



# PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 8, No. 3

Kalispell, Montana

April 13, 2021

*Richard Hull, Editor and Printer's Devil*

## APRIL MEETING

**Monday, April 19, 2021**

**Topic:** "Hard to Get to, Harder to Leave: A Look at Libby's Early Development 1808-1900"

**Presenter:** Jeff Gruber, of Libby, Montana

**Where:** The Red Lion, 20 North Main, Kalispell, Montana

**Time:** 5:15 pm Grab 'n' Greet and book signings  
6:00 pm - Dinner  
7:00 pm - Presentation

**Dinner:** \$19; Apricot glazed Black Forest ham, scalloped potatoes, corn succotash. Green salad with choice of dressing, rolls and butter. Regular or decaf coffee, or hot tea. Chef's choice of dessert.

**Dinner Reservations:** Call (406)752-9642 (leave message with names and phone number); or send email to [kbrittonrn@gmail.com](mailto:kbrittonrn@gmail.com) with the same information.

**Reservation Deadline: Wednesday, April 14, at 9:00 p.m.**

Posse members may join the program through Zoom by contacting [tim.chris@yahoo.com](mailto:tim.chris@yahoo.com) for registration and instructions.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

Located in a rugged and isolated corner of Montana, Libby has long been the area that tapped into the state's natural resources - mining, timber and water. And no one is perhaps more qualified to tell the story, that retired Libby High School history teacher Jeff



**Jeff Gruber**

Gruber. A Libby native, he has collected nearly 600 photos stretching from the early settlers through the 1970s and written articles and a book.

First visited by Canadian fur traders in the early 1800's, the Kootenai River Valley was first settled by prospectors. Its early mines, though billed as being as rich never lived up to the golden expectations their stock-selling promoters promised.

As such, Libby's early development was noted by the rises and declines of the mining industry. A total of 237 mines are listed in Lincoln County by the USGS, and mining remains an important element of the economy.

The most notorious is the W.R. Grace operation, where the vermiculite insulation proved to be contaminated with asbestos.

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The railroad also played an important part in early history, arriving in 1892. The mainline of the BNSF still threads its way along the Kootenai River valley into Idaho.

Logging, led by the J. Neils Lumber Company, became a leading industry in the area. Gruber points out that the commercial forests became a testing ground for sustainable logging beginning in the 1950s.

### *About the Presenter*

Libby Native Jeff Gruber spent a lifetime among the people and places that make Libby fascinating. With the exception of his time in college and his first teaching job in Judith Gap, Montana, Jeff made Libby his home. He jokingly told his students, "he hadn't gone very far in life," but Jeff knows that if you're lucky enough to live in Montana, you're lucky enough.

Jeff taught a myriad of high school subjects for 29 years before retiring in 2018. In his retirement, he is an active community volunteer and well recognized in the timber, lumber, and railroading community in the Libby area. He also operates a small sawmill business.

His book "Our Hometown, A Pictorial History of Libby, Montana" will be released soon. It will be first history of Libby published in nearly a century.

## **FUTURE PROGRAMS**

**May:** Monday, May 17, 2021  
Program: "**Dynamic Montana in Time Lapse**"  
Presenter: Doug Ammons of Missoula, Montana

**June:** Monday, June 21, 2021  
Program: **Part 3 of a series on the Lewis & Clark expedition.**  
Presenter: Hal Stearns of Missoula, Montana.

## **FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG**



Spring has sprung, Daylight Saving Time is here, and the bears are out (I know, one has already visited our bird feeders here in Kalispell last week). So it looks like we are starting to get back to normal again (assuming our new normal is the same as our old normal).

Our first two programs (February and March) got us off to a great start. Several new programs have been added to our agenda over the next 18 months.

In addition to the previously reported "two dam good programs" (Hungry Horse Dam in October and the Libby Dam in 2022), our Lewis & Clark series has received a "contract extension" until at least 2025.

Our series on the Glacier Lake Missoula series will resume again in September. Stay tuned for more exciting program news developments.

We will continue in our spirit of having fun, so historical or hysterical attire will be promoted at each meeting. Period attire is not mandatory and is entirely optional, of course, but greatly encouraged.

