TALES FROM THE LAST OF THE BIG CREEK RANGERS

TALES FROM THE LAST OF THE BIG CREEK RANGERS
Payette National Forest, Idaho

by Earl Dodds

August 2013

USDA Forest Service

In memory of my father,
Earl Dodds Sr.,
who taught me deep appreciation
for everything in nature

Contents

Foreward . . . i

Preface. . . . vi

The Wilderness Religion . . . 1

A Long Day on the Trail . . . 6

Gary Miller's Escapades . . . 12

A Tribute to Larry Garner . . . 17

A Near Identity Crisis or How I Met Lafe Cox . . . 23

Billy Owens and His Banty Hen . . . 27

Francie Wallace and the Dewey Moore Ranch Cleanup Project . . . 30

Small World . . . 36

John Vines and the Inebriated Ranger. . . . 38

The "Rest of the Story" Behind the Photo of Napier Edwards with his Mail Sack . . . 44

The Trail Crew and River Booty . . . 46

Vern Wisner and the Ruger Arms Company . . . 48

Jim Tracy – I Just Did Something You've Never Done . . . 52

Snowed In at Warren . . . 55

A Smokejumper Story . . . 60

My Best Ski Story . . . 66

"The Rest of the Story" Behind the Photo of Angel Arch with the Person Standing in the Base 69

Foreword

Earl Dodds was one of the last of the "on the ground" district rangers in the U.S. Forest Service. He spent more than twenty-five years as the ranger on the Big Creek District of the Payette National Forest, located in what is now the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in central Idaho. Twenty-five years on one district is unthinkable in today's Service, and further setting him apart is the fact that he was the one and only ranger to preside over the expanded Big Creek District.

Earl started his career with the Forest Service working timber survey on the Lewis and Clark National Forest in north central Montana during the summer of 1948, while attending forestry school at Utah State. He then served two seasons (1949–50) as a McCall, Idaho, smokejumper, followed by forestry jobs in Boise and later on the Uinta National Forest in north central Utah. His permanent status in the Idaho backcountry began with his assignment as the Chamberlain District ranger in June 1957. The next year he was promoted to ranger of the combined Chamberlain and Big Creek districts which covered nearly 800,000 acres.

In a letter to the Intermountain regional forester in October 1957, Payette National Forest Supervisor Sam Defler summed up the expectations concerning the ranger's job description for the combined districts. In the letter he expressed concerns about assigning either of the two current rangers to the new district. His primary worry was isolating them from the mainstream of timber and range management, which was the usual work on most districts. He felt that if he were to assign one of these up-and-coming professionals to this generally non-standard district, he would be doing a grave disservice that potentially could destroy either one's career. However, Defler also recognized that the remote area presented some major challenges that would require a professional who understood the diverse challenges of fire management, wildlife management, building construction/ maintenance, trail construction/maintenance, handling pack and saddle stock, and, most of all was well-equipped with people skills. On the point of public relations Defler commented, "[The] District is heavily populated by people that might almost be classed as eccentrics. It requires considerable tact and diplomacy in handling this class."

These "eccentrics" were primarily the result of the Forest Homestead Act of 1906 and the Mining Act of 1872 that created a large number of isolated inholdings on the district, which were mostly occupied by fairly independent types that generally were not fond of the government in general. Most of these people lived on the south end of the district within the mining areas, or along the Main Salmon River on the far north end of the district. By this period, most of the occupants were not really actively mining or ranching, but were instead using the properties as an escape from "the outside" (mainstream America).

In contrast, the central part of the district was home to large elk herds. As a consequence it attracted elite and wealthy groups of big game hunters, including the commercial outfitters and guides. Working with this element of the population was also political and required a different kind of tact.

Needless to say, Earl was chosen ranger and proved to be just the man for all of the unique challenges. Over the years American values shifted and what was once considered non-valuable forest land became one of the most-prized federally designated wilderness areas in the United States.

I first met Earl when I came to his district in 1972 as the assistant fire management officer. My career with the Forest Service started five years earlier and most of that time I worked as a McCall-based smokejumper. I was thrilled with the new assignment, particularly since the job required my family and me to live at the remote Chamberlain Guard Station for nearly six months of the year. My years working at Chamberlain gave me some insight into managing remote areas and the difficulties associated with the ongoing transition to wilderness taking place at the time. It provided an immeasurable opportunity to observe Earl managing the complex issues on the district.

One of the largest obstacles employees on the district, as well as the various user groups faced was adapting to primitive methods (i.e., no chain saws) in an effort to gain wilderness designation. Our hard work paid off when Congress created the River of No Return Wilderness in 1980. Along with the new designation came many conflicting perspectives. Earl was there for all of the formative years of this transition and not only handled the multitude of challenges well, but also remained in concert with the wilderness movement. Many of his contemporaries were not quite on board with wilderness, but Earl created "harmony" among the different camps. Having said this, I would like to note that even though Earl did believe in wilderness designation for this area, he was only mildly infected by what he referred to as "the wilderness religion." His balanced view helped tremendously with the move toward wilderness on the district and in instilling its values thereafter. A more zealous leader might have experienced much more difficulty in dealing with the varied users of the day.

Dick Lynch, a retired Forest Service employee and friend to both Earl and me, referred to Earl as a "gentleman." He meant Earl seldom lashed out in anger in his professional role as a district ranger, whether the incident in question was related to Forest Service employees or the public he served.

Earl did come with a few interesting quirks that folks working on the district took notice of. He was fastidious about how we kept the stations and other facilities, like fire lookouts. He felt that well-kept stations and facilities represented the agency to the public. Invariably Earl started his routine inspections by wandering around a station. If he turned up something that concerned him, he would commonly utter a few, "Egads" and mildly launch into an explanation of how he felt the situation might be improved. Raney Jensen's (the wife of employee Lee Jensen) housekeeping at Big Creek was the casualty of one of these customary checks. After looking at the refrigerator, he kindly commented that the frig needed to be polished. His request took her by surprise, as she had never heard of "polishing" a refrigerator. From instances like this, one can imagine just how well-maintained everything on the district was kept under his supervision.

Earl also liked to schedule a day or two each season to get out into the backcountry to review trails and other points of interest on the district. Late one fall he called me at Chamberlain and told me that he wanted to take a ride from the station south to Ramey Meadows. He specifically instructed me to have a horse ready for him so we could leave

immediately upon his arrival via airplane. We chose a date and agreed upon an early morning departure time. One has to understand that Earl was never known to kick a horse in the ribs so as to move along at a rapid pace. He valued his time in the field and took an immense amount of pride in the land, therefore he did not hurry on these outings. Well, I put two and two together and realized that with the short days, at very best we would be riding into the night.

I knew that Earl liked this old wind-broken sorrel named Rocky that didn't care a whit about whether the other horses walked off and left him or not. I figured that he would ride whatever animal I had at the hitching rail when he arrived. With this in mind, I decided to saddle up a horse that wouldn't allow the lead horse to get more than a few steps ahead. Of course the thinking here was that I would keep my horse moving right along and Earl would be forced to follow at a reasonable speed, enabling us to get back to the station before midnight.

Well, Earl finally showed up in Chamberlain about 10:00 in the morning, got out of the airplane and unloaded his personal saddle. He glanced over at the hitching rail and saw Ginger, a fairly high-spirited mare and wanted to know the whereabouts of Rocky. I mumbled something about how Ginger was a good choice of mount for the day's ride, but Earl would have none of it. I was left taking Ginger back to the corral, catching Rocky and saddling him using Earl's saddle; this took at least an hour of precious daylight. As predicted, we finally got on our way and did not arrive back at Chamberlain until midnight. The two of us did see most of the places he had on his list with good light, but we spent the last ten or twelve miles with a dim view of the district as the horses clomped their way back to Chamberlain.

As a result of Earl's long-term profession as a ranger and his passion for the land and its history, he became a part of it. Working in the vast region with a broad array of "eccentric" residents, and employees from all walks of life, he lived through some colorful and darn right wonderful events. With Earl's natural ability for storytelling, his accounts of those events became legendary.

The Big Creek landing field from McFadden Point. Note the Hogback to the left of the field. — USFS

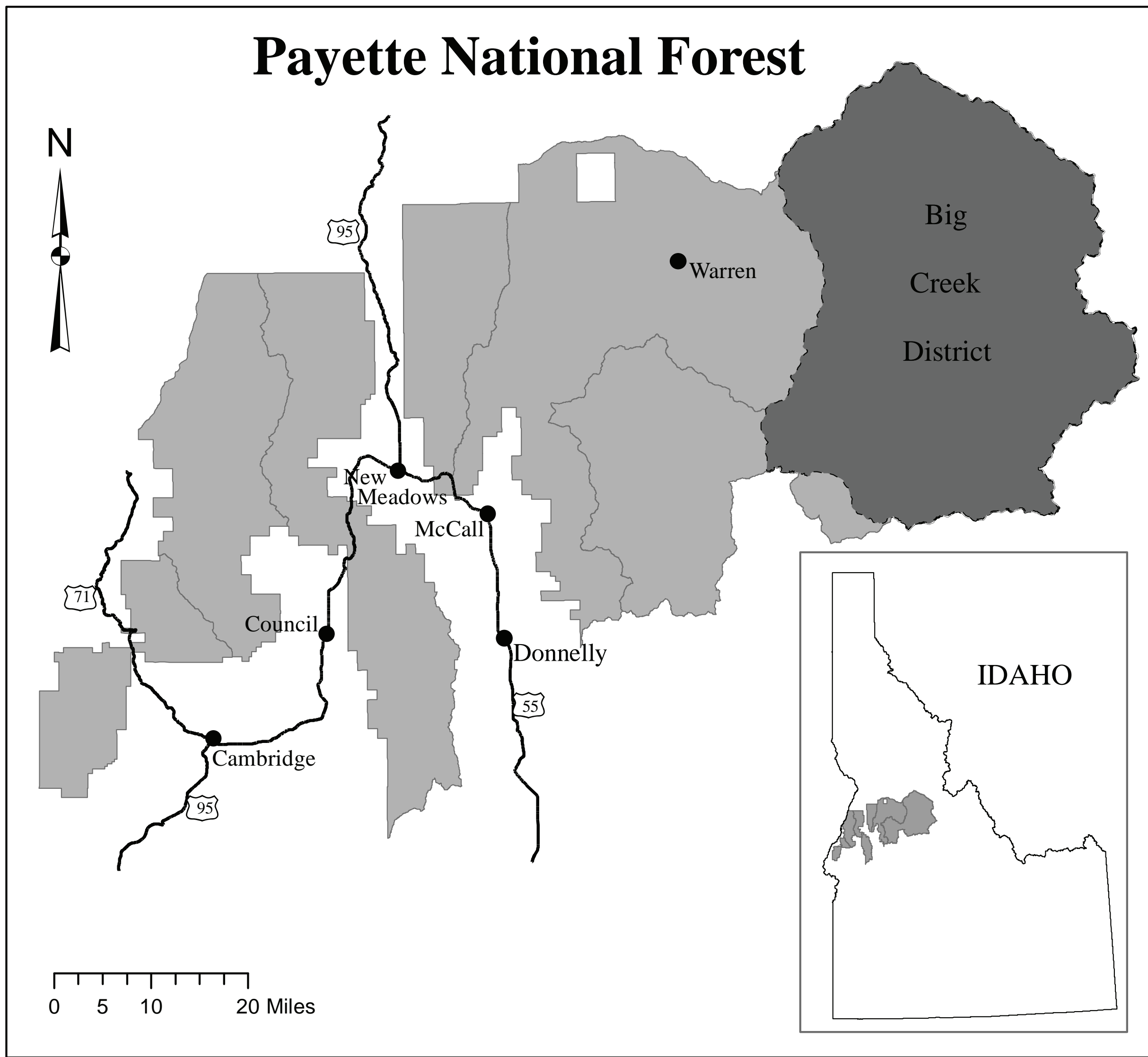
Through the years many, including myself, encouraged Earl to write down some of his recollections for future generations to enjoy and also to help preserve this important period of Forest Service history. He wrote the compilation of stories bound herein over the last eight years.

As Earl explains in his writings, it is hard to

escape the impression the backcountry has on someone. Now retired, I am seasonally drawn back to enjoy and marvel at the incredible landscape. It was on one of my many post-retirement visits to the wilderness that a few friends and I sat around a campfire at Soldier Bar and first read some of Earl's stories.

I am pleased to have had the good fortune to have worked for Earl and have enjoyed his friendship for the past forty-one years and I am looking forward to many more. I hope that I have achieved my goal of portraying Earl as the concerned, hardworking, and dedicated individual that he was and is. Earl's heart is in this stretch of backcountry that we fondly remember as the Big Creek Ranger District. I encourage you to take pleasure in Earl's reflections of his years during the time that he served as leader and mentor of our beloved backcountry.

Ed Allen
McCall, Idaho
July 2013



The location of the Big Creek Ranger District in central Idaho.

Preface

I have been asked to supply a little information on my background that led up to my being part of the stories in this collection.

I was raised in the East, born in Cincinnati and grew up in eastern Tennessee and northern Alabama where I went to high school while my father worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). I've always had an outdoor bent and liked being in the woods, more so than most kids. My Dad instilled in me an appreciation for everything in the natural world – astronomy, taxonomy (in the Boy Scouts, I was always the one who could correctly identify the most species of trees and there are a lot more species in the Eastern woods than in the West), and all things outdoors in general. While the other kids were playing football and had their heroes on the gridiron, I was reading Ernest Thompson Seton's, *Two Little Savages*, and dreaming of life in the wild.

I have long felt that to fully appreciate what we have here in the West, with virtually unrestricted access to vast areas of public lands, a person has to have lived in the East for a considerable period of time. I think that this is particularly the case if you have an outdoor bent in your soul. I have three grown sons, all born and raised in McCall. They are all outdoorsmen and active hunters and fishermen, as is the case with the majority of the young fellows raised in McCall. And they all love Long Valley and Idaho, but I don't think to the same degree and passion that their old man does. Why? Because they have always had public lands right out their back door and don't know what it's like to live in a place where it takes a real effort to shake off the bonds of civilization for an outing of any size. The East has its own beauty with a lot of rather small wooded areas, most of which are privately owned, often with "No Trespassing" signs. True, there are a few national forests and parks but not on the scale there are in the West, and attractions like the Great Smokies are overrun with people.

