

Glacier National Park

Montana's Crown Jewel

If it were on the way to or from someplace, Glacier National Park would draw a lot more visitors. Still, two million people trek to this remote corner of the United States between mid-June and late September every year...to see some of the most magnificent mountain scenery in the world.

However, don't plan to see a lot of glaciers. There are 30 remaining in the park, but only one can be easily seen by the average visitor. Instead, make the trip in order to see what the glaciers have left behind: a landscape of carved mountainsides that seem to reach to the stratosphere.

And while you're in the area, stop in Great Falls to see the fascinating C.M. Russell Museum, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, and Giant Springs State Park.

Here, for your enjoyment, is a wonderful four-day guided tour of Glacier and Great Falls:

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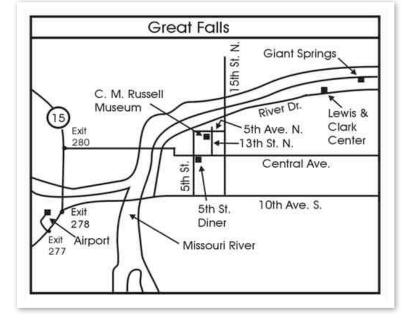
Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West

by the Authors of Seven Perfect Days in Colorado and Seven Perfect Days in Northern California

If you plan to fly into Montana, the logical point of entry is Great Falls. This is Montana's third largest city, but with 65,000 inhabitants and no building over eight stories high, Great Falls feels more like a smallish town in the Midwest. Nevertheless, it has some top-notch visitor attractions, which you shouldn't miss—especially if you have an interest in art and history.

Day One

Spend the morning at the **C.M. Russell Museum**. The museum has three components, all on the same



property: the art museum, Russell's Log Cabin Studio, and the Russell Home. (For directions and hours, see the map and "To Learn More," at the end of this issue.)

Who was Charles Marion Russell? He and Frederic Remington created the best-loved paintings and sculptures of the Old West. Of all Western artists, Russell (1864-1926) is renowned for having lived the scenes that he painted. From age 18 to 29, he worked as a nighttime cowboy not far from Great Falls, using his days to sketch what he saw. In 1893, he became a full-time artist and went on to produce approximately 4,000 works of art.



The art museum contains the largest collection of Charles Russell paintings and sculptures in the world. They are beautifully displayed on the walls and in glass cases in several large rooms on the main floor. Many of them depict cowboys at work, elk and other animals in their habitats, and plains Indians in action. Elsewhere on the main floor and on the lower level are Western-themed paintings, sculptures and other artwork by O.C. Seltzer, a contemporary of Russell's, Bob Scriver, an exceptional sculptor, and many other modern-day artists.

And there are interesting collections of rifles and conveyances (miniatures) that were used on the frontier.

Russell's Log Cabin Studio, built in 1903, is where he did most of his painting and sculpting. It looks as though he just got up from his easel to go study one of the beautiful Indian artifacts on display in the other room. Or, perhaps, he went next door for dinner.

Charlie married Nancy Cooper Russell in 1896, and together they built their two-story, four-bedroom frame house in 1900. Furnished with lovely period pieces, the home shows how a highly successful artist could live in those days. Nancy Russell was as much responsible for that success as Charlie; it was she who managed the business, set the prices, sold the artwork, and arranged Charlie's art exhibits around the country. The Russells adopted a son, Jack, in 1916.

The Russell Home and Log Cabin Studio were designated National Historic Landmarks by the National Park Service in 1966.

Next, head for the 5th Street Diner for lunch. It's at the corner of Central Ave. and 5th Street. The food is very good, and the fifties ambiance is even better: it has a black-and-white checkered floor, aqua booths, pink walls, and an original 65-foot-long F.W. Woolworth ice cream counter with chrome swivel stools.

Then spend a couple of hours at the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, and another hour enjoying the adjacent Giant Springs State Park.

If you have read Steven Ambrose's, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*, you'll relive that exciting period in American history. If you haven't read it, you'll find the Center fascinating and will resolve to buy the book.

Briefly: After President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, Lewis and Clark headed up the Missouri River with a crew of 28 to learn whether there was an all-water route to the Pacific Ocean, and to study the plants, animals and American Indian tribes along the way. After two and a half years and 8,000 miles (12,874 km) of exciting but difficult and hazardous discovery, they returned with stories and information that led to the settlement of America's West.

