



# AUTO TOUR

AAA Washington Travel Services

## *Silver Valley, Idaho*

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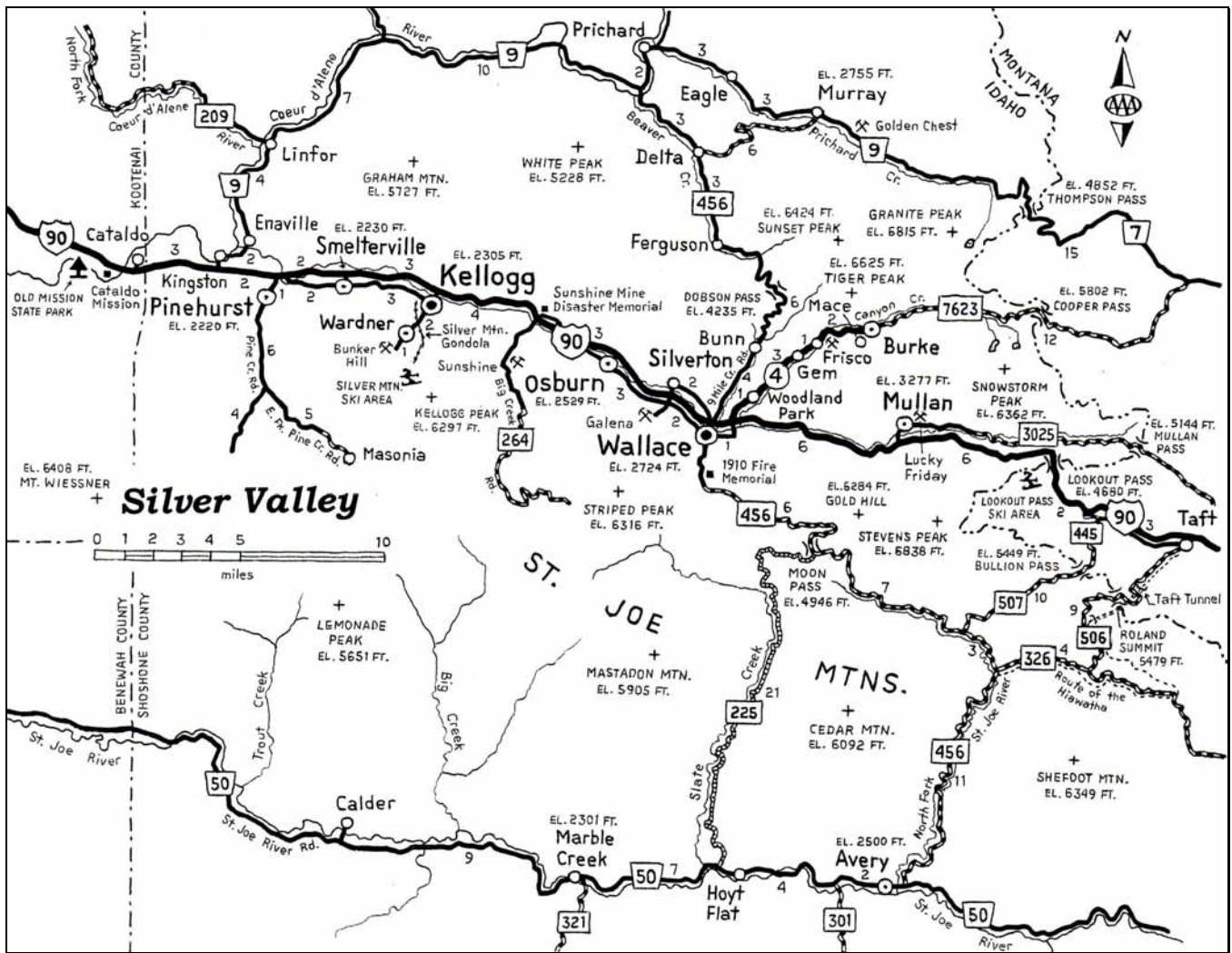
For 100 years, the narrow valley east of Coeur d'Alene was one of the world's hot zones of mineral wealth. The towns of Kellogg, Wallace and Mullan boomed (and later busted) on the strength of the successful extraction of over six billion of dollars' worth of silver, lead and zinc ore - this was the Old West at its wildest!

