

Summer Pack Trips with Swan Mountain Outfitters

Frequently Asked Questions

General Information

Some of you have packed with us or other outfitters before and others are new to the process. We've taken the time to list a few of the more frequently asked questions in hopes that it may help you in preparation for your trip. If you have a question that isn't covered here please email or call us.

Where will we be?

The trip begins out of our Base Camp, which is 3 miles off of Montana Highway 83 just north of the town of Condon. We load up and begin the ride up to our Upper Camp, which is 14 miles from our base camp rising approximately 4500 feet in elevation. The Upper camp is just below Swan Peak on the south side, the creek is fed by a glacier. Each day we will strike out to a different spot into the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, which is only 2.5 miles away over Lion Creek Pass. If you want to order topo maps from U.S. Geological Survey (Denver, CO 80225 or Renton, WA 22092), you should request these quadrants: Salmon Prairie and Swan Peak. GPS Coordinates for Upper Camp are: N 47° 41.492' W 113° 36.795', in case you want to use Google Earth.

You have said to get in shape and practice riding, what do you mean?

We will ride between 4 and 6 hours each day. On our excursion days it will usually be split up with ride to a spot in the morning and back in the afternoon. If you haven't ridden in a while or at all, it always helps to get in the saddle a few times before you get here to get those certain muscles in the mood. Likewise when we hike, if you have done a little bit of exercise before you come, you won't feel so out of shape when you get here. These trips are at a relaxed pace, no intense workouts, but just a little bit of preparation will make the trip a whole lot more enjoyable. BY the way, if you are thinking of getting new hiking boots, break them in before you get here to avoid blisters on the trip.

Is there any reading I can do on the area?

There are several great books on the Bob Marshall and surrounding areas, in particular Glacier National Park. Many folks like to get a book on the mountain alpine flowers or birds to help them with identification. If you do so, make sure you get ones that are applicable to the Northern Rocky Mountains. We will have several books in camp as well.

What about bears?

There are both Grizzlies and Black Bears in the area. While there may be an opportunity to spot one, the bears are not at all interested in us, and do their best to avoid us. We follow all the appropriate safeguards to minimize bear attraction to our camps, and encounters on the trails. Additionally all personnel are equipped with firearms as well as bear spray. In over 40 years of operation, we have never had a legitimate charge or mauling. In the unlikely event we were to have one, we are prepared to protect you. Although there is always a risk, we want you to be rest assured that you will be safe.

What can I expect to experience related to riding, climbing, and any potential fear of heights?

The travel time from the base camp to the high camp, where we have set up our sleeping quarters and everything we need to support the trip is between 4-5 hours of riding. Some of the riding to high camp is level ground and a good amount is working up the mountain on zigzagging narrow trails we call switchbacks. At times the climb up with your horse is steep, your horse is very well trained, sure footed and has done this trail many times. For those who have fears of heights, it will surely bring some moments of exhilaration.

Once you are in high camp, the scenery of the next part of your adventure is a magnificent mountainside, the doorway to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. You will need to make this remaining 2-hour trek up the side of the mountain with your horse and your guide on the days we go into the wilderness. The opening of the pass is some 2000 feet up; you will be able to see the narrow trail outlines we will be using, along the sparsely treed upper mountainside.

What is an appropriate tip?

The most important thing for guests to remember is that guiding is a service business, and all guides and wranglers throughout the world rely on their tips as part of their earnings. Having said that, like any service, they must earn it. There have been many published guidelines on the amount to tip 10-15% of the trip cost, \$15-25 a day for the cook per person who also acts as a camp valet, \$15 per person for each wrangler/packer who packs gear up and back, etc. If you are coming with a group, it is always a good idea to talk with others about how much they plan to tip, so as to avoid embarrassment. Give the tips to the individuals themselves or a manager rather than a pool to be split up. We have envelopes at the base camp if you need them.

What are we going to do?

These trips are all about you. Therefore, you really need to help us design the week's activities around what it is that you will like to do the most. We have some groups that focus heavily on fishing, others want to hike or ride all day and others that explore and photograph wildlife, flora and fauna. We had one group that was into geology, and we rock hunted for several days. Ofcourse, many just want to chill. You call the shots!

How do the licenses for fishing work?

Montana has various options for fishing licenses; so the one you get depends on how long you will be in the state, and how many of those days you intend to fish. They are: 1-day, 2-day, 10-day and season fishing licenses. The best way to do this is on line before your trip at fwp.gov.mt. If you arrange for us to pick you up, we can usually stop at a sporting goods or convenience store on the way to the ranch so you can get your license. If you are driving yourself, you'll want to do that before you get to camp. If this all seems confusing, please ask.

What if I have to cancel?

We highly recommend purchasing trip insurance to cover your expenses and non-refundable deposits in the case that you have to cancel, or an unforeseen event such as a fire closes an area, your flights get canceled, etc

What about before and after our trip?

Many people are adding this trip to an extended vacation that includes a visit to Glacier National Park and/or the surrounding area. We are proud of where we live and truly enjoy assisting our guests on options of things to do and places to see before or after their trip with us, so please don't hesitate to ask!

Question Not Answered Here?

The key to having a good time and feeling like you know what you are getting is to be informed. We have tried to cover the common questions we get, but if we didn't cover your questions or concerns, please email us or pick up the phone. We are committed to making sure we meet your needs so please don't hesitate to ask.