



# DRIVEN TO ADVENTURE

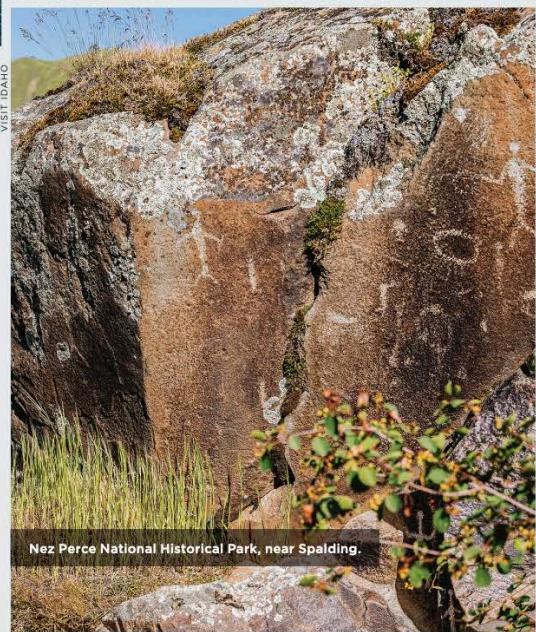
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IDAHO'S LONGEST BYWAY

BY GARY McKECHNIE

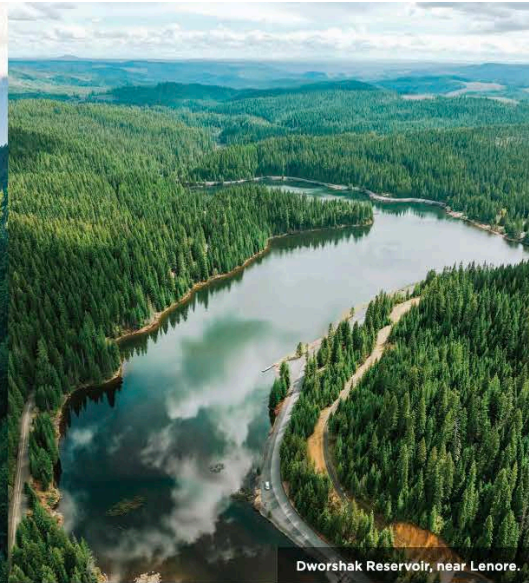
Northwest Passage Scenic Byway, near Kooskia.

It may sound unbelievable, but exploring the Northwest Passage Scenic Byway feels like traveling back in a time machine. Stretching over 200 miles from Lewiston in the west to the Snake River Gorge in the east, the byway, over the course of one day or several, takes you to experience when views of grassy plains, deep canyons, majestic buttes, crystalline rivers and thousands of miles of forests were open and unbroken. This is a road that propels you forward with the promise of significant historical sites, forested trails, rushing rivers, spacious state parks and scenic overlooks. Is it really that wonderful? Well, Lewis and Clark liked it so much that they completed it twice.

Before you embark on the byway, however, we have a few words of advice: Check for closures online in advance, and take advantage of services—such as gas stations and restaurants—in the small towns along the way. The Northwest Passage is a respite from the real world, and offering its magnificent scenery and sites can make your journey, a contemplative adventure above all, an unforgettable experience.



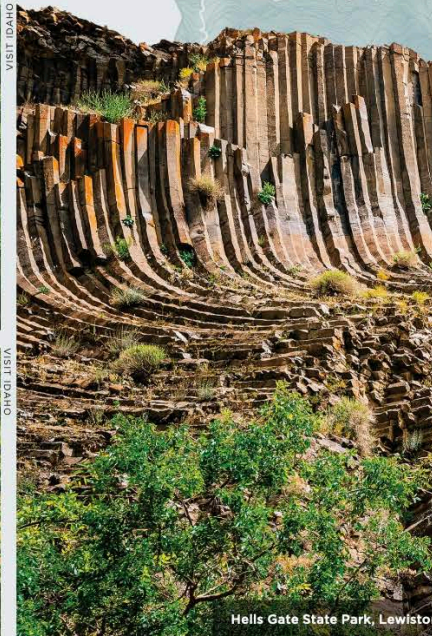
Nez Perce National Historical Park, near Spalding.



