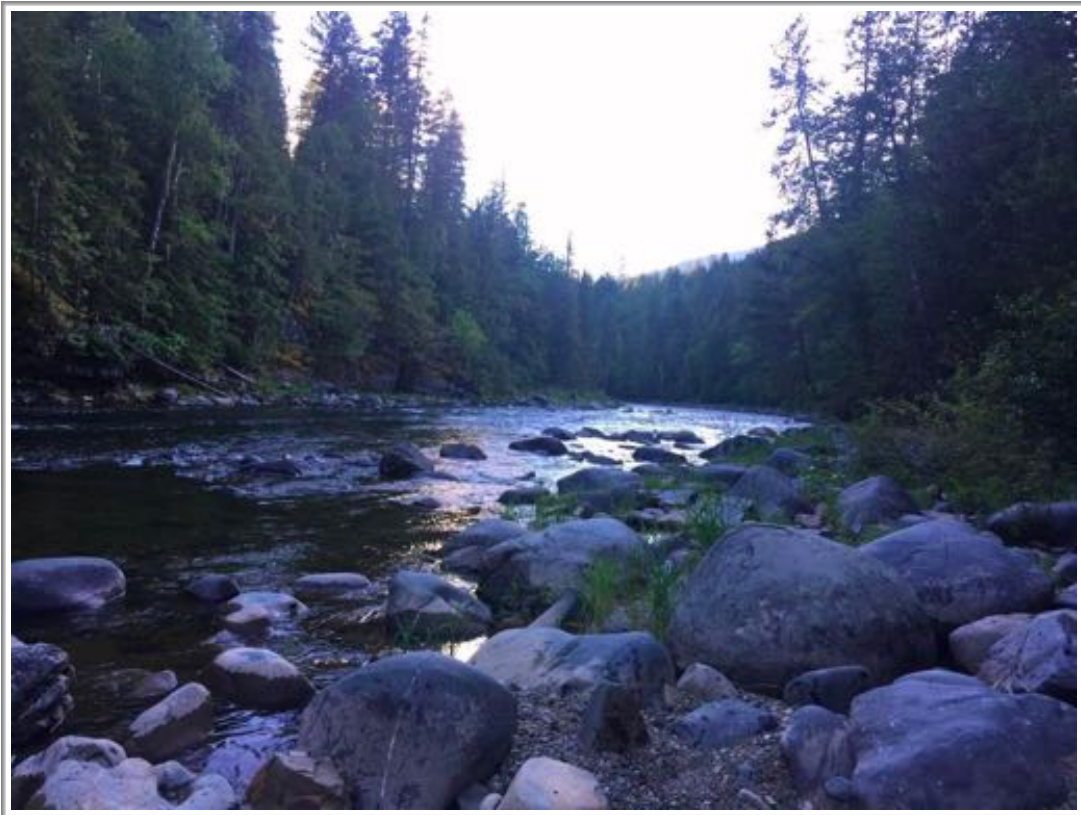


# Yaak River Loop Tour

*Wilds of Northwestern Montana*



4 Days/3 Nights

Gateway City: Missoula, Montana



Sweeping vistas, magnificent views, peaceful serenity! You've reached one of the truly Last Best Places - the Wilds of far Northwest Montana, home to the Yaak River Scenic Byway. It's also home to the rugged, remote landscape of the Kootenai National Forest, in an area that was a high barren plain when an uplifting mountain range along the Pacific Coast caused the sea to flow into the plains. As the mountains eroded, billions of tons of shells and skeletons of sea creatures that eventually turned to limestone were buried in the icy water. 60 or 70 million years ago, forces began gradually uplifting the Rocky Mountains, which were two miles higher than they currently are. In fact, the oldest rocks on earth are exposed in the Siyeh Formation at the top of northwest Montana's mountains. Glaciers ultimately reached the mountain tops and formed Glacial Lake Missoula before beginning to retreat 25,000 years ago, releasing water from the lake that left the Rocky Mountains behind. Today, carved out of the Southern Purcell Mountains, the Yaak Valley has a much stronger geographic relationship with the Pacific Northwest than the rest of Montana. The "modified Pacific maritime" climate supports small pockets of rare inland-temperate rainforest dominated by western red cedar and western hemlock, complemented with marshy wetlands. The Wild Yaak, 180,000 acres of undisturbed, rugged, and remote roadless area, acts as a refuge for many threatened plant and animal species within the abundant western larch. The soft,

bright green needles of these trees light up the Yaak in spring, deliver a brilliant gold in the fall, and cover the forest floor in winter.