Raffle items and history themed book signings will be available during the Grab 'n' Greet session. Hope to see each of you at our April meeting on the 19th.

**Please bring a friend/neighbor, a pioneer, a miner, a train engineer, a logger, a student, ....or one of each.**

**Notice:** The membership Renewal Grace Period will end on Monday, April 19th at 7pm. So please send in, or deliver, your 2021 dues payment before your time runs out.

## GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

**N**MPW's meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of the month, except the months of December and January, at the Red Lion, 20 North Main, Kalispell, Mt. (East end of the Kalispell Center Mall).

All meetings begin with a Grab 'n' Greet for a chance to 'chew the fat' and to get acquainted, followed by the evening meal, and a postprandial presentation pertaining to Western history.

- Evening meals are open to both members and nonmembers. **Dinners require advance reservations.** Pay for the meals at the door upon arrival!
- Walk-in seating in the 'peanut gallery' for the presentation will be available free to all Posse members and youths under 16 and \$5 each for all non-members.
- There will be our usual raffle for door prizes.
- Local history authors will sign book
- Attire: Period or historical encouraged, but not required.

### **Posse wishes to thank the following Posse members who have contributed to the Live-Streaming Equipment Fund:**

Ben and Jodie Morris, Susan and Ron Foster, Bill and Diane Lundgren, Bill and Marilyn Hedstrom, Steve Armstrong, Bill Dakin, Richard and Deb Ellsworth, Kyle Stetler, Jeff Gruber, Pauline Sjordal, Marianne Madler, Carol Buchanan, Stan and Janet Bones, Beth Gardner, Robert Rodman, Doug Berglund, Ed and Marge Rothfuss, Jeff Ohrn, Ed Byrne, Tim and Glenda Christenson, Ron Beard and Joan Monaghan

## TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

**Tim Christianson** knew that Jeannette Rankin of Missoula was the first woman elected to Congress, and probably the first elected to a national legislature anywhere. She voted against World War II in 1917 and was the only member of Congress to vote against declaring war after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

### **This Month's Question**

(Answer in next month's newsletter.)

The question is simple and related to this month's presentation. Who was Libby?

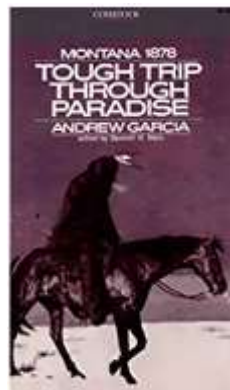
Submit your answer to Ye Editor at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto:richardahull@charter.net) and we will print the names of all who submit an answer with special notice for those who get it right.

## NEW MEMBERS

The following new member recently joined the Posse:

DeLain M. Kerney of Kalispell, MT

## FROM THE BOOK SHELF



*Tough Trip Through Paradise* is a Montana classic that belongs on every bookshelf. It is the autobiography of Andrew Garcia, who decided to give up the cowboy life in 1878 and try his hand at trapping. Despite some initial setbacks, including his choice of a partner,

Garcia became a true mountain man, living among local tribes and marrying a Nez Perce woman. The book is still in print, and often pops up in used book stores.

Published in 1967. 409-466 pages



## FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

Photos by Rick Hull

Libby is an easy day outing from Kalispell, especially along the loop up U.S. 93 to Eureka, down Hwy. 37 along Lake Koocanusa to Libby, and back home along U.S. 2.



The upper Kootenai falls are split by rock islands.

But while in Libby, don't miss the chance to see Kootenai Falls, a few miles west of town on U.S. 93. This historic falls was featured in the movies *The Reverent* and *The River Wild*.



The river then cuts through a narrow gorge.

Kootenai Falls is actually a series of cascades and gorges that stretch for a mile. A key attraction is a swinging bridge that accesses the north side of the falls complex.

The Kootenai River takes a peculiar course.

It bursts out of a canyon in the Canadian Rockies (where it is spelled Kootenay) and passes within a mile of the headwaters of the Columbia River – the two rivers heading in opposite directions. It becomes the 90-mile-long Lake Koocanusa reservoir, which straddles both side of the U.S.-Canadian border, churns the generators at Libby Dam, and then sweeps up through northern Idaho and back into Canada. There the river turns into the long, narrow Kootenay Lake, which approaches Flathead Lake in size. Earning its keep at a another dam, the Kootenai River finally joins the Columbia River near Nelson, B.C.

