

## TRAIL HISTORY OF SEELEY LAKE

This spot in God's Country has always been a cross roads of trails. The Ancient Indian trail up the Blackfoot River (known as Cokahlarishkit, as Lewis rendered it, or "the River of the Road to Buffalo," better transcribed as Qoq'áax 'í skit and translated as "buffalo road") was the "Interstate Highway" serving travelers from today's Idaho, and Bitterroot/Clark Fork valleys. "Business" loops went to various hunting-gathering sites along the way.

Here in modern Seeley Lake, ancient trails went four directions before being "discovered" by explorers. The Jocko Trail came from the west splitting towards Woodworth, Cottonwood Lakes and Pyramid Pass. Old Indian Trails went up the valley and Morrell Creek to the Swan Valley. During Pioneer times, routes to Missoula, up Rice Ridge, to Morrell Mountain, Archibald/Mount Henry were added. Early day Forest management and pioneer subsistence depended on trails as access to the back country (it was all pretty much back country then.)

Wagon roads often used the old Indian routes. After WWII, the social and political environment turned to developing our wildlands. During the 1950s and 60s the Government attitude was any place they could build a road negated any need for a trail. That was still pretty much the corporate attitude through the mid '70s. But in the late '70s – early '80s it turned more toward regarding trails as a recreation resource rather than a transportation facility. One of the Forest Service trail priorities was to connect them to communities.

As one trammed through the forest 30 years ago it would be noticed that several trails weren't on the maps: e.g., Rice Ridge, Richmond Peak, upper Morrell Creek, Trail Creek, Morrell Mountain, Devil's Basin (Crescent Lake), Boles Creek, Mt. Henry, Dinah to Reservation Divide, West Fork Clearwater, Blackfoot Divide, Nome Peak, Young's Mountain, plus some in the wilderness. Since then several of them to the F.S. trail inventory map to show what was there. A few of them were added to the Forest map on recent revisions.

In the late 1990s, the Chamber of Commerce had cohered the County Planning Department to make a map showing a trail around Seeley Lake. Their main interest was to show a connection between town and the campgrounds. Plans were on the drawing board to reconstruct highway 83 through the village. With a little cajoling, county surveyor Horace Brown at

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a stroke of the pen added a pathway along the highway, eventually planned to go to Double Arrow Road.

After that it was several user-made and prominent game trails in the area were noticed that could easily be connected to offer some loops and side trail opportunities. The Community Council began expanding our town pathway and trail system. The Forest Service was kind enough to make a map and Lisa Blackburn added the "Connecting the Community" tag to the system.

The bylaws of the Council had a line in it something like "benefiting the community," so they figured that gave them the authority to seek grants to begin improving the network. One of the restrictions of the grants was that no new trails could be built on National Forest land. So they interpreted that to mean any place where people or animals had wore a hole in the vegetation was an existing trail. Their basic strategy was to start on Boy Scout Road at Highway 83 and work clockwise around the lake. They received three grants to improve the trail almost to Deer Creek. It was good enough for the Forest Service to let a contract to gravel it from Lars Kramen to Seeley Lake Campground.

Later the Council started hearing from parents that there were "too many Dodges to dodge" on the Airport Road to allow kids to walk or bicycle on it. The County Road Engineer agreed to facilitate development of a pathway from the airport to the high school. The County and State began filling low places with material they cleaned from ditches, much of which was from the Salmon Lake hillside unraveling. The County installed several culverts in driveways to allow the trail on the north side of the road at the Fly Inn Subdivision area. Telephone and TV cables were reburied at a critical point near the Lutheran Church. The Community Council received a couple grants for equipment work to level the fill, cut off some high points and do some weed control. A couple years ago the ATV Club received a grant to gravel the stretch from top of High School Hill to Morrell Creek. The Airport Road pathway project has been stalled because the County has declared a moratorium on piece meal work, wanting it to be finished all at once.

A major blow for the Council getting more trail and pathway work in the community came 3 or 4 years ago when it was determined the community councils did not have the legal standing to assume contract obligations.

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Grants are considered a contract obligation. That means getting new money for work is very difficult for the Community Council.

At a meeting about three years ago, discussion was directed to how could the Connecting The Community trail program continue with the financial constraints. One suggestion was to form a non-profit corporation to become eligible for grants. That prospect met with some reluctance because there was already several non-profits with the potential for receive grants for trail work. Rather than a new non-profit, the consensus was to gain stronger collaboration between existing groups, even expanding to include adjacent communities. After that the current "Seeley Lake Trails Project" coordinated by the Clearwater Resource Council began to gel.

The importance of trails and pathways for "Connecting The Community" is recognized. That includes within the business and residential area as well as connecting to the surrounding public lands and other communities.

Over the past 15 years quite a bit of progress has been made on the community trails and pathways, but more work is needed. The northwest segment of the 13-mile "Around The Lake" trail is on the roadway and needs constructed along the road. The highway crossing at Auggie Creek needs relocated farther south to a place with better sight distance. The return loop of the trail behind the Community Hall needs improvement. Perhaps the most important need to complete the Airport Road pathway between Frontier Drive and top of High School Hill.

Community volunteers and contributions have been the foundation for accomplishing the existing "Connecting The Community" trail and pathway system. Community involvement will be essential for further development of recreational routes in the community and valley.