

The Ghost Vacation

In the Boulder Area

Comet

The Comet Mine was developed in the 1880s and a large mill was built in 1926. During this period it is reported that Comet had 22 saloons. The town is on private property now, but is open to the public. Located approximately five miles north of I-15 on High Ore Road between Boulder and Basin. Basin is approximately 10 miles south of Boulder on I-15S. 406-465-2106

Elkhorn

Rich silver deposits were discovered here in 1870 and the population soon reached nearly 2,500. Much of the remaining town site is owned by private individuals, so be sure to heed the "no trespassing" signs. Fraternity Hall and the adjacent Gillian Hall are managed by Montana State Parks. Be sure to follow the road through the town to the cemetery. Turn right onto highway 69 as you exit Boulder Hot Springs. About 5 miles down the road will be a sign to Elkhorn. The town is located about 11 miles/20 minutes north into the mountains on a country road. 406-495-3260 Ask at the front desk for a map of Elkhorn.

In the Helena Area

Rimini

History has it that Rimini was either named after a city in Italy or a drama production that traveled through during its formative years. Several of Rimini's old buildings are inhabited today and community. Rimini is located about 12 miles west of Helena just off Highway 12. Turn south on the Rimini Road to reach the old town site. 406-442-4120

Charter Oak Mine and Mill

Further west on Highway 12 you will come to Elliston. The Charter Oak Mine and Mill was a lode mine and mill, active off and on from 1916 to 1955. It is located near the Little Blackfoot River south of the community of Elliston. It contains standing building and mining/milling building and equipment. The mine has been stabilized and interpreted and is open for public visitation on select summer weekends. Call 406-449-5201 for available weekends.

Marysville

Continue north on I-15 to exit 200/highway 279 west. Take 279 west to Marysville. Marysville, once a thriving gold camp, now a small community with several buildings listed on the National Historic Register. There is a lot to see here in this almost-ghost town. The town is not deserted and some mining still goes on. The Catholic Church and general store still serve the community. 406-442-4120

South of Boulder/South of Butte

Quartz Hill – Vipond

Discovered in 1868, the Vipond brothers built a road to Dewey in 1872 to transport the rich silver ore. Numerous old buildings and mining sites are found in the area. The Quartz Hill mining camp can be reached via the Quartz Hill Road about half a mile north of Dewey on Highway 43. (Highway 43 is exit 102 off I-15 S.) Take Quartz Hill Road about five miles to the area. 406-832-3300

Coolidge

Located in the east Pioneer Mountains above 7,000 feet, Coolidge was the last silver boom town in Montana. A narrow-gauge railroad was built to the mine but the quantity of silver ore did not justify the expense of the rail line or the huge mill that was built. Reached by a good five-mile gravel road and half-mile hike at Mono creek along the Pioneer Scenic Byway. Continue west on Highway 43 from Dewey to the Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway. Coolidge is south of Crystal Park and close to Elkhorn Hot Springs. 406-832-3178

Bannack State Park

The discovery of gold on Grasshopper Creek in 1862 triggered a major gold rush to what would become Montana. Bannack was founded that fall and became the first territorial capita. Bannack is one of the best-preserved ghost towns in the country and was once home to the infamous Sheriff Henry Plummer and his gang of outlaws. More than 50 buildings still stand in Bannack. The Visitor Center is open from May through October. Town tours, mill tours, living history, gold panning and Saturday entertainment programs are scheduled from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Bannack Days, a celebration of pioneer life takes place on the third weekend in July. The park and Campground are open all year. Bannack is located 25 miles southwest of Dillon, off Highway 278. If you are coming from Coolidge, continue south on the Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway to highway 278 and turn east to Bannack.

Farlin

The boom years for Farlin were 1905 and 1906 when the Indian Queen produced half a million pounds of copper. Farlin had its own post office and school. Today a few cabins remain along the Birch Creek Road and the schoolhouse is a short hike up a side gulch. Take the Birch Creek exit between Glen and Dillon and go west six miles. Coming from Bannack, go east on 278 to Dillon and then north on I-15 to the Birch Creek exit. 406-683-5511

Glendale and Canyon Creek Charcoal Kilns

Once a thriving smelting town, little remains of Glendale today, just the old stone Confederate office building, a smelter stack and a few other building. During the boom period of the 1880s the town boasted a population of 2,000. In order to supply charcoal for the smelter, the Canyon Creek charcoal kilns were built about five miles up Canyon Creek beyond Glendale. Numerous beehive shaped kilns remain. Continuing north on I-15, take the Melrose exit and head west on the Trapper Creek Road for five miles to Glendale. To reach the kilns turn right on the Canyon Creek Road at Glendale and gravel about 5 miles. 406-832-3278

In the Same Area but Farther East

Rochester

The Watseca gold mine was discovered in 1869 and the town of Rochester sprang up; the Watseca mine operated until the 1980s. A few stone building, a wooden headframe, a modern gold mill and the old cemetery remain. Located about eight or nine miles from Twin Bridges. Twin Bridges can be reached by going south on highway 69 as you exit Boulder Hot Springs. Continue under I-90S to Whitehall and highway 55 which will connect to highway 41 to Twin Bridges. 406-684-5121

Virginia and Nevada Cities

Virginia City is a vast National Historic Landmark, housing America's finest collection of 1860s "boom town" building on their original sites and collections of Old West artifacts. Nearby Nevada City is an open-air museum with more than 100 buildings, thousands of artifacts and gem mining to experience. Historical reenactments of "Living History" weekends are a popular summer attraction. Out of Twin Bridges take highway 287 to Nevada City and Virginia City. The History Vacation lists more sites to visit in this area. 800-829-2969

The Alder Gulch Tourist Train, a 1910 steam locomotive, runs between Virginia City and Nevada City every day during the summer months.

Pony

Named after Tecumseh "Pony" Smith, the discoverer of the placer gold deposits in 1867. Although Pony has seen better days, this picturesque little town refuses to die. Many old abandoned buildings remain, including the Morris State Bank and the Morris Elling stamp mill. As you continue east from Virginia City on highway 287, turn north at Ennis to Harrison. Pony is located six miles southwest of Harrison on Route 283. 406-685-3386

Other Ghost Towns in the Area

Granite

The remnants of this once thriving 1890s silver boom town bear stark witness to Montana's boom-and-bust mining history. Montana State Parks preserves the Granite Mine Superintendent's House and ruins of the old Miners' Union Hall. The road is narrow, steep and winding. A vehicle with good clearance is recommended. Granite is outside of Philipsburg.

To get to Philipsburg take Hwy 15S to Butte and continue west to Anaconda. Take the Anaconda exit/hwy 1 to Philipsburg. From the flashing light/stop sign in the middle of Philipsburg, turn right. Just past the railroad trestle, turn left. Follow this gravel road for approximately a mile, then turn right at the sign marking the way. Granite is approximately four miles from Philipsburg. 406-859-3388

Garnet

Gold was discovered at the Nancy Hanks Mine in 1898. Garnet's population boomed to nearly 1,000 people but by 1950 the town was deserted. More than 30 buildings have been preserved. Garnet offers a Visitor Center, interpretive signs and self-guided trails. From Philipsburg continue north on Highway 1 to Drummond. Follow the north side frontage road to the Bear Gulch Road and proceed 11 miles up the gravel road. This road is not suitable for trailers or motor homes - use the access 30 miles east of Missoula on Hwy. 200. 406-329-3914