

Great Rides!

Birdseye Loop

Conversing about this loop, one HBC member confessed to having mixed feelings. He felt that while Birdseye is indeed a great and popular bike ride, it's also relatively dangerous due to its sometimes busy and fast traffic, and its narrow, rough pavement. He wanted me to implore you, if you ride the Birdseye Loop, to please do so cautiously.

Start & End Point: Spring Meadow Lake State Park (parking, restrooms, picnic tables, shelters)

Map Link: ridewithgps.com/routes/2285917

Best Direction to Ride: Clockwise or counter-clockwise

Length: 27 miles

High Point: 4,540 feet at the Birdseye fire station

Low Point: 3,740 feet at Applegate and Norris Roads

Cumulative Elevation Gained & Lost: 1,240 feet

Road Surface: Paved, except alternative routes as marked

Best time to ride: Avoiding riding during Helena's morning and evening commute times, especially close to town. For instance, Country Club Road is often very busy during shift changes at Fort Harrison. Generally, you'd be wise not to ride out of town around 5:00 p.m., or into town between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m.

Cautions: No water, few services, sometimes high speed vehicle traffic, roads are busy during commute hours. No shoulders, often rough pavement. The first four miles requires extra caution. Here Birdseye is a rough, narrow road where cars sometimes drive *way-too-fast* and rush crazily to pass slower vehicles. The pavement's roughness can make it difficult for either cars or bikes to hold their line, and you, the cyclist, are vulnerable.

Description: This well-liked 27 mile loop, probably best for intermediate and experienced riders, circles the Scratchgravel Hills, primarily traversing Country Club Road, Birdseye Road, Lincoln Road, Green Meadow Drive, and Custer Avenue.

Despite our reservations about the road and traffic, this is a sensational ride. It's just long enough to mete out a good workout, but short enough to squeeze in between Saturday morning chores and coaching your child's mid-afternoon soccer game. Birdseye Loop is still one the prettiest rides around, and with possible extensions out-and-back to Marysville, or out around the Masonic Home, there's enough challenge even for knuckle-draggers.

This route can be extended into the Helena Valley Loop, or the Chevallier Loop (see previous Great Rides! at: helenabicycleclub.org/index.php/great-rides-archive/). It also could be extended toward Lincoln up Flesher Pass.

I first rode this loop on a 10-speed about thirty years ago with my friend Jon Derry. Jon sat astride his beautiful Schwinn Paramount; I was on my 1971 green Raleigh International. This was the era of Campagnolo and hand filed lugged Reynolds 521 double-butt tubes, forks, and stays. It was the time of magnificently silvery Cinelli stems and Proofid-ed Brooks saddles. In the 80's Birdseye featured only a few scattered houses and still fewer cars. The Birdseye Loop was a fun, quiet, rural ride.

Since then both the Helena Valley and the Birdseye Valley have become less rural and more suburban. Horses still mix with houses, but the roads haven't changed—they are still narrow, ragged-edged, shoulder-less, and now, during commute hours, busy. Lincoln Road is still narrow, and many autos are traveling at the 70 mph legal limit. (In our dreams, someday, Birdseye will get shoulders or a multi-use path, and Lincoln Road will get a rail trail. Think positive thoughts.)

In the 1990's and 2000's, with increased traffic, the Birdseye Loop became the ugly poster child of bicycle-automobile conflict. Drivers couldn't understand why lycra-clad cyclists were riding two or more abreast and blocking the road. Cyclists were mystified why drivers were cussing them for enjoying a healthful ride in the country. There were a few accidents and more than a few unsatisfying shouting matches. Something had to change, and fortunately things are beginning to mellow out. The Sheriff's Department is following up on dangerous drivers, there are 'Share the Road' signs up, and cyclists are beginning to ride more like adults, toward the right, in single file, and in a manner drivers could accurately label "courteous."

Let's make Birdseye, once again, a safe route for cyclists. Here are the rules:

- Ride with traffic, on the correct side of the road
- Stop at stop lights and stop signs
- Ride as far to the right as safety allows
- Ride single file
- Wear your helmet
- Use your mirror
- Signal your turns
- Ride predictably, in a straight line
- Use lights at night (although, this would be a foolish place for a night ride)

Please ride Birdseye with respect for its dangers, and appreciation for its allure. Perhaps we can help restore the neighborly behavior that used to be the norm for drivers and cyclists on Birdseye. *bn*

BIRDSEYE LOOP

Moderately-Strenuous Bonus Ride: The climb to Marysville, up and back, adds 13.2 miles and 1,080 feet of climbing to the Birdseye Loop. No services in Marysville.

Shortcut: By turning off Lincoln Rd at Green Mdw Dr, cyclists can shorten the basic Birdseye Loop (as drawn) by 1.3 miles. Portions of Green Meadow Dr along this shortcut feature widened shoulders. Some portions are shoulderless.

Bonus Ride: Continue east on Lincoln Rd, turn south on Glass Dr. Follow Glass Dr as it turns west and becomes Masonic Home Rd. Turn south onto Frontage Rd, and follow it to Sierra Rd. Turn west under the Interstate, cross Montana Ave, then continue on to Green Meadow Drive, or, you can turn south before Green Meadow Drive on McHugh Ln and continue south, turning west on either Forestvale, Mill, or Custer. This extends the basic Birdseye Loop by 6.7 miles.

Disclaimer of Liability. Cycling is an inherently dangerous activity. Traffic, road conditions, harsh weather, facility closures, et cetera all change and present hazards. Cyclists are responsible for their own safety and well-being. The author or Helena Bicycle Club are not liable for injuries or damages which arise in conjunction with using this map and guide. Be prepared and ride safely.

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0	L	Leave Spr Mdw Lk SP, turn left on Country Club Ave
1.2	R	Continue right onto Williams St
1.7	L	Continue left as Williams St becomes Birdseye Rd
11.4	R	Turn right onto Lincoln Rd
18.7	R	Turn right onto Applegate Dr
20.6	R	Turn right onto Norris Rd
21	L	Turn left onto Green Meadow Dr
25	R	Turn right onto Custer Ave
25.3	L	Turn left onto Henderson St

25.5	R	Turn right onto Brady St
25.9	L	Continue left onto Joslyn St; cross RR tracks
26.2	R	Turn right onto Country Club Ave
26.9	L	Turn left on Broadwater Ave,
27	L	Turn left , enter Spring Meadow Lake State Park

