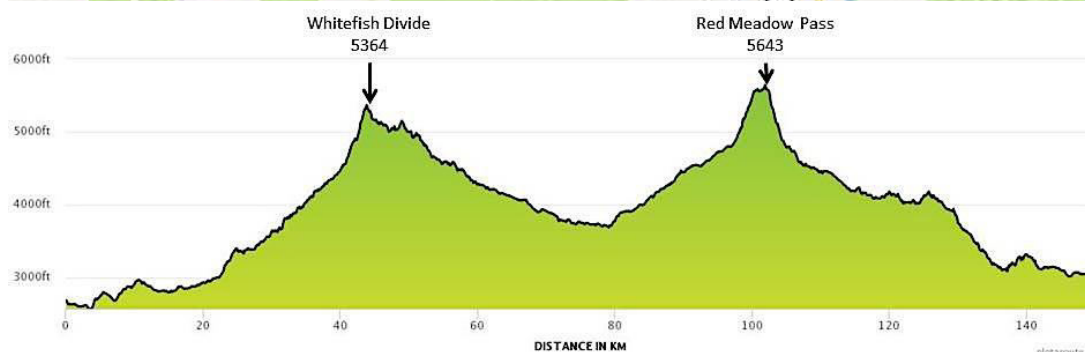
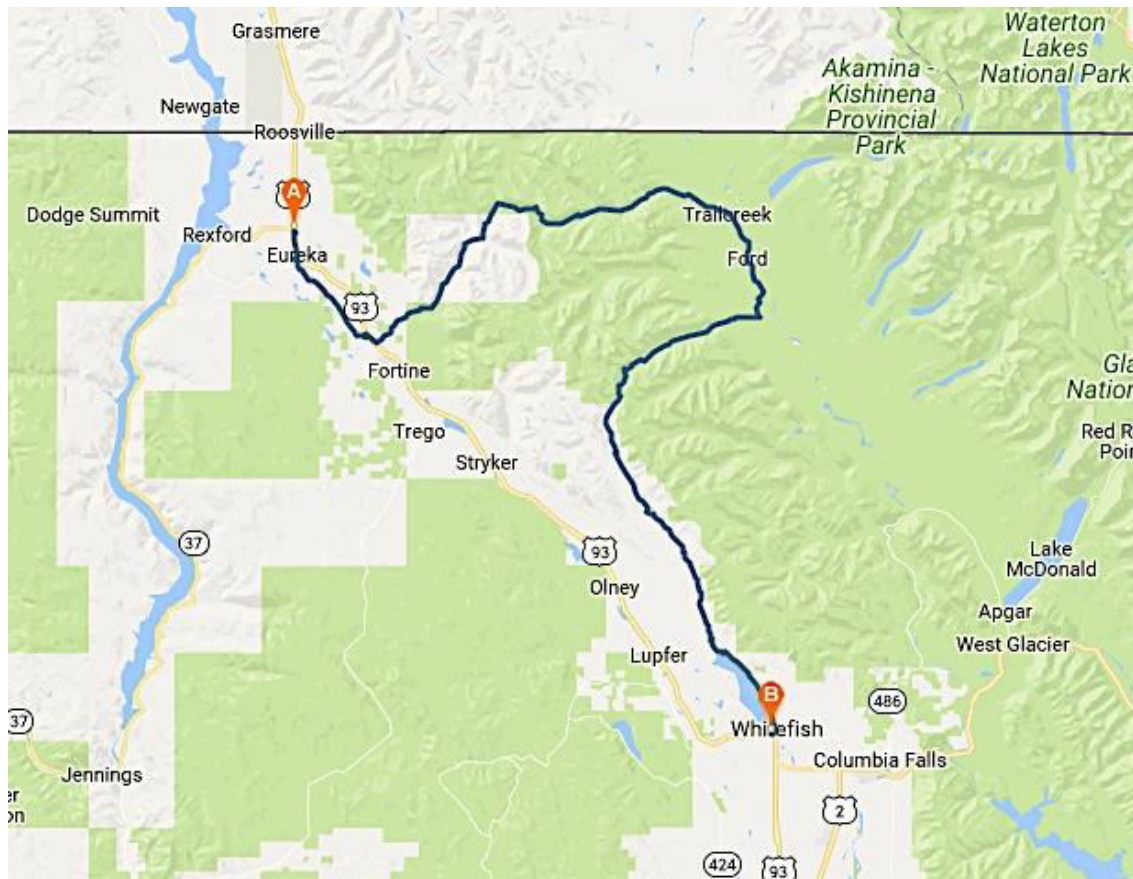


