

# *Last Chance Gulch Tour*

Helena,  
Montana



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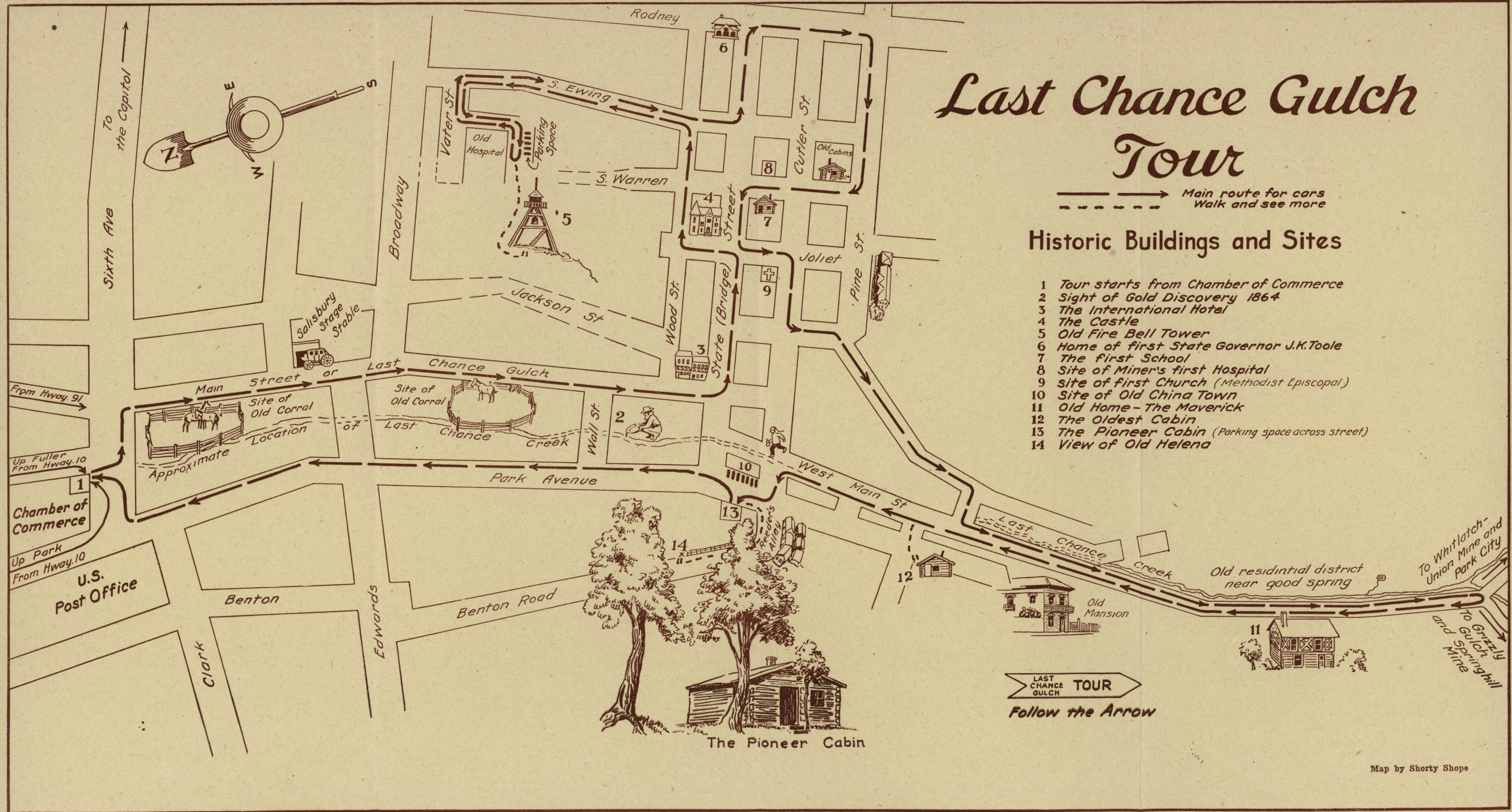


