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EARLY DAYS ON THE OLD WEISER NATIONAL FORST

By Dewitt Russell

1968

Since I will try to introduce as many of the rangers and supervisors as possible, I will start with a brief sketch of my own service. I entered the Service in April of 1912, on the Payette National Forest at Third Fork Ranger station. Salary, \$75 per month. I went to work for Ranger Horace J. Burr. Mr. Burr was a native of Connecticut. He came to Emmett soon after the turn of the century. While in Emmett he married Ora Keithly, a school teacher. They had three boys: Willoughby, Ralph and Stewart. Ralph recently retired from the Service at Ketchum, Idaho where he still resides. Ranger Burr was one of the original Weiser rangers. When the Idaho and Weiser Forests were divided to make the Payette, Ranger Burr's District went to the Payette.

My work at Third Fork consisted mostly of improvement work. I cut logs and drove them three and one-half miles down Squaw Creek to the station where we built a barn. The 1912 fire season was very mild and I never was called to go to a fire that season. That same year I helped build the first telephone line from Third Fork to the Mill Creek Station. Clarence Favre was in charge of the construction work on this line. He did this during his vacation while attending the University at Moscow. Favre was also from the Weiser. He was raised on a ranch south of Indian Valley. Mr. Favre later became Assistant Regional Forester in Range Management. Also in this crew was another college student by the name of George Donart. He was studying Law at Moscow and was working as a guard on the Weiser during his summer vacations. George became a noted Criminal Lawyer at Weiser, Idaho.

In 1913 Ranger Burr was transferred to the Crawford Ranger Station and I went with him as station guard. While at Crawford I spent many weeks repairing telephone lines and patrolling sheep driveways. During the spring

and early summer there were well over a hundred bands of sheep trailing through Long Valley, headed for Pen Basin and any feed that they could find. This required a lot of policing.

In the fall of 1913 I took and passed the ranger's examination. In the spring of 1914 I was transferred to Stolle Meadows, as assistant ranger, where I worked for Ranger Monty Buster. My salary was now \$1100 per annum. In 1915 Monty resigned and I took his place as District Ranger, salary still \$1100. I remained at Stolle Meadows through 1916, spending the two winters on the South Fork Road. Working on the section from the Big Falls to the Deadwood River. While on this road job I met Louis Hillman, a ranger sent to the job from the Weiser. By the time I went to the Weiser, Louis had left the Service. He now resides in Emmett.

Being tired of herding sheep day and night I resigned in the late fall of 1916 and went to Kansas City, where I spent the winter attending the Sweeney Automotive School. When I finished the course I took a job at Twin Falls for the summer. Here I registered for the draft and later enlisted in the Marines.

In the spring of 1919 I was discharged from the Marine Corps and returned to Emmett. Supervisor Mains had offered me a job again. The salary now was \$1340 per annum. Mr. Mains instructed me to pick up a truck and take it to Crawford Station where I would be stationed for the summer. This truck was a three quarter-ton G.M.C. It was a 1916 Model and had been used by the Pacific Fruit and Express in Boise. As far as I know, this was the first Forest Service-owned truck in the Region. What a time I had nursing this truck to Cascade! Getting over some of the roads was an experience. I soon learned that the Long Valley side roads were not ready for automobiles. I later apologized to the truck as it came through the season in good shape.

While at Crawford I worked on spring maintenance, and for over a month I was back at my old sheep herding job. I soon found that my experience before the war was a Sunday School Picnic compared to this. Somehow the war had stimulated the sheep business. This year we had all the surplus sheep from Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and California trying to get into Pen Basin. My job in the past had been to escort these sheep through Lost Basin, Horse Thief Basin, over the heads of Clear Creek and the Middle Fork of the Payette. From here we went across the South Fork of the Salmon, just above the mouth of Blue Point Creek, then up the hill, eight miles to the divide between the South Fork and Johnson Creek. Here, with great relief, we dumped them into Tindall Meadows. The bands were so close together on the driveway that they were constantly mixing. One day in a blinding snow storm we found nine bands of three different ownership mixed into one. Everybody chipped in and worked to get over into Tindall Meadows where they planned to put them through the separating corrals. To everyone's consternation, some one had burned the corrals the fall before. It became necessary to break the large band into small herds and hold them on the meadows while the men rebuilt the corrals. Up to now my main objective was to get these sheep through and dumped into Pen Basin so that I could forget them. I was soon to learn, however, that I was to inherit the dumping grounds.

