

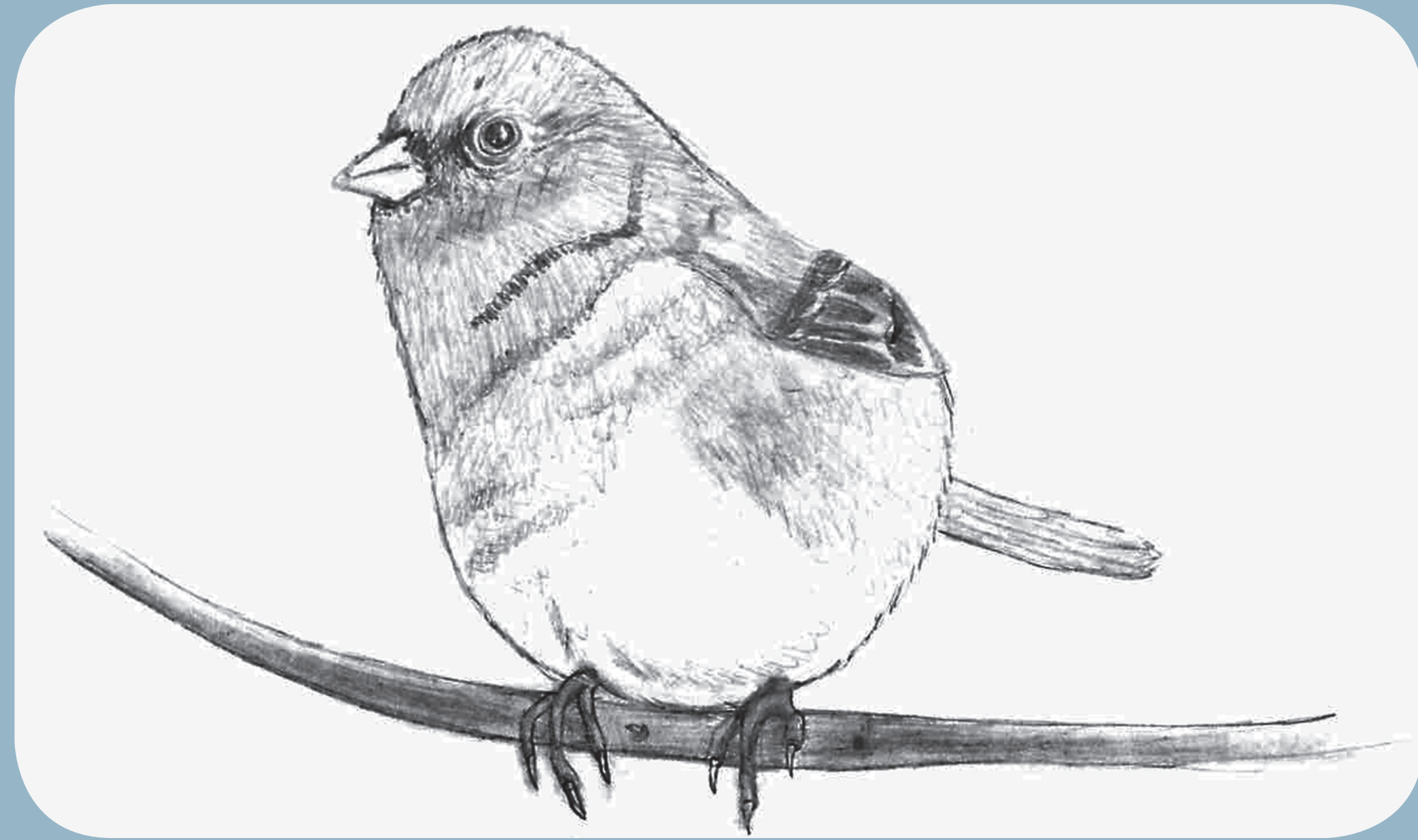
How a Young Brave Survived

The 'Aqłsmaknik (Kootenai) hold the Jennings area in high reverence. An oral tradition speaks of a young warrior's survival as he endured hardships to reach his people at 'A-ki'yi (Jennings, MT):

'Aqłsmaknik warriors traveled afoot until the arrival of the horse (Kqłłaxa'łçin: Elk-dog). They revered the horse, strong as an elk and loyal as a dog. These qualities impelled young warriors to travel long distances to obtain them. Warriors sought the best horses from enemy encampments. Should an undercover warrior successfully whisk them away, he was thought to be great; should he be caught in the act, war ensued.

One late autumn day, a group of 'Aqłsmaknik warriors assembled in center camp and announced their intent to travel over the Rocky Mountain Divide and make war by performing the Rawhide Beat Dance. One of the warriors, intended to teach his thirteen year old son to be a warrior, to be courageous. The group traveled afoot across high peaks and far into the plains to find a suitable spot to make camp and rest for the night.

The following morning, the group was ambushed. Only the boy survived, staying undercover and running through gullies during the conflict. He knew he had to return to his people. With only a small pouch containing flint and an animal skin robe, he kept walking until he reached the foothills. Snow accumulated as he trekked high into the mountains, fearing pursuit from the enemy, he did not sleep and knew to head west as they had traveled east. He walked for two days and could not walk any further as he was exhausted. His tattered and wet moccasins carried him to a suitable spot to rest for the night. Breaking off boughs from a nearby tree, he made a bed under the canopy of lower branches and covered himself with his hide. Sad knowing he was still very far from home, he thought "I'm going to die, either from starvation or freezing to death."