Dworshak Reservoir, near Lenore.



Lewis & Clark Discovery Center in Hells Gate State Park, Lewiston.



Hells Gate State Park, Lewiston.

## START YOUR ENGINES

I prefer traveling west to east—there's the warmth of the morning sun and, later, the exhilaration of seeing long shadows, which remind me of the fullness of that day. So consider Lewiston's **Hells Gate State Park** as your starting point. Here on the Idaho-Washington border, the legendary Snake River is a reminder that waterways like these were the highways of the 19th century and will be your traveling companion as you journey east. At the park's **Lewis & Clark Discovery Center**, a short film recounts their struggles to trek across Idaho, interpretive exhibits further detail their ventures and a simple walk through the area (with more than 80 campsites if you're so inclined) finds you adjusting to the tempo of nature and sets the pace for the journey ahead.

The morning, like the river, flows effortlessly as you leave Lewiston, following the Snake to the Clearwater River east to Spalding and the **Nez Perce National Historical Park**, an unusual national park distinctive for its nearly 40 historic sites stretching across Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Here, and for the remainder of your

journey, much of the land you'll travel was that of the Nez Perce—or Nimípuu. Their history is chronicled within the visitor center and in preserved structures, such as a general store and lumber mills, as well as walking trails along the Clearwater River and Lapwai Creek. Drive another 30 minutes, and you'll arrive at **Canoe Camp**, where the Nez Perce not only welcomed Lewis and Clark but also worked with the explorers to carve the five canyons that would help them reach the Pacific Ocean. As a sign of their hospitality, the tribe safeguarded their horses and saddles until they returned the following spring.

Slowly and steadily, the Northwest Passage continues to reveal itself. From Canoe Camp, the road leads to Orofino where a bridge over the Clearwater River invites you to take a side trip. While the roundtrip detour to **Dworshak State Park** adds a collective 50 miles to your drive, it more than compensates with views of **Dworshak Reservoir**. Should you choose to stay overnight, four cabins and 100+ campsites are available, but be sure to stock up on food and supplies in Orofino.





DeVoto Memorial Cedar Grove, near Lowell.

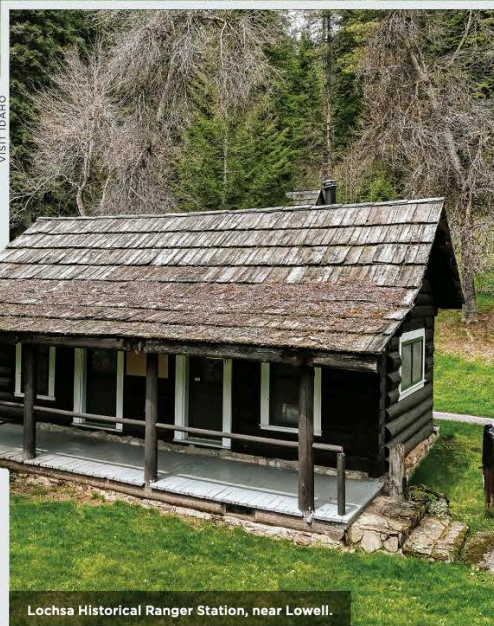
### THE HOME STRETCH

There are an estimated four million miles of roads in Idaho, but for my gas money, among the top 1% are the 130 miles between Orofino and the terminus of Northwest Passage near Lolo Pass, Montana. If one ever advises you, "Just drive straight to Lolo Pass," don't believe them—from Kooskia east, nothing is straight about this leg of your trip. Instead, the road follows the twisting curves of the Clearwater and Lochsa Rivers, where the warm grays of the western trail gradually replaced by the verdant greens of the **Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest**.