The Silver Valley prospered until the early 1980s, when most of the mining operations shuttered and one-third of the population left the scarred valley behind. The area's economy suffered a fair degree of tumult but has revived on the strength of its tourism trade. One of the world's longest gondolas (over three miles long) transformed Kellogg's local ski hill into Silver Mountain Resort in 1990. Wallace has thrived as a historic district – saloons, antique shops and turn-of-the-century architecture are cherished relics from its colorful past. For adventurous souls, Mullan is a jumping-off point for two major mountain biking routes – the *Route of the Hiawatha* and the *Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes*.



*Photo courtesy Wikipedia*

An easy day trip loop from Coeur d'Alene (129 miles) or Spokane (193 miles), the Silver Valley also has several spur routes that allow travelers a plethora of recreational opportunities off the beaten path.



## Eastbound to Wallace (via I-90 and Forest Roads 9 & 456)

Starting east from Coeur d'Alene, Interstate 90 traverses a narrow neck of the resort town's namesake lake, which stretches 30 miles south – **Veterans Memorial Centennial Bridge** at milepost 18 provides a particularly panoramic view. The highway gradually ascends for twelve miles to 3,081-foot **Fourth of July Pass**, a haven for cross-country skiers. Ten miles further on is the junction to State Highway 3, the White Pine Scenic Byway, the connector to St. Maries and the St. Joe's River Valley. Our auto tour instead continues east on I-90 and soon descends into the Silver Valley itself.

Our first stop is at Exit 39, the turnoff for **Old Mission State Park**. Home to Idaho's oldest standing building (built between 1850 and 1853 by the Coeur d'Alene Indians and Jesuit missionary Antonio Ravelli), the Sacred Heart Mission building (also known as Cataldo Mission) features 18-inch-thick walls composed of woven straw and mud – without nails! To this day the mission serves as a spiritual center for the tribe – the annual Feast of the Assumption pilgrimage occurs on August 15 each year.

In later years, the mission building served as a hospitality station for miners and others settling in the Silver Valley. The restored Parish House next door houses period artifacts and room décor as well as exhibits describing the relationship between the priests and native peoples. A new visitor center is under construction at the park's north end and interpretative trails are scattered throughout the 18-acre layout. The park is open daily year-round with extended summer hours.



*Sacred Heart (Cataldo) Mission*

The interstate proceeds past the small town of **CATALDO** (pop. 240, elev. 2,152 ft.), then our auto tour poses a question – continue along I-90 through the populated zones right away, or take the Kingston ramp (Exit 43) and turn north for a meandering, adventurous trip on the slow road along the picturesque Coeur d’Alene River? Motorists can expect to take 90 minutes to properly explore this 52-mile diversion. *Note: Trailers & RV’s are not recommended to drive through Dobson Pass due to tight cornering on the pass.*

Exit 43 drops travelers onto Forest Road 9, a two-lane paved road that hugs the river for over 20 miles. Fair warning - the only fuel stop along the route is at the Enaville Resort, 1.5 miles into the drive. During the heights of valley mining, tailings contained high levels of lead contaminated the entire length of the Coeur d’Alene River. Three decades of reduced mineral extraction have allowed the river’s beauty to return, as well as enabling human activities like inner tubing and swimming. Summertime campers perch on small chunks of beach as the water lazily passes. A number of small RV parks dot the north shoreline – they are accessible via the bridge just past Enaville.

Once you enter the Coeur d’Alene National Forest after 13 miles of driving, the power poles disappear and you’re in nature. There are a number of pullouts along the valley floor to stop and take in the (cleaner) atmosphere. Motoring through these woods may give you the feeling you’ve seen this scene somewhere – if you’ve screened the 1997 Pierce Brosnan movie *Dante’s Peak*, you’d be right! The film was principally shot in Wallace and on this road. Feel famous yet?

After 21 miles the road splits in two – keep to the left, following signs for Prichard and Thompson Pass. Two miles further up, turn right at the sign for Murray and Thompson Pass. Over the next six miles, the effects of mining on the landscape become clear as piles of displaced rock line Prichard Creek.



