Cabin City
Interpretive Trail Guide

Superior Ranger District
Lolo National Forest

Welcome to Cabin City Interpretive Trail. The trail winds through the forest for 3/4 of a mile and has 21 interpretive stops. It should take you less than an hour to complete the trail. The brochure contains information about some of the plants and animals you may encounter along the trail. Take your time, see if you can identify some plants that are new to you, listen for the sounds of animals and most importantly, enjoy your walk.

#1. As you look around, you can see: douglas fir, ponderosa pine and western larch.

DOUGLAS FIR makes up about half of our western forests. Its blue-green needles are about an inch long and stand out from all sides of a twig. The bark on young trees is smooth and marked with resin blisters. The bark on older trees is thick, dark gray and divided by irregular, tan fissures, referred to as “bacon bark”.

WESTERN LARCH, also called tamarack, is unique in that it is the only deciduous (needle shedding) conifer in western Montana. Its pale green needles are 1 to 1 3/4 inches long and grow in bunches from a twig. The bark is reddish-brown and up to 6 inches thick on old trees. The Lewis and Clark Expedition discovered the species in 1806 on the Clearwater River in western Montana. Larch can be identified at a distance from other conifers by their light green needles in summer and golden yellow needles in fall and barren branches in winter.

PONDEROSA PINE, Montana’s state tree, is found in every state west of the Great Plains. The 5- to 11-inch long needles grow in clusters of 3. The bark is brown to black on young trees, yellowish brown and broken into scaly plates on old trees. It grows in dry areas, and its thick bark and high crown canopy, makes it resistant to fire.

#2. BEARGRASS, a member of the lily family, is a grass-like perennial forb. Its white flowers bloom in early June and are borne on a single stem that grows up to 5 feet tall. Bear, elk, deer, and bighorn sheep eat the flowers. Native Americans wove containers out of its long fibrous leaves, which are coarse to the touch and slippery underfoot.

#3. Notice the **GOAT'S BEARD LICHEN** (also called deer moss) hanging on the branches of the trees. You may need to look high up the trunk of the trees to locate it. This dusty, green-colored lichen is an epiphyte or air plant. It draws its nourishment from the air, not the tree. Elk and deer feed on this highly nutritious plant. Early Americans also ate it regularly.

#4. STUMPS and ROOT WADS of long-dead trees are scattered throughout the forest. When trees die from disease, wildfire, or old age, the roots decay, leaving the tree without any anchor to keep it upright. Wind, snow and gravity work to topple the tree, exposing the roots. Stump holes are the depressions left where the roots and soil were lifted out of the ground. Root wads are mounds of exposed root and soil. In time, the depressions and mounds are covered with plants.

#5. GRAND FIR is easily identified by its flat needles, which are yellow green above and silvery green below. Young trees have smooth bark marked with blisters of resin. Old trees have deeply furrowed bark. Grand fir often hosts Indian paint fungus. You can see the conks, or fruit of the fungus, on this tree. A tree with several conks may have no commercial value because the fungus causes decay eight feet above and below each conk.

#6. SNAGS are standing, dead or dying trees. They provide food, resting and nesting places for over 40 kinds of birds and mammals in the forest. A rotting tree becomes a home for carpenter ants and other insects, which in turn become food for birds and rodents. Can you see the pileated woodpecker's rectangular feeding holes in this snag? Woodpeckers also dig nesting holes in snags, which will be used later by other cavity nesting birds such as screech owls, mountain bluebirds and red-breasted nuthatches.

#7. Evidence of early-day logging can be seen throughout the area. The large, decaying western larch log that you see here was felled with an axe and crosscut saw. Loggers most likely left this long butt because of its high pitch content. The pitch (because of its stickiness and weight) made it difficult to saw and transport logs by water. Notice the wood separation, referred to as "shake", in the log.

#8. Can you see the **Terraces** or benches that slope down to the creek? The terraces reflect the geologic history of this valley, which has been a continuous process of erosion and deposition. Over several thousand years, the creek deposited soil and gravel along its bank. It then cut through the deposits, leaving behind elevated terraces. The creek carved this valley, and the width between the terraces marks the extent of the movement of the creek.

#9. SPOTTED KNAPWEED. If you're here in July and August, you may recognize this plant by its purple flowers. During other times of the year, you'll see "skeletons"- gray, multi-branched flower stocks with many seed heads. Knapweed is a native of Europe and Asia. It was accidentally introduced to the Bitterroot Valley in the 1920's. Since then, it has spread throughout Montana, mainly on dry, sunny areas. It is an undesirable plant (noxious weed) crowding out other desirable grasses and plants.

#10. Good **FISH HABITAT** has a certain proportion of riffles, or fast moving water, and pools. A 50:50 pool to riffle ratio is ideal. Old logging practices and watershed work destroyed many of the pools in this creek. Pools provided fish with resting areas. They dart from a pool into the faster current to capture drifting food, and then swim back. In 1986, the Forest Service cut and placed logs into the creek to improve fish habitat by producing pools. Logs also provide fish with cover by catching branches and other debris during high water flow.

