



AP PHOTO/GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE, ROBIN LOZNAK

Dylan Dickinson of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation watches out the door of a state helicopter as it cruises over the Jocko Lakes fire burning near Seeley Lake, this past summer. Researchers are now finding numbers of artifacts in the burned areas.

Researchers finding rare artifacts in burned areas of Jocko Lakes fire

MISSOULA (AP) — Ammunition for firearms and a tool for scraping buffalo hides are among artifacts found by an archaeologist and a graduate student at the scene of a major wildfire near Seeley Lake, northeast of here.

The student, Anya Minetz, recently saw an oversize cartridge on ground blackened by the Jocko Lakes fire, which started in August and burned more than 36,000 acres. Minetz called for archaeologist C. Milo McLeod to take a look.

"That's from a Spencer rifle," said McLeod, who owns one of the Spencer guns, produced in the 1860s.

In an area just 70 feet long and 30 feet wide, McLeod and Minetz found 17 more cartridges, most with casings and rounds intact; an ax head inscribed with the name of the Douglas Axe Manufacturing Co. of Douglas, Mass., in business from 1836-1897; a pair of scissors or forceps; a whetstone; a bullet mold; and the 14-inch hide scraper.

McLeod works for the Forest Service and said that in more than 30 years of work on the Lolo National Forest, in which the

Jocko Lakes fire burned, he has never found a site with so many artifacts related to the fur-trading era.

McLeod and Minetz, a University of Montana graduate student in forensic anthropology, noted the distribution of the artifacts, mapped and photographed them and completed a metal detector survey. Then they hauled the treasure to McLeod's office at Fort Missoula.

"I believe we've recovered all the artifacts," McLeod said.

He said it appears they were "just left" in the 19th century.

"In 1870, you don't lose 18 unfired cartridges," he said. "You don't lose your ax, your bullet mold, your scissors, your hide scraper."

McLeod and Minetz discovered artifacts in a likely camping stop — near a trail, on level ground, with water nearby. There was no evidence of a camp, however.

"We speculate that maybe a grizzly bear ran the guy off, killed him and ate him," McLeod said.

Minetz researched "buffalo hide scraper" on the Internet and found a picture of one similar to that taken from the fire scene. The scraper pictured was pro-

duced by the Hudson's Bay Co. in the 1800s. A Hudson's Bay post operated in the Flathead Valley's Fort Connah until 1871.

On Thursday the artifacts went to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' tribal preservation office in Pablo. Consultation with tribal officials is standard after an archaeological survey on traditional tribal homelands.

McLeod and tribal representatives talked, but the tribes issued no immediate statement about the artifacts.

"We have a process that we use," said Francis Auld, a tribal preservation assistant. "There is a Salish-Pend d'Oreille elders advisory group, there is a Kootenai elders advisory group. When things like this come around we tend to take the story, or the theory, and intermingle it to see if anybody has any kind of connection that they can maybe recall in their family line, or in several family lines."

McLeod said the artifacts that he and Minetz found are "pretty neat, but I don't want people to go out and try to find stuff and dig it up." Archaeological sites on federal land are protected by law.

1800s artifacts arise from ashes of Jocko Lakes

The Spencer
rifle
cartridges
found at
the site
were used
by the U.S.
Army until
1870, and
by trappers
and traders
in the area.



TOM BAUER/Missoulian

By **KIM BRIGGEMAN**
of the Missoulian

The oversized cartridge was lying on ground left black by last summer's Jocko Lakes wildfire.

When Anya Minetz spotted it last month, she could see it was something special.

"Come look at this one," she called to C. Milo McLeod, who was sifting through the detritus of a modern-day hunter's camp west of Seeley Lake. He came, saw and performed a double-take.

"That's from a Spencer rifle," McLeod said.

He knew because he owns one of the 1860s-vintage firearms, the world's first

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practical repeating rifle.

They were a diverse pair – McLeod an archaeologist and manager of the Lolo National Forest's heritage program, Minetz a graduate student at the University of Montana.

She was in the second day of her first fire survey with McLeod. He came to the Lolo in 1975, years before Minetz was born.

Over the next few hours and days, their excitement grew in tandem as they located artifact after artifact lying exposed on the charred ground.

