

A PATAGONIA SUMMER IN NORTHWEST MONTANA WITH

**FOY'S TO BLACKTAIL TRAILS**

By Mari Stoner, *Patagonia Meatpacking*



When I got the opportunity to apply for a Patagonia Environmental Internship this last spring, I began my search to partner with an environmental group in Northwest Montana. As a child, I spent many a summer at my grandparents' house on Flathead Lake near Polson, Montana, and now the Northwest Montana wilderness is one of those special places that I return to and feel as if I've come home. **(Photo: Grace Lake, Glacier National Park, June 2015)**

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After extensive research, I connected with *Foy's to Blacktail Trails*, an organization responsible for preserving recreational access from Herron Park, a large natural area just outside of Kalispell, Montana, to the trails in the Flathead National Forest. Herron Park is a playground for many different outdoor activities, including mountain biking, equestrian, hiking, trail running, and snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in the winter. **(Photo: Herron Park Trailhead, June 2015)**

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*Foy's to Blacktail Trails* was founded in 2001 when recreational users of the trail systems at Herron Park realized that the private land surrounding their outdoor playground was in jeopardy of being developed. These private lands link the Herron Park trailhead to the extensive trail systems in the 2.4 million acre Flathead National Forest. Armed with the mission to save the area around Herron Park, FTBT, a group of passionate volunteers set out to raise \$2.5 million in grant money to purchase surrounding private land and trail easements and create an official 15-mile trail from the Herron Park Trailhead to Blacktail Mountain in the Flathead National Forest. **(Photo: Foy's to Blacktail Trails Information Kiosk, June 2015)**

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When I joined the team of board members and volunteers, FTBT had successfully completed their fundraising campaign, increased the size of the park fourfold, added miles of new trails, and were now focusing attention on raising awareness, increasing membership in the organization, and building new trails within the park and surrounding areas. **(Photo:** The viewpoint from Foy's Overlook Trail to the valley below, June 2015)

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One of the largest projects we coordinated while I was there was a volunteer day for National Trails Day on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015. This event brought over one hundred volunteers from several different groups together to build and maintain the trails in Herron Park and Lone Pine State Park. These groups included the boy scouts, several schools, rotary club, Montana Conservation Corps, and various other organizations. **(Photo: Americorps FTBT Intern Grete Gansauer helps the boy scouts put in posts for a new Nature Trail in Herron Park on National Trails Day, June 2015)**

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(Photo: National Trails Day Volunteers, June 6, 2015)

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Herron Park is a particularly important natural area for several reasons. It offers the residents of Kalispell an extensive outdoor recreation area less than five minutes from downtown. It also helps divert some of the over-recreation of Glacier National Park, which welcomed its 100 millionth visitor this summer. **(Photo: Going to the Sun Road, GNP)**

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During my time with Foy's to Blacktail Trails, I was so impressed with the passion and the dedication that have driven this group of volunteers to preserve, maintain, and improve such a gorgeous area for outdoor access. (**Photo:** Foy's Overlook Trail, Herron Park, June 2015)



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The “Family Trail” is one of the newer trails to be completed in Herron Park, a lovely loop that was created with the family user group in mind. (Herron Park, June 2015)

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Several major equestrian events happen each year at Herron Park as well, making the park a fun and versatile place to recreate for a variety of user groups. (**Photo:** Herron Park, 2015)

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Much of the work I did with FTBT included getting the word out to the community about *Foy's to Blacktail Trails* and its mission. I partnered with two local Kalispell Patagonia retailers, Rocky Mountain Outfitters and The Sportsman, to create displays in their stores that highlighted Herron Park, FTBT, and my Patagonia Environmental Internship. (Photo: Patagonia hiking table at The Sportsman, Kalispell, MT)

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Patagonia's Employee Internship program gave me the opportunity to connect with some wonderful people and work to save and restore the gorgeous Montana wilderness. It allowed me to feel as if I can make a difference, no matter how small, doing the things that I love to do in order to protect a place that I love. I returned to New York City and Patagonia Meatpacking both enriched and excited to share my experiences working with *Foy's to Blacktail Trails* in Montana.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."* – Margaret Mead, American anthropologist