Right here, in Great Falls, Lewis and Clark conquered one of the major obstacles of their journey: five large waterfalls along a ten-mile stretch of the river, each of which blocked boat passage up the Missouri. It took them nearly a month to portage their boats and supplies around the falls.

In the Interpretive Center, you'll see a slide presentation and displays about the portage, as well as a Ken Burns movie that beautifully describes the entire Lewis and Clark adventure from St. Louis to Oregon and back. Also, there are many exhibits showing the discoveries that they made along the way.

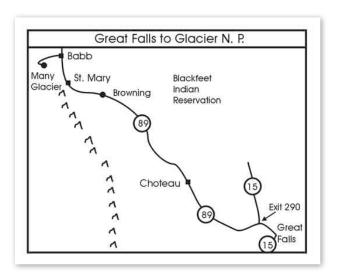
Giant Springs State Park is on the same bank of the Missouri River, one-half mile east of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, and is reachable by car or the paved River's Edge Trail. Discovered by Lewis, this natural phenomenon calmly bubbles 108 thousand gallons of crystal-clear water per minute, or 156 million gallons every day! Giant Springs creates the world's shortest river, the Roe, as its water exits into the Missouri just 201 feet away. The park is also the site of a state fish hatchery, which can be toured.

Day Two

Drive north on Highway 89 to Saint Mary, which is 150 miles (240 km), or about three hours, from Great Falls. Along the way, you will experience "Big Sky Country" (horizon-to-horizon views with virtually no trees or structures), vast rolling fields of grain and grazing land, gorgeous views of the Rocky Mountains well off to the West, and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation around the town of Browning.

If you arrive in **Saint Mary** about lunchtime, we suggest the **Park Café** for tasty and affordable food, but especially for their homemade pies. Another option is to purchase a box lunch from the Concierge Desk at the Many Glacier Hotel when you arrive there. While in Saint Mary, you may want to fill up your gas tank; there are no gas stations in Glacier National Park.

It's from Saint Mary that you'll enter Glacier National Park tomorrow morning to drive the Going-to-the-Sun Road. But for now, continue north eight miles (12.8 km) on Highway 89 to the town of Babb, where



you'll turn west, enter the Park, and drive 12 miles (19.3 km) to Many Glacier. The water on your left is five-mile-long Lake Sherburne, which is framed by a beautiful mountain backdrop.



Even more beautiful is the bowl of mountains surrounding Swiftcurrent Lake and the **Many Glacier Hotel**, your destination for this day.

Let's be clear: the star of the show at Many Glacier is the scenery, not the hotel. But if you know its strengths and weaknesses going in, you'll find the hotel to be full of character and old-fashioned charm, and a beautiful complement to the lake and surrounding mountains.

Built in 1915 by the Great Northern Railway, the hotel has the external appear-

ance of a Swiss chalet, a wonderful rustic lobby with a large fireplace, and 208 sleeping rooms, making it the largest lodging in the Glacier National Park area. Our strong suggestion is that you reserve early and request a lakeside room. The hotel's balcony view of **Swiftcurrent Lake** and the surrounding mountains is worth many times the cost, which is not really all that much. (If you are unable to get a reservation at the Many Glacier Hotel, or are on a strict budget, you might look into the **Swiftcurrent Motor Inn**, which is one mile from the hotel. The motor inn also has a camp store.)

But don't expect the Many Glacier to be a luxury hotel or resort. It is, after all, a lodge owned by the National Park Service, and they are not known for their swanky accommodations. There is no TV, and no cell phone coverage...so you *can* get away from it all. The rooms are sparsely furnished and not air conditioned, but you aren't going to spend much time there, and air conditioning is seldom needed at this altitude. The eating options are limited, but you'll find dinner in the **Ptarmagin Restaurant** to be quite good. Check out **Heidi's Snack Shop** for light fare. The entire facility is non-smoking.

Now, back to the scenery. One visitor remarked, "This has got to be one of the most beautiful and relaxing spots on earth." We totally agree. The view from a lakeside balcony or a restaurant window, at any time of the day, is nothing short of spectacular.

But that's not all there is. You can get up close and personal with the scenery by taking a hike. There are two choices in the immediate area; both can be accessed from the trailhead just south of the hotel.

