

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ www.ferguselectric.coop

Dino Adventure

Merl Busenbark reflects on discovery of a lifetime

Story and photos by Charlie Denison | Contributing Writer

ON a quiet Sunday afternoon in 1992, Merl Busenbark and his son Ben took a stroll on their land north of Winnett. They walked near Crooked Creek, taking their time, hoping to get lucky.

"We were looking to see if we could find anything, maybe some dinosaur bones," Merl said. "You found stuff like that out there."

Never could they have imagined they'd find something as remarkable as they did that day: a nine-foot prong-horned Torosaurus skull.

"We would pick up little stuff all the time, but this one was pretty surprising," Merl said. "We weren't looking for something like this."

At the time of the discovery, Merl said he had no idea just how much of the dinosaur was in the ground.

"All I could see at the time was something that looked like a jaw," he said, "but we had a feeling there was a lot more there. We didn't say anything about it for the longest time, and we didn't want to get too specific with people about where we found it so they wouldn't go up there digging."

After a while the curiosity got to Merl. He started searching around to see if he could find someone who could take on the project, whatever it may entail.

"A friend of ours knew this preacher named Ken Olson, and asked us

if it'd be OK for him to come take a look. Ken was interested right away."

The Busenbarks gave Olson title to the skull, which he in turn donated to Bozeman's renowned Museum of the Rockies. An amateur paleontologist, Olson worked as a research associate for the museum. He'd been at it for 15 years by the time he'd heard from Merl.

Before Olson began the dig, the Busenbarks sold their land to the Bill and Lisa Weaver family. Fortunately, the Weavers were receptive to getting the Torosaurus head to its rightful place.

"That was part of the deal," said Merl. "By then it already belonged to the Museum of the Rockies."

The excavation began in the fall of 1999.

"It became a big operation," Merl said. "A crew from Montana State University even came out, which included several students. They worked pretty seriously for a week or two."

Once the digging was complete, the crew set their eyes on the largest



Merl and Gladys recently stand by the recreation of the Torosaurus skull Merl and his son Ben discovered on their old property north of Winnett nearly 30 years ago. The re-creation is at the Central Montana Historic Museum. The skull itself is on display at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman.

dinosaur skull ever found. Impressed, internationally known paleontologist Jack Horner burst onto the scene, the man who inspired the character of Alan Grant in Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*, which evolved into the Steven Spielberg blockbuster of the same name.

"He came out to supervise," Merl said of Horner. "He was there the day they got it out. It was almost completely intact. Seventy-five percent, I believe."

Gladys, Merl's wife of 56 years, remembers that day well. It was July of 2001. A Montana Army National Guard Blackhawk came out to lift the skull and take it to Bozeman.

"That was something to see when it came over the hill," she said.

The involvement of the Blackhawks from Helena's I-189 Combat Support

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Office employees work to provide the best service

This month I want to write about our friendly office staff.

Sally Horacek, our office manager, is very dedicated to working hard on behalf of the members and the cooperative. Janine Rife Didier works hard to ensure employees are paid on time, and that the members are billed properly for material. Susan Hinkley takes great care in her work to get capital credit checks to members and to member's estates. Erika Mattaliano's voice is often the first one you hear when you call the office. Erika works judiciously with members to ensure electric bills are kept current. Sue Werdin is our outgoing and friendly receptionist, and billing clerk. When you come into the co-op's office, Sue is the employee who is there to greet you. Kaitlyn Staffileno is our friendly, versatile part-time employee who happily assists all of us whenever and wherever help is needed. Kaitlyn is leaving us at the end of May as she and her husband are moving. We wish them both the best!

I am proud of the co-op's excellent office employees who assist you, the member, in multiple ways. The office staff helps to resolve your billing questions, taking outage phone calls and furnishing members with updated information as it becomes available. They maintain the billing cycle and make sure statements are mailed out in a timely manner each month, and they check bills for accuracy and inspect atypical power usages.

In addition to their regular duties, each year on the first Thursday in June the office staff leaves the co-op's office and arrives at the Trade Center ready to cheerfully greet the members who attend the co-op's Annual Meeting.

Annual Meeting day is always a full, busy and enjoyable day spent registering members and students, handing out gifts and prizes, providing information and answering questions, etc. It is an opportunity for staff to meet face-to-face with members they have talked with on the phone during the past year, but may not have seen in person since the previous Annual Meeting. The success of the Annual Meeting is due in large part to several months of planning, preparing and organizing by the co-op's capable, competent office staff.

