

HBC Great Rides, April 2014

Really Big Gravel Loop

Suggested by: Scott Herzig

Link: <http://ridewithgps.com/routes/4199264>

Length: 83.3 miles

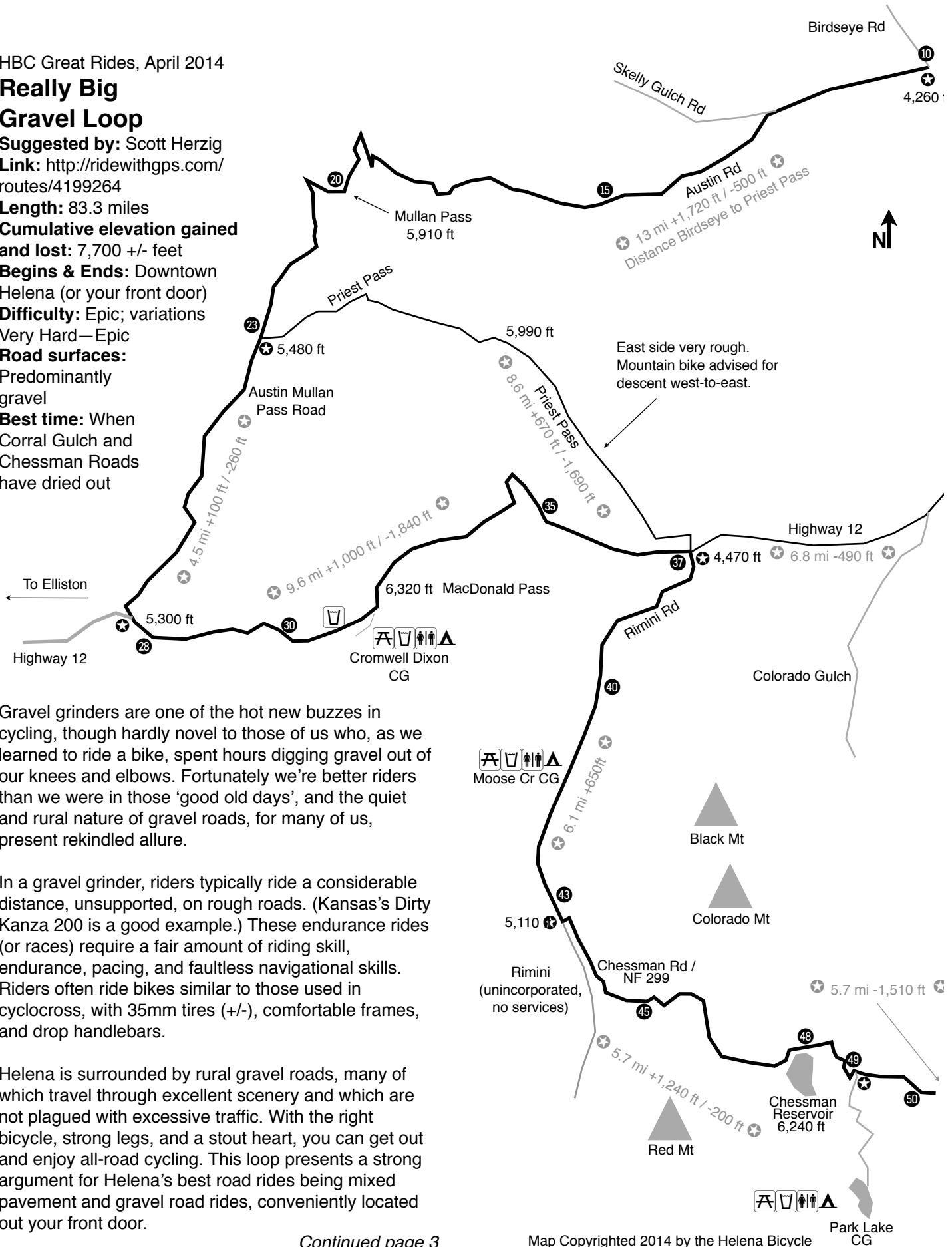
Cumulative elevation gained and lost: 7,700 +/- feet

Begins & Ends: Downtown Helena (or your front door)

Difficulty: Epic; variations Very Hard—Epic

Road surfaces: Predominantly gravel

Best time: When Corral Gulch and Chessman Roads have dried out



Gravel grinders are one of the hot new buzzes in cycling, though hardly novel to those of us who, as we learned to ride a bike, spent hours digging gravel out of our knees and elbows. Fortunately we're better riders than we were in those 'good old days', and the quiet and rural nature of gravel roads, for many of us, present rekindled allure.

