

GREAT FALLS MONTANA

River's Edge History Tour



The River's Edge History Tour

Archaeological sites such as buffalo jumps and ancient camps confirm the presence of Native Americans in the Great Falls area for several millennia before Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery arrived in 1805. The tribes were attracted by bison herds and other game animals known to use a Missouri River ford at this location. When he reached the falls, Meriwether Lewis was greatly impressed with their grandeur and beauty, features no doubt appreciated by the tribes as well. The Falls of the Missouri possessed other qualities, however, that attracted those who would build a city and develop corporate enterprise.

After reading Lewis' description of the falls, Paris Gibson, a sheep rancher from Fort Benton, was inspired to visit them in 1880-1882. He focused on the aesthetic and economic potential of the area and realized this was an ideal place for a city. Having owned flour and woolen mills in his former Minnesota home, he was acutely aware of the potential to derive industrial power from waterfalls. He also knew the surrounding region contained coal and mineral deposits. His vision for the area was "...a great industrial center as well as a city of unsurpassed beauty and attractiveness."

As Montana Territory entered a decade of exceptional growth, Gibson could not have picked a better time to conceive and implement his dream. Newly completed railroads would ensure the feasibility of large-scale hard rock mining and the age of electric power was on the horizon. Just ten years after Gibson began his project, the city had more than 4,000 residents, two railroads, five banks, lumber and flour mills, a gas and light company, trolley system and other essential services. East of town, two smelters were processing ores from the nearby Little Belt Mountains as well as from mining operations in Butte, 150 miles to the south. A dam at Black Eagle Falls provided power for these developments.

Water power and mineral processing became the foundation of Great Falls' economy in this first decade and defined the course of its development for much of the next century. The first water projects at Great Falls supplied mechanical power for industry, but technological developments in the production and

distribution of electricity rapidly increased the demand for electric power and copper. By 1915, Butte's once diverse copper mining interests had been consolidated into the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. To meet the ever-increasing demand for electricity to power its Montana operations, Anaconda looked for suitable dam sites on the Missouri River. None were more attractive than those at Great Falls.

The Montana Power Company (MPC) was created from several small firms and proceeded to build dams and power plants near Great Falls and other sites in the state. While the MPC was not an Anaconda subsidiary, John Ryan was president of both and they were closely associated for many years. MPC supplied power for Anaconda's mining and related operations, and expanded production to meet the demands of further development in the state, including municipal growth, railway electrification and large irrigation projects. Together, these companies controlled vast resources and wielded overwhelming political power in the state.

Anaconda's refinery dominated the Great Falls landscape until operations ceased in 1980, under the management of new owner, Atlantic Richfield. The plant had evolved from a copper smelter into a refinery, zinc plant and wire mill, but the economics of the industry had changed. The massive 506-foot smokestack on Smelter Hill was demolished in 1982, ending an era in Great Falls history.

The Montana Power Company had a large, diverse customer and resource base in water power, oil and gas, mining and coal generation. Between 1998 and 2000, the company sold its successful power generation and transmission facilities, only to become a failed telecommunications firm. It was sold at auction in 2002.

The new owner of area hydro generation, PPL Montana, has put thousands of riverfront acres into trail and conservation easements and provided new public access to the island at Black Eagle and along the north shore between Rainbow Reservoir and Morony Dam.

Much of River's Edge Trail is built on former roads and railroad lines. We encourage you to explore these historic transportation routes at your own pace. Enjoy your tour.