Day 4 12th June 2017
Eureka to Whitefish

150.1k / 93.3miles

2553m / 8376ft (2444m / 8018ft descent)
42.8%↑ 44.2%↓ 13%→ 26.7% max

'Angst is quickly replaced with the adrenalin rush of knowing you are facing the trail, the elements, and yourself and nothing else - the world is simplified'
John Stamstad¹



I was woken by some cyclists leaving the Inn at 03.30 – thanks for that, prats.

I left at 06.30, but found myself waiting outside Stein's, the local supermarket, for it to open so I could stock up before Whitefish.

1. John Stamstad initiated the ultra-racing genre with his pioneering individual time trial of the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route in 1999.

I ended up speaking to one of the elderly operatives who told me he had fallen off a ladder at work and suffered an extradural haematoma. This had been evacuated and he now had a titanium plate in his skull. He said he still had a degree of double vision; seemed very happy still to be working for the company.

There was a café in the supermarket, and to my shame I ended up having a, wait for it,.....Breakfast pizza!! Yes there really is such a concoction.

I was a full rider when I finally set off in earnest.

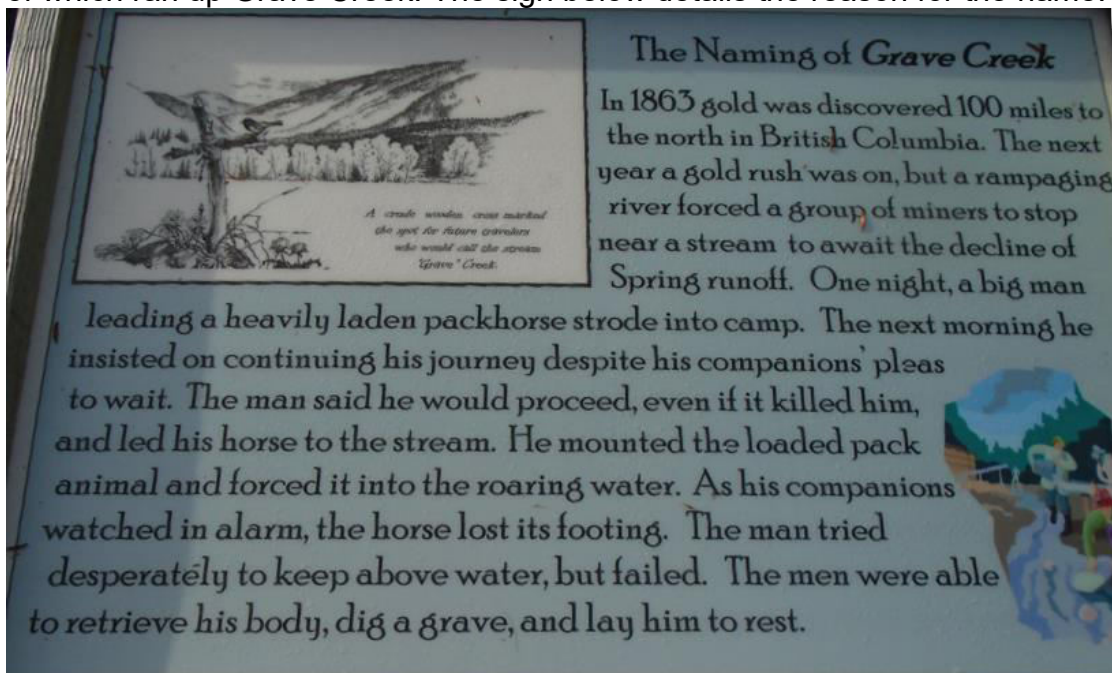


Eureka town sign

Apparently there are 2 Eureka's in Canada and 22 in the US!!

