

Mount Borah from the valley floor, page 3. Photo: Borah Vista.

A BORAH VISTA FIELD GUIDE

Seventeen Places in the Lost River Range

The hikes, hot springs, backroads and one small copper town we actually filmed — with the drive times, the seasons and the things nobody tells you.

Borah Vista

Free at borahvista.com/guide

A day trip from one small town

Mackay sits at the bottom of the Lost River valley, the highest mountains in Idaho on one side and the Pioneers on the other. These are seventeen places we went while filming Borah Vista. Where something is risky we say so; nothing here is a paid placement.

	THE SEVENTEEN PLACES	ROAD MILES FROM MACKAY	
1	Mount Borah	23.6 mi	3
2	North Fork of the Big Lost	36.4 mi	4
3	Trail Creek Road	41.7 mi	5
4	Mountain Biking Sun Valley	57.1 mi	6
5	Mackay	in town	7
6	Sunbeam Hot Springs	94.2 mi	8
7	Whitewater at Stanley	93.1 mi	9
8	Challis Hot Springs	54.9 mi	10
9	Spar Canyon Road	35.2 mi	11
10	Morgan Creek Road	61.8 mi	12
11	The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge	101.7 mi	13
12	Custer	103.2 mi	14
13	Craters of the Moon	45.5 mi	15
14	Doublespring Pass	22.1 mi	16
15	Mine Hill & White Knob	4.7 mi	17
16	Bayhorse	62.9 mi	18
17	Pass Creek Canyon	12.1 mi	19



Evening light near the trailhead. Photo: Borah Vista.

1. Mount Borah

IDAHO'S HIGH POINT · 23.6 MILES FROM MACKAY

Idaho's high point, 12,662 feet, and the most misjudged hike in the valley: 5,262 feet of gain in about four miles, and Chicken Out Ridge, a quarter mile of exposed scrambling near 11,000 feet. The valley below dropped seven feet in the 1983 earthquake, and the scarp is plain from the road: page 16.

Drive north on US-93, watch for the Mount Borah Trailhead sign, and turn. Three miles of gravel take you to the lot at about 7,400 feet, with five first-come campsites.

AT A GLANCE

TRAILHEAD	23.6 miles, about 37 minutes by car
ROAD	US-93 north 20.4 miles, then Birch Springs Road 3.3, gravel
THE CLIMB	About 7–8 miles round trip, 6–12 hours; mid-July to September

SCAN FOR MORE



The North Fork of the Big Lost. Photo: Borah Vista.

2. North Fork of the Big Lost

MOOSE, CAMPING, AND NOBODY · 36.4 MILES FROM MACKAY

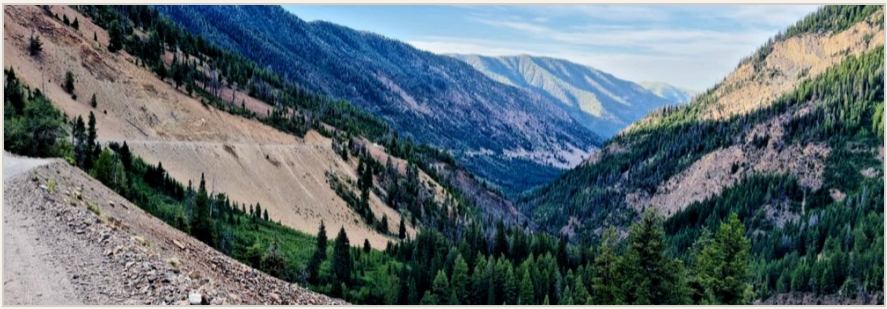
A road that doesn't go anywhere, and that's the point: twelve and a half miles into the Pioneers with almost nobody in it, moose in the willows and pronghorn on the sage below. Free camping all the way up, and a good ride on the ATV or UTV.

Take Trail Creek Road from US-93. A little past the bridge, the North Fork road turns west and climbs from about 7,100 feet to nearly 7,800, then stops. The bull moose in our film was a little more than halfway up.

AT A GLANCE

JUNCTION	36.4 miles, about 1 hour 10 minutes by car
DEAD END	12.5 miles on, 48.9 from Mackay
CAMPING	Dispersed, free, 14-day limit, no facilities at all

SCAN FOR MORE



Trail Creek Road. Photo: Borah Vista.