Prospecting of a different sort is the town’s heritage in **MURRAY** (pop. 100, alt. 2,755 ft.), the center of Idaho’s short-lived gold rush of 1883-84. From here claims shifted along both forks of the Coeur d’Alene River until silver was struck on the south fork the next year. The Bedroom Goldmine Bar (pictured at left) dates to 1886. Of note for tourists is the **Sprag Pole Inn and Museum**, a free-of-charge exhibition with detailed exhibits on mining as well as a hodgepodge collection of knick-knacks accumulated by brothers Walt and Harry Almquist.

Murray is just eight miles from the Montana border and Thompson Pass (alt. 4,852 ft.) Instead, our auto tour makes an about-face and returns to Prichard.

When you reach the road split you encountered before, turn left onto the cutoff and left again to take Forest Road 456 south to Wallace. This road is rough for several miles, but it saves you 40 miles over backtracking to the interstate to get across the Silver Valley. The scenery here is purely composed of evergreen foothills and narrow valleys. After seven miles the road finally smooths out just as you reach the base of **Dobson Pass**, a challenging six-mile hairpin-laced stretch of pavement. Open year-round, the road scales over 1800 feet of elevation gain in a series of seemingly endless switchbacks before topping out at 4,235 feet. The descent is no less challenging as FR 456 becomes 9 Mile Creek Road for the last four miles to Wallace.

As one of the few towns in America whose National Historic District consists of every single downtown building, **WALLACE** (pop. 960, alt. 2,744 ft.) clings to life on the back of its colorful past as the center of one of the world’s richest mineral deposits. Founded in the mid-1880s, the town sits at the confluence of four major canyons that contain over 200 miles of mining tunnels. An 1890 saloon fire leveled most wooden structures downtown and led to the construction of brick buildings that now comprise the Historic District – one of the finest examples of turn-of-the-century architectural style in the Inland Northwest. The legendary blaze of 1910, America’s all-time largest wildfire that charred some three million acres, tore through the town’s east end. Lana Turner, one of Hollywood’s glamour actresses of the 1940s and 50s, was a Wallace native. Downtown Wallace nearly fell to the wrecking ball to pave way for Interstate 90 in the 1970s. The town’s successful campaign for a Historic District designation in 1976 forced the federal Transportation Department to elevate the freeway, a process not completed until 1991.

The road from Dobson Pass turns into Sixth Street as you enter downtown. On your right is the **Sixth Street Theater**, a community theater group that each summer presents the Sixth Street Melodrama, a family-oriented revue about the town’s

past that actively encourages audience participation. A year-round slate of plays and musicals are presented at the Theater, whose exterior evokes the vaudeville era circa 1899. Across the street is the **Northern Pacific Depot Railroad Museum**, a restoration of Wallace's train stop (complete with characteristic turret) that tells the story of railroading in the Coeur d'Alene mining district.

Two blocks ahead at Bank Street, look down - in 2004, Mayor Ron Garitone declared a manhole cover here to be *The Center of the Universe*. How lucky! Ahead on the left is the ivory-white **Shoshone County Courthouse** that dates to 1906. Across the street is the 1890 White Bender Building, home to the **Silver Capital Arts and Mineral Museum**. Open daily, it showcases displays of minerals from the Silver Valley and other mining regions of Idaho and the West.

Another decision to make - turn right on Bank Street and you find storefronts gilded with antiques as well as Wallace's watering hole and nightlife center, the AAA-approved **1313 Club**. If you choose left instead, you reach the east interchange of I-90 and the start point of two side trips - hop I-90 to go to Mullan, or take Highway 4 to visit the valley's ghost towns.

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### Side Trip – Mullan

East of Wallace I-90 follows the upper reaches of the Coeur d'Alene River. The canyon narrows as we pass signed exits for old mining camps: Golconda, Compressor, Gold Creek. In places there's barely enough room for the river, freeway and the former railroad right-of-way (now a trail). After six miles we reach **MULLAN** (pop. 754, alt. 3,277 ft.), the easternmost town in the Silver Valley. It's a careworn place, a mix of old and new buildings tucked in a deep fold of the Bitterroots, six miles from the Montana border at Lookout Pass. Winter snowfall is heavy (averaging 112 inches) and most of the buildings have steep metal roofs.

