



# PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 10, No. 9

Kalispell, Montana

October 11, 2023

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## OCTOBER MEETING



**Monday, October 16, 2023**

**Topic: "Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies"**

**Presenter:** Posse member Darris Flanagan of Fortine, Montana

**Where:** Second floor of the Northwest Montana History Museum, 124 2nd Ave. East, Kalispell

**Time:** General membership meeting at 6 p.m., followed by Greet 'n' Gab, book raffle and book signings.

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

**Historic Presentation:** Program begins at 7:00 p.m. No reservations are required, but seating will be limited; so come early.

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

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86263483579?pwd=UkxOdC96ZWVzOUREREluaWIPTVZFUT09>

Meeting ID: : 862 6348 3579

Passcode: : 671506

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

## ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



In this month's presentation, local author and Posse member Darris Flanagan will explore how and where the Kootenai Indians crossed the Continental Divide to hunt buffalo on the Great Plains.

Starting from Flanagan's present home near Fortine in the Tobacco Valley, the Kootenai trekked across mountain passes labeled "challenging" in modern trail guides.

Cliffs on routes like Logan Pass required stationing men on individual ledges, who would boost the women and children to the next level.

Gentle routes, like Crowsnest Pass, located just north of the Canadian border, were avoided because of dense forests and deadfalls.

Marias Pass, on U.S. 2, was considered too far for foot traffic. It was only traversed in summer with horses, and the Kootenai's route included climbs over the crests of the Swan and Flathead ranges.

The tribe's historic route headed up Graves

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Creek, just south of the U.S.-Canadian border. It crossed the Whitefish Range and tied into aptly named Trail Creek on the North Fork side. From there the Kootenai scaled one of several alpine passes in present-day Canada.

Hunting buffalo meant dealing with the Blackfeet. The Kootenai camped on the open prairie, rather than sheltered river bottoms, so they could keep an eye out for raiding parties.

The Blackfeet envied the Kootenai, who were not dependent of the luck of the hunt. Even the bark of some trees was not only edible, but considered a seasonal delicacy, Flanagan notes.

The Blackfeet were 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.

The Kootenais are known for cultivating Indian tobacco, which gave the Tobacco Valley at Eureka and southern Canada its name.

Flanagan has also uncovered details of 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 surveys disagreed, and parallel tracks were cut.

### ***About the Presenter***

Darris grew up on a ranch near Eureka, and graduated from the University of Montana with a teaching degree in history. He taught in Fortine and Somers, and in Dayton near the present home of the Kootenai tribe.

He has authored 15 books on northwest Montana history. In 2018 he was awarded the Montana Keepers award by the Montana Historical Society. He is now chairman of the Tobacco Valley Museum.



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

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

The Fall harvest is winding down across the Valley. Farmers and gardeners alike have their crops in. People are busy baking, canning, and processing fruits and vegetables.

One of my new favorites is canned Plum Compote while enjoying the old standby Apple Butter. The recipes range from ones passed down over the generations to those brand-new ones we are trying for the first time.

As we close out the Northwest Posse of Westerner's ninth year, we are looking ahead to our 10-year anniversary in 2024. In conjunction with that, our parent organization, Westerners International has chosen for the first time to move the annual convention out of the southwest and come north. The 2024 convention will be hosted by our neighbors in South Dakota.

We are looking to do something special for our 10th anniversary – be it a special event outside of our regular meetings or a dinner during one meeting has yet to be decided.

The Posse is looking for members for an anniversary committee to chart, plan, and execute the event next year. The committee will meet in November following our last meeting this year for about 15 minutes to formulate a schedule to meet over the following two months.

The intent is to present their plan at the February meeting.

The Board meets from 6:00 - 6:30 p.m. before the 7 p.m. presentation at the museum. All members are welcome to attend to observe the meeting. Also, anyone interested in becoming more involved in the Posse is encouraged to volunteer.

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](mailto:edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com).

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## GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

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

Sessions begin with a board and general membership meeting at 6 p.m., followed by a Greet 'n' Gab 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 historic 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.

Contact Kathy at [kbrittonrn@gmail.com](mailto:kbrittonrn@gmail.com) with any questions .

## FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **November 20:**  
"The Battle of Butte "  
by Doug Ammons of Missoula

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



- **November 2:** History Book Club discusses *The Last Green Valley* by Mark Sullivan. 2 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum.

- **November 25:** Ninepipes Museum, located between Ronan and St. Ignatius, holds a gathering to thank the community for its support. The day includes stories, live music, authors and artists, and refreshments. Bring a non-perishable food item for the Ronan Bread Basket and receive a 50% discount on admission to the museum.

