

Glacier National Park, MT

July 28 – Aug. 1, 2010

We decided to go to Glacier National Park for our family vacation this year. We had a great time seeing beautiful scenery and a variety of wildlife which created some lasting memories.

From the Wolf on the Lochsa River, the Bear on the Avalanche Lake trail, the Marmots, Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goats at Logan Pass, the Buffalo at the National Bison Range, and the majesty of Glacier, the trip was a big hit. Oh yeah, and swimming at the hotels!



Hidden Lake Overlook – Glacier National Park

Trip Highlights:

Tuesday, July 27 – Spend the night at the family cabin

Saw my first Pileated Woodpecker from the deck of the cabin

Wednesday, July 28 – Travel to Whitefish, MT.

Mammoth exhibit in Grangeville, ID

Saw a young wolf driving along the highway on the Lochsa River, ID

DeVoto Memorial Cedar Grove hike along the Lochsa River

Lolo Pass Visitor Center – Montana/Idaho border

A Carousel for Missoula ride in downtown Missoula, MT

Thursday, July 29 – Glacier National Park

Going to the sun road overlooks – saw two Bear cubs (close range)

Logan Pass Visitor Center – Wildflowers, Marmot, Bighorn Sheep, Mountain Goats

Hidden Lake Trail from Logan Pass (3m rt) – Spectacular scenery, Mountain Goats

Sun Point Nature Trail at Saint Mary Lake

Saint Mary Visitor Center

Avalanche Lake Trail (4m rt) – Saw a yearling Bear while hiking (close range)

Lake McDonald Lodge

Friday, July 30 – Glacier National Park

Goat Lick Overlook – Mountain Goats

Running Eagle Falls Nature Trail at Two Medicine

Many Glacier Lodge

Boat ride on Swiftcurrent & Josephine Lakes and hike to Grinnell Lake (2m rt)

Saturday, July 31 – Travel to Hamilton, MT

National Bison Range loop drive – saw Buffalo, Bighorn Sheep & Antelope

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in Missoula, MT

Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge in the Bitterroot Valley, MT

Sunday, August 1 – Travel back to Boise, ID

Bayhorse State Park, ID (mining ghost town)

Visit a friend working at Redfish Lake Lodge, ID

Stanley Fish Hatchery, ID (King and Sockeye Salmon viewing)

I've wanted to visit Glacier National Park ever since I was a young Boy Scout. We had plans to go to Glacier but it fell through probably due to lack of funds. I've also tried to create a family tradition of visiting Americas National Parks. Glacier is definitely one of my favorites.

I guess I'll start out with Thursday morning. It was an early morning. We bypassed all the views in order to get a parking spot at Logan Pass which is a very popular destination. It is my favorite stop along the going to sun road. It is on the Continental Divide and in Glacier you feel like you're on top of the world.

Our plan was to make the 3 mile roundtrip hike to the Hidden Lake Overlook. The trail was still 30% covered in snow but my girls were up to the challenge. The glaciated valleys, flower covered hillsides and glacial carved horns were spectacular. Add the Bighorn Sheep, Marmots and Mountain Goats at close range and it made for an exciting adventure for the kids. There was also a decent chance of spotting a Grizzly but not this time. We definitely weren't alone on the trail since this was one of the most popular hikes in the park due to its ease of hiking.