The road ahead embodies the essence of your journey—it delivers a feeling of independence and the magic of leaving the world behind. You'll rarely see other motorists, but in this region, it's not just you and the freedom to explore. You'll find the **Lochsa Historical Ranger Station** in the shade of towering conifer trees, as well as a variety of trailheads, campgrounds and lodges.

In the final miles, the road climbs steadily and leads to the **DeVoto Grove Picnic Area and Trailhead**, where two loops wind through western red cedar trees that were planted when the Declaration of Independence was signed some 1,800 years before that. This combination of natural beauty and historical resonance creates an ideal backdrop to the journey. Your day began with Lewis and Clark and now concludes with a bow to those intrepid explorers. Fifteen miles ahead is the **Lolo Pass Visitor Center** near the site where, in 1805, it took the exhausted members of the Corps of Discovery 11 days to clear the 5,233-foot pass through the Bitterroot Mountains. This is also where, sadly, in 1877, the exhausted Nez Perce fled the Cavalry to avoid being relocated to a reservation.

It has been a full day or, perhaps, days. Stretching from border to border, the Northwest Passage Scenic Byway is not only a link across Idaho but truly a time machine that links present-day explorers to the Gem State's past.



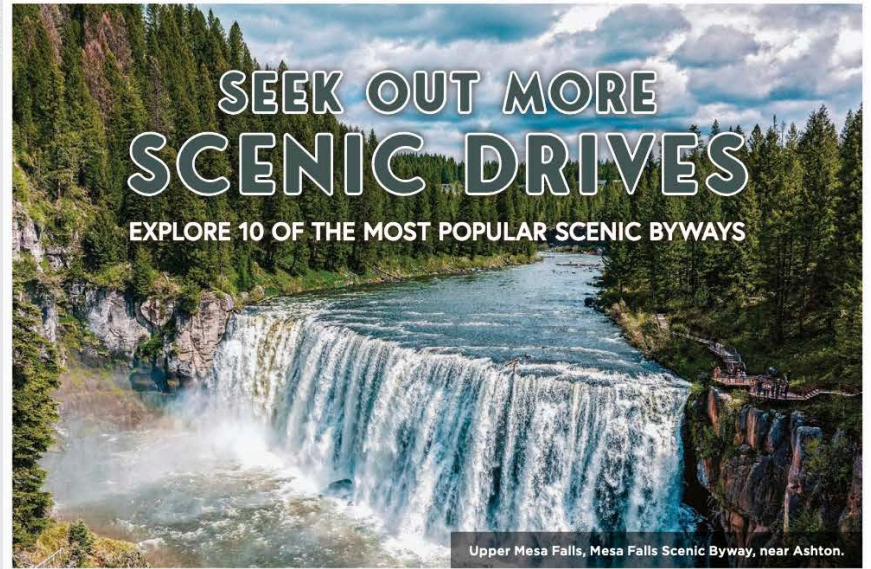
Lochsa Historical Ranger Station, near Lowell.



### IDAHO 511

Travel information, including road conditions, detours and closures, can be found at **511.idaho.gov** or by downloading the free app.

VISIT IDAHO



# SEEK OUT MORE SCENIC DRIVES

EXPLORE 10 OF THE MOST POPULAR SCENIC BYWAYS

Upper Mesa Falls, Mesa Falls Scenic Byway, near Ashton.

### MESA FALLS SCENIC BYWAY

DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 45 MIN.

Drive this beautiful eastern Idaho byway to take in the impressive **Upper and Lower Mesa Falls**. The route offers a convenient entry point to walking trails and viewing platforms, ideal for a family outing. Don't miss the chance to check out the **Mesa Falls Visitor Center**—built around 1915—to learn about the area's history and geology.

### THOUSAND SPRINGS SCENIC BYWAY

DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 1 HR., 30 MIN.

