



# PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 10, No. 1

Kalispell, Montana

February 13, 2023

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## FEBRUARY MEETING

**Monday, February 20, 2023**

**Topic:** Hori's Secret and the Japanese in Northwest Montana

**Presenter:** Rick Hull of Kalispell, MT

**Where:** Northwest Montana History Museum, in the second floor historic classroom, 124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, MT.

**Time:** Gab 'n' Greet, raffle and book signings start at 6:00 p.m.

No dinner offered, but there are downtown restaurants within walking distance.

**Historic Presentation:** Program begins at 7:00 p.m. No reservations are required, but seating will be limited; so come early. Call (406)-309-0938 with any questions.

Posse members may join the program through Zoom at the following address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89199481805?pwd=YlIIMc2xmOHV4YWZQa3lyd2JSY1NBZz09>

Meeting ID: 891 9948 1805

Passcode: 003734

E-mail Tim Christenson at [tim.chris@yahoo.com](mailto:tim.chris@yahoo.com) for more help.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



**M. M. Hori in his early 20s**  
Photo - NW MT Hist. Museum

The Japanese immigrants who played a major, but often unrecognized, role in the Valley's early history is the topic of this month's presentation.

The narrative begins with Mokutaro Hori, who managed the household staff at the Conrad Mansion in Kalispell. There was something he hadn't told the Conrad family about the staff

– all fellow immigrants from Japan. It was a twist that Hori converted into becoming one of Whitefish's leading businessmen.

And Hori had another secret that wasn't uncovered until 60 years after his death.

Hori's story is just one chapter about the Japanese who played a major, but often unrecognized, role in the Valley's early history.

Other tales include a Japanese trapper who vanished on Werner Peak and is now immortalized in a misnamed ridge-top basin, and a Whitefish church bearing witness to a good deed. There is also a combined Romeo and Juliet, rags-to-riches story.

The impact of Japanese immigrants on local

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history is not insignificant. Over 750 Japanese worked for the Great Northern Railway in northwest Montana, and Kalispell had its own Japanese hospital. When the railroad's mainline moved to Whitefish, so did the Japanese. Along with maintaining tracks across the mountains, they ran businesses and farms.

The presentation also touches on the growing West Coast animosity that exploded after the Pearl Harbor attack. Though most local families were spared the interment of 100,000 Japanese-Americans during World War II, they did run afoul of restrictive laws and a few bad characters. Yet many served in the U.S. military during World War II, including in the Pacific, and their heroism became a major step towards acceptance.

### *About the Presenter*

**Rick Hull** is editor of the Posse's newsletter, the Pony Tracks. Born in Whitefish, he had a lifetime career on local newspapers, including the *Kalispell Weekly News* and *Daily Inter Lake*.

His fascination with local history was a foundation for newspaper features stories and now the articles tacked to the end of Pony Tracks. One of his historical features was expanded into a story published in *True West* magazine.

He also worked as database programmer and a commercial real estate appraiser.



Japanese railroad section crew on Marias Pass  
Photo - NW Montana Historical Museum



## FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

Welcome to a new season of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners. I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday break and are well rested and healthy as we grind through the remainder of the winter.

We have a new and exciting 2023 planned beginning on the 20th with our very own Rick Hull presenting Hori's Secret and the Japanese in Northwest Montana.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome and introduce the newest member of the Posse Board – Kyle Stetler has stepped up as the new Deputy Sheriff replacing Ron Beard. Kyle has been a member for several years and hails from Bigfork. He is active in the Bigfork Art and Cultural Center and a member of the Northwest Montana Lookout Association. If you recall, Kyle gave an excellent presentation one year ago on “The Historic Forest Fire Lookouts” to the Posse. Welcome aboard Kyle and thank you.

Kyle has been working with Ron on the transition and finalizing the 2023 schedule while starting to look ahead to the 2024 schedule. We are always looking for new and exciting topics (and speakers) so don't be shy and contact Kyle with your ideas. We still have a very long laundry list of topics on the webpage that just needs to link up subject matter experts, i.e. speakers.

On a separate topic, we will be returning to the Red Lion for our March meeting due to a conflict with the museum. We are going to have the traditional 6-7 pm dinner followed by the 7 pm presentation. I will have the menu options available to discuss at the meeting on the 20th as well as sending out details in the next newsletter. Encourage everyone to attend.

Now it's that time of year again for sustaining members to get their dues in. I request each of

you bring at least one like-minded friend, neighbor, or family member to a meeting this year. The purpose is to give them the Posse experience and if they like what they see then invite them to join our ranks. Like so many other groups around the Flathead Valley, we are still building back our pre-COVID numbers.

Even though we are a low-overhead organization, it still requires funds to operate to cover monthly location costs and to consistently attract quality speakers. Our two primary ways of accomplishing this are through membership dues and our book raffles. If you have any history books sitting on a shelf collecting dust, please drop one (or more) off at the check-in table.