### **Touring the Byway**

We recommend starting your journey in Missoula where you can explore the downtown on a historic walking tour and visit the Montana Natural History Center, the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, before taking the Riverfront Walking Trail.

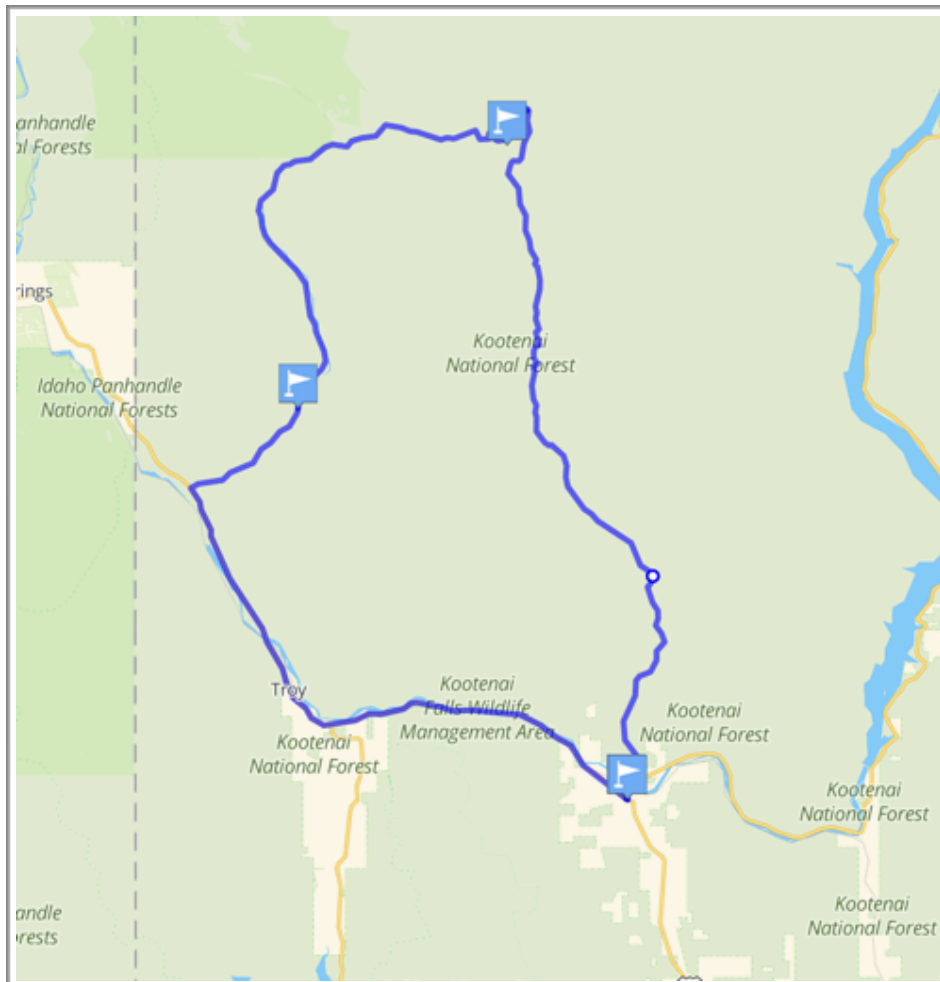
From there, you'll can take Interstate 90 to the St. Regis exit (unless you want to meander between Alberton and St. Regis on the Clark Fork Scenic Drive) which will ultimately put you on the St. Regis-Paradise Scenic Byway, one of the bonus beauties of this trip. Eight miles east of Thompson Falls is the Koo-Koo-Sint Bighorn Sheep Viewing Site with a highway pull out with information about the sheep. Weighing up to 300 pounds, they charge their rivals at 20 miles per hour, butting heads in a struggle for herd dominance. This violent sport can be heard miles away.

