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# THE BITTERROOT COMPASS

Fall 2003

## Wapiti

‘Wapiti’ is the name that Native Americans of the Shawnee tribe gave to the majestic animal that we call the elk. The Shawnee depended on the elk not only as a food supply, but also used the hide for clothing and the antlers for tools. Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery noted in their journals that elk was their meat of choice as they traveled through the uncharted territory of the Northwest. They also discovered that elk hide was ideal for making moccasins and they made multiple pairs per week for their arduous journey West and back again.

Modern Montana natives also need elk, maybe not for sustenance or clothing; though many people do hunt to fill the family freezer, but more as a symbol that all is well in the American West today. Elk are good barometers of environmental conditions. They need what we all know is good for humans too: fresh air, clean water, a healthy place to raise our young and space to roam!

Elk are able to adapt to the presence of humans as many people in the Bitterroot Valley know. It is not uncommon for people living in the west foothills of the Bitterroot Mountains or on the eastern slopes of the Sapphire Mountains to see elk in their pastures feeding with their cattle or horses. Elk can be seen from Highway 93 traveling through the Bitterroot Valley, grazing in herds on open ranchland. A site such as this always fills the viewer with a sense of awe... and the first time one hears an elk bugle in the wild it makes their hair



stand up! They are one of the Maker’s finest creatures.

Elk are quite large—much bigger than deer. An elk calf weighs about 35 pounds at birth, gaining two pounds a day for the first few weeks of its life on the rich milk provided by its mother. A cow elk may weigh more than 500 pounds and stand 4.5 feet at the shoulder and measure 6.5 feet from nose to rump, while a bull elk weighs 700 pounds and stands 5 feet at the shoulder and measures more than 8 feet from nose to rump. These are conservative averages and the hunt for the biggest bull with the biggest rack of antlers is a lifetime pursuit for many hunters and photographers in the United States.

Their rumps, by the way, are white in contrast to their brown and tan bodies. The Native American Shawnee name Wapiti means ‘white rump’. North America is fortunate to have such a majestic animal roaming our mountains and plains. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, which began in Montana, has a wonderful and informative visitor’s center in Missoula. Their website is full of wonderful photos and can be found at [www.rmef.org](http://www.rmef.org). ☀



*“It seems to me that Montana is a great splash of grandeur. The scale is huge but not overpowering. The land is rich with grass and color and the mountains are the kind that I would create if mountains were ever put on my agenda. Montana has a spell on me.”*

— John Steinbeck

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*Thanks to Rhonda Johnson for her help with this newsletter!*

## Seasonal Chore List

Fall in Montana is a beautiful time of year with crisp mornings, warm days, stunning colors and a sense of change in the air. The busy summer schedule starts to give way to U. of M. football games, slow cooked pot roast in the oven and the beginnings of preparation for winter. The first snow in Montana can “surprise” you at anytime in the fall. Sometimes a sneak attack happens early; you wake up and the air smells different-SNOW! It doesn’t mean the snow will stay; it could be gone by noon or stay a day or two, but it definitely makes you think about preparing for winter in Montana.

Winter begins in the Bitterroot after Thanksgiving sometime. Fall is a good time to check wood burning stoves and fireplaces. Birds or creosote buildup can be the cause of a chimney fire if not cleaned out properly. Many people clean their own chimneys with brushes that they have purchased or rented, others opt to hire someone to clean their chimney.

Cutting firewood on public land is allowable with a permit from the U.S. Forest Service for the nominal fee of \$6.00. Many areas have good roads and often the Forest Service will provide a map and direct firewood cutters to areas that need clean up. Families consider firewood gathering an outing complete with a picnic lunch, creek fishing, and the opportunity to enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of Montana in the fall.

It may be easier to purchase a load of firewood from a commercial cutter. The price for a cord of firewood measuring four feet by four feet by eight feet can vary. If the wood is split for fireplace size and delivered and stacked it will be more than if it is loaded into a truck at a storage yard and then split and stacked by the purchaser. Generally, however, the price for good dry firewood ranges from \$80.00 to \$100.00. Wood species include tamarack, fir, spruce, and pine listed in the order of desirability and BTU rating. Cedar is prohibited from cutting in most areas of western Montana.

Some homeowners use wood as the sole source of heating but it is more common to see homes heated primarily with natural gas, propane, or electricity. A newer well insulated home in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana has an average winter monthly utility bill of approximately \$200.00.

Nothing can replace the warmth and comfort of a wood stove or a crackling fire in the fireplace on a chilly evening. Most of the time watching the fire with a good book beats television every time. ✨

## Mountain Eats

### Venison Carbonnade

Warm and hearty for cool fall evenings

*Contributed by Kathie Butts, Transaction Manager, King Real Estate*

- 4 bacon slices, finely diced
- 2 1/2 pounds venison roast, steak, loin or chops cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 4 cups thinly sliced onion (about 3 medium)
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 (10 1/2 -ounce) can beef broth or vegetable broth no added salt
- 1 (12-ounce) can light beer
- 1 bay leaf
- 6 cups cooked medium egg noodles (about 1 (12 ounce) package)

