

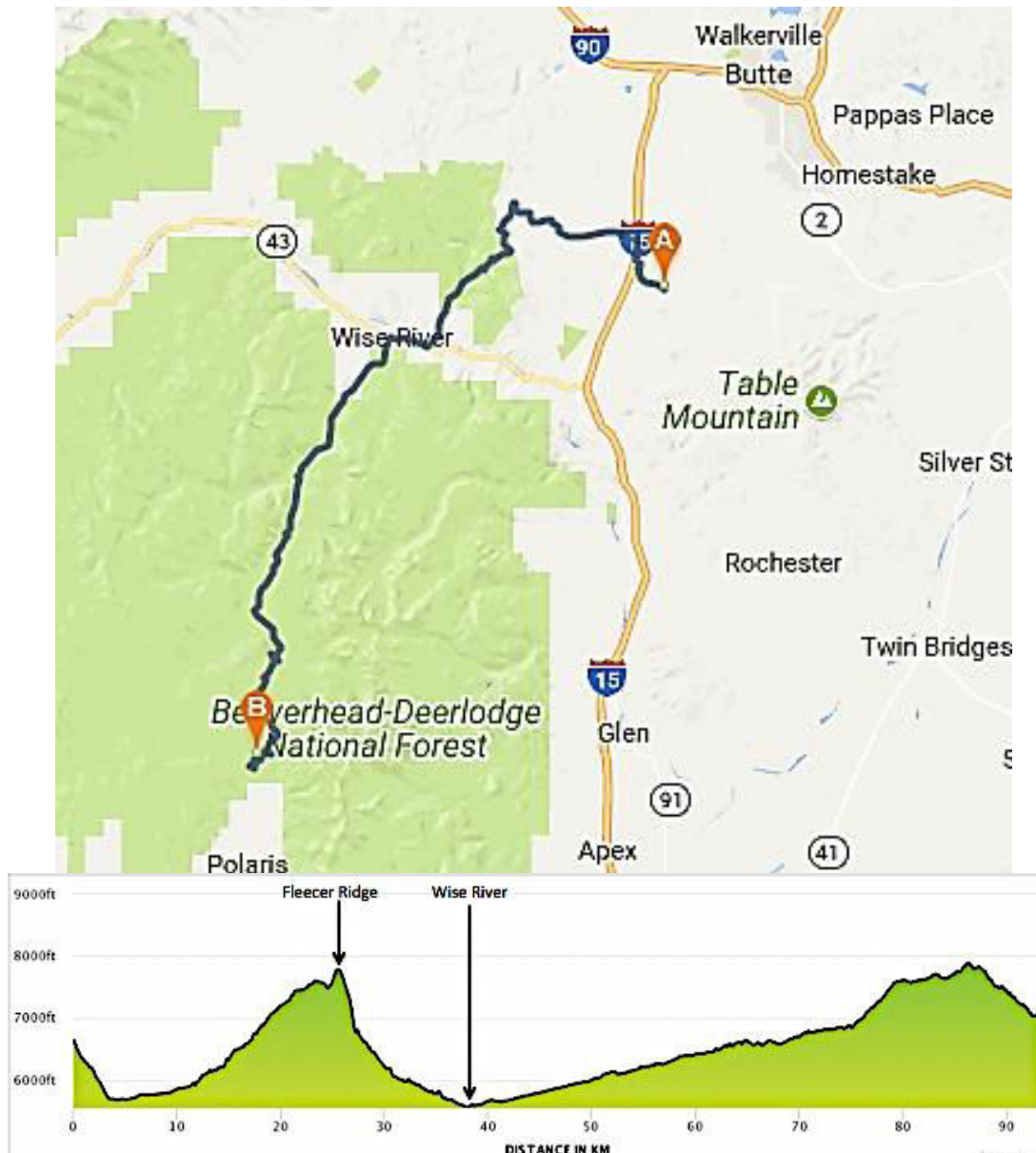
Day 10 18th June 2017
Crazy Creek to Elkhorn Hot Springs

93.3k / 58miles

1904m / 6246ft (1752m / 5748ft descent)
53.5%↑ 35.2%↓ 11.3%→ 16.7% max

*“It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best,
since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them”.*

Ernest Hemingway



Annoyingly, the site I'd chosen for the night proved to have had a slight slope. Not massive, but enough to ensure you woke periodically, with a cold backside, having slipped off the sleeping mat.