The next day he continued his journey for a short distance before sitting due to fatigue and dozed off. He awoke to singing; a snowbird was across from him set on a branch. The boy dug for stones and with all his strength cast it at the bird knocking it to the ground. He felt sorry but knew he could use this bird as bait for a larger meal such as a weasel or rabbit. He made a snare with his moccasin strings, stretched them as much as he could, and found a suitable spot to support the bird bait in his trap.

"A small animal will catch the scent and go through the snare and it will tighten around the animal's neck choking it." He continued, "I may as well get ready for the night. I'll build a shelter." He broke branches away from smaller trees and shrubs and created a sturdy shelter. He took tree boughs and spread them around the inside for a bed. He crawled inside, "if it doesn't blizzard tonight, I'll be lucky."

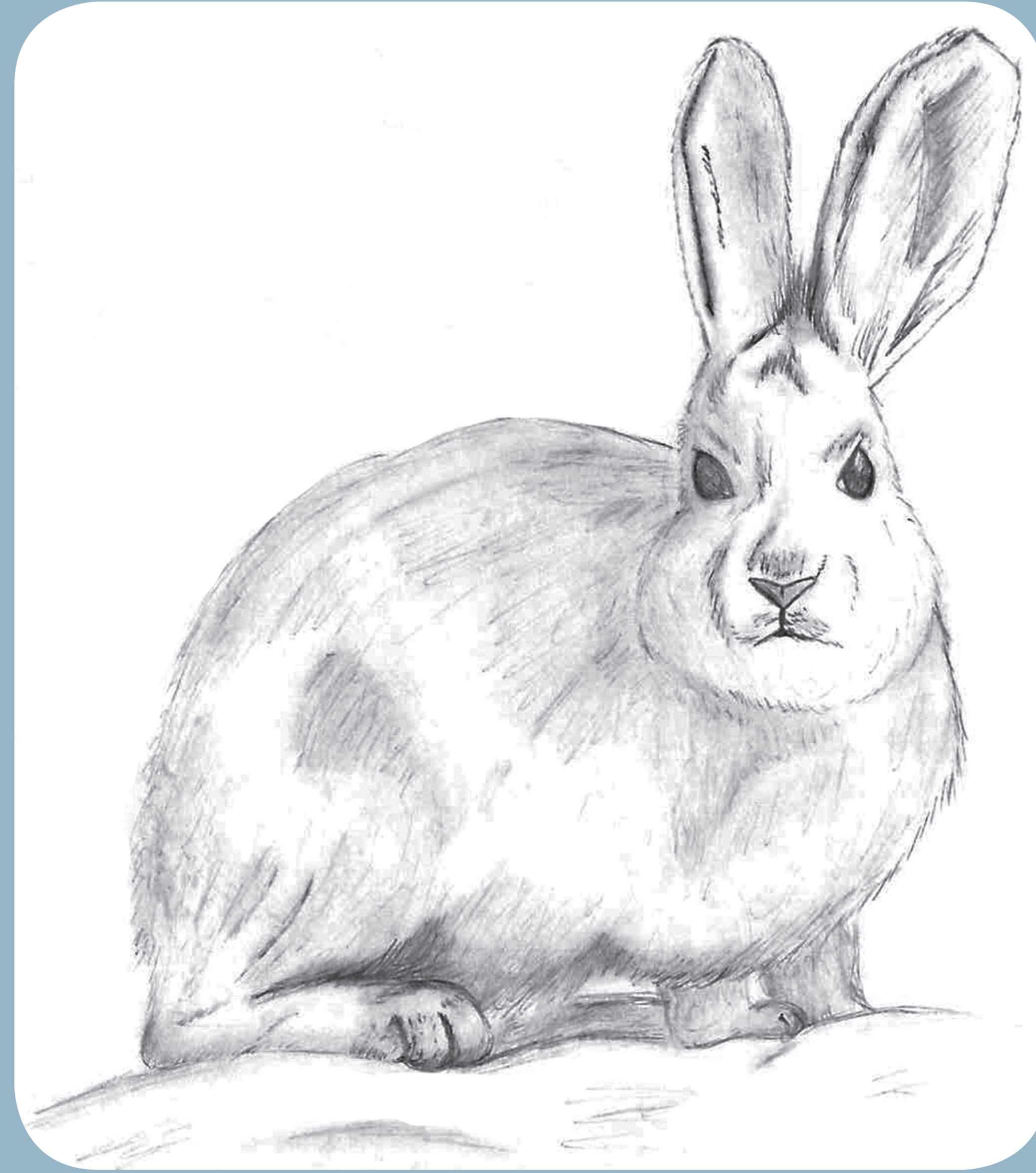
He awoke the next morning with his snare fresh in his mind. He went to check his trap and found that he had caught a weasel! He was happy for now he had something to eat. He reset his trap with the remaining bird bait and went back to his shelter. He crossed a small iced-over stream on his walk back and worked to clear the snow and ice away in order to get a drink; his first since his escape from the war party. He drank his fill and set off to a stand of cottonwood trees to collect tinder, dry wood, and pitch. He returned to the creek, gathered small stones and a larger flat rock.



