

## What the Road Is Like

- While most of the road is narrow, rocky and steep, some stretches are more like pleasant country lanes. Still, it's a good idea to drive a tough "rig" with high clearance.

- Most passenger cars are too low and will drag where rocks jut from the roadway. Good tires are a must. "Donut" spare tires don't last long on stretches of rugged road, and you could be left stranded. Tow truck service can take days to arrange and can cost \$250-\$500.

- Towing trailers is not recommended. Additional care must be taken with RVs or motor homes over 23 feet long, as overhanging branches, brush and trees can knock lights, air conditioners or other equipment off the tops of vehicles. Protruding rocks along the narrow road can gouge and scrape vehicle sides.

- The motorway is a single-lane road, and a driver needs to be able to back up a quarter mile to find a suitable passing place for an approaching vehicle. Steep drop-offs can be on either side of the road. Vehicles traveling uphill have the right-of-way, so the downhill driver has to back uphill. Confidence in using mirrors while backing is a must.

- Be prepared! Pack necessary provisions. Include a Clearwater National Forest map, compass, binoculars, camera, spare tire, food, gas and water, or water purification system. Before you head out, check with local Forest Service offices for current road conditions.

## Finding a Campsite

You'll find many places to camp, but they're not "formal" campgrounds.

You'll notice campsites that others have used. Please use these rather than set up new camps.



*Pileated Woodpecker*

Avoid building new rock rings to contain campfires, and collect only small deadwood from the ground. (Large logs and standing dead trees provide homes for wildlife.)

High mountain lakes and surrounding areas are especially susceptible to damage, so avoid soft, wet soil, and camp a good distance from water sources.

Be prepared for rain and wind and even snow, particularly early and late in the season. In July and August, thunderstorms can roll in.

Pack out all garbage. (You'll find no garbage receptacles along the motorway.)

Toilets are few and far between. Dispose of human waste properly. If camping with a large group, dig a common latrine, at least 200 feet from camp and any water source. Otherwise dig a hole that is 6-8 inches deep and 200 feet from camp and water.

Return disturbed sites to their natural condition, as much as possible.

## For More Information

### CLEARWATER NATIONAL FOREST

#### Supervisor's Office

12730 Highway 12  
Orofino, ID 83544  
208-476-4541  
TDD 208-476-0129

### LOCHSA RANGER DISTRICT

#### Kamiah Ranger Station

Rt. 2, Box 191  
Kamiah, ID 83536  
208-935-2513

#### Kooskia Ranger Station

Rt. 1, Box 398  
Kooskia, ID 83539  
208-926-4274

### POWELL RANGER DISTRICT

#### Powell Ranger Station

Lolo, MT 59847  
208-942-3113  
TDD 208-942-3120

*Whether you're driving across the Lolo Motorway from the east or the west, plan to spend 2-5 days. Take your time while you take in the scenery and the history.*



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Forest  
Service

**Lochsa Ranger District  
Clearwater National Forest**

United  
States  
Department  
of  
Agriculture

# Driving the Lolo Motorway



A single-lane road built with help from the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, the Lolo Motorway is not for the faint of heart.



## A Journey to the Past

When it was built in the 1930s, the Lolo Motorway replaced historic paths that traversed the ridges west of the Bitterroot Divide. Although narrow, rocky and slow-going, the route built with help from the Civilian Conservation Corps provided access into the mountains.

The route the motorway follows once bore the footprints of early Indians. The Nez Perce people (Nimiipuu) called the route “K’useyneisskit,” the buffalo trail. For them the trail was a land bridge between the Columbia River Basin and the Northern Plains.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition struggled along these same ridges, on their journey west in 1805, and on their return trip in 1806.

In the 1860s the Bird-Truax route was surveyed and constructed along the ridge line to accommodate traffic to the gold fields of present-day northern Idaho.

In 1877 the non-treaty Nimiipuu followed the route in their flight from General O. O. Howard and his Army troops. In 1991 the long and circuitous route they traveled, including this segment, became part of the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail.

## Getting There

From the east, take Parachute Hill Road 569, which intersects with U.S. Highway 12 before the turnoff to Powell Ranger Station. Or take Saddle Camp Road 107, which leaves the highway 22 miles west of that junction.

From the west, follow the national forest access sign posted along Highway 12 as you leave Kamiah. Turn onto Kamiah-Pierce Road 100. Follow Road 100 to Lolo Forks Campground. Cross the bridge and turn right onto Road 500.

In 14 miles you’ll reach Canyon Junction, a five-point intersection. Road 500 becomes a narrow, unsurfaced travel way here and remains that way for 73 miles until you get to Powell Junction where Roads 569 and 500 join. This 73-mile segment is the historic Lolo Motorway.

If you’re traveling U.S. Highway 12 east from Lewiston, Idaho, go to Greer and cross the bridge. Stay on State Highway 11 to Weippe. When the highway makes a turn in town, take the county road that keeps going straight (east) out of Weippe, and connect with Road 100.