My brother Dave and I made one little adventurous trip somewhat removed from civilization that was a forerunner of many later adventures in the West. We loaded our 17-foot cedar and canvas Old Town canoe on a freight train and sent it upriver to Chattanooga, Tennessee. We followed on a passenger train with our camping gear and made a week-long paddle back down the Tennessee River to the Tri Cities area where we lived. The majority of the trip was through a series of reservoirs, as most of the Tennessee has been dammed and very little of the river is in its original free-flowing state. This was a lot of fun and something that few people ever did.

My first forestry job away from home was while I was still in high school. I was the compass man on a two-man TVA timber cruising crew in the hardwood forests along the Tennessee River. This was old-school forestry work involving the use of a Jake Staff to support the compass and dragging a length of smooth steel "chain" to measure distances. The crew leader was Bob Hansen, a professional forester who had graduated from what is now Utah State University at Logan, Utah. I ran the compass and kept us on the proper line while Bob did the technical part of the timber cruising work. He also spent a lot of time teaching me some basic forestry practices, and telling me stories of his life as a forester in the West. I was really taken by all his talk and the attention he gave me and

decided right then that I wanted to be a forester, like Bob Hansen. (Incidentally, Bob left TVA after a few years and returned to the West, eventually becoming a sort of guru for the Forest Service in the Kemmerer, Wyoming area.)

After graduating from high school, I served a short hitch in the Marine Corps at the tail end of World War II. There was one little thing about this time in the Marines that had some bearing on my desire to move to the West. While on a troop ship on the way to Puerto Rico to practice amphibious landings and with lots of time to spare, I somehow got a copy of a little pocket book titled, *Snow Above Town* [*Snow above Town: A Story of Wyoming* by Daniel Hough]. This was about Jackson, Wyoming, and heavy on the part the Park Service and Forest Service people played in the community. I remember thinking that I wanted some day to live in a place with snow above town.

My time in the Marines qualified me for the GI Bill to help finance a college education. So I packed up and left Alabama and enrolled in forestry school at Utah State, Bob Hansen's school. I took an immediate liking to forestry school and the beautiful town of Logan and knew that I had made the right decision in moving west and I never looked back.

My first job with the Forest Service was as a timber cruiser on the Lewis & Clark National Forest in Montana. This allowed me to use a lot of the knowledge that Bob Hansen had taught me back on the Tennessee River. Then I spent two summers with the smokejumper unit in McCall. This was by far the most exciting time of my life. I think all young people ought to do something really adventuresome before their 21st birthday.

Then I spent part of the winter working for Potlatch Forests, Inc. in the Clearwater country of northern Idaho helping the company engineer survey the p-line for access to the last big stand of virgin white pine in northern Idaho in the Little North Fork area. While there, I received a letter offering me a job that would lead to a permanent appointment with the Forest Service on a forest survey project based out of Boise. This was essentially another timber cruising job but considerably more sophisticated than what I had done before.

I was with this job for three years followed by a couple of other assignments with the Forest Service, one on the Boise National Forest and one on the old Uinta National Forest at Spanish Fork, Utah, before I was promoted to the position of District Forest Ranger on the old Chamberlain District of the Payette National Forest in June of 1957. The Chamberlain District was combined with the Big Creek District in January of 1958 and I then headed up the combined districts of almost 800,000 acres until my retirement in April of 1984.

After leaving the Forest Service, I worked as a seasonal technician for nine years for the State of Idaho, Department of Lands on the restoration of mines in the west central Idaho area. I retired from this job in 1993 and have remained in McCall primarily because of my love for skiing at the nearby Brundage Mountain Ski Area.

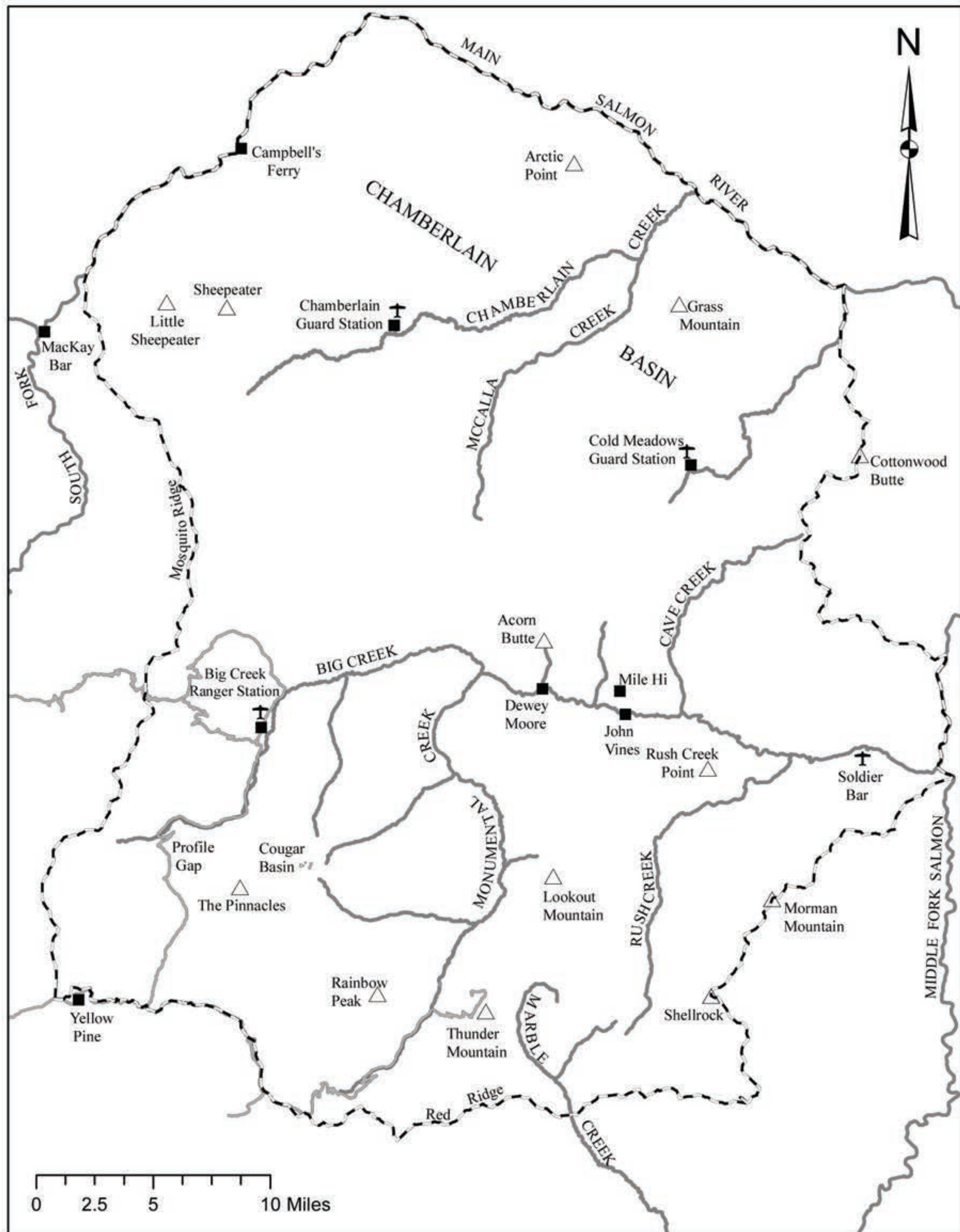
Now I want to provide a little more information on the uniqueness of the Big Creek Ranger District than might be picked up in reading the stories. The Chamberlain area is all backcountry in the true sense. There are no roads, but it does have one of the largest airfields in the backcountry that provides the usual means of access. There is a low-standard road into the Big Creek Ranger Station from McCall, 80 miles away and over two high mountain passes that are closed by heavy snowfalls for a period of seven to eight months each year. Big Creek also has a good airfield that usually melts free of snow in

mid-May, and this was about the time when I usually moved in and opened the station for the season. I liked to say that when the grass turned green I was ready to leave McCall, where I spent the winter, and head for the backcountry, and when the snow hit the high country to stay, I was ready to leave and move back to town.

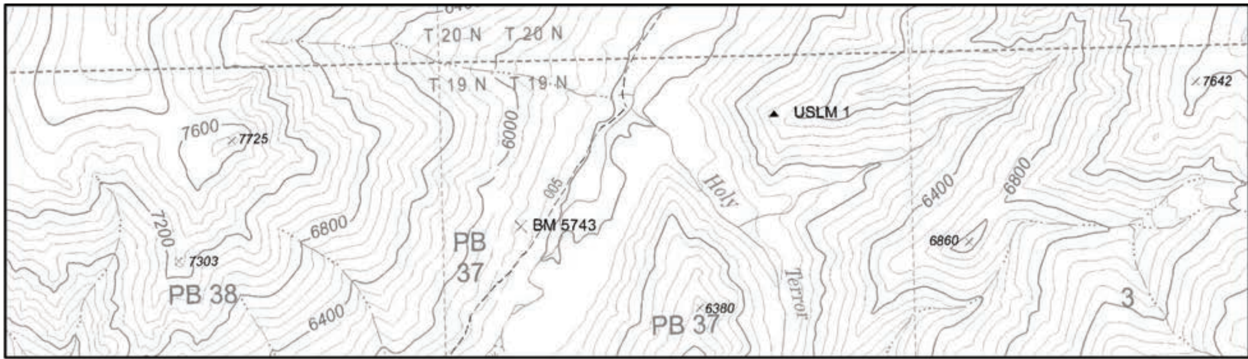
A lot of Forest Service people wouldn't have liked the backcountry life and this move-in/move-out arrangement to the extent that I did. No reliable source of electric power, just a war-surplus generator that was always breaking down, no television, and social contacts pretty much limited to the Forest Service employees, but I fully enjoyed my years in the backcountry and miss being there.

Earl Dodds (the last of the Big Creek rangers)
McCall, Idaho
July 20, 2013

The Ranger's Cabin where I lived at Big Creek - 1969. — USFS



A map of the Big Creek Ranger District with some of the place names mentioned in the stories.



U.S. Geological Survey

The Wilderness Religion

When I was promoted to the position of ranger on the old Chamberlain District in June of 1957, most of the backcountry on the eastern part of the Payette National Forest was classified as the Idaho Primitive Area. Forest Service management direction for the Primitive Area centered upon keeping the area wild, and free of road building and logging, but with a heavy emphasis on fire control. At that time, fire control played the major role in the management of all the national forests in the West. This emphasis had its origin in the big fires of the 1910 season that burned three million acres of prime timberlands in northern Idaho and western Montana and killed 87 people. The Forest Service was going all out to prevent anything like that from ever happening again.

Consequently, the backcountry districts on the Payette National Forest were primarily firefighting outfits. The Forest Service had small initial attack fire crews based at Chamberlain, Cold Meadows and Big Creek, a system of fire lookouts, and miles and miles of trails and telephone lines to tie everything together for communication and access purposes. There were also three airfields on the Payette National Forest, within the Idaho Primitive Area, that were originally constructed and maintained for fire control purposes

And then there was the smokejumper program that started in the late 1930s just before WWII that seemed to be the answer to the problem of taking fast initial attack action on remote fires in the backcountry that were difficult to reach by trail. By my time on the combined Chamberlain and Big Creek Districts in the late 1950s, it was pretty much standard practice to use jumpers to man all new fires in the backcountry and then to retrieve them by helicopter.

All this with the major objective of putting fires out while they were small, and holding the burned acreage to a minimum. And for the most part this management strategy worked. In my 25 years on the Big Creek District there was only one large fire of consequence – the Flossie Lake Fire in 1966 that burned 5,500 acres, small potatoes by today's standards.

When the Wilderness Bill was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1964 and the old Idaho Primitive Area became the cornerstone for what is now known as the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, management philosophy changed in a big way. We were directed to conduct all of our activities in such a manner that we would have minimum impact on the land and on the wilderness experience of those visiting the area. The general direction

was to return conditions to those existing before the arrival of the Forest Service in the backcountry – more like the conditions that Lewis & Clark would have found if they had visited the area.

We started off by getting rid of all of our motor-powered equipment. The power saws were sent out to the fire warehouse in McCall and replaced with the old hand-powered crosscut saws for trail maintenance and cutting firewood for the station. Likewise with the gasoline-powered lawnmower used to tidy up the lawns around the station. This was replaced with an old human-powered push lawnmower like those commonly in use before the invention of the motorized mower.

About this time, the Forest Service started a nationwide policy of "Pack it in, pack it out" regarding trash and garbage created on a camping trip. I don't remember whether this had anything to do with the passage of the Wilderness Act, but up until this time it had been standard practice to encourage visitors and our own Forest Service crews to bury their trash. When we were camping away from the station, one of the first things we did was to assign someone the task of digging a garbage pit. And we encouraged the outfitters and the public to do likewise. This burying policy was a poor one in that the bears, coyotes, and other critters frequently dug up the garbage, and scattered trash all over the woods, but we never thought that we should pack our trash back to the station and eventually out of the backcountry.

However it came about, we started on a program of general cleanup of the new wilderness. As part of this cleanup program, we went around to all the outfitter and hunter camps and packed out all sorts of junk that had accumulated over many years. This project proved to be very unpopular with all those involved. The crew didn't like collecting and packaging other people's trash; the packer and his mules didn't like packing out loads of old tin cans that rattled on the trail and tended to spook the pack stock; and the pilots didn't like to fly the many loads of nothing but nasty old trash. But the real dislike of this program was at the McCall Airport. The airport manager wanted the trash to be immediately unloaded from the airplane to a Forest Service truck and hauled to the dump. He didn't like the junk unloaded anywhere near where it might come in contact with the public. Of course, no Big Creek personnel were usually in town to help with this, so we leaned on the guys in the fire warehouse to help us out. Like the rest of the Forest Service people in town, the warehouse guys felt that this was Big Creek trash and the Big Creek District should take care of it. Not easily done when the closest district personnel were a 45-minute airplane flight away, but we did the best we could and moved a small mountain of trash out of the wilderness.

