

KID-FRIENDLY HIKES IN THE RED LODGE AREA

This is a brief description of short hikes for young children. Find adventure outdoors by following your child's lead. Take time to look at the wildflowers, watch and listen for wildlife and birds, discover animal tracks, find feathers, climb rocks, play in the water, make rock art, draw pictures in the dirt, sing songs, become detectives, superheroes or forest fairies. You may not travel far, but you will experience nature through your children's eyes.

Take only pictures, leave only footprints. Just a quick note on LEAVE NO TRACE Ethics . . .

- ✓ Leave everything as you find it so that others may enjoy. Wildflowers die very soon after being picked and may take years to bloom again. Carving on trees will harm the trees forever.
- ✓ Take everything out that you bring in, even biodegradable food. Be a forest friend and pick up litter that others may have dropped.
- ✓ It is best to use the 'Loo with a view' off the trail and away from the creeks. Prepare some 'potty packs' before you leave. Put a little toilet paper and a single-size Wet One in a snack-sized ziplock bag. After your little one has used these, place the toilet paper and wet one back in the ziplock bag and toss into a trash can upon your return. They also come in handy for sticky hands or wiping noses.
- ✓ Teach your children why we should not feed wildlife. Human food is not good for their digestive systems and can cause them to rely on being fed. It may cause wildlife to associate humans with food, which can lead to them biting people.

SAFETY

Take plenty of water, lots of snacks, a ziplock to carry out your trash; sunscreen, insect repellent, close-toed shoes, caps or hats, sunglasses, rain jackets, fleece, camera and a few bandaids. Hiking poles and binoculars are always fun for kids to use.

Kids are very good at singing and talking on the trail, which will alert bears that you are near. Carry bear spray and know how to use it.

Do not approach wildlife, and know how to respond if wildlife approaches you. Wildlife experts recommend the following:

Slowly back away from BEARS. Do not run. You do NOT want to seem like a threat to bears.

If you encounter a MOUNTAIN LION, keep your children close to you, make yourselves look big by waving your arms and yelling. You DO want seem like a threat to mountain lions.

If you encounter a MOOSE, keep your distance. Moose can be very dangerous.

Seek out more detailed information about wildlife available in publications locally or online.

Be careful when throwing rocks. You don't always know when a trail is below you where a person or animal could get injured.

Water, even though it looks clean, it can contain giardia. It is not drinkable. Bring your own drinking water. Beware: rocks can be slippery, and keep a close eye on your children near fast moving streams!

TRAIL RATINGS:

SUPER DUPER EASY- short and fairly level

PRETTY EASY- short, but a little elevation gain

MORE CHALLENGING- a little longer with some elevation gain

Most of the trails listed here are the beginning of longer trails. Some longer distance options for older kids are included. See the additional resource listings for information regarding these trails.

WEST FORK OF ROCK CREEK TRAILS

These trails begin 2½ to 13 miles from town. To get to these trails from Red Lodge, go south on Highway 212 to the edge of town. Turn right (west) on the West Fork Road.

WILLOW CREEK TRAIL – Pretty Easy

This is a lush, creekside, forested trail that crosses several bridges over Willow Creek as it gradually climbs in elevation. Watch for moose tracks.

Snack on thimbleberries and huckleberries later in the summer.

How to get there: On the West Fork Road, go 1.1 mile, turn right onto Palisades Campground Road, then follow the signs 1½ miles to the campground. Parking is by the west restroom. The trailhead is at the far west end.

The hike: Follow the Willow Creek Trail staying left. After a short distance up the trail, watch for an interpretive sign on the right at an old mine adit. After the third creek crossing over a wooden bridge watch for an old miner's cabin on the right before the trail goes up a steep slope. You may choose this as your destination. Have a snack by the bridge and return the ½ mile or so to the trailhead.

Option: continue up the trail (800' elevation gain) through a lodgepole pine forest to the Red Lodge Mountain Ski Area road (4 miles round trip).

SILVER RUN TRAIL - LOOP 1- Pretty Easy

Walk a 2.4 mile loop trail up through a lodgepole pine forest and loop around to return down along the West Fork Creek.

How to get there: On the West Fork Road, go 2.7 miles; take the left fork continuing on pavement another 1½ miles. Turn left at the sign for Silver Run, cross the bridge and park.