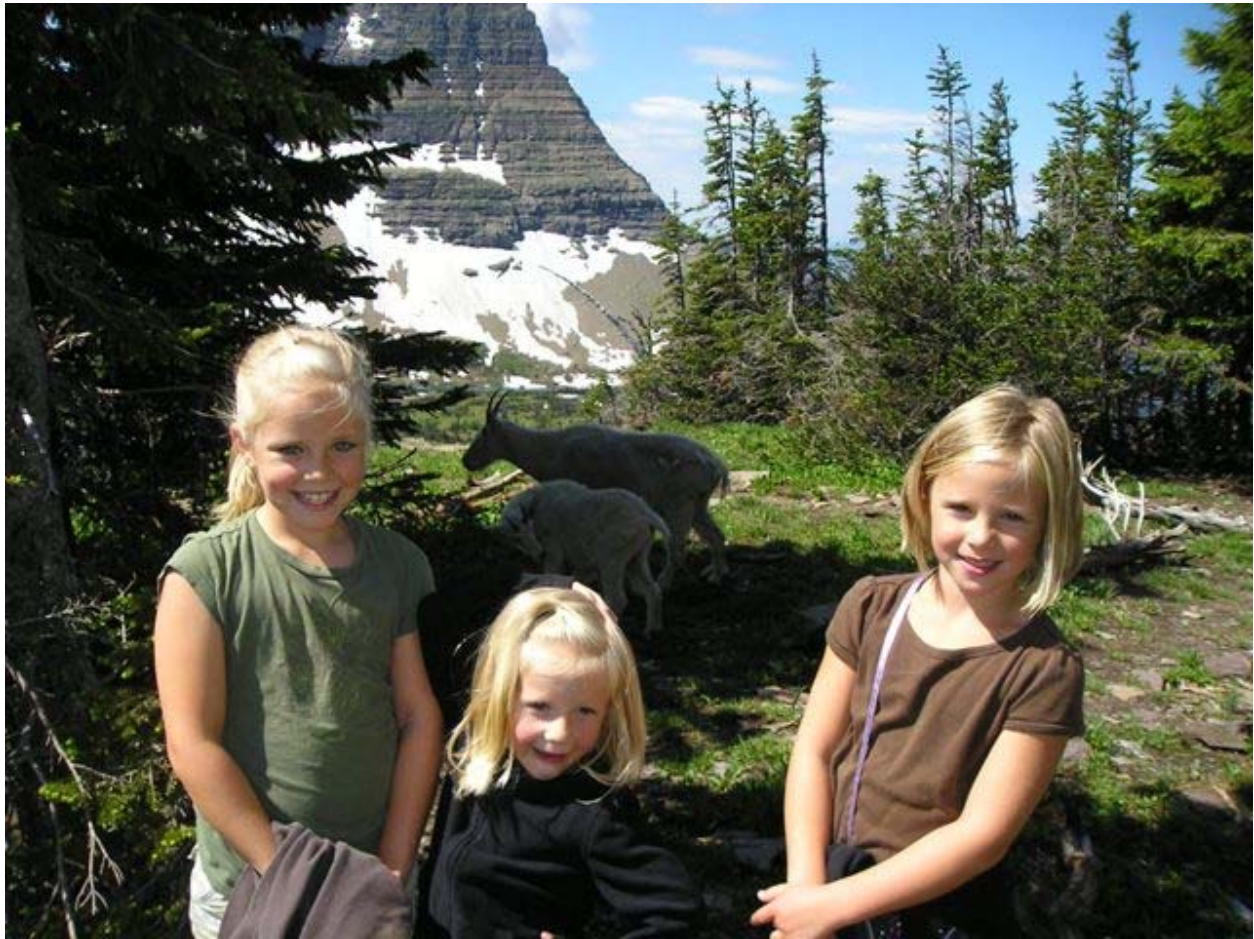


Logan Pass Visitor Center



Hidden Lake Trail





Hidden Lake Trail



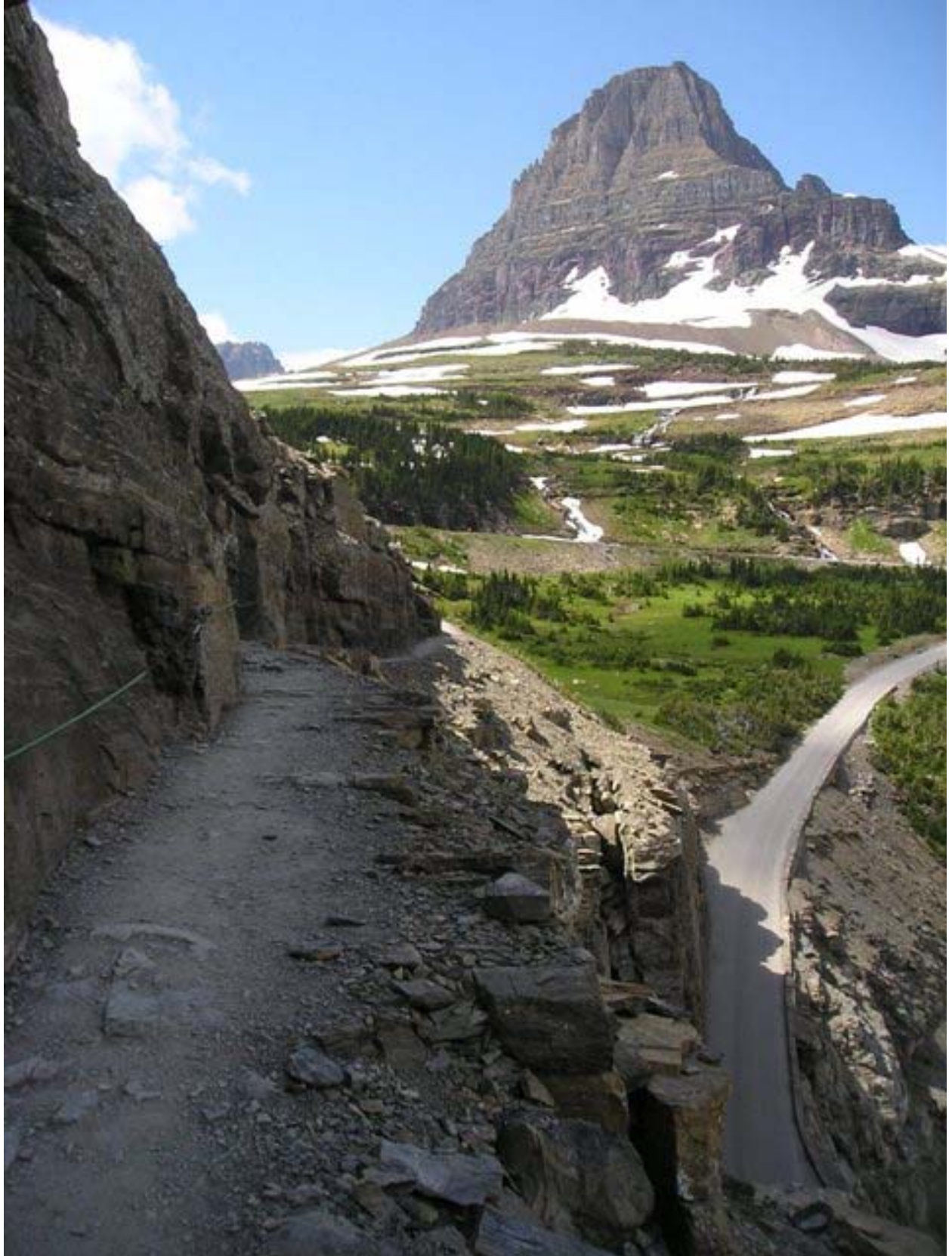
That was our favorite hike. The kids were real surprised to get so close to Mountain Goats.

While the kids went into the visitor center to get their Junior Ranger pamphlets, I hiked a short distance along the sheer cliff section of the highline trail. I wanted to get a few pictures of the valley and waterfalls. This trail isn't for the faint hearted. It was straight up and down on both sides of the trail. A rope was provided on the cliff wall for those that needed some extra assurance.