Back at camp, he cleared snow to create a pit and started a fire atop the flat rock using his flint and tinder. He placed the flame under his dry wood and pitch and blew so that the fire would take.

For the first time in many nights, the boy felt warm. He carefully skinned the weasel saving the skin and sinew and placed the hide on a stick over the fire to dry. He placed the sinew in his pouch and saved the intestines nearby for bait. He roasted the weasel and felt much better having finally eaten. The boy spent the rest of his afternoon gathering firewood, placing large pieces in the fire to have good coals for the morning.

He awoke early and went to check his trap, this time he caught a rabbit. Resetting his snare, he took the rabbit back to his shelter to skin it using the same routine he did with the weasel. He ate his fill, saved the rabbit meat and sat for a while, "since I have something to eat for another day, I should start home. I have quite a distance left to go and will be able to cross the mountains without getting lost."



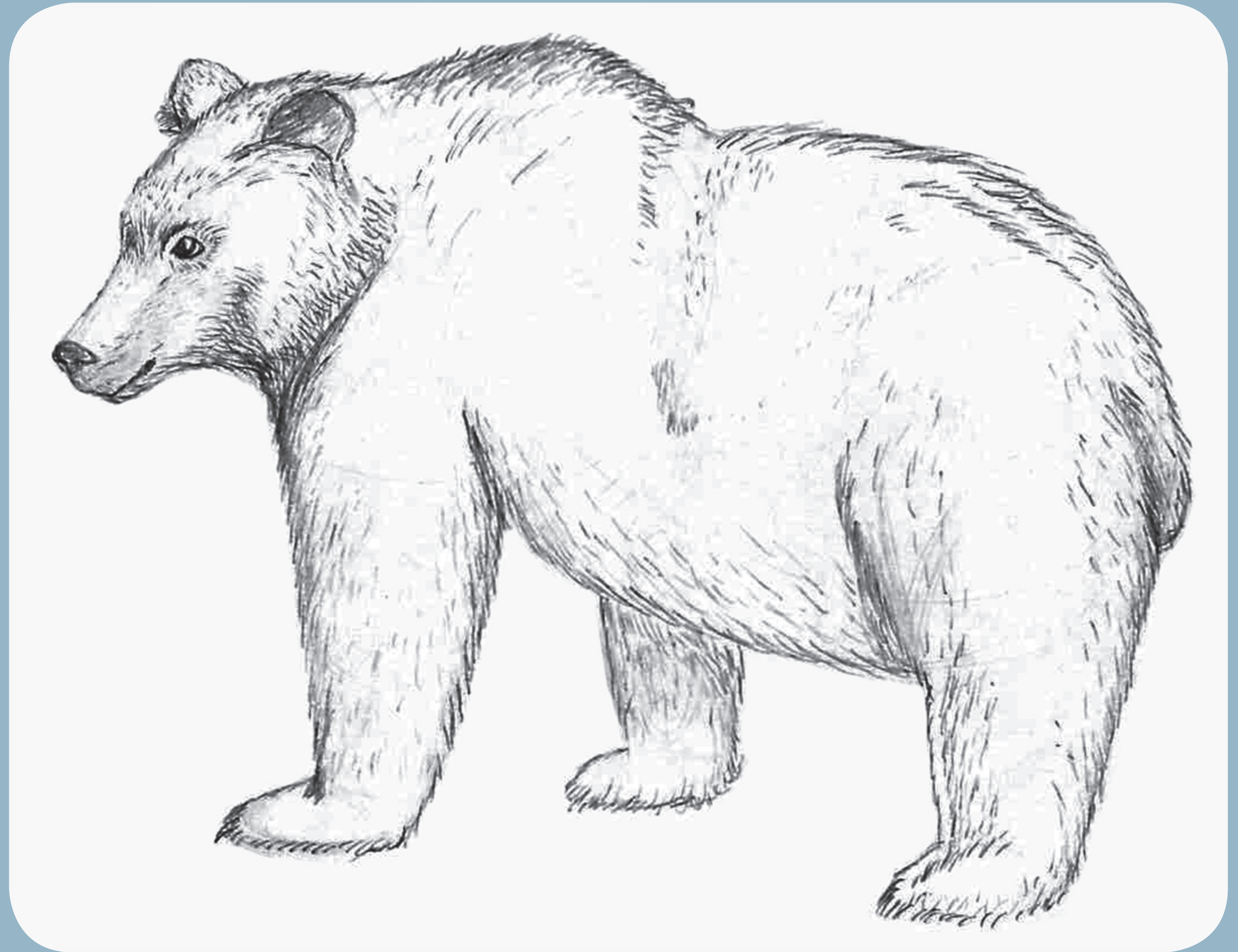
He went to sleep wondering what he should do. At daybreak, he finished his cooked rabbit and went back to his snare where he found a larger rabbit. He carefully dressed it out saving the sinew and intestines. This sinew was longer and stronger than the first, which prompted him to look for a young cedar tree from which to make a bow. He spliced the sinew together to make a strong bowstring and imagined hunting bigger animals upon finishing the bow. He re-set his trap and decided to stay awhile longer.

