

**Steele Creek Roadhouse Rehabilitation, June-July 2009**



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## Steele Creek Roadhouse Rehabilitation, June-July 2009

Cover: Steele Creek Roadhouse, June 2009.

Location: Steele Creek Roadhouse (49-EAG-00019), Fortymile river mile 22.8R

Participants: Robin Mills (BLM-FDO Archaeologist), Kevan Cooper (BLM-FDO Realty), Doug Stephens (USDA Forest Service, Mountain Heritage associates), volunteers with Teacher Conservation Corps

Date(s): June 25 – July 8, 2009

### **The Undertaking:**

This project involves rehabilitating portions of the Steele Creek Roadhouse (cover photo), a site on the National Register of Historic Places, located on the Fortymile River at river mile 22.8R, inside the Fortymile National Wild & Scenic River corridor, managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Figure 1). The log roadhouse measures 52' in length and 21' wide, is two-stories tall, with a full gable height of about 25'. The building is oriented east-west. The ground floor of the building is composed of two large rectangular rooms, side-by-side, sharing a short-axis wall. There is also a single-story shed off of the western short axis of the building which, for present purposes, won't be discussed further. See Figure 2 for a plan view of the building. Specific goals of the project this summer included: (1) replacing all rotten sill and lower courses of wall logs of the roadhouse, and (2) straightening the building which was leaning a couple of feet out of plumb to the northward.

### **April- July 2009:**

Between April 7 and 11, 2009, personnel from the BLM–Fairbanks District Office (archaeologists Robin Mills and Steve Lanford; recreation specialists Colin Cogley and Cory Roegner; realty specialist Kevan Cooper) travelled from Fairbanks to the main bridge over the Fortymile River at Taylor Highway MP 112.4, where, over the course of several days, they transported with snowmachines 30 spruce logs over the river ice to the roadhouse site, located 6.6 miles downstream from the bridge. The logs had been delivered by a contractor from Tok during our stay, when the road was finally plowed open to the main bridge (Figures 3-5).

On June 25, 2009, Mills transported Doug Stephens and other personnel from the Mountain Heritage Services, USDA Mountain Heritage Associates (MHA), along with much equipment, supplies, and provisions, into the Fortymile area. The MHA is a group in the USDA Forest Service's Enterprise System that specializes in historic building restoration projects. All personnel spent the night at the BLM Chicken Field Station at Taylor Highway MP 68.2, and proceeded the next morning to the main bridge over the Fortymile River. There we met local riverboat operator Larry Taylor who, over the course of the day, transported the two Forest Service personnel and all of the supplies to the site, with each round trip taking about 1 hour to accomplish (Figures 6-8).

Mills then returned to Fairbanks, where he coordinated with six volunteers associated with Teacher Restoration Corp., an all-volunteer group that helps restore/rehabilitate historic

buildings throughout the U.S. The volunteers assembled in Fairbanks on June 30 and stayed overnight at the Alaska Fire Service's temporary firefighters barracks on Ft. Wainwright. We proceeded to the Fortymile bridge the next day, met Mr. Taylor again, and transported all personnel to the site by boat. BLM-FDO employee Kevan Cooper accompanied the TRC crew to the site, and remained with the field crew until the end of the project.

Mills then returned to Fairbanks, but returned on July 7 with other BLM employees to retrieve the crew from the site. We stayed overnight at the Taylors' residence at MP 113.3, and pulled all personnel, equipment, and supplies from the site the following day via riverboat, and returned to Fairbanks that same night.

