

# Indian Education for All Units Related to Montana State Parks Giant Springs State Park

January 2010 (revised)

## Title

Montana's Little Shell Tribe and the Struggle for Federal Recognition

## Grade Level

11th and 12th

## Content Areas

Social Studies (Government, U.S. History, Tribal History, Current Events)

## Duration

Four 50-minute class periods

## Montana Education Standards & Benchmarks

Indian Education for All Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

**Essential Understanding 1** There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

**Essential Understanding 6** History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

## Montana Content Standards

**Social Studies Content Standard 2** Students analyze how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance to understand the operation of government and to demonstrate civic responsibility.

**Benchmarks:** Students will...

**(1)(d)** relate the concept of tribal sovereignty to the unique powers of tribal governments as they interact with local, state, and federal governments.



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**Social Studies Content Standard 4** Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships.

**Benchmarks:** Students will...

**(1)(h)** analyze and illustrate the major issues concerning history, culture, tribal sovereignty, and current status of the American Indian tribes and bands in Montana and the United States....

## Overview and Context

Giant Springs State Park is located in Great Falls. The springs are a leak from an underground aquifer that extends from central Montana into southern Canada — the largest aquifer in North America.

Visited by Indians for centuries, the springs were given their first written description in July 1805 by Captain William Clark, who called them “the largest fountain or spring I ever saw,” adding that the clear spring water “boils up from under the rocks near the edge of the river.”<sup>1</sup>

Present-day Great Falls, situated as it is in central Montana, was a center of American Indian activity long before the Lewis and Clark Expedition passed through on its way to the Pacific Coast, and long before Paris Gibson founded the town site in the 1880s. Archaeologist Mavis Greer suggests that the first humans were in Central Montana during 9,200-8,900 BPE,<sup>2</sup> or as many as 11,200 years ago.<sup>3</sup> Anthropological linguist Morris Swadesh suggests the Salish language was spoken in Central Montana between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago.<sup>4</sup> Modern Salish people now living on the Flathead Indian Reservation, headquartered at Pablo, Montana, speak very much the same language.

Regarding contemporary Montana tribes, archaeologist Carling Malouf proposes that the Ktunaxa or Upper Pend d’Oreille “was centered in the Sun River valley west of Great Falls” during 500-1750 CE.<sup>5</sup> Malouf also reports, “To the north of the Pend d’Oreille at this time were the Plains Kutenai [that is Kootenai].” In addition, “South of the Pend d’Oreille were the Flathead [that is, the Salish],<sup>6</sup> who were centered in the Three Forks area of the Missouri River and in the Gallatin Valley.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Auchly. “Gushing Over Giant Springs,” *Montana Outdoors*, May-June (2005):

<http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/articles/2005/GiantSprings.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Before the Present Era

<sup>3</sup> Mavis Ann Loschider Greer. “Archaeological Analysis of Rock Art Sites in the Smith River Drainage of Central Montana” (PhD diss., University of Missouri—Columbia, 1995): 71.

<sup>4</sup> Morris Swadesh, “Salish Phonologic Geography,” *Language* 28, no. 2 (1952): 232-234

<sup>5</sup> Current Era

<sup>6</sup> Malouf used the term, “Flathead,” but this is an incorrect designation for the Salish people, and should be “Salish.” See, Salish-Pend d’Oreille Culture Committee. *The Salish People and the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005): xiii.

<sup>7</sup> All references to Malouf in this section, see footnote no. 1, Greer (1995): 77-79.6

During the period 1750-1800, the Salish and their Pend d’Oreille allies “moved their headquarters to the Bitterroot Valley” west of the Continental Divide, due to population “losses from [disease] epidemics and pressures from rifle-armed Blackfeet raiders.”<sup>8</sup> The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851<sup>9</sup> and the Treaty with the Blackfeet 1855<sup>10</sup> held that the territory now comprising central Montana, including Great Falls and the Giant Springs area, was “the territory of the Blackfoot [sic].” In addition, the Fort Laramie Treaty made the Continental Divide the border between the Blackfeet and the Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and the Kootenai. In addition, the two treaties also set the northern boundary of the Crow Reservation, which was later changed.<sup>11</sup>

Following the Executive Order of 1873<sup>12</sup> and the Act of Congress of 1874,<sup>13</sup> the southern border of Blackfeet territory was pushed 200 miles to the north, and the area centered on Great Falls was opened to white settlement. During the late 1870s and early 1880s a group of Métis — Chippewa-Cree-French and other ethnicities-mixed — settled along the south banks of the Missouri just east of Great Falls. One of their settlements became present-day Lewistown.<sup>14</sup> Other Métis settled along the Rocky Mountain Front, while Cree and Chippewa bands had small, impermanent settlements throughout the state. After more than three decades of landlessness and living as social and cultural outcasts in the young state of Montana, Rocky Boy’s band of Chippewa and Little Bears Band of Cree were finally granted a reservation in Montana (Rocky Boy’s Reservation, created in 1915.) However, many of the Métis, Cree, and Chippewas who had long resided in the state were excluded from enrollment at the newly created reservation.

