



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 10, No. 5

Kalispell, Montana

June 12, 2023

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

JUNE MEETING

Monday, June 19, 2023

Topic: "Larger Than Life Leaders:
Lewis and Clark and the Corps
of Discovery" (Part 4 of a series)

Presenter: Hal Stearns of Missoula, 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/89519236085?
pwd=RGFxSUp5a1ZKSmtSk1PUml0RmR0dz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89519236085?pwd=RGFxSUp5a1ZKSmtSk1PUml0RmR0dz09)

Meeting ID: 891 9948 1805

Passcode: 003734

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



Waving a flag, Lewis and his three men meet
Blackfeet warriors near present-day Cutbank.

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

In part four of his series, Lewis and Clark
expert Hal Stearns covers the expedition's
journey back home.

The story starts as the group recuperates at
Travelers Rest in June 1806 after barely
surviving the trip across Lolo Pass in 12-15 feet
of snow. For their final push in their journey,
Lewis and Clark split up.

William Clark would explore the Yellowstone
River through southeast Montana. Meriwether
Lewis would return to the Missouri River. The
expedition would reunite where the two rivers
meet in present-day North Dakota.

Lewis would also explore the Marias River,
whose spring flows had been confused with the
Missouri, and see how far north it reached.

The divided expedition would test Lewis and
Clark's military skills. The Great Plains was
populated by hostile tribes who were ready to
prey on the small parties.

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Lewis headed up the Indian “Buffalo Road” along the Blackfoot River east of Missoula and onto the Great Plains with 10 men. After uniting with 11 men sent down the Missouri by Clark at the Great Falls, and digging up buried caches, Lewis split up again and headed north with three men to intercept the Marias River.

Things soon turned sour. At first it was stolen horses. Marias's chain of tributaries headed stubbornly west, and Lewis gave up at a place he named “Camp Disappointment”.

And a day after turning back there was a confrontation with Blackfeet teenagers that left two of the youngsters dead. A rush back to the Missouri followed, fleeing 70 miles in a day.

Meanwhile Clark was having his own problems on the Yellowstone River with the Crow tribe stealing his horses.

Lewis was almost to the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri in present North Dakota, when, dressed in deer hide, he was shot by one of his own men while hunting. When he finally united with Clark, it was with the indignity of being confined to the boat with a wound through his rear.

This program is made possible by assistance from Humanities Montana.

About the Presenter

Dr. Hal Stearns has been honored as Montana's Teacher of the Year and Montana's Outstanding U.S. History Teacher.

He has led tours and lectured in over 40 states and five foreign countries.

He is a member of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Board and the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commission in Montana.

Dr. Stearns served his country as a Brigadier General in the Montana Army National Guard.



FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

Exciting news this month with our host organization, the Northwest Montana Historical Society. They officially kicked off the downtown Kalispell walking tour on Monday, June 5. The walking tour takes about 90 minutes and covers roughly a mile. The Museum has titled the tour “The Iron Horse Snorted in the Garden of Eden,” referencing the significant growth of Kalispell once the Great Northern Railway arrived.

The museum conducts the tour every Monday beginning at 10 a.m. starting and ending at the museum. Reservations can be made by calling 406-756-8381 or emailing donna@museum.nwmthistory.org. I am scheduled for the June 12th tour. Private group tours can be given depending on the availability of tour guides.

On a more somber note, longtime Posse member and volunteer Joan C. Monaghan passed away on May 3rd here in Kalispell. She was 81 years old. Many Posse members remember Joan running the book raffle table at meetings and volunteering for myriad of tasks associated with the club. Our sincere condolences go out to her partner of many years, Ron Beard.

We also lost a titan in education, leadership, and public service, Dr. Sheila Stearns on May 23rd at age 76. Sheila is the wife of this month's speaker Brigadier General Hal Stearns (USA Retired). Together they were awarded the Governor's Humanities Awards for their support of the Humanities throughout their careers in education in Montana in 2017. Sheila served throughout the University system and the Board of Regents – most recently as the interim President of the University of Montana, Missoula. Our thoughts and prayers go out to

her husband Hal and their entire family.