3. Trail Creek Road

WHERE THE MOOSE ARE · 41.7 MILES FROM MACKAY

Where the moose are. Below the summit on the Mackay side, the creek slows down and spreads out: beaver water and willow up over your head. Watch from the road. A cow with a calf is the one thing out here that will come to you. A great ATV and UTV ride, too.

Forty miles from the Big Lost over the mountains to Sun Valley, most of it dirt. The pavement quits early, and the road climbs to a summit just under 7,900 feet through meadows, aspen groves and beaver ponds.

AT A GLANCE

TURNOFF	15.8 miles north on US-93
MOOSE FLAT	41.7 miles, about 1 hour 20 minutes by car
SEASON	Opens mid-May to mid-June, closes about mid-November

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Singletrack above Ketchum. Photo: Borah Vista.

4. Mountain Biking Sun Valley

OVER THE HILL · 57.1 MILES FROM MACKAY

More than ninety miles of trail within five miles of Ketchum. Sun Valley is a Silver-level IMBA Ride Center: four networks, none more than ten minutes apart. In summer the Roundhouse Express Gondola lifts you 2,000 feet up Baldy and River Run brings you down.

Go over Trail Creek Road in summer and start at Adams Gulch: Sunnyside–Lane's is 2.5 easy miles. Black Tie of Sun Valley (866-360-6433) delivers rental bikes.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	57.1 miles, about 2 hours by car over Trail Creek Road
EASIEST	Sunnyside–Lane's 2.5 mi · Shadyside 1.7 mi
BIKE PARK	Roundhouse gondola, summer, Wed–Sun 9–4

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Main Street, Mackay. Photo: Borah Vista.

5. Mackay

THE TOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RANGE · YOU'RE HERE

Four hundred and thirty-nine people at 5,900 feet, with Mount McCaleb standing over Main Street. The Oregon Short Line pushed a branch up this valley in 1901 to haul copper, and within a year twelve hundred people lived here. The Lost River Museum keeps the mining, the railroad and a moonshining exhibit.

Go in on a Friday and ask about the 1983 earthquake: eleven storefronts and thirty-nine houses didn't survive it. Mackay Reservoir is just north of town, and Mine Hill rises above it: page 17.

AT A GLANCE

MUSEUM	Lost River Museum, Main Street, Fri–Sat 11–4, May–September
FUEL	Sammy's Mini Mart, 318 W Custer, the last before Trail Creek Road

SCAN FOR MORE



The Salmon River at Sunbeam. Photo: Borah Vista.

6. Sunbeam Hot Springs

FREE, ON THE SALMON · 94.2 MILES FROM MACKAY

Hot water comes out of the hillside at close to 160 degrees and lands in rock-walled pools on the bank of the Salmon River. You mix it yourself, moving a rock to let the cold river in, until it's somewhere around 105. It is free, and it always has been.

US-93 to Challis, then Highway 75 up the Salmon, about twelve miles short of Stanley. Come early on a weekday, June to October; spring runoff covers the pools and the river is dangerous. Pair it with the rafting, page 9.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	94.2 miles, about 2 hours by car
FEE	Free; vault toilet, no drinking water
SEASON	June–October; never in spring runoff
RULES	Swimsuits; no glass, no soap

SCAN FOR MORE



On the Salmon below Stanley. Photo: Borah Vista.

7. Whitewater at Stanley

RAFT THE RIVER OF NO RETURN · 93.1 MILES FROM MACKAY

The Salmon, the River of No Return, runs wild two hours from Mackay. Leave after breakfast, run twelve miles of Class II–III through a granite canyon by lunch, and soak at Sunbeam on the way back.

