

ELK LAKE RESORT

5200 Elk Lake Road Lima, MT 59739

406-276-3282

Our Historic Montana Lodge Abounds With Interesting Stories From Montana's Past



Our Montana Lodge's history begins long before any man stepped foot into the Centennial Valley. Of course, it had no name when the hand of God began forming its chain of lakes. Geologists believe Elk Lake, Hidden Lake, Goose Lake, Otter Lake, Cliff Lake, and Wade Lake were all part of a chain flowing to the north (providing a natural outlet for the Red Rock Lakes) into the Madison River. However, at some point in history, an upheaval changed parts of this chain. Elk Lake, on whose banks our Montana Fishing Lodge sits, now drains to the south and enters the Red Rock River via the Red Rock Lakes. The others continue to drain north.

More change may be in store as seismic activity continues into recent history. For example, on December 26th, 1890, the Henry's Lake newspaper reports, "The ice at the Lake was rent from center to shore by gases operated from some unknown source, recently, and a small geyser threw water, mud, and fish in large numbers to a considerable distance on the ice. This phenomenon lasted two days." Even more recent was the 1959 earthquake which raised the Madison range up, in some place 15 feet. And, of course, the activity continues today with small quakes a regular occurrence throughout the greater Yellowstone area.

The Centennial Valley, a vast 385,000 acre valley which runs east and west for some 65 miles along the Continental Divide in southwestern Montana, was named in 1876 by Mrs. William (Rachel) Orr, when the P & O (Poindexter and Orr) Cattle Company first brought cattle here to summer.

Fertile and picturesque, the Centennial Valley has been home to many. First it was home and hunting grounds to Indians. Then came fur trappers, hunters, miners, homesteaders, dry farmers, squatters, cowmen, sheepmen, rustlers, moonshiners, and revenuers. There have been ranches, Western Montana Hunting Lodges, stage stops, mines, unsolved murders, a taxidermist, a fish hatchery, and in later history a Montana Fishing Lodge and a Wildlife Refuge.

In September 1835, before any white man is known to have inhabited the valley, in fact, before it was named the Centennial Valley, the explorer Osborne Russell wrote that the valley from which ". . . flows the head stream of the Missouri. . . was full of Buffalo when we entered it and large numbers of which were killed by our hunters. We repeatedly saw signs of Blackfeet about us to waylay the Trappers. On the 27th we stopped at this place to feast on Buffalo."



Dr. John C. Seidensticker, M.D., a writer for the Beaverhead County History Books tells of a Father DeSmet ". . . traveling slowly up the Centennial Valley with the Flathead Indians, leisurely hunting on the way. . . ." The Centennial Valley was well known to the Shoshone-Bannock, the Nez Perce, and other nomadic tribes. As there is evidence of considerable Indian traffic in the area (and records of their visits in the early settlers' diaries), there is little reason to doubt the Indians frequented the area.

Using the term loosely, Marcus Daly, the famous American copper magnate, was the first to 'possess' the Centennial Valley. He owned notable sections of ground in the late 1800's. As he believed the high altitude would increase the lung capacity of his horses, he aspired to own the whole valley and fence its perimeter. However, he didn't think the place fit for man nor beast in the winter. Thus he built horse barns in the valley, at least one which is still in use today.

The Levi Shambow are titled the Centennial Valley's first permanent settlers although a newspaper article dated from 1893 says, "Ike Marble and his father, John Marble, have sold their improvements and are going to Big Horn country. They are the oldest settlers in the valley, and we regret to have them leave." The Shambow family arrived in the mid 1880's. After an easy winter, the Shambows believed they had found paradise. The next winter, however, was more typical, and tested their determination and will.

Most early settlers to the Centennial Valley arrived in the 1890's, spurred on by a new land law which was passed in 1889. This law allowed a homesteader to take 640 acres. Many early settlers, once they had completed the three year proving time, sold their land to ambitious larger ranchers who sought to expand their land holdings. In fact, many families seemed only to happy to leave the area once they'd experienced its turbulent winters, but others stayed and put down deep roots.

Thanks to the pens of people like Lillian Hackett Hanson Culver, who moved to the Centennial Valley from Lima to homestead in 1887, we have a fairly extensive record of life in the Centennial. Set apart from the rest of the world, this valley became a world of its own during the late 1800's and early 1900's when the official census put the number of residents at its all-time high of 500.

Even after the white man had set up permanent residence in the valley, Indians continued to frequent the area. A July 4, 1890 newspaper article tell us, "A balloon was up at 9 o'clock at night, illuminated by fireflies that were caught at the mouth of Demon's cave, near the foot of the lake. It was filled with gas, and being the first one ever let go here, the natives went wild with delight." Then, on September 28th, Lillian wrote, "Indians call. Sell them \$1.00 worth of groceries and get Bill and Fred gloves and meat."

The incredible leeway given the Indians in their annual hunts is amazing. A September 25th newspaper article reported, "A small band of Indians are camped near the narrows." On October 6th it said, "Chief Ten Doy and his followers are camped at Cliff Lake and are slaughtering elk, deer, and everything they chance to see. They have a pass from the agent at Lemhi to come to Montana for two months to hunt elk." The settlers' feelings are evident in a November 5th newspaper report. "Fred and Will Dingler were up here on a hunt, but as Ten Doy and his bold fellows have been in the vicinity this fall, the game has all been killed or driven away and the boys were unsuccessful." Since white men were not allowed to kill elk in the valley, it is easy to understand how hard feelings could develop. However, their return reported on September 21st, 1891, seems to have been their last.



