

Ranger Stations and the Forest Service

Guard stations like this one were once the seasonal homes and offices of Forest Service employees. The winters were spent in town (Vernal), but once the snow melted and work could be done in the field the ranger or other employees would move into the guard station. The ranger's family might also spend the summer in the station. Today there are 11 remaining guard stations, plus Ute Mountain Fire Lookout on the Ashley National Forest. Most of these were built during the 1920's and 30's. Many of the buildings look similar because nearly all were built using one of several standard designs and approved materials. Most of the stations contained living quarters, a barn and corral for horses - the primary means of transportation, and buildings for storage. At Stockmore and Summit Springs there was a room for the ranger's office. By the 1960's roads and vehicles had improved to the point that many of the guard stations were not used as often; although, seasonal crews are still sometimes housed in these buildings. The Vernal District Ranger has chosen to rent this guard station to the public so they can enjoy a rustic experience similar to the first rangers. Most fees (like timber and grazing) collected by the Forest Service are sent to Washington D.C., however, the rental fee for this cabin is used by the district for maintenance of these buildings. The Vernal District has three guard stations available for rental. Ute Mountain Lookout on the Flaming Gorge District is open for tours during the summer.

President Cleveland set aside the Uinta Forest Reserve in 1897. Headquartered in Provo, this reserve covered most of the Uinta Mountains, including this area. Forest Reserves were set aside to improve and protect forests, conserve watersheds, and furnish timber. In 1905 the Forest Service was organized as an agency and placed within the Department of Agriculture. The Ashley National Forest was created on July 1, 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt. The forest was carved from the eastern portion of the Uinta National Forest and named for Ashley Creek and Gorge which are prominent natural features on the forest's southeastern corner. Ashley Creek was named for William Ashley an early trapper and the first American to cross the Uintas in 1825. The Forest Service was created to be a decentralized organization. Most of the decisions and actions occurred at the local or lowest level – the ranger district. The ranger was given authority to sell timber, create grazing allotments, and make most of the decisions essential to operating the forest in that area. Each forest had several ranger districts overseen by a forest supervisor.

Colton Guard Station

Colton Guard station was built in 1933 and remodeled in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was part of the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt instituted during the Great Depression. Single young men were recruited to work on natural resource projects like building dams, roads, fences, campgrounds, and buildings. The men lived in camps that were run by the military. Many of the roads and buildings on the forest were built during this period. The wood porch was replaced with a cement one in 1974, but the station essentially looks the same way it has for nearly 70 years

Frazio tells the following story about the Colton Guard Station.

Thirty years prior to the construction of Colton Station, Louis Freestone and two other men found a dead cowboy at the site. It was reported that he had been thrown from his horse, crawled to the creek for water, and died where he lay. Glen Lambert (A Vernal District Ranger), however, later heard one of the men that buried him say he had been shot – not thrown.

The grave is located squarely beneath the present station. Lambert and the others were aware of this in choosing the location, but since it was the best spot, and hoping that the cowboy wouldn't mind and others would probably not know the difference, the little station was built where it stands today.

One of the last crews to live in Colton was a timber crew who worked long hours conducting stand exams. Stand exams are to identify the types of trees, their size and any disease or bug problems in a particular area. One evening the crew noticed a porcupine had begun eating bark near the top of a spruce tree beside the station. They watched the porcupine for several days, but one day it left the tree and was waddling on the ground. Wanting to protect the tree and guard station from the porcupine, but not kill the porcupine, the crew quickly grabbed a garbage can and captured the fellow. He was transported in one of the crew member's van a few miles from the station and released. Can you find the tree the porcupine was living in? How might the porcupine have killed the tree and what danger was there to the guard station?

One of the main duties of the employees who stayed at Colton was to watch the sheep drive line that passed just north of the station. Beginning in World War I and into the 1920's over 100,000 sheep were driven into the Uintas to graze for the summer. Each herd was given a specific area (allotment) to graze. The herders were never in a hurry to reach their allotments because every day the sheep spent in someone else's area meant more feed on their own allotment later. Forest Service employees would ride the drive way to encourage the herds along and count the number of sheep to ensure there were no more than had been permitted.

William Hurst, Forest Supervisor between 1950 – 1955, told the following story about one of these riders. Hurst hired a local young man to ride the drive way and sent him to Colton. The man was a good rider, but had been given a Forest Service horse that could be stubborn. The next morning the young man walked into Hurst's office and threw his badge on the desk and said, "I quit." Hurst asked him why he was back so early, what had happened. "Remember Blue (the horse) and how many times we had threatened, if I had a gun? Well, this morning I had a gun." Hurst talked the young man into going back to Colton to deal with the horse's body. When they arrived the horse was walking around the corral. The young man swore the horse had gone down when he had shot it, but no wound could be found. Blue lived to torment employees for several more years.