Metering system update

Our line crews are installing communication equipment for the new metering system. Members will see our service trucks working in the

Hilger, Winifred, Roy and Roundup areas. Relatively soon our line crews will begin working in the Glengarry, Moore, Hobson, Judith Gap, Lavina and Ryegate areas.

After the communication is installed, the cooperative will begin installing new meters, and then we will begin to gradually switch from our old "turtle" meters to our new system. It will be a welcome change for the cooperative as the old metering system is a challenge to keep working. The old metering system is still a very accurate system; however, our meter technician works hard to keep the turtle meters reading, and in our many discussions, I know he is really looking forward to the new metering system being installed!

We do have a lot of work to complete this year and the next to meet our target date of December 31, 2021, to have the new meters all installed and the old system retired. I believe the new metering system will be a valuable system and much appreciated by both cooperative employees and members.

Did Old Man Winter Drive Up Your Power Bill?

Cold Weather and Power Bills

Paying your power bills is a concern, especially in the winter months. During the months when the temperature outside your house dropped, it took more energy to maintain a warmer temperature inside your home. The increase in power usage resulted in a higher power bill, which may have made it difficult to manage your household budget.

There are things that you can do to save energy in your home. When it's cold out, it is tempting to raise the temperature setting on your thermostat; however, doing so uses more energy, regardless of what type of fuel you are using to heat your home. Be sure to lower the temperature when you go to bed or are not at home.

During the day, open shades and curtains to let in the sun's warmth. Close them at night to retain the day's heat. Check the weather stripping in your home for air leaks around doors, windows and baseboards, and where pipes, wires and vents enter the house. Change or clean furnace filters once a month during the heating season. Infrared or milk-house heaters may make your rooms warm and cozy, but when run often, use more energy, which will reflect on your power bill.

Even when the weather is very cold, vehicle engineblock heaters only need to be used for roughly two hours before driving; for that reason you may prefer the simplicity of using a timer to cut energy costs when plugging

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Dino adventure

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Merl has other items on display at the Central Montana Museum, as well, including a whiskey still and a cream separator.



This is a replica of the Torosaurus that's on display at the Central Montana Historical Museum.

Aviation Battalion turned the dig into an event, as people tuned in to see coverage of it on NBC's *Today Show*.

"It was amazing," said Gladys.

Preserving a piece of history in Central Montana

Merl said he was happy the Museum of the Rockies could preserve the Torosaurus skull in their Dinosaur Hall, but he wanted it to be part of local history, as well.

"I asked Jack Horner if he could make a replica, and he said, 'I'll make you anything you want. If you want I'll make you a whole head.' So, anyhow, that's how we ended up with what we have at the museum here," Merl said.

Local historian and passionate museum volunteer Shirley Barrick was instrumental in making this happen.

"She really wanted the museum to have it," Merl said. "She was excellent to work with. I've continued to work with her and with the museum by donating other items here."

Those items include an old whiskey still and a cream separator.

"I've always liked that old stuff," Merl said, "I can't take it with me, so I pass it off."

On a recent visit to the Central Montana Historical Museum, Merl and Gladys admired the Torosaurus skull replica and the pictures from the dig

included in the display. Merl smiled proudly, recalling his time on site. He shook his head in near disbelief.

Looking back on it, Merl said he was grateful he got Ken Olson involved.

"You couldn't ask for any better than Ken," he said. "He was real good."

Merl added that there's a real sense of pride that goes along with this discovery, as it's remarkably rare. According to a 2001 article from the *Great Falls Tribune*, this was only the fifth finding of a Torosaurus skull, and the second excavated by Olson, who unearthed the fourth skull in 1996.

According to www.dinodictionary.com, a Torosaurus is a horned-faced dinosaur, and a cousin of the Triceratops. Adult Torosaurus were larger than elephants, measuring eight-feet high and 20-feet long, and weighing up to 18,000 pounds.

It's still hard for Merl and Gladys to believe this Torosaurus was discovered on their property, and looking at the replica made it even more surreal.

Merl couldn't help but light up as memories returned.

Gladys was cheerful, albeit more reserved and happy to be a bystander.

"I really wasn't in on much of it," she said. "It was a guy thing."