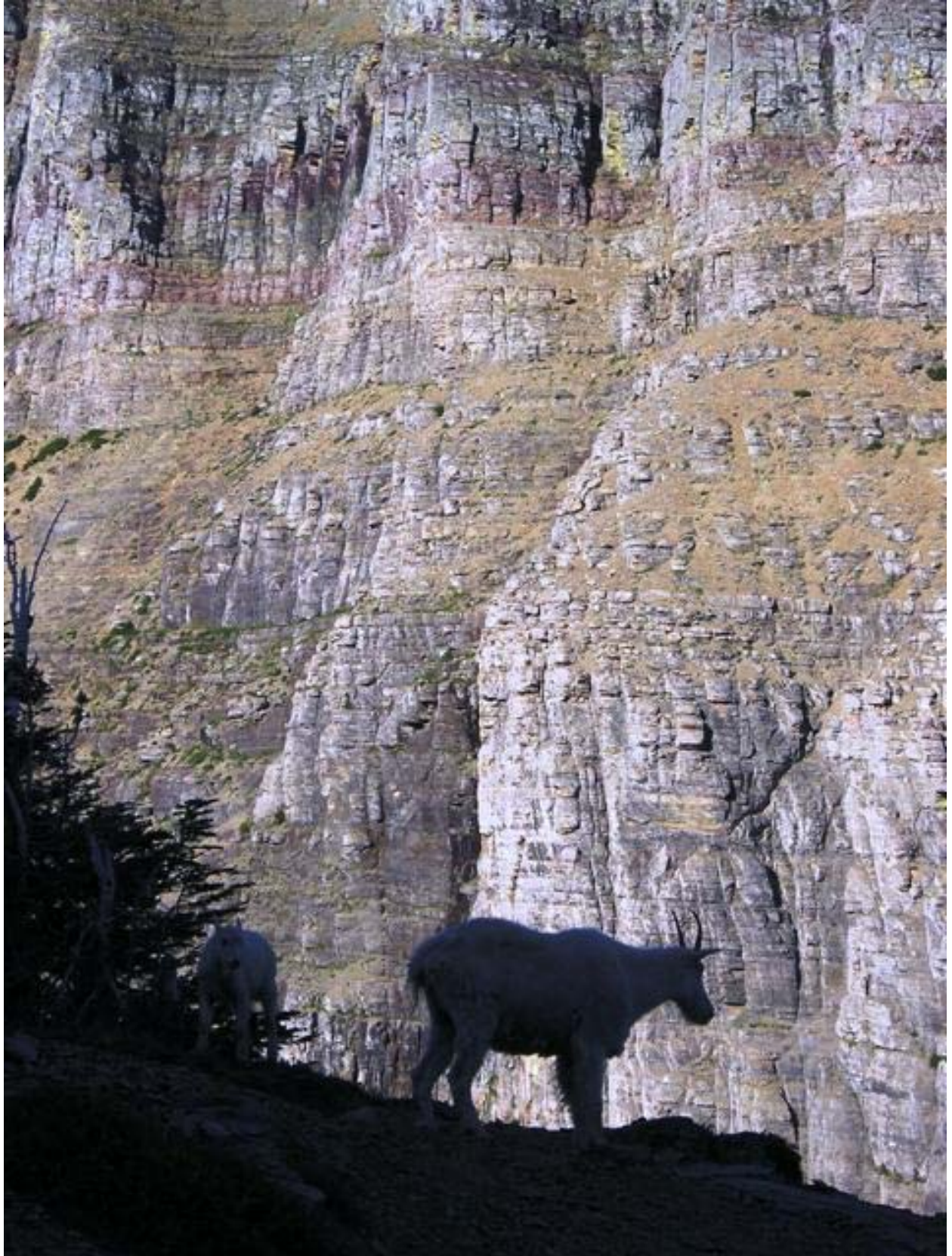
Next we stopped at the Sun Point Nature Trail for lunch and views of Saint Mary Lake. The scenery continued to be amazing. While driving down to the Saint Mary Visitor Center to become Junior Rangers we had two bear cubs cross right in front of us on the road. One of them stood on its hind legs and looked at us. That was definitely a highlight for the girls to witness.



