

# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE POMEROY RANGER DISTRICT

from 1953 to 1962  
with photographs

by *Leade Orvis*

# POMEROY RANGER DISTRICT

## Umatilla National Forest

### A Short History Of Things On The District From 1953 to 1962

I would like to call this period "a time of change from a purely custodial operation to the beginning of a management operation". I was stationed at Wenatchee Guard Station during the summer of 1953, Big Butte Lookout the summer of 1955, District Assistant Ranger from June, 1956 to December, 1960, and Timber Management Assistant from then to 1962, when I was transferred to the Mt. Hood National Forest. During this time I was acting District Ranger for almost two years.

The following is an outline of things during this time frame:

1953 There were five lookouts Clearwater, Oregon Butte, Diamond Peak, Saddle Butte, and Big Butte Diamond Peak was not manned and was destroyed that year

There were four guard stations: Clearwater, Tucannon, Saddle Springs, and Wenatchee., Saddle Springs was not manned, but was used for several years as a crew Stopping place.. None of these places had electricity . Clearwater and Tucannon had running water from springs.

There were six developed campgrounds: Tucannon, Pataha, Big Springs, Spruce Springs, Teal, and Wickiu Each of these had a developed spring and running water, and at least one outhouse.

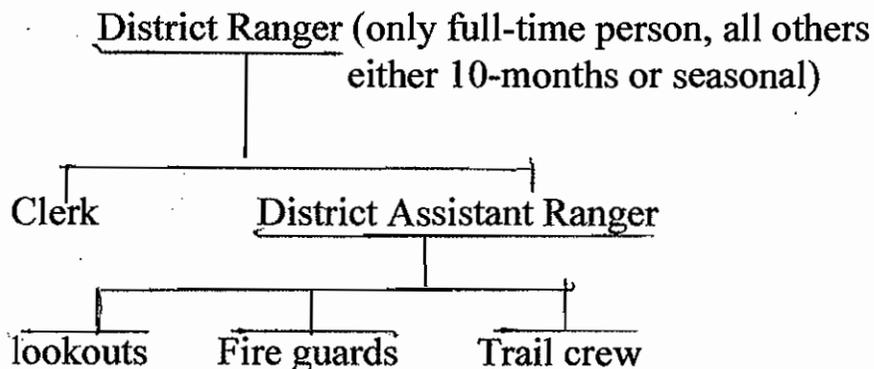
The district office was located in the old Revere Hotel Lobby In Pomeroy. It was moved to a location across the street from the Pomeroy Steak Huse in 1957

1953 - There were approximately 285,000 acres of national forest in Washington and 75,000 acres in Oregon plus 135,000 acres (Cont'd) Where the forest service had the responsibility of fire protection. There were several ranches in this protection area, each of which had a sealed five-man fire-tool cache.

A fire tool pack for one man consisted of the following: a wooden backpack with shovel, a pulaske, a file for sharpening these, a first-aid kit, a box of C-rations, and a one-gallon canteen.:

There was two-man trail maintenance crew during the summer months.

The district organization chart looked like this:



The ranger and assistant had to be “a jack-of-all-trades” so to speak being responsible for all operations on the district. Fire control, range management, wildlife management, building, trail, and campground maintenance to say the least, along with public relations.

Each of the guard stations had a barn and corral for horses. All of the horses were either in use or kept at Clearwater guard station. (I believe there were five horses and one mule, who's

name was "Jerry, or Jerome Carlson when being scolded because he was donated to the F.S. by Elis Carlson, the former District Assistant Ranger..

The guards were responsible for first-attack on any fire reported on the district or protection area, with the help of the D.A. , the Ranger, and any men hired to assist. Both men had the authority to hire any able-bodied man to fight fire. There were no smoke-jumpers at that time, and few roads, so much of the travel was by foot or horseback.

