

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT PETTY CREEK?  
LEO T. KINNEY'S VERSION.

I am going to write about the Petty Creek area which lies between the Clarks Fork River on the north then ties into the Graves creek on the south. It is a small area as the overall country goes. The mouth of the creek is about two miles east of Alberton, a small town located thirty miles west of Missoula, Mt.

The drainage is about sixteen to twenty miles long and is mostly a canyon with room for a road except for a few areas that widen out allowing room for two ranches and some bench areas.

A present day drive (1980) would let you see a road with a small creek running along side, some virgin timber, some logged over area, new houses going up in some areas that have been subdivided, some hay meadows, various types of livestock, some beautiful scenery, several side roads that will take you up to the high country on each side of the canyon or the main road that will take you across the Wagonmountain road and on down to the Lewis & Clark highway that runs up Lolo creek and over to Idaho. The chances of seeing wild game is rather small now but at one time it had lots of game and a short drive in the evening would allow you to feast your eyes on quite a collection of game which will be enlarged on later in this story.

Your first thought would no doubt be what is there to see around here and how could there be any history connected to an area like this. I hope as this writing goes on you will be able to see into the past and realize that there has been history made here and I hope this will prompt other people to write about other areas so their history won't be lost. The majority of what will be written here is fact altho dates mentioned and possilby some of the names of people may be in error altho I will try to come as close as possible and beg your indulgence..

First let us go back a lot more years than I can remember to a time which Geologists and ancient books mention about a river, possibly the Bitterroot, flowing into the upper Petty creek area then up the Westfork and over into Sawmill drainage and on west from there. I can't say this is a fact but you can go on the top of some of the high ridges and find water tumbled gravel so there was water running through there at one time.

Also, in the early days there was an Indian trail that forded the river near Frenchtown then up Albert drainage and onto the Petty creek side of Petty Mtn. area eventually coming to the pass where the present road crosses the wagon mountain area. This trail was supposedly used by white men in later years and there are reports that road agents and outlaws used it as a getaway route. (Here is your chance treasure seekers, maybe there is loot buried along this trail somewhere.) Also near where this trail crossed the East fork creek when three of us were coming down a bench we saw what appeared to be five graves marked by large flat rocks which were foreign to that area so would have to have been carried in from somewhere else. These markers were at least five feet long, eighteen inches wide and three to four inches thick.

Two possilbe explanations follow. The first is a story in a book called Early days in the Couer D'Alene mining district which tells about a group of prospectors leaving Frenchtown, going past Hellgate, then up the Bitterroot river, then up Lolo creek, then Graves creek and over into Petty creek where they built a cabin and supposedly found a lot of Placer gold. They stayed there too long and got snowed in, then all but

one got sick and died. This one took all the bags of gold and tried to get over to Lolo creek and civilization which he finally did but had to bury all but one of the bags of gold and had frozen feet and hands and was quite sick. The book states two endings, one being that he got o.k. and led a group back in the next spring and buried his partners and picked up the gold he had cached and the other that he died and no one ever found the area again.

Another is a story handed down by old timers that a group of soldiers got snowbound in that vicinity and all except the Indian guide perished and he later took another group back in and they buried the ones that had died. It is possible that neither of these stories had anything to do with the graves we found but it is at least a possibility that one of them could have some connection.

Now to come up to homesteaders. John H. Schmitz took up the first homestead at the mouth of west fork, then Ed Schmitz took up on at the mouth of Eds creek, Gus Schmitz at Gus creek, Bill Schmitz at Bills creek, Mike Anderson (a family friend) at Mikes creek, Fritz Schmitz at the mouth of South fork and a generation later Wm. Schmitz the land between Bills and Fritzes homesteads. You have probably guessed by now these creeks got their names from three generations of Schmitzes and their friends.

Johns creek was different, it got its name from John Smith who lived there and operated a still in the area.

Garden gulch got its name during the 1910 fire as Schmitzes had a garden there and Garden point lookout which was a tent L.O. by being at the head of Garden creek drainage.

Whiskey creek, which is in the south fork, got its name from a still that was there and when they moved it out they buried some bottles of whiskey there and gave the location to some other people but the bottles were never found.

