

FAIRMONT HOT SPRINGS RESORT

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Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, formerly Gregson Hot Springs, is located in western Montana along I-90 between Butte and Anaconda. The resort sits in a valley at the base of Pintler Wilderness area and is near the Continental Divide.

Fairmont features two Olympic-sized swimming pools and two mineral soaking pools, one of each located indoors and outdoors. The pools are supplied by a 160°F (71°C) geothermal well which produces 150 to 180 gpm (40 to 48 L/min), located about 1,700 ft (518 m) from the resort, cooled to various temperatures for the pools. The resort buildings are also heated geothermally covering approximately 20 acres and have 158 guest rooms, a 130-seat main dining room, 60-seat coffee shop, 90-seat cocktail lounge with a carousel casino, a beauty shop, and a gift shop. A 7000 ft² conference center is also available.

Several springs discharge about 250 gpm (946 L/min) at 143°F (61.5°C) from Tertiary volcanics associated with the Boulder batholith into ponds near the resort. In Figure 1, the hot springs are located between the two guest room wings. Total dissolved solids are 559 ppm and the pH of the water is 8.41.

EARLY HISTORY

The early history of Gregson Hot Springs is taken from an article "The Old-New Hot Springs", author and date unknown, furnished by Lynn Gransbery, Administrative Assistant of Fairmont Hot Springs Resort.

Long before Eli and George Gregson located the springs, Indian tribes such as the Flathead, Nez Perce, and Shoshones set up tepees in the trees surrounding the twelve hot pools; they call them "Medicine Waters."

George and Eli Gregson located the springs on April 11, 1869. They acquired the springs from a squatter by the name of Hulbert for \$60 and took up claim on the surrounding land, a total of 320 acres (130 ha). The Gregson brothers went into the dairy business. The ground they had put claim to was excellent pasture, producing about 90 tons of hay a year. In the years to come, the brothers turned their attention to the twelve pools of hot mineral water. They built a well furnished and equipped two story hotel that would house fifty of sixty guests, a plunge bath, and five large bathing rooms, and offered cures for all types of ailments such as rheumatism, bone and muscle ailments, aging and many others. Away

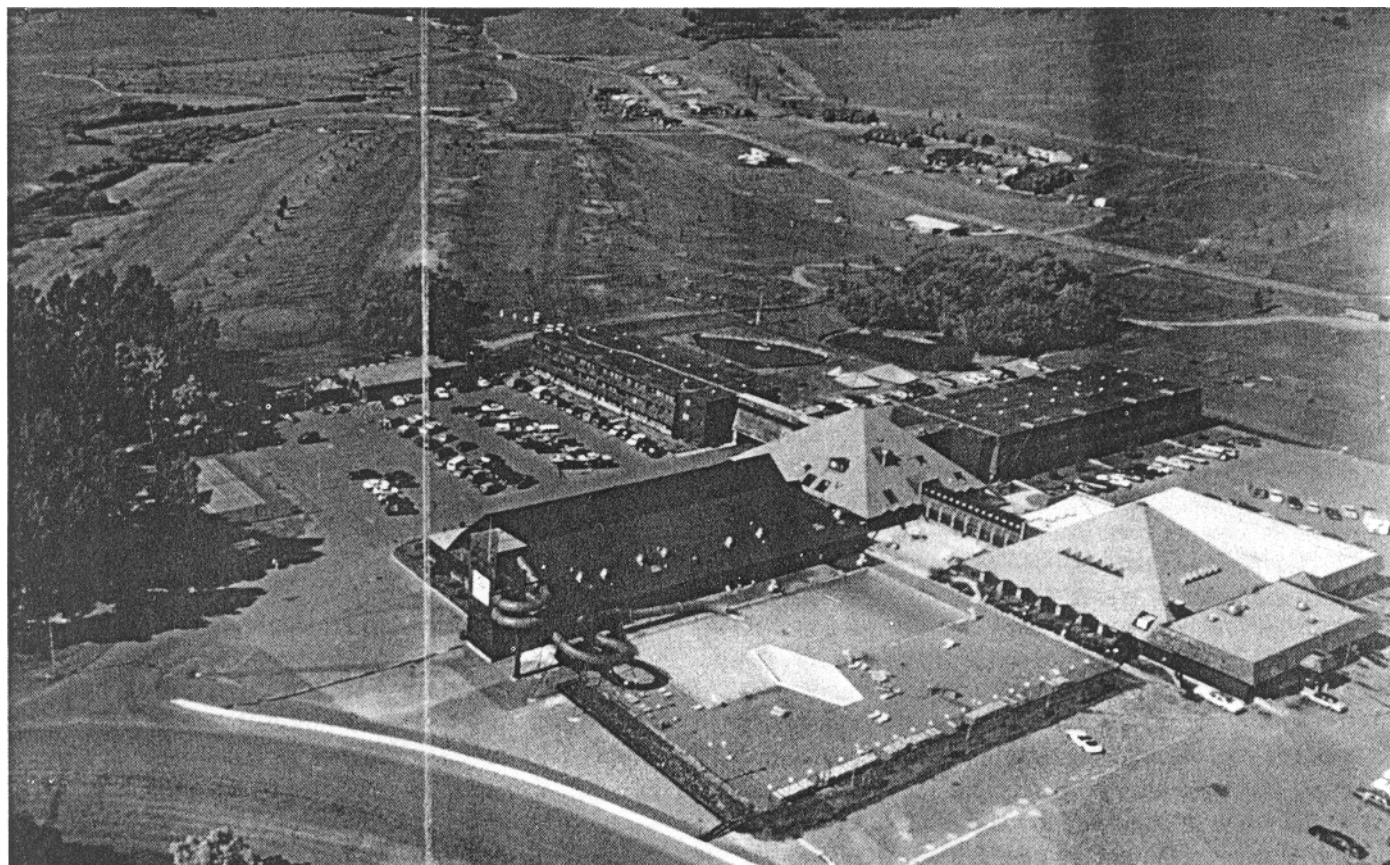


Figure 1. Fairmont Hot Springs Resort.

from the main building, they built a bar room and separate sleeping apartments. They used a covered flume to conduct the hot and cold water to the bathhouses. The cold water was taken from a pure cold water stream flowing about 700 yards (640 m) south of the hotel.

