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THE BITTERROOT COMPASS

Spring 2004



"St. Mary's, or Bitter Root Valley, is one of the finest in the mountains, presenting throughout its whole extent of about 200 miles, numerous grazing, but few arable tracts of land. Irrigation, either by natural or artificial means, is absolutely necessary to the cultivation of the soil..."

-Father DeSmet, 1846 "black robe" and one of the first white inhabitants of the Bitterroot.

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Ootlashoot

Beginning in the high mountains of western Montana and flowing through the valley that bears its name, is the Bitterroot River. Ootlashoot, as it was known to the Salish Indians can be translated as *Spitlem seukn* or "waters of the bitter root".

The River is such a vital part of Valley life that much could be written about its importance. Foremost, is the River's gift of irrigation water - water that is used to steward thousands of acres of hay crops for the cattle herds and horses that drive the agricultural lifestyle still enjoyed here. The Bitterroot River begins high in the mountains and has two major forks. The West Fork of the River flows east from the Montana-Idaho border past Indian petroglyphs and Painted Rocks Reservoir. The East Fork flows west from the Anaconda Pintlar Wilderness through the meadows near the settlement of Sula. Many of the areas along the River are steeped in historic significance as places where Lewis and Clark found Sacagawea's tribe members and early settlers camped and later settled. Stevensville, which is about mid-Valley, was the first white settlement in all of Montana.

The River is very recreation friendly thanks to Montana Stream Access Laws which allow the public access along the high water mark of

all navigable waterways. Much of the River is bordered by Forest Service roadways making it easy to fish or picnic without a guide or craft. Fly fishing is a way of life in the Bitterroot, the language of which is understood by almost everyone. The local newspaper reports the water levels, the hatch, and the latest on fishing activity as a regular feature.

The Bitterroot River can't be classified as whitewater when compared to the neighboring Lochsa or the Middle Fork of the Salmon. The many braided channels and the deadfall of cottonwoods can, however, make the River dangerous. It is wise to check with one of the fly shops or sporting good stores before going rafting to make sure that the River is navigable. Life preservers are required for everyone by Montana Fish and Game. There are many shuttle services for the recreationists in the Valley at a reasonable fee.

The beauty of the River defines the Valley life. It winds its way through irrigated hayfields in the shadows of the towering peaks of the Bitterroot Range. Only one of five rivers in North American that flows north, Ootlashoot is considered to be headwaters of the Columbia River system. It is a river that is to easy love and hard to leave and blue...like the Montana sky. ☀

Spring in the Bitterroot

Spring time in the Bitterroot is heralded by the birds that can be heard and seen all around the Valley. Robins, Killdeer, Meadowlark and Red Wing Black birds announce the arrival of Spring time in Montana. The diversity of bird populations is amazing. Several species are year-round residents, such as the Red Wing Blackbird, and many are here for specific seasons, such as the Tree Swallow.

There are several habitats in the Valley that feature various birds. For example, along the Bitterroot River, Birds of Prey such as Bald Eagles and Osprey can be seen hunting, while various woodpecker species, warblers and sparrows share the same space. Besides the Bitterroot River habitat, there are about 8 other habitats including wetlands and marshes, open grass and shrubs, mountain streams and lakes, forest edges and high elevation forest and alpine areas. Bird watching is an excellent family activity that can be shared by all members. The U.S. Forest Service has an excellent pamphlet regarding the birds of the Bitterroot. Pick one up at the many Forest Service locations throughout the Valley.

The other herald of the season enjoyed by many, is the abundance of wildflowers that can be seen almost everywhere. Lupine, Paintbrush, Columbine, Arrow leaf Balsam, Pasque, Trillium, Buttercup and Glacier Lilies add color and new life to the Valley. Their fragrances and captivating beauty and simplicity are wonderful gems for all to enjoy. The wildflowers' natural beauty is awe inspiring for all and another reason we all love to live here.

Like the birds of the Bitterroot, wildflowers can be found in several different habitats. Along the Blodgett Overlook Trail, several species of native and introduced wildflowers such as wild strawberry, starflower and wild hyacinth can be seen and enjoyed. Take notice of the different species of wildflowers in various habitats throughout the Valley. St. Mary's Road, Lost Horse Road and Roaring Lion Road are great viewing areas for various wildflowers. Please contact the U.S. Forest Service for informative

Mountain Eats

Fried Trout

Contributed by: Carole Anne Lozinski—Administrative Assistant

- 4 Trout filets (2 big filets cut in half)
- 1 cup Flour
- 1/2 cup Cornmeal
- Season Mix— 1 teaspoon each: Garlic salt, Onion salt, Paprika, Black pepper
- Canola Oil for frying

Clean and rinse trout filets under ice water. Slightly towel dry. Coat filets in flour, cornmeal and season mix. Fry filets in oil. Cook filets for about 2 - 4minutes per side. Serve with pasta, wild rice or anything else that sounds yummy. Great for breakfast too, with huckleberry pancakes. ☀



Bitterroot Flora

The Bitterroot Flower

To be designated as the State Flower in the “Treasure State” speaks volumes about the small delicate blossom that grows close to the ground. A perennial, the Bitterroot has an exquisite blossom that varies in color from white to shades of deep pink. The flowers grow from the root as do the leaves. The leaves begin to wither before the flower emerges giving the impression that these flowers have no life supportive leaves. The plant thrives on well drained dry exposed areas, often on rocky soil.