Merl and Gladys from 2001, during the dig.

Lineman Appreciation Day

Monday, April 13th, is Lineman Appreciation Day. Fergus Electric is proud to join other electric cooperatives in showing our appreciation for linemen through the observance of a formal day of recognition. If you know or see a lineman, join us in thanking them for all their hard work to keep the power on for all of us!



Power Bill

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in your vehicles or farm equipment. Assistance with Paying Utility Bills

If you need assistance; programs are available through Human Resource Development Councils (HRDC) to help members with their heating expense. Please visit <http://www.ferguselectric.coop/energy-assistance> for information and links to the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP), Universal System Benefit Funds (USB Funds), and Energy Share.

If you have difficulty paying your power bill, contact the co-op now to discuss options for payment arrangements.

Organizations that Provide Help:

Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) – Helps low income individuals and families reduce their home heating costs. Applications will be accepted during the heating season, which runs from October 1st through April 30th of each year. To request an application, contact the Lewistown office at (800-766-3018) or (406-535-7488). You will also find a link to the application when you click on the link to our website. This link is also an excellent source for further information on the LIEAP program. <https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/energyassistance>.

Universal System Benefit Funds (USB Funds) – Funds may be available in certain cases in which a member may not qualify for other energy assistance programs. An application for LIEAP must be completed before USB funds can be applied for. Funds are available once a year for a heating bill or heating system repair/replacement. Applications are taken in the Lewistown office, 406-535-7488 or 800-766-3018.

Energy Share – This program raises and distributes funds in the private sector to help people facing emergency situations with their energy costs. Private donations are usually used in the area from which they came. For example, if you live in Lewistown and donate \$100 to Energy Share, 100-percent of that gift will be used in the Lewistown area to help someone in need.

In addition to raising and distributing contributions from individuals, Energy Share works with utilities and cooperatives around the state to implement low-income programs. Energy Share is the last resort for heating emergencies only, and is a once-in-a-lifetime “match” program, unless the money is repaid. If it is during LIEAP season, then you must apply for LIEAP prior to applying for Energy Share. Applications are taken in the Lewistown office, 406-535-7488 or 800-766-3018. The Energy Share season is from September 1st to June 30th.

Lewistown – District 6 HRDC – 406-535-7488 or 800-766-3018, 300 First Ave North, Rm 203, Lewistown, MT 59457. Serves counties: Fergus, Golden Valley, Judith Basin, Musselshell, Petroleum and Wheatland

Billings – District VII HRDC – (406-247-4778) or (800-433-1411), 7 North 31st Street, Billings, MT 59103-2016. Serves counties: Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Yellowstone. Serves Crow Reservation

Great Falls – Opportunities, Inc. – 406-761-0310 or 800-326-0955, PO Box 2289, Great Falls, MT 59403-2289. Serves counties: Cascade, Chouteau and Glacier

Bozeman – District IX HRDC – 406-585-4866, Caren Couch, energy assistance program director or 406-585-4860, Amy Revious, energy assistance program director, 32 South Tracy, Bozeman, MT 59715. Serves counties: Gallatin, Park and Meagher

Your Neighbor Cares of Central Montana – provides a way for people who have exhausted all other resources to receive assistance. They are a non-profit organization that relies on neighbors in Lewistown and surrounding areas to fulfill requested needs. This can be done by calling 406-366-4596, emailing yourneighborcares@gmail.com or writing to PO Box 3672, Lewistown, MT 59457 to ask for a Need Request Form.

Don't Wait - Call Fergus Electric Cooperative Now

Fergus Electric encourages you to call 406-538-3465 to discuss options for payment arrangements with the co-op's billing staff, or to find out more about available energy assistance programs.

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Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32.50 credit

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 396933 ● Account 391782
Account 319600 ● Account 351248
Account 392072 ● Account 230350

You will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

Buffalo Church of Buffalo was last month's winner!

**Numbers are drawn monthly.*

Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc.

LEWISTOWN, MT

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

FOR OUTAGES

First: Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

Second: Check the breaker below the meter.

Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

Fourth: Call 406-538-3465 day or night or:

Dale Rikala	406-366-3374
Bret Ophus	406-366-7523
Scott Olson	406-366-5822
Scott Sweeney	406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)	406-366-3465
David Dover	406-366-1975
Melanie Foran	406-462-5650

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