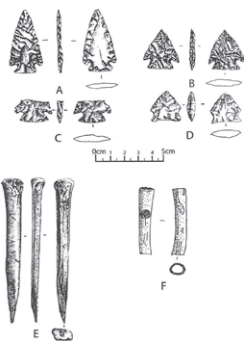
Chris Serysheen photo USF & W



1 Meriwether Lewis and the Grizzly Bear

Meriwether Lewis first encountered the Great Falls of the Missouri on June 13, 1805. The following day he continued west along the north side of the river, finding four more falls. Between the last of the falls (Black Eagle) and the mouth

of the Sun River, Lewis killed one of a thousand buffalo he had seen that morning. With his attention focused on the dying buffalo, he didn't notice a grizzly bear had approached within "20 steps." Having failed to reload his rifle and with no time to do so, Lewis found himself in a life-threatening situation on the open plain. He quickly retreated toward the river, some 90 yards to the south. The grizzly raced him to the river. Lewis was about 20 feet from the river bank in waist-deep water when he turned to face the bear, espartoon (spear) in hand. The episode ended when the bear wheeled about at the river's edge and ran at full speed for three miles to the trees on Sun River.



2 The Vivendi Site

City civil engineers discovered this 2500-year old Native American archaeological site when constructing an addition to the wastewater treatment plant. University of Montana archaeologists excavated the site, recovering stone artifacts, bone tools and the remains of food bones. Their analysis revealed the ancient inhabitants camped here in the spring. Hunters brought bison, elk and deer to the camp, where they processed the game and repaired their weapons. Some of the stone used to make spear points came

from what is now Yellowstone National Park, indicating this group traded with others or they might have travelled to the south. Travel was slow in those days because horses would not be introduced to North America for another two millennia. Hunting was done with an atlatl or spear-thrower, as the bow and-arrow was not yet used in this area.



Jo Coon photo

3 Tenth Street Bridge

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Tenth Street Bridge is the oldest reinforced concrete, open spandrel, multi-arch bridge in Montana. Since its replacement by the Ninth Street Bridge, the historic structure is being restored by

a group dedicated to its preservation. It was built in 1920 to meet city and county transportation needs after a period of rapid growth. Cascade County adopted a novel method to obtain the bridge design, launching a contest with a \$1000 prize to the winner. Plans submitted by structural engineer, Ralph Adams of Spokane, and prominent Great Falls architect George Shanley won the award. The River's Edge Trail was built through a tunnel under the north end of the Tenth Street Bridge, and the restored portion of the bridge is accessible from the trail. The bridge is occasionally lighted at night, casting a neon-blue glow across the water.

4

River Bank

A few depressions in the ground are all that remain of a shanty town known as River Bank. It was one of several areas occupied intermittently by squatters for about 20 years beginning in 1891, when the first Black Eagle Dam and the Boston and Montana Smelter were being built. Occupants were European immigrants, primarily from Scandinavia, Wales, Croatia and Slovenia, who worked at the smelter. Most used this area for temporary dwellings until they had the resources to build permanent homes. Many moved a short distance to the town of Black Eagle.



5a

Boston and Montana/Anaconda Housing Development and Landscaping

The Boston and Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company built a large smelter and refinery complex on the north side of the Missouri River in 1892. Company housing for managers and supervisors once occupied the terraced areas west of the paved road at this location. The firm's successor, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, continued to provide housing until it shut down in 1980. Many of the homes were then moved to other locations, including the manager's elegant 1893 Queen Anne-style residence. (See # 8b)

One of the Anaconda managers, Al Wiggin (1918-1941), helped transform the once barren Smelter Hill industrial complex into a carefully designed green landscape. The vertical concrete structure on the east side of the paved road at this location was once an artificial waterfall, part of an impressive park at the refinery gate. Other green developments included a 9-hole golf course, many trees and lawns, flower beds, water gardens, picnic areas, walking trails, a lily pond and an overlook. These developments were in the tradition established by Great Falls founder, Paris Gibson, who believed "... capitalists, professionals, wage earners, and merchants ought to be united by a common bond of building a beautiful city." The top of Bell Tower Hill is a short walk up the path west of the waterfall, where the remains of a reflecting pond can be seen as well as the Boston and Montana Barn. (See # 5b)



5b

Boston and Montana Barn

The Boston and Montana Barn is the large white structure that's visible north of the trail loop at the reflecting pond. It is the only surviving building related to smelting and refining operations still in its original location. It was built by the Boston and Montana Company around 1900 as a horse barn, and later served as a fire house and garage. Located at the south end of the Anaconda Hills Golf Course, the two-story barn is built in a T-shape with a wood frame and gable roof.



