

# Hiking



**Forest Service**  
Lewis and Clark National Forest  
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center



For more trail information call the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center: 406-727-8733 or visit the website for a calendar of activities at [www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/lcic.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/lcic.htm)

## Sulphur Spring Trail 801

Trail Beginning: 2960 ft. elev. (902 m)

Route begins at the Morony parking area trailhead.

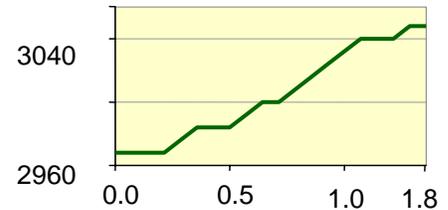
Trail Ending: 3040 ft. elev. (927 m)

Route ends at the Sulphur Spring.

Access: Travel north from Great Falls on the old Havre Highway (US 87) for 3.6 miles and turn right onto Ryan Dam Road (a large sign along the highway marks the turnoff). Continue 11.5 miles on the Ryan Dam Road, following the signs for Morony Dam. Trailhead parking is on the left (east) side of the road and adjacent to the abandoned Morony Dam town site.

**Length of Hike:** 1.8 miles (one way)

**USGS Map(s):** Northeast Great Falls



**Distance (miles)**

### Attractions and Considerations:

Sulphur Spring trail offers a half-day hiking opportunity into Montana native prairie and a step into history. Pack a lunch and within 20 minutes find yourself in the solitude of the native prairie grasses and flowering cacti. Only 15 miles from Great Falls, this graveled footpath along a relatively remote stretch of river is for hikers only. Feel the prairie winds from this exposed perch along the river bluff and listen for the call of the Western Meadowlark or the soothing sound from the Missouri River rapids below. As a bonus, learn a snippet of history about the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the ensuing hydroelectric communities that evolved a century later. Interpretive wayside signs at the trailhead provide a route map and historical overview of the area. A 300-yard compacted gravel trail leads to a scenic overlook and a snapshot of the impressive prairie landscape downriver – this short stretch of trail is ADA accessible. A brief story of the 1805 portage around the waterfalls and the historic spring is portrayed on an interpretive panel at this overlook. Three additional interpretive wayside signs further along the trail illustrate the hardships of the 1806 portage and describe the restorative powers of the Sulphur Spring in healing the ailing Indian woman, Sacagawea. Bring your binoculars to catch a glimpse of the birds that nest in the protected thickets and fish the river - orioles, meadowlarks, pelicans, bald eagles and swallows. Early morning hikers might stir up a coyote on the hunt or mule deer feeding in one of several ravines.

### Narrative:

The compacted gravel trail winds through central Montana prairie with minor elevation changes that challenge novice hikers. For nature seekers, blooming white yucca, prickly pear's milky yellow petals, and purple milkvetch provide early summer color. Look for prairie apple, a nourishing root identified by Sacagawea, growing alongside the trail. In fall, rubber rabbitbrush bursts into yellow blossoms and the leaves of the shrubby sagebrush emanate a familiar herbal fragrance. Massive juniper shrubs hug the ground and flank the trail at several locations.

The hike begins with a slight descent across a narrow coulee and brief climb onto the rolling prairie. The hiking path meanders across prairie to the bluff overlooking the Missouri River; it then parallels the river, looping on the bluff to the historic spring. A scenic overlook along the loop portion of the trail offers hikers downriver vistas towards Lewis and Clark's historic lower portage camp and direct views into the mouth of Belt Creek, known as Portage Creek in 1805. Belt Creek marks the start of the explorers' 18-mile portage across the prairie, an arduous journey bypassing the five falls of the Missouri River.

Although close to Great Falls, hikers should plan ahead and take basic precautions to prevent injury:

- Rattlesnakes are prevalent and prickly pear and yucca spines can pierce skin, so stay on the trail where they can be easily avoided. Poison ivy is prevalent in several of the coulees, so be able to identify and avoid it.
- Shade and drinking water are unavailable, so bring a hat and sunscreen, and carry plenty of drinking water.
- Shelter is nonexistent, so watch weather conditions and head to the trailhead if a thunderstorm approaches.

Needle and thread grass, prickly pear, yucca and rattlesnakes can be dangerous to your dog. Protect your pet's health by leaving your dog at home. If you do risk bringing your pet, please pick up their droppings.