

About the Beartooth Highway



Touring in the 1930s

Beartooth Highway is a 68.7-mile route that begins at the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park and runs northeast through portions of Wyoming to Red Lodge, Montana. It also is known as the Red Lodge-Cooke City Highway and U.S. Route 212.

In Crow, “Na Piet Say” means the bear’s tooth, a sharp spire that juts from the Beartooth Plateau in Wyoming and Montana. Native Americans, including Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Crow, and Shoshone, have traversed and occupied the Beartooth Mountains for at least 12,000 years.

In the 1800s, the area was explored by mountain men, trappers, and traders. In 1872, Yellowstone National Park was established, but it was almost impossible to cross the Beartooth Range on horseback, and no eastern route to Yellowstone was possible.



Looking west at Beartooth Butte

In the early 1900s, citizens from Red Lodge lobbied for a scenic eastern approach to Yellowstone. On January 31, 1931, President Hoover established the Beartooth Highway, which was built between 1932 and 1936.

Beartooth Highway is one of the most beautiful, high-elevation scenic routes in the United States. It is designated a Forest Service National Scenic Byway and traverses portions of the Shoshone, Custer, and Gallatin National Forests. Primarily used for recreation, the Beartooth Highway is open Memorial Day to October 15th. Along the highway are roadside turnouts, trail heads, and campgrounds for tourists to observe and enjoy the beauty of the Beartooth Range.