6a *First Black Eagle Dam and Powerhouse*

Black Eagle is the westernmost falls on the Missouri River described by Meriwether Lewis in 1805. Recognizing the potential for industrial power, Paris Gibson's Great Falls Water Power and Townsite Company constructed the first Black Eagle dam in 1890-92 to help induce the Boston and Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company to locate here. The Boston and Montana built a smelter and power plant on the north side of the falls to process ores from its Butte mining operations. Black Eagle was the first sizable water power development in the state (See #6b and # 8a.)



6b *Current Black Eagle Dam and Powerhouse*

Absorbing the Boston and Montana in 1910, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company soon acquired the power to run its operations from the Montana Power Company (MPC). The power company continued to develop dams at the Great Falls and elsewhere to meet demand, but by the 1920s the plants at Black Eagle Falls were obsolete. In response to increased demand from municipal growth and other developments in the region, MPC rebuilt the dam and powerhouse in 1926-27. The new, higher dam and modern generating equipment allowed the production of considerably more power. The powerhouse superstructure was made of steel and concrete instead of brick as originally planned because unionized bricklayers wanted pay rates established for the City of Great Falls rather than the lower rates paid by Anaconda. The Company's response was to use no bricklayers.

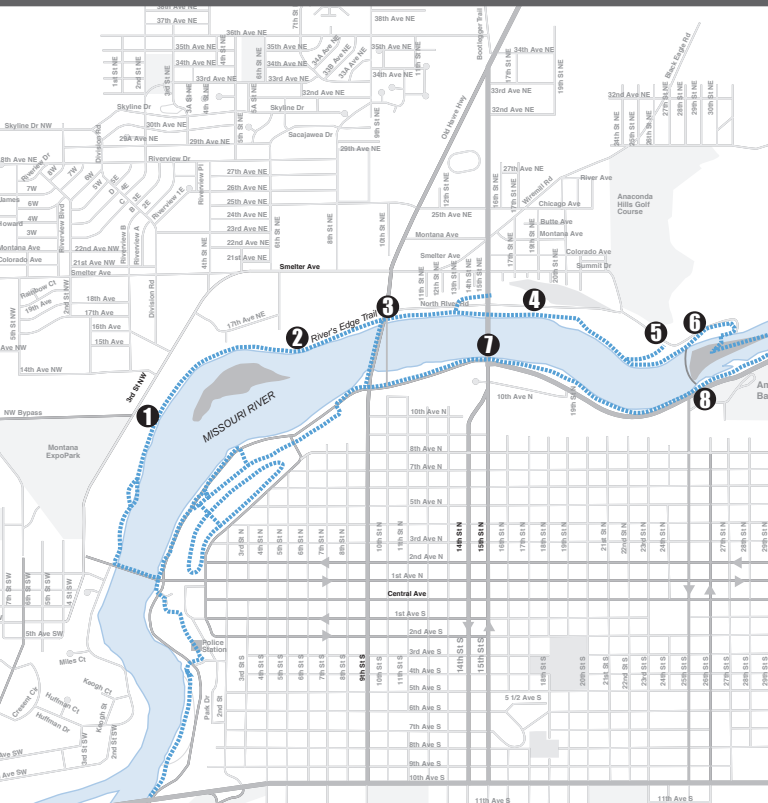
Stone and concrete retaining walls were constructed north of the powerhouse during the rebuilding project. One of the larger stones with "1927" carved into it can be seen from the River's Edge Trail. About 430 feet east of this date marker and south of the trail, brick arches of the first Black Eagle power plant can be seen, incorporated into the forebay of the current powerhouse.



