

Country Roads

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The Dino Hunter

She lived out a childhood dream in Montana's Badlands.

Story and photos by Linda Aksomitis, Qu'appelle, Saskatchewan

When I was a kid, I wanted to be an archaeologist when I grew up. I dreamed about digging and discovering things long buried by time. These days, I do most of my digging through history books and the Internet.

Or, I did, until I found the Makoshika Dinosaur Museum in Glendive, Montana. The museum is just one of 15 stops along the Montana Dinosaur Trail.

Jerry Jacene, the museum's resident paleontologist, takes would-be dinosaur hunters like me out into the Badlands in search of ancient riverbeds, shells and the bones of Late-Cretaceous Era heavyweights like Triceratops, Stegosaurus and Tyrannosaurus rex.

I brought along everything I'd need for a day under the sun—a wide-brimmed hat, hiking shoes, sunscreen and sunglasses. The museum provided the practical tools of a paleontologist—rock hammer, chisel and brush.

Jerry was a great teacher. As we hiked out to the dig, he tossed back answers to our questions as fast as we threw them: "Did a meteorite kill the dinosaurs?" "Why did dinosaurs become extinct?" He shared one bit of information that really stuck with me.

"The difference between a dinosaur bone and a rock is that your tongue will stick to the bone," he said.



The adventure begins. Jerry Jacene (above) lays out the tools of a dinosaur hunter. Visitors to the museum can join Jerry out in the field to search for dinosaur fossils.



As soon as we reached the dig, we got right down to business. I gathered my tools and began poking around in the richest fossil bed in Montana.

Digging for dinosaurs is hot work and certainly tedious. I could almost hear dinosaurs thundering across the land. In the hot haze of the afternoon, I had to blink a few times as the mirage of a 7-ton T. rex plodded across the prairie grass below me.

I smoothed dust away from each tiny piece of rock and loosened shale. All I found were small bone fragments, mainly of the Hadrosaurus. I didn't lick them to make sure.

One of the great things about digging with the museum on private ranch land is that I got to keep small finds as souvenirs. My visit to this dinosaur dig netted me one of the best gifts I'd ever brought home for my grandson. I gave him some priceless dinosaur bones to treasure. Now he dreams of becoming a dinosaur hunter, too.

In Winter, They're All Ears

It's not weather you'd expect folks to stand around in for hours at a time. But on Chester Greenwood Day, the residents of this old New England town willingly freeze everything except their ears off.

Farmington is the Earmuff Capital of the World, thanks to Chester Greenwood. In 1873, a teenaged Chester invented the earmuff simply because his ears were cold. The invention made him a very prosperous hometown hero.



Photo: Albert Knox

More than 100 years later, the town celebrates Chester with a parade in his honor, a chili cook-off and a gingerbread house-building contest, among other events.

The dress code is casual, but earmuffs are a must.

"Obviously, it's a quirky event," says Lorna Nichols, who is executive director of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. "But you'd be amazed at how many people line the streets in anticipation."

The day is also a celebration of winter. By 3 p.m., a hearty few strip down to their swimsuits and plunge into Clearwater Lake. "These are some brave people," Lorna notes. "It's really, really cold."

This year, folks will be reaching for their earmuffs (and their swimsuits) on December 6.

Julewhat?

Loosely translated, julebukk means “Christmas cheer.” The Norwegians who settled this town at the tip of Mit-kof Island brought the tradition with them. From Christmas to the New Year, families

went door-to-door, sharing treats and toasting their neighbors.

In the Alaskan version, people go from shop to shop, sampling Alaskan and Norwegian goodies like krumkake, spritz cookies, pickled salmon and pickled herring.



Photo: Donel Judy

“It’s a way for merchants to thank customers for their business all year,” says Sally Norheim Dwyer, executive director of the Petersburg Chamber of Commerce.

There are quite a few ways to make the dishes served during the event, and each store owner puts his or her own spin on them. Folks stop by Coastal Cold Storage for the Cajun shrimps then head to Lee’s Clothing for owner Roxy Lee’s spritz cookies. The competition can be stiff on this island, where cooking is serious business.

“When the new pharmacist came 39 years ago, he brought pastrami sandwiches,” says Sally. “He has them flown in from a deli in New York City.”

Julebukkers hit the streets of Petersburg December 22-24.

More Country Celebrations

Sandstone Ice Festival

December 12-14

Sandstone, Minnesota

Cold weather won’t keep most Minnesotans from their outdoor pursuits. Organizers of this celebration of winter sport want others to join in on the icy fun, too.

Winter camping, ice climbing, snowshoeing and gear swapping are all part of the festival’s offerings. First-timers will learn to climb ice, camp and dress for the cold. Organizers also have gear available for novices to try. Hibernation is not an option.

Wassail Weekend

December 12-14

Woodstock, Vermont

Christmas in the 1890s is the theme of this festival. An old farm manager's house is decorated with fresh greens, and vintage ornaments adorn the Christmas tree. Take a sleigh ride through the farm or tour the Victorian farmhouse.

Yuma lettuce Days

January 23-25

Yuma, Arizona

If you're eating lettuce in the middle of winter, chances are it was grown in Yuma. The self-proclaimed Winter Lettuce Capital of the World likes to boast that 90% of all winter vegetables are grown here. During the festival, locals celebrate by dining at the longest salad bar in the Southwest and hosting an "iron chef" contest. Free agricultural bus tours and a salad dressing contest also are part of the fun.