Prized by the Flathead and Salish Indians as a nutritious supplement to their wild game diet, one ounce of dried Bitterroots provided enough nourishment for a meal. When pulverized and mixed with deer fat and moss, the cooked root could be molded into patties and carried on hunting expeditions or war parties. The Bitterroot was harvested by trenching a hole and lifting the entire plant from the hole. The natives broke a section of the root off, stripped the exterior skin from the root and then discarded the root skin back into the hole to grow again. Cleaned and dried, the root was a valued trading and barter item.



A sack of dried Bitterroots could be traded for a horse.

Lewisa rediviva is included in the journals of Lewis and Clark. Lewis found that the root of the plant was quite bitter for his taste but noted that the Shoshone “ate them heartily”. Lewis pressed, dried and shipped the flower described as “other uncommon plant specimens”. The Bitterroots traveled over 3,000 miles prior to being delivered to botanists Bernard McMahon and Frederick Pursh. McMahon noticed new growth on the well traveled plants. The name *rediviva* refers to the plants amazing ability to revive after being dried for many years; *rediviva* is defined in Webster's Dictionary as “living again.” ☀

pamphlets on the various species of plants that can be found here in the Valley.

The Bitterroot Valley is a fabulous place to come and explore nature's beauty. New calves, foals and lambs dominate the fields, while the snow covered mountains

accent the blue sky and captivating green meadows. May it be the birds or wildflowers, or even the regeneration of life caused by this season of rebirth and change, there is something special and unique about Spring in the Bitterroot. ☀

BITTERROOT 101

'Tis the Season...the Irrigation Season

Spring time brings many things to our beautiful Bitterroot Valley, including the rush to get ready for the approaching irrigation season. With our semi-arid climate (the Valley receives only 13 inches of moisture annually), residents cannot credit their green lawns and fields, flowers, shade trees and vegetable gardens to the occasional rain shower. Irrigation is what keeps our Valley growing, and without it, our Valley would certainly be a different place!

Montana's first-known irrigation system was developed here in the 1840's, and the state's first-ever water right was filed in Stevensville in 1852. More claims for water followed on a first come, first serve basis that has historically prioritized water rights and water use out of creeks to this day. The demand for water increased dramatically with new settlement in the Valley. To meet the soaring need, farmers started diverting more and more water from creeks on the west side of the valley. By the turn of the century, 75 dams had been constructed at high elevations to store critical snowmelt and stretch-out the irrigation season for as long as possible. Claims for water are currently under review, or adjudication, by the State of Montana to ensure their validity and accuracy.

Around the same time, irrigation on the east side of the Valley increased with the construction of the "Big Ditch". The ditch runs a 75-mile northerly course on the east side of the Valley, originating from Lake Como (a popular reservoir south of Hamilton developed to supply water into the ditch) and irrigates about 17,000 acres. The Bitterroot Irrigation District (BRID) manages the water in the ditch, supplying 1,200 users. There are numerous other ditches and ditch companies that supply water throughout the Valley. Fees for this water use generally appear as water shares or inches of water on a property owner's tax statement.

'Wondering if you have a water right or share that allows you to irrigate on your property? There are several sources you can check, but the easiest one is logging on to a web site maintained by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) at www.dnrc.state.mt.us. The transfer of an existing water right should be a part of the sale or purchase of your property. The amount of water allowed, the point of diversion, and the method of irrigation are all specified. Should you be one of the fortunate who has a water right, the irrigation season usually begins the middle of April and ends the middle of September, depending on water supply. Irrigation wells also supply water to many properties where water rights from creeks and ditches don't apply.

So, clean those ditches, set those lines and prime your pump for yet another irrigation season that will bring bounty to the Bitterroot! Have a wonderful Spring and Summer! ☀

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PONDS, SPRINGS AND WELLS

There are some areas in the Bitterroot Valley that seem just right for a new pond. In 2001, however, the Bitterroot Basin was closed to new surface water ponds in response to a concern over future unregulated development. Montana law now prohibits any new pond construction or alteration of a creek without a permit. The permit is commonly referred to as a 310 permit. The purpose is to insure that the creeks and streams are not damaged and that irrigation practices and historic diversions are not altered. Ground water development may also require review and permitting. Domestic wells require a permit prior to drilling at a cost of \$15.00 and are not currently under restriction. Permitting is done primarily to make sure that the well is located 100 feet or more from any septic system or safety concern. The Bitterroot Valley is blessed with clean drinking water and private wells with good production. The Bitter Root Water Forum has a pamphlet regarding watershed information, see brwaterforum@bitterroot.net.



"New Bitterrooters" Ray and Jan Novak

"We found the Bitterroot Valley researching property on the Internet. We came from Chicago and found the friendly, welcoming residents of the Valley to be the most surprising thing. We love the views, the quiet and the wildlife of the Totem Peaks area, where we have bought bare land to build on. The perfect day in the Valley for us is to enjoy the wildlife, the views and imagining our future log home on our property and then taking a hike on Bear Creek Trail." ☀



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Montana Statistics

Things to Know and Forget

Montana's average elevation is 3,400 feet, the lowest of all mountainous states.

The University of Montana's School of Journalism has produced seven Pulitzer Prize winners.

Deer are the most commonly hunted big game animals, with about 89,000 taken each year.

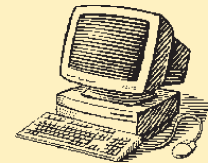
It is estimated that 30 to 60 million bison roamed the American West in 1864.

The average price for an acre of land purchased in The Louisiana Purchase was \$35 per acre.

The top awarded selling agent in the Bitterroot Valley for the past 6 years.



Jan King, Kathie and Carole Anne



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