The lookouts and guard stations were connected to a ranch on grouse flats , a game dept. cabin at Wickiup, and the office in town.. This phone line consisted of over 80 miles of # 9 galv. iron wire ,strung from trees or pole jacks thru donut-shaped insulators. The ground served as the second wire. Telephones were hand-cranked, battery operated , and it is remarkable how well the system worked.

Phone line repair, which was a major spring job, was time-consuming, but necessary.

The work day, which was at least 8 hours was spent on-the-job in the field. Travel to and from the job was extra.

Radios were unheard of until 1954, when the office, the two pickups, and the lookouts were equipped with tube-type radios. The ones in the lookouts were army surplus.

In 1955, more reliance was being made of aircraft for spotting fires and dropping supplies. Saddle Butte LO was torn down,, but Saddle Springs GS would be used for a stopping place for

crews working in that part of the district.

The lookouts and guard stations each had a weather station for measuring wind direction and speed, temperature, relative humidity, and fuel moisture percent. Typical readings during fire season would be temp. 100, wind 10-20 mph, relative humidity 20-40 percent, and fuel moisture, 3-10 percent.

The Ranger and Assistant Ranger carried side-arms most of the time, not for law-enforcement purposes, but because there were rattlesnakes, and porcupines in the area, and there always was a chance of a horse breaking a leg in the back-country.

All personnel were required to keep a daily diary of places traveled, persons talked to, and type of work performed.

1954 This was a period when things were beginning to change.

thru In 1956 the D.A. became a full-time position, and I was hired, right out of Penn State Forestry School. The organization  
1957 chart remained the same.

The Ranger and District Assistant were both commissioned as Garfield County Deputy Sheriffs, and Washington and Oregon State Fire Wardens.

At the end of fire season in 1956, an additional man was hired for the trail crew and a major trail construction project was begun. The crooked creek trail on the south side of the district was to be built along one side of the creek, so it would be useable during high water. Presently, it crossed from bar to bar for several miles. A trail construction camp was located on a nice flat area at the

beginning of the trail. There were two sleeping tents, a cookhouse and eating tent, and a supply tent. The trail crew foreman's wife was hired for a cook, and she was very good.

One night in October, the ranger rode into camp on horseback to bring me a very important letter. I had been drafted into the army and was to report to the induction center in New Jersey in January.

There would be no D.A. until I returned in June, 1957, having been discharged early due to a medical problem.

During the time I was away, the Forest Supervisor's office made the first timber sale on the district, Patit Creek. this required hiring two men for a brush crew. Their job was to pile the limbs and logging debris (slash) so it could be burned in late fall or early spring, when the fire danger was low. This new crew was under the direction of the D.A.

There was an old warehouse building at Tucannon guard station that we completely remodeled for a crew quarters, complete with a kitchen, shower, and sleeping area. Running water was provided from a spring a ways up the Tucannon river, which also supplied water to the Tucannon campground.

At about this time, electricity became available in the area and the guard station, shop, and the new crew quarters were wired For lights, stoves, refrigerators, and water heaters.

The logs from the Patit Creek timber sale were scaled in the woods,, and it was the last sale measured this way, as it was very time-consuming... A man was hired to help the D.,A. With the scaling.

1958 The weather had been very good, and there were few fires up until 1960.

Thru

1960 This provided a chance to catch up on some much-needed maintenance work on the buildings and campgrounds. Most of these were constructed during the early 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corp. ( CCC ), which was organized by President Roosevelt during the great depression to give many men jobs. A lot of these \men were skilled crafts men, and their work showed it.

There was a large CCC camp located along the road from Mt. Misery to Wenatchee GS, just south of a good spring (3C spring). Rows of rocks that outlined where the tents were can still be seen t today.

In 1958, another timber sale (Stevens Ridge) was sold by the Forest Supervisor's office. This was what is called a "tree measurement" sale, where the volume to be harvested is estimated by a partial cruise, the actual volume to be measured by scaling the logs on the trucks as they were taken from he forest. This method saves considerable time when preparing a tract of timber for sale.

I believe that the volume of timber taken from Stevens

Ridge timber sale was 23 mmbf.