One group, called the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa for its historical leader, Little Shell, has resided in and around the city of Great Falls for many years. For over a century, the Little Shell Tribe has sought federal recognition, which, without a treaty, is extremely difficult to obtain. In 2001, the tribe became officially recognized by the State of Montana, and is now headquartered in Great Falls. Although the Department of the Interior (which oversees tribal-federal issues) acknowledged in May, 2000, that the tribe qualified for recognition, final federal

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<sup>8</sup> Salish-Pend d’Oreille Culture Committee: xiii-xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Treaty of Fort Laramie, September 17, 1851: <https://www.ndstudies.gov/gr8/content/unit-iii-waves-development-1861-1920/lesson-4-alliances-and-conflicts/topic-2-sitting-bulls-people/section-3-treaties-fort-laramie-1851-1868>

<sup>10</sup> Charles J. Kappler (Editor). “Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855,” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. II, *Treaties* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904).  
<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/bla0736.htm>

<sup>11</sup> About the Crow Government: Reservation Land Cessions, Map: [http://lib.lbhcc.mt.us/about/government/map\\_cessions.htm](http://lib.lbhcc.mt.us/about/government/map_cessions.htm); and Charles J. Kappler (Compiler and Editor). “Crow Indians, Montana, agreement of, for sale of lands accepted, ratified, and confirmed.” Act of Congress, Chapter 7, Apr. 11, 1882. | 22 Stat., 42. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. I, Laws* (Washington: Printing Office, 1904): 196. On the Internet: [http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/HTML\\_files/SES0195.html#ch74b](http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/HTML_files/SES0195.html#ch74b)

<sup>12</sup> President U.S. Grant. Executive Order, Blackfeet Reserve. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, July 2, 1873. [http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/HTML\\_files/MON0854.html#mt](http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/HTML_files/MON0854.html#mt)

<sup>13</sup> Charles J. Kappler (Editor). “An act to establish a reservation for certain Indians in the Territory of Montana, April 15, 1874. | 18 Stat., 28,” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. I, Laws* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904). [http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/HTML\\_files/SES0149A.html](http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/HTML_files/SES0149A.html)

recognition is still pending. The tribe was recently denied federal recognition in December, 2018, and they are still working to receive federal recognition. This lesson will be centered on this tribe's history.

In this lesson students will explore the history of the Little Shell Tribe.

## Activities and Procedures

**Teacher Preparation** Teacher should become familiar with all of the materials and resources in this lesson.

### Class period 1

Start of the class with a quote from the Giant Springs State Park Web site:

“Giant Springs was discovered by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805 and is one of the largest freshwater springs in the country.”

Ask about the term discover. Did they really discover it? Who might have discovered it first? Little Shell tribal members and other tribes in the Great Falls area discovered these falls long before Lewis and Clark were in the area. Remind students that as they visit state parks throughout Montana that these sites have been inhabited by tribes for thousands of years.

We are going to be learning about the Little Shell Chippewa in this unit. Watch this brief video in class to introduce the topic. Use the tribal territories map to facilitate a discussion about the traditional territories of the tribes in Montana and highlight the Little Shell.

[Indian Nations: Little Shell Chippewa](#)

[Map of Tribal Territories in Montana](#)

Students will be providing answers to the following questions:

- a. Who are the Little Shell? What are their cultural roots and ethnic characteristics?
- b. Where did the Little Shell tribes' ancestors come from, and when did they arrive in Montana?
- c. Who was Little Shell himself?
- d. What reservation was established for some of the Chippewa and Cree in Montana in 1915?
- e. Where have members of the Little Shell band lived, primarily, over the course of the last century?
- f. The Little Shell Tribe is recognized as a tribe by the State of Montana but not the Federal Government. What is the current status of the tribe regarding federal recognition?

## **Class periods 2–4 Student Research and Poster Presentations**

Students, individually or in small groups, will provide answers to the above questions and prepare a poster board presentation with their findings. They should be prepared to share with the class.

Share these resources as a starting point for their research:

[Montana Indians: Their History and Location](#)

[Little Shell Tribal History Project - Study Guide and Timeline](#)

A copy of the Little Shell Tribal History book “The Whole County was...‘One Robe’” The Little Shell Tribe’s America by Nicholas C.P. Vrooman should be in the library.

Have them do a web search using terms such as Little Shell Tribe and Little Shell Federal Recognition to find more information as they conduct their research.