Popular Scenic Routes

"Around the Block" West Yellowstone Wildlife Tour
(64 miles round trip)

This 64-mile round trip, called 'the block' among local residents, travels through two states, over two mountain passes and winds around three lakes. It also features gorgeous scenery and the best wildlife spotting opportunities. Depart from West Yellowstone on Highway 191 heading north towards Bozeman, Montana. Highway 191 straddles the western boundary of Yellowstone National Park. Approximately 9 miles north of West Yellowstone, watch for junction with Highway 287. Turn left (west) on Hwy 287 towards Ennis and Virginia City, Montana, which runs along Hebgen and Quake Lakes.

Turn left (south) at the junction with Idaho Hwy 87, and drive for nine miles to Raymond’s Pass. This pass straddles the Continental Divide. At Raymond’s Pass, you will enter Idaho. Continue another 9 miles along Healy Reservoir to reach the junction with Hwy 20. At the junction with Hwy 20, turn north to West Yellowstone about 12 miles away. This road climbs up and over Targhee Pass and then back down into Montana.

Areas to watch:
Hwy 191: Bison, moose, osprey, eagles, coyotes, and foxes near the Madison River and Coyote Creek areas.
Hwy 287: Near marker 22: Osprey nest south of Croy Creek. Also bison (spring), hawks and eagles.
Hwy 287: Mile markers 16-10: Moose and elk on the hillside.
Waterfall along the lakeshore.
Hwy 287: Mile markers 6-3 (Coyote Lake): Big horn sheep (spring). Migratory common ducks and geese. GIFTS to the north, behind Visitor Center are home to mountain goats. Deer can be seen along the rivers.
Idaho Hwy 87 to Raymond’s Pass: Deer, elk, black bear & antelope.
Raymond’s Pass to Hwy 20: Moose, elk, deer, antelope, coyotes, foxes, and wolves.
Hwy 20: Mile markers 402-406: Moose among the willows and aspen trees.

The As You Return to West Yellowstone, watch for black and grizzly bears (near trees and trails), moose, and elk.

West Yellowstone to Ennis
(745 miles round trip)

Follow the same directions for the "around the block" tour paralleling Hebgen and Quake Lakes. Once past the Earthquake Visitor Center, continue on Hwy 287 past the junction with Idaho Hwy 87. You will see a sign for Ennis, another 41 miles to the northwest.

After leaving the canyon area, you will come to visit some vast grazing lands, large Montana ranches, majestically ringed by snow-capped mountains. This is the winter location for large herds of elk. At times, in the spring, you can see thousands at once. This is also one of the best locations for spotting antelopes, deer, coyotes and on rare occasion, owls. Drive carefully through this area, especially early morning and dusk when these animals are on the move.

West Yellowstone to Big Sky
(90-120 miles round trip)

Leave West Yellowstone and head north on Hwy 191. Continue past the junction with Hwy 287, over a large hill, and down around a steep curve and bridge over Gray Creek. Continuing north, this stretch of road runs through twenty miles of the extreme northwestern section of Yellowstone Park (55 mph speed limit).

This is truly a scenic corridor as the road parallels Gray Creek Valley, and then the Gallatin River. Mountains rise on each side in elevations from 6,300 to 10,000 feet. Black Butte, with its steep jutting peak, is such a distant landmark visible from the river. Snowy mountains and rugged peaks create a postcard-perfect view.

Areas to watch:
Rendered to the west, by the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area, the Gallatin National Forest and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests, it is also known for its wildlife. You can spot bald eagles, black and grizzly bears, deer, elk and moose, otters, foxes, and coyotes, at different times throughout the year.

After leaving Yellowstone Park, watch for moose, deer, and elk in the springs area to your west; then moose along the river for the next ten miles. Elk and deer frequently travel across the highway, especially in early mornings and late afternoons, to reach the river.

As you approach the 320 Ranch area, begin watching the ridges for bear and mountain lion sightings, often spotted each spring.

When nearing the Big Sky turnoff, watch for more big horn sheep, especially on summer slopes. Turn left onto Montana Hwy 64 (Lone Peak Trail) to travel into the Big Sky area. Watch for sheep and wildlife along hillside and near stream areas.

West Yellowstone to Red Rocks Lakes Wildlife Refuge
(90-120 miles round trip)

This route may not be fully accessible until late May–early June depending on snow and weather conditions. The Lower Lake Road is open May 15 through December 1.

Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located in the scenic and isolated Centennial Valley of southwestern Montana, approximately 50 miles west of Yellowstone National Park. The refuge has a vast array of habitats, ranging from high elevation prairie at 6,600 feet, to the harsh alpine habitat of the Centennial Mountains at 10,000 feet above sea level.

