

Running the Bottom of the Glacial Lake

Although Missoula simply appears to be a quaint hideaway nestled in between three mountain ranges and at the point of confluence of 3 majestic rivers, life here was not always as pleasant as it seems. You are in fact standing on soil that was at one time at the bottom of a former glacial lake that measured roughly 3,000 square kilometers and held 500 cubic miles worth of water (roughly half the volume of Lake Michigan!)

Glacial Lake Missoula was the result a series of ice dams that blocked the Clark Fork River around the modern-day town of Clark Fork, Idaho periodically during the end of the last ice age (between 15,000 and 13,000 years ago.) During that time, Glacial Lake Missoula would fill with enough water to cause the ice dam to burst and drain the lake, flooding parts of Washington and Oregon and subsequently causing the formation of the Columbia River Gorge.

This happened several times during those 2,000 years and happened at a rate of roughly once every 55 years. With that knowledge, you could say that there were actually several “Glacial Lake Missoulas!” If you look closely, you can still see the horizontal scars on Mount Jumbo that show where the shorelines for these lakes once lapped against these ancient hills.

Everything about the Missoula lifestyle is based on this geographic history. We run “up” Pattee Canyon, “up” the Rattlesnake, “up” the Bitterroot and so on. All is “up” and “down” with hundreds of miles of beautiful surrounding mountains, long valleys and deep canyons to explore.

When we say, “Run the bottom of the glacial lake,” we do it every day here in Missoula, Montana.