There were a number of old junk cars and pickup trucks that had been abandoned along the old mining road down Big Creek to the Snowshoe Mine. They were now inside the wilderness. We didn't really have the proper equipment for towing vehicles but we managed to get the job done using our one and only ¾-ton Forest Service pickup truck.

Most of us didn't fully realize it at the time, but we were in for a sea change in management direction. Fire control was on its way out as the principal activity and concern of the Forest Service in the backcountry, and was being replaced by a wilderness management philosophy – "the wilderness religion," as I called it. This trend has only intensified over the years; the current situation being that there is very little fire control in the historical

sense and forest fires are allowed to burn freely, sometimes for weeks or even months, much like in the days before the Forest Service came to the backcountry. The feeling is that forest fires are a part of the natural scene, and a key part of what I call "the wilderness religion." Of the many lookouts that were manned back in the days when fire control was king, only one, Sheepeater, is currently manned and that is largely for communication purposes. Trail maintenance has been greatly curtailed. If the policy is to not fight fire, you don't really need as many trails, and smokejumper activity has just about become a thing of the past in the wilderness.

One of my big concerns now that I was getting the wilderness religion was how to go about maintaining the Chamberlain Airfield – actually two airstrips at an angle to each other, one about 4,800-feet long and the other 3,000-feet in length. We had been using a small gasoline-powered tractor to mow the grass on the airfield several times during the summer, in keeping with the desires of the aviation people, and trying to keep the tractor out of sight as much as possible by hiding it in a shed. Now that we realized that the tractor was going to have to go, we planned to go back to using horse or mule-drawn haying equipment as the farmers did in the days before tractors were invented.

We (Ed Allen, Clem Pope and I) decided that the best plan was to buy a pair of matched mules for this purpose. We had previously done business with an outfit in Dodge City, Kansas, that specialized in mules. If you bought some of this dealer's stock, he would truck them to you. The trouble with this arrangement was that it was a case of buying animals sight unseen until they arrived at your doorstep and you were obligated to take them. We had not been entirely satisfied with this arrangement on a previous occasion, as we felt that the dealer had unloaded an animal on us that he had found difficult to sell elsewhere – certainly not a mule that we would have bought if we had the opportunity to look it over beforehand.

Ed and Clem leaned on me to authorize the two of them to take the Payette National Forest stock truck back to Dodge City and make their own deal for a pair of matched mules. That way we would be buying animals that we wanted and not something that the dealer was pushing off on us.

Now, the stock truck was used mostly to retrieve smokejumpers and for other firefighting tasks and never got very far afield from the Payette National Forest. I could see the logic in their proposition, but I was really reluctant to authorize such a deal for fear that something might go wrong – an auto accident or maybe a mechanical breakdown with the truck way out there away from home base. I also felt that if I had let it be known around the Supervisor's Office that such

Ed Allen driving the mowing machine at Chamberlain Guard Station, 1976 — USFS

a deal was in the wind, that someone was sure to blow the whistle on the whole thing and I would get an order to have the mule dealer deliver the mules to us sight unseen as had been the case before.

I agonized over this decision for several days. Eventually, I had a little conference with Ed and Clem, "Okay you guys, you can go ahead with this, but for God's sake, drive safely, no accidents, tend strictly to business, no fooling around and get back here as soon as you can. And one other thing – Mum's the Word! I would just as soon that nobody around the Forest knows anything about this!"

And away they went. I believe that I thought about the two of them at least once every hour while they were gone. But it all turned out just great. They were back in a few days with three mules, one for the McCall Ranger District, and a dandy pair of matched mules that were just what we needed for the job of maintaining the Chamberlain Airfield. They reported that, sure enough, the dealer had tried to influence them to take an animal that they were not impressed with – he was a real horse trader in the full sense of the term!

Ed Allen blading the airfield at Chamberlain, 1972 — USFS

Our two new mules were both female, so we named them after two of the gals in the secretarial pool in the McCall office of the Forest Service. I remember having to do a little explaining about this when one of the gals found out, "Oh now B-----, we named the best looking one after you." But I didn't make any points with this.

However, undoubtedly my greatest trial and disappointment with adoption of the wilderness religion centered on the washing machine at Chamberlain. Our overall goal was to eliminate all motorized equipment and machinery at the station. We didn't have much trouble doing without the power saws and lawn mower, but there was one piece of machinery that we felt that we just had to have – a clothes-washing machine. There were actually two pieces of machinery that were involved in the clothes-washing operation, the electric washing machine that was much like most of the washing machines commonly used throughout rural America, and a gasoline-powered electric generator that supplied the power for the operation.

Now the washing machine didn't make much noise, just a little sloshing around of clothes in the wash water, but the generator was quite loud and could be heard for a mile or so from the station. Ed Allen, the head man at Chamberlain, had his wife Sue and two young kids living at the station fulltime during the summer months. The kids played outside all day and accumulated quite a pile of dirty clothes in a few days' time. So Sue would start

up the generator for a few hours of clothes washing. This really upset some of the people on the crew who had caught a little of the wilderness religion.

Ed and I spent a lot of time thinking about this situation and what we could do to correct things. About this time, we discovered that the folks on one of the tracts of private property along the Salmon River had recently purchased a Maytag washing machine that was powered by a little Briggs & Stratton gasoline engine. About all the engine was doing was turning a 6" pulley by means of a fan belt type arrangement that rotated the plunger in the tub of the machine and did the actual washing. We thought that if we could just somehow figure out a way to turn that pulley by some means other than the Briggs & Stratton engine, that we would have this problem solved. We reasoned that the noisy generator was the real concern with the present setup, not the comparatively quiet washing machine. That's where we made a big mistake.

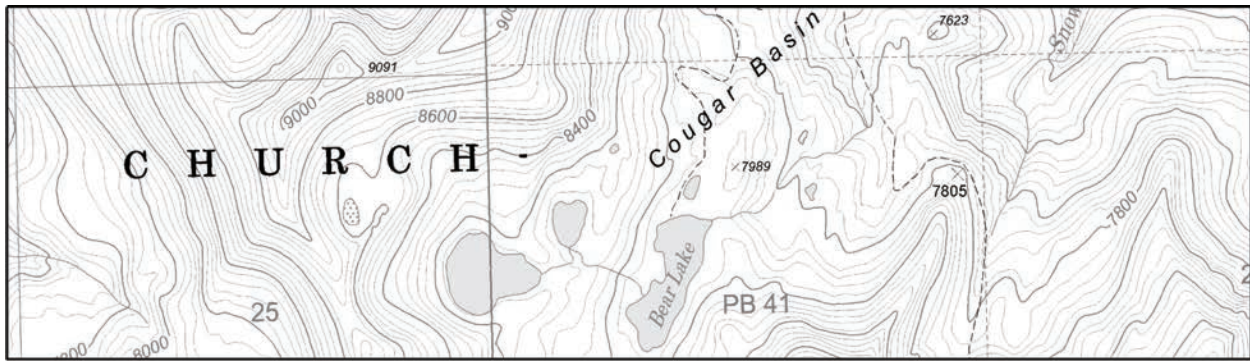
Someone turned us onto an old German man named Felix Mannheimer who was somewhat of a mechanical wizard, and who had a machine shop at Banks, Idaho, on the west side of the Payette River across from Highway 55. We purchased one of the Maytag gasoline-powered washing machines, removed the gasoline engine, and Ed took our problem to Felix. In a short time, and for a price of a little more than $200, Felix built a small water-powered turbine unit about the size of your hard hat and with a fan belt that turned the pulley on the washing machine. Problem solved! Well, not quite.

We plumbed this outfit into the water system at Chamberlain and it worked like a charm. I was really proud of this outfit, and never missed a chance to show it off to visiting Forest Service dignitaries. "Look, no more noisy, gasoline-powered electric generator, no need to fly gasoline into Chamberlain (always a somewhat messy and dangerous operation that the pilots disliked.) And a real savings expense wise – it would cost way more for the airplane flight to bring in even one drum of gasoline than the $200 we paid for the turbine unit. And we have a much happier crew now that we have eliminated the noisy and smelly old generator."

This didn't last for more than a season or two until some of the wilderness purists heard my story. They agreed that it was commendable that we had eliminated the electric generator, but this water-powered unit was not acceptable in a wilderness setting. It was a lot like allowing bicycles in the wilderness, something not motorized in the usual sense, but designed to provide a mechanical advantage and something that Lewis & Clark would never have encountered on their Corps of Discovery Expedition.

The one and only water-powered washing machine in the Forest Service would have to go. If Ed and I entertained any thoughts that we might be in line for some sort of an award for this innovative effort, these thoughts went right along with the washing machine when it was hauled out to the junk yard. When I heard about this, it darn near broke my heart.

Now, it is not the intent of this write-up to debate the often touchy subject of wilderness management, but ponder for a moment how the matter of washing clothes is currently handled on the many tracts of private property within the Frank Church Wilderness – Mackay Bar, Campbell's Ferry, the Root Ranch, the Flying B and others. These folks don't treat the matter of washing clothes with anything like the concern for wilderness values that the Forest Service does at Chamberlain.



U.S. Geological Survey

A Long Day on the Trail

This pack trip started out as part of one of my long-term goals in managing the Big Creek Ranger District – learning the geography of the country first hand. All new rangers are expected to spend considerable time in getting to "know their district." On most ranger districts, which in these days are pretty well roaded, this involves a lot of driving in the standard vehicle of the Forest Service, a half-ton pickup truck. Indeed, most new rangers can acquire a fair working knowledge of their districts in a matter of a few weeks. But on a backcountry district with few roads, like the almost 800,000-acre Big Creek District, this translates into a lot of miles on horseback or pounding the trails with a backpack, and can take years.

I really liked this aspect of the job, and in my 25 years on the Big Creek District, I was always anxious to take in new country. Over the years, I managed to visit a lot of hard-to-get-to locations that I bet my successors will be hard pressed to duplicate. I put horse tracks on Shellrock Peak near the southeastern corner of the district and on Little Sheepeater and at Little Sheepeater Lake near the northwestern corner. I set out on horseback on two different occasions from Cold Meadows for the old abandoned lookout on Cottonwood Butte and never quite made it. So, after I retired, I did a backpack hike to this quite spectacular mountaintop near the northeast corner of the district on the Salmon/Payette National Forest boundary. Also, I climbed to the brass caps on Rainbow Peak and The Pinnacle, two of the highest mountains on the district.

One of my biggest disappointments in this regard was that I never quite made it to the brass cap on the summit of Mormon Mountain, the highest point on the Payette National Forest. On a backpack hike from Thunder Mountain to the Taylor Ranch, the hiking group skirted around the east side of the peak and only a few hundred feet of climbing would have taken us to the summit, but I couldn't persuade anyone to go with me.

I got a little side-tracked, but now for the background behind this particular pack trip.

The Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association meets twice each year to discuss business matters and their relationship with the Forest Service. As the Forest Service is the agency responsible for managing the land on which most outfitting activities take place in Idaho, most of the rangers who had outfitting activities on their districts attended these meetings on a regular basis.

It was at one of these meetings that an outfitter, whom I was not particularly fond of as I thought he was a know-it-all, became very vocal about conditions at one of his assigned campsites in the Marble Creek area. Marble Creek is a large drainage that heads near Thunder Mountain and runs in a southeasterly direction to its mouth on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. The lower portion of the drainage is on the Boise National Forest while the upper end is on the Big Creek District. This particular outfitter conducted most of his operation on the Boise National Forest but did have one assigned campsite along Marble Creek near the mouth of Little Cottonwood Creek, a few miles inside the Payette National Forest and in an extremely remote and seldom-visited location. So I decided to take a pack trip to learn more about the country on the southeastern side of the district, with the primary objective of checking on the status of the outfitting camp that was supposed to be at Little Cottonwood Creek. My companion on this trip was Gary Miller, a young fellow who had been a seasonal employee on the district for several seasons.

As I recall, this pack trip took place about mid-October when the big game hunting season was still open, but the big rush of opening season hunters had left the backcountry. The aspen had turned bright yellow, the days were getting shorter, and the air had a little bite to it in the early morning – a great time to be on a horseback trip in the Idaho backcountry!

We rode up the Lick Creek Trail to Cougar Basin, camped for the night, then to the old abandoned McCoy Ranch on Monumental Creek for the second night, then to Roosevelt Lake and up Mule Creek to the abandoned Sunnyside Mine on Thunder Mountain for the third night where we stayed in one of the old cabins. The next day we decided to leave our camp gear at the Sunnyside and ride down Marble Creek to the district boundary and return to the mine for a second night's stay. The trail down from Thunder Mountain to Marble Creek was in good shape, and things went fairly routinely until we started downstream on the so-called Marble Creek Trail.

Similar to most of the tributaries to the Middle Fork of the Salmon, Marble Creek flows in a steep-sided V-shaped canyon with a narrow flood plain in the bottom. As is the case with many of the drainages that originate in the general area of Thunder Mountain, Marble Creek obviously has a history of instability and high erosion. From my limited knowledge of geology, I believe that this is linked to Thunder Mountain being part of a caldera. One of the most famous calderas is Crater Lake in Oregon with Wizard Island near the center of the lake. As I understand it, Thunder Mountain is similar to Wizard Island from a geologic standpoint, and most of the rim of the caldera eroded away eons ago. However, geologists are able to identify remnants of the rim in several locations. This entire area is definitely not part of the massive Idaho batholith that is the major geologic feature for much of central Idaho. It is noticeably different from the surrounding area in that the trees are stunted, ground cover by grasses and forbs is sparse, and there is considerable bare ground and evidence of erosion. Many of the drainages have names that indicate instability – Mud Creek, Chalk Creek, Paint Creek, Milk Creek, and Slide Creek. Also to be considered is that there are sizable areas that have eroded somewhat similar to Bryce Canyon in Utah. Then there is the monument for which Monumental Creek is named. This approximately 65-foot high hoodoo topped with a large boulder is testimony to the extensive amount of erosion that has taken place in the past.