Take Hwy 20 south from West Yellowstone Montana to Island Park, Idaho. Turn right (west) at the Hwy 87 junction (33.1 miles) and drive another 5.3 miles to Henry’s Lake Drive, taking a left and driving towards Henry’s Lake. These roads are gravel and not paved. After another 5.6 miles, Henry’s Lake Drive becomes Red Rock Pass Road and you will enter back into Montana (7.6 miles). Red Rock Pass Road becomes Montana Road for another 9.4 miles, you will drive through Lamb Creek, Montana and then another two miles to Lower Lake Road which drives into the Refuge. (Alternative route: follow Hwy 20 past Henry’s Lake to the Red Rock Road (599). Turn right and continue to Red Rocks Wildlife Refuge.)

Highlights:
One of the most important trumpeter swan breeding areas in North America. Sandhill cranes can be seen on the refuge from April to September. The refuge is also home to a variety of mammals native to the region.

West Yellowstone to Big Springs, Island Park, Idaho
(50 miles round trip)

This route may not be fully accessible until late May-early June depending on snow and weather conditions.

Leave West Yellowstone on Hwy 20 heading south to Island Park, Idaho. (See wildlife spotting tips in the "Around the Block" tour above.) For the next 12 miles, you will encounter a large meadow, which has the longest "main street" of any town in the U.S. over 30 miles. Seven miles later, in the Mack’s Inn area, you will want to turn left (east) on Big Springs Road (Forest Rd. 619). Drive east for another five miles and you will be at Big Springs.

Areas to watch:
Hwy 20: Antelope and elk grazing in the fields, eagles and hawks sitting on fence poles; osprey on a tree, and bird watching along the fishways.
Moose and elk near the meadow area and small ponds along the highway. Big Springs: Enormous trout can be viewed from both sides of the bridge. (Be sure to check fishing times through winter as this is one of the last remaining salmon habitats and the fish, mullard ducks and the resident muskrat.) Look downstream to see a moose feeding in the water. Watch for osprey, bald eagles, waterfowl and the occasional moose, white-tailed deer, and muskrat.

Travel Tips

Weather is unpredictable, especially in the Spring and Fall, and can change quickly, even during the summer months. Visitors are advised to be prepared for a range of conditions. We recommend checking on road and weather conditions through the numbers below before departing.

Opening Dates for Roads & Activities
Yellowstone National Park roads open to motorized, wheeled vehicle on a staggered schedule each spring. Once an Entrance/Road opens, they remain open 24 hours a day. The only exceptions are caused by road construction and weather-related restrictions.

First week of April - Weather permitting, roads from West to Canyon and Mammoth open to bicycle only travel. Services are limited and travelers must be self-sufficient.

Third week in April - Weather permitting, west-side roads open to motor vehicles. Visitors will be able to drive through the park by the north entrance. West Entrance to Norris, Madison, Canyon, & Old Faithful.

First week of May - Weather permitting, the road linking Canyon, Fishing Bridge, & the East Entrance opens to wheeled vehicles.

Second week of May - Travel from the South Entrance to Grant, West Thumb, Fishing Bridge, & Lake-ewr Cieres Park to Old Faithful on to wheeled vehicles. The road from Cooke City over Coeur Par to the Chief Joseph Scenic Highway to the Long Lake gate shall be open as soon thereafter as possible.

Late May – Durango Pass (Tower to Canyon) Long Lake Gate over the Bear Tooth Highway to the Red Lodge Mountain Road.

For current dates and road conditions visit:
www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/roadconditions.htm

National Forest roads generally open mid-to-late May depending on weather conditions. For specific road openings check with the Gallatin National Forest’s Headquarters at 406-823-1800.

The General Fishing Season opens in Montana on the third Saturday in May. There are areas outside of West Yellowstone that are open year-round. The Montana Fishing Regulations contain specific details.

www.montana.gov/fishingregulations

West Yellowstone Visitor Center 406.646.7701
Hebgen Lake Ranger District Headquarters 406.823.6917
Yellowstone Park Road Conditions 307.344.2717
Montana Road Conditions 800.226.7623
Montana Road Conditions (Calling In MT) 511
Wyoming Road Conditions 888.996.7623
Idaho Road Conditions 888.432.7623

More Information

West Yellowstone Chamber 30 Yellowstone Avenue West Yellowstone, MT 59758 406.646.7701

At West Yellowstone Chamber, we know how to make your visit an exceptional one. Whether you’re here for business or pleasure, we would love to welcome you to the heart of Montana and to West Yellowstone. For more information, contact us at 406-646-7701 or visit our website at DestinationYellowstone.com.

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