We have two strong suggestions for this and the Two Medicine hike on Day Four: 1) carry bottled water or a full canteen, because the air is dry and you could quickly become dehydrated; and 2) make noise with occasional loud talking, clapping or ringing of a bell, to warn any bears in the area of your presence so they won't be surprised.

The first hike is the level, 2.6 mile (4.2 km) **Swiftcurrent Nature Trail**. It makes a circle around the lake and returns to the hotel. Pick up a copy of the Nature Trail pamphlet as you enter the trail. Here is a snippet from the pamphlet, which highlights what you will see during your stay in Glacier N.P.:

"Some of the rocks around you are almost a billion years old...Three million years ago, glaciers up to 3,000 feet thick carved their way through these valleys. When they melted away 10,000 years ago, they revealed a new landscape. Broad U-shaped valleys replaced V-shaped canyons. Massive rock had been chiseled into the horns and arêtes so characteristic of Glacier National Park."

A "horn" is a pyramid-shaped peak resulting from glacial gouging of rock from different sides of a mountain. An "arête" is a knife-edged ridge formed by two glaciers eroding opposite sides of a mountain.

If you follow the Swiftcurrent trail, and look closely, you'll see that four different tree species dominate in the area: Engelman spruce (squarish, stiff, sharp needles), Subalpine fir (flat, flexible needles), Lodgepole pine (long, straight trunks with needles high in the tree), and aspen (smooth gray bark, heart-shaped leaves). Also on this trail, where Swiftcurrent Creek enters the lake, you may see signs of beaver: trees gnawed off, and beaver-built dams that form small ponds.

At the foot of Swiftcurrent Lake, you'll come to a "Y" in the trail. Follow the right fork to complete the Swiftcurrent Nature Trail.

Take the left fork for the hike to Grinnell Lake.

If you choose the longer hike to Grinnell Lake (a total of 6.8 miles, or 10.9 km, round trip from the hotel) you'll find the vistas to be more grand and the walk to be more invigorating—because there's about a 500-foot gradual gain in elevation. If you have a history of heart or respiratory problems, we recommend that you skip this hike.



The dominant feature of the **Grinnell Lake Trail** is, of course, the mountain scenery. But the most eye-catching feature is the color of the two lakes. Both Lake Josephine and Grinnell Lake have a striking aquamarine color, which is the result of light reflecting from small rock particles, called rock flour, that are suspended in the runoff from Grinnell Glacier.

For the best view of Grinnell Lake, we recommend that you take the upper trail when you reach the end of Lake Josephine. Then, when you come to an optimum overlook of Grinnell Lake, find a place to sit and enjoy this exquisite sight. And we hope you haven't forgotten your camera!

If you wish, you can continue another mile and a half on this same trail to Grinnell Glacier itself.

Day Three

Today, you'll experience one of the most picturesque drives in the world. And if it's beautiful pictures that you want, you'll be headed in the right direction at the right times of day. The 50-mile (80.4 km) **Going-to-the-Sun Road** is best traveled from east to west—while the sun is shining on the eastern side of the Continental Divide in the morning, and on the western side in the afternoon.

We suggest that you personally drive the road, because that will give you the flexibility to see it at your pace, and to experience several sites in a little more detail. However, if you like the idea of not driving and of having a tour guide tell you more about the sights along the way, consider taking a **Red Bus Tour** which departs from the Many Glacier Hotel. You'll find contact information in "To Learn More," below.

Before starting out from the Many Glacier Hotel, you may want to purchase a box lunch at the Concierge Desk. There is no place to buy food while on the Going-to-the-Sun Road—not even at the Logan Pass Visitor Center. For breakfast, we recommend that you try the giant pancakes at the **Babb Press** restaurant in Babb.

Now, retrace yesterday's drive to St. Mary, and turn right to enter Glacier National Park. Here's a tip: if you are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident 62 years of age or older, you're eligible for the Golden Age Pass. It costs only \$10.00 and gives you lifetime access to all U.S. National Parks and National Monuments.

Just past the entrance gate, you'll see the driveway into the St. Mary Visitor Center. This is an interesting, but unnecessary, stop; at the halfway point on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, you'll come upon the Logan Pass Visitor Center, which should satisfy your information needs. Also, you will have received a packet of materials upon entering the park; it includes several maps of the park, which show the Going-to-the-Sun road in some detail.

