

Big Helena Valley Loop

Route Contributed by Steve Field, March 2012

- Length: 35.6 miles
- Elevation: Starting: Last Chance Gulch, 4,100 feet
Low point: Lake Helena, 3,875 feet
High point: Montana City, 4,200 feet
- Time: 3.5 to 2.5 hours (10 mph/15 mph average)
- Difficulty: Easy to moderate
- Attractions: Lake Helena; Regulating Reservoir (off-route); Prickly Pear Creek; roundabouts; Helena city
- Surface: Mostly paved, short gravel section north of Lake Helena
- Terrain: Predominantly flat, some rolling and a few small climbs
- Best time: Earlier in the day, before the winds kick up. Ridable all year, depending upon snow and ice coverage
- Traffic: Light to moderate

This is a classic ride for early season, very good for getting base miles in. It features many easy bail-outs if the wind comes up or the weather tanks. There is easy access to restrooms and snacks along the way. There's only one significant (if short) climb, just east of Montana City. This loop is contained, if barely, entirely within the Helena Valley.

Water is available at Bob's Valley Market near I-15, at the Libation Station at Applegate and Lincoln Road, off-route turning north on Hauser Dam Road at the Causeway Chalet Bar, at the Town Pump in East Helena, and various places in Montana City including Montana City Store.

Food is available in downtown Helena, at the convenience stores along Lincoln Road west of the Interstate, at the Grubstake restaurant on the Interstate, at the Causeway Chalet, in East Helena; in Montana City; and then again back in Helena. Picnic sites include the Lake Helena, the Causeway, East Helena, and along Prickly Pear Creek east of Montana City.

There are restrooms at the Causeway, where you cross Lake Helena, and at bars, restaurants, and convenient stores along the way.

There are bail-out options, including at mile 11.7 at Collins Drive. Return to Helena via Frontage Road to Sierra Road, west to Green Meadow, and back into town along your route out. Additionally, you can ride back to Helena along Canyon Ferry or York roads, or along the north side of Highway 12, using the paved multi-use path.

- 0.0 Begin at Sixth Avenue & Last Chance Gulch
- 0.1 Travel west to Park Avenue. Continue North on Park Avenue, Park changes to Benton Avenue, continue to Custer Avenue
- 1.9 Turn West on Custer, continue to Green Meadow Drive
- 2.2 Turn North on Green Meadow, continue to Norris Road
- 6.3 Turn East on Norris Rd, continue to Applegate Drive
- 6.7 On Applegate, continue North to Lincoln Road
- 8.7 On Lincoln Road, turn East (bike path available), continue east over Interstate, continuing on to Lake Helena Drive near the Causeway
- 15.2 Continue south on Hauser Dam Road/Lake Helena Drive across the Causeway (restrooms; 1.5 miles of gravel from south end of Causeway to Deal Lane) to Main Street/Old Highway 12 in East Helena
- 23.8 On Old Highway 12, aka Main Street, travel west to South Lane Avenue, aka Highway 518 on east side of slag piles. (Convenience store)
- 24.6 Continue on State Highway 518 along Prickly Pear Creek (small climb) to Montana City, passing the Montana School and crossing the Interstate. (Food, Restaurants, gas station)
- 29.3 Turn right at roundabout on Highway 282, traveling north on small rollers toward Helena. You will pass a number of roads which travel optionally steeply uphill to South Hills Drive, which is a means of extending your trip)
- 32.1 Continue through the roundabout on Saddle Drive, continuing straight through on Colonial Drive. Continue to Broadway.
- 33.2 Turn left on Broadway. Travel west on Broadway to Dakota St. (one block west of Montana)
- 34.6 Drop two blocks downhill, north onto Fifth Avenue
- 34.7 Travel west on Fifth Ave. to Warren Street
- 35.5 Turn North on Warren one block to Sixth Avenue.
- 35.5 Continue downhill into Last Chance Gulch, and where you began
- 35.6 You are on the Walking Mall, downtown Helena. Nearby are the Big Dipper, for cones and sundaes, and the Parrot, for chocolate, ice cream, and their justly famous Chili Mac tamale. Other cyclist-friendly eateries are nearby, up and down Last Chance Gulch.

