

Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum

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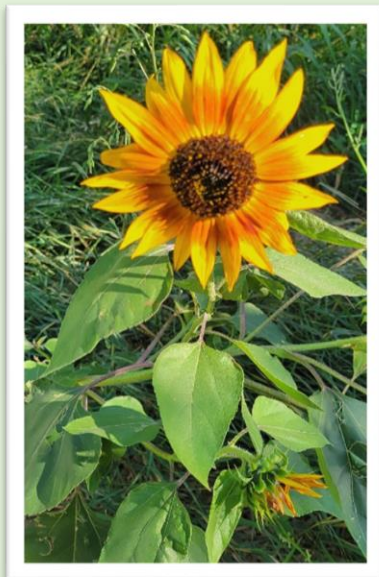
The Official Newsletter of the Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum



September 2024

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The Big Jump

This month marks the 50-year anniversary of Evel Knievel’s attempt to jump the Snake River Canyon! For a day in 1974 the world’s attention fell on the city of Twin Falls for better or worse.

At eight years old Robert Knievel found inspiration in Joie Chitwood, a race car driver turned daredevil known for his crazy stunt driving. It seems from that day on Knievel was drawn to the thrill of the extreme participating in rodeos, ski jumping, pole vaulting, hockey, and motocross.

It wasn’t until he started a job at a motorcycle shop owned by Don Pomeroy that he started pursuing his dream of being a motorcycle daredevil.

Don’s son, Jim Pomeroy, who later became a professional motocross racer, taught Knievel how to perform a wheelie and ride while standing on the bike’s seat.

Knievel began his daredevil career in 1965, making a name for himself by jumping increasingly dangerous obstacles.

In 1967, Evel Knievel attempted to jump the fountains at Ceasar’s Palace in Las Vegas. He cleared the fountains but came up short resulting in a concussion and many broken bones.

Perhaps looking for a glorious return, Knievel announced that he was determined to jump the Grand Canyon. Upon request however, permission for the jump was denied.

After some consideration he set his sights on the Snake River Canyon in Twin Falls, Idaho announcing that he would be jumping it on the Fourth of July or Labor Day 1973.

July 4th, 1973, Evel Knievel was nowhere to be seen. A call to his home in Butte, Montana confirmed that Knievel was enjoying a game of golf and would not be jumping the canyon that day.

Visitors and locals alike were disappointed by the cancellation and the jump was rescheduled for the following year.



Robert “Evel” Knievel
1938-2007



Evel Knievel's Skycycle X-1 and X-2 were built by Bob Truax, an aeronautical and mechanical engineer with a background in rockets and missiles. The cycles were steam powered, described by Truax as being "like an overgrown pressure cooker". The design was so similar to that of a plane that it had to be registered as an aircraft instead of a motor bike.

Local opinions on the jump and the daredevil attempting it were mixed. Knievel had many fans and admirers but was also known to be hot tempered and have a I'll-do-as-I-like attitude. Many felt that the exposure from the jump would have a positive effect on the city but there was no shortage of concerns.

November 4th of 1973 Knievel and his team sent an unmanned "Skycycle X-1" over the canyon in a test flight. The cycle launched from the ramp at 200 miles per hour before tipping over and "fluttering" into the canyon, landing in the Snake River. Two recovery attempts were made but the cycle could not be located. Knievel seemed unbothered by this failed attempt but locals speculated if the jump had any chance of being successful.

By June the next year the Skycycle X-1 had still not been located. Knievel announced a \$5,000 reward for anyone that could find and recover the vessel to him. According to Knievel "the vehicle must be discovered for valuable recording instruments" before August.

The Skycycle was finally recovered from the Snake River by seven local men on July 8th 1974. It was found 100 feet downstream from the launch site by Percy Greene, Rulon Thompson, Dave Kirk, John Weston, Mike Thompson, James Sparrow, and Gary Dennis.

As the day of the jump drew nearer concerns were raised about safety and crowd control at the sight as well as vandalism and property damage from unruly campers. People were unsure of what to expect from this sudden influx of tourists.