The hike: Head west from the parking lot ¼ mile up the gravel road. Go straight and follow the trail to the fork. Stay left towards Loop 1. After 1.1 mile take the right fork at the junction to continue on Loop 1. This will connect with the loop trail system to return to the trailhead along

the river. There are several places along the return where you can dip your toes into the water, but keep a close eye on your kids along this fast moving stream.

Longer options: Continue straight up the trail from the junction for the 1st Loop trail. Follow the signs to hike Loop 2 (3.4 miles total) or Loop 4 (5.1 miles total). All trails return to the same path.

WILD BILL LAKE – Super Duper Easy

A short walk to a small lake stocked with rainbow and brook trout for kid-friendly fishing. (Velveeta cheese is the bait of choice for these fish.) Several docks with benches allow for fishing or easy spotting of the numerous fish swimming in the lake. The trail continues around the lake for a short loop hike.

How to get there: On the West Fork Road, go 2.7 miles; take the left fork, continuing on pavement 3.1 miles to the Wild Bill Lake parking area on the right.

The hike: The trail leads directly out of the north side of the parking lot past the restrooms. Take a minute to read the interesting history of Wild Bill's resort. Walk up the trail, across the bridge, and left towards the lake. You can explore all the way around the lake for more fishing areas, or to complete a loop hike. There are many picnic tables located in the shady pines east of the parking lot.

BASIN CREEK LAKES TRAIL- Pretty Easy

This description is for a very short, but cool hike at the beginning of this trail. It is a walk uphill, along playful Basin Creek to a view of a waterfall cascading down along the trail.

How to get there: On the West Fork Road, go 2.7 miles; take the left fork, continuing on pavement 4.2 miles; turn left at the Basin Creek Lake trailhead parking lot.

The hike: Head south of the parking lot and continue straight on the trail. You will be walking along Basin Creek and will come to the waterfall on your left 0.4 miles up the trail. Hang on to your kids as you peer up the creek at the cool falls.

Longer option: Continue up some switchbacks to a pretty part of the trail where it levels off for a while following the creek. Beyond that the trail has many steeper portions. You can hike 2½ more miles up 1400' to the lower lake. I would rate this hike as strenuous for kiddos due to the elevation gain.

Another option: As you return towards the parking lot you will see a sign for the Silver Run Trails. Take this connector trail to hike Loop 4 of the Silver Run Trail. You can hike a short 1 mile loop by turning off the main trail at an unmarked square post, or continue on to the Loop 2 junction where you continue back on the Loop 4 trail for a total of 2 miles. This is a pleasant, relatively flat trail through the forest along little creeks and over small bridges.

WEST FORK TRAIL- More Challenging

This trail gently climbs along the West Fork of Rock Creek initially through remnants of a forest which burned in the 2008 Cascade fire. It is a good fire ecology lesson in observing the thick new undergrowth rich with wildflowers. There are several options for destinations, from waterfalls to a beautiful open meadow with views of Whitetail Peak and surrounding mountains.

How to get there: On the West Fork Road, go 2.7 miles; take the left fork, continuing for 10 miles to the end of the road at the trailhead parking lot. (After the Basin Creek Campground, the road becomes gravel.)

The hike: The trailhead is at the north side of the parking lot near the restroom. Follow the trail sign towards Quinnebaugh Meadows. When you hear the thunder of a waterfall after 1.4 miles, watch for an unmarked trail on the left. This will lead you to Calamity Falls. There are steep drop offs and it is fast moving water, so be sure to hold your child's hand close to the water. You may choose this as your destination and have a snack on the large rocks beside the falls, or walk another mile up the trail to Sentinel Falls, which can be seen from the trail.

Longer option: Hike up another 1.6 miles to Quinnebaugh Meadows. It is 8 miles round-trip to the meadow, with a 900' elevation gain. This would be strenuous for little ones because of the distance and elevation gain.

LAKE FORK/MAIN FORK TRAILS

These trails begin 11 to 13 miles from town.

LOWER LAKE FORK TRAIL- Pretty Easy

Hike 2½ miles round trip on this gentle trail along the Lake Fork Creek through a shady lodgepole pine forest.

How to get there: Drive 10 miles south on Highway 212. Turn right (west) at the Lake Fork Road sign. Go 0.8 miles and park in the paved pullout on the left.

The hike: Walk down towards the creek on the hidden paved path at the east end of the parking area. After you walk across the bridge, follow the trail to the right. Continue along the creek. There are several splits in the trail. Take any of them, as they come together again after a short distance. You will reach the bridge that leads to the Lake Fork Trailhead parking lot after 1.2 miles and 350' of elevation gain. This is your turnaround point. Follow the trail back down to the wooden bridge you initially crossed at the parking pullout to return to your car.

