



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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JULY MEETING

Monday, July 21, 2025

"Glacier Park's Iconic Red Buses"

Presenter: Ray Djuff of Calgary, Alberta

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

Time: Gab 'n' Greet, raffle sales and book sales and signing by Djuff start at 6:00 p.m. Soft drinks, beer and wine will be available.

Historic Presentation: 7:00 p.m.
No reservations are required, but seating will be limited; so come early. Call 406-309-0938 with questions.



Bus 111 at Wild Goose Island viewpoint in 1949

"It was a surprisingly close call that all came down to vehicle suspension," Djuff said.

With their bright red bodies and roll-back canvas tops, they were versions of a model first used in Yellowstone Park in 1931. Eventually seven national parks featured the distinctive White 706 tour buses.

Though hard to imagine the park without its Red Buses, it was no sure thing as time passed. Known as Jammers for their stubborn manual transmission, the buses accumulated an estimated 600,000 miles each by 1999, and there was a plan to permanently retire the fleet. The other parks had already sidelined their buses in the 1960s over maintenance costs.

Djuff will look at how Glacier Park's buses survived, why they reached iconic status, and what their design had to do with it. A 2000-2002 renovation, donated in part by Ford Motor

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

Calgary author Ray Djuff relates the story of Glacier National Park's famous Red "Jammer" Buses at this month's meeting of the Westerners.

Djuff notes that the tour buses started hauling visitors in 1936, just three years after completion of Going-to-the-Sun road.

Glacier Park Transport Company president Howard Hays had looked at offerings from Ford, GMC and REO, before purchasing thirty-five Model 706 buses from the White Motor Company.

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Company, fitted the traditional bodies on new frames, with new engines and automatic transmissions. Another overhaul is in the works.



Buses at Logan Pass in 1949 - Walt Dyke photo

About the Presenter

Djuff is a noted history writer and author with more than a dozen book about Glacier National Park and its cross-border sibling, Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta. Along with his book on the buses, *Glacier's Reds*, are *Glacier's Historic Hotels and Chalets: View With a Room,* and *High on a Windy Hill, The Story of the Prince of Wales Hotel.*



This is the third visit for Djuff. In 2015 he covered the early history of Many Glacier Hotel on the eve of its centennial and in 2019 he talked about how Great Northern Railway's Louis Hill manipulated the media in promoting the park.



FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

Summer is here and with it comes the height of tourism season in the Flathead. As the tourists grow in numbers and become more astute to our hidden treasures, be it the North Fork with Bowman and Kintla Lakes, the Jewel Basin, Holland Lake Falls, or a myriad of other locations that social media and the States tourism machine now highlights in addition to Glacier Park, Flathead Lake and Whitefish.

These pressures on our own backyard affords us to go beyond our Northwest Montana boundaries and see the spectacular, albeit less traveled locations around the Big Sky.

From a historical perspective Montana offers museums, battlefields, state parks, ghost towns and so much more. Favorites of mine include Pompey's Pillar, Virginia City, Garnet Ghost Town, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, and the new (almost completed) Montana Historical Societies Heritage Center in Helena. Note: The center is scheduled to be complete and fully opened December 2, 2025.

If you have the time and inclination to take three days this Summer. visit Great Falls (C.M. Russell Museum, Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, the namesake falls of the city), Fort Benton with its quaint historical charm; and Helena (the Capitol complex, the Montana Heritage Center, Last Chance Gulch, and so much more).

As for the wife and I, we are splitting the Summer between travels and the garden at home. We just returned from a day trip to St. Regis by way of Paradise and Quinn's Hot Springs for lunch. Last week was several days in Helena. Now its back to the garden and picking raspberries, strawberries and peas before our next adventure.

The Board meets from 6:00 – 6:30 p.m. before

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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 with the group is encouraged to show up early and volunteer your time and services.

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 THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull



The former Rexford general store is today's museum.

When Libby Dam was completed in the 1970s, the former riverside town of Rexford was relocated up to the shore of the new reservoir.

However the town's former railroad depot, general store and church were all moved to a park at the entrance to Eureka. Over the years more buildings were added, including a schoolhouse, library, log house, ranger cabin, caboose and fire lookout tower. The result is the Tobacco Valley Historical Village.

The key is the former Fewkes General Store, which is now the museum. Inside are numerous donated items, including a wooden clothes washer with colloquial instructions, a pair of bullets that

fused when two hunters shot a deer at the same time, period clothing and more. A selection of books by popular Eureka historian Darris Flanagan, a regular speaker before the Westerners, are also available.



Vintage cooking supplies donated to the museum.

The museum is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free, but you will be encouraged to sign the log book. The village buildings are open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



The classroom in the former Iowa Flats School.

While you are there, take the neighboring Riverwalk along the Tobacco River. Along with exercise machine stations, the paved trail has displays telling of Eureka's boom and bust history. Who would think making mucic acid from stumps would support a town.

Eureka is a short drive, in Montana terms, and can be made a day trip by continuing along lake Kooconusa and back through Libby.

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FUTURE PROGRAMS

Below is the tentative schedule for the remainder of the year. We appreciate suggestions about topics and possible speakers.

- **August 18:** "The Bair Family of Martinsdale" by John Shontz of Helena.
- **September 15:** "The Swan Valley Massacre" by Rick Hull of Kalispell.
- **October 20:** "Fifty years of the Alert Helicopter" by Bob Sandman of Kalispell.
- **November 17:** "Why the Railroad Left Kalispell" by Jacob Thomas of Kalispell.

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

Northwest Montana Westerners meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January, at the Northwest Montana History Museum at 124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, Montana.

Meetings begin with a Gab 'n' Greet session from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. for a chance to get acquainted. The speakers often have their books for sale.

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. Soft drinks, beer and wine will be on sale by museum staff.



TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Pat Walsh, Scott Tanner and Laura Rowntree knew that "O-Mok-See" is the Blackfeet name for "games on horses" that are still practiced in community arenas across Montana.

This Month's Trivia Question

This month's question is carefully written to avoid a Google shortcut.

In a story I covered for the newspaper in the 1980s, the Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality announced it was tired of delays by the Great Northern Railway over the clean up of the Somer's railroad tie plant, and it was going to court. However it accidentally sued a National Park concessionaire based in Arizona.

The question is - why the confusion?

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

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The next issue of Pony Tracks will be emailed on August 13 (or thereabouts).

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