

A scenic landscape of a lake at sunset. The sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of blue, purple, and orange. The mountains in the background are covered in snow and reflected in the calm water of the lake. In the foreground, several large, smooth rocks are scattered in the shallow water.

Discover

Wallowa County

2021 WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN VISITOR GUIDE

www.wallowa.com







Dulcimer Week

The Wallowas offer lessons in this Appalachian classic

Story & Photos by Ellen Morris Bishop

With sweet, tangy tones and easy playability, the dulcimer is an Appalachian Mountain treasure that's moved west. Here in Wallowa County, the acoustic-music duo of Heidi Muller and Bob Webb has elevated dulcimer playing into the realms of magic. Their albums and concerts here and across the U.S. have introduced the dulcimer to many new musicians. And they want to help others learn and refine the joys of playing this instrument.

In 2011, Muller and Webb started a weeklong dulcimer workshop at the Wallowa Lake Camp and Conference Center. The program, now in its tenth year, offers Appalachian Mountain dulcimer classes for players from beginners to advanced musicians.

COVID-19 has put a big question mark on the 2021 edition of dulcimer camp, Muller said.

"A lot of our participants are older, and so we're not sure how many would want to come given COVID-19, even if we could have it this summer," Muller cautioned.

If the 2021 Dulcimer Week goes as planned, it will follow the lead of the previous nine editions, Muller said.

"Having taught at dulcimer camps back east, I wanted to start the same thing that a lot of folks are used to from other parts of the country, but had not been done up here," Muller said. "Wallowa Lake seemed the ideal place."

Dulcimer Week in the Wallowas has grown each year and this year, if all goes well, Muller said she anticipates hosting about 70 dulcimer players from across the U.S. >>

Dulcimer: (dul-ci-mer | \ 'dæl-sə-mər). An American folk instrument with three or four strings stretched over an elongate fretted sound box that is held on the lap and played by plucking or strumming. (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The mountain dulcimer, originally played by strumming its three or four strings with a turkey quill, harkens back to the early 1800s in the Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia. It probably was

modified from a German 3-string Scheitholt instrument that, like the mountain dulcimer, consisted of an elongated wooden sound box with a fretted fingerboard that extended the length of the sound box. Although the dulcimer is often considered Irish or Scottish in origin, it was the Celtic heritage of the Appalachian musicians that provided that flavor to American dulcimer tunes.

Muller and Webb have an astounding selection of dulcimers at their beck and call. Those include a 12-inch long “little dulcimer” made in Indiana, a baritone dulcimer, and a Galax dulcimer, which is thicker and boat-shaped, with all the strings tuned the same. One of Muller’s most treasured instruments is a dulcimer made by folk

music legend Jean Ritchie and her husband’s uncle, Morris Pickow, in 1967. It is one of over 300 “Jean Ritchie dulcimers” they made and sold in New York City.

The mountain dulcimer, originally played by strumming its three or four strings with a turkey quill, harkens back to the early 1800s in the Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia.

“Someone who knew me called me up at work one day in Seattle and said, ‘There’s this dulcimer and I can’t get it because my wife won’t let me have any more.’ So I took a bus to the store and brought it home,” Muller said.

Muller’s favorite to play is a Sunhearth dulcimer, of which only a 1,000 were made.

“It has a special tone that isn’t duplicated by other dulcimers,” she said.

Webb enjoys playing his electric dulcimer, which he made in his studio.

No matter which dulcimer they are playing, the music of this old-timey instrument is compelling, invigorating, and soothing all at the same time. ■

About Dulcimer Week in the Wallowas

When: July 4-10, 2021. Registration started March 12.

What: A workshop that offers a week of dulcimer lessons for players from beginners to advanced. Dulcimers are available for rent if you do not own one.

Where: Wallowa Lake Methodist Camp

Who: Instructors for 2021 include Dave Haas, Jeff Furman, Susan Trump and Bob Webb

Cost: \$345 plus room and board, so the total cost for the week is between \$700 and \$1,000.

Public concert: The workshop traditionally concludes with a concert for the participants and the public on the last day of the camp at a location to be announced. There are no other concerts or musical events for the public during camp.

Contact: Visit <https://www.wallowadulcimer.com> or email wallowadulcimer@gmail.com