



Celebrating the Beauty of Montana & the Joy of Christmas

As the snow blankets the picturesque landscapes of Montana, we extend our warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas!



This festive season, let us embrace the spirit of joy and togetherness that fills the air, as families gather around crackling fires, sharing laughter and stories that will become cherished memories.

Whether you're sipping hot cocoa while watching the snowflakes dance outside, or enjoying the breathtaking views of our majestic mountains, may your heart be filled with the warmth of love, peace, and the magic of the holiday season.

Here's to celebrating the beauty of Montana and the joy of Christmas with those who matter most!

Our Leadership

President
Mike Penfold

Treasurer
Tom Towe

Board Members

Dale Anderson
Yellowstone River App
Content Coordinator

Dave Eckroth
Historical &
Archaeological Research

Jaeger Held
Historical Research

Rebecca Kallevig
Archaeology &
Historical Research

Gary Little
Commercial Illustrator,
Fine Artist & Sculptor

Patty Molinaro
Author / Historical
Researcher

John Pulasky
Back to the Future
Coordinator

Ralph Saunders
Bozeman Trail
Researcher / Author

Dave Wanzenried
Restoration and
Improvement Projects

Ross Wapels
Trail Coordination & River
Monitoring

Don Woerner
Buffalo Restoration

A Landmark Achievement for 2025

Celebrating The Bozeman Trail Project

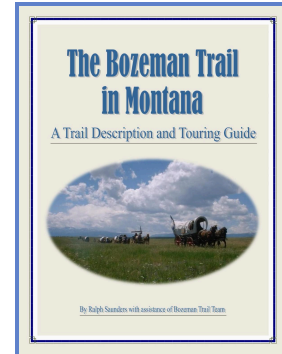
This Christmas season, we are delighted to share one of Our Montana's most meaningful accomplishments of the year: the successful completion of a multi-year effort to research, document, and illuminate the historic Bozeman Trail through both print and digital media.

This project includes three important milestones:

The Publication of a Remarkable New Book

Board Member, historian, and author Ralph Saunders released *The Bozeman Trail in Montana: A Trail Description and Touring Guide*, the most accurate and comprehensive mapping of the trail's Montana corridor to date.

This landmark guide is the culmination of decades of meticulous fieldwork, archival research, aerial analysis, landowner collaboration, and on-the-ground exploration. Ralph's unparalleled commitment to uncovering the true route of the Bozeman Trail has resulted in a resource that is already reshaping public understanding of this historic corridor.



Available at This House of Books and Amazon, the guide reflects a lifetime of dedication to Montana history.

Regional Recognition: Brett French Article in the Gazette

The Billings Gazette highlighted Ralph's work in an article by Brett French, describing the guide as a "forensic study" of the trail and celebrating the depth, precision, and historical significance of Ralph's contribution (The full article appears later in this newsletter.).

Launch of TheBozemanTrail.com

Created by Our Montana, this new website provides a rich digital companion to Ralph's research.

The site features:

- Historical overviews
- Trail mapping foundations
- Native perspectives
- Emigrant diary excerpts
- Documentary features
- Interviews with historians
- Drone footage and interpretive content



Together, the book, article, and website offer one of the most complete public resources ever created for understanding the Bozeman Trail's legacy.

2025 Year in Review

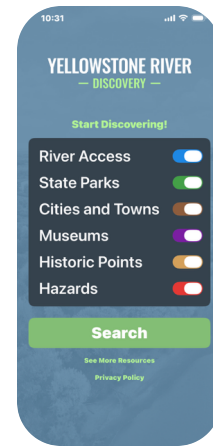
Celebrating Progress, Partnerships & Montana's Stories

Yellowstone River Discovery App

What began as a simple mapping tool has become one of Our Montana's most innovative projects. Formerly the Explore Yellowstone River, the Yellowstone River Discovery App is has been completely and will provide river users with real-time information, interpretive learning, safety alerts, and educational insights along the entire river corridor.

From paddlers to teachers to families exploring the river for the first time, this app will help people connect more deeply with the Yellowstone — understanding not just how to navigate it safely, but how to appreciate the delicate interplay of ecology, hydrology, culture, and recreation that defines America's last free-flowing river.

The Yellowstone River Discovery App embodies exactly what Our Montana stands for: education, stewardship, accessibility, and a love of Montana's landscapes that grows stronger through understanding.



Cinnabar Foundation Grant



In 2025, Our Montana received a generous grant from the Cinnabar Foundation, strengthening our Yellowstone River Watershed Project and enabling the creation of a new documentary film directed by Mike Penfold.

This film will serve as a powerful outreach tool, bringing together landowners, recreationists, tribal representatives, conservation partners, and community leaders. Through storytelling and shared perspectives, the film will help inspire

forward-thinking stewardship of the Yellowstone for decades to come.

Boothill Cemetery Preservation

Overlooking the rims above Billings, the historic Boothill Cemetery holds some of the city's earliest stories. Under the leadership of Dave Wanzenried, and with the support of passionate volunteers, the site received much-needed preservation and enhancement this year.

From brush removal and pathway improvements to historical interpretation upgrades, the project honors the memory of those buried there and strengthens the connection between Billings residents and their shared past



Archaeology & the Keelboat Mystery

This year included meaningful field visits and documentation work with archeological researchers Dave Eckroth and Patty Molinaro, focused on visiting and studying significant rock art sites in the region.

Among these was a rare and intriguing site featuring a keelboat carving, located alongside pictographs known to be centuries old. Keelboat imagery is uncommon in this area, raising compelling questions about how such imagery entered the visual record — whether through direct observation, cultural exchange, or oral tradition.