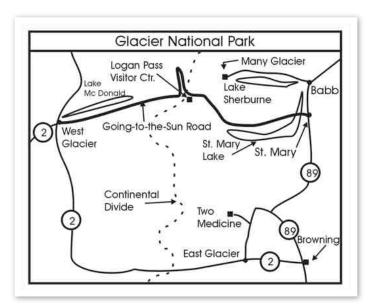
Here's a brief history of the park and of the Going-to-the-Sun Road:

It all started about 75 million years ago, when plates deep within the earth collided and thrust parallel rock layers upward to create huge mountain masses. Over the millennia, the mountains trapped so much snow that the weight of it pressed downward and formed glaciers in the bowl-like formations, called cirques, high-up on mountainsides. As the snow continued to pile up, the weight increased and gravity pulled the glaciers downhill—scraping, gouging, and pulling rock away from the faces of the mountains. Finally, when the Earth's climate warmed and

most of the giant glaciers melted—by about 12,000 years ago—we were left with the u-shaped valleys and spectacular scenery that we enjoy today.

More recently, beginning in the 1890's, the Great Northern Railway started bringing tourists to the eastern and western sides of the park. After the railway built lodges in both areas—the Many Glacier Hotel and Lake McDonald Lodge—tourist traffic and the demand for roads into the park increased. People wanted to see more of this natural wonder, and to travel through it other than by hiking or on horseback.

Glacier National Park was established in 1910, but it wasn't until 1924 that the National Park Service decided to build a single, scenic east-west road, instead of a network of roads, through the park. This would open up the area for mass public enjoyment, but would minimize the damage to the landscape. With that in mind, the decision was made to build a two-lane road across the face of the mountains, rather than up and down in a series of switchbacks. (There is



only one switchback on the entire Going-to-the-Sun Road.) Though more difficult and expensive to build, the idea was for tourists to enjoy the scenery and not have to concentrate on driving the road. This policy was later adopted by other national parks.

Two short roads had been built into the park in the early 1920's, one beginning at West Glacier and the other beginning at St. Mary. They became the two ends of the Going-to-the-Sun Road, which was constructed between 1925 and 1932.

Americans, Swedes, Austrians and Russians built the Going-to-the-Sun Road, which was named for a mountain near the

Jackson Glacier Overlook. They carved the roadbed shelves into the sides of mountains, dug two tunnels, built eight bridges and numerous culverts over rushing streams, constructed retaining walls and guardrails out of the colorful native stone, and spread crushed gravel to make the roadbed. It was, indeed, a monumental engineering project, which created what many people consider to be the most spectacular drive in America.

What you'll see is the heart of Glacier National Park as you drive, first up the St. Mary glacial trough, then down the McDonald glacial trough (now called valleys). What you won't see much of is the great variety of animals that live in the wilderness you'll be traveling through: grizzly, brown and black bears; elk, deer and moose; bighorn sheep and mountain goats; mountain lions and gray wolves; wolverines and badgers; marmots, ground squirrels, pikas and weasels.

Also tucked away in the park's one million acres are 650 lakes, 1,450 miles (2,330 km) of rivers and streams, and 700 miles (1,120 km) of hiking trails.

There are 1,000 species of flowering plants here, as well as the occasional bald eagle, owl, and ptarmagin, which is a kind of grouse that has white plumage in winter.

A few more facts and we'll begin the drive: Most of the highest mountains you'll see along the Going-to-the-Sun Road top out between 7,700 and 10,000 feet elevation (2,347 and 3,048 m). Trees generally do not grow here above about 6,500 feet (1,980 m), as compared with a treeline of about 11,000 feet (3,353 m) in the Colorado Rockies. The park averages about 80 inches (2 m) of snow every winter, which must be cleared from the road each spring—and explains why the road often does not open before the middle of June.

Using the Park Service maps, we particularly recommend the following must-get-out-of-the-car-and-enjoy sights along the way, in the order that you'll come upon them, as you traverse the next 50 miles (80 km).



St. Mary Lake, 10 miles long, is one of the largest and most beautiful lakes in the park.

Wild Goose Island Overlook does not show on the Park Service maps, but you'll see the sign for it 7.6 miles (12.2 km) from the entrance gate. This is the most-photographed scene in the park. Across St. Mary Lake, Mahtotopah, Little Chief and Dusty Star Mountains rise a mile (1.6 km) above the water.

Sunrift Gorge is located just before the end of St. Mary Lake. A short walk will

take you to an overlook of Baring Creek which flows through a fracture in the bedrock.

