

## **MYSTERY OF THE LARCH BALL**

When the first frigid winds of winter blow through the valley nestled beneath towering snow capped peaks, the tender green needles of the deciduous larch turn a brilliant yellow. Their fluorescence displayed in silent tribute to the fading warmth of a season passing. Then slowly - one by one - the needles fall to the ground or drift uncaring to the chilling waters of a high mountain lake.

As winter winds stir the waters into gray turbulence, the water bound needles join at their forks - rocking with the waves, gathering another needle and perhaps yet another until a knotted cluster gradually forms.

Then if nature commands a perfect performance, the awesome mystery continues and the clusters grow into a complex, symmetrical form.

This is one such mystery, a larch ball born to the majestic larch and the rolling waves of a scenic lake in the beautiful Seeley-Swan Valley of Montana.

In the past, before the white man came to claim the land, the Flathead Indians crossed the Seeley-Swan Valley to reach their hunting grounds in the South Fork of the Flathead

River Valley located in today's Bob Marshall Wilderness. If an Indian found one of these rare larch balls, the lucky finder could have the ability to place all of his wrong-doings, or "sins", into the ball - cleansing him and allowing a new start in life. Still it was a risk to pick up a "sin ball" which had already had sins placed in it.

The Indian brave that picked it up would be given all the sins held within.

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