Canadian explorer David Thompson called it "McGillivray's River" and used it to supply his trading posts in western Montana. He side-stepped the falls to follow his namesake river overland to the Clark Fork.

The falls required a lengthy portage, and an exhibit at the falls quotes explorer and missionary Father DeSmet complaining about the trek.

Parking for the falls is well marked in the

canyon seven miles past Libby. Visitors need to be warned that access includes a bridge over the railroad tracks with 64 open-grate stairs down to the river corridor.

Upstream the river splits with multiple falls. In the middle is a gorge with its own falls, while downstream the swinging bridge provides a view of the swirling currents in the final gorge. Trails on both sides of the river provide multiple viewing opportunities.



The swinging bridge.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Members aware of events not listed here are encouraged to contact Ye Editor with the particulars at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto:richardahull@charter.net)

- October 8 & 9: Westerners' International Third Annual Gather and 75th Los Angeles Corral in Los Angeles. Details coming.

## NW MONTANA MUSEUM EVENTS

- **The Story of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company**

This exhibit features photographs, documents, and artifacts from the glory days of CFAC, a Columbia Falls mainstay for more than half a century. Included is a full model of the aluminum pot line and a framed photo of 101 employees who started at the plant when it opened in 1955 and were still there for the 25th anniversary in 1980.

- **"Making Music" with a special opening reception April 19 from 5 to 8 p.m.**

Displays include a Victrola Cabinet phonograph, a stand-up player piano and a collection of autoharps.

- **John White Speakers Series with Bob Brown on April 21 at 4 p.m.**

Long time Montana Legislative leader and Secretary of State **Bob Brown** will discuss his nearly half century in politics in a prerecorded session.

The Museum is open Monday through Friday from 10 to 5. For more information, please see the Museum's webpage at [nwmthistory.org](http://nwmthistory.org) or call 406-756- 8381.

## Posse Gold Stars

Recognizing those members and friends whose generosity has assisted the Posse in so many ways:

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## BLOOD AND GOLD

### The untold story of Libby's frontier violence

By Rick Hull



The tombstone in Demersville Cemetery for the three prospectors killed at Wolf Prairie.

*Photo by Rick Hull*

When the topic is Montana's Indian troubles, the narrative usually revolve around the Sioux and Blackfeet. But the Libby area in northwest Montana had a pair of incidents in which six white prospectors were the victims. Both events have been largely hushed up, because they involved fierce vengeance against the perpetrators. One revenge lynching took place just in Flathead County, and remains an open secret.

The first killings took place in the summer of 1866 or 1867. Four men – William Allen, Anthony Kavanaugh, John Moore and Joseph Herren (or Herron) – were prospecting on Libby Creek when they ran short of supplies, and went to either Bonner's Ferry, Idaho or Wild Horse in Canada to restock. When they returned, the prospectors asked for help from a small party of Kootenai tribal members in canoeing the supplies across the Kootenai River to the mouth of Libby Creek. Accounts blame the Indian women for proposing to scare the miners away and seize the pile of goods. At first the Kootenai men warned of signs of Blackfeet in the area, and urged the whites to leave immediately. That ruse failing, the Kootenais waited until early morning and fired into the camp. But instead of running off, the miners scrambled to

reload their pack horses. The Kootenais then fired directly, killing all but Herren, who was shot through the cheek (or chest) and crawled into the brush.

Herren was afraid the assault was part of a general attack on the main Libby Creek camp upstream. So he instead swam the Kootenai River and headed north on a primitive path along the river. Twenty-one days later, his clothes torn and having survived on berries, he arrived in Wild Horse with his story.

The Kootenais are an unusual tribe, especially when compared to their joint tribes on the Flathead Reservation. The Flatheads and Pend d'Oriettes prided themselves on their friendly relations with whites, and are part of the Salish language group, which gave them family connections throughout the Northwest.