6c *Tailrace Bridge*

When the first Boston and Montana powerhouse was constructed, a bridge was built across the tailrace to connect smelter facilities with Tailrace Island. In the process of repairing damage to the hydroelectric facility caused by the flooding Missouri River in 1908, a new bridge was installed to accommodate vehicles. Still in use, this structure is a single-span, double intersecting, Warren through-truss bridge. One of the most common types of truss bridges, the Warren design was first patented in 1848.

Great Falls, Montana • The

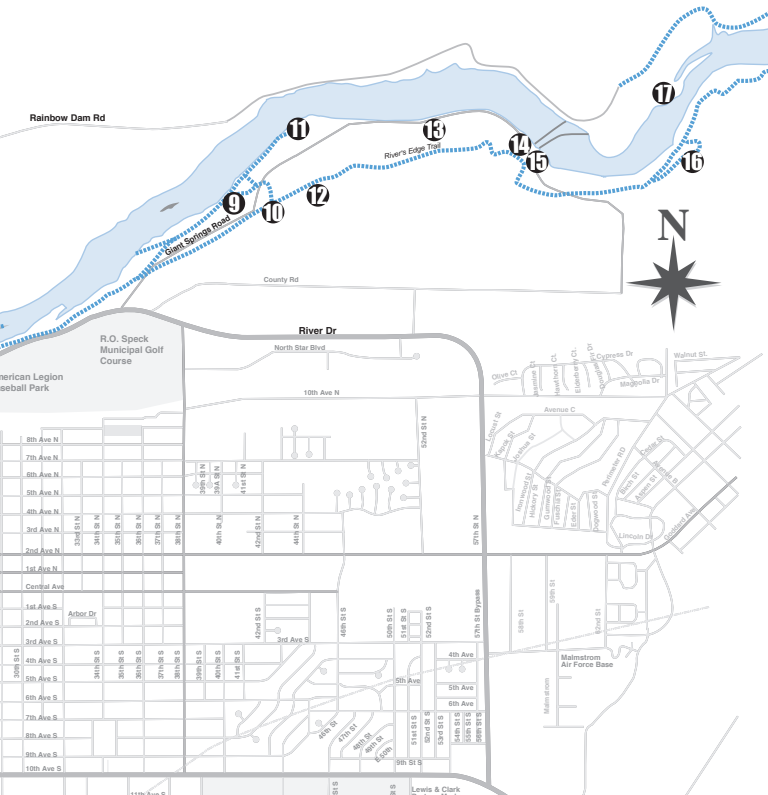


River's Edge

■■■■■■■■■■ River's Edge Trail

- 1 Meriwether Lewis and the Grizzly Bear**
- 2 The Vivendi Site**
- 3 Tenth Street Bridge**
- 4 River Bank**
- 5a Boston and Montana/Anaconda Housing Development and Landscaping**
- 5b Boston and Montana Barn**
- 6a First Black Eagle Dam and Powerhouse**
- 6b Current Black Eagle Dam and Powerhouse**
- 6c Tailrace Bridge**
- 7 Fifteenth Street Trolley Bridge**
- 8a Black Eagle Falls and Powerhouses**

The River's Edge History Tour



Site Key

- 8b** Incline Railroad and Suspension Bridge
- 8c** Boston and Montana/Anaconda Mining Facilities
- 8d** King Bridge on the Great Northern Railroad
- 9** Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center
- 10** Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Visitor Center
- 11** Giant Springs
- 12** The Monana Smelter
- 13** Colter Falls
- 14** BNSF Bridge at Rainbow Falls
- 15 & 17** Rainbow Dam and Power Plant
- 16** Crooked Falls



7 Fifteenth Street Trolley Bridge

Still standing in the river east of the present 15th Street Bridge are several piers and pillars that supported its predecessor. Built by the Canton Bridge Company of Ohio, the first bridge was a steel structure supporting a 20-foot roadway and six-foot sidewalk. In spite

of large construction crews of as many as 45 men, bridge completion was delayed by slow delivery of materials and high winds. Opened to wagon and foot traffic in 1892, the bridge greatly improved access to the new Boston and Montana Smelter located on the north side of the river. It was later adapted to trolley use by the Great Falls Street Railway Company. By 1924 the aging structure was no longer able to safely carry highway traffic and newer, heavier street cars. The bridge was closed to vehicular and foot traffic after the state highway commission recommended it should be abandoned. The mill and smeltermen's union also passed a resolution condemning the bridge. It was not in use when replaced by the current 15th Street bridge in 1960.