From there, you'll continue on Montana 135 until you reach Thompson Falls, where you can explore the Old Jail Museum. As you pass through Thompson Falls, you'll see the Thompson Falls High Bridge just south of the intersection of Gallatin

and Preston Avenue. Built in 1911, the bridge offers a stunning view of the dam, fish ladder, nesting osprey, and a beautiful vista of the Clark Fork River.

About 40 miles north of Thompson Falls, you'll be turning north on Montana 56, which is the Bull River Valley Scenic Drive. Traveling north, the Ross Creek Giant Cedars Grove will be on your left and the Cabinet Mountains on your right.

When you come to the end of the Bull River Scenic Drive, we suggest you turn east to spend the night in Libby, since it's a long drive to other accommodations. After a night's stay in Libby and exploring the Heritage Museum and the Libby Dam Visitor Center, you'll be headed to Troy, the Yaak River Scenic Byway, Yaak, and finally to Eureka for the night. From Eureka, you'll be taking the Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway back to Libby to catch US 2 to Kalispell. From there, we wish you safe passage if you're traveling on another Montana Scenic Drive, or a safe and pleasant journey home





## DAY ONE



### **Missoula**

C. P. Higgins and Francis Worden opened a trading post on the Blackfoot River in 1869, that was followed by the arrival of the Mullan Road connecting Fort Benton with Walla Walla, Washington. Fort Missoula was opened in 1877 to protect the growing community. The arrival of the railroad in 1883, along with the Missoula Mercantile Company, made the city a trading center. The University of Montana opened in 1895. Missoula's location within a heavily forested area made logging the mainstay industry until the mid-1970s. Saws could be heard over two miles away on a clear summer night.

### **Downtown Missoula Historic and Art Walking Tour**

Learn more about Missoula on the downtown walking tour, which has one of the largest collections of buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the country. Locations like the Atlantic Hotel and the Diner Café, with huge historic neon signs, that have long been repurposed, peacefully coexist with the 1910 Missoula County Courthouse and the 1909 Palace Hotel. The downtown partnership has funded over 20 works of public art that appear along the route.

## **Montana Natural History Center**

The Montana Natural History Center features displays of the flora and fauna, ecosystems, and geology in the state, including the Montana Ecosystem, The Magic Planet, a Naturalist Forest Station, Glacial Lake Missoula, Explore Fossils, Explore Geology, and the outdoor Nature Adventure Garden.

120 Hickory Street, Suite A, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-327-0405, T-F 9AM-5PM, Sat Noon-4PM, Adults \$4

## **Montana Museum of Art and Culture**

Located on the University of Montana campus, this museum now has 11,000 pieces including works by Rocky Mountain artists, historic European works, along with collections from Southeast Asia, American Impressionists, contemporary Native American artists, ceramics, and public art sites across the campus. European masters include Rembrandt, Delacroix, Boucher, Piranesi, and Daumier, along with 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, Miro, Toulouse-Lautrec, Chagall, Dali, Picasso, Remington, Merritt Chase, and Andy Warhol.

Across from the Adams Center off East 6th Street. University of Montana Campus. 406-243-2019. Tu-Sat Noon-6PM. Free, donations accepted. **Historical**



## **Museum at Fort Missoula**

Fort Missoula was established by the US Army in 1877 to protect settlers in the region. Nearly 100 years later, the Historical Museum encompasses 32 acres with over 20 historic structures and a collection of nearly 50,000 artifacts.

3400 Captain Rawn Way, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-728-3476 M-Sat 10AM-5PM, Sun Noon-5PM



## **Riverfront Walking Trail**

The riverfront walking trail along the Clark Fork River takes you past McCormick Park, the Old Milwaukee Depot, John H. Toole Park, and other scenic and historic treasures in Missoula.





## **Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Blue Mountain Bed and Breakfast** 6980 Deadman Gulch Road, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-203-3187 The gardens here frame breathtaking views of the Bitterroot River. Elegant breakfasts go along with the Inn's lovely décor. Guest rooms have private baths with jetted tubs, air conditioning and amenities, plus Wifi.

## **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Catalyst Café** 111 North Higgins Avenue, Missoula, MT, 59802, 406-542-1337  
American cuisine café.

**Scotty's Table** 131 South Higgins Avenue, Unit P3, Missoula, MT 59802, 406-549-2790 Fine dining in Missoula.

**Tamarack Brewing Company** 231 Front Street West, Missoula, MT 59802, 406-830-3113  
American pub and bar, vegetarian and vegan options.