1919 was an extremely bad fire season. I put a lot of miles on the old truck hauling fire fighters and supplies to fires. The plan was for me to spend this season at the Crawford Station as a fire guard and truck driver. I was to take the ranger's examination again in the fall and if I passed, I was to be given Urban Herrick's salary. Urban was a ranger near Round Valley who was resigning at the end of the season.

In the spring of 1920 I went back to herding sheep again. The Pen Basin area had been taken into the National Forest. I was reinstated as a ranger, having passed the examination again. I was assigned to the Pen Basin District, (now called the Landmark District.) When Pen Basin was put under Forest Service management we got rid of about 80% of the sheep.

In 1923 while still at Pen Basin, I married Goldie Parker, daughter of John D. Parker, another old time ranger.

In 1924 the supervisor thought that I had had enough sheep herding and transferred me to Garden Valley. There my troubles were converted from sheep to cattle on the basis of five to one. This was my first experience with cattle in the Forest Service. I was at home with the few bands of sheep on the district, but the cattle proved to be even more of a challenge. My salary was now \$1860 per annum. While in Garden Valley, one of my fire guards was Glenn Balch. Glenn is a noted writer of boy and horse stories. One season was enough for Glenn. We stayed in Garden Valley for two years. During the winter of 1925 and 1926 I took the ranger course at the University of Idaho. After finishing the course I was transferred to the Council District on the Weiser Forest. My salary was now \$2000 per annum, a raise of \$140. I replaced Elmer Ross and R.E. Clabby. At this time the districts were divided. I took over the old Indian Valley District and the south part of the Council District.

While in Council I became acquainted with some of the early day personnel of the Weiser: J.B. Lafferty, E.B. Snow, R.E. Clabby, Thomas Evans and Louis Hillman. J.B. Lafferty was the first supervisor of the Weiser. He started in 1905. Ellis Snow was a native of Indian Valley and the first white child born there. He was also the first ranger in the valley. He had his

headquarters at his own ranch. Snow and Lafferty were close friends, and in 1918 resigned from the Service and, together, started a saw mill at Evergreen. In 1927 they sold the mill and went out of business. Mr. Lafferty moved to Weiser and went into the implement business. Mr. Snow still owned the Indian Valley Ranch and now bought one near Council and went into ranching and stock raising. Mr. Lafferty passed away in 1966 and Mr. Snow passed away in 1967.

In 1907 R.E. Clabby was on the Bear Creek District northwest of Council. While there he married Genevieve Robertson. Mr. Clabby was also identified with the early boundary surveys of the Weiser Forest.

In 1926 when the districts were divided, Clabby was transferred to the Price Valley District. Then in 1932 he was transferred to the Cache at Malad, where he served until his retirement. He still lives at Malad.

In 1907 Tomas Evans was a member of the Weiser force with headquarters at the Stevens Station at the mouth of the East Fork of the Weiser River. Although I had met Mr. Evans on different occasions, he had left the Service before I came to the Weiser. Some time following J.B. Lafferty, Lyle Watts was supervisor of the Weiser.

In 1925, Ben Rice was transferred from the Weiser to the Payette, and John Raphael was transferred to the Weiser. Johnnie came from the southeastern part of Idaho. He was a hard nosed grazing man. He got things stirred up trying to get better management. Some rangers disagreed and resigned from the Service. Horace Burr and I were transferred to the Weiser at this time. Ranger Burr took the Brownlee District which had been under Ranger McGinnis. He had resigned. I took Elmer Ross's District and he was transferred to the Payette. In August of 1926 Ethyl Fears resigned and Willard McDowell took over

the Hornet Creek District. At this time Vernon Brewer was given a field promotion. He was my guard at Mill Creek and now he was assigned to Bear Creek as District Ranger. Later Willard McDowell was transferred to the Kiabab [Kaibab] Forest with headquarters at Kanab. Vernon Brewer was then transferred to the Hornet Creek Station.

