



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 10, No. 4

Kalispell, Montana

May 9, 2023

Richard A. Hull, Ye Editor, e-mail: richardahull@charter.net

MAY MEETING

Monday, May 15, 2023

Topic: "1929 Half Moon Fire"

Presenter: Rick Trembath of Bigfork, MT

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

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

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

Beer, wine and soft drinks available for purchase by museum staff.

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/82368773831?pwd=K1Nwa2JhRmN3dHBmNlBvN25iL0tQUT09>

Meeting ID: 891 9948 1805

Passcode: 003734

E-mail Tim Christenson at tim.chris@yahoo.com for more help.

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



Half Moon Fire sweeps up Teakettle Mountain in 1929.
Courtesy of the Northwest Montana History Museum

The Flathead Valley's most devastating fire is the subject of this month's presentation.

In what had already been a bad fire year, logs were being loaded on a railroad flatcar near Half Moon, east of Columbia Falls in mid August of 1929. A spark from the winch triggered a fire, which erupted in an afternoon wind and soon invaded the slash piles and dead timber that had accumulated in the area.

It exploded on August 17, despite the effort of about a 100 fire fighters, combined with two other fires, and raced up Teakettle Mountain. It spread to within two miles of Columbia Falls and Kalispell residents could see the vivid glow to the east.

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“This, with the flames on Teakettle Mountain, and the fire north of Columbia Falls, gave the impression that the whole country from the Canyon to the park, were afire,” reported the Daily Inter Lake.

Coram residents were holding the fire off with Forest Service pumps, and volunteers recruited to man the lines at Columbia Falls.

The fire jumped the North Fork River and raced into Glacier National Park, covering more than 30 miles in 48 hours.

Hundreds of firefighters were brought in to protect park headquarters at West Glacier. A special train ran to West Glacier to evacuate the tourists. The flames were stopped 250 feet short of town.

But the fire continued to push up the Middle Fork, and north then over the mountains to Lake McDonald.

Compounding the battle were fires on the South Fork, and North Fork, which sent residents fleeing across the border into Canada.

The fires continued to burn well into September, eventually burning 103,400 acres. It took over a thousand firefighters and \$100,000 to battle the fire.

About the Presenter

Rick Trembath started with the Forest Service on a hot shot fire crew in 1967. He then became a timber technician at the Swan Lake Ranger District in Bigfork, eventually retiring as a supervisor in 2003. His college degree is in Science Forestry.

He is a qualified Safety Officer, and is former wildfire instructor for the National Fire Academy, and teaches a wildland fire course at Flathead Valley Community College. He has more than 56 years of wildfire experience.

Trembath also spent 35 years on the Bigfork Fire and Ambulance Department, including four years as Chief. He was county Fire Warden for two years.

He currently runs a forestry and fire consulting business and is active in the local chapter of the American Foresters.



FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

May has arrived and with it, all the crazy weather changes that Montana is accustomed to. In the Flathead, we move from the sun and 80 degrees one day to overcast and rain the next. Still, it's a great time to get into the lower portions of Glacier before the tourists arrive in full force. Recommended is a morning drive up the North Fork to Polebridge to get a huckleberry bearclaw at the Mercantile and then head to Bowman Lake inside the park for a short hike and picnic.

A couple of updates for the club going forward in the immediate future. We have decided to stay at the Northwest Montana History Museum for the foreseeable with a couple offsites throughout the year. The relationship with the museum staff and friendly confines was the primary reason for members voting to stay with the museum versus moving back to the Red Lion.

The Board is also looking to rename the club. There is significant confusion throughout the Flathead community, and perspective speakers as to who we are. Specifically, the term "Posse" in our title. In addition, by stepping away from Westerner's International we will no longer be tethered to pay a portion of our annual dues to Texas. We are interested in your thoughts on this action and any ideas for a new name. The intent is to maintain professional presentations and continue to grow the membership and guests. We will take a vote of the body of the whole in July to determine if we sever ties with Westerners International and register as a new and separate organization.

Once again to volunteer or if you have any questions, recommendations, or concerns, please get in touch with me at 406-871-6001 or edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com.

FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

For the past several years, volunteers from the Latter Day Saints Church have been digitizing documents at local museums. They copied the shelf of loose-leaf binders at the Whitefish Historical Stumptown Museum and are now working Thursdays in the attic at the Northwest Montana History Museum in Kalispell.

As known colloquially, the Mormons are mostly concerned with gathering newspaper obituaries and family histories for the Church's massive genealogy collection. But they have copied a variety of other books and documents. At the Kalispell museum, they scanned the early *Inter Lake's* and are now working their way through the *Kalispell Times*. The copying is done with a handheld phone, followed by more work on a computer to clean up the images.

The results are available on the LDS's free genealogy website, FamilySearch.org. On the home page, click on "Search" to bring up a drop-down list and chose "Books". The resulting search page works well for specific searches, like family names, but is not as effective for general searches, like "Kalispell".

However, I stumbled across several surprising documents, including books on local history. Some documents can be downloaded, while only the cover is available on others because of copyright restrictions.