The Boy set off early the next morning to hunt, traveled a short distance before spotting a fawn. He shot it, watched it fall and packed it back to camp. He dressed his kill, saved the brains to tan the hide later, and placed the meat in the snow to keep it from spoiling. "Since I have enough fresh meat, I could cut some up and smoke it. It would be easier to pack with me." With his new cache of meat and tools, he felt safe. He decided to create a bigger shelter sturdy enough to hold up under heavy snowfall.

Meanwhile, his people at home were worried about the warriors who had not returned. Another group left to search for them and traveled along the same route into the plains before reaching the site of the massacre. They returned home feeling sadness in their hearts for their relatives who they assumed had all perished.

Back in the mountains, the boy finished his shelter by placing his flooring and making his bed. He ended his day by gathering enough wood to last for a while. The next day he tanned his fawn skin using the same methods he learned from watching his mother tan. He scraped the flesh from the hide using a deer rib and spread the skin over the snow to keep it moist. He scraped his hide with a small rock and rubbed cooked brains over the hide so that it would penetrate and soften the skin. After many days, he completed it and felt very warm in his new robe; it was worth the effort.

Between his tanning sessions the boy hunted, accumulated a healthy store of meat to be dried, and used the hides for rugs and robes. He killed two large bucks and dragged them back to camp. He wanted to make better moccasins so he dressed them out and threaded the sinew through an awl he fashioned from a small bone. He used this awl to punch through the thick hide to stitch his new leggings, shirt and moccasins with the sinew. With thicker, warmer clothing and a good amount of meat, he would not go hungry or cold as the winter days grew harsher.



The boy knew it was time to leave this area and fashioned himself some snowshoes and a stronger bow. He traveled for many days and nights and after depleting much of his meat supply thought that he'd hunt for a bear. The meat and fat would give him good energy to continue the long journey. While hunting he came across a bear den.

The boy poked into the den knowing that if the growl sounded hollow, it was a grizzly but if it sounded muffled, it was a black bear. He crawled into the den and killed the bear, gutted it and drug it back to camp which wasn't too difficult to slide across the hard-packed snow. The boy tanned the hide, smoked the meat and cut the fat into strips to hang over the fire. He continued his journey knowing he had enough to travel well through the mountains. Walking took its toll on the boy and he felt hungry for something different than bear meat and fat. He fashioned a small stone hook and attached it to his bear sinew and began to fish a nearby lake. He caught some trout and enjoyed his meal.



Many weeks passed and it was now spring, yet the snow had not melted. He thought of his mother and relatives, wishing he was home with them. He decided to go home and dried the meat he had left and set off walking. The boy would spend his last few nights under trees walking during the day until he arrived into a familiar river valley. He wondered if his people were still at the site which he had left. Many days and nights passed as he followed the Kootenai River. The boy felt the mounting excitement as his eyes fell upon his people's camp on a distinct westward bend in the river. Upon reaching the camp he dropped his belongings and walked to the nearest lodge.

The people in the camp were in shock and disbelief. Some men believed that there were no survivors of that war party. The young boy spoke to them, "it is true, all the warriors were killed, I managed to escape. I barely survived the winter and I have been living in the mountains."

He asked if his mother was still living amongst them and where he could find her. The men pointed toward her camp. One man went ahead to her lodge, entered and after some time broke the news, "your son has returned, he is alive and well." The mother asked him to repeat what he said. He repeated, "I said your son has returned, alive and unharmed." He came to my lodge and inquired about you. Come with me."



She followed the man to where her son was waiting. She entered his lodge and saw her son sitting at the rear facing the entry; she was in disbelief and ran to embrace him. The boy's mother was very happy to see him as well as everyone else in the camp. After reuniting with his mother, the boy untied his bundle and handed his mother the bear robe. He told her, "I made this for you." He untied a smaller bundle and showed her the meat inside.

The men gathered the rest of the people to announce the return of the young brave. Shouts of joy came over the camp and they joined the boy for a celebration. He shared his pemmican with them while relaying his story and experiences on how he had survived.

The boy would grow into a highly respected and powerful man. It was not sheer luck that the brave survived this ordeal. The snow-bird's song gave him strength, courage, and will. His knowledge of and his respect for the environment allowed him to survive. This story, passed down along with many others exemplify a profound understanding of the environment as well as ones place within that environment.

Occupants Along the Rocky Mountain Trench

Before humans walked the valleys of Western Montana, there once lived a sea-monster, big and horrible, who spent his time terrorizing the vast lake that once filled these great chasms. The Ktunaxa (Kootenai) people refer to this being as Yawu'nik, a large serpent-like creature whose eventual sacrifice drained the great expanse of water that once inundated much of Western Montana. From this point on Ktunaxa people would become stewards of the Rocky Mountain Trench, traveling an expansive territory far beyond their mountainous surroundings.

The Ktunaxa language is a unique isolate dialect found nowhere else. Many significant landforms have been shaped and bear markings from that once great lake. These Ktunaxa places signified in story, passed down through generations, honor a millennia-long relationship the Ktunaxa have with their homeland.

Geographically speaking, the aboriginal territory of the Ktunaxa include what is now Washington, Idaho, British Columbia, Alberta and Montana. The traditional life ways of the Ktunaxa people reflect the varying environments of the intermountain, plains and plateau regions.

Prior to contact, the 'Aqłsmaknik designated place names throughout the aboriginal territory following the waterways through mountainous terrain and out onto the plateaus and plains. Many places are followed by the phrase "nik" referring to the

"People" or families who regularly occupy these areas throughout the seasons.

