

# HISTORY ON THE ROAD

## HELENA NATIONAL FOREST, MONTANA

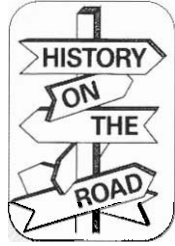
Containing nearly one million acres of land, the Helena National Forest lies on either side of the Continental Divide and surrounds the capital city of Helena. The Forest's landscapes are diverse, ranging from alpine meadows and stark limestone ridges jutting up from the Missouri River to the drier sage lands of the Big Belt mountain range. Wildlife management, recreation, mining, and grazing form the active corps of resource management responsibilities. District Ranger offices are located in Townsend, Helena, and Lincoln.

Long a place for habitation and "wilderness experiences," The Lewis and Clark Expedition experienced this area in 1805, when they traveled up the Missouri River and entered what is now the Gates of the Mountains. Their return trip in 1806 took them across portions of the Forest just northeast of where Lincoln is today.

The Forest is an angler's delight, offering ample fishing opportunities for five species of trout, plus Atlantic grayling and whitefish. Individuals can also hike along the Continental Divide Scenic Trail, or view big game in the Elkhorn Wildlife Management Unit.

One of the more popular drives on the Forest is on portions of the Scenic Figure-8 Route. The route, now partially closed by a washout, offers views through the mountains and the deep canyons of Trout and Beaver Creeks. A side road to Hogback Mountain leads to an overlook providing a magnificent view of the Helena Valley and the Beaver Creek Canyon below.

Ten campgrounds and four picnic areas allow recreationists a leisurely experience. Two destinations, the Meriwether Picnic Area and Coulter Campground, are located along the Missouri River in the Gates of the Mountains and are accessible only by boat or foot. Excursion boats operat-



ing on the River offer scenic tours of the area, with a stop at the Meriwether Picnic site.

Several gold boom settlements and communities such as Diamond City, Whites City, Hassell, and Old Lincoln were established throughout the Helena Forest area when mining activity was at its peak. Remnants of these once-booming towns can still be found.

The city of Helena, itself, is picturesque and rich in history of the old West. The discovery of gold in 1864 created a

rush to the area and by the time of the Nation's Centennial, the boom town boasted a population of 4,000. Helena's historic sites are worth visiting and include the Helena Cathedral, the C. M. Russell Art Gallery, and the old Governor's Mansion.

For more information or maps of the Helena National Forest, please contact:

**FOREST SUPERVISOR**  
2880 Skyway Drive  
Helena, MT 59601  
Phone: (406) 449-5201

This summer, the Helena National Forest is commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire.

The Forest has several activities planned in honor of the wildland firefighters. Interpretive hikes into Mann Gulch and the monuments will be offered on an occasional basis in June, July, and August. The placing of a ceremonial wreath occurs on August 4th. The commemorative ceremony at the Montana State Capitol Building, in Helena is scheduled for August 5th. Over the weekend of August 6th and 7th, displays of past and current fire fighting equipment can be viewed at the Meriwether Picnic Area in the Gates of the Mountains on the Missouri River. For more specific information about the events, contact:

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Or visit the Helena National Forest home page:  
[www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/)

*Funding for the commemorative events is supported by the National Forest Foundation. They are still accepting donations. If you are interested in supporting the events, send a check to:*

National Forest Foundation, 1099 14th Street, NW Suite 5600W,  
Washington, DC 20005-3419