The annual allowable cut for the district was 9mmbf per year.

To accomplish the truck scaling, required construction of a portable scaling station located along the Mountain Road on the way to Pomeroy. A 25ft. Camping trailer, which had been on the district for several years was used for a scaling office, complete with cooking ,bathroom, and sleeping facilities.

In 1958, Ranger Spike Armstrong was transferred to the regional office. In Portland, and I was to assume the job of "acting District Ranger" and D.A. until the arrival of Jack Usher in the spring of 1960.

1960      The year 1960 should be called " the fire year".      Fire season  
thru      got off to an early start the first week of July one night when  
1962      the district experienced one of the worst dry lightning storms  
            for many, many years      The weather had been extremely  
            hot and dry to make matters worse.

The storm began on the south end of the forest, so Pomeroy was the last to be hit, starting about 9 PM and continuing most of the night.

I was watching the storm's progress from the airport above town where a good view could be had of the district. It wasn't long before it was realized that there would be many fires and I went down to the office to start getting the necessary man-power organized. An air patrol was planned for daylight to pinpoint the location of each fire..

it was obvious that many fire-fighters would be needed, and because Pomeroy was the last district to be hit, there would be no smoke-jumpers available.

Not much could be done that night, so I took two men and drove out on a couple of roads to check for fires. We found one small one and , in a short time, put it out. We found another a short distance from the road, and I left the two men there to put it out. Someone would pick them up later. Daylight would be there shortly, and I needed to get back to town to meet the plane .

Things were getting organized in town by the ranger and the fire control officer from the Supervisor's office. An office was set up in the old Green Giant pea cannery building ,and my wife was hired for a time-keeper.

The plane left the Pomeroy airport about 6 AM and would not return until late that afternoon, spending over 8 hours in the air. We made several passes over the district and spotted 119 fires, many of which could have been put out if there had been a bucket of water in the plane.

After marking the location of each fire on a 1" scale fireman's map we returned to the office to develop a plan of action on each fire. The ones closest to a road and in the more hazardous areas would be attacked first. Several of the fires would take a few days to get to, and would get large before action could be taken.

An all-out effort was undertaken to hire firefighters from

just about any location, such as homeless from Burnside street in Portland, trustees from the state prison in Walla Walla, notices placed in the local news papers, and on the local radio stations.

When I was in the office, I received a call from the governor of the State of Washington,, asking if we needed the national guard. to help. After some discussion, we decided that she would mobilize the guard.

The thing about the national guard is they have their own camp and kitchen facilities, and a disciplined organization. They just aren't trained to fight fire.

Of course, while we were doing all of th, the fires were getting larger Most of them were under 100 acres, but 3 reached project-fire size of 3,000 to 6,000 acres.

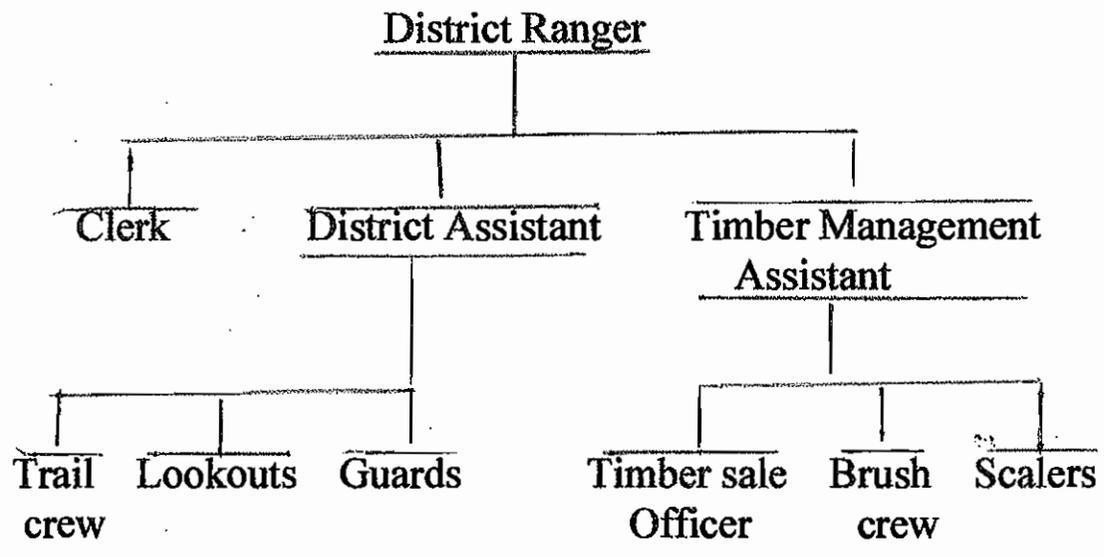
Needles to say, all of the overhead personnel worked very long h ours... We had over 1,000 fire-fighters on the lines, and it seemed like some of the fires were un-stopabled, it was so hot and dry, and every afternoon a wind would come up.