To the far northeast is the territory where the "river running into, out again, and back into another river" the Kak'waqamituk'nik. This place name describes the convergence of the Elk River and one of its tributaries, Michelle Creek just west of Crow's Nest Past, Alberta. Families often wintered east of the continental divide on the prairie south of the Crow's Nest Pass.

Just northwest a few ranges, as the crow flies, are the 'A-kisq̄nuknik, for Columbia Lakes, but who also made their rounds between Crow's Nest Lake and Waterton Lakes wintering between Old Man (Kootenai River) and Bow Rivers. One of the larger family groups was known to inhabit the valleys west of Whiteswan Lake in British Columbia. Despite the village/placename recorded as Q̄anta:k, it is known that these people were 'Aq̄amnik.

Found downstream are the people(s) of Tobacco Plains, distinguished not due to locality but in their names, the 'Akanuxu'nik, Flying Head People and Swift Current People, the 'A-kanxu'nik. The subtle differences potentially indicate two different family groups, inhabiting the northern and southern portions of Tobacco Plains or a phonetical anomaly based on difference in dialect. These families utilized the Tobacco River and typically hunted west of the divide hunting with relatives found as far north as the Bull River in British Columbia.

From the Tobacco Plains, cross over into the narrow valley of the Kootenai River where the 'A-kukaq̄uknik, the Narrow Valley or Canyon People, make their lodges. These families often joined their relatives downstream to summer in the Bonners Ferry floodplains in northern Idaho.

Further along the western course of the Kootenai, near modern day Libby, Montana is the area utilized by the 'Aqswaq̄nik. Families accessed the Lower Clark Fork corridor traveling west to Troy and along the Bull River Passage. From this middle river area groups utilized the Fisher River drainage and traveled east to Flathead Valley and south along the Mission and Swan Ranges.

The 'Aq̄anq̄minik or 'A-kaq̄ahaq̄xu occupy the flood plains of the lower Kootenai River near modern day Bonners Ferry, Idaho. During flood season the valley offered islands for families to occupy. These groups often joined relatives further down river utilizing the abundant resources offered by the lower Kootenai's floodplains.

The 'A-kisq̄nuknik land occupied downstream near modern day Creston, B.C. Translated as the Two Lakes People for the Kootenay Lakes, partly from which they sustained themselves. The valley located south of Kootenay Lakes, B.C., Ya-q̄annu·ki refers to "where the rock stands" and offers a variety of natural river corridors for families to travel and reconnect with relatives.

To the south along the banks of the Flathead Lake live the Ksanka who make their lodges around the western shore of modern day Flathead Lake. This body of water designated Yawu'nik 'Akuq̄'nuk by the Ktunaxa and refers to the "monster in the deep". The families who dwelled in the valleys associated with this body of water reached to the Missoula, Bitterroot, and Deer Lodge Valley's representing the southernmost expanses of the Ktunaxa aboriginal territory. These families often joined their relatives in the Jennings and Libby area utilizing trail systems through modern day Kalispell and Niarada, MT.

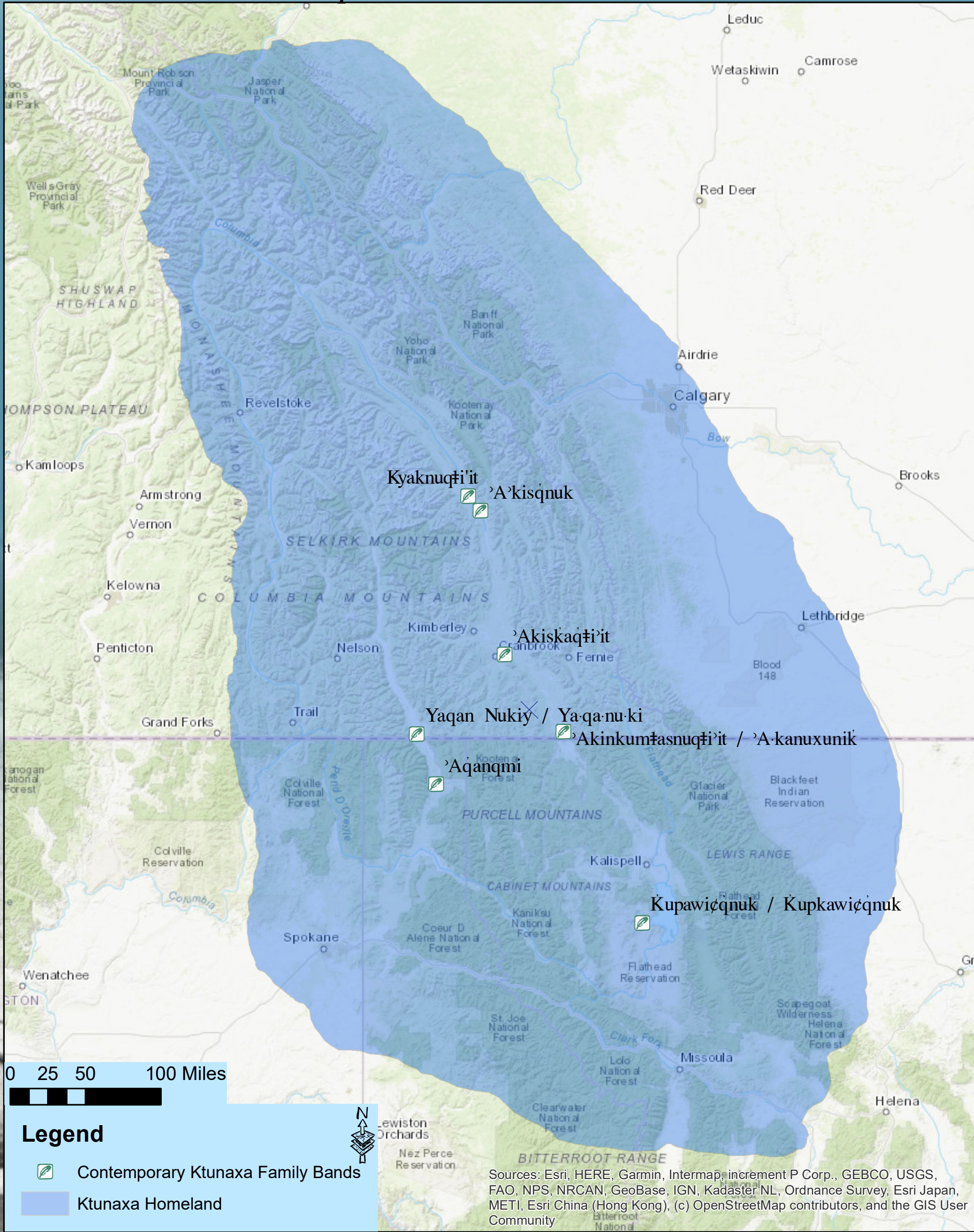
Here at Jennings, Montana, where the Kootenai River makes a westward bend are the 'A-kiyiniq, who, like their kin, utilized the corridors south of Marias Pass to hunt east of Dupuyer Mountain and Heart Butte area.