Gary and I started down the trail only to find that there was no trail after a few hundred yards as the stream had washed it out. We looked around and we could see a short section of trail on the opposite side of the stream. So we crossed over to the other side, and after a short distance no more trail, and back across the creek we go. After this happened about five or six times, we just stayed in the creek as the water level was low this time of the year. Although the going was a little rough and slow, we made fairly good progress.

What I really wanted to do was to ride down Marble Creek to the forest boundary, if for no other reason than just to be able to say that I had been there. (Sort of like the mountain climber and his reason for climbing a high peak – "Because it's there!") Recognizing the actual boundary proved to be considerably more difficult than one might think. The boundary line on the map looks plain enough, but finding it while riding down a narrow V-bottom canyon with limited vision, looking upslope on either side is another thing. There were no signs on the side drainages and I have to admit that I don't know if we actually reached the boundary, but I was satisfied that there had been no outfitting activity in this area in recent years so we turned around and went back to the Sunnyside. (The fact that one can get lost, or at least confused as to exact location, is one of the charms about the Idaho backcountry. There are not very many places left in the United States that are wild to the extent that this is possible.)

The monument on Monumental Creek. — USFS

This made for a long day on the trail but nothing like what was coming up the next day. We left the Sunnyside, and rode out the ridge to the north toward Lookout Mountain, some 12 miles away on a much better trail than the day before. Also, in contrast to the day before, we were up on a ridgetop and could see the country for miles around. About noon, it was quite obvious that we were in for a major change in the weather. The sky to the southwest behind Rainbow Peak was turning dark, the wind began to blow on our backsides, and the tails of the horses and mules were blowing up between their back legs. In October this means Snow! We got to the lookout that was closed for the season in late afternoon and had to make a decision. We could stay there and have a nice tight roof

over our heads, but the horses and mules would never stay up there in a snowstorm. From the lookout we could look down in the West Fork of Rush Creek to a nice campsite we frequently used at a much lower elevation which was somewhat protected from the impending storm. We knew that we had left tent poles and firewood there on a previous trip. So we decided to go on. After all, it was only about four or five miles and we had a little daylight left, so let's do it!

The lookout, of course, is on the high point, and we dropped down to the Milk Creek Saddle with little difficulty. This saddle is on the divide between Monumental Creek and Rush Creek and the site of a four-way junction in the trail. One can continue on the ridge to the north toward Routson Peak and eventually down into Big Creek at the Dewey Moore Ranch, drop down Milk Creek to the west to Monumental Creek, or down to the east toward the West Fork of Rush Creek.

Almost immediately after leaving the saddle, we came across the first of many down trees blocking the trail. However, we had a power saw. In the days before wilderness classification, we seldom left the station without one. We cut the tree in good Forest Service trail crew manner, making the cuts well away from the trail so that there was no danger of the mules snagging their packs, and put the saw back on the mule, using one of Jack Higby's saw boxes that made for easy on-and-off of the saw. However, it soon became apparent that there had been a freak windstorm, possibly a microburst, in this area. There were so many down trees across the trail that it was better to stay dismounted and carry the saw from one log blocking the trail to the next. Then it started to get dark. Out came our flashlights and we backed off on doing such a good job, finally settling for stepping and jumping the string over everything we could and just making one cut in the middle of the trail if the ends would drop and allow passage. Next the batteries in the flashlights started to fail, but no big deal. We had a Coleman lantern in a little wooden box specially made for packing on a mule. We got this out of the load, and for a while we had the woods well lit-up and were in fat city.

But this didn't last long. By this time the leading edge of the storm was upon us, and as is the usual case, this was the most active part of the storm with strong winds driving sheets of snow. Gary was carrying the power saw in one hand and the lantern in his other hand. When he got to the next log that required cutting, he set the lantern on the ground in order to operate the saw. Only he didn't get the lantern placed very well. It fell over, hitting a rock and breaking the glass globe. *Whoosh*, a gust of wind immediately blew out the mantles leaving us in the dark in the middle of the night on a trail blocked with fallen timber and in a snowstorm. Our only recourse was to go back to using the dim flashlights, and we started more or less feeling our way along the trail.

About this time a little incident took place that made a lasting impression on me. My job was to lead the string and keep up with Gary, who was using the power saw and doing all the real work, yet not get so close that I was interfering with the log-cutting. After a while I became aware that the string was not moving along as they should have. I made my way back along the trail, dodging the bulky side-packs on the mules and almost getting pushed off the narrow trail, to see what was causing the trouble. One of the mules had stepped over his lead rope and was standing on the rope with his head bowed down. So I got down on my knees in the dark and tried to get him to lift his hoof off the rope. He

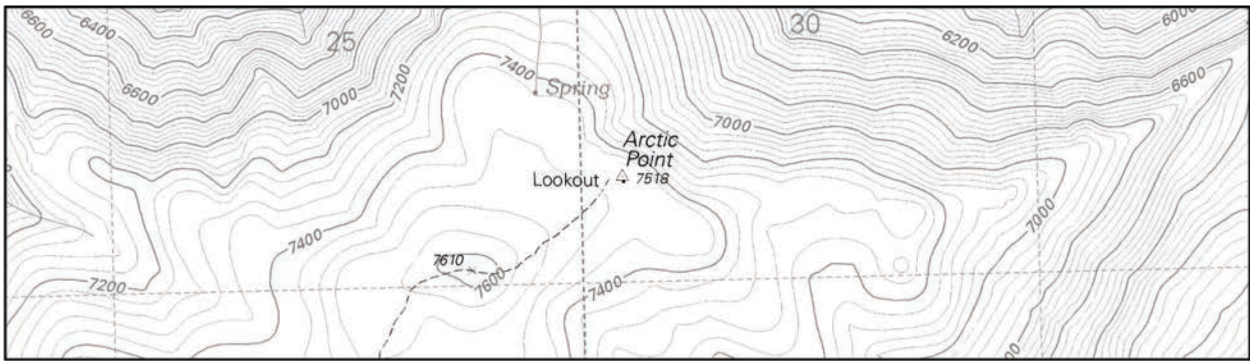
soon got the idea but when the hoof came up, it caught the underside of my somewhat prominent nose with what the boxers call an uppercut. HURT – I was in a world of it!

Now, I don't want to give the impression that old Nip Mule did this with the intention of hurting me. In fact, the exact opposite was undoubtedly the case in that he was doing exactly what I had asked him to do. Over the years, I have been on a number of trips where things didn't go very well, and the pack mules seemed to sense this and took a very patient and cooperative attitude as though they didn't want to cause any additional trouble. It's as though they were thinking, "Let's be part of the solution here and not add to the problem!" (I hope someone will do a little write-up on Salmon River pack mules. They are really marvelous creatures, and I can fully understand why the old-time rangers became so attached to them. I remember one little story of an early day Idaho ranger being transferred to Alaska and complaining, "There are millions of acres of national forest lands up here – in fact, the largest national forests in the whole Forest Service system, and not a mule on any of it!") Thanks to the efforts and interests of my predecessor rangers, the Big Creek District had some of the best mules in the Idaho backcountry.

Not long after this, things started to improve. The leading edge of the storm had passed and, although it was still snowing, the wind had noticeably died down. And there were fewer and fewer logs across the trail so we put the saw back on the mule and got back on our saddle horses and made our way to the campsite in short order. It didn't take long to unpack, feed the string some oats, install new mantles on the lantern, and set up our wall tent with a little sheepherder stove inside to start heating things up and drying us out. Thank Goodness that our tent poles were still there as we were in no mood to go out in the woods and rustle up a new set. I got into my personal gear to find my watch – 2:00 a.m. – a **Long Day on the Trail**!

The next day we rode up to Bear Trap Saddle and then on to the Rush Creek Point Lookout. Here we were treated to a sight that I will never forget and was right in line with one of my favorite sayings, "When the Lord Made the Earth, He Cared Enough to Make it Beautiful." The Big Creek Canyon below us was filled with puffy white clouds from the aftermath of the storm the night before. The sun was shining on the snow-covered high country, including our immediate surroundings, and the sky was a dark blue with a few white clouds floating around. I got out my camera and took a photo of this with the pack string in the foreground trying to rustle a little grass that was sticking out of the snow. This was one of those rare times when it felt so good to be alive and so fortunate to be in the exact location where we were. I was reminded of something that Dan LeVan, former Big Creek Ranger for 26 years, once told me, "When you get a little of that Big Creek snow in your hair, you'll never quite get it all out!"

Rush Creek Point looking north toward Cabin Creek. — Earl Dodds



U.S. Geological Survey

Gary Miller's Escapades

One of the more satisfying and interesting parts of my job as ranger on the Big Creek Ranger District was the opportunity to work with the young seasonal employees. The field season in the backcountry runs from about mid-June until mid-September and corresponds closely with the time that the younger people have their summer break from school. The Forest Service hires a large number of school kids, mostly college students, but also a few who have just graduated from high school to work during the summer months. On my days on the Big Creek District, these were the folks who manned the isolated fire lookouts, worked at maintaining the 600 miles or so of trail on the district, and were on three-person initial attack firefighting crews with the goal of suppressing fires while they were small. The situation on the Big Creek District during my tenure was a little unique compared to other ranger districts in the Forest Service, in that all of the employees lived on the district and trips to town were infrequent at best.

I think the thing that I liked most about working with this group was that, for the most part, they were full of "piss and vinegar" and eager to take on new experiences. Supervising these kids was often a matter of reining them in rather than having to build a fire under them as is occasionally the case with older employees. For many of them, their Forest Service job was their first real away-from-home job. They were eager to do good work and genuinely interested in the country and their unusual surroundings. Indeed, most everyone who has worked in the Idaho backcountry for a season or two considers this time to be one of the high points in their lives and looks back on those days with fond memories.

Employees on the ranger districts, particularly those who live on the district, develop a tie to the forest and the land that is often lacking elsewhere in the Forest Service. I have heard other career Forest Service people comment on this situation as well. Once a person moves from the ranger district level to the Supervisor's Office, and then possibly to the next higher level, the Regional Office, he loses the everyday contact with the land. The conversation among the employees changes from talk that is largely associated with the day-to-day activities on the ground, to personal family and health problems and time remaining to retirement.

One of my favorite seasonal employees was Gary Miller. The thing that I most liked about Gary was that he was so upbeat about virtually everything. He could always make the best of every situation no matter how difficult it might be, and more than that, he usually was able to turn a difficult situation into something fun.

Gary started working on the Big Creek District upon graduating from high school in Riggins, Idaho. Riggins is a small town on the banks of the Salmon River, so he grew up with a lot of exposure to the Idaho outdoors. His first job was that of manning the Arctic Point Lookout on the breaks of the Salmon River on the northern part of the old Chamberlain district. This station was often referred to in jest by district personnel as the "North Pole." The actual lookout with the standard Forest Service fire-finding alidade is a 7-foot square metal cubicle at the top of a steel tower 75-feet high. A small 10 x12 foot log cabin at the base of the tower serves as living quarters. The usual access is by trail from the Chamberlain station 21 miles away, and as the immediate surroundings are not particularly scenic, summer visitors are rare. It is not unusual for the person manning this station not to see a single person for weeks at a time and then only Forest Service trail crews or packers bringing him supplies two or three times during the summer.

Now, Arctic Point is a backcountry lookout. This means that it is not only remote and isolated from civilization, but that it is also completely lacking in modern conveniences often considered standard equipment and practices on lookouts in other parts of the forest that are accessible by road. Those lookouts (Brundage Mountain comes to my mind) usually have a propane tank to run a refrigerator and cooking stove. The lookout person can use his pickup truck and a power saw to gather firewood and haul drinking water uphill from the nearest spring. And he doesn't have to continually climb up and down a 75-foot tall steel tower to search the skyline for signs of smoke.

In contrast, Arctic Point is a tough station, and in many ways a throwback to the early days of the Forest Service. It is asking a great deal of a lad just out of high school to man this remote post of the U.S. Forest Service for the usual ten-to-twelve week period of the summer forest-fire season. He is entirely at the mercy of his own cooking, and on his own for matters of housekeeping and personal hygiene. He doesn't have a refrigerator, and he has to backpack all his water uphill from a spring located a considerable distance in elevation below the lookout. As his cooking is done on a wood-burning stove, he needs plenty of firewood that has to be collected with hand tools as the use of power saws is banned in the wilderness setting. And in keeping with the primary reason for being there, he is expected to climb the tower and scan the horizon every fifteen minutes or so for smoke from possible forest fires.

Several weeks after Gary manned the lookout, Jack Higby, the district Fire Management Officer, and I rode out to Arctic Point to check on Gary. As we approached the lookout, we could see something unusual hanging on the tower just below the cab. "What in the devil is that thing?" It looked like a blanket or a piece of canvas. We didn't even have the horses tied up before asking Gary about what he had going on up there on the tower.

Well, he had jury-rigged a sort of hammock-like affair using one of the heavy canvas manti that packers use to cargo loads for packing on their pack animals. He would spend a good part of the day in this contraption, thereby cutting down on the number of times he had to climb up and down the tower to look for smokes. Jack and I didn't think that this

was at all safe or a good idea and we quickly dismantled Gary's handy work and took the manti back to Chamberlain. This taught me a little about individual initiative and Gary Miller, but didn't prepare me for this next little stunt that I only heard about in subsequent years.

Al Tice was one of the outfitters who operated out of Chamberlain, taking clients on fishing and hunting trips in the backcountry. He had two main base camps, one adjacent to the Chamberlain airfield, and the other one at Mackay Bar on the Salmon River at a much lower elevation. Al was a pilot and had a small Piper airplane that he regularly flew back and forth between his two base camps, some 20 air miles apart. His usual flight path was well to the west of Arctic Point, but not so far away that Gary couldn't see and hear the airplane. This went on almost daily for most of the summer and set Gary to thinking about how he could turn this into a little fun.

