

## ***The Eagle Hunting Pits of the Ya Ha Tinda***

The first pit that Johnny and I found at the ranch was in the spring of 1996. Coincidentally, at the time, I was reading Jack Nisbet's book, "*Sources of the River, Tracking David Thompson Across Western North America*". After reading the excerpt below which is found on Page 59 of the book, I realized that this pit on the ranch was likely an Eagle Hunting Pit. Later, I found 6 more of these pits in the valley. The federal archaeologists confirmed that these are indeed remains of Eagle Hunting Pits. Originally these pits were deeper but have been blown in with soil over the years. Incidentally, there is a nice display in the Luxton Museum in Banff of natives hunting eagles.

*"The natives made shallow pits which they covered with slender willows and grass under which they lay, with a large piece of fresh meat opposite their breasts; thus arranged they patiently await the flight of the eagle, which is first seen very high, scaling in rude circles, but gradually lowering, till at length he seems determined to pounce upon the meat, his descent is then very swift with his claws extended, the moment he touches the meat the Indian grasps his two legs in his hands, and dashes him, through the slender willows to the bottom of the pit and strikes his head till he is dead. Lying in this position, and frequently somewhat benumbed, it requires an active man to pull down an Eagle with his wings extended, and dash him to the ground...as the Eagle never loses his courage, the whole must be quickly done, or the Eagle will dart his beak in the man's face, and thus get away."*



\*\* Some of the Eagle Hunting pits have large flat rocks positioned on one side of the pit. Perhaps these were used in the killing of the Eagle.

The following is a guide to the seven Eagle Hunting Pits located in the valley of the Ya Ha Tinda. Please note I have used the FOESA Ya Ha Tinda Ranch brochure as a reference to Trail numbers and descriptions.

### ***Eagle Hunting Pit #1***

Located on the ranch road at the double gates on the E. side of Scalp Creek. This Eagle Hunting Pit is located just inside the pasture fence close to the SW corner of the Bighorn Pasture south of the double gates. If look along the barbed wire fence south of the double gates, watch for a fencing staple tacked onto the top of a fence post. Just inside the pasture from this post you will notice a depression in the ground. It measures about 4' in diameter and is about 2 – 2 ½ feet deep. If the grass is tall it is difficult to see this pit.

***Eagle Hunting Pit #2 – along the Old Forestry Road***

This pit is located just off of the old Forestry Road on the West side of Bighorn Creek north of the falls. Proceed north of the falls on the horse trail that is located on what is referred to as The Old Forestry Road. At a distance of approximately 1 km north of Bighorn Falls you will notice a slight rise of land forming a small round shaped knoll to your right. If you go to the top of this knoll you will find an Eagle Hunting Pit. Look carefully to see if there is a large flat rock on one side of the pit.

***Eagle Hunting Pit #3 – East side of Bighorn Creek***

From the Bighorn Campground, cross the ranch road and go around the locked metal gate and proceed up the roadway to the top of the knoll. Keep on going on this road/horse trail. Keep to your left on the horse trail and you will notice you are approaching a steep grade. This trail meets up with a trail from the west that comes up from the creek crossing above the falls. You will notice to your right there is a large willow bush about 50 feet east of the trail. Not too far from the base of this large willow bush is an Eagle Hunting Pit.

***Eagle Hunting Pit #4- Trail #8 on Trail Map***

This pit is a bit harder to find. From Bighorn Campground cross the ranch road and head north of the camp ground up the steep hillside. You will gain the top of the ridge and then drop down to a nice little shallow draw where the horse trail heads NE and will eventually follow the ridge above the ranch road. You will pass one of the U of A Grass exclosures. After passing the grass exclosure, and before you reach the 2nd grass exclosure, the trail will drop down into a shallow little dip and then angles to the NE into the trees. Before you enter the trees, the pit is located on the south sloping ridge to the SE (above the ranch road.)



***Eagle Hunting Pit #5 – Trail 7a***

This pit is located off of the ranch to the East along the Bighorn Creek/Eagle Creek High Loop Trail. This trail winds along the side of a high ridge with lots of poplar trees lining the trail. The pit can be found on the north side of the horse trail at a distance of about 1 ½ kms from the ranch east boundary fence line. Again this one is easy to ride past and not notice.

***Eagle Hunting Pit #6 – Trail 7a***

This shallow pit is located on the Bighorn Creek/Eagle Creek High Loop above the remains of the Sheep Trap on the highest part of the grassy knoll. It is not very deep. The Archaeologists thought

perhaps the pit was too difficult to finish excavating so the natives abandoned it and dug Pit #5 further west.

***Eagle Hunting Pit #7 – at junction of Trail 7 and 7a.***

This pit is easy to see. It is also located off of the ranch in that beautiful valley west of Eagle Creek on the Bighorn Creek/Eagle Creek High Loop. Using the remains of that old Sheep trap as a reference point, continue downhill to a point where you reach a flat bench. The pit is located on the west side of the trail and is only about 1-2 feet from the trail (if that). To the NE is a deep little canyon that Eagle Creek comes out of. Once you leave the spot where the Eagle Hunting Pit is, you will go through a dip and then over a small ridge and then drop down that steep rocky hill to the level of the Creek where upon crossing you will find the junction of the trail to Eagle Lake and back towards Frontier Town.

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