

The Lost City of Glacier National Park

By Rick Hull

If you know where to look on Google Maps satellite view, you can see the grid of former streets — so technically this lost city of Glacier National Park is visible from space. Consisting of 375 lots, it sits deep in the woods at the base of Apgar Mountain. It is just northwest of Blankenship Bridge where the North Fork and Middle Fork meet.

But don't expect it to be featured soon on a four-part special on the Discovery Channel. The street were never paved, only a handful of structures built, and certainly there was never a post office or down town. The town existed largely in the imagination of the developer — and buyers.

Little remains of this mystery town. Forest fires have destroyed the buildings, fallen trees block the only access road, and a key bridge has been wiped out by a flood. Access is now a lengthy trek by foot. The only remaining structure is a small, futuristic dome, visible on Google Maps as a tiny white dot.



The only cabin in the subdivision in 2002.
Photo by Lloyd Barrie of Barrie Appraisal

The city's name is Glacier Summer Sites and it was created in 1956. The 50 x 98 ft. lots were originally sold for \$200 each, or \$10 a month.

Glacier Summer Sites is not the only subdivision in the park. There are others near Polebridge, and Lake McDonald still has large pockets of private land, including the small town of Apgar.

However Glacier Summer Sites is perhaps the most audacious. It was created by Charlie Green, a developer and real estate agent based in Coram. Green wasn't shy — he published a four-volume biography and authored a steady barrage of letters to the editor of local newspapers in his time.

The period preceded Montana's Subdivision and Platting Act. Development required only filing the paperwork at the courthouse. No planning office looked at the proposal and no

public hearing required before the planning board. And Green went well beyond the typical subdivision, filing three adjoining plats to create a new town.

Private lands in national parks are known as inholdings. All are on homesteads and purchases made before the parks were created. When Glacier National Park came into existence in 1910, virtually all the land between West Glacier and Apgar was privately owned. There is still a motel, shops and numerous summer homes on along that corner of Lake McDonald. Even upper McDonald Creek up to the falls was in private hands, and old timers remember the motel in the woods east of Lake McDonald Lodge.

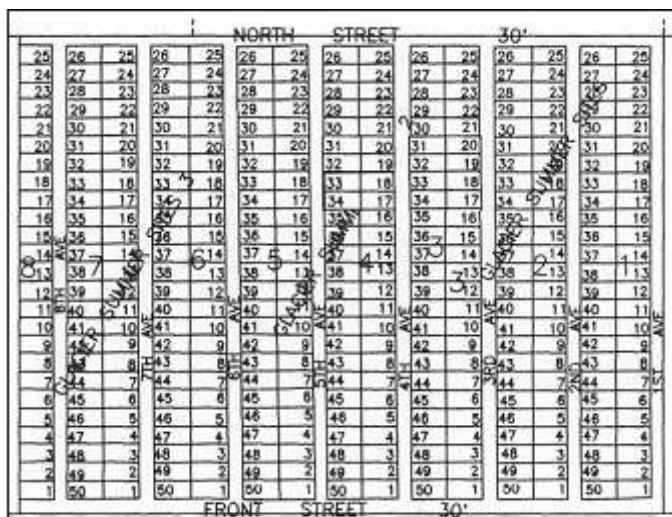
Some of the original cabin owners on Lake McDonald, like Kalispell Mayor C.W. Whipps, were among the earliest advocates of the park. But many treated their inholdings as nothing special.

Posse member **Bill Dakin** said Green clearcut his property on Apgar Mountain, enraging park officials with the visible scars. And Posse member **Arne Boveng** has picture of a bridge across the Middle Fork that the Lee Brothers built when they were logging their holdings in the park.

The National Park Service originally saddled the private land with restrictions designed to force to the landowners out. Most of the area along lower McDonald Creek ended up in government hands.

But property owners in Yosemite Park organized the National Parks Inholders Association in 1978 and fought back. The group has since renamed itself the American Land Rights Association, and spread its mission to cover other issues involving federal lands.

Local court cases have allowed Glacier National Park inholders to build homes or even win the right for motorized access to isolated sites.



Glacier Summers Sites subdivision plat



A photo of the bridge the Lee Brothers built across the Middle Fork to log their property in Glacier National Park. *Courtesy of Arne Boveng*

In 2017, private inholdings accounted for 2.6 million acres of the 84.6 million acres in national parks.

The National Park Service switched to only pursuing willing sellers. But federal red tape, including special appraisals, and the need to find the funding, means properties are often snatched up before park officials can act. However Glacier Park has managed to acquire all but 12 of the Glacier Summer Sites. A friend of Dakin acquired one lot through a tax-deed, and Daken handled the sale to the park.

I first learned about the lost city as a newspaper reporter. In 1955, Quaker Oats had offered a deed to a square inch of Canada's Yukon Territory in return for cereal box top. Charlie Green took the idea,

and during the 1964 Montana territorial centennial, had divided up a lot and starting selling square feet of Glacier National Park. The lots soon became delinquent for property taxes and 25 years later their unsure status was haunting the county Clerk and Records' office. A copy of a

square-foot deed hung for years in the plat room, but it has since vanished, along with any details about the episode.

Later I went to work for Barrie Appraisal, which won repeated bids to value lots in Glacier Summer Sites when they came up for sale.

Glacier Summer Sites was accessed though Quarter Circle Bridge across McDonald Creek and then through the woods for another seven to eight miles. The town never consisted of much more than 40-foot-wide streets cleared through the forest. Eight streets ran north and south, two ran east and west.



View of 3rd Ave in 2012, after the Roberts Fire.

Photo by Lloyd Barrie of Barrie Appraisal

Posse member and summer ranger **Michael Ober** remembers when it was still possible to access townsite in four-wheel-drive truck.

Before the Roberts Fire of 2003, only two summer homes that had been built in the subdivision and one had burned.

For a while Glacier Summer Sites could be accessed by mountain bike.

But the 2003 fire destroyed most of the subdivision, and fallen trees made wheeled access almost impossible. In addition, a 1996 flood wiped out the bridge over Rudideau Creek, and beavers inundated another portion of the road.

The last time appraiser Lloyd Barrie went to site, he and a ranger had to canoe across the North Fork and hike in.