He took the butcher knife from the cabin and cut a small pile of bear grass hay from the surrounding area. Then he took a set of his extra clothes and stuffed them with hay and made a sort of scarecrow-type dummy. He went out in the woods and found a length of dry lodgepole pine about four inches in diameter and ten feet long. He then hauled the pole and dummy to the upper part of the tower, tied a big hangman's knot around the neck of the dummy, and rigged the dummy from the pole so that it looked like a hanging.

Gary said that it didn't take long before Al Tice's airplane came spiraling out of the Salmon River Canyon on its way from Mackay Bar to Chamberlain. About the time the airplane gained enough altitude to clear the river breaks and head for Chamberlain, it suddenly made a tight banking turn standing steeply on its left wing and headed straight for the lookout. Gary was in the cab just above the "hanging," trying to keep his head down and out of sight. Al made a circle around the lookout, then dropped down to about the same elevation as the lookout cab, and made a pass close by for a good look. Gary said he just had to have a look and when he raised his head to do so, he and the pilot established eye contact for a brief instant. Al then wagged his wings as though to say "I'm on to you, kid!" and went on about his business.

In subsequent years, Gary worked out of the Big Creek Ranger Station and became a competent packer. I remember one pack trip when the two of us were returning to the station after being in the Monumental Creek country for a few days. We camped at Cougar Basin for our last night out, and the next morning rather than wash the breakfast dishes over the campfire, we just packed them up dirty to take back to the station where we could do the job better and easier.

The trail has 17 switchbacks in it coming out of Cougar Basin and making its way to the divide between the drainages that flow into Monumental Creek and those that flow into Big Creek. I was in the lead as we made our way up these switchbacks when I noticed a tiny mountain wren of some type flying alongside the pack string and landing at each switchback only a short distance off the trail, and almost within arm's reach. "Hey, Gary, look at this bird. He's staying right with us!" Gary said, "I bet he'll go all the way to the top with us." I said, "Oh, I doubt that. There are 17 switchbacks in this section of the trail; he's bound to miss one of them and keep flying straight ahead and miss the turn." "No, I don't think so. What do you want to bet?" he said. "Okay, I bet you he's not with us when we top out and whoever loses has to wash all those dirty plates and cooking gear that are

in the pack boxes." And I'll be damned but that dumb little bird was right with us when we cleared the last switchback near the rock cairn and I had to wash the camp dishes.

The best example that I can come up with as to Gary's ability to make not only the best of a tough situation but also to turn it into something fun took place late in the field season one fall. The engineering section in the Supervisor's Office wanted to visit the elevation control points that are widely scattered throughout the backcountry for a mapping project that they were working on. They suddenly woke up to the fact that the Forest Service pack and saddle stock would soon be trailed out of the backcountry to winter pasture and that they had only a short time to do the necessary field work. They wanted to send one team of three engineers to the north side of Big Creek to the Ramey Ridge, Bismark Mountain, Mile Hi country and another team to cover the country on the south side of Big Creek in the Monumental Creek-Thunder Mountain area. One of the engineers supposedly had considerable horse experience, and he would serve as the packer for the group going north, and Gary would accompany and be the packer for the two guys who were going south.

So we assembled the necessary pack and saddle stock and camp outfits for two separate expeditions into the backcountry on a Monday morning in late October. The engineers showed up about noon, and by mid-afternoon the two pack strings cleared the station and were on their way. As I remember, the weather for the rest of the week was typical for that time of the year – blustery with snow squalls and light rain.

On Friday afternoon I was in the little office at the station doing some of the paper work required of all rangers when I looked across the airfield toward the gate leading to the barn and the corral and here comes Gary. He was obviously in a big hurry as he jumped off his saddle horse, got the gate open in record time, and almost ran to the barn where he proceeded to drop the packs off the mules, jerk the pack saddles off, and turn the stock loose in the pasture. He came running across the airfield toward his little apartment next to the office. I thought that something had gone wrong and someone had gotten hurt and he would come into the office and tell me about it. But no, he hardly gave me a nod and went directly into his apartment where I could hear him building a fire in the cook stove and banging pots and pans around. I knew that he had something going so I let him alone.

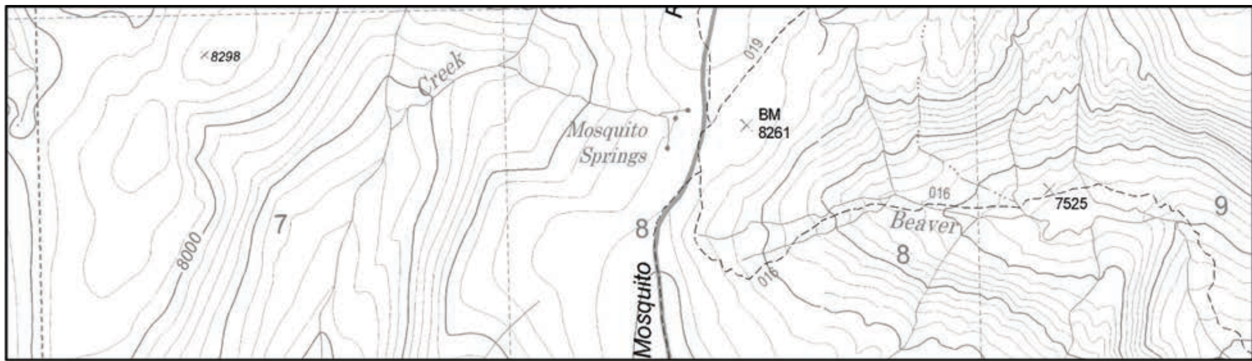
Shortly thereafter, the group that had gone to the country to the north rode in. They all looked pretty beat and had nothing but bad things to report. None of them knew the country so they were lost a good part of the time. Their horses had run off and they had a hard time finding them. They had a horse wreck that ended up with most of their gear bucked off and widely scattered along the trail. Everything considered, they were not a bunch of happy campers.

And then a little later here came the two engineers that had been out with Gary for the past week. As they were opening the gate, Gary steps out of his apartment and hollers for them to hurry up and come right over to his place.

It turned out that Gary had a little bet going that he could ride on into the station while they were doing the last engineering task, and he would bake a cherry pie and have it ready before they got there. And this he did. And what did the two engineers have to do

for losing the bet? Why, they had to wash all the camp dishes and cooking ware that had been packed up dirty after breakfast as it was the last day on the trail. Even with that, these two guys thought that they had had a great trip and thoroughly enjoyed their week with Gary.

Arctic Point Lookout. — USFS



U.S. Geological Survey

A Tribute to Larry Garner

You don't meet a person like Larry Garner very often. In fact, you're lucky if you get to know a Larry Garner once in your lifetime. Although his name may be a common one, the Idaho backcountry icon Larry Garner was an uncommon man and as close to a model human being as most of us will ever know. As a purveyor of the "golden rule," Larry was second to none.

In writing of my experiences as a forest ranger in the Idaho backcountry, I have devoted quite a bit of prose to the younger, college-age employees with their fresh and open-minded eagerness to spending a summer season working in the backcountry, and that in most cases, in later years these folks look back on their time in the backcountry as one of the high points in their lives. In writing in this manner, I have been guilty of overlooking the contribution that some of the older employees made to the daily operations of the Big Creek Ranger District.

I first met Larry in the spring of 1957 when he was about 50. He held the job on the Big Creek Ranger District that used to be titled alternate ranger. This was a position somewhat like the sergeants in the Army or the chiefs in the Navy in that the "Alternate", as they were known, was the person who worked with projects on the ground and was pretty well removed from most of the government paperwork that occupied so much of the district ranger's time.

As far as formal education went, Larry didn't have much, and might even have been considered illiterate in the minds of some people. He had difficulty in writing and completing such minor jobs as the required reports on small forest fires on the district. But when it came to backcountry knowledge, he qualified for a Ph.D. He was a woodsman, a horseman and mule packer, a camp cook, and generally fully in tune with all things backcountry. He was a master of such tasks as working with pack and saddle stock, camping in the mountains under adverse weather conditions, and practically any job that involved working with his hands.

It is almost impossible to say enough good things about Larry Garner. He was honest to a fault with a personality and vocabulary totally lacking in guile, bravado and profanity. Because he was so laid back and low key, he was not the kind of individual who stood out in a crowd – yet he had life figured out in that he was upbeat about most everything. He

was the kind of person who did not have many down days or spend much time being mad at people or things. He liked people and people liked him. I don't think that he had any enemies or that anyone ever badmouthed him. He was respected by all who knew him, including the hard-to-please types like Fire Management Officer Jack Higby. His quiet demeanor and "impish" smile often left many of us wondering what all was really going on in his head. Over the years more than one bet was lost by those who believed Larry would eventually be heard to swear, complain, or even yell loudly.

He would take on any job sent his way, but his long suits were working with the young seasonal employees and the pack and saddle stock. Ability to work with and be a mentor to younger, inexperienced employees was very unusual for a packer. Larry's patience with mules and trail-crew kids was phenomenal. When you think about it, there is a commonality of personality traits in young men and mules that may make Larry's dual ability somewhat understandable. His slow, methodical packing style was inevitably transferred to any young man (the crew was all male in those days) who showed an interest. Pete Mourtsen told me that even today when he is faced with the task of wrapping something, like an unusually-shaped Christmas present, he still thinks back to the lessons he learned from Larry about cargoing things of unusual shape to pack on the mules.

Larry's extensive time spent in the backcountry, including many years spent as an outfitter working out of Cold Meadows, also made him a walking history lesson. On more than one occasion Larry would tie up his mules and lead the crew on a short walk to a little-known gravesite or historic cabin. These impromptu side trips only happened once the individual or crew had passed Larry's trustworthiness test. First-year workers were rarely, if ever, so treated. If prompted (usually back at camp), Larry would pass along stories related to the sites which had been verbally relayed to Larry by "old-timers" he had known. Larry was never known to quote anything from a written source. Whether the stories were true or not, they added considerable intrigue to a long trail swing.

I'm going to digress here a little and provide my take on the cult of mule whackers. The heydays of the packer culture in the mountains of Central Idaho was way before my time as ranger that started in 1957, but there were still a few men around whose primary interest in life was working with pack and saddle stock. Some of the names that come to mind are Bus Thorpe, Dub Horn, Lafe Cox, Verl Potts, Arlo Lewis, Shorty Derrick, Jim Porter and Larry Garner. With the exception of Jim Porter, these fellows are all dead now, but it was my good fortune to have ridden a few miles with most of them and shared a campfire or two. Most of these fellows had mellowed quite a bit from the character and image of the old-time packer. There are still stories of old-time packers who had never been seen without their wide-brimmed cowboy hats, and people wondered if they even slept with their hats on. Some of these guys were downright uncommunicative and would hardly talk to anyone they felt was below their status (like college kids working on a trail maintenance crew during their summer break from school – many of whom with little outdoor experience.) Most of them liked for their mules to be on the wild side and difficult for anyone other than them to handle. If a mule was prone to kicking while being packed, that was fine with most of the old-timers. They would somehow get a rope loop around one of the mule's hind legs and lift and tie his hoof off the ground so the animal was standing on three legs and unable to kick. With some of the old-time packers, it was standard practice to catch the pack stock by roping them with a lariat while running them

around in a circular corral. They could have trained them to come to a bucket of oats but they liked playing cowboy. These guys were tough and they wanted their pack stock to be the same way. Most of these mule skinners have gone into history now and will never be replaced. Indeed, I just squeezed into the tail end of this era during my time as the Big Creek Ranger.

The era of the Forest Service pack string was probably at its peak in the two or three decades following the disastrous forest fires of 1910, the worst forest fires in American history that burned over 3 million acres of prime, old growth timberlands in northern Idaho and western Montana and killed 86 people. The 1910 fire season moved fire control and forest protection to the top priority of the Forest Service in the management of the western national forests. The agency started on a program of opening up the country by improving access and communications. A system of forest fire lookouts for early fire detection was constructed throughout the backcountry. Telephone lines and trails were built to service the lookouts, and a number of airfields were built to provide fast access for fire control purposes. For many years the objective of the Forest Service was to control all fires by 10:00 a.m. on the day following their discovery.

Dub Horn on a springtime trip to Cougar Basin, 1959. — Liter Spence

Although Larry Garner was a great pack string and mule man in somewhat the old tradition, he was a lot more than that. One of his best attributes from my perspective was his ability to work with and teach the younger employees (and me also) some of his backcountry tricks. Larry likely had forgotten more tricks about backcountry woodcraft than most of us will ever know. On one pack trip the trail crew was camped at Crescent Meadows when some little creatures of the night chewed the cinch strap in two for one of the riding saddles. (The cinch strap, or latigo, goes under the horse's belly to keep the saddle in place.) Larry came to the rescue and made a temporary replacement cinch using a burlap sack that worked just fine until they got back to the station.

On another trip on the 19th of August with a wilderness specialist from the regional office, we were en route between Big Creek and Chamberlain via Mosquito Ridge when we were caught in a late summer snowstorm. We managed to get the mules unpacked and set up a couple of tents, but it just kept snowing and blowing. (Mosquito Ridge is the high divide between the South Fork of the Salmon River and Chamberlain Basin.) When it looked

like this might become an all-night affair, Larry had us put the saddles back on the horses and mules, not only to provide a little warmth for the stock, but also to prevent having the sweaty pack pads and blankets freeze and get as stiff as boards and difficult to handle the next morning.