The Gold Hunter and Morning silver mines opened here in 1884 and a town sprang up the following year. Its name honors Captain John Mullan, the West Point graduate who selected the route for a wagon road between Fort Benton, Montana and Fort Walla Walla, Washington in 1859-60.



*Photo courtesy City of Mullan*

At its peak in the 1930s-40s, Mullan had around 4,000 people, 19 bars, 7 grocery stores and 6 churches. **St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church** dates from 1890. The mines worked round the clock extracting silver, lead and gold. The **Lucky Friday Mine**, on the eastern edge of town, dates back to 1899 and is still operating. The deepest parts of the mine extend more than 6,000 feet beneath the hoist and mill of its modern surface plant. The silver-lead and zinc concentrate is shipped to smelters in British Columbia.

The **Captain John Mullan Museum** is downtown at 229 Earl Street. Its two-story 1930 brick building served as an I.O.O.F. lodge and the town's movie house. The hodgepodge collection of donated items ranging from early clothing and furnishings to I.O.O.F. regalia and mining, reflect Mullan's eclectic history.

Mullan's wealth attracted two railroads. The Union Pacific extended its Wallace line to Mullan in 1888. The Northern Pacific built a branch from its mainline west of Missoula over Mullan Pass reaching the mining town in 1891. The Mullan Trailhead, off exit 58 on River Street, is the eastern end of the all-paved **Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes**, the former UP alignment. It's all downhill to the shores of Coeur d'Alene Lake. The trailhead has a kiosk display about the railroads. Check out [www.friendsofcdatrails.org](http://www.friendsofcdatrails.org) for additional info.

Mullan is also a jumping off point for the **Route of the Hiawatha**, a spectacular recreational trail following the former Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad right-of-way. Its name recalls the *Olympian Hiawatha*, a streamliner that operated between Chicago and Seattle-Tacoma from 1947-61. Highlights along the 15-mile gravel trail include 10 tunnels and seven trestles. The east trailhead is at Taft, Montana, five miles east of Lookout Pass. *Note: Helmets and lights are required to ride the route.* Visit [www.skilookout.com/hiawatha](http://www.skilookout.com/hiawatha) for more information, including admission pricing and shuttle services.

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## Side Trip – Burke Canyon

Burke Canyon extends northeastward from Wallace. Highway 4 begins at I-90 Exit 62 and follows Canyon Creek for nearly 7 miles, passing a number of historic mining sites. Mining started in the canyon in 1884 and developed quickly – by the start of the 1890s seven concentrators were processing ore. There’s not much left of the string of settlements that housed the miners, but along the route you’ll see tailings and ruins of mines, mills and machinery, testimony to the district’s once productive industry.

Three miles into the canyon we pass the site of **GEM** (alt. 3,238 ft.). Founded in 1886 around the Gem of the Mountains Mine and once home to nearly 2,000 residents, this was the site of bitter labor disputes in the early 1890s. Just up the road is the ghost of **FRISCO** (alt. 3,304 ft.) – look for remnants of the old Frisco Mill on the hillside.

Crumbling ruins of the Tamarack Mine mark the site of **MACE** (alt. 3,621 ft.), another ghostly settlement. Just east is **BURKE** (pop. 40, alt. 3,701 ft.). Located at the end of the paved road, this was the largest of the canyon towns, reaching a peak population of nearly 2,500 in the early 1900s. The Tiger, Poorman and Hecla mines opened in 1884 and by 1887 a rail line linked the town with Wallace. Today, derelict mine structures cling to the steep hillsides. The constricted canyon offered some building challenges. The Tiger Hotel, which opened in 1888 and demolished in 1964, was a 4-story, 150 room structure that completely spanned the narrow ravine. The creek, a street and two railroads passed underneath the building.

East of Burke, gravel Forest Road 7623 climbs seven miles up to the 5,802-foot summit of Cooper Pass on the Montana border. Instead, high-tail it back to Wallace to continue the auto tour.

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Returning to Bank Street in Wallace traveling westbound, you pass under an ordinary blinking yellow light with a superlative past – the last traffic light on the route from Seattle to Boston was removed from this spot upon completion of the elevated freeway in 1991.

