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## Documentary looks at life of breaks homesteaders

BY KARL PUCKETT • TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER • JUNE 24, 2009

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Settlers of the rugged Upper Missouri River Breaks and surviving descendants are featured in a new Bureau of Land Management-sponsored history documentary airing for the first time Thursday on Montana PBS.

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"For any history buff, it's good," said Dana Darlington, 44, a Big Sandy-area farmer and rancher who appears with his son, Dylan. "The scenery is spectacular."

"Pride and Perseverance" is an apt title for the 30-minute documentary, Darlington said.

Homesteaders were "coaxed" to the area, only to discover later that the land was less hospitable than indicated in the promotions, he said.

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument was designated in 2001.

Families such as the Darlingtons recognized the unique beauty of the Breaks decades earlier, homesteading with young families in the late 1800s, said Vicki Marquis of the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council, which helped to arrange interviews.

"One of the positive projects that have come out of the monument designation is a greater appreciation for the history of the area," she said.

The documentary is part of a larger BLM effort to highlight the area's homesteading history, said Zane Fulbright, a BLM archaeologist in Lewistown.

As part of the \$40,000 project, five interpretive signs also are being erected describing homestead sites, domestic life, agricultural endeavors, early use of the rivers and roads and establishment of communities, Fulbright said.

Digital Wave out of Oregon, hired by the BLM, shot the video in 2008. Family members shared stories and provided insights into what it takes to survive in the Breaks.

Fulbright pitched the documentary to Montana PBS.

The Darlingtons still own a family cattle and wheat operation southeast of Big Sandy near the White Cliffs, the landmark rock formations rising from the banks of the Missouri. Nora Darlington, the family's great-grandmother, a widow at the time, came here with a brother from Ohio. Darlington's grandfather, Harley, was just 16 at the time.

Nora and son Harley stayed in Montana, but her brother lasted just a year. "He said it was too tough a country for him," Darlington said.

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### DOCUMENTARY

"Pride and Perseverance" will air on Montana PBS at 7:30 p.m. Thursday; 5 p.m. July 4; and at 10:30 a.m. July 5.

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