Even the museum was taking precautions, having a volunteer motorcycle club patrol the grounds and buildings.

The crowds started to pour into Twin Falls, filling hotels and tripling beer sales.

Campers occupied the fields surrounding the site and Shoshone Falls Park. Six-foot-high chain link fences were erected along the canyon and the area filled with concession stands selling everything from hot dogs and beer to motorcycle parts and gold statues of Evel Knievel.

September 8, 1974, all eyes are on the Snake River Canyon as Evel Knievel was strapped into the Skycycle X-2. This would be his longest jump yet, and all the test flights had

ended with the cycle landing in the river. A little after 3:30 the Skycycle was launched into the air but shortly after take-off a parachute on the back of the cycle came loose. At first the Skycycle seemed to continue mostly unaffected but at around 1,000 feet above the jump site, the parachute filled with air. The crowd watched in horror as the wind pushed the cycle back toward the south side of the canyon. The craft then drifted below the canyon's edge and out of sight leaving spectators to assume the worst.

For a breathless moment, the fate of the fearless daredevil was unknown. Then he was spotted. By some miracle Evel Knievel had cheated death once again. Unlike the previous test flights, the Skycycle X-2 had not landed in the river but on a rock ledge beside it.

Knievel confirmed in a later interview that if he had landed in the Snake River that day, he would have drowned due to a malfunction with the harness holding him in the cycle. Knievel walked away from the event with only a broken nose and a few lacerations.

There has been a lot of speculation about what exactly caused the "mechanical malfunction". When a dazed Knievel was questioned directly after he admitted it was possible he had blacked out but didn't believe he had pulled the chute release. Bob Truax, the builder of the Skycycle later said the parachute canister must have been knocked loose by the force of takeoff.



"Percy Greene and Rulon Thompson with the smashed cycle." Twin Falls Times News July 8, 1974

**Snake River Canyon Jump
TICKETS**

\$25 General Admission  **\$25** General Admission

ONLY 10,000 LEFT in the STATE of IDAHO
"First Come, First Served Basis"

TICKETS GOOD FOR
MOTO-CROSS RACES
\$125,000 Prizes and Cash
AUGUST 29 thru SEPT. 6
"Spectacular Racing"

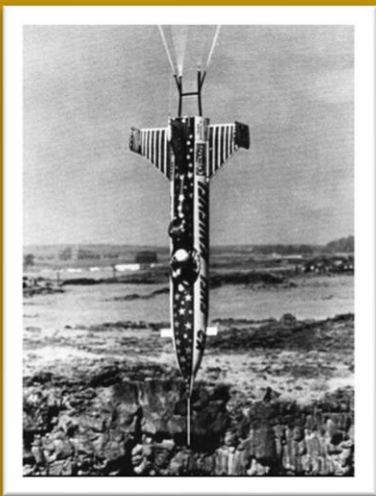
AND
EVEL KNieVEL
COUNTDOWN . . . SATURDAY, SEPT. 7
BLAST-OFF . . . SUNDAY, SEPT. 8
"HAPPY LANDINGS"

TICKETS
Snake River Canyon Enterprises Inc., 444 Main Ave. So.
Twin Falls, Idaho
Phone 734-7021
Send Cashier Check or Money Order Only

There were also theories that the jump was rigged from the start to fail. Some believed that Knievel's team knew the jump was too dangerous and planned the "malfunction" while others believed Knievel accidentally deployed the parachute at takeoff.

The jump would go down in history as a failed attempt, but Knievel disagreed. He said he absolutely believed that the Skycycle X-2 had crossed the canyon's expanse before the wind pulled him back.