# Last Chance Gulch Tour

————— Main route for cars  
 - - - - - Walk and see more

## Historic Buildings and Sites

- 1 Tour starts from Chamber of Commerce
- 2 Sight of Gold Discovery 1864
- 3 The International Hotel
- 4 The Castle
- 5 Old Fire Bell Tower
- 6 Home of first State Governor J.K.Toole
- 7 The first School
- 8 Site of Miner's first Hospital
- 9 Site of first Church (Methodist Episcopal)
- 10 Site of Old China Town
- 11 Old Home - The Maverick
- 12 The Oldest Cabin
- 13 The Pioneer Cabin (Parking space across street)
- 14 View of Old Helena





## TOUR

Our pioneers of Last Chance Gulch might have greeted you with "Light and rest your Saddle." We are going to invite you to keep riding on a short tour of their old stomping grounds so that you may see something of Montana's interesting Capitol City and perhaps visualize some of the romance and color of its early days.

By whatever trail you may have entered Helena you passed through or near placer diggin's and mining camps which were pretty active and gala places in the past. Some of them still are. The discovery of gold in Last Chance Gulch, which we hasten to explain follows the present and less romantically named Main Street of Helena, focused the attention of prospectors on this area in 1864. Huge gold dredges are now at work in this vicinity to say nothing of the many "quartz" or "hardrock" properties in operation. Despite the millions in gold, silver, lead and zinc which have been taken from the district surrounding Helena, it has far to go before the pay streaks peter out.

The accompanying map shows our trip as starting in the heart of Last Chance Gulch at point No. 1.

**Point No. 1**—The Helena Chamber of Commerce on the corner of 6th and Fuller Avenues. A little creek used to meander past here. It now runs through a storm water drain almost under your feet.

The mountain with the limestone cliffs just west of town is Mount Helena. Looking north along Fuller Avenue you can see the Prickly Pear Valley with the Big Belt range of mountains on the skyline. The mountains to the west are the main range of the Rockies. All right, let's go.

**Main Street**—Time was when this crooked thoroughfare was seething with miners, merchants and mud. There were freight outfits, bars, corrals, gambling houses, dance halls, cafes, hotels and business concerns catering to the demands of the restless population.

The mud is gone. There is still gold beneath the buildings and pavement—lots of it. They are built on old mining claims.

**Point No. 2**—Now here you are at the corner of Wall and Main Streets, the former so called because two banks adorned its corners in the early days. This is where the discovery was made by the "Georgians" on July 14, 1864. John Cowan and John Crab from Georgia, D. J. Miller from California, and Reginald or "Bob" Stanley from London had been on an unsuccessful prospecting expedition which had taken them north of here. On their return they deplored their poor luck. Without much enthusiasm they decided to give this gulch a whirl as their "last chance." They sunk a shaft to bedrock and panned out a string of colors that looked like the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. The news leaked out. In no time shacks, huts and cabins lined the gulch. According to the business census taken in January, 1867 there were 45 grocery stores, 20 dry goods and clothing stores, 15 corrals and feed stables, 7 carpenter and furniture stores, 14 saloons, 7 restaurants, 7 meat markets, 5 banks, and 2 lumber yards. There were 11 blacksmiths, 10 doctors, and 16 attorneys. Eggs were \$2.00 a dozen, butter \$1.25 a pound, but venison sold for 10¢ to 12¢ per pound. They hadn't heard about O.P.A.

**Point No. 3**—As you turn left from Main Street into State Street you pass on the left-hand corner all that is left of Helena's first and once famous hotel, "The International." Whoever named it believed in taking in a lot of territory. On the right-hand corner is the Bristol, also an old-timer. A closed bridge used to connect the two and so the street was originally called Bridge

Street. A few hundred feet north on Main Street you passed the last edition of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. They were notable hostleries in their time and many national figures signed their registers—President Grant, General Phil Sheridan, Henry Ward Beecher, Frances Willard, to mention a few.

**Point No. 4**—Now turn left on Joliet and travel a very short block to intersect Wood Street. The large brick building on the right is still known as "The Castle." In the early days it was a place of varied entertainment where light hearted ladies kept perpetual open house. Most of the business, entertainment and life of the town centered in this vicinity before it outgrew the area to bulge down the gulch and overflow the rims.