The resort offered many things besides swimming and cures. It also offered fishing and hunting, freedom from noise, the heat and dust of the large cities. It was offered to any wage group, day laborers, weary business people, invalids, as well as the pleasure seekers. No pains were spared to make the stay of the sick and invalid as comfortable and beneficial, as that of the tourist, pleasant and enjoyable. Many organizations and clubs held their picnics and parties at the Springs yearly. They came by buggy, horseback, and train to enjoy the pleasures offered by the Gregson Brothers.

The Gregson Resort was leased in 1890 to Miles French. In 1892, a townsite was platted and lots for villa sites 45 by 125 feet (14 by 38 m) were laid out. The Butte Miner carried a story dealing with the dedication of the townsite held on December 9, 1893. The same paper carried the story of the new B & P Depot that had been recently built at Gregson. In 1901, the resort was sold to Con Hays and James Breen.

PICNICS "REAL WING-DINGS"

On August 12, 1912, the Butte miners held the most memorable picnic at the Springs. Fourteen thousand people took part in different events during the day, including races, other track contests, a tug-a-war, and drilling matches. The tug-a-war between the St. Lawrence and Buffalo miners turned into a brawl between the Anaconda Smeltermen and Butte Miners, commonly referred to as the "Bohunks" and "Irishmen." Fists, bottles, rocks, and various other things were thrown, different stories are told of what happened that day.

One interpretation was, that two men started shooting their guns in the air, very much upsetting the whole picnic. The angry crowd started to pursue them. Seeing they were outnumbered, they took off for the hills. Their fellow Serbians or Bohunks saw that the crowd had turned on them also, they instantly headed for the hills to help the two men.

A ranch hand returning from a hunting trip got between the two opposing crowds and shot the two "Bohunk" in the thighs. The cowboy got out of the mob and headed down the valley for the ranch where he was employed. As the angry crowd pursued him, they tore out fences and had to be driven away from the ranch with guns. Later that afternoon wagons were finally brought to carry the wounded men back to the railroad station. One man died in the three and one-half hour wait for the train; the other man died the following day in the hospital.

Many stories were told at the inquest; many people were called to testify since it was impossible for the judge to determine what really happened. The cowboy was not prosecuted. The incident was closed.

Most of the picnics held were not "ordinary picnics"; they were considered "real wing-dings."

On December 23, 1914, the dance hall and some of the adjoining buildings caught fire. The losses were estimated at \$35,000. One week and one day later, the hotel plunge and other buildings caught fire and burned. The damages amounted to \$75,000. Both fires were blamed on faulty wiring. At the time of the fires, Gregson was under a managementship. The owners were the Montana Hot Springs Association, with George Forsythe as president. In 1916, George Forsythe bought Gregson. From 1916 to 1926, a second and third building were rebuilt to accommodate the people of Montana once more, and tourists from surrounding states. Sometime in 1944 or 1945, Treasure State Industries took over Gregson. Finally, it was closed in 1971 because of the collapsing walls. Gregson had run for over 100 years and had given many hours of pleasure and joy. Imagine the stories that were within those walls and the hundreds of people that passed through its doors seeking many things.

GREGSON-FAIRMONT TODAY

On August 29, 1971, a Gregson Surveyor's Picnic was held. The ad and story were carried in the Montana Standard, telling of the last chance to see the old Gregson Hot Springs before the new construction began. It was to be a state-wide event. The Anaconda Leader printed a Souvenir Edition on August 29, 1971 of Gregson Hot Springs, showing many old pictures of the way it used to be. The Montana Standard of July 10, 1971 tells of Gregson Complex winning federal funds to rebuild a complex consisting of a 18-hole golf course, two tennis courts, picnic area, outdoor pool and at least 190 rooms to house tourists and guests to Gregson. Fishing, hunting, horseback riding, skiing, and snowmobiling would also be added to the facilities.

In 1972, the remaining buildings were demolished to make way for the new resort costing to date 5.4 million dollars. This was a far cry from the original \$60 paid for the 12 mineral pools.

In the early months of 1972, Lloyd Wilder of Fairmont Hot Springs, British Columbia, became the prime owner of Gregson Hot Springs. Joe Reber of Helena, Reber Contractors, started the rebuilding of Gregson as a new complex. The architect, Ken Knight of Great Falls, designed it to be a cross of structures, and indoor pool of 80 by 120 feet, and larger outdoor pool with a smaller hot pool in the center. Lodging units on the south and west, lobby and shops in the center, convention center with two dining rooms, lounge and coffee shop, large modern kitchen to the north, and also a cabaret on the second floor which connects to the second floor west wing by a large bubble. At no time must you leave the complex to enter another area unless you so desire.

Fairmont not only has mineral waters to calm a person, a golf course and tennis courts to challenge; but, food offered by a chef that would make the very meekest appetite desire more.

For additional information about the resort, please contact: Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, 1500 Fairmont Road, Gregson, MT 59711 or call (406) 797-3241.