

Helena Bicycle Club Great Rides!

Garnet Mountains Loop

Avon—Helmville—Drummond—Garrison—Avon

Contributed by Eric Grove, June 2012

According to Eric: “Despite it's proximity to the Interstate the frontage road is wonderful and you will have it all to yourself. Loop rides of this length and degree of difficulty (moderate) are hard to find in Montana. This, in my humble opinion, is one of the best...”

“This loop rides well both ways and both alternatives have their advantage. [Riding in a counter-clockwise direction] makes for a very mild climb over the high point of the ride while riding [clockwise] offers a bit more of a warm up, [and if you're lucky a tailwind into Drummond].”

“... The entire ride is quite scenic but arriving in the Blackfoot Valley near Helmville is probably the high point.”

- Length:** 80.2 miles round trip, 67 miles to Garrison*, 52.3 miles to Drummond* (* shuttle required)
- Starts:** Avon
- Ends:** Avon, but could end at any other point with a shuttle. Ending at Garrison, for example, would shorten the ride 13 miles, and avoid busy US 12 (while still riding a busy 4 miles along I-90)
- Parking:** Avon Cafe (call to ask 406-492-6381), various other sites as well
- Elevation:** Starting and low point: Avon 4,799
High point: Height of land 7.4 miles north of Avon, 5,150 ft +/-; second pass between Helmville and Drummond, 5,051 ft
- Duration:** Day tour
- Difficulty:** Moderate. This is a longer day ride exposed to wind with two moderate hills.
- Attractions:** This ride features splendid rural scenery, and early in the season fields are often carpeted with wildflowers. The hills are, for the most part, moderate, and traffic is usually light except for four miles of Interstate 90 shoulder near Gold Creek and on US 12 between Garrison and Avon. This is a great training ride, long but not terrifically demanding, which can, with a shuttle, be shortened.
- A meal at the Avon Cafe is reason enough for this ride, but watch for and enjoy the flowers and birds along the way. This is a very nice slice of Central Montana, nestled on the western slope of the Continental Divide.
- Picnic:** There are many prime picnic spots
- Surface:** Paved road. Variable surface, generally very good. Variable shoulders.
- Terrain:** Ridden counter-clockwise, there's a steady but very moderate climb cresting at mile 7.4 to the height of land between the Little Blackfoot and Nevada Creek drainages

Best time: Any time the road is snow free. This route can be windy.

Traffic: Light to moderate for most of the route. The 4 mile stretch on the freeway shoulder will be busy, as will, potentially, the 13 miles from Garrison to Avon (although this ride, with a shuttle, can be constructed to avoid this stretch).

Cautions: If riding in the counter-clockwise *you must get on the Interstate 90 shoulder at the Gold Creek Exit*. The frontage road appears to continue east past this exit, but instead dead-ends in a mile or so.