8a Black Eagle Falls and Powerhouses

The first large water power project in the state was a dam and powerhouse constructed at Black Eagle Falls. On the south side of the dam, the Boston and Great Falls Electric Light and Power Co. constructed a small water power plant to replace its steam plant on the hill above (1891). This company supplied electricity for the city and a street car system. A year later, the townsite company built another plant just below the Boston and Great Falls facility to supply mechanical power to the Royal Milling Co., a predecessor of General Mills. The dam has been replaced and there are no longer any power generation facilities on the south end of the falls. However, remains of the power plants can still be seen as can large steel pipes (penstocks) used to supply water to them. (See # 6a)



8b Incline Railroad and Suspension Bridge

Smelter workers living on the south side of the river had access to the Boston and Montana complex via a suspension bridge located at Black Eagle Falls. The Great Falls Street Railway Company provided transportation service to a trolley barn located on the bluff above the falls. An incline railroad (cable line) on the steep slope connected the trolley system and bridge until the bridge was destroyed by a flood in 1908. Powered by electricity generated at Black Eagle Dam, the street railroad grew with the city and became one of the assets of the Montana Power Company. The trolley system was abandoned in 1931 when it was no longer economically viable, and little remains of it today. Footings for the incline railroad still rest among trees and shrubs on the slope south of Black Eagle Falls.



8c *Boston and Montana/Anaconda Mining Company Facilities*

The large retaining walls on the north side of the river were associated with an industrial complex that dominated the landscape from 1892 to 1982. It was built by the Boston and Montana

Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company to process ore from its mines in Butte. The complex included a dam and powerhouse, rail lines, wagon roads, water pipes and electrical lines. Other structures were those for smelting and refining as well as blacksmith shops, machine shops, carpenter shops, storage facilities, a barn, worker housing, a dining hall, laundry and employee clubhouse. A large smokestack stood at the apex of "Smelter Hill." After absorbing the Boston and Montana in 1910, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company made many changes to the facility, focusing more on refining copper and zinc as well manufacturing wire.



8d *King Bridge on the Great Northern Railroad*

At Black Eagle Falls, the River's Edge Trail crosses a beam girder railroad

bridge built by the King Bridge Co. for the Great Northern Railway. The King company was a major manufacturer of metal truss bridges for railroads between the 1880s and 1920s. This company also built highway bridges and jail cells. While most of their railroad bridges have disappeared, some have been adapted to other uses such as walking and cycling trails. The bridge was manufactured in 1902.



9 *Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center*

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center is easily accessible from the River's Edge Trail. The center provides a broad range of exhibits and programs commemorating the spirit of exploration embodied by the 1804-1806

Lewis and Clark Expedition. Also featured are the history and culture of Plains and Northwest Indians encountered by the Corps of Discovery. The national headquarters of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation and its library of research materials on the expedition are housed here as well. All facilities are open to the public.



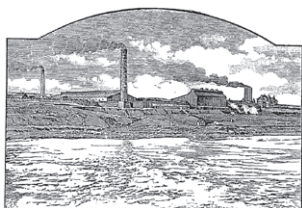
10 *Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Visitor Center*

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Visitor Center and Region Four Headquarter building borders the River's Edge Trail. It contains exhibits and information about local wildlife and outdoor recreational opportunities.



11 *Giant Springs*

In June 1805, Lewis and Clark commented on the beauty and size of one of the country's largest springs. City founder, Paris Gibson also saw a natural treasure here and worked to make Giant Springs a "... pleasure center for the citizens and ... a place of interest to which visitors may be taken for entertainment." He succeeded, in part, because the water, while clear and pure, was too rich in minerals for industrial boilers. When planning a dam at Rainbow Falls in 1908, John D. Ryan established the height of the dam below the maximum feasible for power generation. Although this decreased energy production from the dam, it ensured Giant Springs would not be submerged but would instead remain available as a potential source of municipal water or other use. Now a state park and fish hatchery, Giant Springs ultimately developed according to Gibson's vision.