No history of the Centennial would be complete without a mention of the stage line which carried visitors through the valley from Monida, Montana to West Yellowstone from 1898 - 1907. The M-Y line sold three excursion trips from Monida through Yellowstone National Park. Their outfit consisted of twelve 11-passenger

and four 3-passenger Concord coaches, eighty horses, two buggies, and forty employees.

Looking at Monida today, it is hard to imagine anything ever happened there. However, at one time tourists flocked to the town, stayed in its hotel and visited the local saloons before embarking on a six to eight day round trip to Yellowstone National Park. Thirty miles outside of Monida the stage passed through the then-booming town of Lakeview. Today Lakeview consists of the Refuge headquarters and a few private landholdings; back then it had a hotel, a general store, a post office, two bars, and a good blacksmith. Four miles past Lakeview George Shambow leased buildings and a stable to the stage line for a lunch and horse switching station. Then it was on up the valley for the overnight stop at the Dwelle residence.

It is hard to comprehend the vast numbers who rode the train to Monida, only to take the long stage ride across the Centennial Valley before reaching their destination - Yellowstone National Park. However the Madisonian Newspaper reported on August 28, 1902, that the stage line ". . .has carried over 12,000 passengers to the National Park this season and are having all they can handle every day. They have had to put on extra teams to accommodate the large number of tourists."

Like every other era in history, this one soon met its demise. Out dated by the faster and more efficient motorized transportation and the addition of a Union Pacific branch line from St. Anthony, Idaho to West Yellowstone, Montana, the stage line ceased operation in 1909, although the M-Y continued tours of the Park until 1916. It was probably this change, as much as anything else, which guaranteed the delayed expansion of the Centennial.

One of the many 'unique' things about the Centennial is the lack of a 'town'. However, it still had its characters. For example, Jack Hamilton and his wife who ran Al Forsythe's store. Jack is remembered for having a terrible temper. However, if you could get to the store after he and his wife had a row, they would outdo each other giving things away. Another character, Slim Newton led a colorful life during Prohibition making moonshine and doging revenuers.

Town living didn't necessarily mean life was any easier. Take Christmas Day, 1894. A blizzard blew into Lakeview that was so bad residents had to stretch a rope from the house to the barn just to keep from getting lost while going to feed the stock and milk the cows!

The realities of life in the Centennial Valley were often hard. A newspaper article dated December 27, 1889, reports, "Mr. Cooley's cattle are in bad shape. They have had no hay for ten days. He has 300 tons of hay that he cannot reach. The snow is too deep, and the hay is fifteen miles from the stock. He has 250 tons of hay at the ranch and 500 head of cattle to feed. This will not last more than 1/3 of the winter. . ." And, as life will have it, animals weren't the only ones to suffer.



"The stormiest day I ever did see. . .This is hard country to live in. I don't think we will stay in it long." Lillian records on February 1st, 1890. On June 2nd she writes, "Commenced to hail yesterday at three and then rain, and we are in an awful plight. Found everything wet in my room and kitchen. . .Has rained steady all day till we have not a dry place in the whole house. We both cried we were so blue.

. . .Oh this is dreadful, and the corral is ankle deep in mud." And, on July 21st of the same summer the newspaper records, "A terrible cloud burst occurred on the Upper Ruby last Sunday evening which ruined 30 acres of oats, tore down houses, swept away mowing machines, carried out bridges. . .and tore things up in general; hail stones, as large as hen's eggs, fell."

If the weather didn't get you down, the mosquitoes might carry you off. On July 16, 1892, Lillian writes, "The mosquitoes were a terror tonight. The men could hardly milk." And on the 27th she says, "The mosquitoes are so bad the men don't always milk."

Dillion offered the nearest doctor - a long wagon ride followed by an often longer train ride. Babies born in the Centennial were often delivered by a midwife or a neighbor. They didn't always survive. On June 3rd of 1894, Lillian wrote, "Mrs. Burns' baby came 30th May. Buried Saturday 2nd. First funeral in a month." Accidents also occurred. On April 8, 1849, the newspaper reported, "We are pained to hear of S.K. Clark's little daughter getting kicked by a horse. Her skull was badly fractured. The latest report is that she will get well. She narrowly escaped death." But on July 31st, Lillian reported, "Sam Clark's little girl, Francis, was taken to Dillon to be buried last Saturday. She died after three operations."

Not every incident turned out tragic. A July 13, 1891, article reports, "Seven tramps passed through the valley one day last week, going to the railroad. . .As Frank Pederson was coming home one evening, not long ago, he saw two men leaving his place. He hurried and looked through the house and found they had taken all of his wearing apparel, so taking his six shooter he followed and soon overtook them. Pointing the revolver at them he demanded his clothes, and they disrobed even to his underwear and jogged along a best they could."

The people who lived - even thrived - during that era are the heros. Take Thelma Catherine Black. Born in the Centennial on April 3rd, 1899, Thelma was the first girl to graduate from the eighth grade in the valley. Not an easy feat in those days! This industrious young lady went on to attend Butte Business College. However, true to her roots, her real love was riding the open range on a half-wild horse. She was the picture-perfect Centennial Valley belle in her red velvet riding habit with her rawhide rope and .22 pistol by her side.