UPPER LAKE FORK TRAIL- Pretty Easy

Because this is a relatively level trail and shaded along the cascading Lake Fork Creek, this is a popular trail. In a little over a mile, you reach a wonderful view of Silver Falls and a beach alongside the river. Moose are frequently seen along this trail.

How to get there: Drive 10 miles south on Highway 212. Turn right (west) at the Lake Fork Road sign. Follow this paved road 2 miles to the end at the trailhead.

The hike: Find the trailhead at the west end of the parking lot and cross the bridge. Follow the trail to the right up the pleasant, shaded path alongside Lake Fork Creek. You will enter the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness in a few minutes. A little after one mile, look to the left to see

Silver Falls. Depending on the time of summer, you will cross two creeks of varying levels coming out of the falls. Look to the right for the small beach on Lake Fork Creek. This is a good destination for some playtime and snacks.

Longer options: For older kids you may want to continue up the trail 2 more miles to Broadwater Lake. It is actually a wide slow part of the river that makes for a pleasant destination. The total elevation gain to this point is 800'.

GREENOUGH LAKE/Parkside National Recreation Trail- Super Duper Easy

This is a short, level hike to a kid-friendly fishing lake.

How to get there: Drive 11.5 miles south on Highway 212 and turn right at the brown Campgrounds sign. Bear left to the Greenough Lake trail and campground. Take this 0.3 mile road to the end of the campground where you will find the trailhead parking lot.

The hike: The trail leads south past the trail sign to a split in the trail. Both trails meet at Greenough Lake; the left trail follows an old road, while the right trail takes you along Rock Creek. You will reach the lake in a quarter mile. Here you can take the trail to loop around the lake and do some exploring or find good spots for catching rainbow trout.

Longer options: The Parkside National Recreation Trail continues south from the west side of the lake for another mile and a half with a slight elevation gain of 200'. The views open up to take in the Beartooth and Hellroaring Plateaus. Make your own story for the history of the old car you pass in the woods. The trail comes to a footbridge over Quad Creek where you can retrace your route back to the lake and parking lot.

BEARTOOTH PLATEAU TRAILS

The spectacular drive up the Beartooth Highway make these an all day trip. The Beartooth Plateau offers many trails and wide open areas where you can simply get out of your car and walk to a small lake, or explore around the rock formations, discover wildflowers and keep an eye out for the mountain goats that frequent the area.

ISLAND LAKE- Pretty Easy

This popular hike is included in this list of kid-friendly hikes because if I were a kid, I would want to explore here. The 1 mile hike follows the lakeshore and you can fish from anywhere along the trail. It is essentially a level path to the end of the lake. It is better to hike this later in the summer to avoid mosquitoes.

How to get there: Drive south up the Beartooth Highway (212). Plan to take your time up this curvy, windy road with spectacular views. Stop at the Vista Point approximately 25 miles up the road where there are restrooms, a short paved walk to an awesome vista of the plateaus, and fat chipmunks begging for food. After 38 miles you will reach the Island Lake turn-off on your right, continue 0.2 mile to the parking area turn-off on your right. Continue to the parking lot by the restroom.

The Hike: The trailhead begins on the north side of the parking lot and leads you down to the boat launch area by the lake. The trail continues towards the west along the lake. There is a crossing at Little Bear Creek, which does not have a bridge. Depending on the water flow, you may be able to step across on the rocks, or wade through the water. Little ones will need assistance getting across. Walk along the shoreline trail, exploring as you go. When you reach the end of Island Lake, you may want to continue on to Night Lake just a little further up the trail. There are a multitude of good places to rest, have a snack and enjoy the area.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Day Hikes in the Beartooth Mountains by Robert Stone

Hiking the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness by Bill Schneider

These and other informational publications may be found in several places in Red Lodge, including:

Sylvan Peak Mountain Shop, 9 S Broadway

US Forest Service Ranger Station, 6811 Highway 212 (south of the West Fork Rd)

A full list of area trails is available at <https://www.beartoothtrails.org/trails>. This guide was compiled by Laurie Barnard, a volunteer with the Beartooth Recreational Trails Association. If you found it useful, please consider a donation, via <https://www.beartoothtrails.org/donate>.