

## Stepping Out of Bounds in Red Lodge, Montana By Lynette Reagan

After all the convention fun and festivities are wrapped up in Billings, we will head to Red Lodge, Montana, a small town at the base of the Beartooth Mountains. Local legend attributes the town's name to a tribe of Crow Indians called the Red Lodge Clan who covered their teepees with the local red clay. Coal mining operations later drew many Europeans to the area. Western Legends say that Calamity Jane and Packsaddle Ben Greenough once had a 'Business' of cutting firewood from the area and selling it to Billings hotels.

Red Lodge is about a 60-mile drive from Billings via I-90 west to Laurel, then Hwy 212 south. Beartooth scenic highway [US 212] runs through town to the northeastern entrance of Yellowstone National Park.

The downtown has been redeveloped since the mid-1980s for historic and cultural tourism, as the Red Lodge Commercial Historic District.

The City of Red Lodge has a vision for developing a system of trails called the Rocky Fork Trail System for the purposes of alternative transportation, recreation, active lifestyles, safe routes to schools/parks, and historical interpretation. Working with partners like the Beartooth Recreational Trails Association (BRTA), trail opportunities are identified within the city limits and greater Red Lodge area.

We will begin our walk to explore Red Lodge from Red Lodge High School parking lot! The 5K trail will go through town and along Rock Creek. Bring your field glasses to watch for wild turkeys, moose and various other critters out and about in June! To create the 10K trails, add to the in town trail the Red Lodge Airport Trail, the newest segment of the Rocky Fork Trail System. Enjoy this 3-mile loop above and around the Red Lodge airport, rodeo grounds and fairgrounds.

Red Lodge prides itself on being friendly and we will see the friendly faces of locals from various organizations who will offer food, drink and hospitality at the start/finish and along the trail. The Beartooth Recreational Trails Association and the Chamber of Commerce have shared many ideas to make the Red Lodge event very memorable!

What to do when you have completed the walk? So many opportunities—so little time! In the olden days, they said Red Lodge had a saloon on every corner. Well, some of those saloons have been replaced by art galleries, gift shops and a park while keeping the historic small Montana town character. Every shop is a gallery of fun stuff, curated by an owner who loves what they do. So whether you want to talk with the artist or just want to find something incredibly unique it's what's inside the shops that gives the main street its charming, character. Have a look, and find out for yourself!

When we visited Red Lodge, we fell in love with Montana Candy Emporium. Built in 1917 in the heart of the historic district, it offers old fashioned candies like Walnettos, Mary Janes, Kits, BB Bats, and Squirrel Nut Zippers are featured. Open every day. You haven't been to Red Lodge 'til you've been here!

Red Lodge will be busy with our walkers in town as well as high school musicians on Saturday, June 10 for the Red Lodge Music Festival at the Civic Center. The Festival is celebrating its 53rd anniversary this year! The oldest and most successful music festival in Montana attracts over 200 students from Montana and other states, with talented university faculty, colleges and symphony orchestras from

across the nation. A schedule of music events will be available at the walk registration area. You will see musicians around town playing along the street and other venues along the trail.

Do you have your hotel reservations yet? We have reserved rooms with special rates for volksmarchers at Yodeler Motel [reservations@yodelermotel.com 1-866-446-1435] and Comfort Inn of Red Lodge [406-446-4469]. Make your reservations before May 1 for the reduced rates.

Walking trails, a flowing creek, wildlife, cultural and historic sites, a plethora of restaurants, friendly people, and quaint shops--all within a 3-mile radius in a beautiful Montana town. Red Lodge will make an impression!