We are still looking for a webpage manager and an IT specialist to manage the equipment and zoom requirements. If you have experience in one of these realms your assistance is needed and would be greatly appreciated.

To volunteer or if you have any questions, recommendations, or concerns, please contact me directly at 406-871-6001 or [edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com](mailto:edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com).

Here's to a successful 2023.

## FUTURE PROGRAMS

- March:** Monday, March 20, 2023  
"History of the Hungry Horse Dam"  
by M'lissa Morgan
- April:** Monday, April 17, 2023  
"Charles Lindbergh in Montana History"  
by Dennis Gaub
- May:** Monday, May 15, 2023  
"1929 Half Moon Fire"  
by Rick Trembath
- June:** Monday, June 19, 2023  
"Larger Than Life Leaders:  
Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery"  
by Hal Stearns

## FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull



When headed to Whitefish Mountain Resort, look for the Museum of Skiing. The small building is located in front of the ice-skating rink at 705 Wisconsin Avenue.



Photos by Rick Hull

The museum covers the early history of local skiing before and after the opening of Big Mountain in 1947. Most of the displays are photographs, but there are early skis and other items.

A Hall of Fame honors early ski pioneers and local legends. A new exhibit highlights the 10th Mountain Division. A number of locals served in this winter warfare unit during World War II and went on to become prominent Flathead Valley residents.

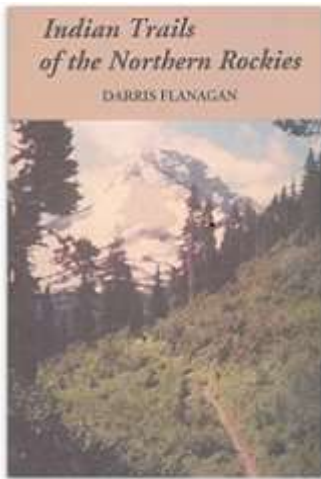
A video library features rare skiing footage from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

The museum is open Wednesday through Saturday.

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## FROM THE BOOK SHELF

By Rick Hull



Volunteering at the Kalispell museum bookstore gives me time to thumb through the books by local authors. Recently catching my attention was *Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies* by Darris Flanagan of Eureka. Essentially the book is about how the Kootenai Indians traveled from

the Tobacco Valley to the buffalo country on the Great Plains. Their journey usually started on Graves Creek near Fortine.

Graves Creek Road connects to the aptly named Trail Creek Road on the North Fork, providing a route across the Whitefish Range in summer. The combined roads run just south of the U.S.-Canadian border and pass near Frozen Lake, which is split by the boundary line. From the North Fork River, the traditional Kootenai trails go through several passes in Canada.

The book is full of interesting tidbits. Indians usually avoided river valleys, and often went across mountain terrain that labeled “challenging” in modern trail guides. Cliffs on routes like Logan Pass required men standing on individual ledges, and boosting the women and children to the next level.

Easy passes, like Marias Pass, were considered too long for foot traffic and only traversed in summer with horses. Even that trail required climbing the Swan and Flathead ranges to reach the Middle Fork. The gentle Crows Nest Pass, located just north of the Canadian border, was avoided because of dense forests and deadfalls. The tribal reliance on alternate routes is why both railroad passes were missed by early explorers.

Hunting buffalo meant dealing with the Blackfeet. The Kootenais camped on the open prairie, rather than sheltered river bottoms, so they could keep a eye out for trouble. At the same time, the Blackfeet envied the Kootenais, whose mountain valley homeland had numerous food sources. For example, it was not only possible to eat the inner bark of pine trees; it was considered a seasonal delicacy. The Blackfeet were dependent on their hunting success.

The Blackfeet also uncomfortable in the forest, and would only pursue their enemies so far. Places like Marias Pass were felt to contain evil spirits and were off limits. Glacier National Park was more home territory for the Kootenai than the Blackfeet, Flanagan notes.


The second half of book covers the white exploration of the Graves Creek trail, and includes lengthy journal accounts. The major mapping effort was the Northwest Boundary Survey of 1860-61. American and Canadian crews plotted the 49th parallel, cutting a 40-foot-wide swath over cliffs and across mountain tops along the arbitrary line. Sometimes their instrument reading disagreed, and parallel tracks were cut.

The book is an easy read, and offers a more favorable view of the Kootenai tribe than most.

Interestingly, the book introduction contains a poem by James Whilt. The now forgotten Kalispell author was once known as “Poet of the Rockies.”

Stoneydale Press Publishing Co., Stevensville, Montana. Trade paperback, 192 pages, \$17.00.

**Blacktail Mountain Books**



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## TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

November's question was: Many of the names in Glacier Park, such as Mt. Reynolds and Wilbur, are connected to what magazine?