Again, the specific goals of the project this summer included: (1) replacing all rotten sill and lower courses of wall logs of the roadhouse, and (2) straightening the building which was leaning a couple of feet out of plumb to the northward. These goals were partially met. In the span of the one week that the full field crew was at the site, they were able to accomplish about 1/3 of the log replacing, and 1/2 of the building straightening (Figure 2, red highlight). Since the walls that needed log replacement included portions of two rectangular rooms situated side-by-side, there were six external weight-bearing walls that needed their lower rotten logs replaced: two short-axis walls (at the opposite ends of the building), and four long-axis walls, corresponding to the long walls of the two rooms (see Figure 2). The assembled field crew was able to excavate out and replace the rotten logs associated with the eastern short axis wall, along with those of the adjoining north wall of the eastern-most of the two side-by-side rooms (Figures 9-10). Thus, two of the six walls were fully stabilized (Figures 13-14). Also, the eastern half of the roadhouse was straightened via a system of come-alongs anchored on the south side of the building, which were attached to straps that passed through the building and were attached to long, vertical logs vertically abutting the full height on the north side of the building (Figures 11-12). In this manner, and by working all come-alongs at once, the crew was able to pull the eastern half of the roadhouse into proper alignment.

Next summer 2010, 10 employees from the USFS and the BLM will return to Steele Creek to finish the work on the roadhouse: replace the rotten lower logs associated with the remaining four walls, and straighten the west half of the building.