When I think of Larry Garner, one of the first things that comes to my mind is the way he ran the packing and camp cooking job for the trail maintenance crew. I'm going to digress here again and provide a little run-down on the trail program for the Big Creek District. As the district had very few roads, trails were, and probably still are, the principal means of getting around. (When I moved into the ranger position, I inherited one ¾-ton pickup truck and 40 head of pack and saddle stock.) We thought that there were about 600 miles of trail on the district but, in truth, we really didn't know how many miles we had. The standard means of determining trail mileage was to get a reading on how long it took time-wise to cover a distance on horseback. That is, if it took about 8½ hours to ride from Big Creek to Chamberlain and the horse usually travelled at a rate of 3½ miles an hour, then the distance must be about 30 miles. In my early days before wilderness classification (most of the district was part of the old Idaho Primitive Area that later became the basis for the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness), the engineering department of the Forest Service was starting on a program of management for the trail systems on all the national forests. First of all, they wanted an inventory of all the trails on the district with accurate measurements of distances. Then each trail was to be assigned a number and signs made for each trail junction providing mileage to each destination accessed by that trail, very much like the highway system.

Now this was a big job as some of the trails were way out there on the far edges of the district in really remote country. One of my long-term goals as ranger was to hold onto all the trails on the district, not so much for fire-control purposes, as was the case with their original construction, but more as a means of maintaining Forest Service jurisdiction over these remote areas. I liked the idea that the Forest Service should establish and maintain a presence in the backcountry, and this required laying down a lot of horse tracks and quite a bit of backpacking and pounding the trails with hiking boots. I viewed this as part of the Forest Service mission.

I took the direction from the engineering department seriously and started on a program of accurately measuring trail distances by means of an odometer mounted on a bicycle wheel that was to be pushed along each of the 600 miles of trail that we thought we had. Pete Mourtsen did a lot of this work. Pete worked on the Big Creek District for seven seasons in various capacities, starting on the fire crew and eventually moving up to being the first wilderness ranger on the Payette National Forest. Pete has told me that one of the primary reasons he returned to the District for multiple seasons was due to the great individuals he got to work and learn from, not the least of which was Mr. Larry Garner. Pete then went on to have a full career in the Forest Service, eventually retiring from the Coconino National Forest in Arizona.

I believe that we eventually got all the trails on the district measured in this manner, and we started on the signing part of the job in keeping with direction from the engineering department. However, about this time the Wilderness Act was passed, and we started a program of putting into practice wilderness management concepts that I have called "getting the wilderness religion." However, it will suffice to note here that the general

direction for wilderness management is to lessen mans' activities on the land, and the engineering program of signing for the trail system on the order of a little highway system was contrary to wilderness objectives. I believe that the current direction is to keep signing to a bare minimum and encourage visitors to use a map to find their way around as part of their wilderness experience.

Trail maintenance was a big part of the Forest Service work in the backcountry during my days, and there were trail crews based out of all three Forest Service stations on the district: Big Creek, Chamberlain, and Cold Meadows. We were always open to new ideas for "working trail" and tried several methods. Without going into detail and straying further from Larry Garner, we tried backpacking crews, whereby the crew carried everything – tent, sleeping bags, cooking utensils, groceries and tools to work with. We tried crews outfitted with one packhorse and even one crew that used a couple of llamas to pack their camp gear. All these methods had one thing in common – we were very weight-conscious and strived to go lightweight and keep the amount of camping and kitchen equipment, particularly groceries, down to a minimum. Consequently, these crews used a lot of freeze-dried, dehydrated, backpacking-type foods, and cooking consisted largely of heating water to reconstitute this stuff.

But this was not the way Larry Garner ran his trail crew. He was not the least bit concerned about weight, "Hey, packing camp equipment and groceries – that's what those mules are for!" Larry didn't go for the dehydrated potatoes and other chicken-feed like trail foods. He packed a full 100-pound sack of real Idaho potatoes and a slightly smaller sack of onions. After all, that was only a side pack for one mule. As for the kitchen cooking equipment, there was much more to cooking in Larry's camp than just boiling water, so he didn't go for the lightweight, backpacking type pots and pans. Heavy cast iron – that's the ticket for serious camp cooking. He packed a large cast iron griddle for the morning hotcakes and an oversized cast iron skillet for frying those spuds and onions for the evening meal.

And he packed a Kimball stove in order to do some serious camp cooking. The Kimball stove is sort of like a big brother to the much smaller, and more popular, sheepherder stove. It is made of sheet metal, much like the sheepherder stove, but is much larger. The cooking surface is approximately 15-inches wide by 30-inches long. This provides you with a large firebox and you can really get this baby hot. The bottom is open so the stove has to be placed on the bare ground when in use. Then there is an oven that is only slightly smaller than the firebox and this fits on the back side of the unit. The oven, again, is large enough to do some serious baking.

Larry's most notable claim to fame as a gourmet backcountry chef was that he was a sourdough artist. I remember Larry telling a story of an experience he had while he was in the outfitting business. One of his clients, a well-paid but over-worked CEO from a big eastern city, arrived in hunting camp and announced that he suffered with a stomach ulcer and would require a special diet. Larry fed him sourdough hot cakes, biscuits, and bread, and when he left at the end of his hunt ten days later, he told Larry that he had never eaten so well nor felt so good in years.

Those of you who are familiar with sourdough know that the "starter" can be quite fragile, and it requires considerable attention even in the environment of your home kitchen, so you will have some appreciation for what Larry was faced with in using sourdough for one

of the main staples of the daily menu for a trail crew in a highly mobile camp setting. He was concerned that the "starter" not get too hot during the heat of the day in midsummer so he would put the sourdough crock in the creek to slow down the fermentation reaction. Then during the night when the sourdough needed a little warmth in order to work its magic, he would often take it to bed with him.

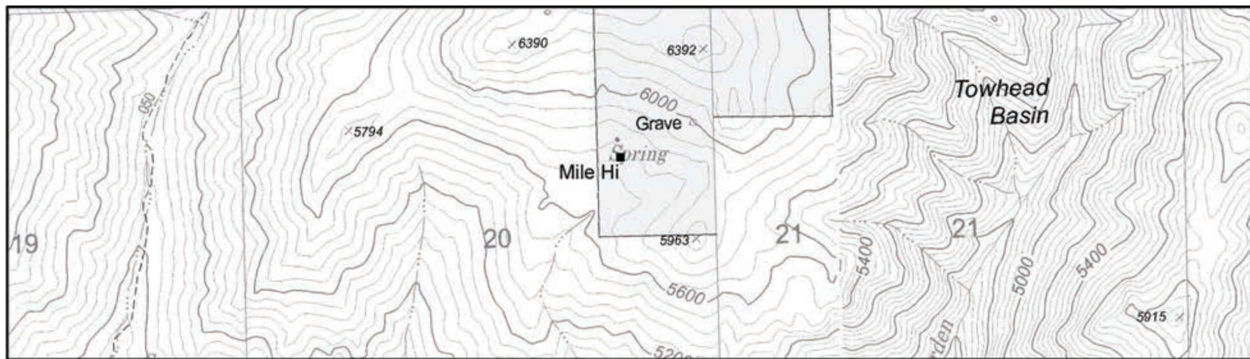
Larry started the day off by feeding the crew big stacks of sourdough hot cakes which is almost standard practice for those cooking with sourdough. But the thing that I remember most as being a little unusual was the square pan of sourdough rolls that he turned out to go with the evening meal. I'm not sure how he made these tasty morsels but they were a little larger than your fist, and I believe they were somewhat like miniature loaves of bread. As I recall, he baked nine of these in a square pan and, as this was an odd number for the three-man crew plus Larry, there was always a debate as to who got the extra roll. For sure, it was always devoured with relish. The crews just loved to go out with Larry and eat his cooking. No freeze dried, Mountain House, chicken-feed-like fare for Larry Garner's trail crew! Thick slices of slab bacon, real eggs, real potatoes, and fresh-baked fare were always the first order of the day in Larry's camp! The young fellows who were on Larry's crew were some of the happiest guys in the Forest Service.

Larry passed away in 1985. Everyone who knew him had a great deal of respect and admiration for the man, especially those of us who were privileged to have worked with and learned from him in the Idaho backcountry.

I have been thinking about how to end this little tribute to someone that I thought so highly of, and what keeps coming to mind is the last line in one of my favorite poems, "Gunga Din" by Rudyard Kipling – "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!"

– Earl Dodds (the last of the Big Creek rangers) with a lot of help from Pete Mourtsen.

Larry Garner - boulders in the Big Creek Trail, 1974. — USFS



U.S. Geological Survey

A Near Identity Crisis or How I Met Lafe Cox

This is an account of a little incident involving the first time Lafe Cox and I met. We often talked and laughed about this in subsequent years.

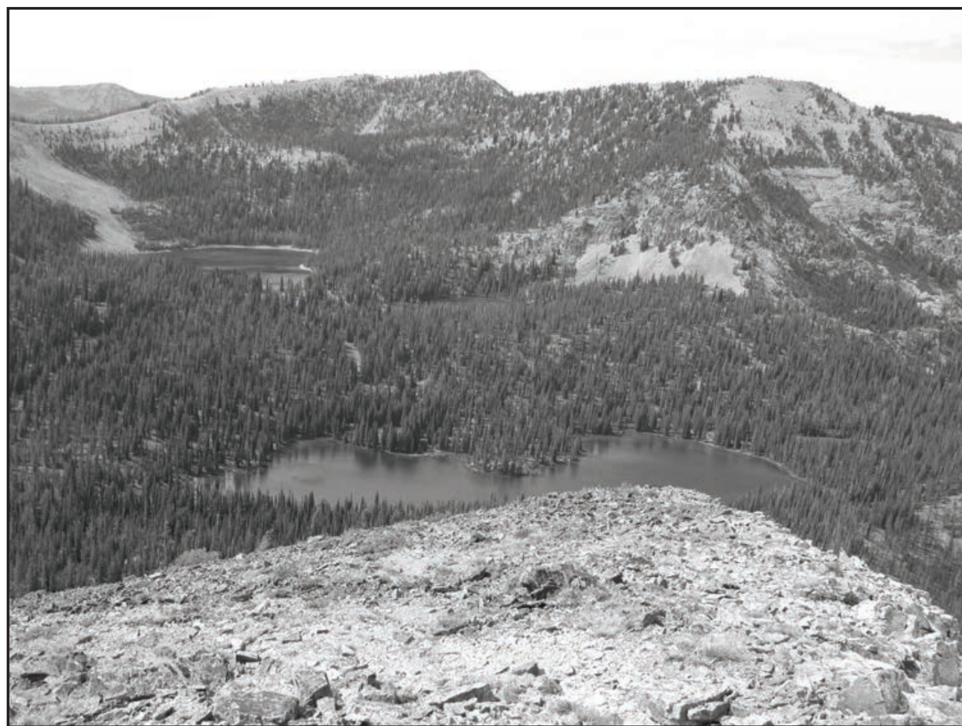
When it came to discussions about the Chamberlain, Big Creek and Landmark sections of the Salmon River country in the mountains of Central Idaho – places, people, events and history – Lafe Cox was much more than just a person who spent a lot of years in the backcountry. He was a genuine guru and somewhat like a patriarch of all things backcountry. His parents brought him into the Yellow Pine area at an early age and he received most of his education at the one-room schoolhouse on the south edge of town – in a building that burned and was later replaced by the one known as the University of Yellow Pine. As a young man he purchased the Mile Hi Ranch on Big Creek and he and his wife, Emma, lived in this isolated location for several years. He grew up on horseback and was one of those cowboy characters who saddled up first thing in the morning to make his way to the outhouse. He rode everywhere he went in the backcountry – even to the brass cap on Rainbow Peak, elevation 9,325 feet. I have the feeling that when he died he arrived at the Pearly Gates on horseback for his encounter with Saint Peter. (For a detailed account of the life of Lafe and Emma, see "*Idaho Mountains, Our Home, The Life Story of Lafe and Emma Cox*.")

Whenever I came across something unusual that needed an explanation, I turned to Lafe for an answer. Case in point being the discovery on one of my backpack trips of the skeletons of three horses at Cap Lake way out on Red Ridge, one of the most remote parts of the Middle Fork of the Salmon backcountry. "Oh, my old Dad lost those three broom-tails on a late-season sheep hunt back in 1929," was Lafe's explanation.

The incident that is the subject of this little story was part of a pack trip in the early 1960s, shortly after I was appointed ranger on the Big Creek District. The objective of the trip was to give the Forest Engineer a first-hand view of a somewhat representative section of the trail system on the district. We planned to take several days and make a loop ride – up Lick Creek to Cougar Basin, down the West Fork of Monumental Creek to the main Monumental Creek, then down Monumental to Big Creek, and then up Big Creek to the Ranger Station.

I made this ride a number of times during my years as ranger and always liked it. It covers a lot of particularly interesting and scenic backcountry. About three miles out of the station, and after a steep climb with a lot of switchbacks, the trail crosses the head of Little Marble Creek and you get a great view of a typical U-shaped glaciated valley below you with steep sidewalls and a rounded bottom with a little jewel-like green meadow that I always wanted to get to but never made it. On the far side of Little Marble Creek the trail makes a switchback in a rockslide and then tops out on a rocky ridge dividing the drainages that go into Big Creek from those that flow into Monumental Creek. There is a rock cairn here about two to three feet high, marking a nearby Geological Survey brass cap with the elevation – a little over 8,000 feet, if I recall correctly. This is the high point on the trip, and you have a 360-degree view of the spectacular mountainous country in the head of Big Creek You can look across to the west to Elk Summit at approximately the same elevation, and from there looking south to Mount Eldridge, Dixie Mountain, Mount Logan, Profile Gap, Goat Mountain and the Pinnacle. This is some of the highest and most scenic country on the Payette National Forest and right in the backyard of the Big Creek Ranger Station, my summer home for 25 years. The trail then drops down to Cougar Basin in the head of Snowslide Creek by means of a series of 17 switchbacks. Cougar Basin, with its beautiful Bear Lake and the two smaller satellite lakes that are unnamed on the map but have been labeled the Cub Lakes by the local residents, is much like one of the high basins in the better known Sawtooth Mountains, and is one of the gems in the backcountry.