In another development, the Kalispell museum is ready to launch its downtown walking tours of historic Kalispell. The museum had a \$5,000 grant for the project, but with the change in museum directors and other issues, it looked like the money might have to be returned.

Then Barbara Sanders, a local volunteer, took the pile of photocopied research papers and put together a polished itinerary and script. I was on the rehearsal run, and was impressed. Keep checking the museum website, nwmthistory.org for times and pricing.

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

NMPW 's meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January.

Meetings begin with a Greet 'n' Gab session from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. for a 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 out of the area members and the members who cannot attend the meetings.

Contact Kathy at kbrittonrn@gmail.com with any questions .

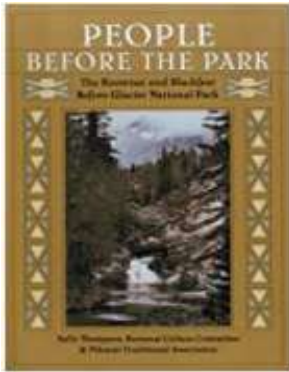
FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **June 19:**
"Larger Than Life Leaders:
Lewis and Clark and the Corps of
Discovery" by Hal Stearns
- **July 17:**
"A Mansion in the Mountains:
How Kalispell's Treasured Landmark
Came to Be" by Brit Clark
- **August 21:**
"Gustavus Sohon: A Pivotal Player
in Northwest Exploration"
by Ken Robison
- **September 18 :**
"Fools Rush In: Johnny Grant and
the Early Montana Cattle Industry"
by Lyndel Meikle
- **October 16:**
"Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies"
by Darris Flanagan

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FROM THE BOOK SHELF

By Rick Hull



People Before the Park largely follows its subtitle – *The Kootenai and Blackfoot Before Glacier National Park*. Only a chapter is about the native use of the park, the tribal names of park's peaks and lakes, and tales behind the names.

Instead the book does cover the pre-European lifestyle of the two tribes who shared what is now Glacier Park.

The book is divided into four parts. The first is a background of the tribes by author Sally Thompson. The bulk of the book is by the Kootenai Culture Committee, and the Pikunni (Piegan Blackfoot) Traditional Association, who write about the world view of their very different tribes. A final section is on keeping traditions alive in current times.

Thompson's introduction is even handed, especially considering it was written with two cultural committees looking over her shoulder. Among other points, she notes that inter-tribal warfare has been over emphasized.

The Kootenai portion looks at tribal life month by month, describing the plants harvested, and the game sought, in each season.

On the other hand, the Blackfoot account is full of supernatural folklore, and the seeking of signs and predicting the future. Superstition seemed to influence many decisions.

There are many items of interest. Serviceberry bushes were a seasonal source of arrow shafts. Cooked tubers, like camas, were a dependable winter food, but meat and fat, like pemmican, was lighter and preferred when traveling.

Trade paperback. Montana Historical Society Press. 248 pages. \$19.95

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Writing a trivia question that outsmarts Google again caused problem. Last month's question was based on Lindbergh Lake, which was renamed to honor the aviator.

It asked: What major geographic feature withing 10 miles of Lindbergh Lake was named after an infamous American until three decades ago. Beth Gardner was right that Lindbergh Lake was originally Elbow Lake, but it answered the wrong question. A couple other said they were looking for someone notorious.

The answer is Mount Calowahcan in the Mission Mountains. Prior to 1991, the 9,061-foot peak was named after U.S. President Warren Harding. Considered one of the nation's worst presidents, his administration was caught in numerous scandals. The most famous were the Teapot Dome scandal, involving the illegal tapping of a Naval reserve oil field in Wyoming, and a later memoir published by his mistress.

Harding's nemesis was Senator Thomas Walsh from Montana. Walsh's investigations resulted in the Secretary of Interior going to prison. Harding died suddenly in 1923, and his wife refused an autopsy, leading to rumors he had been poisoned.

Walsh also died mysteriously in 1933 while on his way to Washington D.C. to become U.S. Attorney General, possibly poisoned by his new bride.

Calowahcan is the name of a prominent local family. The peak's name before 1922 was Teton, a French name that has it own issues.

This Month's Trivia Question

A hopefully simple question: The life and death cycle of what tree is intimately tied to forest fires?

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

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Members aware of events not listed here are encouraged to contact Ye Editor with the particulars at richardahull@charter.net

- The Heritage Museum in Libby opens for the season May 13. Hours 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sunday.
- Annual Fort Connah Rendezvous Open House June 17 & 18. The restored Hudson's Bay Co. trading post is north of St. Ignatius. Watch for details.
- History Book Club: *Amos, to Ride a Dead Horse* by Stanley Gordon West. 2 p.m. June 7 at the Northwest Montana History Museum.

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This issue of Pony Tracks is Volume 10, Number 4

The Pony Tracks is published monthly except December and January by the
NORTHWEST MONTANA POSSE OF WESTERNERS

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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 June 12, 2023 (or thereabouts)

richardahull@charter.net