More of the Schmitz family moved to Petty creek after one of the brothers and one of his daughters died of spotted fever on Bear creek in the Lolo drainage. Most of the homesteads were taken up for being close to mining areas and availability of timber for a sawmill, but after reverses in mining and the loss of a years cut of ties from high water they were developed more to farming and livestock. Said ties were dumped into Petty creek and floated down to Lothrop at the mouth of the creek for sale but before they could be sold the flood of 1908 which washed out the Higgins bridge in Missoula, and the bridge at Lothrop, plus several houses that were close to the river, broke the boom holding the ties which then went into the Clarks Fork and headed for points west. A look at Petty cr. today makes it seem it would have been impossible to float ties down it but at that time it was quite a creek in high water.

There was also a Forest Service Ranger Station at the mouth of Barber Gulch which was tore down and abandoned in later years. Barber Gulch got its name from a man by the name of Clarence Garrison who had a small homestead there and was a barber in Lothrop and later in Alberton. It is located on the west side of the creek about one mile above Martin Spring and above and on opposite side of creek from Madison creek.

Printers creek got its name from a trapper who lived there at one time.

Now to tell some of the things that made history. The ranch located at the mouth of Eds creek was lost to the bank due to reverses in mining, loss of ties, and a love for whiskey. The bank put a man by the name of Otis in charge of the ranch and shipped in (you guess) 1600 head of Texas longhorns brought to Lothrop by the N.P.R.R. then turned them loose in the hills for the summer. In the fall one big roundup was in progress but

said longhorns had got as wild as elk by this time and had scattered all over the hills, possibly even over into Idaho. Anyway, with the help of twenty or more cowboys and anyone else who was willing to help, about 600 of the original 1600 that were turned loose were rounded up after lots of wild stories being told about longhorns knocking down horses and chasing riders up trees and ect. To my knowledge a broken leg was the most serious injury, but the next time you are hunting in this area be sure the horns are branched on that elk you see on yonder ridge as there is to this day better than 900 head of Texas longhorns roaming them there hills somewhere. The only ones that were rounded up were trailed over to the Bitterroot to the Daly Ranch.

Another thing out of the ordinary was the U.S. army brot camels into this area to use as pack animals traveling from Walla Walla to Fort Benton and they made several trips thru Petty creek as a short cut to reach the Bitterroot country. Every thing went o.k. until winter when their feet froze and they got sore footed so they wrapped their feet with burlap and cloth to protect them and headed for the Salt Lake area where they hoped to have better luck.

Another type~~x~~ creature that walked on its hind legs, that altho there wasn't actual sightings, tracks, a strong odor, and a grunting sound were observed. The first time was when four of us went in to pack out a six point bull elk on our backs and on arriving where the elk was supposed to be laying we found the intrails only and in the snow coming to and leading away from the area was a large set of tracks.

At first we guessed it was a very large bear except bears don't walk on their hind legs only for short distances and ordinarily would drag a carcass this large. Whatever it was had picked up the elk whole and clear of the ground. We started following the tracks and after about one half mile said creature had stepped across a 3 ft. diameter log that was laying on the ground and on top of the log in the snow we could see where the horns had drug. At this point we held a conference and decided that we were not particularly anxious to catch up to whatever it was and tho we didn't confess it at this time, in later conversations we found out that we all had a very uneasy feeling and could feel chills running up and down our backs.

This event took place in 1940 in the South fork of Petty cr. about where the present Garden point road goes. The following year when W.W. Schmitz was hunting in the upper Bills creek area he came across the same type of tracks and smelled a strong odor and heard a grunting type noise. He decided that he could find elk elsewhere and left the area. At this time we had never heard of Bigfoot so passed it off as something we didn't want anything to do with and let it go at that.

How are we doing as to the history in the quiet Petty cr. country, don't go away as there is more coming up about other animals, events, and places of interest!

Lets leave the upper area for awhile and travel to the mouth of the creek where the town of Lothrop is. In the early days the main industry was the Western Lumber Co.'s big sawmill. There was supposed to have been around 3000 people connected to the mill, some living in the mill compound and surrounding area and some in camps where the logs were coming from, and some as far away as the Nine Mile drainage where the logs were hauled to the river then dumped in and floated to Lothrop where they were caught by booms and then dumped and brot into the mill pond. We have pictures of the large mill, the planer, some of

the residential area, the school house and part of the business district, as well as showing the entire flat on both sides of the creek covered with lum ber. The planer alone had machines to handle as small as lathe ~~and~~ and as big as 16 x 24 timbers and all sizes inbetween. If anyone is interested in seeing these pictures contact the Kinneys in Alberton.