Designated as middle-Kootenai River territory, Jennings-Libby provided a vantage point in which to utilize the river as well as its tributaries as important travel corridors. These family groups ranged over the Fisher River drainage extending east into the modern day Pleasant and Flathead Valleys.

These groups also utilized the Bull, Thompson and Vermillion River drainages to access into the Lower Clark Fork corridor. In addition to traveling, this area provided rich hunting, fishing and gathering ground in which to sustain the occupants of the area from season to season. Material remains recovered in the areas have provided evidence for seasonal yet prolonged occupation of Jennings, which is maintained by the Ksanka families located on the Flathead Reservation.



Yaqaḥ Hankatiḥiki na 'Amak



Blood and Veins

The Ktunaxa homeland spans across three major ecosystems, the plains, intermontane, and plateau. These varying environments provide a variety of foods and medicines for the groups. The homelands of the Ktunaxa are comparatively productive and able to support large family numbers as these groups moved about the country. Herds of bison were plentiful on the plains and ranged over vast distances making hunting excursions lengthy and difficult.

In the mountains, these families hardly went without as game animals, fish, bulbs, roots and berries were abundant. Streams, rivers and lakes found in the mountains offer various food and medicinal items, more so, rivers and navigable streams offer passage through the surrounding mountains. These mountains provide food, medicines, materials and most importantly, a place to reconnect with ancestral traditions and beliefs.

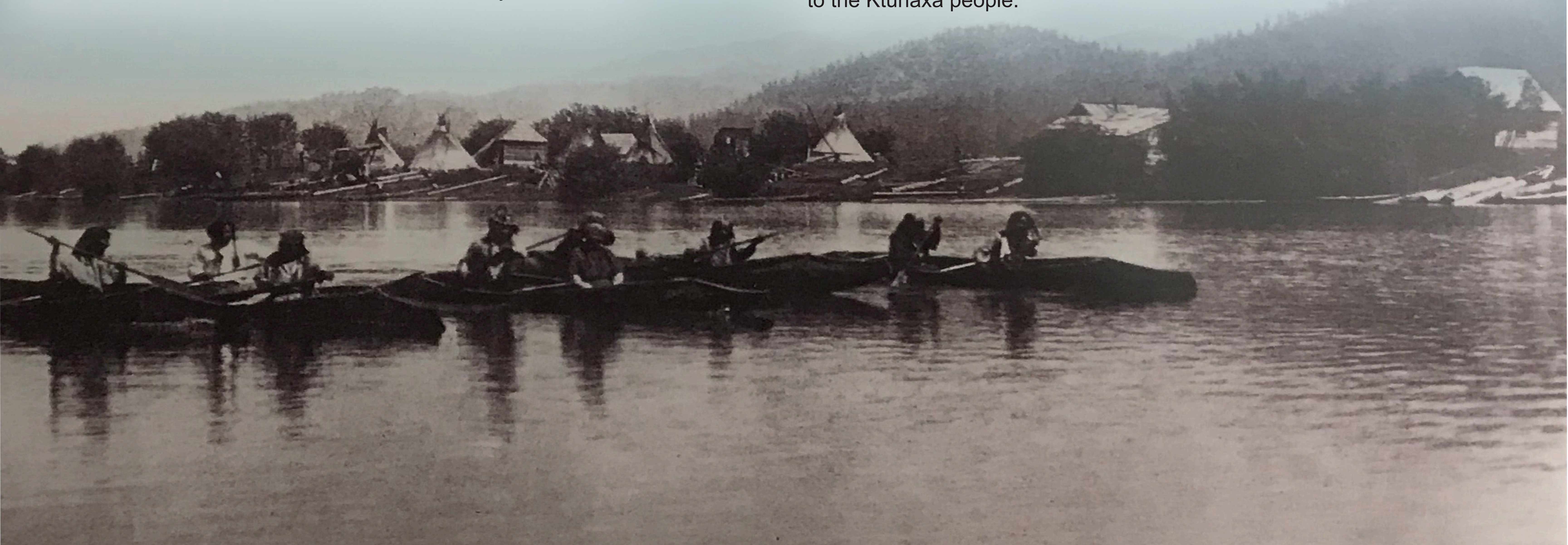
For the Ktunaxa people the waterways provide many resources from fish to fowl to aquatic plant species. Many types of fishing equipment exist throughout the Ktunaxa history including stone hooks, fishing nets and traps indicating a steady use of the local fisheries. One of the more prized Ktunaxa advents is, yaqsu'mit, the Sturgeon Nose Canoe, a uniquely manufactured vessel which has allowed for the safe and efficient travel of the local waterways and lakes.