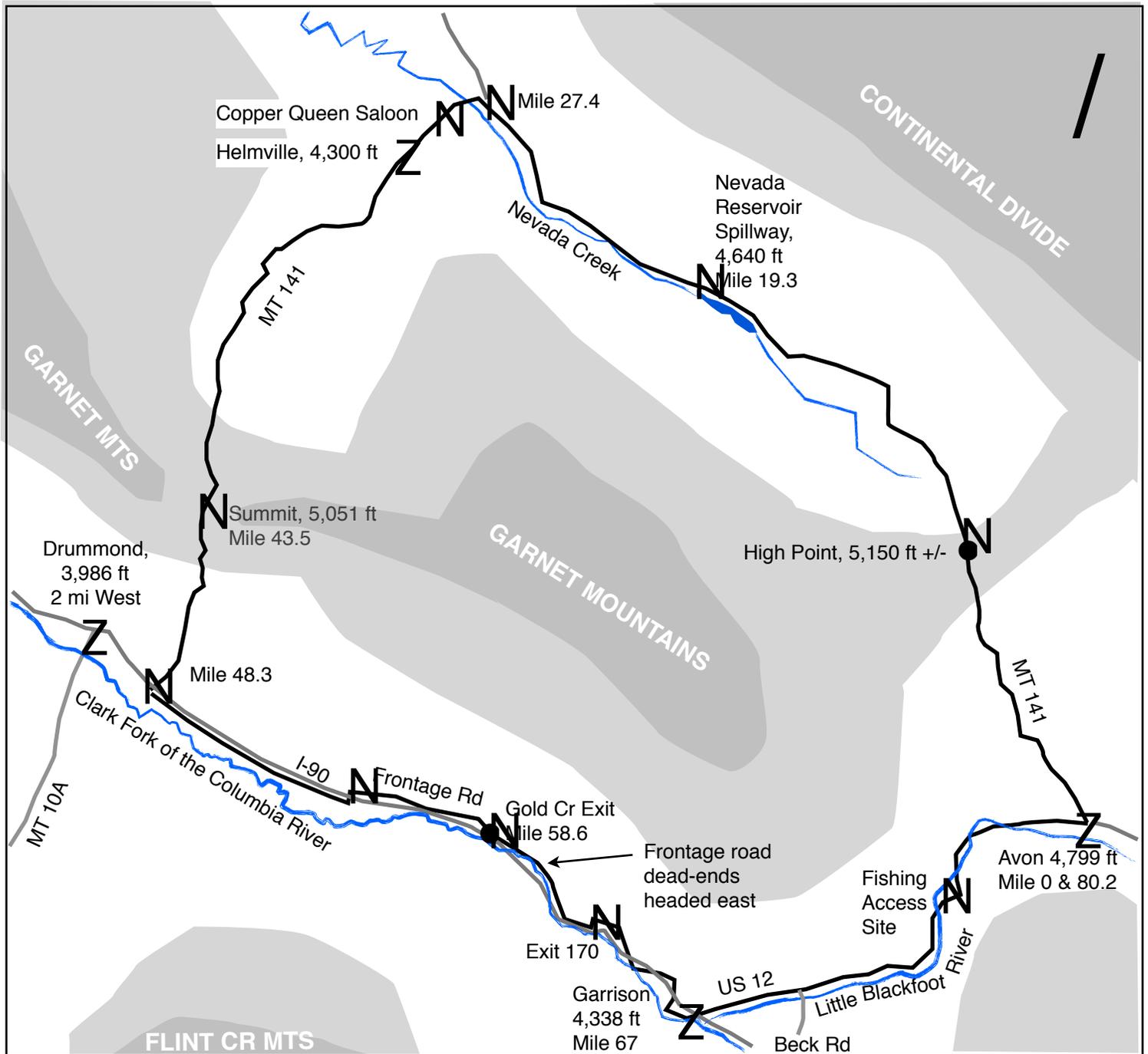
Riders are exposed to potentially severe weather. There are only a few spots to get water, so stock up when you can. The route between the Gold Creek Exit, Exit 166, and the Phosphate Exit, Exit 170, travels on the Interstate shoulder. Exercise caution on this 4 mile stretch, potentially heavy traffic, including trucks, is moving at 75 mph+. Shoulders may or may not be swept, but please ride close to the guardrail. US 12, between Garrison and Avon, can be very busy with fast traveling cars, trucks, and narrow shoulders. Ride this end-of-the-day stretch with extra care, single-file, as far right as you can, and be as visible as you can.

You might want to check with the Copper Queen Saloon, in Helmville, to determine hours, food options, and so forth: (406) 793-9612.

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Fine Print — Please read

You are responsible for your own safety. Wear a helmet, be visible, and ride single-file and predictably. Prepare yourself and your bicycle for this tour. This ride is very rural, it travels over variable road surfaces, and you will be exposed to varying amounts of traffic and potentially very dangerous weather. Conditions change and hazards appear for reasons too numerous to foretell or specify. These directions, this cue sheet and this map may have errors and may become out-dated and inaccurate over time and without warning. The Helena Bicycle Club, its officers, volunteers, trip leaders, and others associated with these Great Rides! descriptions cannot be held responsible for the conditions of this route, or for any aspect of your ride. HBC is not responsible for any injuries or damages sustained or occurring while riding this route. Ride smart, ride safely, and ride well.



CUE SHEET (Riding counter-clockwise)

- 0.4 Avon Cafe
- 0.0 Avon (US 12/MT141 intersection), head N on MT 141, (Cafe, limited groceries in Avon NW of intersection)
- 7.4 7.4 miles to top of rise of land, north of Avon, 5,150 ft
- 19.3 Nevada Lake Dam (no services)
- 27.4 Turn WSW (left) from MT 141 onto MT 271
- 28.7 Copper Queen Saloon (limited services)
- 28.9 Helmville (no services)
- 43.5 Approximate summit between Helmville and Drummond (4,800 ft)
- 48.3 Helmville Rd (RT 271) and Frontage Rd, 2 miles east of Drummond (groceries, cafes, hotels)
- 54.5 Turn N, following frontage road under freeway at the Jens Rd underpass; continue SE on frontage road
- 58.6 Cross Gold Creek overpass, ride on Interstate 90 shoulder heading E. Good shoulders, but cycle carefully
- 61.7 Rest area, restrooms, picnic tables. Continue on freeway shoulder, exit at the Phosphate exit, Exit 170, head N under freeway and turn E, regaining north-side, east-bound frontage road.
- 63.6 Turn S under freeway, away from Warm Spr Cr Rd, remaining on (now) south-side frontage road headed E
- 67 Turn E at Garrison, heading toward Avon
- 71 Beck Rd, continue E on US 12
- 75.2 Fishing Access Site (restroom)
- 80.2 Avon ((US 12/MT141 intersection)
- 80.6 Avon Cafe (east of town)