouse, the Ravalli County Museum provides a venue to explore exhibits, participate in archival research, host programming and enrich the community through education and heritage events.



Bitter Root Day: June 13, 9am - 1pm
Our annual Bitter Root Day Festival features a vendor market, live music, and a celebration of both the Bitterroot plant and the Salish People. We invite members of the Salish Tribe to join us and share their cultural heritage through drumming and dancing.



Cowboy Music & Poetry: August 28, 4pm - 6pm
Join us to celebrate Cowboy Music and Poetry, a unique tradition in the West. These artists incorporate storytelling, humor, and nostalgia for the American West and its history through their craft.



McIntosh Apple Day: October 3, 9am - 3pm
Apple Day celebrates all things apple! A vendor market, fresh apple pies, caramel apples, apple butter, apple fritters, live music, free activities and more.



Liquid Apple Night: October 3, 5pm - 9pm
After all the fun of Apple Day, join us for a relaxing a refreshing hard cider fest under the stars! Sample delicious cider from local cider makers, grab dinner from a food truck and enjoy live music with family and friends.



Veteran's Day Program: November 11, 2pm
An annual Veteran's Day Ceremony & Program presented by the American Legion. All are welcome!



Victorian Christmas: December 10, 6:30pm
An enchanting evening of music, food, a special exhibit and decorations inspired by the Victorian Era. Feel free to don your best Victorian-inspired clothing for the event!

Bitter Root Valley Historical Society & Ravalli County Museum
205 Bedford St. Hamilton, MT 59840
www.ravallimuseum.org • 406.363.3338

MUSEUM

Camas Lakes

One of the most popular areas for hiking in the bitterroot Mountains is the cirque which contains Kidney Lake and the three Camas Lakes—Lower, Middle and Upper.

Camas Creek Trailhead

- Dive south from Hamilton for little over 9 miles.
- Turn right (west) into Lost Horse Road.
- Drive 2.4 miles to a posted junction with FR 496.
- Take the right fork (northwest) onto the gravel road and drive for 6.1 miles to the well-marked pull-off for the trailhead.
- There is ample parking but no restroom facility.

Trail Description

- Trail Length – 4.1 miles
- Effort Required – easy
- Elevation Gain – 2,162
- Appropriate uses – hiking, backpacking, horseback riding (to the lower lake), and families with small children, running

The Camas Cirque is a popular area for day hikers, backpackers, fishermen, and equestrians. The trail's tread is in particularly good shape between the trailhead and Lower Camas Lake.

From the trailhead, follow the well-worn Camas Lakes Trail (125) in a northerly direction. The trail crosses Hayes Creek about one quarter of a mile from the trailhead. This crossing cam be slightly treacherous during spring runoff, so be careful.

In just under a mile, after crossing the east face of the ridge, the trail turns sharply to the northwest and enters a much denser forest as it traverses along the north side of the ridge.

Approximately 2 miles from the trailhead, the track crosses two log bridges in a quick succession over two channels of Camas Creek. The footpath then begins a more rapid ascent including several switchbacks to lessen the impact. The incline of the trail lessens even more as it approaches the 2.5-mile mark.

About 2.8 miles from the trailhead, the track reaches Lower Camas Lake. Just east of the lake is a campsite large enough for several tents.

Although not official, there is an unmaintained trail around the north side of the lake which proceeds to Middle and Upper Camas Lakes.

If you desire more information about that trail and many others in the Bitterroot Mountains, the first and second volumes of "Bitterroot Mountain Trails" are always available at Chapter One Book Store in Hamilton and at Valley Drug and Variety in Stevensville.

Mountain weather can change rapidly, so it is a good idea to carry plenty of water, a few snacks, and an extra layer of clothing.

Enjoy the wildlife, wildflowers, and spectacular views during your visits to the Bitterroot Mountain Trails!



KURT WILSON, MISSOULIAN

"As you travel down the Bitterroot Valley, imagine the ice-age scene: a lake hundreds of feet deep lapping onto the base of the mountains on either side of the valley and icebergs breaking off from the glaciers flowing in the from the Bitterroots. "—excerpt from the Mountains on the Move: The Bitterroot and Sapphire Ranges marker. Trapper Peak, highest elevation in the Bitterroot Mountains south of Darby.



PHOTO BY PERRY BACKUS

A view of the Bitterroot Mountains from the Bear Creek Overlook.

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People of all ages gather at the Sapphire Lutheran Homes in Hamilton to enjoy a free concert in this 2018 file photo. The 2026 Sapphire Lutheran Homes free Summer Concert Series kicks off its 14th year at 6 p.m. on Friday, June 12th.