This mill was there from the late 1800's to 1908-1909 when it was sold to the A.C.M. and moved to Bonner. It appears that men each had their own residential areas according to nationalities as there was Swede town, Finn town, Irish town and so on altho the Supervisory staff and their families lived in company owned housing and several of the other families lived on the bench where Ahearn and Spence houses now stand.

One amusing incident of note was during the 1908 flood a lot of the lum ber was floating away so the company arranged with the Bars and Saloons as they were called at the time, to give a free drink to any lumberjack that would bring in a timber. The jacks would ride a timber into the saloon, collect their drink, turn the timber loose and as there was a door at each end of the building the timber would float out the back door and on down the river. When the mill closed several of the buildings were floated across the river then moved on rollers to Alberton where they remain today.

The N.P.R.R. had a depot and other buildings there as well as an Agent and a large section or maintenance crew and a water tower where the steam engines could take on water. They even had their own cemetary where several people were laid away. This is still there but in mostly abandoned condition and I understand there are only two head markers left.

Lothrop was also the scene of a double murder. A transient that had gotten off a train killed the section foreman and his wife with an ax. He was caught, found guilty and hanged in Missoula. This was the last or one of the last hangings in the state of Montana, and an interesting note is there is a man at present in the State that has been sentenced to hang but has been getting delays whose name is Coleman which was also the name of the man I just told you about.

One of my early experiences was in about 1926 and there was an abandoned building near where Mose Longpres house now stands that had a forge with the bellows to make air to keep the coal burning. A friend and myself would ride our bikes from Alberton, build a fire in the forge and pretend we were the village blacksmith under the spreading chestnut tree. Lots of fun. This was called the McCann place at that time.

Cinderella Mtn. stands just east of the mouth of the creek. One of the stories as to how it got its name was that there was a mine called the Cinderella on the side of the mountain.

At one time there were no elk in Petty cr., then around 1909 to 1912 they hauled several carloads of elk to Lothrop on the N.P. and turned them loose and ran them up the creek.

Lothrop was a busy place in the early days as they ran a passenger train as well as freights and the passenger train was the only connection to Missoula prior to the days of the auto and better roads and bridges. There wasn't a passable road all the way thru Petty until close to 1910 and then it was just a buggy road that wound back and forth where ever there was an easier route. It crossed the creek at least eight times and at first no bridges, you forded the creek. Early day travelers from the upper area went by trail up Westfork over to Sawmill Gulch and crossed the river on the Ferry that was near the mouth of Sawmill Gulch.

The road that runs up the creek today was put in by the A.C.M. to log their timber out. This was in the middle to late forties. The Harper logging done the logging run by Leland Harper.

Speaking of sawmills, at Lothrop there were two smaller mills there in later years, one called the S.K.H.LBR. co. that was just west of Petty cr. on the original mill planer site, then the Grizzly Bear lbr. co. located east of Petty cr.

Well lets get back to the game that has been and still is to a certain extent. You read in sports magazines about hunting goats and having to climb way up into the high country even almost into glacier area and deep snows to see a goat, but along in the middle fiftys I was coming back from a hunting trip in the high country of the east fork and was within one half mile of the main road way below the snow line when I looked back along the side of the ridge in some cliffs and there was 18 head of the white goats laying around and standing enjoying the afternoon sun. I watched them for almost thirty minutes with my binoculars and they sure were a pretty sight. Goats were also sighted for several years about that time all the way from the East Fork as far down the creek as the West Fork. I hope there are still some ranging this area.

Also there was lots of bear, including Grizzlys, blacks and browns, and another type of brown bear that was a lot larger than the ordinary blacks and browns. These were at least four feet tall on all fours and I estimate they would weigh around four to five hundred pounds. These bear seemed to be quite docile as people reported walking within thirty feet of them and they never made any effort to attack or show any symptoms of being aggressive.