The Board is still accepting recommendations to rename the club. We will bring forward the recommendations at the July meeting for a vote. Once we have a new name then the Board will move forward with the administrative steps to implement the name at the August meeting. As discussed at the May meeting the intent is to maintain professional presentations and continue to grow the membership and guests.

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.



Members of the Posse were given a private tour of Hungry Horse Dam on May 19, courtesy of M'lissa Morgan, speaker at the March's Posse presentation.

Photo by Ed Byrne

FT. CONNAH RENDEZVOUS

- The Fort Connah Restoration Society holds its annual rendezvous, featuring living history demonstrations, on June 17-18, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. The 1847 Hudson's Bay Company's trading post is located six miles north of St. Ignatius and is considered the oldest existing building in Montana. The event is free to the public. Ph. 406-745-4336 for further information.

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.

The handicap ramp is on the north entrance of the museum, with direct access to the second floor by elevator

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

- **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 YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull



When you go to the Heritage Museum in Libby, you might as well plan on spending the day.

The museum has everything: wildlife and birds in natural settings, full-size mockups of a newspaper office, a typical pioneer home, a ranger station, not to mention two replica mines. Everything is covered, from Libby



A replica of a Kootenai tepee sided with rushes.



Kootenai River Sturgeon

Dam, the Christmas tree industry, early mining, the Kootenai tribe, lookouts, the first chainsaws, early washing machines and a collection of buttons. Upstairs is a display of extraordinary handcrafted quilts.

Even the unpleasant is presented – a display tells the story of the vermiculite mine that sickened the community with asbestos. It includes a computer station to hear the residents' personal stories about the aftermath with cancer and lung issues.



Paul Bunyan fry pan was once used for fund raisers.

Outside are multiple collections of farm, logging and mining equipment, as well as an old-time service station. Even the exterior of the 130-foot wide building is pressed into service to display various implements, including early lawn mowers.

The only thing missing is the Shay steam-powered logging locomotive, which is currently hidden away for restoration.



Outside display includes firetrucks and a lumber loader.

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And its all free. Admission is by donation.

The museum opened for the season on May 13. It is located U.S. 93 on the east entrance to Libby. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday 1-5 p.m.



Early fire equipment included this bucket brigade.



This outside display shows mining equipment in use.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



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

- The Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana, located just south of the Charlo turnoff on U.S. 93, resumes summer hours June 18. It is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$9, and \$8 for seniors and veterans, \$7 for students and \$5 for children.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Last month's question was: The life and death cycle of what tree is intimately tied to forest fires?

Michael Ober ventured it is the ponderosa pine, whose thick bark protects it from periodic ground fires that keep the competition in check.

But **Pat and Trish Walsh**, and **Barbara Boorman** correctly guessed the lodgepole pine. In most varieties, its tightly bound pine cones need fire to release the seeds. The tree becomes old and diseased at a relatively young age, setting itself up for a catastrophic fire.

I call it the Phoenix tree, after the mythological bird that rose from its ashes.

Locals recall the explosive fires in the North Fork in the 1980s. The regeneration is so effective that the tree can return as the dense "dog hair" stands that gave Lewis and Clark trouble at Lost Trail Pass.

This Month's Trivia Question

How and when did geographic features like Maria's River lose their apostrophe?

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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WHAT LEWIS AND CLARK MISSED AND WHY

By Rick Hull

In traveling around the state, I have cataloged what Lewis and Clark missed -- the lowest pass across the Continental Divide, or the wagon route that did an end run around the Rockies. But I now realize they were restrained by their mandate, hostile tribes and a basic misconception about travel on the Great Plains. And these geographic near misses remained essentially unlocated for decades after their return.

One problem was the expedition's chief goal. According to President Thomas Jefferson, it was to find "the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce."

It was a logical mandate. After all, that was how all of western Canada was traversed. Starting at the Grand Portage on Lake Superior, Hudsons Bay Company traders could carry trading goods and furs all through the network of rivers. And Canadian explorer Alexander Mackenzie, who reached the Pacific Ocean in 1793, made most of his journey by canoe, though it involved multiple portages through alpine lakes.

It was one reason Lewis and Clark ignored tribal advice to take the well-traveled "Road to the Buffalo" along the Blackfoot River, and instead canoed upstream to the far end of the Missouri, and then Jefferson, drainage.