12 *The Montana Smelter*

The Montana Smelting Company built the first large industrial development in the Great Falls area. Completed in 1888, it included a state-of-the-art, silver-lead smelter with residential areas for management, professional staff and laborers. Located on the south side of the river near Giant Springs, the smelter processed ores from the Little Belt Mountains not far to the south and from mines in Idaho and Canada. It used steam plants to generate motive and electrical power. Operating a "custom smelter," the firm did not own mines but rather contracted for ore. A new smelter in East Helena, Montana, along with several other smelters in Colorado ratcheted up the competition for ore. This problem continued to plague the Montana Smelter even after it merged with the East Helena firm in 1890. A decade later, the Montana Smelter was absorbed into the American Smelting and Refining Company. The new company had too much capacity and it closed the Montana Smelter in 1902. Little remains of the smelter other than smokestack ruins located just north of the River's Edge Trail.

13 Colter Falls

The pool formed behind Rainbow Falls, a half mile to the east, submerged the smaller Colter Falls. The latter can be seen only when the Missouri River flow is unusually low. Meriwether Lewis of the Corps of Discovery first described the falls in 1805. However, it was city founder Paris Gibson who named the falls in honor of John Colter, a member of the Corps. Although valued for his hunting and wilderness skills, Colter was allowed leave the expedition on its return trip to lead fur traders up the Missouri River in 1806. While in this trade, he travelled widely and was likely the first Euroamerican to see what is now Yellowstone National Park and the resort town of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Colter also had several confrontations with the Blackfeet. In one case, tribesmen stripped him naked and allowed him to run for his life. He did so, and lived to tell the tale.

14 BNSF Bridge at Rainbow Falls

The Toledo Ohio Bridge Company manufactured the Rainbow Falls Bridge in 1901 for the Great Northern Railway. A year later, the GN installed the bridge when rebuilding 22 miles of line from Great Falls to Floweree.



15 Rainbow Dam and Power Plant

17 At the beginning of the 20th Century, Butte mining companies grew rapidly in response to increasing world-wide demand for copper. Dam construction began on the Missouri River when power for mining and

related operations could be generated from water power plants at half the cost of local steam plants. After acquiring several small power companies and the land at potential power sites near Great Falls, John D. Ryan built the Rainbow Dam project in 1908-1910. Two years later, he consolidated several firms into the Montana Power Company. The Rainbow powerhouse was constructed some distance to the east near Crooked Falls to increase the amount of power generated. Six generators installed in a 1918 powerhouse upgrade are still working today.



16 Crooked Falls

The name "Crooked Falls" is obviously derived from the shape of this natural feature. Meriwether Lewis of the Corps of Discovery described this landmark on June 14, 1805.

The River's Edge Trail continues downstream. Sheer canyon walls, enchanting coulees, unexpected coves and such engineering marvels as Cochrane, Ryan and Morony Dams, can be seen along the unpaved segment of the trail.

River's Edge History Tour

Paris Gibson's city grew to over 24,000 residents by the time of his passing in 1920 and, thanks to his vision, it was indeed beautiful and well planned. His emphasis on parks, trees and ample open space grew from the notion that the aesthetic qualities of Great Falls contribute to the "health, comfort and refinement of our people." Certainly the River's Edge Trail development conforms to that vision.

For information on other historic resources in Great Falls and Cascade County contact the Historic Preservation Office located in Room Four of the Civic Center or call 406-455-8435.

Preserve America is a White House initiative developed in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Department of Commerce. The City of Great Falls was named a *Preserve America* community in 2006 following a resolution by the city commission to reaffirm its commitment to the preservation of its heritage assets.

SPONSORS

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