Fifth and Bank is the gathering point for Wallace’s popular **Sierra Silver Mine Tour**. A trolley conveys travelers a short distance to the tunnel housing displays of mining life during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – from early miners’ first-person accounts to demonstrations of modern-day equipment. Tours last 75 minutes and are offered from May through September. Across Fifth Street from the trolley is the **Wallace District Mining Museum**, a repository of information on the development of mineral extraction. Photographs and equipment samples are presented alongside a 20-minute educational film. One mile south of town (via Bank and King Streets) is the **Pulaski Trail** containing interpretative markers about the heroes and devastation of the 1910 wildfire.

## Westbound to Kellogg (via Silver Valley Road and I-90)



*Sunshine Mine Memorial*

Proceed north on Fifth Street and follow the road around to the left in front of the I-90 flyway and becomes Silver Valley Road (also signed Business Loop 90). This county road maintains an unusually slow speed limit for its width, a fact owing to the large number of combination trucks that once clambered from town to mine. Two miles along is an underpass for the small residential community of **SILVERTON** (pop. 720, alt. 2,720 ft.) and three miles on the road enters **OSBURN** (pop. 1,459, alt. 2,530 ft.).

Midway through town, we leave Silver Valley Road briefly to return to I-90. At Exit 54, jump off the highway and take pause at the **Sunshine Mine Disaster Memorial**. On May 2, 1972, a fire 3,000 feet deep within the world’s all-time richest silver mine claimed the lives of 91 workers. A 25-foot bronze statue of a determined miner (richly illuminated at night) stands atop a dais inscribed with the names of the deceased.

Continue west on Silver Valley Road for two miles and you reach a Valley family favorite, the **Crystal Gold Mine Tour**. Visitors don hard hats and foray into a 48-degree mine shaft to learn about the hand-labor, hard-rock techniques used here since its inception in 1879. One hour of panning for treasure is included in the price of admission.

Just one mile further up Silver Valley Road is **KELLOGG** (pop. 2,296, alt. 2,308 ft.), the anchor of the Silver Valley. Its name honors Noah Kellogg, the man who first discovered *galena* (a composite ore made up of lead, silver and zinc) in Milo Gulch two miles south of town in 1885. Our auto tour turns left onto Division Street and passes Dave Smith Motors, a dealership that is surprisingly the Valley's biggest employer. Pass under the interstate and as the road starts uphill, the **Silver Valley Visitor Center** appears on the left side. This tourism bureau is housed in the old Kellogg-Wardner train depot, the nexus point of shipping the Valley's namesake element to the world.

Partway up the hill, turn right onto McKinley Street and **Historic Uptown Kellogg**. First on the tourist menu is the statue of Captain John Mullan, who blazed a road connecting Ft. Benton, Montana with Ft. Walla Walla that enabled an influx of settlers to the Northwest in the 1870s. The Uptown district is a two-block stretch of Old West façade storefronts with covered boardwalks. A half-mile further along at 820 W. McKinley is the **Staff House Museum** ([www.staffhousemuseum.com](http://www.staffhousemuseum.com)), a 1906 home to executives of the Bunker Hill Company (operators of the Valley's largest mine) converted into exhibits on topics such as metallurgy, the industry's environmental impact and more.

Retrace your route on McKinley and turn down Hill Street. Pass the Silver Valley Veterans Memorial on your left and turn left on Bunker Avenue.

Just ahead is the area's four-season tourist draw, **Silver Mountain Resort** ([www.silvermt.com](http://www.silvermt.com)). Originally known as Jackass Ski Hill (named after Noah Kellogg's donkey) and later Silverhorn, the mountain had a geographic handicap in its early years – the road from the lodge to the hilltop was a dangerously twisty seven-mile path.

Facing economic extinction by 1988, the residents of Kellogg approved a tax earmarked for the construction of a gondola produced by Swiss manufacturer Von Roll. The world's longest single-stage, people-moving gondola – 3.1 miles long, 3,400 feet in elevation gain and an 18-minute ride one-way – was completed in 1990 and heralded the arrival of the refurbished resort.