Paradise Guard Station

According to the Roosevelt Standard newspaper, “Paradise Park received its name in 1906 or 1907 when Bill Caldwell, a sheepman in the Dry Fork drainage, became lost in a snow storm. Mr. Caldwell wandered for two days and finally came upon the camp of Ellis J. Ellis. Bill said, ‘it sure looked like Paradise to me’ and the name stuck.”

The guard station was built in 1922. One story we cannot verify is the district ranger constructed the buildings in his spare time. They have changed little since they were built. The cement porch was put in 1978. Mike Bergfeld, district recreation forester, still vividly recalls the long 14 hour day when the porch was poured as they had to build a wood form and mix the concrete in wheelbarrows.

Darrell Johnson, district silviculturalist, remembers staying in the guard station during the mid 1960’s. They would stay in the station during the week while they burned slash – the left over limbs and wood from logging operations.

The slash had been machine piled into long windrows. We would usually wait for the first snow and hope it wouldn’t snow more than what we wanted. The best conditions to burn were as hard snow was just beginning. We used propane torches to get the windrow fires started. They would be hard to start if it rained before the first snow came or if we were late and the snow had a chance to melt and get the slash wet before we started. The windrows were hundreds of feet long and ten to fifteen feet high so when the fires did get going they burned tremendously hot. Once we started we hated to stop and would get a lot done in a day. When we got back to the guard station in the evening, we would be tired... cold... wet... and very hungry. We would take turns cooking a big supper (steaks, or a lot of times stew) and would play cards until late.

Bartlett Sawmill*

In 1929 the Bartlett Sawmill was moved to Paradise Park. The sawmill was located approximately 75 yards south of the guard station. The Bartletts built a large three-story building to house the operation. They also purchased a boiler from a dredge operation that had been working on the Green River. Moving the equipment to Paradise Park was a considerable challenge. The steam engine was almost completely dismantled and hauled in iron-tired wagons to the sawmill site. The boiler was more difficult to move. It was 25 feet long, eight feet in diameter and weighed 6 tons. A truck was hired to haul the boiler, but 12 miles from the sawmill they encountered snow on the road and the driver did not feel he could drive safely any further. It took two days using a team of four horses and sleighs to move the boiler the remaining distance. The most difficult part was maneuvering the boiler around turns, as it would roll off the road.

A rather large complex built up around the sawmill. At the time it was the largest lumber operation in the Uintah Basin. Cabins were built near the mill for the family and workers. In addition to three cabins and a large storage shed, two good-sized stables and a large corral were made for the animals. Two underground cellars were built for storage of potatoes, carrots and onions. Can you find remains of any of these buildings today?

The Bartletts felt it was important for their families be together for the summer. The children would spend the summer at the mill and return to school in the fall. The men would work through the fall and into the winter at the mill. The family has many fond memories of the summers in the forest.

The sawdust pile was the setting for many marshmallow roasts and ghost story-telling pastimes. There were rides on the lumber car and 'hide and seek' or 'run sheep run' games. During the evening, the early twilight or dusk hours, the sawmill afforded many excellent hiding places for these activities.

The 'monkey pole' was a memorable, sometimes recreational, facility. The monkey pole was a length of 1-1/2 inch metal pipe, secured firmly at the roof of the second floor and extended to the bottom of the first or ground floor. To get from the second floor to the boiler room quickly, one simply had to grasp the pipe and slide downward. After working hours, sliding down the monkey pole was a great attraction for active youth who were visiting the facilities. The Bartlett children developed many varieties of descending antics, such as 'one hand and one leg,' 'two hands, no legs,' 'one hand or two hands and one toe,' 'legs only,' 'head first,' etc. most of which mothers disapproved. The real test of one's strength and talent was to climb up the monkey pole feet first.

The children also built small houses and villages from scrap wood and even a large clubhouse.

The family loved to make ice cream in a "Montgomery Ward 6-quart, hand operated" freezer. A snowdrift always formed on the north side of the sawmill and if it had been buried under shavings some snow could be encouraged to last into the summer. Sometimes ice was taken from Ice Cave, a few miles west of the mill, to help freeze the ice cream custard. Usually vanilla or maple was used to flavor the treat. However, sometimes the milk cows would eat garlic while grazing and this would flavor the ice cream, milk, butter or cream with garlic. "The smell of garlic in milk, butter, and cream readily turns off the appetite." "The remedy, however, was simple; the consumer ate a piece of onion, and he became oblivious to the garlic."