Eureka Montana styles itself as the Christmas Tree Capital of the World.

Today was to prove long and hot. The first 30k was on tarmac (pavement) part of which ran up Grave Creek. The sign below details the reason for the name:



The first obstacle today was the Whitefish divide (5,364'), the first Continental Divide crossing in the US.

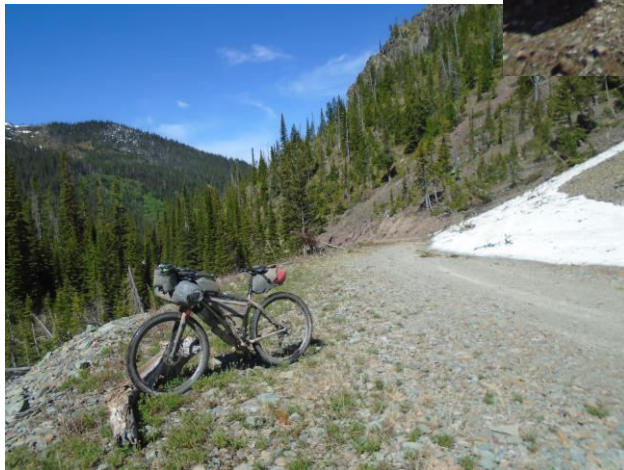
Photos on this page - climbing the Whitefish Divide in lovely weather



Reputedly high density of Grizzly bears in this area but I saw none.

*Snow in an avalanche chute.
Bike shows remaining depth.*

The weather continued fine throughout and I met several riders as I progressed south down the North Fork Flathead River Valley to the west of the Glacier National Park.



Fine views of the river valley, with whole mountain sides completely covered by vast pine forests.

I duly completed my climb over the 5,364' high pass and started the descent alongside the North Fork of the Flathead River.





North Fork of Flathead River

I noticed vast fields of these flowers, called I believe Bear Grass¹. They appear to be very specific at what altitude they flourished.



Bear Grass is a fire-resistant species that is the first plant to grow after a fire.

A curious episode occurred while I was descending at speed over lots of ruts and uneven terrain. One rut caused my bear spray canister to fly from my handlebar bags. It hit the ground and exploded in a vast red mist of toxic pepper spray.

1. Xerophyllum tenax is a North American species of plants in the corn lily family. It is known by several common names, including bear grass, squaw grass, soap grass, quip-quip, and Indian basket grass. They can grow up to 6'.

I braked hard and returned to the spot just as the last of the noxious looking contents were seeping out of the punctured can.



*Dead bear spray can
(puncture hole highlighted)*

Given the fact that I did not have a plastic bag I really couldn't pick the leaking canister up to pack out so I reluctantly left it – sorry.

Incidentally I was very impressed by the lack of litter. I found Montana to be an incredibly clean state. Perhaps, because of the presence of bears, people leave nothing around. I don't know.

*View of the
Glacier National Park*

The climb up to Red Meadow Lake and the associated pass (7,227') was hard, the last 3-4k being hike-a-bike over crispy snow.

Surprisingly, compared with the other riders in my immediate vicinity I was proving quite a reasonable climber.