Well, the end of August it started to rain, and this pretty well put an end to thre fires. Things slowly returned to normal

Cutting was taking place on two timber sales and another was ready for sale. This increased activity in ther timber sale area caused a reorganization of the district pesonel.,

Because I had my schooling in timber management , it made

sense for me to become the new Timber Management assistant. The new district organization chart looked like this:



More timber management was beginning to take , with more timber sales, thinning and pruning, and tree planting.

Steps were being taken to finally designate a large part of the district as a “wilderness” area (Wenaha/Tucannon).

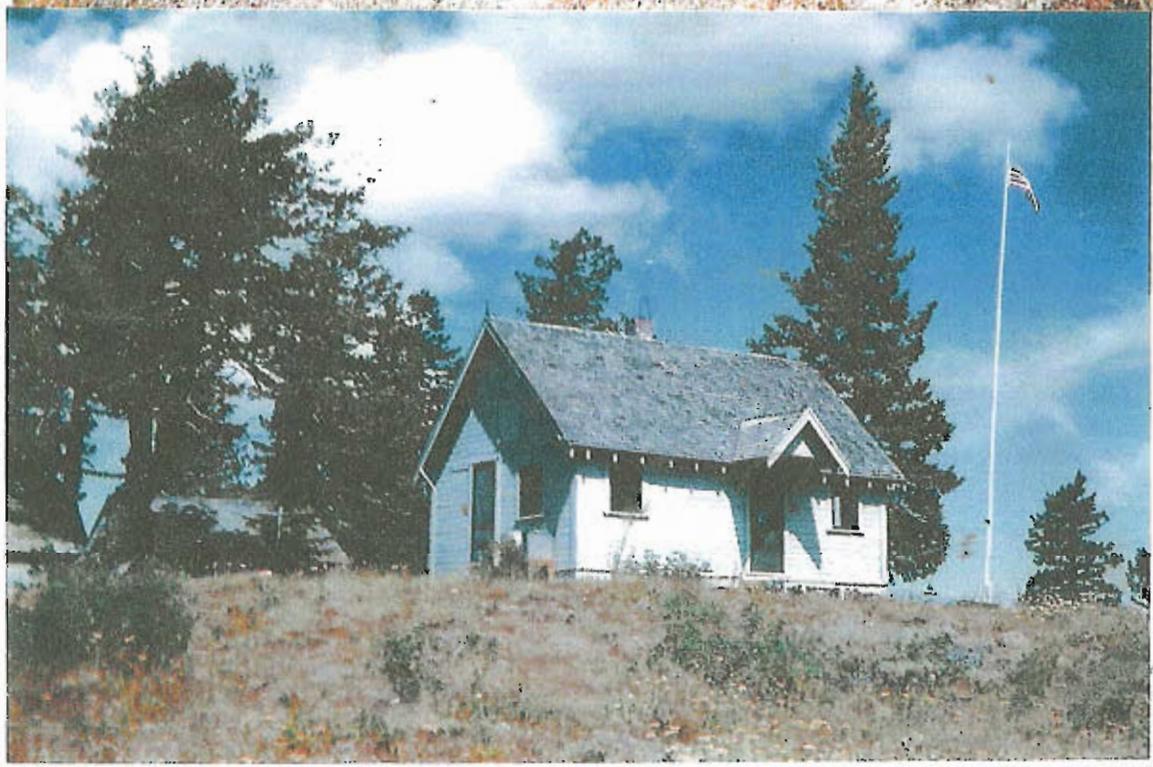
With more timber sale activity, there were more roads being constructed to open up more areas for camping and hunting, and access for fire control .