#11. DENDROCHRONOLOGY is the science of dating events and variations in the environment in the past by studying growth rings in trees. The space between tree rings reflects the amount of precipitation received each year. Growth is rapid when a tree is young and gradually slows down as it ages. Can you tell how old the tree was when you were born?

#12. A RIPARIAN ZONE is the area where land and water meet, and it offers wildlife the bounties of both. Riparian areas contain vertical layers of trees, bushes and grasses, which provide wildlife with many places to nest, feed and rest. Deer and elk will come to the water to drink or feed on the lush vegetation. More than 70% of all land birds nest in riparian areas, which make up only 1% of the land types.

#13. The **GREAT FIRE OF 1910** burned the original site of this campground and much of the surrounding area. It burned over 3 million acres in Idaho and Montana and claimed 83 lives. Only a few of the larger Western larch, Douglas fir and ponderosa pine along Twelve Mile Creek survived. Fire scars at the base of these trees, like the one on this douglas fir, are still apparent.

#14. SERVICEBERRY bushes grow from 3- to 20-feet tall and produce fragrant white flowers in May. Their fruits are one of the first to ripen, producing reddish-purple berries usually by July. Serviceberry is an important food for a variety of wildlife. Deer, elk, moose and mountain sheep eat the leaves and twigs. Coyotes, bears, chipmunks and birds, such as robins, cedar waxwings and catbirds, eat the berries. People use the berries to make jelly, wine and pies.

#15. BLACK COTTONWOOD, seen across 12 Mile Creek is one of the few broadleaf trees in this area. It is named for the light cotton-like material that it sheds in the late spring. This "cotton" helps to transport its tiny seeds. Grouse eat cottonwood buds and old decayed trees make excellent nesting holes for wood ducks, owls, and squirrels. Some of the larger cottonwoods here are several hundred years old.

#16. SUBALPINE FIR can be recognized by its pyramid-shaped crown and tapered trunk. Its silvery green needles are about an inch long and stick out around the twig. This fir is extremely susceptible to fire because of its thin bark and low branches. The Lewis and Clark Expedition first recorded it during their trip across the Bitterroot Mountains in 1805.

#17. This side trail will take you to Twelvemile Creek. Creeks contain a variety of tiny **AQUATIC LIFE.** Many plants and insects attach to rocks or logs to keep from being swept along with the flow of the water. Pick a rock out of the water and look for green algae on top of it. Can you find the caddisfly larvae in their cases? They build tiny gravel and stick cases for protection. Mayflies and stone flies larvae can also be found in the rocks.

#18. Many streams continually change course moving back and forth along a valley bottom. These wandering curves are called **meanders.** When water flows against the outside of a curved meander it results in stream bank undercutting. Gravel bars build and more sediment and vegetation gets trapped which eventually builds a new bank.

#19. If you look around, you may notice that you are standing on an old road now overgrown with trees. This road was used to transport logs to the Mann Lumber Company at Henderson in the early 1900's. The Henderson mill consisted of the sawmill buildings plus a boarding house and a school. As you leave Cabin City heading toward I-90 via the Henderson exit, you'll see some ponds along the right hand side of the road. This is all that remains of the old Mann Lumber Company.

#20. Notice a low trailing shrub on the ground called **kinnikinnick**. Its leaves are evergreen, waxy in appearance and spatula shaped. Its berry is bright red with a dry, mealy interior. It provides good food for grouse, turkey, bear, deer, and elk although it is not palatable to domestic livestock. The berries are edible raw but are not tasty. Kinnikinnick also makes a fine cover for bank stability on dry sites.

#21. LODGEPOLE PINE often grows in densely packed stands. Its 1- 3-inch long needles grow in clusters of 2. Its scaly, gray-brown bark is thin. Because of its long and slender, straight trunk, lodgepole is popular for log house construction, fence posts, and rails. It's considered one of the most fire-adapted trees in the West. It produces "serotinous" cones, which remain closed, stay attached to the branches and open only with the heat of a wildfire.

As lodgepole pine matures and its vigor declines, it becomes susceptible to attack from the mountain pine beetle. The lodgepole in this campground are dying from ongoing beetle attacks working through the stand. The Superior Ranger District has periodically removed the dead trees.

LOCAL HISTORY:
Now we would like to share with you some glimpses of the past. Jesse T. High arrived in this area in May of 1905. He and his family raised carrots, potatoes, beets, and other vegetables. They also ran a boarding house at Henderson, about a mile to the southwest. About 1920, Tom Trouse gained title to the properties and began the construction of a tourist camp that he christened CABIN CITY. Trouse built a two story lodge, many cabins, and a fish pond. He remained in business until 1960 when the construction of Interstate 90 diverted the tourist trade. The lodge burned down sometime later.

You've come to the end of our interpretive trail. We hope you have enjoyed your walk. If you have any questions, stop by the Superior Ranger Station or ask the campground host if one is present, and we'll be happy to answer them.

How to get there:

From I-90 take Exit 22 at Henderson, travel east 2.5 miles on the Camel's Hump Road 2148. Turn left (west) at the Cabin City Campground sign on the Twelvemile Creek Road 353 for 0.2 mile.

For more information, contact:

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