



THE GREATER SANDPOINT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
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## HISTORY

The town of Sandpoint celebrated its centennial in 2001. In 2004, it was voted Best Small Town in the West by Sunset Magazine. It was a long time coming and the town of Sandpoint has had its ups and downs, however, its rich past has lent Sandpoint the character and charm that makes it so appealing today.

Sandpoint has seen the lumber and railroad industry come and go, replaced by fishing and military training to a recreation and tourism based economy. What was once considered a rough and tumble town in its pristine setting has now become a growing mountain town known for its outdoor recreation and arts and culture.

Tens of thousands of years ago, the forces of nature were actively at work on the lands we now know as northern Idaho. These were methodical forces moving very slowly over centuries. They were the cold, relentless forces of the glacial ice sheets. The areas of the Lake Pend Oreille and the Clark Fork River, containing a mass of ice that rose nearly a half mile above today's lake level, formed the heart of the glacial ice dams creating Glacial Lake Missoula. When this dam failed, as it did numerous times, a torrent of water was released in gargantuan proportions - moving upwards of 60 miles per hour and hundreds of feet deep, creating forces great enough to shape the landscape we know today from here to Portland, Oregon.

The Kalispel tribe was the first to inhabit Sandpoint. The climate was relatively mild and the food supply was abundant. Sandpoint was a peaceful and beautiful place to settle. The tribe extended into Montana and Eastern Washington.

David Thompson was the determined and intrepid Canadian trading expedition leader who led the first white men to the shores of Lake Pend Oreille in the fall of 1809. Traders and trappers were sporadic visitors throughout the first half of the century, along with an occasional "black robe" missionary. As prospectors began to move northward and eastward in the 1850's, travelers became more frequent in this area. The surveying parties of the International Boundary Commission brought some attention to the region by 1860 and the Wild Horse trail heading northward, became a frequent avenue to reach Canadian mining claims about the same time. It was the estimated 5,000 people who traveled through this region in 1865 that inspired the construction of the Mary Moody in 1866,

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the first commercial steam vessel to ply these inland waters. 1880 brought the activity of our first transcontinental train system. With the commencement of train travel in 1883, the settling of the Pend Oreille country began.

As more Euroamericans arrived, they began to take over the land once occupied by the Kalispel. After much debate, the Kalispel received more than 4500 acres of land for a reservation in eastern Washington.

At the turn of the century, lumber began to take over the local economy. As the forests back East and in the Midwest became depleted, the large companies began to move west and into Idaho. Snowy slopes and the many rivers provided a great way to haul logs. The Humbird Lumber Company became the largest employer and producer in the area.

A city built on railroad and logging made for quite the reputation as a rough and tumble sort of town. When the loggers and the railroad workers were paid, they would flood into one of 23 saloons in the small town and spend their money on alcohol and ladies of the night.

Life was difficult in those times and the weather caused great hardships as well as wonderful bonding relationships. People flooded into the area eager to start a new life and in 1894 LD Farmin opened the first school in the area. Bonner County was formed and in 1901, Sandpoint officially became a city and was named the county seat.

The community across the lake to the south, Sagle was also a growing community. Sagle residents would have to travel to Spokane for their town business and shopping. It was finally decided to literally bridge the gap between the two communities and The Long Bridge was built in 1910. It was the longest wooden bridge in the world at 2 miles long.

As the residents began to settle in and the economy flourished, The Panida Theater was constructed in 1927 as a place to provide entertainment such as silent movies, vaudeville and eventually sound movies.

Soon thereafter, the depression hit hard in Sandpoint shuttering many businesses, lumber yards and banks. Many left town altogether but those that persevered, turned their efforts towards the arts, culture and recreation and other ways to make a living. Fishing became a prosperous endeavor with record sized fish being pulled from the waters of Lake Pend Oreille.

During World War II, the construction of the Farragut Naval Training Station in Bayview brought 300,000 seamen to the area for boot camp training. Many either stayed in the area, or came back after their tour of duty drawn by the beauty of the area and the great opportunity they saw.

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Jim Brown founded The Pack River Lumber Company in 1940 and it soon became a dominant force in the local economy.

In the 40's and 50's as Sandpoint recovered from the depression, optimism pervaded the air as radio and the movies came to town. KSPT brought music to the region in the 50's and soon thereafter, the Motor Movie, a drive-in opened its gates.

In the summer, the area was booming with lake activities and movies and theater at the Panida. However, the town was dead quiet in the winter, until Jack Fowler stopped for gas in Hope on his way home from a ski trip to Big Mountain in Montana. He looked up and saw a snowy bowl in what is now called Schweitzer. He thought to himself that it looked like a great place to put a ski area and then he wouldn't have to drive so far for their ski vacations. He got a group of local and regional businessmen together, sold stocks to raise enough money, hired Sam Wormington from Canada to come and run the resort and Schweitzer Basin opened December 4, 1963, with \$4 day passes for one rope tow and a mile long chair lift.

Suddenly, Sandpoint began to lose its anonymity as visitors flocked to the ski area from all over the Northwest as well as Chicago and Minneapolis. It was then that Sandpoint became a year round community offering a simple, quiet life for those who wanted it.

The 70's brought hippies and environmentalism as well as arts and more theater to the area. This spelled the downfall of the lumber industry. Jim Brown, of the Pack River Lumber Company, wisely diversified his business and, as one of the original founders of Schweitzer Mountain, bought out the rest of the shareholders to make Schweitzer a privately owned venture. Schweitzer has since been purchased by the Harbor Mountain Company based in Seattle and continues to expand its facilities and ski terrain.

The Pend Oreille Arts Council was formed in 1978 and with it, summer theater was born. The Panida Theater closed its doors until it was saved by a community fund-raiser and reopened in 1985. A bridge was constructed across Sand Creek and housed the public market. It is now home to Coldwater Creek's flagship store. The 80's brought more local flair to the area as the Farmer's Market was founded and the Festival at Sandpoint began welcoming top name musicians to the area at its wonderful setting on the shores of the Pend Oreille River.

Today, visitors come to Sandpoint to step out of the fast paced life and visit this mountain town that offers just the right mix of outdoor play and evening entertainment. Just like the old days, many people pass through and most come back, while some even find themselves unable to leave.

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