Then there was Sonny Bean. This favorite valley son was born Jan 5, 1896. The epitome of a frontier boy, Sonny traversed the rivers, lakes, and mountains barefoot in faded overalls. He learned to shoot, ride, and use his fists a little better than his peers. In spite of his 'rough' exterior, Sunny loved his fiddle. When he reached manhood, this 'frontier boy' set his sights on the 'valley belle'

Courtship, however, wasn't always easy. In fact, one July 4th found Sonny working on Clover Creek while his belle charmed folks in West Yellowstone. This wouldn't do. So, Sonny drove his team and buggy to West to pick up his sweetheart. From there they headed to Lakeview for the Independence Day celebration. After winning the foot race, the bucking horse contest, and the high jump, Sonny loaded his lady back into the buggy and returned her to West Yellowstone. He then headed back to Clover Creek. A fully day? You bet! Especially when you recognize it was about 250 miles in a buggy!

Few in these tough but idyllic days realized how close change was to their doors, but rumors were starting to flow. On November 16, 1891, the following was reported, "There is a rumor afloat to the effect that the government is going to set aside the Henry Lake country to be used in connection with the National Park, as a reserve and to prevent fishing and hunting. If this be true, the settlers will all have to move away. We trust this is not true." Then, closer to home: on August 3, 1892, the newspaper reported, "We notice in the report of the State Irrigation convention held in Helena, Jan 7 and 8, 1892, that the lands on each side of the Red Rock river in this valley and the marshy lake lands are withdrawn from entry so as not to interfere with the storage of water when the government sees fit to make an appropriation to put in a dam. This will probably prevent this valley from ever settling up any more than it is at present. In fact, it will cause some of the old settlers to move nearer the mountains if they are to stay here."

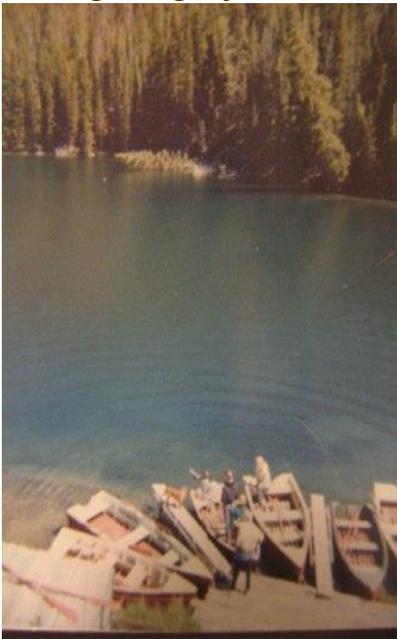
Change really began in earnest in the Centennial in the early 1930's - the depression era. It was during this uniquely vulnerable time the government stepped into the picture. Claiming the drought, which had held the valley for the last several years, would last forever, they talked the ranchers into selling out to create the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

Of those days, one obviously embittered reporter writes, "In the Centennial Valley there are two small ponds which do not freeze over in the winter. . . It seems these ponds had a few swans that lived there year round, forty more or less, I've been told. In the thirties some do-gooders came in and decided that these birds were on the edge of extinction. . ." Thus, he says, in the "1930's [the] G men came to condemn the land for a Refuge. The ranchers were told to sell, or else. Or else in some cases was the revocation of homesteads which were not proved up on yet. In other cases it was pure lies and bullying. As for the owners of the duck hunting clubs on the lower lake, they were told they would have 99 year leases for their clubs to hunt if they would sell their holdings. . ."

This writer goes on to relate his version of the changes which followed over the next 30 years or so - the poisoning of the lakes to kill non-native fish, the discontinuation of grazing to accommodate the ducks, the removal of many old buildings to create a more 'wilderness' feel, and the revocation of the 99-year leases for the hunt clubs.

No doubt the depression made the government's offer to purchase the settlers' land very appealing - maybe even a life-saver for some. Furthermore, I doubt anyone who has visited the Centennial in recent years would disagree the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge presence which vastly impeded development has only made the valley more unique. Where else can one go and enjoy such wide open and un marred vistas as far as the eye can see?

The Beginnings of Elk Lake Resort



Few people lived in the Centennial Valley, year-round, until 1886 when Jim Blair and his partner, Henry Hackett, decided to give it a try. The next year, Henry convinced his sister, a divorced woman with a young son and a serious case of rheumatoid arthritis which had brought her millinery career in Dillon to a halt, to come 'keep house' for the two bachelors. In exchange he would build her a cabin on an adjoining homestead. She came to the valley, fell in love with it, and took up a homestead at a place she named Picnic Springs not far from where Elk Lake Resort now sits. But it would take two years of reminding and downright nagging to get Henry to build that cabin.

Based on Lillian's journals and the newspaper clippings she collected, it would appear Henry Hackett may have been the first to live here at Elk Lake. On March 18, 1891, the newspaper reported, "Word comes that Jim Blair will be with us again soon, and will go into partnership with Henry Hackett at the Elk Lake Ranch." Throughout the year Lillian and her family took several trips to Elk Lake, according to entries in her journal. Then, on November 25, 1891, Lillian wrote, "Henry has sold everything to Blair for \$300." A newspaper article from November 30th clarified the 'everything'. It said, "Henry Hackett has sold his ranch on Elk Creek to James Blair." And, thus, the recorded history of the settlement of Elk Lake began. At what point the land came into the possession of the US Forest Service, I have yet to learn. However, I do know that in 1933 Faye and Edna Selby applied for a permit from the USFS for a Western Montana Fishing and Hunting Resort to be located at "The Narrows" on Elk Lake.