Well, the Forest Service has a policy of transferring personnel to new areas, and I was transferred to the Bear Springs Ranger District on the Mt. Hood NF>

Clearwater Guard Station, 1956, Note the weather station on the hill.  
Clearwater Lookout



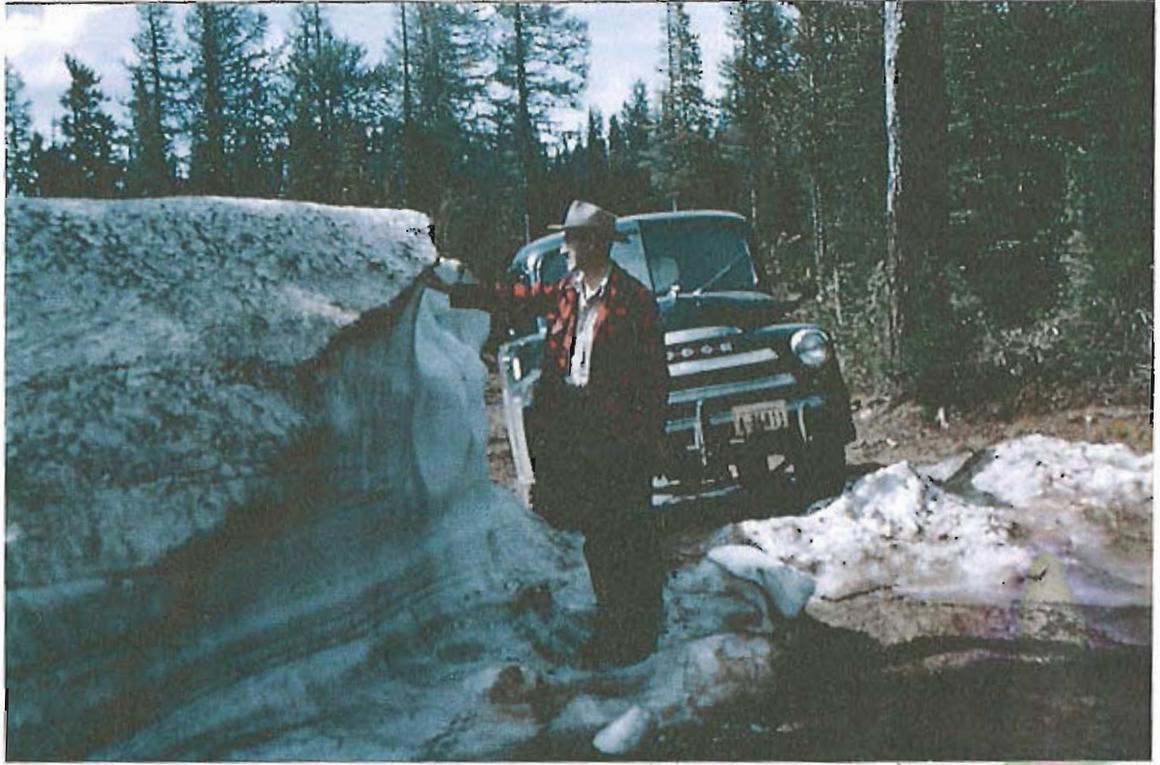
Wenatchee Guard Station, 1953



**Tucannon Guard Station**  
Big Butte Lookout from the air