White Otter Adventures (208-788-5005) sits at the Sunbeam put-in, so there's no bus shuttle: park, gear up, walk to the water. Book the 9:30 launch. In Stanley, Sawtooth Adventure Company and The River Company run the same river.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	93.1 miles to Sunbeam, about 2 hours by car
THE RUN	12 miles of Class II–III, about 3 hours
COST	About $100 adult, $85 child 4–12; confirm when you book

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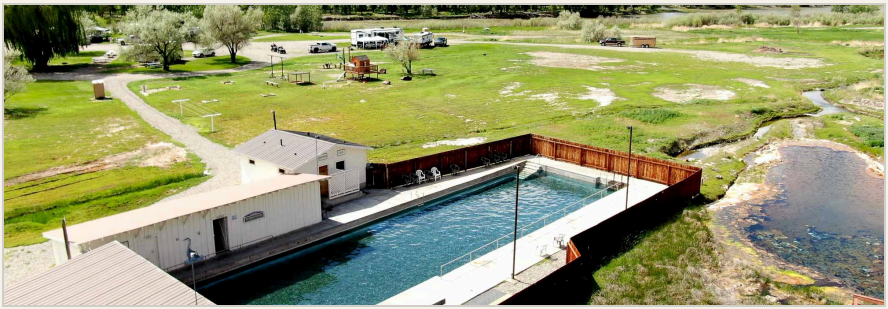

Challis Hot Springs from the air. Photo: Borah Vista.

8. Challis Hot Springs

TWO HOT POOLS · 54.9 MILES FROM MACKAY

Swim in one hot pool and soak in the other, on a bench above the Salmon River. The big pool is a hundred feet by thirty, held around 96 degrees in summer; the small one sits near 105.

Drive north on US-93 toward Challis, then Hot Springs Road. The Hammond family homesteaded here in the late 1800s and ran it for well over a century; since May 2023 it's part of Land of the Yankee Fork State Park. Pair it with Bayhorse, page 18.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	54.9 miles, about 1 hour 20 minutes by car
ROAD	US-93 north 49.9 miles, then Hot Springs Road 5.1
CALL FIRST	Fees and hours changed with the state: 208-833-4442

SCAN FOR MORE



Above the valley off Spar Canyon. Photo: Borah Vista.

9. Spar Canyon Road

WILD HORSES, NO TRAFFIC · 35.2 MILES FROM MACKAY

A dirt road through eroded volcanic canyon, rust and ochre and grey, out to the East Fork of the Salmon: an hour without meeting another car. The BLM's Challis wild horse herd lives on this ground, and a band will stand in the road and look at you.

Past a rocky first stretch it grades out, and in the dry a car handles it. In 2021 a storm tore it apart with washouts thirty feet deep. It's flash-flood country, unmaintained in winter: call first, and turn around rather than test it.

AT A GLANCE

TURNOFF	35.2 miles north on US-93, about 40 minutes
ROAD	Graded dirt; cars in the dry, nothing low after rain
CHECK FIRST	BLM Challis, 208-756-5499; no cell signal

SCAN FOR MORE



A bighorn above the road. Photo: Borah Vista.

10. Morgan Creek Road

THE BIGHORN DRIVE · 61.8 MILES FROM MACKAY

The best place in this guide to see bighorn sheep from a car. They work the rock above the road, so glass upward at the cliff bands, first and last light. Stop, engine off, and stay in the vehicle: they read a stopped car as scenery and a person on foot as a predator.

Forest Road 055 leaves US-93 about seven miles north of Challis and climbs over Morgan Creek Summit on gravel. Four miles up, the BLM's Morgan Creek site has four free campsites, a vault toilet and drinking water.

AT A GLANCE

TURNOFF	61.8 miles north on US-93, about 1 hour 15 minutes
ROAD	Gravel forest road; cars in the dry
CAMPING	4 free sites, 14-day limit

SCAN FOR MORE



The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge. Photo: Borah Vista.

11. The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge

988 TONS IN A CREEK BOTTOM · 101.7 MILES FROM MACKAY

Eight and a half miles up a gravel road you come round a bend and find a 988-ton machine sitting where it was left in 1953: 112 feet long, four stories tall, seventy-one steel buckets on a chain. It chewed through six million cubic yards of gravel for a little over a million dollars in gold.

US-93 to Challis, Highway 75 to the Sunbeam Dam, then Yankee Fork Road. The grey ridges of cobble beside the road are its tailings. Custer, page 14, is two miles on.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	101.7 miles, about 2 hours 35 minutes by car
OPEN	Late May to Labor Day, daily 10–4:30
ADMISSION	$5 adults, $1 children 6–12

SCAN FOR MORE



A cabin at Custer. Photo: Borah Vista.