## **Destination Distinctive Retail**

### **Missoula Art Galleries**

**The Artists' Shop** 127 North Higgins, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-543-6393

Missoula's premiere co-op fine craft gallery. M-F 10AM-6PM, Sat-Sun 10AM-5PM

**Dana Gallery** 246 North Higgins Avenue, **Murphy-Jubb Fine Art** 210 North Higgins Avenue, Suite 300, **Radius Gallery** 114 East Main Street and **The Art Hang-up** 839 South Higgins Avenue

**Lake Missoula Tea Company** 136 East Broadway, Missoula, MT, 59801, 406-926-1038 Teas from around the world, including blends made in small batches.

**Hometana** 312 North Higgins Avenue, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-224-4166

**Ducrey Chocolate Maker** 311 East Front Street, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-218-7396



## DAY TWO

### **St. Regis-Paradise Scenic Byway**

Once considered a shortcut to Glacier National Park, this beautiful route which lies within the Lolo National Forest delivers exquisite scenery of the rolling Donlan Flats with high canyon walls, and distant green mountains, with the comforting rumble of Clark Fork River by your side. You can expect to see elk, white-tailed and mule deer, bald eagles, and the occasional bighorn sheep.

### **Thompson Falls**

The Thompson Falls area was explored by David Thompson in 1809, who also founded the North West Fur Trading Company at Saleesh House just four years after Lewis and Clark passed through Montana. The lovely falls on the Clark Fork River provide the rest of the town's name. The railroad came through in 1881, followed by a gold rush two years later in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, that spurred growth from traffic on the Murray Trail to the mines. The Thompson Falls Dam was built atop the original falls in 1915.



## **Old Jail Museum**

This museum is located in the former old jail and sheriff's residence, which is adjacent to the Saleesh House of the North West Company. It preserves historical artifacts, images, maps and more, to celebrate the pioneers who explored, mapped, settled, and farmed this corner of Montana.

109 South Madison Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873 406-827-4002, Memorial Day-Labor Day, Daily Noon-4PM

## **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Minnie's Montana Café** 921 Main Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873, 406-827-3747

American Café with vegetarian, vegan, gluten free options, and comfort food.

## **Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Linda's Montana Gifts & Gallery** 913 Main Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873, 406-827-4383

**Sunflower Gallery** 301 Main Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873 Located in one of the oldest homes in Thompson Falls, built in 1900.



### **Bull River Valley Scenic Drive**

About 40 miles northwest of Thompson Falls, Montana 56 is the Bull River Valley Scenic Drive that meanders through the Kootenai National Forest. Striking cliffs, spires, canyons, and the magnificent peaks of the Cabinet Mountains follow your drive along the Kootenai and Clark Fork Rivers. Here, there are 191 species of birds, along with elk, whitetail and mule deer, mountain goats and bighorn sheep, moose, black bear, mountain lions, grizzly bears, coyotes, weasels, mink, beavers, otters, squirrels, bobcats, lynx, and other animals who roam the forest.



### **Ross Creek Giant Cedars Grove**

Visitors to Ross Creek often say the ancient forest growing in Montana since before Columbus set foot in America rival the giant sequoias of northern California. Area Loggers who cut trees in the area were the first to protect the trees before a protected area was established in 1960. A nature trail follows the banks of Ross Creek, some of which is hidden beneath the rocky stream bed. The turnoff for the grove from Montana Highway 56 is about a half mile past the southern end of Bull Lake. A scenic pull off about two miles north on 56 offers a scenic view of the Cabinet Mountains and the roar of Ross Creek Falls.



## **Libby**

John Fisher and Stephen Allen first searched around Libby for minerals in the early 1860s and named the town for Allen's daughter Elizabeth (Libby). Their success on Libby Creek in 1867 attracted nearly 600 men to the mining camp. Fortunes varied, with some miners making as much as \$1.25 per pan while others made only two cents per pan. Most men left when winter came and by the 1870s, the camp was virtually deserted. Later when the Snowshoe lode was discovered in 1889 on Leigh Creek, the area was unprepared for a major find, requiring that ore be shipped to Great Falls before the mine could be electrified.