Beyond Cougar Basin the trail drops down to the West Fork of Monumental Creek and from there on, until you get back to the Big Creek Ranger Station, the trail is pretty much on water grade following the streams of Monumental Creek and Big Creek so that you do not do a lot of climbing. One other point of interest is the monument that gives the stream its name, a 65-foot tall hoodoo with a large boulder balanced on top that is easily seen from the trail.


Cougar Basin - Bear Lake and the two "Cubs." — USFS

On this particular trip, about halfway down the West Fork of Monumental Creek, I decided to do a little hunting as this was the third or fourth week of hunting season. It was late in the afternoon, about the time of day that big game

animals usually start to leave their daytime hiding places and start moving around in search of feed. So I dismounted, took the bit out of the horse's mouth, tied the reins to the saddle horn, took the halter lead rope, pigtailed it onto the pack saddle of the caboose mule in the pack string, and pulled my rifle out of the scabbard on the side of the saddle. I then dropped behind the pack string, intending to hike the trail and hunt on the way to the campsite for the night at the old abandoned McCoy Ranch on the main stem of Monumental Creek.

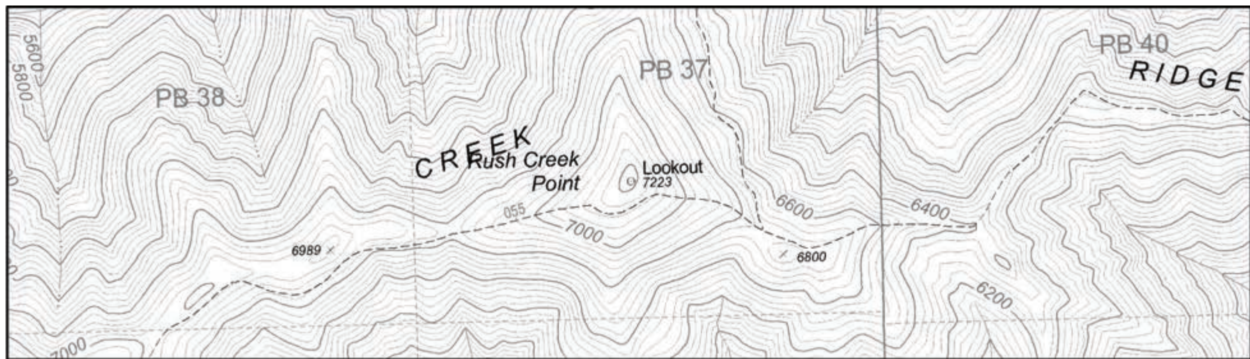
I'm going to digress here and provide a little explanation on the policy of the Forest Service during my time as ranger regarding big game hunting. During my early days in the backcountry, Forest Service personnel were expected, and even encouraged, to hunt as part of the job. The feeling at that time was that wildlife was one of the major resources on the Big Creek Ranger District and big game hunting was the major public attraction. In order for the forest ranger to have any real credibility in dealing with personnel from the Idaho Department of Fish & Game, the Idaho Outfitters & Guides Association, and the general hunting public, the ranger should be a hunter and have firsthand experience in such activities as camping in a wall tent in a snowy hunting camp, and properly caring for and packing out game meat by pack string. Indeed, some of my predecessors were excellent hunters and horsemen in this respect. (I have often felt that it is regrettable that this hands-on concept does not apply to winter sports activities on the Payette National Forest in that the working relationship as well as the level of trust and respect would be much higher if Forest Service personnel dealing with skiing and other winter sport activities were active participants in these sports on a regular basis.)

I let the pack string get out of sight, waited a few minutes, and then started down the trail hoping to encounter an elk. But I didn't see any elk, and as nighttime was fast approaching, I gave up the hunting and started hiking in earnest for that night's campsite on the old abandoned McCoy Ranch just downstream from the junction of the West Fork of Monumental Creek with the main Monumental Creek. The trail crosses the stream and I had to wade, getting my feet wet, so I was in somewhat of a hurry to get to camp and a dry pair of socks.

But before I got within an eighth of a mile or so of the south end of the meadows of McCoy Ranch, I started to hear loud voices and an occasional wild whoop up ahead of me. This grew louder as I approached. And then I saw a wall tent, well lit up with a Coleman lantern, pitched close to the trail in the lodgepole timber just before the trail broke into the open meadowland. It was quite obvious that what was taking place inside the tent was a hunting camp version of Happy Hour and, indeed, everyone was feeling very happy. So I hesitated a minute or so thinking that if I stayed on the trail, I would pass right by this little celebration and maybe that wasn't the smartest thing to do. It still wasn't quite pitch dark yet, and there was still a little bit of twilight, so I'm thinking, "The best plan of action here is leave the trail, take to the timber and detour around the camp. They are making so much noise, they won't hear me and they'll never know I passed by." So out in the lodgepole I go, and was most of the way around the camp when this dog, some kind of a long-haired shepherd I believe, got wind of me and came charging out of the tent barking his head off and threatening to take my leg off. And just for a few seconds, maybe 10 or 15, all was quiet in the tent. And then in a somewhat subdued manner from the former loud voices, I distinctly heard two words over the barking of the dog, "Bear!" and "Gun!"

So right then and there I decided that the jig was up and it was time to declare myself. I shouted “No bear, it’s me, the ranger!” And from the tent, “Come on over here, ranger, and have a drink!” I hollered, “Call off your dog and maybe I will!’

And that’s how I met Lafe Cox.



U.S. Geological Survey

Billy Owens and His Banty Hen

One of the more time-consuming parts of my job as the Big Creek Ranger was that of providing for the everyday needs of the district employees. At the peak of the summer season there were about 25 employees working on the district. All of these people lived full-time on the district, and the Forest Service had to provide quarters and see that they received groceries and mail on a regular basis. If there were problems with any of these needs, they often became my problems. This situation was not entirely unique to the Big Creek District, as the old Krassel and Warren Districts on the Payette National Forest were faced with similar situations and I'm sure that there were other backcountry districts throughout the Forest Service that had similar concerns. In many ways, these situations are throwbacks to earlier days in the Forest Service when such arrangements were normal throughout most of the national forests in the West. However, I always think of how much things have changed when I drive by one of the present-day district headquarters, like New Meadows or Council, with their large two-story office buildings and a small fleet of Forest Service vehicles parked outside. (By contrast, the Big Creek District had a small, but adequate, two-room office, one pickup truck and 40 head of pack and saddle stock.) All of the people who occupy the offices in those two-story buildings and drive all those trucks report for work at eight in the morning and leave around five in the afternoon. When quitting time rolls around, they all go home for the day and take care of their own personal needs.

The area of greatest concern I had with the needs of the district personnel was making sure that the employees manning the lookout stations had enough food supplies to last for about a month when they initially went to their stations. For a season or two, there were eight manned lookouts on the district, all of them remote from roads and somewhat difficult to access. Some of the young people that we hired as lookouts had little idea as to what they were in for in being so far from the grocery store. In my first year as ranger, I had experienced trouble with employees going up on lookout duty with an insufficient supply of food. I remember one young lad in particular who was just hired and told to go down to the local supermarket, open an account and assemble enough food to last for a month or so. When we picked up his supplies, they consisted of a bag of potato chips, a loaf of bread, a few cans of this and that and a half dozen boxes of instant-pudding mix – as if he were going on a picnic for the weekend. The instant-pudding mix was about the extent of his cooking skills and experience in preparing anything to eat.

In subsequent years we got on top of this problem and made up a suggested list of groceries and furnished each lookout with a copy of the Forest Service Lookout Cookbook that has special allowances for cooking at high altitude. It takes longer to do such things as boil spuds and cook beans on a lookout. In addition to this, I also developed a standard little talk that I gave to the employees who were going up on lookout at the time they were hired in an attempt to impress upon them how isolated and far removed from the grocery store they would be. Also, I emphasized that it was best to take the majority of their summer supplies with them when they initially went up rather than relying on someone at the grocery store to select their resupplies. I laid this on so thick that the secretary in the office said, "It sounds like you are sending these kids off to darkest Africa." Thereafter, this became known as my "Darkest Africa Speech," but it did help in getting on top of the problem of no sooner getting a kid on lookout than he was hollering that he was out of groceries.

Back in those days, the late 1950s, the ranger districts did their own hiring, usually from the pool of people who came to the winter office seeking summer employment. Most of us tried to hire local, or at least Idaho people, where possible, as we felt that they had had some contact with the Forest Service and had some idea of what they would be in for in working for the outfit. Nowadays, in an effort to eliminate any thread of discrimination in hiring, the personnel department in the Supervisor's Office does the hiring, and the ranger district often doesn't know what they are getting until the person walks through the door on the day he or she is scheduled to report for work. An application for employment that was processed as S. Jones might turn out to Sally Jones or Sam Jones.

One spring, a nice, clean-cut young fellow named Billy Owens came into the office in McCall seeking a job as a fire lookout. He was a native of Riggins, Idaho, and impressed me as being a little on the serious side and likely to do a good job. So I hired him for summer employment and gave him my "Darkest Africa Speech." Billy had a rural background, and his mother must have helped him with his groceries. When he reported for work toward the end of June he had a large pile of stuff that included jars of home-canned fruits and vegetables and a live little banty hen in a special little homemade box, sort of like a bird cage. Billy was considerably smarter than the average bear and intended to have fresh eggs for the summer.

One of the first things all new hires that are in fire control positions have to do is to go to fire school. At fire school they learn about everything they need to know to be a good fire control employee – how to make initial attack on a small forest fire using shovel and Pulaski (a combination axe/grub hoe tool invented by an early-day forest ranger), proper procedure for operation of the Forest Service radios, and how to use the standard fire-finding alidade. That is the centerpiece of all lookouts and is used for pin-pointing on a map the exact location of any smokes that the lookout should find during their regular 360-degree visual search of the horizon.

In my days, the Payette National Forest conducted one fire school in McCall for all the districts on the Forest and the District Fire Management Officers were required to do most of the instructing. Jack Higby, the Big Creek District Fire Management Officer, was one of those who instructed at fire school, a task that he certainly didn't relish. When he returned to Big Creek after fire school, he was a little on the grumpy side.

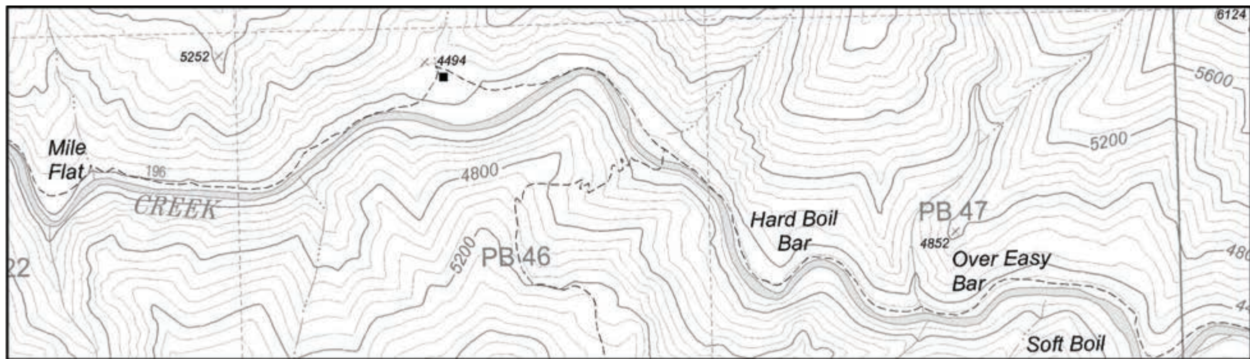
The Payette National Forest had a helicopter on contract for fire control purposes – chiefly for retrieving smokejumpers from remote hard-to-get-to locations. The staff officer in the Supervisor's Office, who was in charge of fire control activities on the forest, had previous experience in the backcountry and knew how much of a task it would be to man eight lookouts using horses and mules. He sent the helicopter out to the Big Creek District with instructions that this would be a one-day-only thing and that we should get all the stuff going to each lookout organized so that there was little down time for the chopper.

Four of the lookouts were to be flown up from the Chamberlain side of the district and four from the Big Creek side. At Big Creek, we carted everything out on the airfield and made four well- separated piles with the idea that the chopper could land right beside each pile to facilitate loading. The largest pile belonged to Billy Owen and was headed for the Rush Creek Point Lookout. Right on top of this pile was the homemade chicken cage with Billy's little banty hen in it.

Things went pretty well with the first lookout, Acorn Butte, and then it was Rush Creek's turn. The chopper made a neat landing right beside the pile of supplies, only the blast from rotor blades blew the chicken cage off the top of the pile. When it hit the ground, the cage popped open and out flew the little banty hen. For all the world, it looked like she went right through the whirling rotor blades but probably not. But for sure, she took off down the airfield at a fast clip – a lot like the Roadrunner in the comic strip. And the entire complement of the Big Creek Ranger Station, including the chopper pilot, dropped what they were doing and took off after her. It took quite some time with a lot of running around and hollering before someone was able to throw his shirt over the poor bird and we got her back in the cage and on her way to Rush Creek.

Most of us laughed about this for the rest of the day and even Jack Higby, who often was a little shy in the sense of humor department, managed a little grin and said "I hope no one took a picture of that!"

"The Rest of the Story" is that Billy Owens reported that the poor little chicken was so scared that it was weeks before she laid any eggs.



U.S. Geological Survey

Francie Wallace and the Dewey Moore Ranch Cleanup Project

I'm writing this partly to comply with the wishes of my three sons and my young Forest Service history-buff friend, Richard Holm, that I document some of my more interesting experiences in the backcountry and partly to pass this on to Francie's daughters who live in McCall and should have this remembrance of their father.

First, the reader needs a little background to the Dewey Moore Ranch Cleanup project. The Dewey Moore Ranch property, approximately 33 acres in size, is located in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness along Big Creek approximately 16 miles downstream from the former Big Creek Ranger Station. The only access is by trail or by the use of a short and extremely challenging backcountry airstrip that is on the property.