District Ranger, F.H. "Spike" Armstrong  
District Assistant Ranger Leade Orvis



Telephone line maintenance, 1957  
crew at lunch



Trail grader in operation (1958)  
Pomeroy Main Street, winter, 1956



Two examples of spring development and water troughs



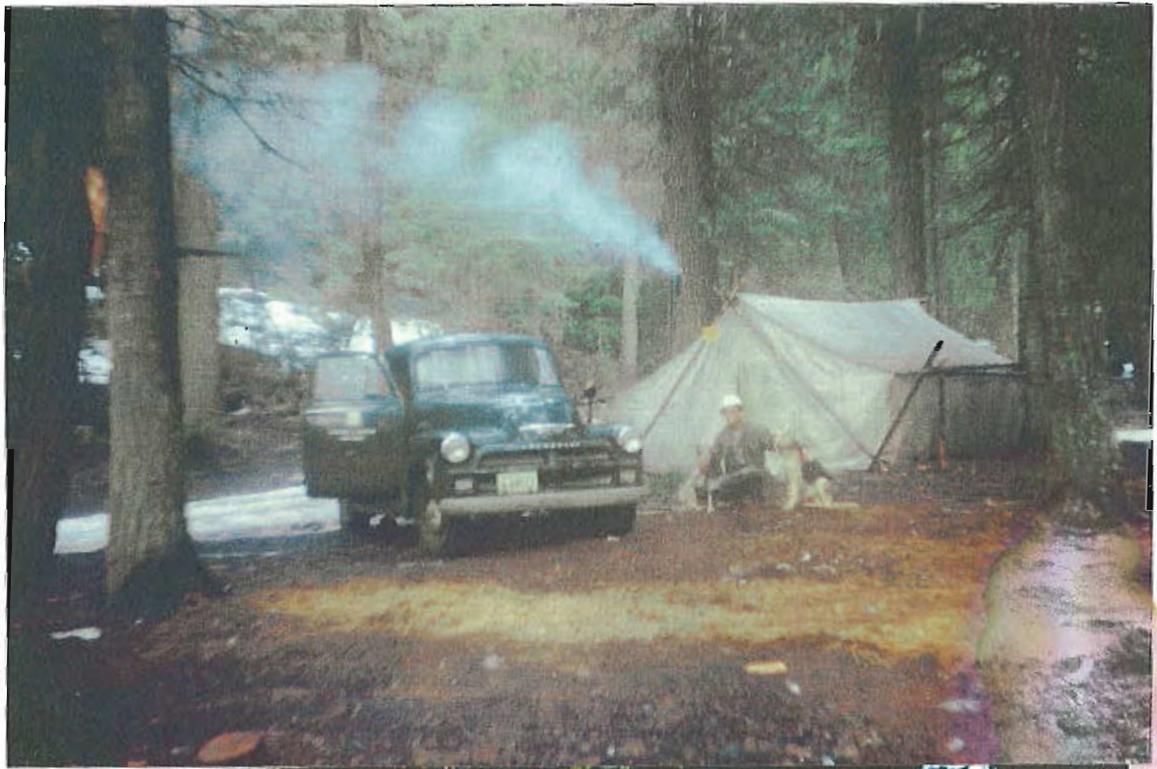
Trail construction camp, fall, 1956  
New crooked creek trail, winter, 1956