## **The Heritage Museum**

This unique twelve-sided, 130-foot diameter log structure preserves artifacts from the region regarding early settlement, mining, and logging, coupled with the Museum Cookhouse, Outdoor Pavilion, and Swamp Creek Community Hall. 34067 US Highway 2, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-7521, May-Sept, M-Sat 10AM-5PM, Sun 1PM-5PM, Donations accepted



## **Libby Dam Visitor Center**

Take a tour of the Dam and take advantage of picnic sites, fishing, golf, the bookstore, and lake and river access.

17877 Montana Highway 37, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-5577



**Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Venture Inn** 1015 West Ninth Street, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-7711

Northwest Montana's finest place to stay, featuring a full-service restaurant, pool, hot tub, and unlimited outdoor recreation.

**Destination Distinctive Dining**

**The Black Board Bistro** 803 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-4505

Outstanding find in Northwest Montana.

**Cabinet Mountain Brewing Company** 206 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-2739 American pub with great food and lots of options.

**Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Zero uno Zero Robotics** 28132 Highway 2, Libby, MT 59923, 406-334-7319

Highlighting fabulous and under-represented artists from all around the country.

## DAY THREE

### **Troy**

Lying at 1828 feet above sea level, the lowest elevation in Montana, the first miners arrived here in 1886 stayed in a tent camp on the Kootenai River. Later that year the Keeler Lode Claim was discovered, creating a new mining district. The town, which did not begin in earnest until the railroad came through, was saved from a fire that raged through in 1901 by railroad hoses that soaked the buildings. Stop at the Troy Museum and Visitors' Center which features Troy-related historical items, conveniently located on Highway 2 as you enter town from the east. The wooden sign in front of the museum was carved entirely by chainsaw.  
629 East Missoula Avenue, Troy, MT 59335, 406-295-4540

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Main Street Perk and Pub** 509 East Missoula Avenue, Troy, MT 59335, 406-295-7375

### **Yaak**

Yaak derives its name from the word A'ak, which is Kootenai for "Arrow" The Kootenai River forms the shape of a drawn bow; its tributary, the Yaak River, is its arrow. Homesteaders arrived shortly after the passage of the Forest Homestead Act of 1906.





## **Eureka**

Until the railroad pushed through the region, this area was home to the Kootenai tribe. In 1904, a longer and easier railroad route through the Tobacco Valley was constructed to replace the existing route, and Eureka was born. Today, it radiates the classic, rural Montana lifestyle. Highway 93 is better known as Main Street.



## **Tobacco Valley Historical Village**

The village features nearly a dozen structures built between the 1880s and the 1920s including a general store, schoolhouse, library, church, two log cabins, a hand-hewn house, railway depot, caboose, and fire tower. Several of the buildings, rescued from the Libby Dam, are all filled with exhibits and artifacts from the founding of Eureka. The Fewkes General Store serves as a museum and depository for archival materials donated by organizations and residents of the Tobacco Valley.

4 Dewey Avenue, Eureka, MT 59917, 406-890-0625 Memorial Day-Labor Day,  
1PM-5PM

## **Eureka Riverwalk**

A 2-mile loop trail that leaves the Historical Village area and continues southeast along the Tobacco River has natural and historical interpretive sites, exercise stations, and benches.



### **Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Homestead Cabin Resort** 18 Drop Tine Road, Eureka, MT 59917 406-882-4929

Accommodations at the highest rated resort in the area are well-built individual cabins decorated in lodge décor with Amish furniture. Windows are positioned for natural sunlight and great views. All are complete with a bedroom, bathroom, family room, and kitchen.

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Front Porch Dewey Burger and Fish Company** 307 Dewey Avenue, Eureka, MT 59917, 406-297-1234 Great burgers and American choices.

