

MONTANA



A Rockhounder's
Dream

ROCKHOUNDING MONTANA: 4 DAYS

Crystal Park, Calvert Mine, Argo Mine

Just a few hours south of Calgary is Montana, the "treasure state". With plenty of public land, few restrictions, and a variety of material, it is a rockhoulder's dream.

Our favorite location is Crystal Park, where you can spend hours digging through sand trying to find that perfect quartz point.

But there are also plenty of old mine tailings to sort through. Four and a half days is enough to see the 3 main sites we've listed, plus the 3 roadside stops. But if you've got more time, there are plenty of other interesting things to see. Maybe you'll even get to Yellowstone!

Calgary to Crystal Park

Without stops, Calgary to Crystal Park is about a 9 hour drive. We typically leave in the evening after work and drive about 3 hours to just across the border to Babb,



Crystal Park
Dig or sift
through sand for
Quartz points.

WILDLIFE



Along the route

There are many opportunities to see some wildlife on your way between rockhounding. Freezeout Lake is one of our regular stops for waterfowl. We have seen Moose, Beavers and Pheasants along and near the rolling Hwy 89 route. The prairies, such as the I15 route, are good for Antelope.

Montana. But it is still about 5 hours to Crystal Park, so consider some roadside rockhounding on the way.

The Route

You can take a divided freeway the whole way, but prior to Helena, we usually take the scenic route through Cardston and Babb. This route is only slightly slower, and hugs the foothills as it winds through rolling ranchland. Once you get near Helena, the freeway is actually very scenic, winding through canyons at a speed limit that would be illegal in most jurisdictions.

Stop 1: Crystal Park

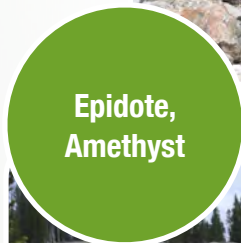
Crystal Park is paved all the way. The snow leaves in mid-May. This is a BLM (Bureau of Land Management) site where you are free to dig through the sandy soil in search of quartz crystals. There are many small crystals to be found and if you're really lucky, something large. A shovel and sifting box are handy items to have.

Rocks: Quartz

Stop 2: Calvert Mine



Calvert Mine



Calvert Mine

After a lunch stop in Wise river, this is not far away. It is on a narrow mountain road, but we had no trouble in a 2WD car. The road eventually goes in a loop, but turn right at the fork, or you'll spend a long time getting there. This is a huge pile of mine tallings, with a large water filled pit. Take some time to wander around as the rocks are a little different. Rocks: Epidote, Amethyst.

Stop 3: Argo Mine

Depending on your schedule, you can either do this one on the way to Crystal Park, or the way back. This is fairly close to Helena if you are staying there, and a favorite, partly for the rocks and partly for the canyon drive. This is at the end of rough road, so you'll want at least a high clearance vehicle. From Helena you start with a fairly long paved drive through cottages and campgrounds around Canyon Ferry Lake and then drive up through narrow canyons on a scenic dirt road.

Found: Malachite, Pyrite, Azurite



Argo Mine Road



Argo Mine Site

Malachite,
Pyrite, Azurite



FOOTHILLS



A Country Drive

The drive through Montana is very picturesque, especially if you stay off of the interstate. Following the foothills down Highway 89 hugs Glacier National Park and through beautiful rolling Prairie.

ROAD SIDE ROCKHOUNDING



Site 2: Near Augusta

Reference

"Rockhounding Montana" by Falcon Publishing, is an excellent resource. Their latest version contains GPS coordinates for each site. It can be ordered on-line through Amazon.



Site 1: Montana City

Road side sites

Road cuts make an excellent rockhounding location. These three are easy to add to your route. Watch for traffic on sites 1 and 2 and watch for falling rock at site 3!

