

What to do between Wings across the Big Sky and Mountain Bluebird Trails 35th Anniversary Celebration?

Go birding!

Take a post-festival field trip sponsored by the Montana Audubon Society, or head out on your own with the Russell Country Birding Trails brochure in hand. (Get one at the Great Falls Visitor Center or find it at

<http://russell.visitmt.com/birding/RussellCountryBirding.pdf> .) Take along DeLorme's Montana Atlas and Gazetteer, too.

Other options:

Backpacking

Snow in the mountains will limit loop trips into the Bob Marshall at this time of year. High water due to spring runoff is also a concern. But some backpacking will be available. Check with the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Office in Choteau for current conditions and possibilities, 406-466-5341.

Bair Museum

Martinsdale may be off the beaten path, but the treasures two power-shoppers brought back from post-World War II Europe are amazing.

www.bairfamilymuseum.org/

Buffalo jumps

Native peoples ran buffalo over a cliff to secure a supply of meat. Visit First Peoples Buffalo Jump near Ulm (8 miles southeast of Great Falls) or Wahkpa Chu'gn in Havre. The jump at Ulm includes a visitor center. http://fwp.mt.gov/lands/site_282807.aspx . Guided walks at Havre show an archaeological dig. www.buffalojump.org

C. M. Russell Museum

The most complete collection of the famed western artist's works. Don't miss the new buffalo exhibit!

www.cmrussell.org

C. M. Russell Auto Tour

Connects Charlie Russell's art with the Judith Basin landscape.

Pick up booklet at U.S. Forest Service Office in Stanford

www.russellcountry.com/Russell_Auto_.html

Charlie Russell Chew Choo

Trestles, wildlife and a prime rib dinner, all on a sunset train ride.

www.montanacharlierussellchewchoo.com/

Dinosaur dig at Two Medicine Dinosaur Center in Bynum/ Dinosaur Trail

Arrange ahead to work beside professionals digging for dinosaurs or preserving fossils

<http://mtdinotrail.org/> or drop in at the small museum. Fossil dinosaur eggs star here.

Day hiking

Many hikes along the Rocky Mountain Front will be available at this time of year. Look them over at www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/trails/rockymtnrange/rmr_trail_page.shtml#sun . Call the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Office in Choteau for current conditions and possibilities, 406-466-5341.

Dude ranches

The full list of area dude ranches is at www.russell.visitmt.com/listings.asp?ActivityGroupID=17&Title=Horseba . Some require a six-day minimum stay.

Ferries

They're free and they're fun. Drive up and push the buzzer, the captain will be out soon to take you across the Missouri River at Carter, Virgelle or Stafford/McClellan. (They don't operate when water levels are too high.)

Fishing

Big R, a farm supply store in Great Falls, has the city's biggest supply of fishing flies, which is a kazillion or so. We called them and they said they'd be happy to give you the latest on fishing spots (406-761-7441, www.bigrflyshop.com/ . The Missouri River and small lakes are typically your best bet at this time of year.

Fort Benton

Walk the levy where steamboats tied up at the world's innermost port in days gone by www.fortbenton.com/. Museums and the Upper Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center, too.

Float the Missouri

Paddle and camp down the historic Missouri River, the Smith or the Marias. Bring your own gear or contact a guide. Click on recreation at <http://russell.visitmt.com/> for area outfitters. Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office/UM.html , Smith River <http://fwp.mt.gov/recreation/activities/smithRiver/default.html> .

Homestead cabin for the night

Overnight in an authentic homestead cabin at Virgelle. www.virgellemontana.com/HomesteadCabins.htm

Horseback Riding

If you want to spend a few hours astride a horse, here are four places to check out: Why Lazy Tee, <http://russell.visitmt.com/listings/9328.HTM> , 406-736-5416
Sun Canyon Lodge, www.suncanyonlodge.com/ , (888) 749-3654
Bull Run Guest Ranch, <http://bullrunglestranch.com> , 406-868-6889
Montanan Hitch N Rail, www.trailridemontana.com , 406-378-2571

Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center

Great Falls, where Lewis & Clark portaged around five falls for a month, is home to one of the trail's premier interpretive sites

www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/lcic/index.html

Sun River WMA

Elk have pretty much moved to the high country at this time of year, but you'll find lots of mountain bluebirds on the way in, and a pleasant assortment of birds. Rugged scenery.

http://fwp.mt.gov/lands/site_282023.aspx

Waterfalls

Water dropped over five falls here (Black Eagle, Rainbow, Crooked, the Great Falls, Colter) when Lewis & Clark came through. Most have dams immediately above them now, but they still make an impressive series, especially at this time of year when the water is high. Cross a suspended footbridge to a picnic area below the Great Falls at Ryan Dam. (Take US 87 north of Great Falls, then follow the sign to Ryan Dam.) Other falls can be viewed from the south side of the river, along River Drive, Giant Springs Road, or the River's Edge Trail. (Colter Falls is buried behind the waters of Rainbow Dam.)