The Kootenais lived in the northern Rockies, straddling the U.S.-Canadian border. Their mix of mountain and plains culture put them in shadow of the dread Blackfeet, and they taught their babies not to cry. Their language was nearly opaque to outsiders and they remain a reclusive tribe.

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A posse was formed at Wild Horse, and headed south to Bonner's Ferry. They confronted Old Abraham, a Kootenai chief, and after a series of threats and promises of amnesty, three of the guilty party were turned over to the posse. On their way to collecting the other perpetrators, one succeeded in breaking free while wading Moyie Creek. He and the other three were immediately shot. The other two Kootenais were located and hanged at Libby Creek.

Twenty years later a very similar incident took place at Wolf Prairie, northeast of Libby, with similar lethal results for both sides. A gold rush had erupted in late 1886, when a prospector showed up in Demersville with a bag of gold dust.

Three prospectors were there in December of 1887 – Daniel McDonald, Ben Tomkins and John Celey. A party of three Kootenai men and three boys had talked with the prospectors, and then pretended to leave the area.

But as the three prospectors were eating, the Kootenai's opened fire from the trees and killed all three. The killers netted \$6.75 in coins, two horses and some provisions. They missed four \$20 gold pieces located later by a burial party.

The murder remained secret. However at a Kootenai celebration near Eureka in early 1888, tribal men gathered to recite their acts of prowess during the previous year. The killers could not resist telling how they had killed three white men at Wolf Prairie and burned the bodies.

A witness repeated the story to Ralph Ramsdell, who had a trading post in the Tobacco Plains. Ramsdell spoke fluent Kootenai, and was a deputy sheriff. As soon as the weather allowed, he headed the 60 miles south to Demersville. Not only did he have details of the murder, but he knew the killers were nearby.

An early Demersville resident, George Stannard, told this story. "The Kootenais, about 40 tepees strong, were camped about one-half mile back of the store."

"The call was sent around to the settlers to assemble at the boat landing on the night of the 22nd of March, 1888, and that night about 75 brave and husky men, who lived by their rifles, congregated at the store. As I was a "tenderfoot", I was told to call them at 2 o'clock a.m., as they were sleeping in the warehouse end store, on top of the counters and under them, using our Indian blankets and our clothing for covering. So at that hour everyone arose and I was told to grab a rifle, which I did, and we marched out and surrounded the Indian camp; the dogs barked, but we approached from different directions and only one Indian got away in the dark, "Antley" by name."

"We brought back with us three Indians, and the Deputy Sheriff, John E. Clifford, took them in charge, intending to take them to Missoula, the county seat, but while the deputy was at breakfast with his wife, some of the boys stole the prisoners from the guard and ran them across the ferry, just below the landing, and hung two of them to the limb of a large yellow pine there."

According to a later Missoulian story, the two hanging victims were Jerome and John Annen.

There are other stories about the decision to hang the pair. One told of a rope used as a line in the sand. Other versions talk of being asked to come forward and grasp a rifle. Deputy Sheriff John Lang would later say he was tricked out of custody when someone told him his wife had taken ill.

The lynching was public knowledge, and a number of early settlers would write accounts years later that were supposedly firsthand, but were wrong on details, such as how many were hung. The local Inter Lake said nothing, while the weekly Missoulian made this cryptic comment in the April 11, 1888 issue: "The prompt and decisive action of the Flathead Lake people in the recent

trouble is worthy of note. They taught the red devils a lesson that will do them good.”

The lynching triggered a back-and-forth show of force between the Kootenais, who were now based at Dayton on the Flathead Reservation and the settlers. The bad blood increased when the chief's son was shot and killed in downtown Demersville, and the settlers learned a Kootenai had killed J. M. Dunn near Lakeside.

The troubles did not end until the Missoula Sheriff rounded up four Indians accused of various murders. Among them was the teenage Antley, who had escaped the Demersville lynch mob, and Pascale, who had killed Dunn. The four were hung December 19, 1890, in Missoula.

The hangman's nooses ended a sordid chapter of local history.

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c/o Clerk of the Posse, P. O. Box 10811, Kalispell, MT 59904.

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For submissions to the Posse Dispatch, contact the Editor by e-mail first for submission requirements.

The next issue of Pony Tracks will be issued May 10, 2021 (or thereabouts)

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