It was cold and overcast when I emerged, somewhat sleepily, from my tent the next morning.

As I busied myself packing up, I was 'shouted' at by an elk standing some 60 yds away, on the tree line. He just stood and looked at me for about 30 mins, hooting/snorting at me at regular intervals – not a happy bunny. Apparently this noise is called an elk bugle I had not heard the term (or the extraordinary sound) before¹.

As I set off it was possible to see the Fleecer Ridge, snow-capped and intermittently enveloped in cloud, across the valley from my campsite;



*Fleecer
Mountain*

The descent down into the Divide Creek valley was steep and sandy and I purposefully took it slowly.

The wide open valley was deserted, a cold wind was blowing and there was more than a hint of snow in the dark threatening clouds. I reached the Interstate 15 and paralleled this road before turning off (west) up Divide Creek Road toward Fleecer Mountain itself.

It was curious to compare the similarities of Mt Fleecer and Mt Ventoux. Both rise dramatically from the surrounding terrain and are white capped (snow on Fleecer Mountain, exposed white rocky rubble on Mt Ventoux) and in both cases the summits were very very windy.

I was looking forward to this part of the trip as Michael McCoy's book: 'Cycling The Great Divide' describes the Fleecer Ridge as being:

*'one of the two or three toughest hills
to negotiate on the entire Great Divide route'.*

I have to disagree, while I found the expected pull ascending the slope strenuous, I have to say I did not find this section in any way the hardest part of the trip.

1. This curious YouTube clip illustrates exactly what I was listening to.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20PET6-Hr_c



While climbing the eastern side of Mt Fleecer I came upon this sign – I was to cycle along Jerry Creek when I reached the opposite side of the mountain as I progressed to the community of Wise River.

I did hope I wasn't going to end up in a Dead End.

The final approach to the summit, where the trail turns left and runs along the side of the wood

I stopped, just before the top, to get fully toggged up as it was starting to sleet and the wind was really strong. It was quite eerie being alone on this hill in the wind and sleet.



The light was a very odd shade of grey but bright at the same time - never seen that before.



View from the top of Fleecer Ridge

The slope on the far side of the ridge is notoriously steep and indeed I only managed to get down the first 300m, before having to dismount for safety's sake. Once at the bottom the wind dropped significantly.



*Fleecer Ridge
descent, just before
the iconic
30% slope;
the quiet before the
storm!!
(below)*

I was anticipating something nice and warm to eat at Wise River.

As there were no TD bikes around I chose the first and seemingly only, hostelry in 'Town' – 'The Wise River Club'.



The club, no WiFi and rather overpriced, gets 4 stars on Google.

Personally I would not rate it so highly (max 2, 2½) but hey ho. I talked with the Scottish owner about winter temperatures, which seemed appropriate, as he patently was not full of the joys of spring!!

On the way out of this thriving metropolis (pop 297) I noted an additional café 'The Wise River Mercantile' just past my turn off Highway 43. On a whim I elected to go there and I am glad I did; free cup of coffee, good WiFi and very friendly staff. It gets 5 stars on Google and I agree. Go there if you are ever in Wise River.

When I left The Wise River Mercantile I circled the car park and discovered I had dropped one of my gloves. On this trip whenever I re-started after a significant stop I had developed the habit of stopping after say 50 yds and circling back just to check I had left nothing, (like a back pack or two Marty/Glen take note!!)

Why you might ask? How is your OCD treatment progressing??

Essentially it's because if you are not careful, when you are doing a repetitive task, like cycling on your own for hours on the trot, you can easily find that initial little gnawing doubts such as '*did I leave something back there?*' get to you and the further you cycle from the last stop the larger and larger the doubt looms in the psyche. By routinely returning to the spot I could confidently keep the little '*Genie of Doubt*' safely bottled up.

It's probably a good job I didn't see a psychiatrist before I set off, otherwise, for my own good, I would probably not have been allowed to go on this little jaunt!! Somewhat related to this; and reflecting the fact that I was on my own for such long periods, several people have variously asked:

'Were you ever lonely?'

'Did you ever get bored?' and

'How did you managed while on 'your adventures?'

I have to say that at no time did I feel lonely, obviously I missed home, Jackie and the family, but I was never homesick.