Wild Goose Island on Saint Mary Lake



The Highline Trail near Logan Pass



Mountain Goats near Logan Pass

Next on our agenda was to drive back the way we came to see the views on the west side that we had passed earlier that day. We got back down in the valley after seeing more beautiful scenery to start our hike to Avalanche Lake. Most of the girls were tired so I took Cami and packed Hailey. It was a 500' climb and 4 mile roundtrip hike. I told Coleen that we would be back in two hours as they waited at the Trail of the Cedars Nature Trail.

This was another popular hike with lots of people. There were Bear warnings but I doubted we would see anything with the highway of people. We were about halfway along the hike when Cami asked me what we'd do if we saw a Bear. The timing couldn't have been better. I didn't need to answer as I got out the Bear spray. It was a yearling and I couldn't tell if it was a Grizzly or Black Bear. It didn't want anything to do with us. It ran across the trail in front of us and we then watched it as it walked down the slope. You could feel the energy coming from the girls as they witnessed this event. They were more excited than scared as I insured them everything was going to be OK. I'm glad they had the opportunity to experience this occurrence in nature. It's a lot different seeing a Bear on the trail than it is from a safe vehicle.



Avalanche Lake

The hike to Avalanche Lake wasn't anything spectacular as far as scenery until you get to the lake. We counted seven waterfalls coming down into the lake. It was very serene. We also heard a couple of Varied Thrush in the trees which added to the magic of this spot.

Next stop before a late dinner was the Lake McDonald Lodge. We walked through the lodge and out to the lake. It was a beautiful evening on a beautiful lake.



Lake McDonald

I knew Thursday was going to be a pretty long day for the kids so I planned Friday to be a little more relaxing. We drove around the park to Many Glacier and made a few stops along the way. Our first stop was at Goat Lick Overlook near Essex. From the overlook you can see Mountain Goats licking minerals from the cliffs next to the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. We saw four but there can be really large numbers at times. From there we traveled to Two Medicine Valley and walked to Running Eagle Falls and then stopped at the beach at Two Medicine Lake. This area was very dry compared to the northern areas of the park but very beautiful.



Two Medicine Lake

I really anticipated what was on the agenda next in the Many Glacier area of the Park. We had plans to take a 3.5 hour tour of two pristine lakes on the boat and then hike to Grinnell Lake. <http://www.glacierparkboats.com>. I figured it would be exciting and relaxing for the girls. We started at the very impressive Many Glacier Lodge. We crossed Swiftcurrent and Josephine Lakes and took an easy 2 mile roundtrip hike up to emerald colored Grinnell Lake. The kids loved it.

The scenery is spectacular in Many Glacier and the base for many great trails I'd like to hike. This family vacation was a great reconnaissance trip for more serious backcountry destinations that I'd like to hike in the future. I felt that I only visited the tip of the iceberg. Glacier National Park is a beautiful park and well worth the trip. You better see it while there are still Glaciers.