In an area just 70 feet long and 30 feet wide, McLeod and Minetz found:

- 17 more cartridges, most with casings and rounds intact;
- an ax head, rusted but with a discernible inscription – the Douglas Axe Manufacturing Co. of Douglas, Mass., in business from 1836-1897;
- a pair of scissors or forceps with a funky, Victorian-style design;
- a whetstone;
- a bullet mold;
- and, their favorite find, a 14-inch buffalo hide scraper.

"I've been doing work on the Lolo over 30 years and found a lot of interesting things," said McLeod. "But I've



TOM BAUER/Missoulian

C. Milo McLeod and Anya Minetz, heritage specialists for the Lolo National Forest, show some of the items they discovered recently west of Seeley Lake near the old Jocko Indian Trail. While surveying the area burned over by last summer's Jocko Lakes wildfire, they came across the rifle cartridges and tools that date back to the 1860s.

archaeological and historic sites are protected on federal land.

"This is pretty neat, but I don't want people to go out and try to find stuff and dig it up," he said.

If McLeod had his druthers, he wouldn't have been on the Jocko Lakes fire survey in the first place.

"It had been a very busy summer for me, one of the busiest summers on record," he said. "Come the first of October, I was ready for some time off."

But orders came from above. Field work on the salvaged timber needed to be done before snow flew.

"I said, 'Darn. I want to go hunting,'" chuckled McLeod.

As it happened, Minetz had been in touch with McLeod just a few days earlier. She was due to be laid off from the Lolo Hotshot crew after a summer of firefighting and wondered if he'd have any use for her services.

"I said, 'By all means,'" McLeod said.

A Chicago native who came to college at UM, Minetz is nearing the end of graduate school in forensic anthropology. She couldn't have found herself in a better place at a better time.

"This is a great learning experience for me and the other grad students working

displayed at

Ranger Station. Minetz a peeled pond located in the 1980s. Native trees as a fo spring as the McLeod said

A mile west of the site, McLeod located a prehistoric site consisting of lithic scatter upon several "forms" – pit that Native

■ a bullet mold,
■ and, their favorite find, a 14-inch buffalo hide scraper. "I've been doing work on the Lolo over 30 years and found a lot of interesting things," said McLeod. "But I've never found a site with so much relating to the fur trade era."

McLeod and Minetz made their initial find on Oct. 11. The so-called Spencer site was near the Jocko Road, which follows Placid Creek up to the divide between Seeley Lake and Arlee.

They noted the distribution of the artifacts, mapped and photographed them, laid out a grid and completed a metal detector survey. Then they hauled the treasure back to McLeod's office at Fort Missoula to be analyzed.

"I believe we've recovered all the artifacts," he said.

And so the guesswork begins. Whose cache was this? What happened on this remote mountain bench well over a century ago that left behind such a complete stash?

"That's the mystery," McLeod said. "It's like this was an event that happened, is the best way I can describe it. All these high-value artifacts were just left. In 1870, you don't lose 18 unfired cartridges. You don't lose your ax, your bullet mold, your scissors, your hide scraper."

If murder were involved, why wouldn't the killer have kept the goods?

McLeod and Minetz found the artifacts in a likely camping stop – near the trail, on level ground, with water nearby. But there was no evidence of a camp at the discovery site.

"We speculate that maybe a grizzly bear ran the guy off, killed him and ate him," McLeod said.

Based on the vintage of the cartridges and the buffalo hide scraper, he conjectures the treasures have been there since 1870, give or take a few years.

McLeod believes the Spencer site was along a centuries-old travel route over the Mission Mountains. Hunters traveled it from their homelands in the Jocko and points west into the Swan country, and often on to the Blackfoot River and the "Road to the Buffalo."

Three years before his death in 1893, Major Peter Ronan wrote of the trail's value from his standpoint as superintendent of the Flathead Reservation.

C. Milo McLeod and Anya Minetz, heritage specialists for the Lolo National Forest, show some of the items they discovered recently west of Seeley Lake near the old Jocko Indian Trail. While surveying the area burned over by last summer's Jocko Lakes wildfire, they came across the rifle cartridges and tools that date back to the 1860s.