## A Snapshot Today

The Lolo Motorway, Forest Road 500, winds along ridges above the Lochsa River. Don't let the term "motorway" fool you. It's an old-fashioned term from the early days of automobile travel when people didn't take drives; they "motored."

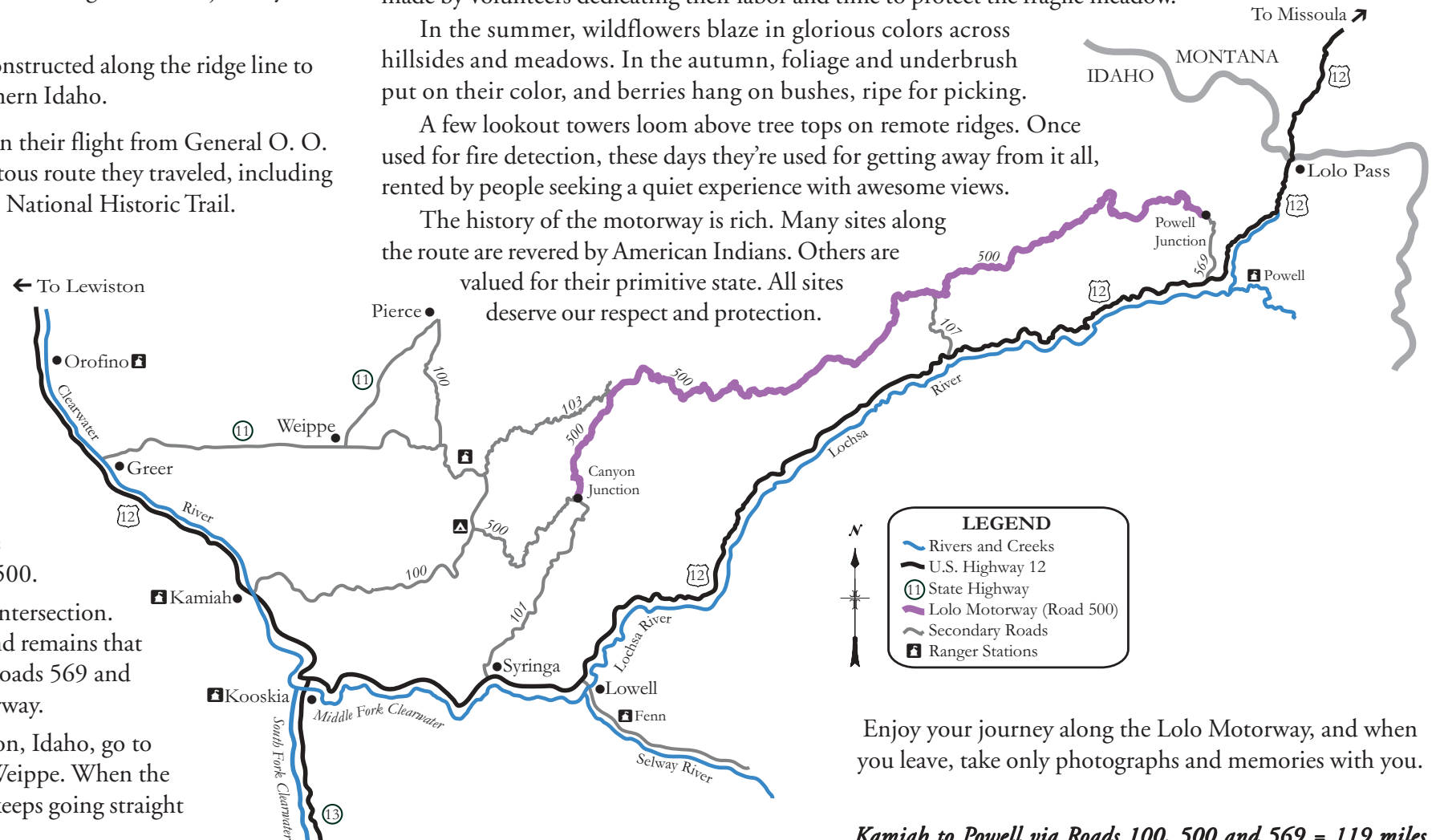
You will find no gas stations, stores, developed water sources or other services along this high elevation, precipitous dirt road. You will find 100 miles of breathtaking scenery, set in a sea of mountains.

Mountain lakes and ridge-top vistas beckon travelers. Trails meander alongside and away from the motorway, offering paths for hiker explorers. Near Weitas Meadows, you can cross a rustic boardwalk made by volunteers dedicating their labor and time to protect the fragile meadow.

In the summer, wildflowers blaze in glorious colors across hillsides and meadows. In the autumn, foliage and underbrush put on their color, and berries hang on bushes, ripe for picking.

A few lookout towers loom above tree tops on remote ridges. Once used for fire detection, these days they're used for getting away from it all, rented by people seeking a quiet experience with awesome views.

The history of the motorway is rich. Many sites along the route are revered by American Indians. Others are valued for their primitive state. All sites deserve our respect and protection.



Enjoy your journey along the Lolo Motorway, and when you leave, take only photographs and memories with you.

*Kamiah to Powell via Roads 100, 500 and 569 = 119 miles*