Many Glacier Lodge

Grinnell Lake





Waiting for the boat at Josephine Lake

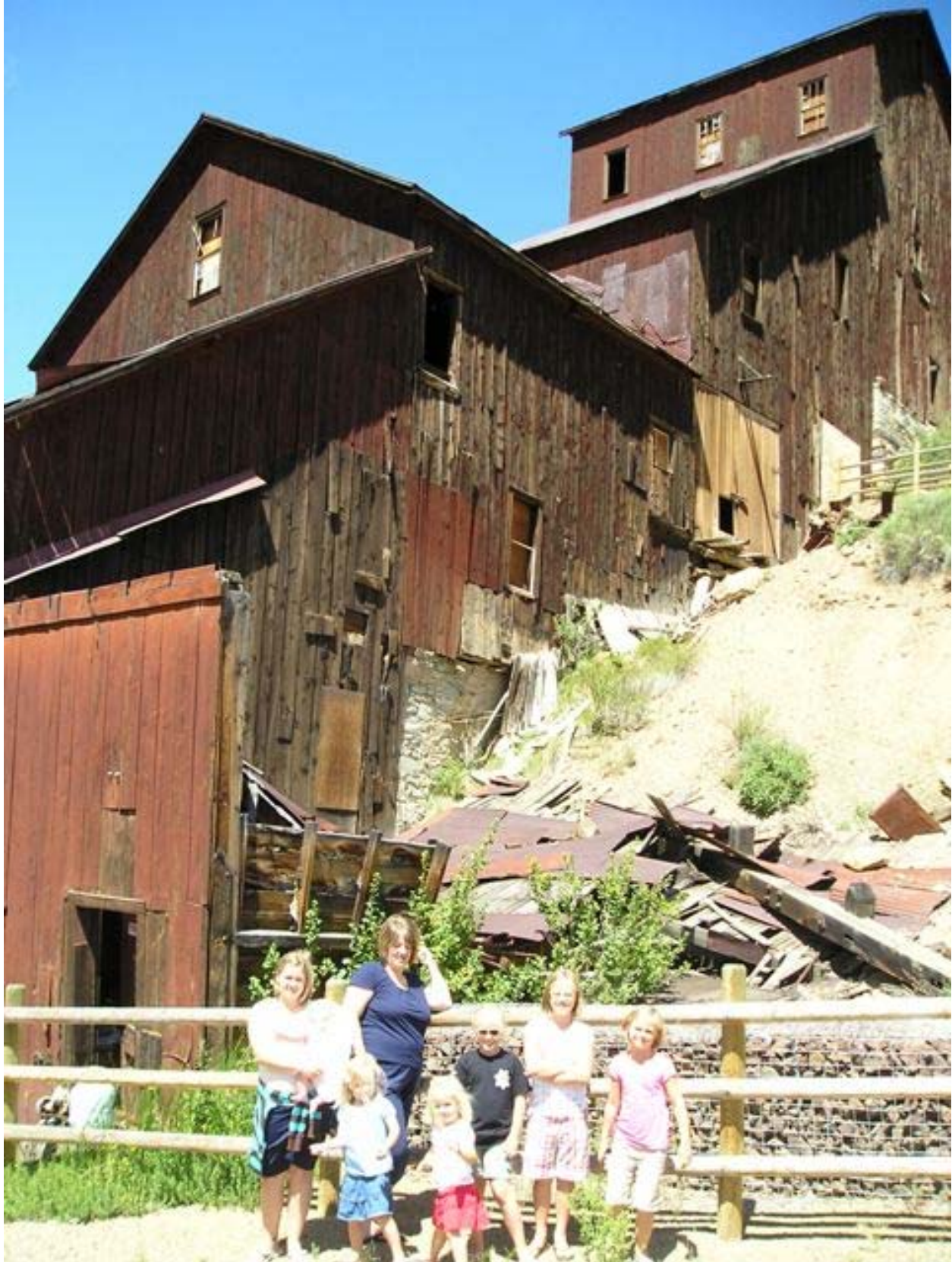
Madilyn's first adventure



Our plan was to drive home on Saturday but nobody wanted to go home yet. We called and got a hotel in Hamilton, MT in the Bitterroot Valley for Saturday night. We slept in, swam and took our time getting to Hamilton. We stopped at the National Bison Range near Missoula for a scenic loop drive around the grasslands to view more wildlife. We saw Buffalo, Antelope, Bighorn Sheep and just missed a Bear sighting. The next stop was in Missoula for Costco hot dogs and a visit to the Rocky Mountain Elk foundation. Before retiring at our hotel we also stopped at the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge to do some bird watching.

Sunday was a beautiful drive home back through Salmon, Challis & Stanley, ID along the Salmon River. It was a lot drier compared to northern Montana. We stopped at Bayhorse State Park which still has a few preserved remnants of the old mining town. There are still several buildings and the mill creating a nice ghost town. We also saw returning King Salmon at the Stanley Fish Hatchery and a Sockeye Salmon in the river below the weir. The girls were content to just sit and wait for a Salmon to jump up the ladder.

It was a great family trip!



The Mill at Bayhorse State Park