This byway runs through south central Idaho along the Snake River and showcases numerous natural springs and waterfalls. Stop at the various viewpoints for a quick photo op, or opt to invest more time in the six distinct units of **Thousand Springs State Park**.

### SALMON RIVER SCENIC BYWAY

DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 3 HR., 15 MIN.

Follow the **Salmon River** on this central Idaho drive. The route has several pull-offs for river access and picnicking, as well as historical sites that shed light on the area's past as a mining and logging hub. Discover ghost towns along the way like **Bayhorse** and **Bonanza**.

### SAWTOOTH SCENIC BYWAY

DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 2 HR., 15 MIN.

This central Idaho byway cuts a stunning path through the Boulder Mountains and provides access to outdoor activities in the **Sawtooth National Recreation Area**. Stop at various trailheads for hiking or mountain biking, and don't miss the starry night skies.

### TETON SCENIC BYWAY

DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 1 HR., 15 MIN.

Set out on this byway to experience eastern Idaho's natural charm with the stunning **Teton Range** in view. This drive is particularly striking during spring and fall when the colors change.

### HELLS CANYON SCENIC BYWAY

DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 1 HR., 45 MIN.

Drive the eastern side of North America's deepest river gorge on this southwest Idaho byway, which offers viewpoints and access to recreational areas in the remarkable **Hells Canyon**. The area is remote, so ensure your vehicle is well-prepared and consider stopping in Cambridge to stock up on supplies and gas before exploring.





VISIT IDAHO

**Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve, Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway, near Arco.**

**PEAKS TO CRATERS SCENIC BYWAY**  
**DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 2 HR., 30 MIN.**  
 This unusual byway takes travelers from the rugged **Mount Borah** to lunarlike **Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve** and small towns like Arco. The route has few services, so fuel up and pack extra snacks and water.

**PAYETTE RIVER SCENIC BYWAY**  
**DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 2 HR., 30 MIN.**  
 Located in Idaho's southwest region, this byway is a dream for those seeking rafting and kayaking entry points along an epic river or access to **Lake Cascade** and **Ponderosa state parks**. The road is lined with spots ideal for picnics or simply soaking up the sunshine and river views.

**PONDEROSA PINE SCENIC BYWAY**  
**DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 3 HR.**  
 This byway stretches through the **Boise National Forest** in southwest and central Idaho, offering views of towering ponderosas and a wealth of outdoor activities, including natural hot springs. Don't miss a stop in historic **Idaho City**.

**SNAKE RIVER CANYON SCENIC BYWAY**  
**DRIVE TIME: APPROX. 1 HR., 30 MIN.**  
 Wind your way through southwest Idaho's agricultural landscapes, featuring vineyards, orchards and charming small towns. Sample wines along the **Sunnyslope Wine Trail**, or pull over for historical attractions, such as **Map Rock**, while enjoying great views.



**GARY McKECHNIE**  
 McKechnie is a two-time *National Geographic* author, two-time winner of the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Award and author of America's best-selling motorcycle guidebook—*Great American Motorcycle Tours*. He's also written hundreds of travel features on two-wheel adventuring. Learn more at [garymckechnie.com](http://garymckechnie.com).

**Myrtle Falls Trail, Wild Horse Trail Scenic Byway, near Bonners Ferry.**

SPECIAL IDAHO TRAVEL GUIDE | VISITIDAHO.ORG



# 31 Scenic Drives

Idaho's diverse scenic byways steer travelers through the state's most captivating landscapes, from magnificent waterfalls to widespread mountain ranges. Each route reveals unique elements of the state, guiding you to both take in iconic vistas and discover more off-the-beaten-path routes. Whether you're an outdoor adventurer, a first-time explorer or a road-trip regular, these 31 byways are worth a drive.



**A GUIDE FOR YOUR GLOVE BOX**

Access more road-trip inspiration on the Gem State's 31 scenic byways when you order or download the free Idaho scenic byways brochure.



VISITIDAHO.ORG | OFFICIAL IDAHO TRAVEL G