12. Custer

A GHOST TOWN, FREE TO WALK · 103.2 MILES FROM MACKAY

A gold town that had six hundred people in 1896 and now has none: the best-preserved ghost town in this part of Idaho, free to walk any hour of any day. The schoolhouse is the museum and the restored Empire Saloon is the summer gift shop.

Two miles above the dredge, page 13, at the end of the good gravel. Do the dredge in the morning; Custer faces the afternoon sun. Fill the tank and the water bottles in Challis: there's nothing up this road.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	103.2 miles, about 2 hours 40 minutes by car
ADMISSION	Free; buildings staffed Memorial Day–Labor Day
WORTH TIMING	Custer Days, second Saturday in July

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The North Crater Flow boardwalk. Photo: Borah Vista.

13. Craters of the Moon

LAVA AND CAVES · 45.5 MILES FROM MACKAY

Lava fields, cinder cones and caves you can walk through, an hour south. In August 1969 Apollo astronauts trained here, Alan Shepard among them. Climb Inferno Cone for the view, walk the North Crater Flow boardwalk through 2,100-year-old lava, and walk Indian Tunnel with a free cave permit.

Drive south through Arco to the visitor center. The seven-mile Loop Road passes every stop, and it takes RVs. Dogs can ride the Loop Road but can’t go on the trails or into the caves.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	45.5 miles, about 1 hour by car
ENTRANCE	$20 a car, good for 7 days
SEASON	Loop Road open to cars about mid-April to late November

SCAN FOR MORE



The gravel shelf on the way to the pass. Photo: Borah Vista.

14. Doublespring Pass

THE SIDE-BY-SIDE RIDE · 22.1 MILES FROM MACKAY

The ATV and UTV ride north of Mount Borah. Everybody on US-93 looks at the peak; almost nobody turns off. This road crosses the scarp the 1983 earthquake tore across the valley, then climbs to 8,323 feet: pine, snow on the peaks, empty hills, and Borah behind you the whole way.

Trailer the machine to the turnoff at the earthquake marker, just north of the peak, unload and go, or drive it: it's graded gravel. Bring goggles for the dust.

AT A GLANCE

RIDE IT	ATV or UTV; trailer to the turnoff
TURNOFF	22.1 miles up US-93, about 26 minutes
THE PASS	29.5 miles, about 55 minutes, 8,323 feet

SCAN FOR MORE



The mining museum at the bottom of town, Mackay. Photo: Borah Vista.

15. Mine Hill & White Knob

RIDE IT FROM TOWN · 4.7 MILES FROM MACKAY

A mountain of copper, lead, gold and silver mining above town, and a great ride on the ATV or UTV: twenty miles of marked stops up to the tramway head house and the remains of White Knob and Cliff City, camps that housed thousands of miners in the early 1900s.

Start at the free museum at the bottom of town, the one with the steam shovel out front, then take Smelter Avenue to Mine Hill Road.

AT A GLANCE

HEAD HOUSE	4.7 miles, about 40 minutes by car
THE TOUR	About 20 miles of marked stops, free
ROAD	Mine Hill Road; ATV or high clearance past the head house

SCAN FOR MORE



The Bayhorse mill from above. Photo: Borah Vista.

16. Bayhorse

A SILVER TOWN STILL STANDING · 62.9 MILES FROM MACKAY

A whole silver-mining town still standing in a side canyon: a big red mill, charcoal kilns, mine buildings hanging off the ridges. Bayhorse had 300 people by 1885, and over $10 million in ore came out of these hills by 1900.

Take US-93 toward Challis, then Highway 75 south along the Salmon and up Bayhorse Creek Road, 3.3 miles of gravel. On the National Register since 1976, it's part of Land of the Yankee Fork State Park now.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE	62.9 miles, about 1 hour 25 minutes by car
ROAD	US-93 51.3 miles, SH-75 south 8.1, then 3.3 of gravel
FEE, SEASON	$7 a vehicle; closed in winter

SCAN FOR MORE



Pass Creek Road in the narrows. Photo: Borah Vista.

17. Pass Creek Canyon

LITTLE YOSEMITE · 12.1 MILES FROM MACKAY

People who ride it call it Little Yosemite: a well-kept dirt road running straight into a gap in the range, between walls of rock that go straight up. A good ATV and UTV ride, twenty minutes from town.