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Cook bacon slices in a large Dutch oven over medium heat until crisp, remove bacon with a slotted spoon, reserving drippings in pan. Set bacon aside. Add venison, salt and pepper to drippings in pan; cook 5 minutes, browning venison well on all sides. Add garlic, cook 30 seconds. Remove venison from pan with a slotted spoon; set aside. Add sliced onion to pan; cover and cook over medium heat 10 minutes; stirring occasionally. Stir in flour, and cook 2 minutes. Add vinegar and the next 5 ingredients (vinegar through bay leaf), and bring to a boil. Return bacon and venison to pan. Cover and bake at 325 degrees for 2 hours or until venison is tender, and discard the bay leaf. Serve over noodles. Can also be done in the crock pot. Recipe freezes well to be used at another time. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 cup venison mixture and 1 cup noodles). ✨



## Bitterroot Flora

### Western Larch—Tamarack

The unusual tamarack is listed in most botanical indexes as *Larix occidentalis*-larch. This conifer has drooping branches with soft needle tufts that turn brilliant yellow and orange in the Fall. The color rivals even the aspen against a dark background of firs and pines. Tamaracks favor the moisture of the northern slopes at high elevations. They tower over sixty feet at maturity and provide excellent habitat for woodland birds. Plan a drive along the high roads in the mountains in the Fall to enjoy the tapestry of color that the forest offers for all that venture high. ✨



*Photo by Suzi Bishop*



## BITTERROOT 101



### The History of Orchard Tracts

In the early 1900's Sam Dinsmore, a local grower, had a vision of a great reservoir at Lake Como and a ditch system that stretched 75 miles from the mountains to Eight Mile Creek in Florence. Chicago bankers funded the project which, when completed, made it clear to developers that there was opportunity to profit by offering the newly irrigated land in what they called 'orchard tracts'. The 10 acre rectangular plots of land were promoted as an opportunity to make a fortune in the Bitterroot Valley growing apples. Nearly 1,200 irrigators planted and grew the Bitterroot Macintosh apple, known nationwide for its lovely red color, crisp texture and delectable flavor.

Families from other parts of the country and immigrants from Europe relocated to the Bitterroot Valley. Nearly 45% of all land subdivision before 1973 took place during the era between 1907 and 1914. Settlers came to create orchards, establish homes and become part of the unique fabric of the community.

The 'Big Ditch', as it was called, still remains a marvel of engineering as it delivers water to land now more commonly used for hay, horses, and cattle. The apple orchards are remembered only in annual celebrations. Washington state's fertile soil and shipping advantages won out in the world marketplace.

Today, the Big Ditch project and other ditch systems continue to transform land that was once covered with sage and timber at an affordable cost. Westerners are envious of acres of green pasture land full of healthy stock and tall haystacks even in the late summer months while other regions are dry and unproductive.

### Bitterroot Macintosh

Many surviving apple trees can be found beside homes, the edges of fields, and even in the wooded foothills on the Westside within what is now U.S. Forest Service Land. If the trees have had care over the years, they still produce the best tasting apples in the world, the Bitterroot Valley Macintosh. A few active orchards are located in Corvallis on the east side of the Valley. They produce fine apples and cider that can be purchased directly from the grower. The Ravalli County Museum hosts an annual fundraiser called Apple Days in September, a tribute to the early orchard pioneers. Homemade apple pies, apple butter cooked over an open fire and freshly pressed cider and juice can be enjoyed while listening to local musicians entertain the crowd. The pioneers provided the hard work and vision that we now enjoy in abundance. ☀

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When viewing a Bitterroot neighborhood one should not assume that the open fields of hay, pastures with strong horses and healthy cattle grazing, and the rows of apple trees under irrigation will be the view forever. The underlying title on such land may reveal that the 100 acre ranch is really Lot 1 through 10 of Block 6 Ravalli Farms—a "subdivision" that was created many years ago for the Apple Boom in the early 1900's. The land will not need to go through any subdivision review, neighborhood comment, or public notice in order to be sold as individual tracts of land. It may or may not be subject to any zoning or private covenants. Ask your real estate representative for further information.

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### "New Bitterrooters" Rick & Joani Cornell

"We found the Bitterroot while driving from Washington state hauling horses back to Wisconsin. We moved here in 2001 and now live at the end of a country road with fabulous mountain views and acreage. We love that we feel accepted for being who we are by our neighbors who were born and raised here. Our favorite places are Coyote Butte, Calf Creek, and Camas Creek. We're self employed now and have time for new friends and the outdoor activities we enjoy." ☀



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### Montana Statistics

Things to Know and Forget

Corvallis was named after two French words, coeur meaning "heart" and vale'e meaning "valley."

Montana has over 300 public access fishing sites that the Dept. of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks administer.

Throughout the state of Montana, there are 14,663 miles of marked hiking trails.

The Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen, a local chapter of a large state and national organization, is dedicated to protecting the right to use horses on Federal and State land.

In Hamilton in the late 1800's, Anaconda Mining Company founder Marcus Daly built Riverside, the largest house in Montana, which included 25 bedrooms and 15 bathrooms.

The Bitterroot Valley is part of the "Banana Belt," named for its mild climate.

If Montana's 3,442,416 acres of federally designated wilderness areas were put together, the area would equal the size of the state of Connecticut.



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

Jan King, Kathie and Carole Anne



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A GUIDE TO MOUNTAIN REAL ESTATE