PERRY BACKUS, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Sapphire Lutheran Homes 14th annual Summer Concert Series



Sapphire Lutheran Homes will celebrate the summer of 2026 with their free 14th annual Summer Concert Series.

The Summer Concert Series is free and open to the public. Concerts will be held on the lawn of the Sapphire campus at 501 N.10th Street in Hamilton. There is plenty of room to spread out, so bring a lawn chair or blanket and enjoy the music.

Food trucks will be on site waiting to serve up some great food. There is a bounce house, face painting, miniature horses, popcorn, lemonade, snow cones, cotton candy, Bitter Root Humane Association dogs, baked goods, and more. There will be $1 raffles held at the concerts with great prizes. Free Ice cream will be served at intermission.

The music this season will feature bands with high energy and plenty of talent. It's a great opportunity to get out and gather as a community.

For 14 years the Sapphire Lutheran Homes has offered the community a free concert series in early summer. "It's been amazing in how well it's worked out," said the center's director, Cole Harden. "We support the idea that we and our residents are part of the community, not apart from it." Three generations of Barbara White's family enjoy the 2018 event in this file photo with her daughter-in-law Cheyenne White and her 4-year-old granddaughter, Hunter. **PERRY BACKUS, RAVALLI REPUBLIC**



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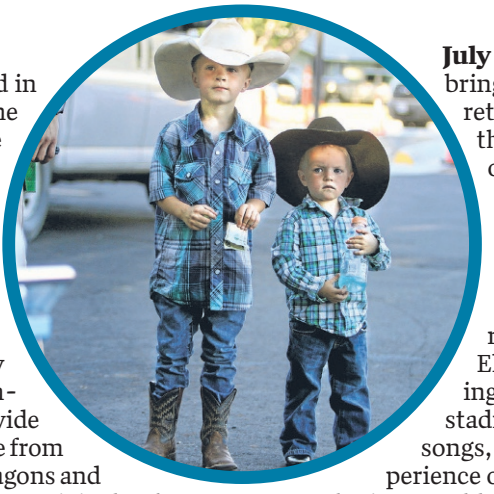
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The 2026 line-up includes:

June 12 at 6 p.m., Tightline — Based in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana, Tightline is a dynamic cover band spanning multiple genres including rock, jazz, country and Americana. Playing favorites from the 30s to the 2010s including artists such as the Beatles, Blondie, the Eagles, Linda Ronstadt, Carrie Underwood, ZZ Top, Journey, and Fleetwood Mac.

June 19 at 7 p.m., River City Rhythm Band — River City Rhythm, previously known as Zootown Music is a local Montana band that loves putting its spin on a wide variety of music. Playing covers that range from the Beatles to Johnny Cash to Imagine Dragons and just about anything in between; with some originals of their own sprinkled in.

June 26 at 7 p.m., J&A's Variety Show — The best hits of the 20th century. Step into a time capsule with J&A's Variety Show, a dynamic duo dedicated to celebrating the greatest music milestones of the 20th century. With a chemistry that sizzles and a repertoire that spans decades, Joshua and Andrea bring a fresh, high-energy perspective to songs that defined generations. Their performances aren't just covers, they are vibrant reinterpretations that honor the original artists while showcasing the duo's signature tight harmonies and charismatic stage presence.



July 3 at 7 p.m., Surf's Up — Surf's Up brings the sun-soaked harmonies and retro cool of America's band back to the stage. From high-energy surf rock of "Surfin' USA" to the symphonic beauty of "God Only Knows," they deliver the authentic sound with a precision and passion.

July 10 at 7 p.m., Elton Jones & The Jets — Elton Jones and the Jets resurrect the dazzling spectacle of Elton John's greatest ears, transporting audiences back to the golden age of stadium rock. They don't just play the songs, they deliver a full, high-energy experience of the Rocket Man himself. Anchored by impeccable live vocals and virtuosic piano, the show is powered by a tight band. It is a full-blown concert experience that brings the legend to life.

Sapphire Lutheran Homes is located at 501 North Tenth Street in Hamilton. These concerts are free and open to the public. Call 406-363-2800 or visit sapphirelutheran.org for more information.

ABOVE: Six-year-old Parker Wilkins and his 3-year-old brother, Luke, keep a close eye on the cotton candy machine at during a free community concert at Sapphire Lutheran Homes in this 2018 file photo. **PERRY BACKUS,** RAVALLI REPUBLIC



The Sapphire Lutheran Homes free Summer Concert Series kicks off its 14th year at 6 p.m. on Friday June 12th. Enjoy food from food trucks trucks, lemonade, popcorn and free ice cream at the intermission.

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