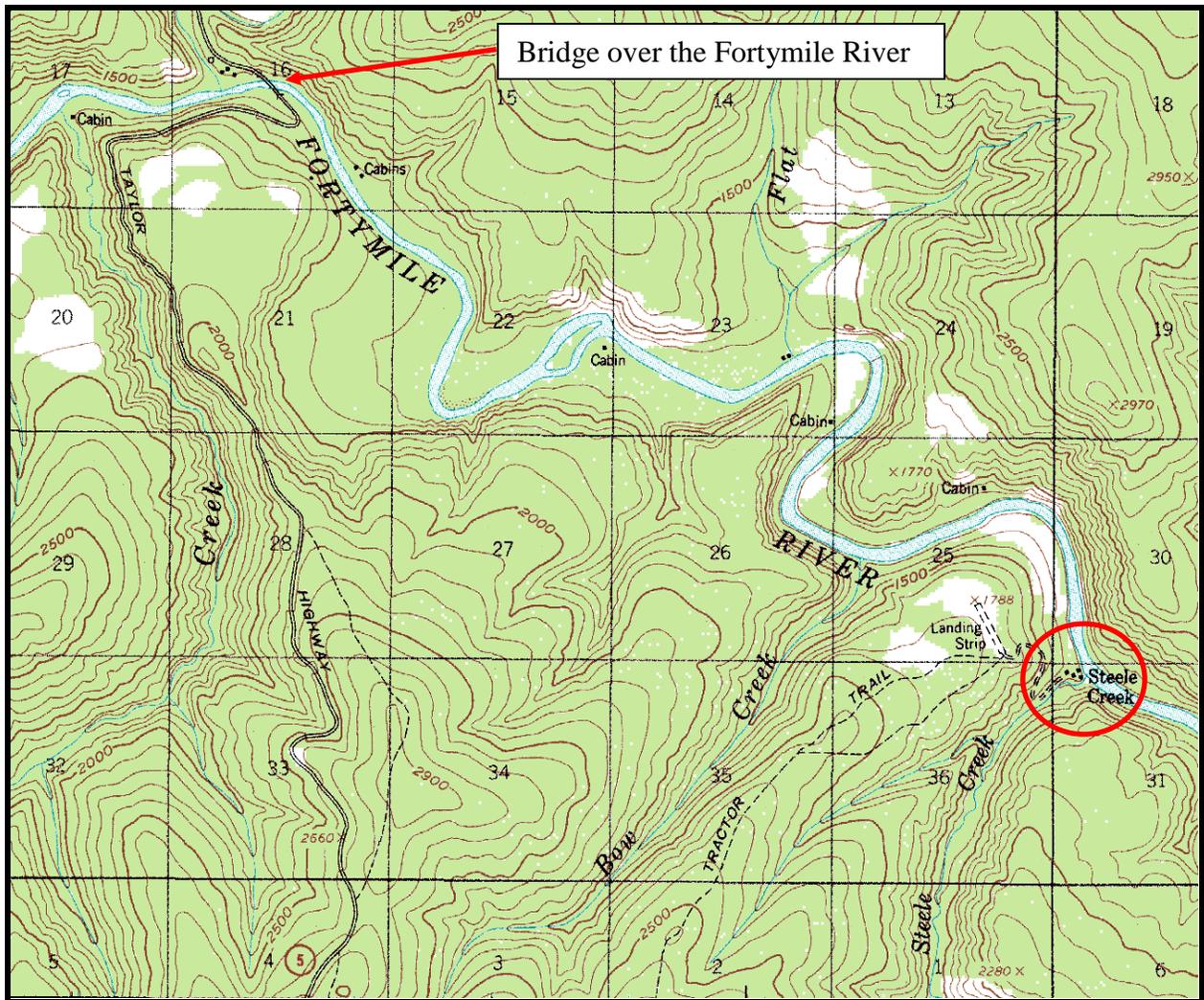


Figure 1. Portion of Eagle B-1 USGS quad map, 1:63,360 scale. Each section is 1 mile squared. Map shows the Taylor Highway crossing the Fortymile River at highway MP 112.4 and river mile 116.2. The Steele Creek site is found at river mile 22.8 on the right/south bank (circled).

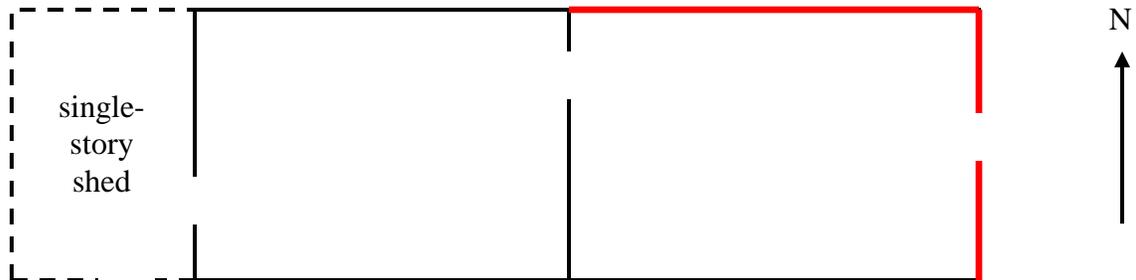


Figure 2. Plan view of Steele Creek Roadhouse, not to scale. Main building (excluding shed) is 52' long and 21' wide. The walls whose lower courses of rotten logs were replaced in 2009 are highlighted in red.



Figure 3. The logs for the summer's project were delivered in April 2009 by contract to the main bridge over the Fortymile River at Taylor Highway 112.4. BLM employees arrived and hooked the logs up on to sleds and transported them to the site, 6.6 miles downstream from the bridge.



Figure 4. Transporting logs to the Steele Creek site via snowmachine over the frozen river.



Figure 5. All logs transported to the Steele Creek site. Other single-story, single room log cabins at the site are seen in the background.



Figure 6. All gear, supplies and equipment for the summer project were delivered in June 2009 to the main Fortymile River bridge.



Figure 7. All gear, supplies and equipment for the summer project were delivered in June 2009 to the main Fortymile River bridge.



Figure 8. .... and transported to the site, 6.6 miles downstream, via river boat.



Figure 9. The rest of the crew arrived in early July, and dug out the rotten lower logs of two of the six walls that needed log replacement. View north, on the short-axis wall at the east end of the building.



Figure 10. View west, digging out the rotten logs on the long axis wall, north side of the eastern room of the roadhouse.



Figure 11. [View east on the south side of the roadhouse]. The come-along system anchored on the south side of the building. The straps passed through the building and ....



Figure 12. .... were attached to vertical logs on the north side of the building. The system helped pull the leaning building back into proper alignment. View west on the north side of the roadhouse. Note also the blocking and hydraulic jacks used to support the roadhouse. A larger system of blocking, supports, and jacks were placed inside of the building.



Figure 13. The replacement logs were cut to proper length, notched, matched to fit, and assembled in an open area in the center of the site prior to installment under the roadhouse.



Figure 14. The replacement logs assembled into place. The new sill logs were placed onto a layer of river cobbles. Prior to backfilling, the outer layer of logs were layered in plastic, so no soil is touching the new logs.