**Café Jax** 207 Dewey Avenue, Eureka, MT 59917 Try the breakfast pancakes and other comfort food goodies.

### **Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Front Porch Trading Company** 307 Dewey Avenue, Eureka, MT 59917, 406-297-9090

**Mountain Gift Shop** 205 Dewey Avenue, Eureka, MT 59917, 406-297-2321

**Silver Fish Gallery** 301 Dewey Avenue, Eureka, MT 59917, 406-207-7660



### **Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway**

Much of the scenic beauty in America was created naturally, resulting in lush landscapes, majestic mountains, shimmering lakes, and rushing rivers. Lake Koocanusa was not. It is man-made and took an extraordinary amount of effort to get completed. The journey began over 60 years ago, when a treaty between the U.S. and Canada coordinated control of the massive flooding that occurred every year during snow melt. Construction of the Libby Dam took 12 years and more than 2,000 workers. To accommodate all these new people, the Corps of Engineers built three new schools, added to other schools, and built the Libby airport. The entire town of Rexford was moved to higher ground which required another new school, water system, sewerage system, fire station, and roads. Montana Highway 37 was also relocated to higher ground and Koocanusa Bridge, the longest and highest in Montana, was constructed to provide access across the northern end of the lake. Relocating the Great Northern Railroad line proved to be one of the most complex projects, requiring a seven mile tunnel through Elk Mountain. The Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway runs along the eastern edge of the lake, through a narrow fjord-like gorge between the Purcell Mountains and the Salish Mountains. Fortunately, even though a much larger plan for the lake was considered, the result was very useful flood control, a water system, and amazing scenic beauty. The reservoir starts rising in March as the snows melt and starts slowly retreating in mid-summer. All this time, the lake remains an ever changing, enchanting, and marvelous place to be.



## DAY FOUR



### **Kalispell**

Kalispell was platted by Charles Conrad when he realized the railroad was going to come through. Named the Salish word for “flat land” or prairie above the lake, Kalispell became a division point for the railroad between St. Paul, MN and Seattle. Soon after “the iron horse snorted through” the remaining buildings from a neighboring town gone bust were moved to Kalispell on log rollers. The first brewery was established in 1894, and today local craft breweries produce more than 40 varieties of ales and lagers made with Montana-grown malts, hand-picked local hops, huckleberries, and Flathead cherries.

### **Downtown Historic District Walking Tour**

Take a walk past buildings from the 1890s and early 1900s including the Conrad Mansion, the Hockaday Museum of Art, Kalispell Grand Hotel, and the Northwest Montana History Museum. The tour includes Main Street and First Avenue East from Depot Park on Center Street, south to the 400 block. Near the tour route, St. Matthew’s Catholic Church, dating from 1910, remains the city’s most commanding Gothic landmark. 602 South Main Street, 406-752 678



### **Conrad Mansion Museum**

The residence of Charles Conrad sits proudly on three landscaped acres atop a bluff overlooking the valley. The shingle-style Norman building, a revivalist version of vernacular architecture in Normandy, France, is surrounded by large ever-blooming flower beds that provide constant color during the summer season, plus hedges, evergreens, and lawns.

330 Woodland Avenue, Kalispell, MT 55901, 406-755-2166, self-guided and docent led tours offer year around, May 15-Oct 15, docent led tours 11AM and 1PM. Adults \$20

### **Northwest Montana History Museum**

Housed in the restored Central School building, this museum features exhibits about history of the Northwest Montana region and Flathead Valley including artifacts, documents, and photographs that tell the story of Big Sky Country. In addition to permanent exhibits, rotating curated exhibits are presented throughout the year.

124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, MT 55901, 406-756-8381, M-F 10AM-5PM, Sat 10AM-3PM, Adults \$5



### **Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Kalispell Grand Hotel** 100 Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-755-8100

The Grand was one of the first hotels built on the frontier and the only one remaining in Kalispell. It hosted the well to do at double the going rate for running water, door locks, and wake-up calls.

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Hops Downtown Grill** 121 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-755-7687 Try the bison burger and other interesting tastes.

**The DeSoto Grill** 227 First Street West, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-314-6095 Great food and great service.

### **Destination Distinctive Retail**

#### **Art Galleries**

**Montana Modern Fine Art** 127 South Main Street, 406-755-5321, **Sassafras Arts, Crafts**

**and Antiques** 120 South Main Street, 406-752-2433 and **Paint, Metal and Mud** 8 First Street East, Suite 104, 406-755-8886

**Western Outdoors** 48 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT, 59901, 406-756-5818

Featuring more than 2,500 boots and 1,500 hats.

**Bear Country Gallery** 4054 US Highway 93 South, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-752-6735

**Flair Gifts and Cards** 123 Main Street, Kalispell, MT, 55901, 406-407-7210