*En route up to
Red Meadow Lake*

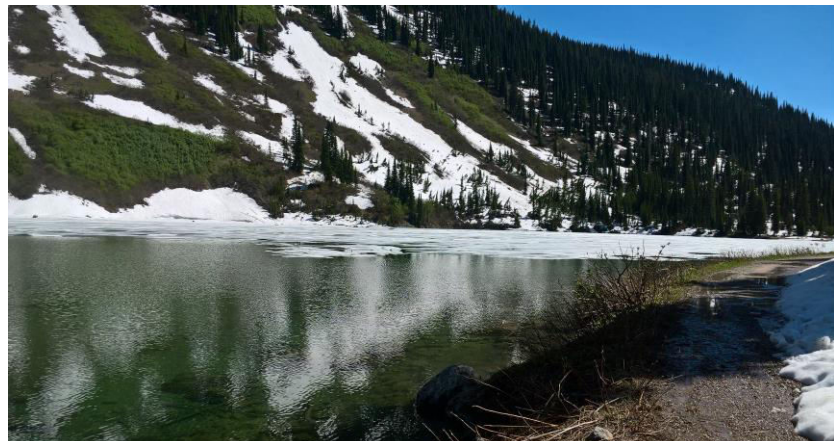
I arrived alone at the Lake in brilliant sunshine and had the privilege of seeing a bald eagle fly over the lake; I originally misidentified this as a fish eagle.

However, 'Googling' shows that fish eagles (various types) only occur in Africa and Asia not America!

At the lake, it was intensely bright with the sunshine bouncing off the snow, unimpeded by the trees. I took several photos and 'did a piece to camera' (video clip using my phone).

I'd been taking lots of photos with my camera but I was concerned the quality would not be as good as my phone. My phone default setting was switched off as I needed to save my battery for Watts Apping. Throughout my trip I did take a restricted number of photos with my phone but as it takes a couple of minutes to boot up spontaneous phone photos were not really on.

*Red Meadow
Lake*



'Only' 65k to Whitefish....The hike-a-bike snow bound section continued for a further couple of k down the south side of the hill. It was here that I came upon a vehicle which had reached the limit of 4 wheel access. A dad from Texas and his two teenage sons were packing up after hiking. We got talking and after I described my bear spray incident he gave me a spare, albeit out of date, can and a tube of factor 60 sun cream – both most welcome.

I passed some stunning holiday houses on the east side of Whitefish Lake They must cost a fortune.

Deer spotted near Whitefish Lake

The wind had got up as I left the TD route to enter Whitefish proper, via a prominent railway bridge.



First stop was Whitefish Glacier Cyclery; **The** bike shop in Montana. The place was buzzing. They gave my bike a look over tutted about the play in my seat but we agreed that it probably didn't need anything doing. I had a free can of coke and they said go and get some food and they would look after the bike.

They recommended a pizza place - Loula's Café just down the street. Accessed from the rear via a very dodgy looking alley. Food ++ consumed and bike picked up I retraced my route to the railway bridge.



Substantial meal at Loula's Cafe

Dusk was approaching, my knee was sore, the wind was adverse and I was knackered when I stopped at Markus food store just before the bridge. After stocking up I considered what to do. The next 50 miles, being principally farmland, would provide relatively few biviing spots. Humm..... With me there was a rider, I think his name was Rick, who was planning to use the TD as his springboard for a round the world trip. He said he was pushing on, planning to do an overnighter.

Just then a chap rocks up and asks if we were doing the Divide and would we like to use his garden to sleep in. Oddly I said yes. Rick elected to carry on.

He introduced himself as Jason and I followed his van to his house – newish two/three bed place on Flint Ave where he introduced me to his wife. I am afraid I didn't get her name.

I spent an hour or so chilling on their veranda with a beer. Jason described Whitefish as a bohemian enclave in otherwise Conservative (with a Capital C) Montana. He and his wife were into cycling, canoeing, hiking and, in the winter, skiing. He was a primary school teacher. I learnt that they had had a bear 'camp' outside the back fence for 2 weeks last year eating apples from the wild apple tree.

I analysed my motive for staying in Whitefish; on reflection I think I made the right decision. I was tired and the knee was starting to play up – no point in pushing on too hard at this point as it might exacerbate a potential problem.

In addition I think the enormity of the task was finally beginning to dawn. Oddly the twisted ankle with it's strapping was fine. I elected to leave the bandage in place.

As I was bedding down the couple told me that rain was forecast for tomorrow. In time honoured manner (THM) I chose to ignore this as I couldn't do anything about it anyway.....