



Rough & Tumble Camps



Primitive construction camps dotted the Bitterroot Mountains between 1906 and 1912.

Hardy colorful gangs of workers from around the globe called these bleak and often ugly temporary settlements home.



The "Main Street" of a Bitterroot section construction tent camp circa 1907.

The hard work and disagreeable conditions on the Milwaukee's Western Extension led many men to quit at the first excuse or opportunity. Winter snow and damp, miserable working conditions in the big tunnel caused many to look for better work elsewhere.

To induce workers to stay on the job, contractors improved accommodations and served better food. Camps sprouted large domed European style bread ovens. East Portal even hosted a YMCA for off-hour play. Finally a bonus system of payment was established to keep workers on the job.



The smaller circle of Milwaukee Road engineers and contractors could escape the rigors of work and enjoy civilized diversions with family and friends.

In late August, 1908, Mr. F. E. Sutton hosted a two day party with a Bald Mountain horse ride followed by an evening marshmallow toast. Pictured left to right: Mr. Sutton, M. J. Griffith, Anna Kurtz, Marcy McCullough, Isabelle Roman, Anabel Ross, Mr. Thompson and Howard Toole.



Young Master Harry Kurtz poses for H. English's camera above the St. Paul Pass Tunnel's west portal with the construction camp in the background circa 1908.



Artfully decorated period tin cans