This was the organization in 1926:

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| John Raphael | Supervisor |
| Felix Koziol | Asst. Supervisor |
| DeWitt Russell | Council |
| R.E. Clabby | Price Valley |
| Horace Burr | Brownlee |
| Vernon Brewer | Bear Creek |
| Willard McDowell | Hornet Creek |
| Henry Hoffman | |

In 1932 Clabby was transferred to the Cache and Frank Youngblood came from the Minidoka to the Price Valley District. Later Brewer was transferred to the Jackson, Wyoming District and James Hockaday came to the Hornet District. When Jim was transferred to McCall, Walter Berry took the Hornet Creek District and stayed there until he retired in 1950. I was replaced by Frank Youngblood.

I must write a few words about Mr. Raphael. He occasionally used the term “me and my Hillbilly Rangers.” On the Weiser at that time there was just one degree in Forestry. This belonged to Felix Koziol, the assistant supervisor. Johnnie knew what was going on everywhere all the time and how much it was costing. He always refused to spend money like a “drunken sailor,” as he said they did in the C.C.C. days. He expected a lot for a dollar spent. I think his hillbillies did very well with what they had to do with. Johnnie was loyal to his men and they to him. He came to Council quite often and chewed us out, one at a time, behind locked doors. This usually cleared the air for awhile.

Supervisor Raphael seemed to come to Council as soon as possible after hearing a new story. The one I liked best was a true one which happened while he was supervisor on a south eastern Idaho Forest. Two of his rangers were building a log cabin in the high country for a late fall camp. This cabin was to be used jointly by the two rangers. After the camp was completed Johnnie could hardly wait to schedule an inspection trip. He finally arrived and, while looking over the new cabin, he noticed a small one out back, which turned out to be the conventional "two holer." He said he was baffled when he was the arrangement; one large hole and one very small hole. Neatly printed by each were the very appropriate instructions: "Rangers with \$1.20 per diem, use small hole" – "Supervisors and visiting inspectors with \$2.40 per diem, use the large hole." I understand this story had a lot to do with raising the Ranger's per diem. I had a lot of respect for Johnnie and learned a lot from him. In 1940 John Raphael left the Weiser and was replaced by John Kooch. I do not remember the dates, but during this time we had as assistant supervisor, Art Buckingham and Henry Hoffman.

In 1944 the Weiser was added to the Payette National Forest and Jack Kooch was our new Supervisor. Both Johnnie Raphael and the old Weiser were but memories. As we roll down the curtain on the drama of "The Old Weiser National Forest", so do we close the career of a supervisor to match.

In 1926 when I moved to Council we rented office space, as there were no government buildings of any kind. In 1927 the office was moved from the Lampkin Building to the Pomona Hotel. Our space was limited, as we had to crowd rangers into the office for the winters. The forest warehouse consisted of one 12' by 18' storeroom that belongs to the hotel. In 1932 we built, on the present government property, a 32' by 72' garage, warehouse and shop. An interesting point here is that Frank Youngblood and another man

moved the stuff from the 12' by 18' shed into the 32' by 72' building and nearly filled the new one. In 1933 the office building now used was built as part of our first C.C.C. Project.

All rangers living in town were required to furnish their own quarters. Ranger Stations were barely adequate until the advent of the C.C.C. days when most Ranger Stations and Guard Stations were built new to the specified regional standards.

During the C.C.C. program we sold the old Mill Creek Ranger Station to the local cattlemen's association for a cow camp. This building, in its day, was a neat two-bedroom frame house. On its front gable was a huge Forest Service shield which read: "U.S. Forest Service Mill Creek R.S. 1907." It was built by Ranger Burr as one of his first projects on the Weiser Forest. This same year he built the log lookout cabin, which still stands, on West Mountain at the foot of Lookout Mountain on the sheep trail.

Out of the C.C.C. program we got a lot of much needed projects. In addition to the new buildings over the Forest, we completed several road projects and many miles of range and boundary fences. This posed a problem in later years as we were never able to get enough money to properly maintain these improvements.