Faye's first job was to build a road to the current Resort location. Based on old photos, it appears the road ended at the foot of the lake. Thus the job of building a road along the edge of the lake and up to the Resort's current location on Narrows Creek had to be done with a team of horses and a Fresno. Once completed, the Selbys began hauling lumber from their sawmill on Tom Creek - across the Centennial

Valley - to build the old ranch house and the barn beside it. By the late 1930's he had finished several rustic cabins and Elk Lake officially became a Western Montana Fishing and Hunting Lodge.

At this time, the road ended at the resort - no access to Hidden Lake existed. The Selby's had wooden row boats on Elk Lake and Hidden Lake to rent to their customers. Selby's boats were located on the south end of Hidden, near where the present boat house stands. On the north end of the lake Monty Neely, who owned a resort on Cliff Lake, had a few wooden row boats of his own. In fact, I have heard it is possible to see one of these old boats, now resting peacefully on the bottom of the lake near where they were originally moored.

Although one would expect little of the 'outside' world ever came to Elk Lake, at least one famous visitor and her entourage made the journey. As an old issue (1940's I believe) of the now defunct 'Click Magazine' recorded, Jane Russell thoroughly enjoyed her fishing trip to Hidden Lake. Read excerpts from the [Click Magazine article](#).

The present lodge was built in the 1950's. At that time it was used more for a summer owner's quarters, dance hall, and bar than its present use. The bar was located in basically the same position as today. However, there were no bathrooms, and I have been told the living room and bar were one big room - with an office area in the present living room. What now serves as our dining room and kitchen were apparently included in the owner's quarters. They made use of the open space, however, as dancing was a regular occurrence in the lodge, with revelries going on late into the night.

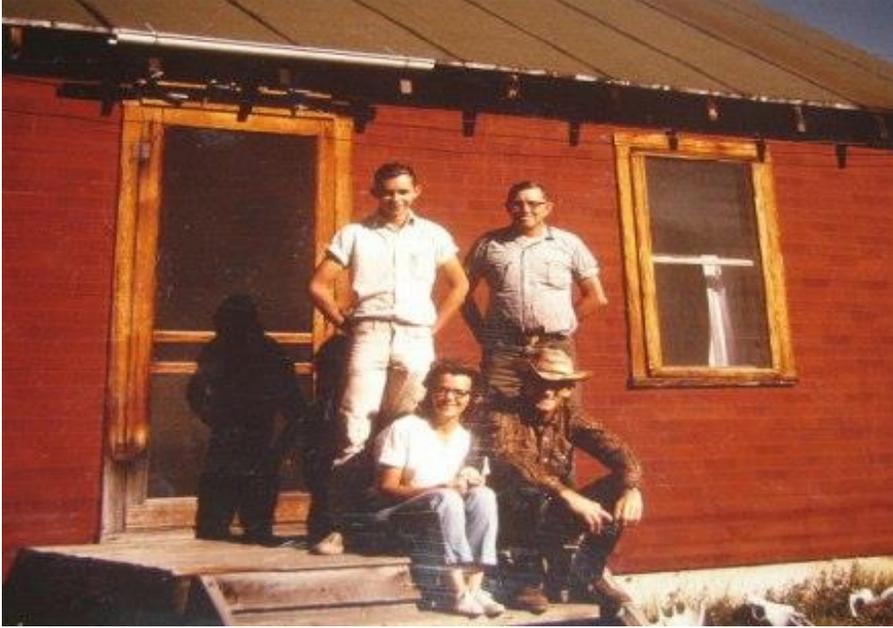
For those wishing for something to eat, there was the "Club House" - as an old sign identified it. Known today as the old ranch house, for several years this versatile building served as a meeting room, owner's quarters, and dining hall. Meals were cooked on an old wood burning cook stove and water ran continuous in the kitchen sink - piped in from a spring up the hill.

Faye Selby profited from the size and quality of fish produced by Elk and Hidden Lakes, but he also contributed to the fishing of the time by hauling in trout to stock the lake. In fact, I believe he was the first person to try Rainbow Trout in Hidden Lake, and although the lake hasn't been stocked in 50 years, descendents of these original fish still produce large feisty fish for the interested angler.

By the late 1950's I've been told it cost \$20 for a trip across Elk Lake followed by a ride in an old car from the end of Elk to Hidden Lake. All this for a chance to catch some of the "Monsters" reputed to lurk in Hidden Lake's depths. However, some of Hidden Lake's fishermen, tired of Faye's extravagant prices, found a way to get a jeep in from Antelope Basin and intersect with the dirt track from Elk up to Hidden. By 1959 this road was frequented by several who knew of its existence. Of course, this was a great source of irritation for Mr. Selby.

Lest one think Elk Lake was too far off the beaten path to be of any interest to the movers and shakers of the 'real' world, it seems several dignitaries visited this humble hovel. It is reported that people such as Jane Russell, Eddy LaMore, Harry Allen, Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, and, possibly the most famous of all, Tennessee Ford, have frequented the shores of Elk and Hidden Lakes in years past.

The final 'big shakeup' of the Selby's career at Elk Lake Resort (then known as Selby Resort) occurred in 1959 when the quake which formed Earthquake Lake in Madison County shook things up at the Resort as well. It is reputed to have done considerable damage to Elk Lake Road. In fact, I've heard not a bottle or glass was left in tact when it was over.



Hank, a tall lanky cowboy with a history of bull riding, logging, and cowboying, along with his wife Erlene, bought the resort in 1965. They had known the Selbys for years, and had spent many happy times at the Resort. Hank and Erlene took over where the Selbys had left off - but they

also began to renovate the resort. They began adding bathrooms to the existing cabins. At this point, the Resort offered breakfast and dinner which Erlene cooked in the old ranch house on a wood cook stove.