From this vessel, canoers are able to fish, gather important aquatic plants, and hunt for waterfowl and other small aquatic mammals. Evidence for the harvesting of aquatic fowl is found among the lower spans of the Kootenai River where people both past and present construct duck decoys and employ other traditional means of hunting.

The Plains have provided The Ktunaxa people many resources and have tempted the bands to travel far out onto the flats in search of herds and potential trade. Prior to the horse it is understood that groups of hunters traveled across the mountains multiple times in a year with the most treacherous trips taking place during the winter season. The tradition of snowshoeing is well documented and indicative of these trans-continental expeditions.

Within the Great Trench of the Rocky Mountains can be found many non-food items that are and have been utilized by the Ktunaxa people including workable stone materials, minerals for paints and dyes, reeds for shelter, and kinnikinnick, a tobacco substitute cultivated by the local Ktunaxa people.

To the Ktunaxa peoples, all earthly beings are connected and serve a purpose in this world. Plants and animals are revered as they provide food and medicine to the Ktunaxa people.



Homelands in Transition

The 1800s brought new challenges to the Aq̓smakni̓k, yet they faced them head-on. For decades, they assisted explorers, maintained relatively peaceful relationships with miners, and engaged in economic ventures with fur traders. Western expansion of U.S. territories, however, altered Ktunaxa homelands and lifeways.

Finan McDonald traveled through Aq̓smakni̓k lands. He spent the winter of 1808-09 near Akiyini̓k and established a warehouse to expand his fur trade. Father Pierre-Jean de Smet, a Jesuit priest, traveled through Akiyini̓k en route to build missions amongst the tribes in the 1840s. Even hopeful prospectors and settlers passing through received hospitality from the Aq̓smakni̓k. Like the Aq̓smakni̓k, these travelers found the river bend beneficial for travel and subsistence. Before long, the Akiyini̓k area included a mixture of tipi housing and Euro-American structures.

The Aq̓smakni̓k homelands provided an abundance of what the tribe needed. By mid-century, however, the influx of U.S. citizens seeking their fortune in the west placed a strain on the resources the Aq̓smakni̓k needed to survive, and peaceful relationships became more tense.

Seeking control of land and resources, U.S. officials encouraged leaders of tribes in western Montana to sign the Treaty of Hellgate on July 15, 1855. The Aq̓smakni̓k and other tribes hoped the treaty meant peaceful relations. Instead, the treaty led to a reservation system and the attempt to curtail indigenous cultures. Families in the Libby-Jennings area continued to practice their traditional lifeways even after the treaty was ratified, but eventually succumbed to the pressures to move to the reserve at present day Elmo and Dayton, Montana.

Since rivers and valleys act as travel corridors into the mountains, this particular bend became a hub that connected the valley trails, Kootenai River, and Fisher River. By 1891, continued growth in the mining industry transformed the trails into railroads, the river into a steamboat highway, and Akiyini̓k into the town of Jennings.



Headman at Kootenai Falls/ Archives and Special Collections, University of Montana

Explorers and fur traders relied heavily on the hospitality of the indigenous peoples. David Thompson noted his reliance of the headman of the “Great Bend,” possibly Chief Whitehead, the “Old Chief.”



Aq̓smakni̓k women in front of trade house

Women acted as mediators, bought and sold goods, and had agency and influence. Their relationship and occasional marriage to Euro-American traders often benefited the tribe more-so than the traders.



Canadian fur trapper, circa 1902/ Archives and Special Collections, University of Montana

The Ktunaxa encountered traders like Peter Fidler, Duncan McGillivray, and David Thompson. More traders set up shop in the decades to follow. Fur trade declined mid century due to over hunting and an increase in mining.

Jennings Boom and Bust

Situated between a mountain and a river, Jennings had no official roads, only a railway and steamboat dock. Trains and steamboats transported supplies, people, and raw materials like ore to and from the mines in Fort Steele, British Columbia.

Japanese, Scandinavian, Irish, Scottish, Italian, and Russian immigrants labored in these ventures alongside Canadian and American born prospectors and indigenous peoples. By 1900, over 1000 citizens lived in the multi-cultural town of Jennings.