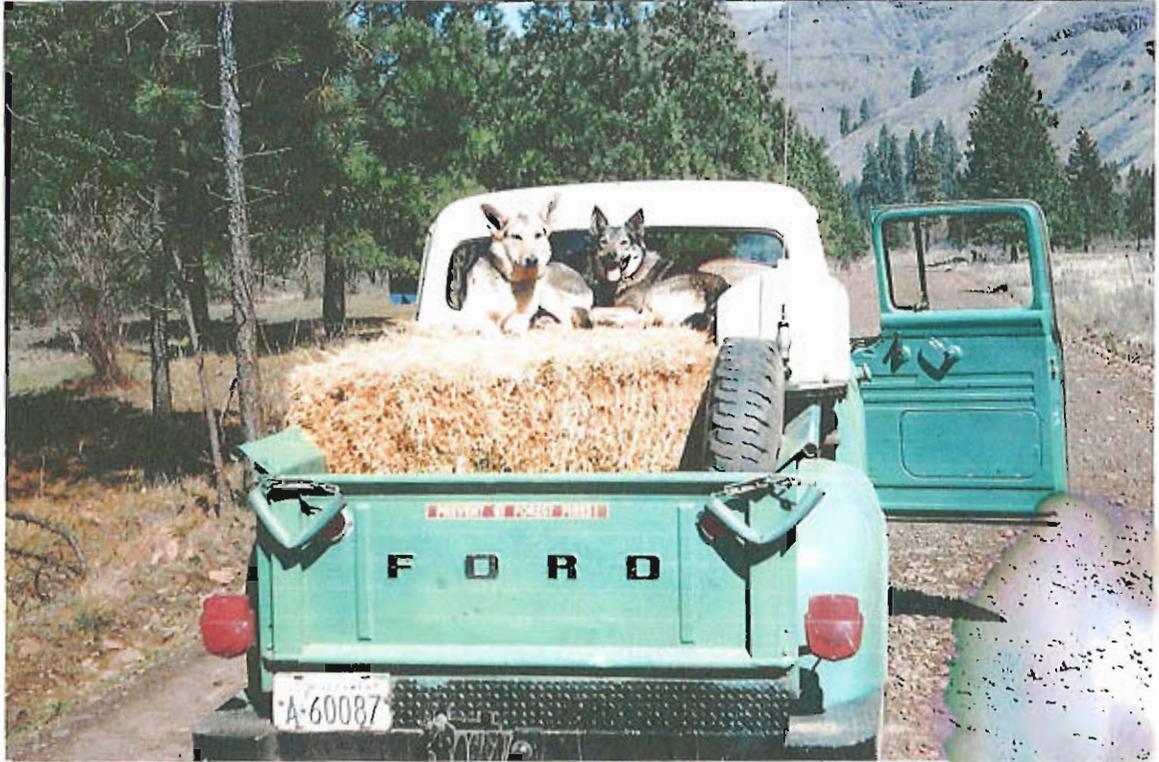
Work on brush crewhouse, 1957  
winter timber sale preparation camp, Tucannon



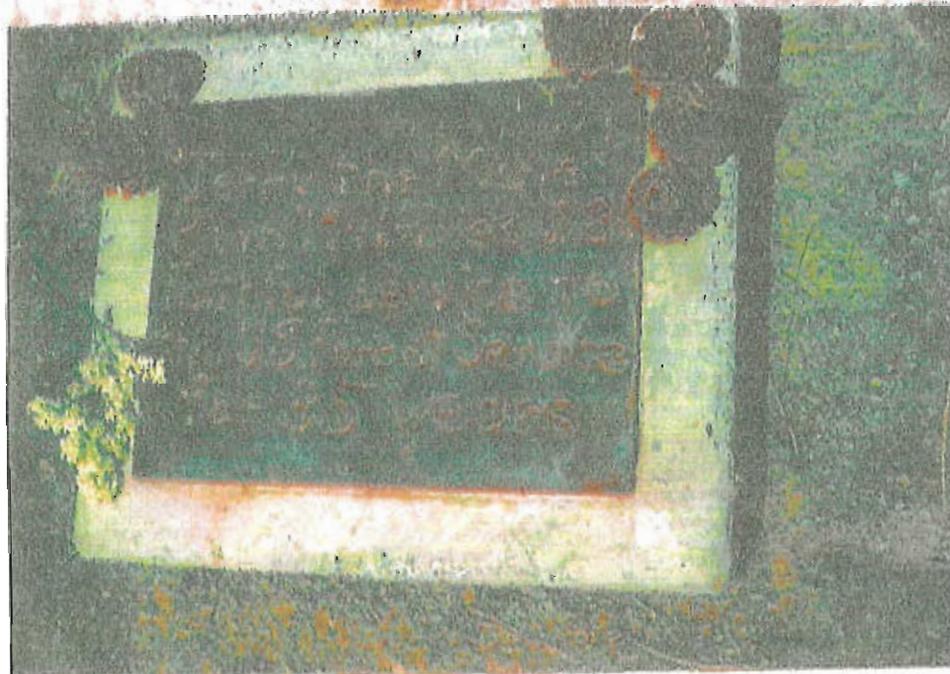
Surveying camp, winter, 1958  
Typical section line board where section line crossed road