They did a lively business in the summer catering to fishermen, and in the fall and early winter catering to hunters. However, they were closed every winter except their last. Back then there was little to no traffic in this portion of the Centennial Valley in the winter. A few trappers running their trap lines or coyote hunters seeking pelts were all the company they had.

In 1967 or 1968 the Forest Service created a major change in Hank and Erlene's business when they put in the road to Hidden Lake. No longer did people need to be ferried across Elk Lake and driven up to Hidden. At that time the road ran right through the Resort - instead of around it - but, because it was a public right-of-way, they couldn't charge a toll, they just had to deal with the irritation. Shortly thereafter, the Forest Service also put a stop to fishermen using the jeep road in from Antelope Basin.

I've had the privilege of visiting with Erlene a few times - twice in person, once on the phone. She shared with me a bit about her life here at Elk Lake Resort. She said they had no phone and no power. Their mail was delivered to the mailbox at the end of Elk Lake Road - by snow plane in the winter. They catered mostly to fishermen, but as the area became more well-known, their fall and early winter hunting business grew. Back then, Erlene said, the hunting was phenomenal.

In 1970, the last winter Hank and Erlene owned the Resort, they began trying to develop a winter business. That

year they were visited by 93 snowmobilers - a large number for the first winter, and especially when one takes in consideration the 'types' of snowmobiles available then.

Erlene told me the story of one well-to-do lady who came in that winter on a snowmobile. She and her husband rented a cabin for the night. Of course there was no water in any building except the ranch house where water from the spring ran through the sink in a steady flow to keep it from freezing. As she watched Erlene cook their supper on the wood burning cook stove, she said, "I'd really like to help, but I don't know what to do." Then she went on to relate that she had a maid, butler, and cook back at home to care for her needs. She found it hard to believe Erlene *liked* living with such 'hardships'.

Later that evening, after a filling dinner and some stimulating conversation, the lady and her husband headed to their cabin. As she walked out the door, Erlene handed her an empty coffee can. "What's this for?" the lady asked.

"Well," Erlene replied, "unless you want to bury your butt in a snow drift, you might try using this when you have to go pee."

In spite of the somewhat 'harsh' conditions, this lady swore, upon leaving, she'd be back next year. However, Erlene never saw her again as she and Hank - with some reservations - sold the Resort the next year to Bill Green and his wife.



Bill and wife and at least a couple of daughters lived off and on at the Resort for the next five or six years. Some say he took from the Resort - selling many of the antiques left by the Mercers and Selbys, others say he put much into the Resort. Either way, he is credited with purchasing the aluminum boats which are still in use at Elk Lake and Hidden Lake.

In 1976 Bill's daughter, Liz, married Mike Bryers. Liz and Mike lived at Elk Lake Resort for the next 4 years. During that time 2 sons were born. In fact, Mike told me he would take Liz out on a snowmobile when her labor started, she would deliver a fine son at the nearest hospital, and then the three of them would return to the Resort.

Mike said most of their customers were local people. They worked well with their neighbors. In addition to running the Resort as had been done in the past, Mike and Liz added guided hunting and fishing trips. In contrast with today's regulations, at that time the Forest Service allowed outfitting activities to be based from the Resort. Mike had a string of horses which he pastured down the road. However, it may very well have been his Arabian stallion which put a stop to all of that.

As the story goes, one day an important person from the Forest Service was riding through the area on his pretty little mare. While riding past the field where Mike's horses were grazing, the wind carried the mare's scent to the little stud and sent his hormones racing. You see, the mare was in heat. Well, next thing Mr.

Forest Service knew, his mare was being mounted by a lusty Arab stud, with him still in the saddle. To make matters worse, the Arab stud's aim was a bit off, and he ended up giving Mr. Forest Service a very unpleasant bath. To add insult to injury, this humiliating experience was apparently witnessed by a few bystanders who let no grass grow under their feet in their diligence to spread and embellish this humorous tale.

By the time Mike heard about it, the damage was done. Mr. Forest Service was very angry, and Mike said his relationship with that particular person was strained from that day forward. He has never been able to prove it made any difference, but it seems suspicious that this offense had a lasting effect since, after the Greens sold to Mr. Bybee - the fourth owner - the Forest Service no longer permitted outfitting or guided fishing or hunting activities to be based here at the Resort

During their sojourn in the Centennial Valley, Mike and Liz did not cater to the snowmobile crowd. In fact, Mike told of spending quiet winters here at the Resort. Except for an occasional coyote hunter, he said they could go all winter without seeing another human being. Of course, there were no phone lines back then, so it could be a long isolated winter. Mike, being an industrious fellow, didn't waste his time, however. He said the current wooden bar top was built one winter from scrap 1 x 2's and wooden pegs. However, his real winter business revolved around running trap lines.

The Centennial Valley is an amazingly quiet place, even today, but back then it was even more so. Mike tells of them being able to hear the road grader as he got to the west side of Lakeview. They would listen as the plow got closer and closer each day, breaking the roads free of the ice and snow which had held them captive all winter. As the grader approached, Mike and Liz would break out the shovels and begin the arduous task of unburying their car. By the time the plow driver arrived, looking for some of the mouth-watering treats he knew Liz would have waiting, the Bryers were packed and ready to follow them out. They would take the road to Monida then head up through Virginia City and Ennis and finally to West Yellowstone. Mike said this break from their self-imposed isolation was always the high point of their spring, but, in the end, they couldn't wait to get back to Elk Lake.