The unruly Kootenai River, tamed today by Libby Dam, made steamboat operations risky. The river, prone to flood, often delayed both rail and steam shipments, as well as destroyed steamboats. Sister Cassilda from the St. Mary's Mission, passenger of the *Rustler*, noted on July 12, 1896:

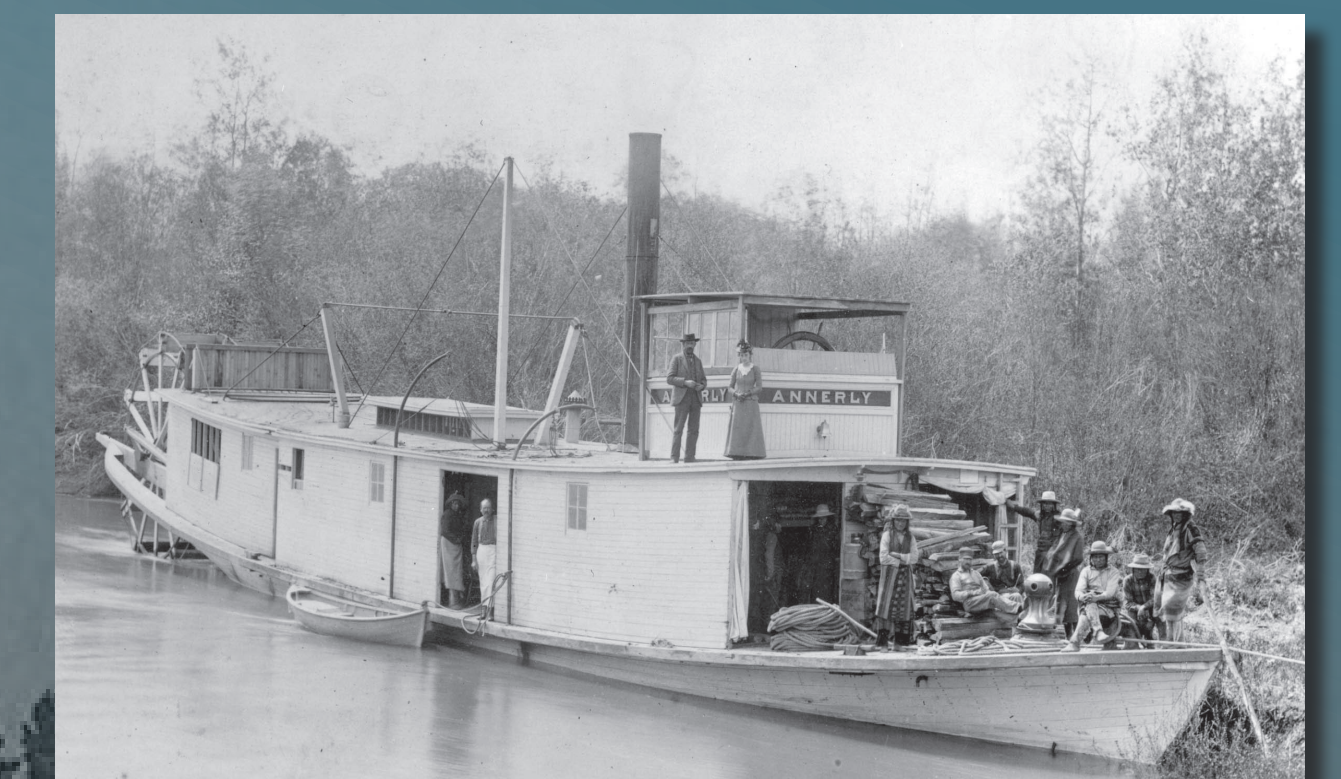
“ It was such a terrible sight to be in that canyon on the rocks and the water rushing by so furiously that really I cannot begin to describe it. The Annerly passed before us and was about a mile below the canyon when we were wrecked, the captain gave the cry of distress and the Annerly turned and came to our help at once which was not a minute too soon. ”

Just as transportation corridors allowed Jennings to boom, it also caused the town to bust. After construction of the railroad branch to the north, the customs office and the workers moved on along with the saloons. This left only a small group of families. Jennings had no roads, only speeders used on the railroad or boats.

Because the town had no roads, families boated across the river in boats to get to their garage to use their car or truck to drive to town and the reverse when they returned. The school taught grades 1 through 8, but children boarded in town to attend high school. Families eventually moved to Libby or Spokane for work. This helped cause the closure of the post office in 1952, marking the end of Jennings as a town. Some Libby citizens still connect their history to Jennings, just as the Aqłsmaknik people remain connected to their homelands and sites like Akiyiniik.



Expansion of railroad and steamboat transportation methods increased the need for ticket stations. A post office, hotel, seven saloons, four stores, restaurants, and several houses were established to accommodate travelers and citizens of Jennings.



After the Treaty of Hellsgate limited movement and land resources for the Kootenai tribe, some members found work on steamboats. Steamboats like the Annerly, Ruth, Gwendoline, North Star, J. D. Farrell, and Rustler made regular, yet hazardous, trips from Jennings to Fort Steele, BC and other points along the Kootenai River.



By 1965, only a few structures remained of the once booming town of Jennings. No buildings exist today and looting of artifacts limits proper study of the site. Jennings is protected under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA) and managed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