SITE 1: MONTANA CITY	SITE 2: NEAR AUGUSTA	SITE 3: NEAR BOULDER
5 min south of Helena Jasper	South of Augusta Fossilized Oysters	I-15 half between Butte and Helena Barite
N46.542850, W111.948300	N47.392633, W112.317320	N46.266367 W112.313483



Site 3: Near Boulder

COMMERCIAL ROCKHOUNDING

Sapphires: **Spokane Bar** (Helena) and **Gem Mountain** (west of Philipsburg) both have gravel for sifting. Use their sifting trays there, or take a bag home.

A nice break on the way down is the **Two Medicine Dinosaur Center** and neighbouring rock shop. But you can't even get a chocolate bar in this town.

EXTRA ACTIVITIES

GHOST TOWNS



Garnet Ghost Town

Off the Beaten Path


Head up a gravel road into the hills in search of some history. Typically a 2WD car is fine to access these sites.



If you have some extra time, Montana has many Ghost towns.

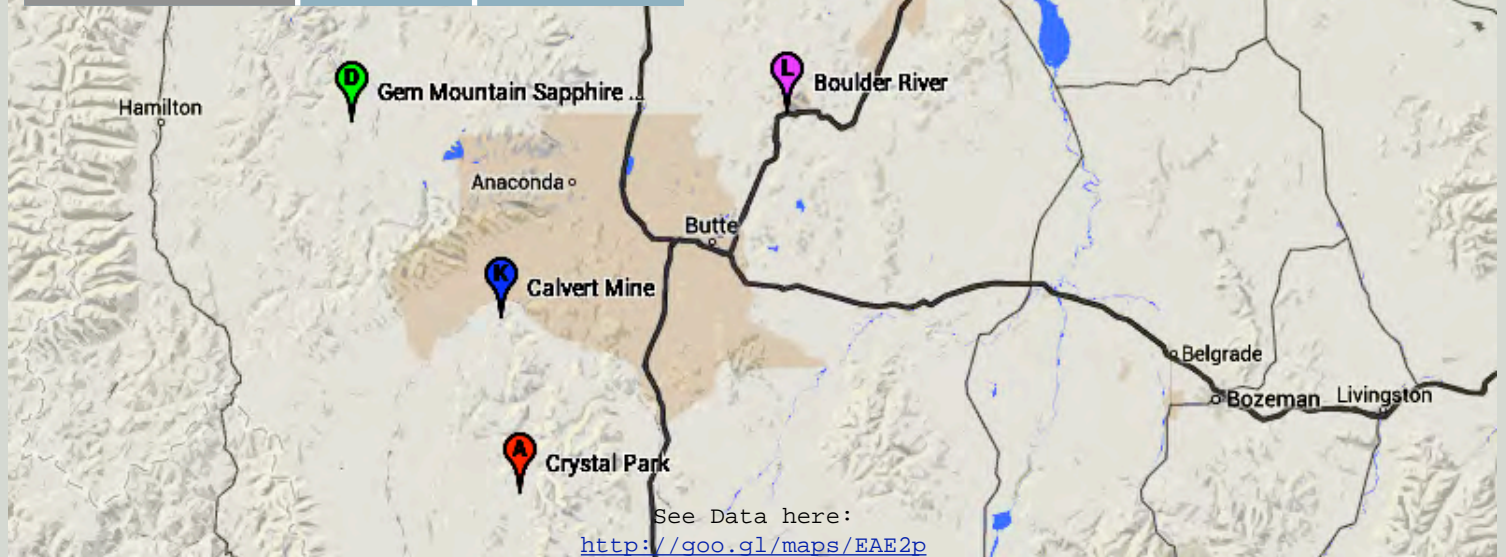
On longer trips, we have visited a few of Montana's ghost towns. Along with the many old mines, there are many old mining towns. Usually high up in the hills. Other towns, such as Philipsburg are very nice and

have avoided the ghost town fate. I'll let you do your own research on the exact locations.

