

LOST BOYS OF THE FLATHEAD

■ **OUR SPECIAL REPORT ON ALCOHOL, YOUNG BOYS AND DEATH BEGINS SUNDAY**

Carved to the Corps

Woman fires up her chain saw to create sculptures of Lewis and Clark's historic journey. **MONTANA, B1**

Donner was here

At least that's what archaeologists believe after discovering remnants of a camp set up before the party's fateful trek over the Sierras. **REGION, A2**

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LOST TRAIL HOT SPRINGS RESORT



LOUIS MONTCLAIR/Missoulian

ABOVE: Lisa Foster carves the face of famous explorer William Clark into a dead ponderosa pine tree at the Lost Trail Hot Springs Resort near the Idaho border Thursday.
BELOW: Foster saws into the chest of William Clark on Thursday. The trees were sculpted into members of the Lewis and Clark party from dead trees that were killed by pine beetles. Rather than cut them down, Lost Trail co-owner Stann Honey hired Foster, from Hamilton, to turn the dead trunks into works of art.

Slices of history

Chain saw sculptor makes use of diseased trees to commemorate Lewis and Clark expedition

By MICHAEL REDSTONE
for the Missoulian

How do you save a tree that's already dead? Make it into a work of art.

That's what Lost Trail Hot Springs Resort is doing to preserve ponderosa trees that were killed by pine beetles. Instead of cutting them down and leaving an ugly tree stump, the resort commissioned local artist Lisa Foster to carve sculptures out of the trees.

"It's a way to say thank you to a tree and let it live a little bit longer," said Stann Honey, co-owner of the resort.

Foster, a Hamilton sculptor who uses a chain saw as her tool, chose the Corps of Discovery explorers as her first subjects. She is finishing up the sculpture of William Clark while the completed carvings of Meriwether Lewis and Sacagawea stand nearby, forming a triangle a few yards apart. They stand on rocks carved into the wood, while Lewis' dog Seaman sits at his master's feet as he gazes out into the sunset.

"I look into the wood and I see a picture. I cut away at what I see and I pull the person out," said Foster.

Each sculpture takes her about 25-30 hours to complete, and she's been working on the Lost Trail project for two months. Her next two projects for the resort are to carve a mountain man and Chief Joseph.

While she is carving out the face of Clark, Foster stands on a scaffold at least 10 feet tall, wielding the chain saw as if it was an extension of her arms. She uses a Dremel high-speed drill to work on the fine details of his face. When she's done she will treat the wood by burning it with a torch, then preserve it with latex acrylic paint, linseed oil and varnish.

Foster, who works part time as a mail carrier, is one of the few female chain saw carvers in Montana. According to her Web site, www.shesawsit.com, she started her craft in 2002.

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Chain saw

Continued

The trees she's sculpting are believed to be 200 years old. When fire ravaged the Bitterroot Valley in 2000, it weakened the trees and left them vulnerable to beetle infestation.

The trees are cut to stand at about 20 feet tall or more. The proposed Chief Joseph sculpture will be about 22 feet tall.

The base of the tree isn't the only thing part being made into art. Foster also plans to use wood from the trees to make

benches, figurines and other carvings.

Honey said the resort is trying to take something ugly and turn it into something beautiful.

Lost Trail Resort chose this project because of its location as a part of history. The ridge just above the cabins is where the Corps of Discovery got lost and is a part of the Lewis and Clark Trail. The Nez Perce Indians used to camp there as well. Honey said that the trees that are there today were probably young when the expedition came through.

"There is a lot of history in this area," he said.