Jackson Glacier Overlook is somewhat of a disappointment, because there's not much glacier left on this 10,052 foot (3,064 m) mountain. Going-to-the-Sun Mountain is behind you as you look at the glacier.

Lunch Creek flows down a natural rock staircase on Pollack Mountain. Walk a short way downhill beside the creek to experience a rocky mountain high.

At **Logan Pass Visitor Center**, check out the movie, displays, books, and Hidden Lake Trail. The center sits atop the Continental Divide at 6,646 feet elevation (2,025 m), so expect some shortness of breath if you choose to hike up the boardwalk-and-snow trail to the lake overlook—and *please hike only if you are physically fit and free of heart and respiratory problems*. It's very likely that you will see mountain goats while climbing or descending the trail. During this hike, you will see why Glacier National Park is often referred to as the "Switzerland of North America." Walk at least a couple hundred yards up the trail to have a "Sound of Music" experience.

Weeping Wall is a wide waterfall that gushes vertically down the mountain right next to the road, but reduces to a trickle by late summer. Unfortunately, this is just a drive-by site.

Serene **Lake McDonald**, Glacier National Park's largest lake, is ten miles long and a mile wide. The surrounding peaks soar 6,000 feet (1,600 m) above the lake.

Notice the denseness of the forests here. There are many more, and larger, trees on this side of the Continental Divide, because more moisture is caught by the western side of the mountains as the prevailing weather moves from west to east.

When you arrive at West Glacier, you'll have a choice to make. (We assume you decided this when you made your room reservations.) You'll need to either drive back to Many Glacier via the Going-to-the-Sun Road, or drive to East Glacier via Highway 2, which runs along the southern border of Glacier National Park. We would choose the latter, wanting to spend the night in East Glacier in order to be positioned for tomorrow's activities. If you choose to spend a second night at the Many Glacier Hotel, you'll have a 45-mile (72 km) drive to get to Two Medicine in the morning.

Highway 2 parallels the route that the Great Northern Railway used to transport tourists between the two sides of Glacier National Park. This very pretty drive from West Glacier to East Glacier is about 50 miles (80.5 km) and will take about an hour. Information on accommodations and restaurants in East Glacier is contained in "Where to Eat and Sleep," below.

Day Four

Two Medicine is a 13-mile, 20-minute drive north and west of East Glacier. It's just another gorgeous national park valley where you can sit and watch the grass grow by the lake, or rent a canoe, if you're so inclined. Or you can walk to two beautiful waterfalls, and even hike to an overlook high above Two Medicine Lake. Yes, there is a camp store where you can get a bite to eat. If you do all we suggest, it should take four or five hours—followed by a three-hour drive back to Great Falls.

About a mile and a half (2.4 km) after you pass through the entrance gate, you'll see the parking lot for **Running Eagle Falls** on your right. A short walk will bring you to an overlook for this beautiful and most unusual falls. It's often called "Trick Falls," because in the springtime when the flow is strong, water pours over the top of the rocks, and when it's weaker, water gushes only out of the rock face.

Before you cross back over the footbridge, look around at the display of wildflowers and at the brightly colored stones under the water.

Next, continue to the Two Medicine Lake parking lot, sit on the bench awhile, and enjoy the reflection of Rising Wolf Mountain on the water's surface. We recommend that you then visit the camp store to buy something to eat at the top of your hike. And don't forget the drinking water—and remember to warn off any bears that may be in the area as you hike!

You'll find the entrance to South Shore Trail just beyond the boat concession. The trail leads to Aster Falls (1.2 miles, 1.9 km), and to Aster Park overlook, 1.9 miles (3.0 km) beyond the falls. The trail provides a steady, gradual uphill walk until you get to the falls turnoff, then becomes a steeper, more difficult climb. The total gain in elevation is 670 feet. Again, we caution you: please don't attempt the second half of this hike unless you are physically fit and without heart or respiratory problems.

If you do get to the overlook, the expansive and highly rewarding view of Two Medicine Valley will open before you, and Mt. Sinopah will tower over you on your left (see the photo on page 1; it's 8,271 feet, 2,521 m). This is an absolutely gorgeous place to eat the lunch that you brought with you.