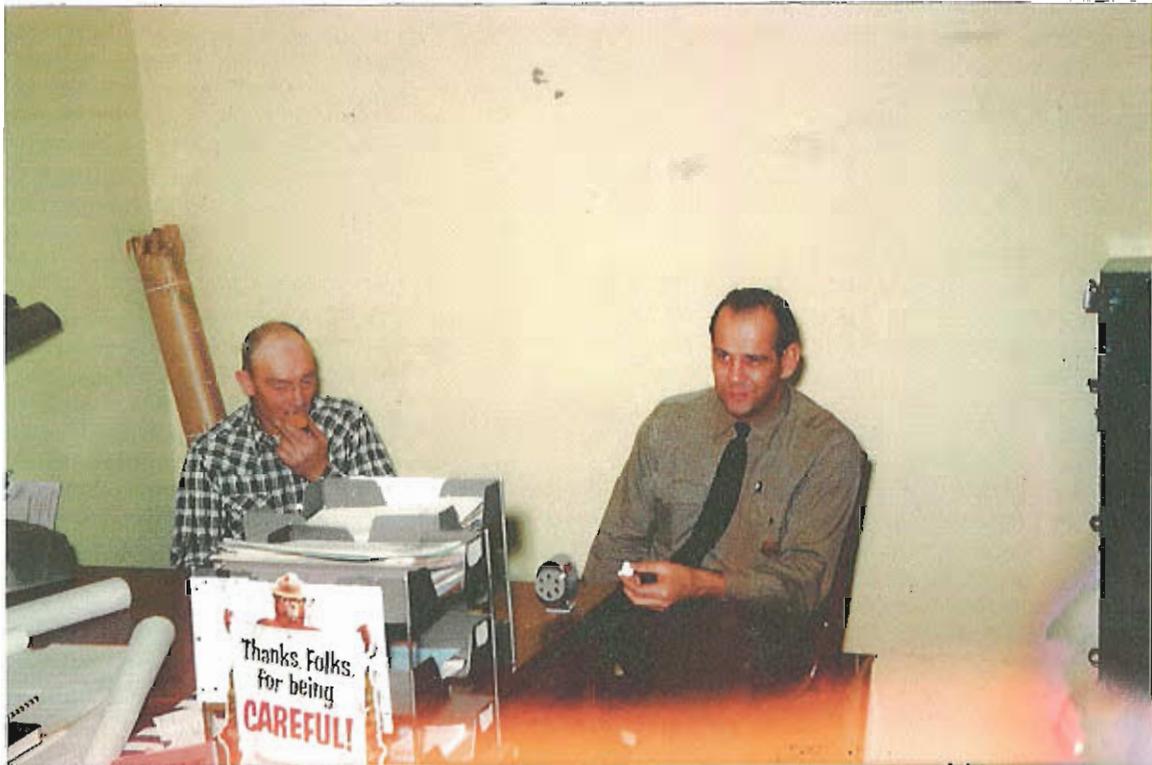
District ranger' pickup, 1958  
one-ton truck, equipped with slip-on pumper and fire tools



Jerry, the mule  
he served the FS for many years, and is buried in Ables Ridge  
horse pasture



Assistant Ranger, Marve Holloway: Ranger Jack Usher (1860)  
District Clerk Nita Stevens



Travel trailer at portable scaling station

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