According to the fourth owner, Mr. Bybee, the place was close to condemnation by the time he purchased it in 1980. So, although the Bryers loved their life here at Elk Lake, it apparently wasn't too lucrative - and thus they were unable to maintain the buildings and improvements.

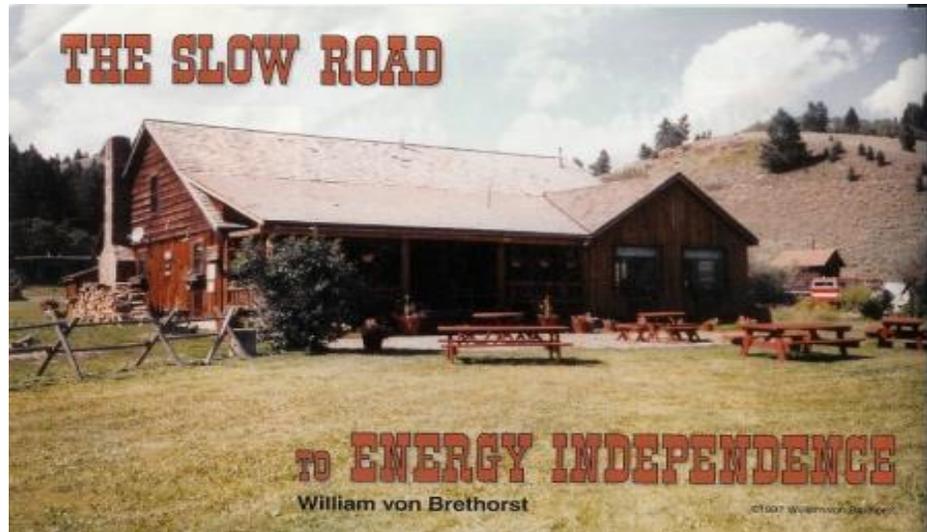
Eldon Bybee, a rare visitor to the resort, made Mr. Green an offer for the Resort in 1980. It was against the advise of friends and family that he made the ridiculously low offer he was sure would be refused. However, Mr. Green accepted. Rumor has it the Forest Service was considering turning the place into a public campground, so Mr. Green probably figured he didn't have much to lose. Thus the Resort came into the possession of Mr. Eldon Bybee, a retired assistance Chief of Police from Pocatello, Idaho.

Mr. Bybee owned and operated Elk Lake Resort for 5 years. According to one visitor from that earlier era, Mr. Bybee was reputed to have been aggressively anti-company. In fact, this gentleman said he had to beg to stay in a cabin, and Mr. Bybee yelled at people if they walked on his grass. However, after a lengthy phone conversation with Mr. Bybee, I find that hard to believe.

Mr. Bybee recounted to me his longstanding ties to Elk Lake Resort, beginning with his parents spending their honeymoon in a tent (of which the Selbys apparently had several) at Hidden Lake back when the original owners still owned the Resort. Mr. Bybee's mother grew up in Dillon, and he was raised in Lima. Thus, the interest in Elk Lake seemed only natural.

Close to retirement, and perhaps looking for another challenge, Mr. Bybee took on the somewhat daunting task of turning Elk Lake Resort into a viable business again. He told me he had made Mr. Green what he considered an offer he would be sure to refuse. However, when Mr. Green accepted the offer, Mr. Bybee quickly applied for and obtain his retired. He then took up residence at the Resort.

One of the first jobs he tackled was the removal of all the old junk cars from the willows down by the lake. Over the years the Selbys (and possibly some of the other owners which followed) had collected quite an impressive collection of



dead cars. Consequently, Elk Lake Resort, like many of its day, was filled with the dinosaurs of a previous era. It took five semi-truck loads to remove them all. With much work and clean up, Eldon got approval to reopen the Resort to the public in 1981.

Mr. Bybee did not have any employees, choosing to run the place by himself. He owned it free and clear, and, as it was not a money making proposition at the time, he hired no employees. As a result, he did not re-open the restaurant. The bar he opened in the evening, when he ran the generator (which was the only time the lodge or cabins had power). While the generator ran, he filled the large cistern with water from the spring on the hill. This provided the Resort with water the following day.

Mr. Bybee wasn't completely alone up here. He had brought with him two faithful companions - one a Black Lab and one a Pomeranian. These two would often team up to catch fish out of Narrows Creek. The Black Lab would take his post on the bridge over the stream and the Pomeranian would go under the bridge and herd out the fish who were hiding in the shadows. As the fish came out from under the bridge, the lab would grab one and carry it to his master. Mr. Bybee developed a pond in the aspens where the spring runs down to the lake. He would put the fish his dog had caught into this pond during the summer. He had built a little bridge over a section of the pond, and Resort guests could view the fish at their leisure.

One day, however, the lab's prowess nearly got him in trouble. Sergeant Holmes, a fish and game warden, had come up to the area and was visiting with Mr. Bybee. While they visited, the good old lab and his Pomeranian cohort went to work. Before long, here came the lab with his catch. Mr. Bybee quickly grabbed the fish, ran to his pond, and threw it in. The uninjured fish swam off to join his new room mates. Sergeant Holmes, much to Mr. Bybee's relief, seemed to take the whole thing in stride. They visited a bit longer and the Sergeant headed off to check out Hidden Lake.