In a gravel grinder, riders typically ride a considerable distance, unsupported, on rough roads. (Kansas's Dirty Kanza 200 is a good example.) These endurance rides (or races) require a fair amount of riding skill, endurance, pacing, and faultless navigational skills. Riders often ride bikes similar to those used in cyclocross, with 35mm tires (+/-), comfortable frames, and drop handlebars.

Helena is surrounded by rural gravel roads, many of which travel through excellent scenery and which are not plagued with excessive traffic. With the right bicycle, strong legs, and a stout heart, you can get out and enjoy all-road cycling. This loop presents a strong argument for Helena's best road rides being mixed pavement and gravel road rides, conveniently located out your front door.

Continued page 3

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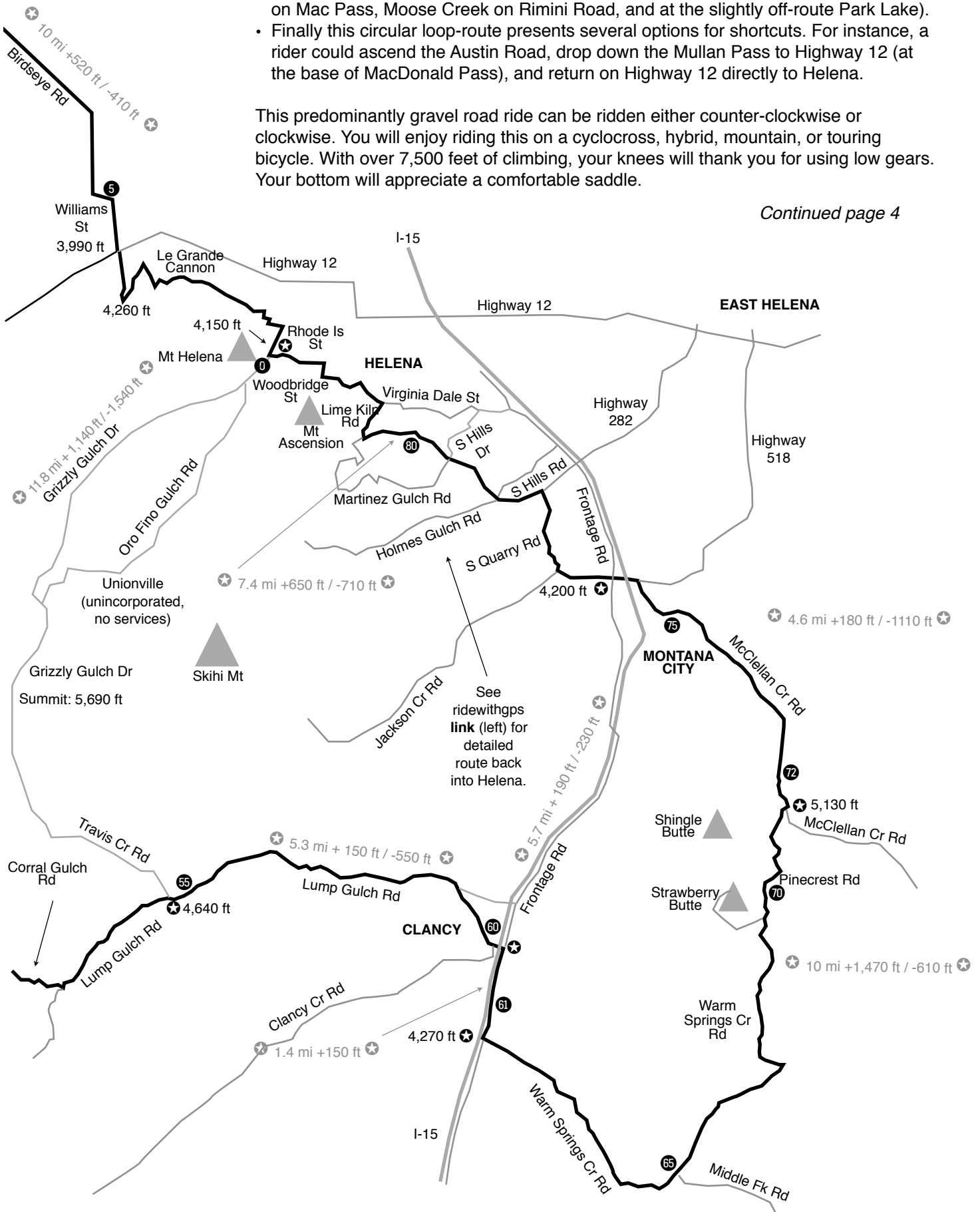
Continued from
page 2