Dave and Patty also visited several additional nearby sites, contributing to a broader understanding of the cultural landscape and reminding us how layered, complex, and carefully stewarded Montana's archaeological record must be.

These experiences underscore how much there is still to learn — and how essential careful documentation, collaboration, and respect for established knowledge are in preserving the stories held in stone.



Bozeman Trail Preservation & Public Access Initiative

One of Our Montana's most significant achievements this year was the completion of a multi-year effort to illuminate the history and geography of the Bozeman Trail through both print and digital media.

Working closely with historian and Board Member Ralph Saunders, Our Montana helped bring forward two major public resources:

- The Bozeman Trail in Montana: A Trail Description and Touring Guide, a landmark publication offering the most accurate and comprehensive mapping of the trail's Montana corridor ever assembled.
- TheBozemanTrail.com, a rich digital companion featuring trail origins, mapping foundations, Native perspectives, emigrant diaries, interviews, documentary materials, and drone footage.



Together, these resources have sparked renewed interest in the trail's preservation and interpretation, providing teachers, families, historians, and travelers with unprecedented access to one of the most historically important corridors in the American West.

Trail Connectivity Breakthrough



Closing the longstanding gap in the Marathon Loop Trail has challenged planners and community groups for years — until now.

In 2025, Board Member Ross Waples partnered with YRPA and Billings TrailNet to identify a feasible route for completing the connection along the Yellowstone River.

If implemented, this new alignment would create safer, more accessible recreation opportunities for thousands of residents and visitors — and resolve one of the region's most persistent trail-planning challenges.

Sharing Montana's Stories

Throughout 2025, Our Montana continued to expand its public outreach through Our Montana, our interview program on Community 7 Television. This ongoing series highlights the people, projects, and ideas shaping Montana's cultural, historical, and environmental future.

Each episode offers viewers a window into the work happening across our state — from conservation and watershed education to historical preservation, trail stewardship, and community engagement. By sharing these stories, we hope to deepen public understanding, celebrate local leaders, and inspire a collective commitment to protecting Montana's landscapes and heritage.



Featured Article

"Forensic Study": Historians create Montana Travel Map for Bozeman Trail - bozeman test



*By Brett French - Lee
Newspapers (Billings Gazette) *
Oct 21, 2025*

Montana history buffs can drive the Bozeman Trail with Billings historian Ralph Saunders as their passenger-seat guide.

Since Saunders can't ride with everyone, it's much easier to purchase his latest publication "Bozeman Trail in Montana: A Description of the Trail Location and Touring Guide." The \$29.95 spiral-bound book can be purchased at This House of Books, the Western Heritage Center Museum

Store and online at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

The book was published in partnership with the group Our Montana, as part of its mission to "promote stewardship and enjoyment of Montana's natural, historic and recreational resources."

"Ralph has this unique capability, using aerial photography and talking to landowners," said Mike Penfold of Our Montana. "He really did an amazing job, kind of a forensic study of the corridor."

For his part, Saunders said it's interesting how much of the trail still remains visible on steep hills where water has continually run, deepening ruts made 160 years ago.

"As a kid, my granddad pointed out ruts from the Bozeman Trail," he said. "He had pulled the car over and was pointing up the hill. At that time, it didn't register much with me."

Who is Ralph Saunders?

For those unfamiliar with Saunders' previous work, he may be best known for locating explorer William Clark's 1806 camp where he stayed with half the Corps of Discovery along the Yellowstone River near Park City.

[Read More](#)

A Season of Giving & Gratitude

Your Gift Helps Protect the Places We Love

During this time of year, when snow softens the landscape and we gather close to the people we love, we're reminded of how much Montana gives to us — in beauty, in history, in community, and in the stories written across its wide open spaces.

If Our Montana's work has touched you this year — through river restoration, historic preservation, community partnerships, or simply through the love of this extraordinary place — we invite you to consider a year-end gift in support of our mission.

Your generosity helps protect:

- the Yellowstone River and its watershed,
- irreplaceable historical sites,
- the wildlife and open spaces we cherish,
- and the stories that connect us to Montana's past and future.

Every contribution strengthens the work ahead and keeps Montana's landscapes and heritage thriving for generations to come.



[Support Montana's Heritage](#)

Show Your Love for Montana — With Every Mile Our Montana Specialty License Plate



In a state where every road tells a story — from snow-dusted backcountry tracks to winding riverside highways — your vehicle can help carry forward the heritage we all cherish.

The Our Montana license plate is more than a beautiful design.

It's a way for every Montanan to take part in preserving the places, histories, and wild spaces that make our state extraordinary.

A Plate Rooted in Montana's Beauty

Each plate features symbols of our shared heritage:

The Bitterroot — Montana's state flower, a sign of resilience and beauty

The Western Meadowlark — our state bird, and the unmistakable voice of summer

Mountain silhouettes inspired by an aerial photograph by award-

When you choose this plate, you're helping protect:

- the Yellowstone River and its watershed
- irreplaceable archaeological and historic sites
- wildlife habitat and open landscapes
- community education and conservation projects
- and the stories that shape Montana's identity

winning photographer Larry Mayer

rtwork and layout by
Barbara Scheppele of
Cooper Creative, whose
design honors Montana's
natural character
Every plate is a small work
of art — and a big step
toward protecting the
landscapes we love.



Mailing Address: P.O. Box 699,
Billings, Montana 59103

Email: info@ourmontana.org

Phone: 406-259-4600

Office: 404 N. 30th Street, Billings, MT 59101



[Our Montana](#) | 404 North 30th Street | Billings, MT 59102 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!