One his return trip, the Sergeant again stopped in for a chat. Much to Mr. Bybee's chagrin, here came the same dog - this time with a healthy grouse in his jaws. After freeing the bird from its captor (also unharmed), Mr. Bybee turned to Sergeant Holmes and declared, "You better haul this vagrant in, Sergeant." Well, the good natured warden just chuckled and let it go at that.

However, that wasn't the end of the dog's adventures. Mr. Bybee recalled another occasion when his lab and an otter got into an argument. It seems man and dog had been taking an evening stroll down by the lake. They came upon an otter. The dog went after the little animal, which quickly returned to its native environment - the lake. The foolish dog followed, only to find he had been outwitted. Mr. Bybee jumped in to save the mutt and found himself outnumbered - about 9 to 2. Both the dog and his owner came away with several bites and scratches from the feisty otters.

Although Mr. Bybee did not run the restaurant, he did rent the cabins. He said 4 of the 6 cabins had bathroom facilities during his day. They rented for \$25 a night. He said much of his business came from Ennis, Cameron, Lima, and Sheridan. His customers came here to fish.

In fact, at that time the lakes produced some large fish. The fortunate angler could catch rainbows which ran up to 10 pounds from Hidden Lake. The largest cutthroat he saw caught out of Elk Lake was 9 1/4 pounds. Of course, fishing wasn't the only 'fun' thing to do. Mr. Bybee told of times he and his friends would go up to the old barn, late at night, with their .22's and shoot the rats which were abundant.

All the Resort business during this era occurred during the summer and fall. Mr. Bybee did not run the Resort in the winter. Of course, he had no need to do so as he had an income from his retirement. However, this did not stop him from staying here. He said the area was most beautiful in the winter. But, it was also cold! At that time there was a big pot-bellied stove in the lodge living room area. Mr. Bybee would sleep upstairs until it got too cold. Then he'd pull out the roll-away and make his bed as close as was safe to that stove.

To keep the lodge at least moderately warm required keeping the fire roaring. This consumed LOTS of wood. As has been said, wood warms you twice - once when you gather it and again when you burn it. Mr. Bybee recounts weeks spent during the summer gathering wood from up by Hidden Lake and hauling it down for winter use.

The electrical system was much different then. Not only was much of the wiring the old knob and tube style and greatly outdated, but the only time the lodge had power was when the generators were running. The generator of Mr. Bybee's day was an old Railroad diesel unit generator. Guests from years previous can remember the big monster shaking the ground, clear across the Resort, when it was running. There was also an old Jeep generator which Mr. Bybee took to the university and had rebuilt. He talked of some old battery packs which were stored in the basement of the ranch house, and an old wind generator down by the lake. However, these must have been seriously outdated and ineffective as they seemed to have added little to the electrical system.

As in the Hank and Erlene's time, the road to Hidden Lake ran through the middle of the Resort. There was an old gate and archway at the entry, and Mr. Bybee made the sign which hung above the gate. He also shot the Elk which provided the antlers for the archway. When, during the Miller's sojourn, the road was re-routed and a new entry created, the sign and antlers were moved to their current location.

Of course other changes have occurred over the years as well. In Mr. Bybee's time there used to be a door from the bar into the dining room -



which was quite a bit smaller in his day. A huge set of Elk antlers hung in the bar, taken from an Elk Mr. Selby had shot years earlier. An old 45 jute box sat under the antlers.

Some things don't change, however, and so there were 'characters' back in his day as today. He recalled a couple of old-timers who used to come up every summer and hunt for the lost mine - when they weren't too drunk. He said legend had it that a man found a vein of gold in the area. Taking a sample of ore, he went to have it assayed. Finding it to be of a very high quality, he hurried back with big plans. But, low and behold, his fortune was about to change, for he soon realized he couldn't remember exactly where that vein of gold was. Search as he might, he never did find that mine again. However, the old-timers spent many a day looking in hopes their luck might be better than his. Alas, it wasn't.

Another visitor who not only bought 'character' but also beauty to the place was an old man known as Dan the Whittler. Story has it Dan would whittle to pay for his drinks. At the time Mr. Bybee sold the Resort there were several beautiful pieces Dan had created on display. The one Mr. Bybee remembers most distinctly was a stage coach done up in great detail with a full team of horses pulling it. Alas, it has gone into some later owner's private collection.

Lest you think Mr. Bybee led a quiet, possibly even boring, life at Elk Lake, I know he would beg to differ. In fact, he told me of one of the least *boring* nights he spent at Elk Lake. He said he woke to the sound of a freight train roaring up the canyon. By the time he woke enough to realize it couldn't possibly be a train, an earthquake hit. He said it shook him so good he thought the lodge might come down around his head. When he took stock the following morning, he found, except for a few broken bottles and plates, the lodge was in good shape. However, upon surveying the outbuildings and cabins he found the boat house had been rocked off its foundation, and the bathrooms on two of the cabins had separated from the cabins themselves.

All good things seem to come to an end, and so, in 1985 Mr. Bybee sold the Resort to Bill and Georgia Miller. Here, it seems, is where the focus of Elk Lake Resort really began to change. I've heard the Millers, particularly Mrs. Miller, were go-getters. Owners of a hot air balloon business in Arizona, they apparently had big plans for what Elk Lake could become.

As a result, the Millers went all out to improve the business aspects of the Resort. They brought in a phone system (via a transmitter on the hillside). They put in a well. They updated the generator setup a bit. They built an addition to the dining room and added the front porch. And, Mrs. Miller who is reputed to have been a friend of Julia Childs, completely renovated and rejuvenated the restaurant. Maximizing her ability, she proceeded to cook some incredibly good - and gourmet - food. During their sojourn, the restaurant was transformed from a standard meat and potatoes "family-style" kitchen to its current status as a country gourmet dining facility.