**M**embers aware of events are encouraged to contact Ye Editor with the particulars at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto:richardahull@charter.net)

## FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull



Though it has nothing to do with history, a hidden gem is stashed away in the northwest corner of Montana. The Ross Creek Cedars Scenic Area is just off the Bull Lake Road (Hwy. 56), which connects U.S. 2 near Troy with Hwy. 200 near Thompson Falls.

This 100-acre site is home to cedar trees a thousand years old. The trees occupy a moist pocket with its own ambiance.



Along with the cedars up to 175 feet tall and 12 feet wide are fallen trees with a spiderweb of roots, multiple-trunks with deep recesses and ornate burls, and a rich undergrowth of thimble berries, trillium, bright-yellow mushrooms and more.

Because of the subtle lighting under the trees, photographs don't do justice to the unique

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coloring. It is more of an artist's arena.

The forest is 18 miles south of U.S. 2 just past Bull Lake. A four-mile narrow, but paved road leads up to the parking area.

A self-guided nature trail winds through the forest.



The scenic forest makes a nice addition to a day trip to Kootenai Falls, which is nearby on U.S. 2 west of Libby.



## FROM THE BOOK SHELF

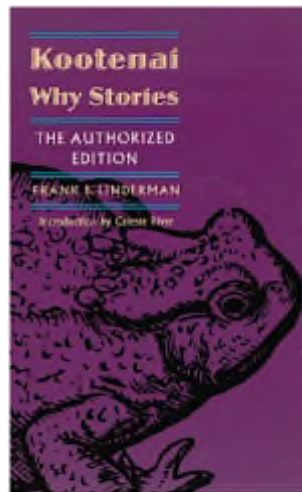
By Rick Hull

*Kootenai Why Stories* was a follow up to Kalispell author Frank Linderman's first book, *Indian Why Stories*. First published in 1926, *Kootenai Why Stories* joined a series of books that

established Linderman's legacy of preserving Native American lore.

The retelling of Kootenai stories, and his friendship with storyteller Two-comes-over-the-hill is interesting, since Linderman had a showdown with some Kootenais after they stole his horses.

The book's preface contains observations about the Kootenais. Fur



trappers told him their name means “flat-bow people”. And he says the Flatheads called them “Cus-sun-ga” or Standing Arrow. That is still the name of Kootenai's annual pow-wow.

He is critical of their boat building, stating, “his bark canoe is anything but beautiful,” and “His dugouts are no better.” Their traditional enemies, the Blackfeet, referred to them as “fish-eaters”, he says, and the frog is often a leading character in their stories.

The book's chapters are mostly “why” stories, such as why the coyote's arms are thin, why the chipmunk has stripes or the moose's nose is flat. The tales rarely have moral lessons, unlike *Indian Why Stories*. The frog, for example, wins a race against the antelope by an elaborate cheating scheme. “Oh, I am not so very fast at running,” explains the frog, but “I am a pretty fast thinker, you will find.”

Overall, the stories are well told and a pleasant experience for readers of all ages.

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Bison Books, Paperback, 173 pages, \$15.95  
Also available on-line at [archive.org](http://archive.org).

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## TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Last month's question was about Canada, which was not assembled into a self-governing country until 1870. What was a big complication?

The unresolved issue was, under a 1670 royal charter, Hudson Bay's Company owned nearly half of present-day Canada. The British paid the company \$1.5 million in 1869 to give up its claims.

Also known as Rupert's Land, the former company land, along with British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, were added to the Atlantic provinces to create modern Canada.

### *This Month's Trivia Question*


There are several historic graves and at least

one other Graves Creek in the forests of northwest Montana. What grave, important to the Kootenai tribe, gave Graves Creek near Fortine its 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.

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## THE OTHER PASS How Canada's Transcontinental Railroad Pierced the Rockies

By Rick Hull

Marias Pass, on the south edge of Glacier National Park, is the lowest pass over the Continental Divide in the United States. At 5,215 feet, it is just shy of a mile above sea level. But just north of Glacier Park in Canada is Crowsnest Pass, which is nearly 800 feet lower.

And the passes get lower further north, despite being surrounded by some of the highest mountains in the North American Rockies. The lowest is Monkman Pass at 3,550 feet, followed by Yellowhead Pass at 3,717 feet.



An early passenger train climbs over itself in the lower tunnel.

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However the route chosen by the Canadian Pacific Railway is Kicking Horse Pass, a steep and difficult pass eventually tamed by a pair of spiral tunnels.

The choice of Kicking Horse was driven in part by a fear of the United States. And it reflected the geographic restraints imposed by the decision to extend the U.S.-Canadian border along the 49th parallel.