The resort consists of two mountains – both Wardner Peak and Kellogg Peak nose above 6,200 feet elevation and feature pistes with descents of up to 2,200 vertical feet. The Terrain Park is home to boarders, tubers and shredders of all abilities. Gondola Village features restaurants and the pet-friendly lodge. The newest attraction is **Silver Rapids Indoor Waterpark**, home to tube slides, rafting and other water features for all ages.



*Silver Mountain Gondola*

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## Side Trip – Wardner

Kellogg's Division Street leads south into the more upscale residential neighborhood adjoining downtown, then follows Milo Gulch, a deep cleft in the mountains. Passing beneath the Silver Mountain Gondola, Kellogg blends into the separate municipality of **WARDNER** (pop. 197, alt. 3,163 ft.). Just above town in 1885, Noah Kellogg discovered an incredibly rich vein of galena ore that became the legendary Bunker Hill Mine. Prospectors rushed into the area, souring the steep slopes. Tents and ramshackle buildings quickly filled the gulch and Wardner was born. Named for early miner and promoter Jim Wardner, the town is an amalgam of old and new (you'll see \$500,000+ homes close by weathered structures from the early 1900s).

To learn more about the town's history stop by the **Wardner Gift Shop and Museum** at 652 Main Street. It houses an eclectic collection of historic photographs and artifacts. Hours vary; phone (208) 786-2641.

The forest on the mountains above Kellogg and Wardner is slowly recovering, after more than a century of mining and smelting. Early mining activity was a voracious consumer of timber. In 1917 the giant Bunker Hill smelter in Kellogg began spewing toxins into the atmosphere that further denuded the landscape. The smelter closed in 1981.

Our auto tour comes to a close by continuing past Gondola Village to rejoin I-90 at Exit 49 heading westbound. Two small towns remain on the route – **SMELTERVILLE** (pop. 618, el. 2,219 ft.) and **PINEHURST** (pop. 1,614, el. 2,240 ft.). A couple miles later the Kingston exit is reached and the loop is complete.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### GOLF

- **PINEHURST GOLF CLUB** – 9-hole public course, par 36 – 11 Country Club Lane, Pinehurst (½ mile south of I-90 off Main) – Phone (208) 682-2013 – Web [www.golfpinehurstidaho.com](http://www.golfpinehurstidaho.com)
- **SHOSHONE GOLF CLUB** – 9-hole public course, par 36 – Exit 54 off I-90 (Turn right off ramp, right on High Water Road, then 2 miles ahead) – Phone (208) 784-0161 – Web [www.shoshonegolf.com](http://www.shoshonegolf.com)

### SKIING/MOUNTAIN BIKING

- **SILVER MOUNTAIN** (see listing in auto tour) – Phone (866) 344-2675 – Web [www.silvermt.com](http://www.silvermt.com)
- **LOOKOUT PASS** – Exit 0 off I-90 at Idaho-Montana border, five miles east of Mullan. Phone (208) 744-1301 – Web [www.skilookout.com](http://www.skilookout.com)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEBRUARY – **Winter Games of Idaho** – Amateur ski/snowboard races at Silver Mountain and Lookout Pass  
MAY (mid-month) – **Northern Pacific Depot Day** – Old West festival – car show, crafts & more (Wallace)  
JUNE (mid-month) – **Gyro Days** – Lead Creek Derby (leather ball floated on river), carnival, crafts (Wallace)  
JULY 4 – **Independence Day Celebration** – Parade, horseshoes, fireworks (Kellogg)  
JULY (mid-month) – **Historic Skills Fair** – Artist’s market, fiddle music (Cataldo – Old Mission State Park)  
JULY (late-month) – **Silver Hoops Festival** – 3-on-3 basketball tournament (Kellogg)  
AUGUST (mid-month) – **Huckleberry & Heritage Festival** – (Wallace)  
AUGUST 15 – **Coeur d’Alene Pilgrimage** – Commemorates founding of Sacred Heart Mission (Cataldo)  
DECEMBER (early-month) – **Yuletide Festival** – Town tree-lighting (Wallace)

*Photos by Tony Mayer, except as indicated – Map drawn by John King*

*Updated 8/14/08 tm/jpk*