Furthermore there is always something to see or a decision to be made: The constant need to avoid the next segment of wash boarded road, ensuring you are in the most efficient gear, assessing how fast to approach a given hill, all occupy the mind and I often found myself thinking such thoughts as:

'I wonder what type of animal THAT was',

'wow look at the view',

'weyhay I am going far too fast here slow down or else!!',

'watch that low lying branch',

'bugger this bloody hill keeps on going despite promising myself it would level off after the next turn', etc etc.

The list is endless. In addition I sometimes used to listen to my iPod – not as much as I had envisaged but it was very useful on those long open sections which inevitably always seemed to be into the wind.

*Along the Wise River
travelling towards Crystal
Park*

As it was the next 45k were uphill and proved a bit of a drag.



I cycled past Crystal Creek. Apparently one is able to 'prospect' here for six sided quartz crystals which are plentiful in the area – max 5 days a years, no tunnelling, no dynamite!



View from Crystal Park

It was still early afternoon when I passed the Little Joe Campground.

Mindful of my son Joe's (in)ability to get up early I 'Watts Apped' the family a photo of the sign and added that I did not stop because:

*'no one was up,
as it was only 2pm!*

I was undecided what to do when I came upon the sign for Elkhorn Hot Springs. I was in serious need of a shower but it was not that late and the Springs themselves were uphill and some 800m off the route.

However I thought it would be interesting to see them so I turned up the track.

I am glad I did; the place was shall we say, 'rustic' ie slightly tatty.

Elkhorn Hot Springs Hotel

However the young barman, who it turns out had recently bought the place, was friendly and it transpired that use of the hot springs was free if you stayed overnight.



On enquiring I found that Bed & Breakfast cost the princely sum of \$35. Oddly I didn't have to debate too long before I said:

'Fine I'll stay and can I have another beer please?'

The room was 'interesting' - only one light worked and the charging port crackled several times as I plugged my electronics into the mains.

However in THM (Time Honour Manner) I elected to ignore this potential fire risk and left the bike in my room while I went and enjoyed the warm, albeit decidedly green, hot springs.

I discovered they were two, surprisingly large, different temperature pools each about the size of a tennis court. I spent about 40 mins in them peering through the steam rising from the water, before having a good long hot shower.

I began thinking my unplanned decision to stay was going to be a good investment of my time.

Steam rising from the hot pools

The evening meal was 'entertaining'. I met and joined for dinner a father/son combo, Craig & Jim. They were wending their way south, in touring mode, having started about a week before me. Craig was a retired geologist.



There was also a conglomerate¹ of geology students, staying as well. They were on a field trip to Crystal Park.

It turned out that the barman, and recent owner of this esteemed establishment, was also mein host, waiter and probably chief cook and bottle washer as well.

I elected to have soup and spaghetti with meatballs in bolognaise sauce.

When it came the soup bowl was literally the size of one of the hot spring pools. I've never seen a bigger individual bowl. I managed to finish this but the main course was of similar proportions. I could barely see Jim/Craig over the top.

This course proved to be an intriguing combination of piping hot meatballs, watery lukewarm sauce and cold spaghetti. Quite how they achieved this I don't know perhaps it's the Montana equivalent of a baked Alaska!

The waiter/barman/bottle washer etc took it back and it came back uniformly hot. Unfortunately it wasn't that tasty and, combined the huge portion size, this meant I was unable to finish it. The barman/owner/waiter/ etc asked if:

'I wanted it to go?'

I said,

'Yes please'

1. Apparently 'Conglomerate' or 'Formation' is the collective known for a group of geologists. Personally I think it should be either a 'Prospect' or a 'Hammer' of geologists!!

As it transpired this conversation neatly highlighted the difference between English and American because about 30 seconds later he came back with the remnants of my meal in a large polystyrene food container. Apparently:

'to go'

does not mean, as I supposed:

'yes get it out of my sight - never to be seen again'

but rather it translates as:

'would you like to take it away with you so you can 'enjoy' it (cold) in the confines of your room?'

Jim and Craig had a good laugh.

Slept well although annoyingly, just like last night the site chosen for the bed proved to be on a slight slope, not massive, but enough to ensure you woke periodically albeit, this time, without a cold backside!!!!

No elks in the room.