

THE BLACKFOOT FAMILY CAMP MEETING

The Blackfoot Family Camp was an interdenominational and non-profit community enterprise. These type meetings began in 1890 in the southwest. They became an institution of the wide-open spaces and were annual affairs in many western states including Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas. The Blackfoot Family Camp Meeting during Labor Day weekend in 1961 was the first one held in Montana. These meetings were planned and carried out by local committees.

The camps were held 1-½ miles south of Seeley Lake on the Double Arrow Ranch from its inception through 1966. It was held at Camp Utmost in 1967. From 1968 through 1994 it was held along Owl Creek about 1 mile west of the highway. In 1995 it was moved to Glacier Camp on Flathead Lake until the last camp in 1997. The earlier camps were during the Labor Day weekend, but after five years the dates were changed to earlier in August in an attempt to avoid fowl weather.

While preaching services and group singing were the primary reasons for having a Camp Meeting, getting to know people better, finding out more about the Bible, just plain fun, good food, and camping out were also important factors.

This was a venture of faith. Expenses of the Camp were met by voluntary contributions -- no offering was taken at any of the services. At a final business meeting a statement of expense is made and gifts are then received to cover it. Those who did not stay for the whole camp left a gift at the registration table. The only wage paid was to the cook, although travel expenses were provided for the main speaker.

Anyone who was seeking a refreshing experience of Christian Faith and good fellowship was welcomed. The camp meeting was for the whole family and for all families. A great deal of enjoyment and inspiration was available for everyone. Families brought their own tents and bedrolls, or a camper. Those who did not wish to camp out could commute from their homes or find accommodations locally. But they missed the fun of hearing the wake p bell and the later evening sharings. Casual clothing was in order, but campers were advised to bring warm clothing for morning and evening (and rain gear.) Electricity and plenty of hot water was available. The Camp Meeting was informal – they did not like rules.

A large truck from Wyoming Presbytery brought the big assembly tent; fully equipped with folding chairs, songbooks, light plant, and a camp kitchen with complete cooking facilities. A top cook and food was furnished. Food was the biggest expense. Everyone who came was generously fed. The session ended after the last noon meal and everyone helped dismantle the camp.

Camp always began on Thursday noon upon arrival to the supply truck. When setup was completed all joined together for a potluck supper.

How it all started.

A planning meeting was held in the Blackfoot Church (now Mountain Lakes Presbyterian Church) on November 10th 1960. Ray Nott, manager of the camp outfit was on hand to “lay the cards on the table.” He brought other experienced “camp men” from Wyoming and South Dakota. Pictures of the 190 Elko, Nevada Camp Meeting attended by “Cookie” Jack Hunter and his wife were shown.

They tried to get the pastor and at least one interested layman from each church in this area at the planning meeting to be in on the authoritative information and major decision making for the venture of Christian Fellowship.

The 1967 financial report indicated they budgeted \$719, with actual expenses of \$641. They served 635 meals in three days. The speaker was paid \$100, the cook \$150, and \$245 for food. Equipment rental, promotion and electricity were another \$183. Insurance cost them \$16.94 and they paid \$1.00 to lease the land.

In 1977 the announcement included an alert that the campsite may be closed because of fire danger. If so, camper could seek other campsites and the meetings would be held at the Blackfoot Church.

A five minute tape and slide presentation was available for showing to church and community groups in the late 1970s.

1980 In this age when families tend to be scattered by various activities that pull the apart, plan a weekend with the whole family together in worship and recreation !!!

Lawrence Copenhaver was chairman/organizer for the Blackfoot Family Camp, serving 21 years on the committee, and was a member of the Mountain Lakes Presbyterian Church of Seeley Lake.

For those with a cholesterol problem of concern they were serving oatmeal before it was fashionable, and it was good.

Last Blackfoot Family Camp --08+03-97