**Barbara Boorman, Pat Walsh and Ron Beard** had the answer.

The answer is *Forest and Stream*, later known as *Field and Stream*. Reynolds (editor) and Wilbur (business manager) never saw their namesake mountains. A major voice in the early conservation movement, the turn-of-the-century magazine was subsidized by Glacier National Park explorer and advocate George Grinnell.

### *This Month's Trivia Question*

This is an obscure question that should escape a Google search: Arlee, Montana is an alteration of what name?

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

## GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

**NMPW 's** meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January, at the Northwest Montana History Museum at 124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, Montana.

Meetings begin with a Grab 'n' Greet session from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. for chance to get acquainted. Historical attire is encouraged, but not required.

Local history authors will have their books for sale, and will be available for signing.

The presentation starts at 7 p.m. and is free for members and youths 16 and under. Non-members pay \$5.

Historic books are raffled off as a fund raiser. All meetings will be broadcast on-line via Zoom for our Out-of-County Corresponding and Brigade members and the members who cannot attend the meetings.

## DUES REMINDER

It is time for our annual members renewal and new member drive. Statements have been mailed to all current members. Please support our organization and its goals by responding as soon as possible.

We ask that your dues be made promptly to the address on the dues' statement or brought to the February meeting.

Do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments.

## NEW MEMBERS


The following have recently joined the Posse:

Steven Shapero,  
Bigfork, Montana

Ed & Sue Gillenwater,  
Bigfork, Montana

Steven Kelly,  
Whitefish, Montana

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# The Bridge That Changed Northwest Montana

By Rick Hull

Getting around northwest Montana is something we take for granted. But we forget how a river could be a major choke point.

The Flathead River is an example. It was a major barrier to east-west travel. A handful of ferries crossed the waterway, mostly in the lower Valley.

One of those ferries was east of Kalispell. At that time, the main road through the Valley came from Whalebone Drive, north along Meridian to Second Street, and then through town and Conrad Drive to the river. But ice or high water on the Flathead Rive could halt traffic for days.



**The Old Steel Bridge united the east and west halves of the Valley and once was the only highway route to Glacier National Park.**

*Photo - Northwest Montana History Museum*

Within two years of Kalispell's founding there was a push to bridge the barrier. And it would be a modern steel bridge, immune to the river's moods.

The Kalispell townsite company led the campaign for a bridge, beginning with a petition drive. In February, 1894, the county commissioners advertised for construction. The width and length were set, but the design was up to the contractor. Though it wasn't the low bid, the commissioners picked the \$17,497 proposal by the Gillette-Herzog company. The Kalispell Townsite Company kicked in \$7,500 and the county picked up the rest.

Work began in July. Among the 35-man crew were three divers who dug

seven feet into the river bed for the circular, concrete piers. Work proceeded quickly once the piers were in place, with the trusses assembled on the shore and lifted into place by crane. The bridge opened on October 19, 1894.

The immediate effect was to put ferries out of business. The Egan Ferry south of town closed that same year, and its neighbor, the Penny Ferry, in 1900. Only the Holt Ferry near Bigfork survived until it was finally replaced by a bridge in 1942.

Hit particularly hard was the community of Egan. Located about four miles east of the river town of Demersville, it boasted a store, hotel and boarding house, two saloons, a blacksmith shop, livery stable, and several homes. With traffic diverted over the new bridge, it eventually faded away to nothing. Just a school remains in the vicinity.

The new bridge was not only the primary access to Creston, but to Columbia Falls as well. Until 1936 it was only route between Kalispell and Glacier National Park. Highway 2 ran through town, across the Steel Bridge, and north along present Highway 206 to Bad Rock Canyon.

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In 1897 Byron McIntire donated his homestead west of the river to the Kalispell Kiwanis Club in 1926. Club members filled in a gravel pit, cleaned out the brush and deadwood, and planted yellow rambler roses. The site was otherwise left natural, with picnic sites along the shore. The club finished off the project with a cedar log arch across the road that christened the area as “Kiwanis Lane”.

The area was a traditional wintering area for the Kootenai tribe, and they camped around the bridge into the 1940s.

Land on both sides of the river were added over the years. In 1973 the club deeded the property to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

In 1936 a new bridge was built a mile upstream and Highway 2 relocated to the new crossing. The downstream structure now became the “Old Steel Bridge.”

The narrow bridge deteriorated until only signs warned that only one vehicle was allowed to cross at time. In the 1990s it was replaced with a modern bridge on new piers. The old truss span was purchased with hopes of moving it elsewhere. But that plan faded and it sat on the site for several years before being scrapped.



Dedication of the new park at the Old Steel Bridge by the local Kiwanis Club in 1926.

*Photo - 13th Annual Report of the Kalispell Water Department*

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Copy must be in the Editor's in-box on or before the first of the month in order to make that  
month's issue. Copy received after that date will be held over until the subsequent issue.

The next issue of Pony Tracks will be issued March 13, 2023 (or thereabouts)

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