He stated in an interview after *"I, under all circumstances, regardless of what happened, do not feel ashamed in anyway to have been defeated by a canyon as beautiful and mighty as the Snake River Canyon. That's all there is to it."*



C. E. B. at "Camp Drinking-Place" in lovely Hagerman Valley where thousands of

Donations

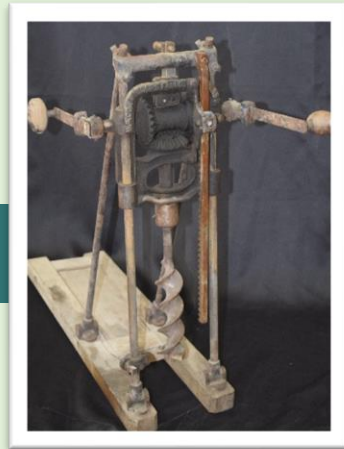
Slide Rules donated by Larry Koldewey



1969 Moon Landing Handbag donated by J.L. Smith



Woodworking drill donated by John Haight



Spittoon and rail car mover donated by Alex Kunkel

Washboard, irons, etc. donated Barbara Silcock



Bank items donated by Barbara Miller



Want to Donate?

Give us a call or stop by the museum if you are interested in donating an item with county history. Keep in mind we only accept permanent donations.

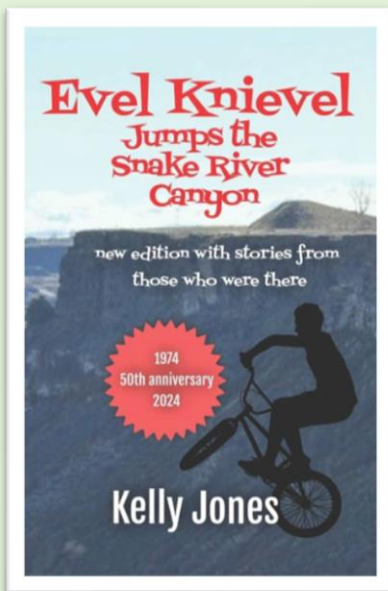
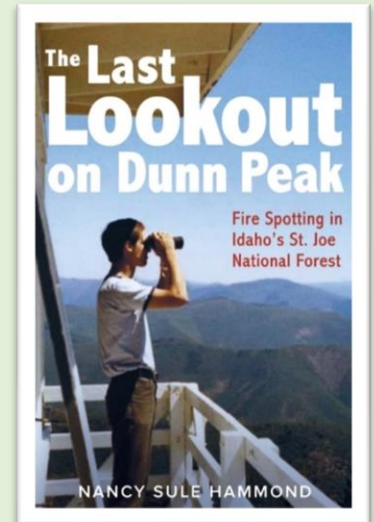
pretty sheep come hurrying down from the cliffs for water. Sunday - March 25 - 1923

New Books Available!

The Last Lookout on Dunn Peak by Nancy Sule Hammond

Don and Nancy Hammond spent three exciting, magical fire seasons in Idaho's St. Joe National Forest. Interspersing personal stories with regional fire history as well as dangers and details of the work, Nancy journeys back to the narrow catwalks and stunning panoramas—a place where a single lightning strike could ignite a raging wildfire.

Western Writers of America Spur Award Finalist!



EVEL KNieVEL JUMPS THE SNAKE RIVER CANYON

BY KELLY JONES

It's 1974 and ten-year-old Pick Patterson is stuck for the summer in Twin Falls, Idaho, with his bossy Grandma Grace and his unemployed, easy-going Uncle Buddy. When Evel Knievel comes to town to jump the Snake River Canyon, Pick is caught up in the excitement as the sleepy little community is awakened and invaded by the worldwide press, motorcycle gangs, drugged-up hippies, and spectators who've come to witness the historic event.

For the 50th anniversary of Evel Knievel's jump, author Kelly Jones brings readers a new edition of *Evel Knievel Jumps the Snake River Canyon*, originally published in 2014. Now including stories from those who were there in 1974.

Signed by Author!

Fun Fact!

Evel Knievel told his childhood friend, Jack Ferriter, to "make damn sure" his signature good luck symbol was fully painted on the Skycycle before the big jump. The emblem was the phrase "Color Me Lucky" painted in bright colors. Ferriter had been unable to complete the emblem on the two test cycles that had landed in the river.

We are scheduling speakers for our fall/winter lecture series. If you have a topic or speaker that you would like to see let us know!

Send your recommendations to info@twinfallsmuseum.org