

The Continuing Saga of My County Seat Walk Challenge: MONTANA
By Sherry Sayers

Woodland Wanderers has sanctioned 56 new county seat walks in Montana for 2026, so we (Frank and I) took a trip to Montana to “proof” the walks. Well, half of them. We decided to do the western half first, then we’ll do the eastern half in early 2026. We accomplished the western half, walking in 28 county seats in approximately 30 days.

Here are some fun facts about Montana. First, there is no sales tax in Montana - no sales tax on food, no sales tax on clothing, no sales tax on anything, except they do have lodging fees (such as motels and campgrounds). Next, Montana has a state law that allows casino betting in almost every town in the state, so, there are casinos in gas stations, casinos in bars, just about everywhere. Next, huckleberries are big in Montana, so you find huckleberry candy, huckleberry coffee, huckleberry beer, and (from personal experience) huckleberry shakes and ice cream. Yummy!!

Finally, there are grain elevators just about everywhere, so be sure to order your Grain Elevators: Monarchs of the Plains Special Program book from me and then go on an awesome quest to Montana to fill up your book!

The western part of Montana is truly beautiful, and I’d like to tell you about a few highlights of our trip. First, Missoula is a very nice city with lots of activities to participate in. The University of Montana is in Missoula – home of the Grizzlies. There is a pretty neat carousel along the trail to ride for only \$2.00.

Bozeman was probably my favorite town – it has it all. The Bon Ton Historical District has many amazing homes from the 1880s with historical information plaques on many. Part of the trail walks along the linear Gallagator Trail, where you will spot a Labyrinth near the public library. The downtown area has lots of unique shops and restaurants. Bozeman is also home to Montana State University, home of the Bobcats, with around 5,000 employees and 17,000 students.

Butte is known as the “Richest Hill on Earth,” due to its rich mining history, particularly copper. In 1888, mining operations had generated around \$23 million, and it became a boomtown. Today, there are 17 headframes remaining throughout the town. Some of the series “Yellowstone” has been filmed in Butte.

Cut Bank is known as the coldest spot in the nation and is only about 30 miles from the Canadian border. It was one of the bleaker spots to me, flat with no trees, and lots of wheat fields, although the Coulee Trail was quite scenic, walking along the bluffs high above the Cut Bank Creek with many unique rock formations along the way.

In Hamilton, you have the opportunity to walk past the Rocky Mountain Laboratories, a high-security research facility that studies infectious diseases. It is under the National

Institutes of Health, and I had a very interesting chat with the security guard, who shared with me some fascinating history about the facility.

Libby is known as the “City of Eagles,” with statues of eagles throughout the town, as well as a few Sasquatches scattered throughout the town. Sasquatch is big in this part of Montana, with quite a few people claiming to have seen one, with Missoula, Flathead, Gallatin and Lewis and Clark Counties registering the highest concentrations of sightings.

In Deer Lodge, you can walk to the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, which is the only national park-owned working cattle ranch maintained by the National Park Service. The nature trail is an out-and-back, but totally worth it. You can meander through the ranch headquarters, exploring the barns, bunkhouse, and sheds and imagine what it was like working on a cattle ranch back in the 1860s. It is a free site.

Polson is a beautiful town, which sits on the southern shore of Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake in the western United States, and you walk along the shoreline for a bit. It is on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Helena, the capital, is another beautiful city, but rather hard to get to. And did I mention, it is hilly! The capitol building was open on a Saturday, so we explored that, and just as we were finishing the walk, we happened upon a soap box derby, with handmade cars careening down the (hilly) streets. The streets were lined with screaming parents, friends and the like, so we joined in. There is also an awesome carousel in Helena, with not just horses, but animals native to Montana (wolf, river otter, bobcat, bighorn sheep, grizzly bear, buffalo, and antelope).

Stanford is a tiny town, but the flower displays were beautiful works of art. There were flowers in an old truck, an old wagon, an old pickup, multiple cement planters and everywhere along the businesses and streets.

Virginia City was the territorial capital of Montana from 1865 to 1875, and the town remains pretty much the same as it was. The boardwalk on both sides of the main street is really cool and there are vignettes in many of the businesses that show what the town was like in the bad old days. The trail takes you up to Boot Hill with a great view of the town. The bar scene in “Little Big Man” was filmed in the Bale of Hay Saloon, which is where we ate lunch!

All the walks start either at the courthouse or administrative building in the towns, except Great Falls, which starts at a river park, since there is no free parking downtown.

Frank has poured his heart and soul into the Montana county seat challenge website, so please check it out at <https://woodlandwanderers.org/Montana/>. Be sure and take the time to listen to and watch Dan Seals and Marie Osmond sing “Meet Me in Montana,” as well as John Denver singing “Wild Montana Skies.” I always get goose bumps watching John, as I

attended his memorial service in 1997, in Aurora, Colorado, which is where his mom lived. I pretty much sang these two songs in my head the entire time we were in Montana!

Stay tuned for my upcoming installment next spring for the eastern half of the Montana county seats, as well as the Nevada county seats (only 16, easy-peasy!), which we are hoping to get to in January or February.