Range Management

1926 saw the finish of the range studies, inventory and management plans made by the Regional Office. These plans were turned over to us to use on our districts for the current year. They included range type maps and forage acres by units and everything a new ranger needed to know. I soon learned there was a great deal more to know. We found that the forage acres in a unit was not the entire story. Much of the range with high forage value was unuseable or

only partially usable. This was due to several factors, such as: lack of water, inaccessibility and lack of management by the riders. We immediately started work on the developments of springs and seeps to provide water on the little-used areas. We built short drift fences, bulldozed out trails thru log jams to open up new areas.

The entire west boundary of district one was fenced from near the East Fork of the Weiser, south to the divide between Squaw Creek and the Little Weiser River. The latter project was made possible by the C.C.C. and the W.P.A. programs. The water developments and short drift fences were built and maintained with our G-16 funds. In later years we found that the G-16 funds were inadequate for the maintenance. From then on we found it almost impossible to get a drift fence of any length approved.

The high range on the Council District was so divided by sheep and cattle allotments that we had a bad situation relative to the drift of cattle to the sheep range. On West Mountain there were two sheep allotments and two cattle allotments. One cattle allotment lay between two sheep allotments. This was virtually unauthorized common-use. Without fencing, it was impossible to control. There was no natural topographic barriers between allotments or between the Payette and the Weiser Forests. After fighting the situation for a few years, we worked out a regular common-use plan for the top of the mountain. We were severely criticized by the Regional Office inspectors who claimed that common-use was double-use. Since we could figure out no cure for the double-use, we regulated the use by sheep and kept the cattle off the high mountain as late as possible and let the chips fall where they may. Since the regional office refused to back a fencing project, nothing further was done.

Besides the range improvement work that we did, constant working with the stockmen and their riders, the thing that got the best results was our tagging program. With all of the work we did on the range, we never seemed to get the results we had a right to expect. We started checking more closely on the surplus stock bearing permitted brands. We followed up stories about mid-summer sales and their transfer to far off pastures. Some of the answers we got did not ring true. We then started the tagging program. This gave us a better chance to check the surplus. Better still, those who were putting surplus stock on the range found that they were in trouble. They sold down to safe numbers. During this period we were taking advantage of every opportunity to reduce use by transfer reductions, shortening the seasons and the threat of out and out reductions in numbers. When I left the Weiser there was a large reduction pending, especially on the Indian Mountain Division. Sheep numbers were dwindling throughout the district, mostly through transfer to cattle. This may have helped the overall picture, and again it may not.

Fish and Wildlife

Practically all of the rangers cooperated with the Fish and Wildlife in distribution of fish to streams and lakes within their districts. Most of our planting of Rainbows and Cutthroats in the larger lakes was a waste of money. We hauled truck loads of fry to places like Lost Valley Reservoir, which to my mind, only furnished feet to the larger trout already in the lake. For this reason, most rangers annually recommended holding the fish over to the second year to plant. With the Eastern Brook, the plantings were much more successful, and they were large enough at planting time to take care of themselves.

We even supplied transportation for beaver [beaver] that were to be planted in the high streams. In my case, beaver were taken from the ranches on the lower

Hornet Creek, to the upper waters of the Little Weiser and the Middle Fork of the Weiser. Success was fair to good on these plantings.

Timber Management

At the time that I went to the Weiser I found many small sawmills scattered throughout the Forest. Most of our side roads leading from the valley were built to serve these mills, which operated only during the field season. When operating, they would only cut from 10 M to 15 M board feet of lumber per day. Most of this lumber was sold to the farmers and ranchers in the near vicinity, the surplus going to small town lumber yards where it was remanufactured for general sale. The majority of the sales were ranger sales. They were for fuel, poles, posts and saw timber. Some of these mills did custom sawing. The ranchers bought the timber and logged it into the mill where it was sawed for so much per thousand. We found it necessary to plan the small sales with the farmers and ranchers in a way that we could have a designated day for marking timber in certain localities. The applicants would meet the ranger in the woods. The ranger would mark his timber and designate the trees to be purchased by each. The ranger would then go back to his office and type up the timber sale forms and mail them to the purchaser.