After returning to the base of the trail, it may be time to say goodbye to Glacier National Park. If so, there are two things to consider doing as you return to Great Falls:

The **Museum of the Plains Indians** in Browning has a wonderful collection of elaborately decorated clothing, headdresses, blankets, jewelry, weapons, musical instruments, pipes, household items, cradle boards, toys, games, bags, and other items used by Blackfeet, Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Crow, and other Indian tribes of the Great Plains. The museum is well worth an hour of your time.

The Log Cabin Cafe in Choteau has excellent stick-to-your-ribs American cuisine.

Note: Just north of the U.S.-Canadian Border is **Waterton Lakes National Park** in Alberta, Canada, which is about one seventh the size of Glacier. In 1932 the governments of Canada and the United States linked the two parks as the world's first International Peace Park.

Getting There: United Airlines is the primary carrier serving the Great Falls airport. Delta, Northwest, and Continental also fly into Great Falls.

Where to Eat and Sleep in Great Falls: Jaker's Restaurant, 1500 10th Ave. S., 406-727-1033, steaks and seafood, open 11:30-2:30 and 4:30-10:30 weekdays and 4:30-10:30 Saturday and Sunday; Dante's Creative Cuisine, 1325 8th Ave. N., 406-453-9599, Italian, open 11-10 Monday-Saturday; 5th Street Diner, 500 Central Ave. 406-727-1962, burgers (etc.), open 8-3:30 Monday-Saturday and 9-2 Sunday. Crystal Inn, 3701 31st SW, 406-727-7788, http://www.crystalinns.com/grtfls.html; Extended Stay America, 800 River Dr. S, 406-761-7524; others via Great Falls Lodging Association, www.greatfallslodging.com.

Where to Eat and Sleep in Many Glacier: Ptarmagin Dining Room, (American and Continental cuisine) and Heidi's Snack Shop in the Many Glacier Hotel, open 6:30-10, 11:30-2, 5-9:30; Italian Gardens Restaurant in the Swiftcurrent Motor Inn (one mile from the Many Glacier Hotel), open 6:30-10 and 11-9:30. It's first-come-first-served at all restaurants in Glacier. For room reservations and other information about the two lodgings, contact Glacier Park, Inc. at 406-892-2525, www.glacierparkinc.com.

Where to Eat and Sleep in East Glacier: The Great Northern Steak and Rib House (first-come-first-served) in the Glacier Park Lodge, open 6:30-10, 11:30-2, 5-9:30; Serrano's Mexican Restaurant, across from the train depot, 406-226-9392, open 5-10 May 1-October 1. Glacier Park Lodge; contact Glacier Park, Inc., as above. The remainder of the accommodations in East Glacier are more modest. The following are on Highway 49, just north of Highway 2: Mountain Pine Motel, 406-226-4403, http://www.mtnpine.com; Jacobson's Cottages, 406-226-4422, "Google it" for more information; and East Glacier Motel and Cabins, 406-226-5593, http://www.eastglacier.com.

To Learn More: The U.S. National Park Service will be your primary source for Glacier National Park visitor information. You can contact them at 406-888-7800, www.nps.gov/glac/, or by email from their website. Red Bus Tours, Glacier Park, Inc., 406-892-2525, http://www.glacierparkinc.com. C.M. Russell Museum, 400 13th Street North, Great Falls, 406-727-8787, http://www.cmrussell.org; May- September museum open daily 9-6, studio and home open daily 10-5; October 1-May 1, home closed, museum open Tuesday-Saturday 10-5 and Sunday 1-5, studio open Tuesday-Saturday 1-4 and Sunday 2-4. Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, 4201 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, 406-727-8733, http://www.fs.fed.us, Memorial Day-September 30 open daily 9-6, and October 1-Memorial Day open Tuesday-Saturday 9-5 and Sunday noon-5. Giant Springs State Park, 4600 Giant Springs, Great Falls, 406-454-5840, "Google it." open all year. Museum of the Plains Indian, Junction of Highways 2 and 89, Browning, 406-338-2230, http://www.blackfeetcountry.com/ museum.html, June-September open daily 9-4:45, and October-May open daily 10-4:30.

Bill and Celia Ginnodo are residents of Arlington Heights, Illinois. They have traveled extensively in the American West, including Montana. They are the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado: A Guided Driving Tour* and *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California: A Guided Driving Tour*, which can be seen at www.pridepublications.com and on Amazon.com. Bill and Celia can be contacted at info@pridepublications.com.

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