

### 3. History of Geothermal Energy Use in Montana

Native Americans in Montana often wintered near hot springs, believing in the healing benefits of the warm mineral water. Early pioneers from the eastern United States who passed by hot springs in Montana recorded seeing tribal teepees nearby. In 1864, Dr. A.J. Hunter reported more than 1,000 teepees clustered around a hot springs near present-day Big Timber, and noted that many tribal members were bathing in the mineral water. Dr. Hunter later filed a claim on this hot springs and built a popular resort there that flourished into the 1930s.

The first white men to visit Montana's geothermal resources were probably the explorers Lewis and Clark, who camped near Lolo Hot Springs and boiled meat in Jackson Hot Springs in 1805 and 1806. Early trappers, miners, and explorers sought out Montana hot springs to take a hot bath and wash their clothes. Soaking in primitive hot springs pools in Montana is still as popular now as it was 150 years ago with the early settlers.



Early day soakers at Camas Hot Springs in western Montana.

*University of Montana archives*

### 3. **History of Geothermal Energy Use in Montana** - *continued*

During Montana's gold rush years in the 1860s to the early 1880s, crude hot springs bathhouses and guest cabins were built near many of Montana's geothermal resources in the western part of the state. Bathhouses built near the towns of Emigrant, Virginia City, Boulder, Clancy, and Helena all served as gathering places for gold prospectors, while cast-iron tubs in a log cabin offered cowboys a bath at a hot water well drilled in eastern Montana in the 1930s.



Cast iron tub filled with steaming water at Angela Flowing Well in eastern Montana, circa 1970.

*Photo by Terri Stewart*

### 3. History of Geothermal Energy Use in Montana - *continued*

With the coming of the railroad to Montana and more urban development, a new level of luxury replaced many of the early hot springs accommodations. The thirty-year period from the 1890s to the 1920s brought major luxury hot springs resorts to Montana, including Hunter's Hot Springs, Chico Hot Springs, Corwin Hot Springs, Boulder Hot Springs, and the most elegant of all, the Broadwater Natatorium and Hotel near Helena.



Exterior of Broadwater Natatorium near Helena, circa 1889.

### 3. History of Geothermal Energy Use in Montana - *continued*

Prohibition, fires, an earthquake, and lack of sufficient revenue led to the destruction and closure of several of these magnificent spas, and those hot springs resorts remaining in Montana saw a decrease in visitors from the 1940s through the 1970s. But many of Montana's hot springs have seen a resurgence in the past 20 years as visitors rediscover the pleasure of soaking in Montana's soothing hot water.



Present day soakers enjoying a hot springs as it mixes with cooler river water in Yellowstone National Park just south of Gardiner, Montana.

*Photo by Jeff Birkby*