There were also at least two of the large black timber wolves who ranged the Petty cr. Fish cr. area for several years, the last of which was shot probably wounded seriously by an Alberton hunter and no more signs were seen after that. At least in the Mikes cr. drainage there was a pack of smaller wolves, gray in color which we called brush wolves. Whether this was their proper name or not I have no idea. They were about twice the size of a coyote and had the square head and jowls characteristic of the wolf family.

On the ridge that lies between the East Fork and the South Fork there seemed to be a lot of foxes. Various sightings seemed to indicate several colors including speckled, reds, browns, grays, and etc.

As to bobcats there seemed to be two varieties. The small ones were about twice the size of a large house cat with short legs and mostly black and white speckled. The other was long legged and about the size and height of a grown airdale dog and the ones I saw were a brindle color.

Of course there were lots of coyotes which seem to be everywhere and are able to adjust to civilization.

There were also Canadian Lynx, Mountain Lions, Weasels, Mink, Martin, Muskrat, Beaver, Racoons, Badgers, an occasional Otter and other small animals.

As to deer, there have been deer in Petty cr. since long before the White man came, both the Mule deer or Blacktail as some people call them and the Whitetail, which seemed to range the lower elevations, while the Mule deer was mostly in the higher but would come down into the bottoms at times.

It seems as tho there were no elk in Petty cr. until 1909-1912 period when they were introduced and apparently thrived as when I was running trap lines in 1940-1941 I saw as many as 48 in a band and you could find these bands in different areas scattered the full length of the creek. Since the advent of so many roads and the increased hunting pressures I doubt if there are near as many elk or deer either for that matter in the area.

Personally I am in favor of blocking off all of the roads except the main road as soon as the timber and wood is removed and leave access only for emergency fire fighting or possibly open certain areas for six weeks in the fall so people could cut their wood before hunting season. I realize this is controversial and would no doubt find lots of people that don't agree with me but I feel this would give the game a chance to build up again to where there would be good hunting.

I could go on telling hunting stories or about the pleasure of getting on a pair of snowshoes or skis and going into what used to be remote areas carrying only a camera and binoculars and watching deer, elk, once in a while a moose and other animals in the wild.

On one such trip into the southfork I sat on a hillside and watched a herd of all bull elk for over an hour. There was 28 in the bunch, some laying down, some feeding and others just standing. There was every kind of sets of horns from small spikes to six and seven points, small, medium, and large, one that had the horn on one side growing down along side of his head and a perfect horn on the other side, another that had a horn on one side only and of course some perfect sets. To me this was living and if I could turn back the clock to when I was younger I would make more of these trips than I did.

In later years, 1968 according to one of the men that helped plant them, wild sheep were introduced into the area and seem to be adapting well as I understand they have been seen in most of the area and according to reports there is at least one full curl and several two thirds curls. There is no open season as of yet and unless there are too many poachers or someone wanting a full curl head to grace their mantle or wall gets anxious, we may see the day we can hunt sheep in Petty cr.

I mentioned there had been mining. Some of the more extensive was in the west fork and Eds cr. but most of the good ore is on A.C.M. land and they are not interested in working it at this time or giving anyone a lease. One of the mines was called the Bessie Bell and was worked for several years but I don't know if any ore was shipped or not. The Copper Smith and the Oriental were in Eds cr. and in the Spring cr. area was another diggings called the Inverness. We have assay reports on the Coppersmith and the Inverness. The major ore was copper but according to assay reports there was Gold, Sulphur, Silver, Silica, Barium Sulphate, Aluminum oxide, Iron oxide, Iron, Calcium oxide, Magnesium oxide and Manganize oxide. Just below the mouth of South Fork was the Two Dells, a heavy iron outcropping. There was a lot of time and money that went into the ground, I am sure more than was ever taken out.

We have lots of personal stories about Petty cr. experiences that if anyone is interested in we could tell as we like to talk tho don't feel they should be written here as they wouldn't interest most people. I think it is about time to end this and hope some of it may be of interest to some people.

#### FOOT NOTE:

I forgot to mention schools. There was three I know of. One at Lathrop, one on present Pack River ranch just south of Eds cr. where present cabins stand and one in the mouth of Johns cr. which had a Teacherage also.