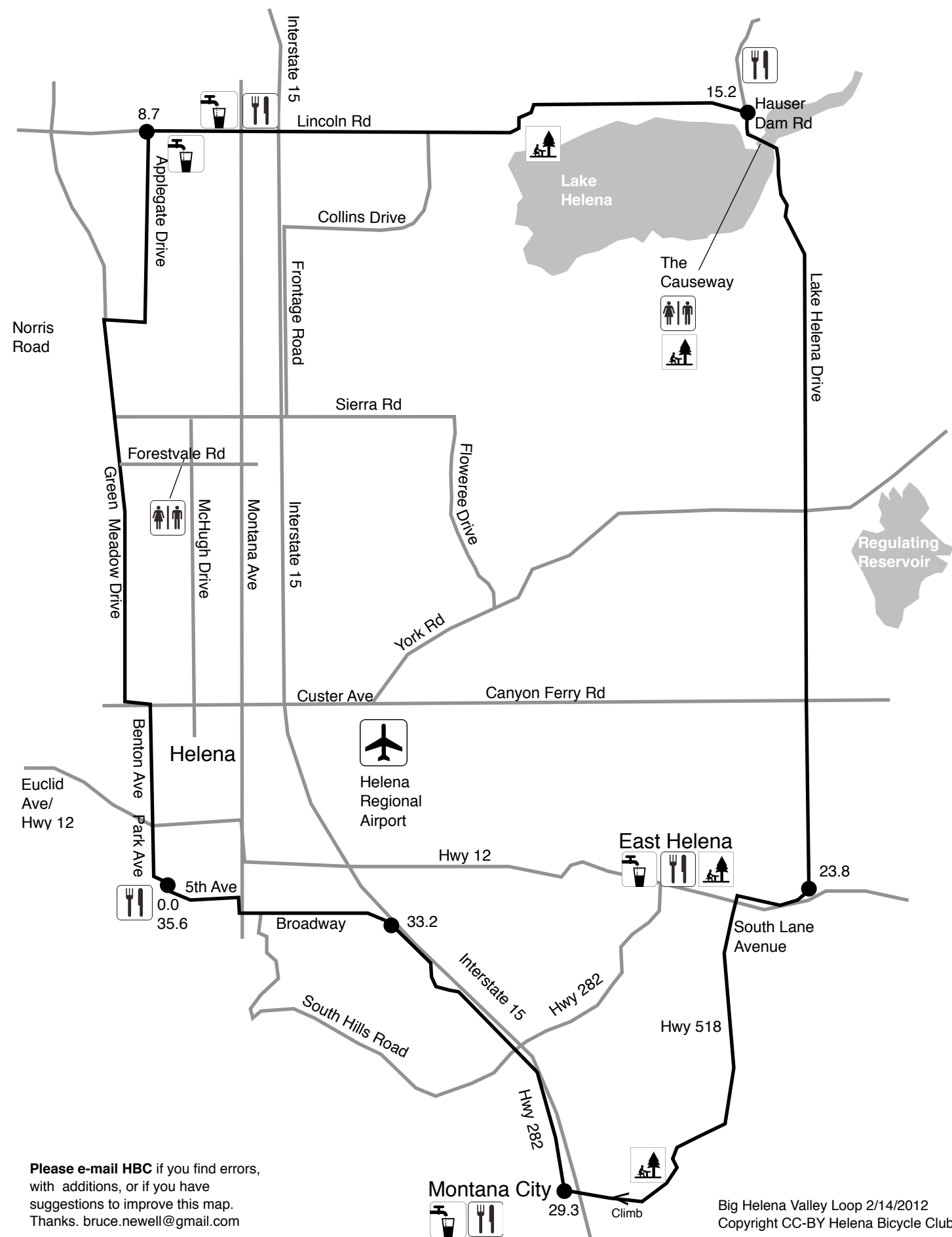
Please read

You are responsible for your safety on this ride, ride cautiously. Prepare yourself and your bicycle for your ride so that you can ride safely. Ride using your best judgment so that your trip is safe and enjoyable.

This trip includes relatively rural areas, on variable road surfaces, and you are exposed to varying amounts of traffic and potentially dangerous weather. Conditions change due to alternations in routes, uncertain weather, changes in traffic, deterioration in road surfaces, construction activities, and other hazards or inconveniences too numerous to foretell or specify. These directions and this map, like all maps and directions, lose accuracy unexpectedly and without warning.

The Helena Bicycle Club (HBC), its officers, volunteers, or contributors of these rides, trip leaders, and others associated with these 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 safely, and ride well. Have fun!



Please e-mail HBC if you find errors, with additions, or if you have suggestions to improve this map. Thanks. bruce.newell@gmail.com

Big Helena Valley Loop 2/14/2012
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