There was also a Rogers Pass involved, though not the one near Lincoln, Montana. But it was named after the same Rogers.

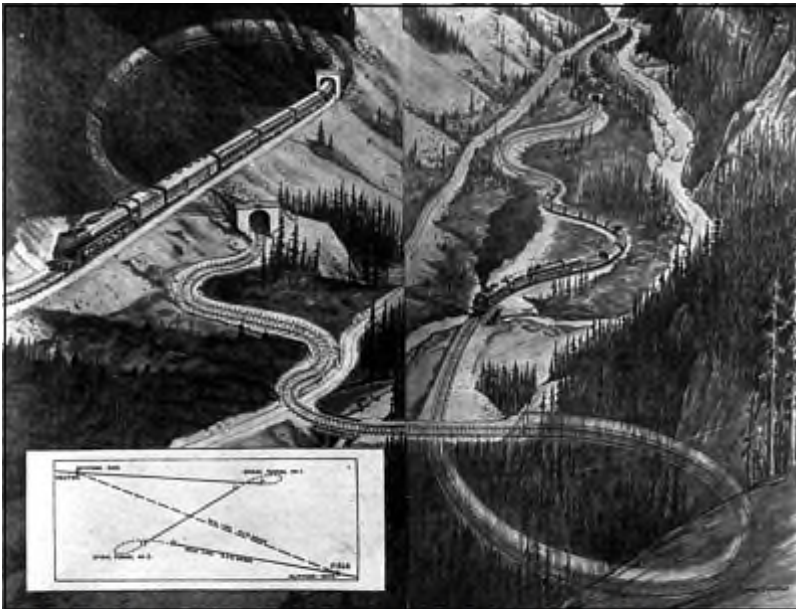
The logical route was Crowsnest Pass, just northeast of Eureka, Montana, and a railroad route was surveyed through the pass in 1881. But there was concern that the United States could push its border north, and the Canadian Pacific's charter specifically forbid a route within 50 miles of the border. Jim Hill's railroad, later known as the Great Northern Railway, was already stealing traffic in southern Saskatchewan, and had its sights on the Wild Horse Creek mines of southeast British Columbia.

The other problem was that the extension of the border along the 49th parallel had cut off the easy routes to the Pacific, leaving the Canadians to cope with the multiple mountain ranges of southern British Columbia.

Yellowhead Pass in the present Jasper National Park was the next choice. But it was considered to be too far north, above the more productive areas of Alberta.

Kicking Horse was the final pick. The pass would connect the fertile farmland around Calgary with the headwaters of the Columbia River.

The pass had been discovered in 1858 in a near disastrous expedition by a group of Banff tourists, in which the leader was severely kicked by his horse.



**The spiral tunnels are embeded in both sides of the valley.**

But crossing the Continental Divide was only half the issue. Since a route down the Columbia River valley and across Washington State was off limits, a way had to be found west through the 80-mile barrier of the Selkirk mountain range.

Major A.B. Rogers was hired in 1881 to locate this second half. He tackled the Selkirk mountains from the west side, but had to retreat after running out of supplies at the summit. In 1883 he tried from the east, and succeeded in determining a practical route. In 1887 Rogers went on to survey Rogers Pass in Montana as a possible route for the Great Northern Railway.

On November 7, 1885, the last spike of the Canadian transcontinental railroad was driven home. An iron spike was used – Canadian Pacific officials thought the gold and silver spikes used in ceremonies by other railroads brought bad luck.

However the grade was a wicked 4.5%.

A rise of 2%, or two feet per 100 feet, is usually considered the limit. The tracks at Marias Pass climb 1.8% in the final ascent to the summit and even that requires helper engines.

The first train up the Kicking Horse Pass derailed, killing three railroad workers. To catch runaway

trains, three spur lines were added. The switches into the spurs were kept open until it was clear the descending train was under control. Trains heading uphill struggled with extra locomotives.

The solution to the steep grade was based on a system pioneered in Switzerland. In 1909 two spiral tunnels were dug in the opposite mountain sides.

The lower spiral extends for 0.6 miles through Mt. Ogden, raising the train 50 feet. Locomotive exit the tunnel while the rear of the train is still entering the far end. The tracks then cross to the other side of the valley and enter a similar spiral tunnel in Cathedral Mountain, rising 56 feet.

The result was a more reasonable grade of 2.2%.

The prohibition on running the Canadian Pacific near the U.S. border was lifted in 1899, and a branch line now runs across Crowsnest Pass.

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The next edition of Pony Tracks will be issued November 14, 2023 (or thereabouts)

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