In June 1940 the men were at the sawmill preparing for the upcoming season. During the lunch break a fire started on the east side of the mill. Although the company truck was saved nothing could be done for the mill. A huge fire developed and for some anxious moments there was concern the huge boiler would explode, but a safety release worked properly. "As the fire roared on, pieces of timber the size of a man's leg were carried by the heated air currents 40 to 50 yards upward toward the ranger's cabin and into the edge of the timber north of the mill houses." After two days the fire was finally put out.

The Bartletts had no insurance and fifteen years of accumulated assets were destroyed. "For Owen, 42 years of age, with a wife, seven children under sixteen, a father and mother in their sixties (for whom he felt financial responsibility), this was a devastating financial tragedy. As he told Mabel (his wife), 'There I stood, with my hands—empty—all of the equipment, tools, and lumber ready for sale, going up in smoke. I could only be grateful no one was injured.'"

“Tridell and the surrounding communities were affected by the loss of the Bartlett sawmill as it was the principal supplier of lumber for homes, churches, schools, commercial and farm buildings, and bridges.” Although the Bartletts were not able to completely recover from the sawmill fire, they were not in debt and were able to rebuild. However, the Paradise Park operation was not rebuilt.

Even after fifty years, the older children could point out exactly where the steam engine was mounted, where the barrel hole was that stored water for cooling around the boiler, where the saw jack stood, and where the blacksmith shop was located. Much of the Paradise Park activity was permanently terminated, though the ‘boiling’ spring where ice-cold, fresh water bubbled the sand in the bottom still continued to bubble. Though the family no longer has mill rights in the Paradise Park area, they hold many fond memories safely and securely within their hearts.

Can you find evidence of this one thriving enterprise or the spring?

*Excerpts taken from the Bartlett Family History.

Trout Creek Guard Station

Trout Creek Guard Station was built in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was part of the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt instituted during the Great Depression. Single young men from financially stricken families were recruited to work on natural resource projects like building dams, roads, fences, campgrounds, and buildings. The men lived in camps that were run by the military. Many of the roads and buildings on the forest were built during this period. The wood porch was replaced in 1998, but the station essentially looks the same way it has for nearly 70 years.

On the porch, just left of the door, is a wood box. This once held the phone that linked all the guard stations on the forest. Dave Keddy, who was stationed at Trout Creek for several years said “the phones were also on the outside to make them available to the public in case they had an emergency and had to get help.” The phone line across the forest was first constructed between 1910 and 1911. For many years they were the only telephones in the area and were relied on by locals. Mr. and Mrs. Walkup, ranger at Elkhorn Ranger Station, “tell of being awoken many times so that someone could call a doctor or to deliver an important message to a neighbor, sometimes eight or ten miles away.”

One of the ranger’s main responsibilities was maintaining the phone line. Bill Hurst, ranger in Manila, remembers long winter days spent trying to find the break in the phone line to Vernal. When he reached the summit just north of Trout Creek (the end of his territory) he would cut down a small lodgepole, put it between his legs and ride it down the hill to his horse. Keddy reports that “one of the first tasks of the summer season was to make sure the line was operating and to clear off any trees that happened to fall across it and reconnect the wires if they were broken and then hang 'em up on the trees on their insulators to get the system in operation.”

Keddy said the first summer he spent in Trout Creek he did not use the phone, but the second summer he became more comfortable with its use. “When you were alone at any of the stations, the Lookout or the Guard Stations and the phone-line was working, you could communicate with the other workers by listening to the phone or ringing them up and asking them what they were doin' but soon as the phone rang, everybody seemed to pick up their phone to find out what was happening. It was an interesting system of communication and one of the social activities that you had while staying at the Guard Station.” Hurst said the Forest Service line on the north slope of the Uintas also went to several ranches like Swett Ranch. Each place had their own distinct ring, like Morse code. Three long rings meant the call was for the Swetts while two longs and a short ring was for the Summit Springs guard station. This party line was an important link to the outside for many years. In the late 1950's President Eisenhower called Emma Swett to tell the workers they could start work on Flaming Gorge Dam. I wonder if any one else picked up their phone for that call. One of these old Forest Service telephones can still be seen in the main cabin at Swett Ranch. A similar phone is also in the regional room of the Uintah County library.