Supervisor Raphael kept close account of the cost of these many scales, in order to keep them self-sustaining. This was hard to do, as these were mostly S-22 sales at \$1.00 per M, plus 25¢ for brush disposal.

My first large commercial timber sale was made during my first year on the Council District. This was the Filley Creek sale up above Evergreen. The pine sold for \$3.90 per M and the other species sold for \$1.50 per M. Felix Koziol, the assistant supervisor, had had some experience in timber sale operation in the Boise Basin. Kozy worked up this sale and got me started.

After that, I was left pretty much on my own. I, personally, did the marking, scaling and woods supervision. The mill was cutting about 24 M per day. I had little time for anything else. I cried for help, but got no answer. I had not been out on the range for days and, being a new man on the district, had no idea what was going on. One day, to bring matters to a head, I applied for a week's annual leave. No one in his right mind applies for annual leave in the middle of the summer on a fire forest. Needless to say, I had a quick visit from Supervisor Raphael. He demanded to know why I wanted annual leave. I told him I wanted to go up on West Mountain and ride for a week or two; that we had some high powered and very expensive Range Management Plans, and nobody to use them. Johnnie finally saw the humor in it and promised me some help. I hired a young man with no experience and taught him to scale. Since there was very little defect in the Filley Creek timber, he caught on rapidly. Later, large sales were handled by men from the R.O.

The Filley Creek area stands as a monument to the early day conservative cutting practices and can still be appreciated by people fifty years old or older. After the land exchange cases started on Bear Creek and Crooked River, I was given a week's training in marking. I realize that this was not the same as our regular timber sales, but it was hard to mark timber at home and try to enforce close utilization rules, such as 16 inch stumps, 8 inch tops, etc. I remember one of the early exchange rules required of a tree that the first log be clear and the second and succeeding logs have at least 180 degrees clear of branches. This left a lot of timber on the ground to go to waste. Many people who did not know the circumstances wondered why I was so strict with them. I tried to explain, but I am afraid I wasn't too convincing.

Fire Control

During my 25 years on the District I was extremely lucky in the fire control. I usually had competent guards. It also helped that I had the Weiser fire dispatcher in my office. In those 25 years I had one Class "C" fire. In the Spring of 1931 I spent two months detail on the Wyoming Forest on Grays River on bug detail. When I returned to the Weiser I found conditions dry as tinder. I had been home but two or three days when a fire broke out near the mouth of Warm Springs Creek on the Middle Fork of the Weiser. This fire, as I recall, burned about thirty acres before we got it under control. I had many Class "B" fires and the usual class "A" lightning fires. To me, this showed that my fire guards and the dispatcher were on their toes. During my time at Council I was detailed to other parts of the Forest on large fires, but got by without a project fire on District one.

There was one man in Fire Control who deserved honorable mention. This is Arch Perkins. Arch came into the Weiser family as a young guard. He caught on quickly and soon became Fire Dispatcher at Council. To keep Arch on the payroll, he was put in charge of the Forest Sign Shop. He drove truck, skinned cat and worked timber sales. He fit in anywhere. Arch stayed on the Payette, retiring at the end of 1967. He now resides in Boise.

General

Looking back over my 36 years in the Forest Service, I see many places where I could have done better. Because all of the way it has been a cut and fit proposition. We have always had much the same objectives. The old-timer in the Service had to go pretty slowly in their work with the pioneers. In many cases they were there first and thought that they owned everything up

to a three mile limit. When we seemed to be getting out of line, public opinion soon put us straight. I knew some who had a "hot line" to the President, and used it often.

The stockmen were, themselves, pioneers. These are the men who built the West. I found myself sympathetic to their hard lives way back in the sticks, and did all in my power to help them. Some responded with better cooperation; some showed little change.

As Goldie and I look back over our many years in the Forest Service, we consider our 25 years on the Weiser the most enjoyable. There we raised our three children and saw them through high school, and the boys through the War. Our boys never took up Forestry, but John, Don and Jean all have the greatest respect for the Forest Service and its personnel. They and their families love the mountains and camping. We think this is because of their early life in the Forest Service. Our fondest memories are of working and playing together on the Old Weiser.

BJR