NEARBY GHOST TOWNS	GARNET	BANNACK	ELKHORN	GRANITE
	East of Missoula Well preserved	Southwest of Dillon A state park	South of Helena	East of Philipsburg

LOCATIONS MAP

	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
ARGO MINE	46.691002	-111.585403
BOULDER RIVER	46.266369	-112.313477
CRYSTAL PARK	45.486492	-113.099609
FREEZEOUT LAKE	47.665771	-112.010086
GEM MOUNTAIN SAPPHIRE MINE	46.247417	-113.591919
CALVERT MINE	45.847748	-113.153503
MONTANA CITY	46.54285	-111.948303
NEAR AUGUSTA	47.389149	-112.315422
SPOKANE SAPPHIRE MINE	46.664825	-111.811035
TWO MEDICINE DINOSAUR CENTER	47.975922	-112.311508



FOOD AND LODGING

Never far away

Food, Lodging

In spite of it's low population and wilderness, you never seem to be far from a place to stay and a place to eat. However, if you come in the off-season, expect to find many store owners have flown south for the winter. We've visited in May through September without many problems.

LODGING

Babb

Babb has only a couple of buildings, but located a nice evening's drive from Calgary. The single motor inn, Thronson's Motel (406-732-5530) is fine. It closes at 6pm, so call ahead. A diner across the street and a bar down the road are good places to eat, but are seasonal. For breakfast the locals take the next right (Duck Lake Road) to the Leaning Tree Cafe.

Polaris

30 minutes south of Crystal Park is a small motel located in beautiful rolling countryside. Grasshopper Inn

Butte

Butte is the nearest large city to Crystal Park, but at about 1.5 hours away it's not too convenient unless you plan appropriately. Still, with all the rockhounding sites in the area, we find ourselves passing through often. Butte also has a massive old pit mine and a mining museum.

Helena

A similar size to Butte, and located close to Spokane Bar Sapphires and Argo Mine.

Choteau

Forget your french when you try to pronounce this place. A small town with a couple of place to stay and eat.

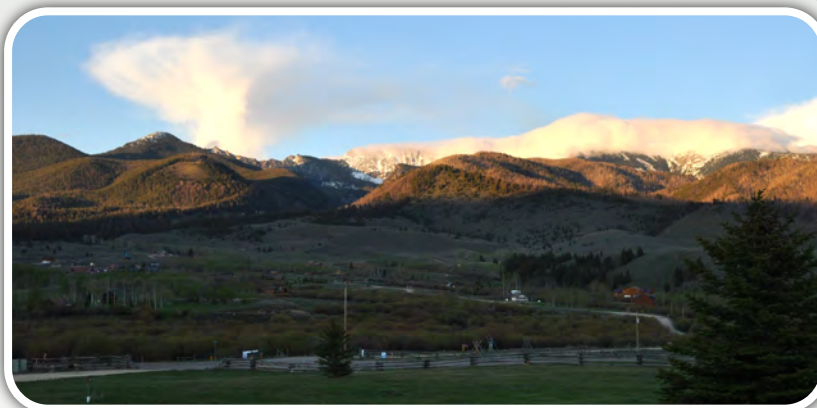
Camping

Campgrounds are plentiful in the mountains and because camping is free if you're below the high water line, you find people camped out just about everywhere. The Pioneer Mountains National Scenic Bypass that takes you to Crystal Park is lined with campgrounds. One is only about 2 minutes south of Crystal Park. Very convenient, but bring your bug spray.

FOOD

Wise River

Just at the start of the road to Crystal Park is the village of Wise River. No corner store, but somehow they have at least 2 places to eat and a popular ice cream shop. A great place to stop when you're moving between Crystal Park and Calvert Mine.



Polaris, Montana

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For CRCL Member's Use

This was produced for Calgary Rock and Lapidary Club members to use in preparing their own personal field trip to Montana.

This document was made by Stefan Gibbins, based on trips taken in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

CALGARY ROCK AND LAPIDARY CLUB

www.CRLC.ca