This (nominally) 83 mile loop could be done by supremely strong riders all in one fell swoop. Or:

- It can be done in segments as a series of day-rides by a good rider capable of patiently finding her way up and down hills safely.
- Or, much of this ride passes through National Forest lands, which means this loop lends itself to being a multi-day camping excursion (campgrounds: Cromwell Dixon on Mac Pass, Moose Creek on Rimini Road, and at the slightly off-route Park Lake).
- Finally this circular loop-route presents several options for shortcuts. For instance, a rider could ascend the Austin Road, drop down the Mullan Pass to Highway 12 (at the base of MacDonald Pass), and return on Highway 12 directly to Helena.

This predominantly gravel road ride can be ridden either counter-clockwise or clockwise. You will enjoy riding this on a cyclocross, hybrid, mountain, or touring bicycle. With over 7,500 feet of climbing, your knees will thank you for using low gears. Your bottom will appreciate a comfortable saddle.

Continued page 4



Continued from page 3

Major intersections are denoted with a star. Distances and elevation gained and lost between stars are noted in rounded miles and feet. Riders will want to obtain a detailed map of this ride. Maps are available from the Forest Service or at local outdoor stores.

There are many ways through Helena. This map assumes you'll leave by way of the gravelly-good and scenic Le Grande Cannon, and sneak back into town along South Hills Road, Lime Kiln, Montana, Woodbridge, Third St., and back into downtown. Of course these details are up to you. Do what makes sense based on where you live and how much you anticipate having left in your legs when you thunder back into town. (See ridewithgps.com link)

Due to sporadic oncoming traffic and sometimes very rough, deeply rutted gravel surfaces, when descending please take care to keep your speed in check.

Cell service is spotty or non-existent along this route. If something goes wrong you'll likely need to help yourself. Pack water purification tablets or drops, plenty of food and water, dry clothing, and tire repair supplies.

Please read: You are responsible for your own safety, so please ride safely. Wear a helmet, be visible and ride predictably. Control your speed on descents. This ride includes rough road surfaces, and you will be exposed to varying amounts of traffic and potentially dangerous weather. Portions of this ride are remote, where timely help may be unavailable. This is a remote ride often without easy recourse to emergency assistance. Conditions change due to alternations in routes, uncertain weather, changes in traffic, deteriorated road surfaces, construction activities, and other hazards or inconveniences too numerous to foretell or specify. These directions and this map, like all maps and directions, may become outdated and inaccurate without warning. The Helena Bicycle Club (HBC), its officers, volunteers, or contributors of these rides, trip leaders, and others associated with this bicycle ride description and map cannot be held responsible for the conditions of this route, or for any aspect of your ride. HBC is not responsible for any injuries or damages sustained or occurring while riding this route.

COMING EVENTS—See helenabicycleclub.org

- April sometime, when weather permits — HBC Tuesday & Thursday night rides
- April 2, HBC Board meeting
- April 22 — HBC Monthly meeting, Jason Karp, Randonneuring
- May 7, HBC Board meeting, at the Staggering Ox
- May 31, 2014 York Burger Boogie (Helena, MT)
- June 24, 2014 HBC Ride to Eat Ride (Helena, MT)
- July 4, 2014 Boulder Ice Cream Ride (Helena, MT)
- July 12, 2014 One Helena Hundred (Cascade, MT)
- August 2-3, 2014 Double Divide Ride (Helena, MT)

Helena Bicycle Club
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