The first court house and first theatre were on Wood Street. Chicago Jo with sparklers in her ears as big as walnuts presided at The Colesium, a three layer honky tonk with bar, dance hall, theatre and other features combined. There was plenty of action.

**Point No. 5**—Watch-Tower Hill commands a view of the old portion of Helena and served as a lookout station for a fire warden. When he sounded an alarm on a huge steel triangle or with a bell, men boiled into the streets below to form bucket brigades.

**Point No. 6**—Leaving Tower Hill, the trail on your map leads you back to State Street and then east to Rodney Street, named after the first man to die in the camp—strangely enough a **Doctor** Rodney Pococke.

On the southwest corner where State and Rodney Streets intersect is the home which Montana's first state governor, Joseph K. Toole, occupied in 1889 at the time of his inauguration. Helena's first public school, built in 1868, was a short distance north on Rodney. No trace of it remains.

Turn right on Rodney, drive 2 blocks south to Pine Street, then turn right again and go two blocks to South Warren. Many of the early homes are in this area. Turn right on Warren two blocks to return to State Street.

**Point No. 7**—In the second block and on your left is a small building now used as a garage. This was the first subscription school in the camp.

**Point No. 8**—Almost directly opposite is the site of the Miners Hospital, a little low log building recently removed. It was hastily established as a hospital after the Sun River gold stampede of 1866 when over forty prospectors were given treatment for frozen limbs.

At State Street turn left one block to turn left again on Joliet to the corner of Cutler and here you arrive at . . .

**Point No. 9**—The first church in the camp, dedicated July 22, 1865, just a year after the discovery. Note how soon churches, schools, and hospitals were erected—all denoting the presence and influence of pioneer housewives. The first church, now a residence, was built of logs which have been bricked over.

The "Hangman's Tree" on which the Vigilante Committee sometimes grafted strange fruit was not far from here. The Vigilantes dealt out grim justice that made the camp unhealthy for thugs and bandits. In 1876 the tree succumbed to an ax wielded by a Minister who took up residence in its vicinity.

Now turn right and drive one block on Cutler to Water Street, then down Water to West Main to . . .

**Point No. 10**—Where Chinatown is marked on your map. For years, Helena's old Chinatown was one of the most picturesque in the West. Its silk and china stores, its tea houses, its gambling and opium dens, and its laundries have disappeared. Descendants of the old-timers now win honors in our schools. They are good citizens.

Now drive up West Main Street to reach the forks

of Last Chance Gulch—Grizzly Gulch comes in from the right and Oro Fino Gulch from the left. West Main was a favorite residential district of the pioneers for it was cool and protected, with springs of crystal clear water nearby.

**Point No. 11**—Huddled close to the limestone rimrock is "The Maverick," a house whose lower half is log and upper half brick. It was built by its owner to resemble his boyhood home in Europe. If you have time after reaching the head of the gulch, you can take a "loop" trip of nine miles by driving up Oro Fino Gulch, to cross a low divide and return via Grizzly Gulch. This route takes you through picturesque mountain country and two ghost mining camps—Unionville and Park City.

Coming back down West Main Street pause at the intersection of Tufts Street to locate . . .

**Point No. 12**—on your map. This is a little cabin set in against the hill and said to be the oldest cabin in the gulch. From here drive to the parking space in front of the Pioneer Cabin. By all means take time to inspect the interior of this relic of pioneer days. It was built in the Spring of 1865, the logs being hand hewn from trees nearby. For many years it was the home of the young bride who brought the locust trees across the plains when they were mere sprouts and planted them in her dooryard where you see them today.

Mr. and Mrs. Warren who live in the house to the south of the cabin have the keys and will gladly show you the interior. If you care to walk up Reeder's Alley after visiting the cabin you will reach the end of the old Benton Road on the rim and be rewarded with an excellent view of early Last Chance Gulch. The Warrens will direct you.

Of course, if time permits, you should visit the State Capitol building and drive through the east and west residential parts of Helena.

We hope you have enjoyed this little diversion and will leave with pleasant memories of Last Chance Gulch.

Best of luck,

The Last Chance Gulch Restoration Ass'n.



Last Chance Gulch in Pioneer Days