



What's Happening in JEFFERSON COUNTY

discoverjeffersonmt.org

Jefferson County is nation's fifth-healthiest rural community

By KEITH HAMMONDS/Publisher Boulder Monitor

Jefferson County has its health issues: It has no hospitals, for one thing. The prevalence of cancer is relatively high, as are so-called "deaths of despair"—suicides and drug overdoses. There's a significant disparity of poverty rates within the county.

But in the scheme of things, county residents are very, very well. How well? In this year's Survey of the nation's healthiest communities by the magazine U.S. News & World Report, Jefferson came out fifth among rural counties and 15th overall. That's among nearly 3,000 counties and county-equivalents. It rose from 85th overall in the magazine's inaugural 2018 ranking.

The "Healthiest Communities" project, developed by U.S. News in collaboration with Aetna Foundation, is an ambitious undertaking. It aggregates and analyzes data for each community against 81 metrics in 10 categories, including population health, economy, housing, and public safety. The magazine says it focused on factors and wellbeing outcomes.

U.S. News says that county level data was harvested from sources including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Communities were ranked overall and within broad peer groups— which means that Jefferson County was compared to rural communities with relatively high-performing economies. The top-ranked county on that list was Wyoming's Teton County, home to the wealthy resort town of Jackson. The next-highest is Madison, at #18.

From 2018 to 2019, Jefferson's performance against the U.S. News assessment improved remarkably in several areas. It received higher scores for economic conditions, environmental factors, food and nutrition, housing and infrastructure. Education remained its relative weak spot: Per-pupil school expenditures and pre-school enrollment were lower than the means of peer communities.

The U.S. News study appears to take a broader view of the factors that determine health that does the more established "County Health Ranking and Road-maps" published annually the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Institute. In the 2019 version of that study, which does not produce a national ranking, Jefferson places fourth out of 48 Montana counties measured.

Trivia

1. *Jefferson County is one of the original counties of Montana and was founded in?*
2. *What is the Montana state slogan?*
3. *What Community is the Seat for Jefferson County?*
4. *How many named mountain ranges does Montana have?*
5. *What Year was the Jefferson County Courthouse Built?*

Pass ancient molten history along Rawhide trail

By Vaia Errett

Few people scout the ridge-lines around Boulder looking for fire, but in the foothills of the Elkhorn Mountains, Rawhide Creek lures you up a sun-flecked draw past the outcrops of an ancient subterranean inferno.

Rawhide Trail is not a hike of grand vistas, but a ramble up a wooded gulch, a meadow with a view and the rattle of runoff your constant companion. Through open to motorized travel, Rawhide trail receives little traffic particularly during the week and holds the potential for solitude even on summer weekends.

Right away there is water, along the road to the trail-head the chokecherries and willows do little to muffle the trickle of Rawhide Creek. But step over the bridge at the trail-head and the two-track veers away from the watercourse, tracing instead the gully that feeds it. Round a bend across a second bridge the water carves a curve between stands of aspen and alder. Warm light rises from grassy clearings studded with strawberries and buttercups, or geraniums and penstemon as the days longer. Then the trunks of Douglas fir lean in. From here, the trail climbs.

And suddenly you stand next to the hulking shoulders of petrified fire. Monolith knuckles of granite, pedestals of the Boulder Batholith, flank the trail, grounded

in shade among the yellow arnica and clematis vine. The rock was once molten magma, about 75 million years ago. It kindled far below the earth's surface as oceanic crust plunged beneath continental crust. The magma belched up, pooled underground, cooled slowly. By about 30 million years ago, when the Elkhorn Mountains heaved themselves into today's skylines, the batholith was exposed, eroded and fractured into totems of this forest. Now tumult and fire are long-gone, replaced by shade hushed and heavy with the stillness of rock. There is mass here, the quiet moments made more tranquil by the slip of the creek over cobbles, the "caw" of a gray jay

The trail climbs in pitches. With your head down and lungs heaving it is easy to believe this track has only aspect, that is "up". Then it takes on diminution: a squirrel chatters, a pine siskin churrs across the creek. A breeze carries with it the scent of rain as it lifts through branches toward the span of sky and suddenly the world recovers its loft and spread.

Twiggy brakes of dogwood thread the ravine, offering glimpses of water where the trail crosses the flow, which it does a couple more times within the first mile. Soon you lose the seep of the creek as you cross through the teeter and topple of lodgepole pine. Yet the track is well-maintained, consistently wide enough for two hikers abreast without dead fall obstructing the trail.

At a mile and a quarter a small clearing breaks the stutter of trunks. At just past the 2 mile mark the true crest opens into a meadow framed with sage above a draping panorama of the ridge-lines north of Boulder. At 1,300 feet above your starting point, you have earned the view.

From here, the trail snakes 2 miles more down through Ninety Cent Gulch to the trail-head at Turnley Meadows if you wish to descend this way toward views of the Elkhorn peaks. Else you can breathe in the meadow summit - there is pasqueflowers and shoot star after snow melt, larkspur and prairie smoke as the season flares to summer - before retracing your steps past mounds of rockbound magma to your exit along Rawhide Creek.

As for the fire, that deep flame, dig in up those pitches and you'll find it. Keep it lit, a pilot light to spark you up your next trail.

Vaia Errett is one of seven volunteers serving on the Jefferson County Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission, an advisory group to the board of Commissioners. Send comments to prtc@jeffersoncounty-mt.gov



Douglas firs and aspen cloak granitic mounds of the Boulder Batholith along Rawhide Trail.

Heart-leaved arnica (Arnica cordifolia) growing along Rawhide Trail



The meadow summit of Rawhide Trail offers views of the ridgelines north of Boulder.

Purple Clematis (Clematis occidentalis) growing along Rawhide Trail.



Jefferson County Fairgrounds - Photo by Kayce Roope