Take US-93 to 3900 West, and Pass Creek Road runs into the narrows. Past them a trail on the right leads into the Enchanted Forest, and the road climbs past campsites to Pass Creek Summit, over the Little Lost River Valley.

AT A GLANCE

NARROWS	12.1 miles, about 20 minutes by car
SUMMIT	19.5 miles, about 35 minutes by car
CAMPING	Seven scattered sites, vault toilet, no water

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Eight things to prepare

CELL SERVICE	Assume none. Trail Creek, the North Fork, Spar Canyon and Morgan Creek have zero coverage. Download offline maps in town and tell somebody your route.
THE MVUM	On Salmon-Challis National Forest land, a route not on the Motor Vehicle Use Map is closed to you. The maps are free and work offline.
FUEL AND WATER	Sammy’s in Mackay is the last fuel before Trail Creek Road; there is nothing between Mackay and Ketchum. Carry more water than you think.
CAMPING	Free on most Salmon-Challis ground, within 300 feet of an open road, up to 14 days. Pack out everything.
FIRE	Check the Idaho Department of Lands fire restrictions the morning you leave. Stage 2 bans campfires entirely.
SEASONAL ROADS	Trail Creek Road opens mid-May to mid-June and closes about mid-November, set by snow. Spar Canyon is unmaintained in winter.
ALTITUDE	Mackay is at 5,900 feet. Thunderstorms build most summer afternoons; be off the high ground by early afternoon.
WILDLIFE	Moose are the ones that hurt people here. Give everything room; if an animal changes what it’s doing because of you, you’re too close.

The year in the valley

MAY	The reservoir, Mine Hill and the museum open. Trail Creek still closed.
JUNE	Trail Creek opens. Big water on the Salmon. Borah still snowy.
JULY	Everything open. Lift-served biking on Baldy. Rodeo weekend.
AUGUST	The best Borah window. Low rivers, warm springs, flash-flood risk.
SEPTEMBER	The sweet spot: empty campgrounds, cold nights, gold aspen.
OCTOBER ON	Hot springs season. Roads start closing; check before you drive.
THE FINE PRINT	Distances were measured by road from the middle of Mackay. Fees, hours and seasons were checked when we wrote this and change without notice: confirm with the operator or the agency before you go. This guide is a recommendation, not a guarantee of safety; your judgment, gear and margin are your own.

Numbers worth saving

RANGER DISTRICT	Lost River Ranger District, Mackay: trail and road conditions, 208-588-3400
NATIONAL FOREST	Salmon-Challis, Salmon Public Lands Center, 208-756-5100
BLM CHALLIS	Mine Hill maps, Spar Canyon, travel maps, 208-756-5499
BLM RECREATION	Mackay Reservoir and the Joe T. Fallini site, 208-879-6200
HOT SPRINGS	Challis Hot Springs, 208-833-4442
RAFTING	White Otter Adventures, Sunbeam, 208-788-5005
BIKES	Black Tie of Sun Valley, delivers, 866-360-6433
ROADS	Idaho road conditions: 511, or 511.idaho.gov
EMERGENCY	911

More, if you have the days

GALENA SUMMIT	South of Stanley on ID-75: the Sawtooths across the whole windshield and the headwaters of the Salmon below you.
COPPER BASIN	Off Trail Creek Road: a wide-open sage basin under the Pioneers, pronghorn, and a good ATV and UTV ride.
KING MOUNTAIN	Look up over Moore: hang gliders come down at the King Mountain Glider Park. The launches are for expert pilots only.
PAHSIMEROI VALLEY	Over Doublespring Pass and down the north side: meadows under snowy peaks, the other half of the side-by-side ride.
THE FILMS	Short Borah Vista films of the drives in this book, and the Craters film: borahvista.com/getting-there
THE PODCAST	Borah Vista's history podcast, starting with Custer: borahvista.com/podcast

Find a place to stay

borahvista.com/stay

Borah Vista

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WATCH THE DRIVES FIRST



Getting There

Short Borah Vista films of the drives in this book: Mount Borah, the North Fork, Trail Creek, Mine Hill, Sunbeam and Doublespring Pass.

borahvista.com/getting-there

WATCH THE FILMS