"How easy the sportsmen and outing parties from Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Deer Lodge and other places might make this trip into the Jocko Valley, on horseback and with pack animals, as the early pioneers went on stampedes," Ronan wrote.

"I think it was a pretty distinct and well-known travel route from the Swan over to the Flathead," said McLeod. It's identified as the Jocko Indian Trail on a 1906 government land office map.

In 1870, Indians and whites alike could have been traveling the Jocko trail. Fort Connah, a Hudson's Bay Company trading post, had been operating in the Mission Valley since 1846.

Spencer rifles were Army-issued until 1870, but McLeod doubts if the artifacts belonged to a soldier. Fort Missoula wasn't established until 1877. The closest military post was Fort Shaw, 90 miles due east. Fort Shaw was manned by Springfield-armed infantry at the time.

"This would have been a time when the Spencer would have been in civilian hands," said McLeod.

The best find, in the eyes of the finders, was the buffalo hide scraper.

"We didn't know what it was until we got it back to the office," McLeod said. "We ran it under hot water, and dirt fell out of the hole on the end. I looked at it and said, 'This is a .50-caliber octagonal rifle barrel.'"

Minetz got on the Internet and Googled up "buffalo hide scraper." She found a picture of one very similar to theirs. It was manufactured by the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1800s. The Hudson's Bay post at Fort Connah operated in the Flathead until 1871.

McLeod crated the artifacts to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribal preservation office in Pablo on Thursday. It's standard after an archaeological survey on traditional tribal homelands to consult with the tribes, especially when something of interest is found.

"I think they'd be interested in this site," he said before he left, "and I'm interested to see

if they have any information on the Jocko Indian Trail."

McLeod was heard out, but the tribes made no immediate response.

That's not how it's done, explained Francis Auld, a tribal preservation assistant.

"We have a process that we use. There is a Salish-Pend d'Oreille elders advisory group, there is a Kootenai elders advisory group," Auld said. "When things like this come around we tend to take the story, or the theory, and intermingle it to see if anybody has any kind of connection that they can maybe recall in their family line, or in several family lines."

That way, he said, oral traditions remain vital and evolving.

"We're not dead yet," Auld said. "We're a continuing tradition."

The tribal preservation office and elders will sit back down with McLeod after they learn what there is to learn, Auld added.

The Jocko Lakes wildfire started near the top of the Reservation Divide in early August. It burned more than 36,000 acres in the next month, many in a mosaic pattern.

The fire made two major runs, forcing a series of evacuations in the Seeley Lake area. Those firestorms turned vast swaths of trees into jungles of blackened sticks, and scoured the duff, pine needles and other ground cover.

McLeod and Minetz were in just such a devastated area when they made their find, and all metallic objects were exposed.

No fire, or even a less intense one, and the artifacts might never have been spotted. A test pit was dug, but indicated nothing buried underground.

McLeod has surveyed other fires in the area, but has never found artifacts approaching the value of these.

"I think what makes this so unique is the association with the Jocko Indian Trail," he said.

He reminded others that

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school in forensic anthropology. She couldn't have found herself in a better place at a better time.

"This is a great learning experience for me and the other grad students working with Milo," she said. "We do the whole process, the findings in the field and the going back and doing the metal detector survey."

Next, she said, comes the curating. Local historian Kermit Edmonds will guide the preservation of the artifacts. McLeod said some might be

displayed at the Seeley Lake Ranger Station at some point.

Minetz also got to see a peeled ponderosa that McLeod located in the area in the early 1980s. Natives peeled pines trees as a food source in the spring as the sap began to rise, McLeod said.

A mile west of the Spencer site, McLeod and Minetz located a prehistoric site consisting of chipped stone, or lithic scatter. They also came upon several isolated "pre-forms" - pieces of chert or flint that Natives roughed out for

easier transport, then turned into arrowheads, knives or scrapers as the need arose.

"Between the peeled tree, the lithic scatter, isolated pre-forms and then this historic site, we're pretty confident we're within the route of the Jocko Indian Trail," McLeod said.

Minetz held up a small bag of the chipped stones and smiled.

"This," she said, "is what we'd normally get excited about."