But the Great Plains were not the muskeg swamps of Canada. The hard lesson was the mountains and semi-arid grasslands were made for horses, not boats.

One supposed misstep was when Meriwether Lewis came to within sight of Marias Pass, near East Glacier, in 1806. It is the lowest pass across the Rocky Mountains and was not officially discovered until 1889.



Oregon Trail and Snake River Plain

Credit - Adam Cuerden and U.S. National Archive

But it was also in the Blackfeet Nation's backyard. Canadian explorer David Thompson would travel 300 miles out of his way to avoid the tribe when traveling to Montana. And passes favorable for railroads and highway are not always suitable for wagons or horses. Local tribes crossed two mountain ranges to bypass the rough spots.

Lewis and Clark's biggest miss was not finding the Snake River Plain and South Pass.

The idea there was a practical wagon route across the mountains probably wasn't even on their minds. But, because of flukes of geology and geography, there was. It would become the Oregon Trail.

They came close to stumbling on the Snake River Plain. If they had gone up

Lemhi Creek after crossing the Continental Divide into southern Idaho, instead of downstream to the Salmon River, they would have found it. But their horses were in bad shape, and Lewis and Clark were not prepared to gamble on further exploration. Once they discovered the Salmon River was impassible, heading back over the mountains at Lost Trail Pass seemed a safer bet.

The other lost opportunity was if they had followed the Madison River, instead of the Jefferson River. Where the Madison veers into the mountains of Yellowstone Park, south of Ennis, is Reynolds Pass. Though higher than Logan Pass in Glacier National Park, it is a barely perceptible rise in terrain that connects with the Pacific-bound Henry's Fork of the Snake River.

The Snake River Plain is a volcanic anomaly that forms a crescent across southern Idaho, bypassing the crags of the Rocky Mountain chain. The feature stands out on satellite maps.

The bulk of this treeless plain is the result of a plume of molten rock poking through a weak spot in the Earth's crust. A chain of eruptions have occurred along it, each covering the path in lava. The volcano is presently under Yellowstone Park, and is headed northeast towards Billings. The movement is an illusion. It is really the North American Continent moving instead.

Originally the "hot spot" was thought to have its origin in the Columbia River basalt outflows of eastern Washington and Oregon. But now it has been tracked to the McDermitt volcanic of northwest Nevada. The western portion of the crescent-shaped Snake River Plain did originate in the Columbia Basin lava flows.

The real key to this route where the Continental Divide wanders across western Wyoming. At points the divide splits into two and leaves landlocked basins that drain to neither ocean. It is these splits that the Great Plains ties seamlessly into the Snake River Plain.

The discovery of South Pass was made in 1812 by a group of Americans from the Pacific Fur Company in Astoria, Oregon. They were trying to get back east to tell founder John Jacob Astor that his company ship had been seized by Indians and destroyed. It was a journey that went badly wrong, including near cannibalism.

It was what could have happened to Lewis and Clark with less discipline.

Led by 27-year-old Robert Stuart, the group went veered south along the Snake River, trying to avoid the Crow Indians. Often lost, their route took them through southern Idaho and western Idaho, sometime going hundreds of miles out of the way. In early October the Crows stole all their horses. Starving, they voted to eat an unpopular member until overruled by Stuart.

Local Indians had told them about the easy pass through the mountains. When they finally found it, they could not believe how flat it was.

But by now it was snowing, and they had to winter along the North Platte in Wyoming. Stuart finally made it to New York in April 1813 with his bad news for Astor.

The pass was essentially lost until rediscovered by mountain man Jed Fisher in 1832. It was not until 1832 that explorer Louis Bonneville took the first wagons across. The first migrants made the journey in 1836, and eventually 400,000 people used the route.

At 7,412 feet above sea level, the pass is the only practical wagon route in the 2,000 miles of the Rocky Mountains. The 35-mile pass leads across an arid landlocked basin, but is short enough and there is enough water for horses and oxen.

The Great Divide Basin directly south is a more direct route. But the lack of water made it impassible until the railroad and automobile arrived. The railroad mainline and Interstate 80 now take this southern route.

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month's issue. Copy received after that date will be held over until the subsequent issue.

The next edition of Pony Tracks will be issued July 10, 2023 (or thereabouts)

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