I have heard the restaurant did a hopping business, with as many as 45 - 50 guests being served on a normal night. Groups came from as far away as Bozeman and Billings to formal, black-tie affairs. And, of course, the year end celebration in the fall was the final touch. Everyone for miles around was invited to come. The Millers roasted a whole pig over a pit of hot coals. All the trimmings and fixings were included. To accompany the food, every open bottle in the bar was set out for the drinking pleasure of the guests. Needless to say, this party was remembered for days, weeks, and even months.

In addition to the changes in the restaurant and dining room, the Millers added a lot of character to the lodge. They are the ones responsible for the lovely rock fire place which graces the living room. They are also the ones who put down the oak floors. Apparently they also did a lot of the internal decor - adding character and personality to the interior of the lodge.

They are also responsible for the archway which graces the entryway into the resort as well as much of the fence around the perimeter. Howard Begin, a retired employee of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, told me of the challenges they faced in standing up the archway. Of course, way out here one doesn't have easy access to heavy equipment. So, after assembling the archway, the big question was: "How do we get it upright without killing someone or breaking something?" Always an industrious man, Howard figured a way to safely use an A-frame and the fruit of their labors still stands today.

There were several employees at the Resort in those days. I know of at least 5 people (including Mr. and Mrs. Miller) who worked part or full time. I believe it was during the Miller's sojourn that J.T. Johnson and his girlfriend, Janice Worble, were hired. These two employees were to stay with the resort until 1997 or 1998 - working for three different employers.

The Miller's plans for improvement did not stop with the restaurant and lodge. They wanted more cabins. They had big plans and dreams for Elk Lake but life changes. Thus in 1992, Mr. Gary Coppin purchased the Resort. Gary came from California. He is mentioned in the Beverly Hills Chronicle dated September 11, 1992. I gather he was a figure known to those in the Beverly Hills set. At the time of the article, five employees made up the Elk Lake crew.

The only other information I have on the Resort during this time comes from a Workman's Compensation case held in March and April of 1996. The facts in this case reveal Elk Lake Resort was operating as a bar, restaurant, and cabin rental at that time. The main lodge included the restaurant and bar with room upstairs for employees. The records show that, "During the summer the Resort caters to fishermen, during the fall to hunters, and during the winter to snowmobilers."

Characters, as usual, seemed to hover in the background during this time in the Resort's history. In fact, during a brief period when J.T. Johnson, who had apparently served as Resort manager since 1990, left the Resort's employ, Gary hired Bojay (Robert McClure) to serve as manager. According to the information in the public records, Bojay fancied himself as a mountain man and wore a sidearm and large knife. He loved to engage the guests in long-winded accounts of his experiences.

Mr. Coppin began, to update the power system here at the Resort. As can be seen by the old propane lights in most of the cabins (which are no longer in use), steady and reliable electric power to the cabins is a relatively new convenience. It took 6 years, but by 1998 the system finally reached more fuel efficient standards. Although still dependent upon the generators for some battery charging and backup power, they are no longer the prime source of energy they once were.

Brothers John and Wayne Schofield, and Wayne's wife, Nancy, purchased the Resort from Gary Coppin in 1996. According to the Schofields, Gary had, at the end of his period of ownership, allowed the property to decline and had run up large debts related to the Resort. Consequently, when the Schofields stepped into the picture there were messes to be cleaned up and problems to be ironed out. However, with work and persistence, they were able to start the process of building the Resort back up to its former glory.

Although experienced in the Nuclear Field, neither John nor Wayne had prior experience with a restaurant or lodging facility. However, they all loved the setting of the Resort and looked forward to the opportunities it represented for a quieter way of life. Thus Wayne became chief cook, Nancy the chief baker and waitress, and John tended bar while sharing maintenance and upkeep duties with Wayne.

Working as a team, the Schofields built upon the previously existing summer business and greatly expanded the winter side as well. In fact, during Yellowstone's heyday, Elk Lake Resort became an almost famous stop over for snowmobilers in and out of the area. A normal winter day could see them serving as many as 100 lunches, with 50 not an uncommon daily occurrence.

However life stepped in, as it often will, and added challenges to their 'perfect' plan. People get tired. Along with running Elk Lake Resort and dealing with the general interruptions caused by the demands of Wayne's job, the Schofield brothers worked their 'off-seasons' at their former trades. This, along with the typical drain experienced by many workers in the service industry, took much of the joy out of Resort ownership. At the time they sold to the eighth owners, in May of 2004, they had decided to either sell or reduce operations to the minimum 4 months required by their Forest Service permit.

After several interested parties slipped away - for one reason or another - along came the Collins family. I have related much of 'how' we found the Resort in [About Us](#). But, our initial impressions may bear repeating.

As the realtor drove us toward the Resort, and we left Henry's Lake headed for the Centennial Valley, we found home. Not only was the countryside beautiful and the people we met friendly, but the wildlife was abundant and the people weren't. Elk Lake Resort had an old west charm which appealed to us, and the setting was - well let's just say incredibly beautiful, unbelievably wild, and extremely quiet and peaceful.

The rest is history. Elk Lake Resort has been good for us - and to us. We have met wonderful people, seen wildlife and scenic vistas which rival everything we'd ever enjoyed, and had the opportunity to live in an area few will ever experience. Our children are experiencing life in an area most kids only see on T.V., and each day holds a new delight.