The Forest Service has a long-term goal of acquiring isolated tracts of private lands in the Wilderness when they become available on a willing seller/willing buyer basis and returning the sites to as near natural state as possible. In this case the goal was to eliminate all the buildings, fences, and other vestiges of civilization in keeping with wilderness philosophy.

The property had been owned by Dewey Moore who had lived in this isolated location for something like 30 years. He was very much a thorn in the side of the local Forest Service as he was always doing things contrary to Forest Service management and generally stirring up trouble. I understand that he was a native of the Big Thicket country in East Texas and had lived in the Steens Mountain area in Southeast Oregon before moving to Big Creek.

At the time he sold his place, I remember his appearance as that of a big man in his late 70s, considerably overweight and with a full head of flowing gray hair that gave him the general appearance of someone between the famous Scopes Monkey Trial lawyer, William Jennings Bryan, and the Earthquake McGoon character in the Lil' Abner comic strip.

I'm getting sidetracked here, but (just to give the reader some idea of the general relationship between Dewey and the Forest Service) I want to relate a little story of an event involving Dewey and a Forest Service packer that took place a few years before my time as ranger. It seemed that Dewey had a long-term feud going with one of my predecessor rangers over having more horses than his ranch could support and running them on the Forest in trespass. Well, the main Forest Service trail down Big Creek went

right through the Moore Ranch. The ranch was fenced with barbed wire and had wire gates on both the upstream and downstream sides of the property that had to be opened to allow passage. Dub Horn, the Forest Service packer, was on his way down Big Creek with a short string of pack stock headed for the Rush Creek Point Lookout when he came upon the first gate and a freshly painted sign tacked to the gate post, “Private Property – No Trespassing – U.S. Forest Service.” So Dub dismounted and started to lead the pack string around the outside of the ranch fence. This meant that he had to traverse the steep side slope for quite some distance causing him considerable trouble and sending a lot of loose rocks rolling down slope.

Well, Dewey’s cabin was built at the base of the side hill sort of at right angles to the toe of the slope. He heard the rocks rolling downhill and the pack string struggling to keep their footing, so he stepped outside for a look. He then put his hands on his hips in disbelief and shouted, “For hell’s sake, Dub, what are you doing? That sign don’t mean you! You bring that string right down here and go through the back door and out the front door if you want. But that son of bitching ranger ain’t getting through here anymore!”

Without going into detail as to my own many difficulties with Dewey, I will have to admit that one of my better days in the Forest Service was the day when I rode down Big Creek and tacked one of the yellow, with black lettering, metal “Government Property” signs on the front door of Dewey’s cabin. (For those who are interested, after leaving the backcountry, Dewey spent his last days on a small piece of property in Long Valley, south of McCall.)

But the real task was yet to begin and that was to clean up the place and make it look like part of the surrounding wilderness. Now, I’m not exactly sure of the actual sequence of events, but I do remember that this was a rather long-term undertaking that went on for most of the field season, and that the district personnel worked on it intermittently along with our other regular jobs.

One of the first parts of the cleanup that I do remember was a flight to the ranch to more or less size up the scope of the job that we were facing. Now, as I said before, the Dewey Moore airstrip is not much of an airport, and I’m sure that that’s true even today. The airstrip is located on a short, somewhat steep slope – probably part of an ancient alluvial fan from Acorn Creek that bisects the ranch – and is some 200 feet or so above the water in Big Creek and at an angle to the general direction of the stream. Now, I’m not a pilot but here is my take on landing a light airplane at Dewey’s. First, and this should be standard

Dewey Moore Ranch cleanup, 1975 — USFS

practice with all backcountry strips, not just Dewey's, give the strip a good look-over from the air to be sure that it is clear of animals – horses, elk or deer. Also to be considered is that several airstrips like Dewey's no longer have anyone living nearby and receive no maintenance and only a few landings in the course of a year. It is a good idea to look closely for such things as holes made by coyotes or badgers digging for ground squirrels, or gullies from flash summer thunderstorms. Then fly downstream for a mile or so to a wide place in the canyon and lose enough altitude to get the aircraft heading upstream a few hundred feet above the water and at approximately the same elevation as the airstrip. This means that you will be flying pretty low in the narrow twisty canyon without a whole lot of clearance on either side and unable to see the airstrip due to twists and turns in the canyon until you clear the last twist in the stream. Suddenly, there's the strip, a little to your right, and you are committed to the landing. (I once heard Jim Larkin, the famous Idaho backcountry aviation guru, tell a young pilot something to this effect, "When you decide to land at one of these backcountry airstrips, set your mind on landing no matter what and wipe any thought of taking a wave-off and making a go-round out of your head. It just won't work and people get killed trying to do so.") This is certainly applicable to the Dewey Moore airstrip. And because the Dewey Moore strip is quite steep, you have to maintain good flying speed and not cut down on the power much as you are going to need it once you touch down in order to roll to the uphill end of the runway and be in proper position for takeoff.

Bill Jeffs was the pilot on this first cleanup flight. He was also a Forest Service mechanic and worked in the automotive maintenance and repair shop along with Francie Wallace. We looked over the place in considerable detail, and I was nearly overwhelmed by the huge amount of junk that had accumulated over the years. Some of this was combustible and could be disposed of by burning, but most of the junk was heavy metal objects that would be hard to move and dispose of. The barn was filled with piles of 55-gallon oil drums, haying and farming equipment, and all sorts of heavy, assorted junk. But the one item that really caused me a great deal of concern was an old International Harvester crawler tractor with dozer-blade. I don't remember the size, but I believe it was about the same as a D-4 Caterpillar tractor. Dewey had had someone walk this into his place many years ago, and much to my displeasure had used it in getting in his winter's supply of firewood. It hadn't been moved in years, was all grown over with vegetation, and looked like a huge pile of rusty iron that would be all but impossible to bury. Being a mechanic, Bill Jeffs examined it closely and said that there was an outside chance that it could be started, and if anyone could do so, it would be Francie Wallace. Francie was a genius when it came to working on International equipment – experience gained from his years of working with his dad at the Brown & Wallace logging and trucking part of the sawmill operation in McCall.

I immediately recognized this possibility as the key to cleaning up the place and restoring it to a natural, undeveloped state, and I got permission to fly Francie into Dewey's to see what he could do towards getting the International tractor back in operation. So another flight back to Dewey's, this time with Bill Dorris as pilot. (Bill did most of the flying for this project.) Francie gave the tractor a close examination, wouldn't say much or make any commitment as to whether or not he could ever get it started, but did remove the magneto and took it back to town to clean and test. (As I understand it, the magneto is a timing device that provides the electric spark to start the engine.)

My next step was to send a small crew and Francie and his magneto into Dewey's to actually start the cleanup. I didn't make this trip; I don't remember exactly why, but I was probably tied up with one of the many meetings the Supervisor's Office comes up with that keep rangers from being in the field. My instructions to the crew leader were, as a first priority, to give Francie all the help he needed in starting the tractor as the tractor could be the key to getting the job done.

When the crew returned to the ranger station a few days later, I got this report – Francie put the magneto back in place on the tractor and he would turn it ever so little while he had various members of the crew use a large hand crank to turn over the engine. This was really hard to do and went on and on for a long time without any results. It appeared that Francie was wearing out everyone and accomplishing nothing. So after an hour or so, most of the crew had decided that this was a lost cause and sort of drifted away and took on other work such as rolling up the barbed wire fences. When 5 o'clock rolled around and it was time to knock off work for the day, Francie was all alone at the tractor but the crew managed to get him to stop work for a while and eat something. After the meal the crew sat around a campfire talking, but Francie returned to his tinkering with the tractor. The crew was shooting the breeze among themselves around the camp fire when all of a sudden they heard, Boop! Boop! Boop! starting out low and slow and steadily increasing in volume and frequency, somewhat like the booming call of a ruffed grouse.

Wow! Francie had started the engine on that old rusty hunk of iron and had it going at a good speed!!

The next day, Francie started the cleanup operation in earnest. He first dozed a big hole at the base of the slope not far from Dewey's house that became the disposal pit. He and the crew gathered up everything movable and put it in the big pit and burned what they could. I'm not going to attempt to describe the cleanup project in detail; however, there were a few minor events involving Francie that should be documented for the record.

Once he got the engine running and had the tractor moving, it didn't take long to see why it had been parked and out of service for so many years as, from the mechanical standpoint, there were a number of things wrong with it. (I understand that this is a fairly common situation with diesel equipment in that the diesel engine often outlasts the mechanics of the rest of the piece of equipment.) The clutch to the track on one side went out making turning one way very difficult. Francie solved this by easing the tractor up onto a large boulder that stuck up out of the ground eighteen inches or so. While the tractor was off balance and sort of teetering, a few of the crew would physically push the machine around to the desired direction. This worked fairly well and Francie improved on it by finding a large round rock, shaped like a basketball. Whenever he had to turn, one of the crew would roll the rock in front of the track; Francie would ease the tractor up on the rock, and the crew would push the tractor around to the new direction.

And there were other troubles with the tractor. A fuel line or some other minor part got broken and one of the crew hiked ten miles to Cabin Creek, the nearest backcountry radio, to report this and get repairs on the way. Diesel fuel was always a problem and in short supply, but Francie stayed with the job on an intermittent basis.

Another little incident that has nothing to do with the actual cleanup project, but will be of interest to Francie's daughters, involved a little fishing the two of us did. The fishing in Big

Creek is truly outstanding as this is the largest tributary to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and the habitat of the legendary Middle Fork Redside Trout. On one of my trips into Dewey's, I brought along my fishing outfit and at the end of the work day talked Francie into hiking downstream a mile or so to the Hard Boiled Bar hole, one of the best fishing spots on Big Creek. I recall that we encountered a rattlesnake just as we were leaving Dewey's, and it took a little talking on my part to get Francie to continue as he thought we would run into more snakes, but we didn't. We only had the one fishing rod between us (my ultra-light spinning outfit) so when we got to the fishing hole, we took turns using it and managed to catch a few medium-sized fish. But every few minutes, a really large trout would come up out of the depths of the pool and take a bug or something that was floating on the surface. This fish wasn't the least bit interested in our spinning lure, so we decided to change to a dry fly with a bubble. By this time, twilight had set in and as both of us were getting along in age with not the best eyesight for close work, we had a lot of trouble trying to tie a fly on to the light 4# test line in the fading light. Even with strong light, it is difficult to work with 4# line and sometimes you have the feeling that you would be better off trying to fish with a cobweb. I can still shut my eyes and visualize the two of us old farts standing there in the twilight beside Big Creek fumbling around trying to tie that fly on to the light fishing line while every few minutes this big fish would make a clunking sound taking a bug off the surface of the water only a few feet from us.

Well, we finally had the fly on and were all ready for a cast. What followed for the next few minutes was a debate as to which one of us should make the cast. Francie saying, "It's your fishing outfit, so you do it," and me saying, "Hey, I live back here and have a lot of opportunity to fish Big Creek, so you take the rod." He eventually did so and about 15 seconds after the bubble and fly hit the water, Whambo! Fish On! The little ultra-light rod bent in an arch a lot like one of McDonald's famous golden arches, and the tip bounced up and down in keeping with the fish's jumps and dives as he tried to free himself from the hook. But to no avail. Francie had his hands full for a few minutes but managed to land a beautiful 18-inch or so redside trout. He was tickled pink and took the fish with him when he flew out the next morning and proudly showed it around the automotive shop. (This was in the days before catch-and-release regulations were established for Big Creek.)

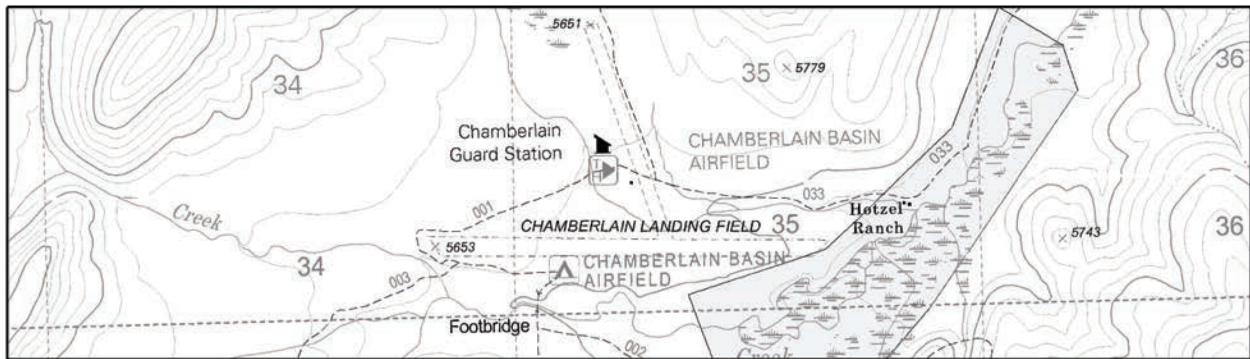
I took a personal interest in the cleanup project and was anxious to have it completed before winter set in. So toward the end of the normal field season when most of the crew had left to return to school, Francie and I, just the two of us, flew into Dewey's to finish up the cleanup and bury the tractor. Francie bulldozed a hole a little larger than the tractor at the base of the slope for the tractor's grave and did some other cleanup work, and we spent the night in Dewey's house. The next morning we were sitting around the small kitchen table finishing up breakfast, drinking coffee, and talking about the work to be done that day. All that was left to do was to dispose of the house, cover the remains with dirt, bury the tractor, and we were through. I think that I was the one who said "You know, I'm going to do something I've always wanted to do." I stood up, grabbed the edge of the table with a jerk, upsetting it and sending the frying pan and the dishes (Dewey's dishes) clattering across the floor. Now, that's one way to do the breakfast cleanup!

This was to be Francie's last day on the project, and things went fairly smoothly for a while. We had put the last of the diesel fuel in the tractor in the morning, and by mid-afternoon we had the house site looking pretty good. The only thing of any real importance left to do

was to move the tractor into its final resting place and bury it. But Francie wanted to leave the place in tiptop shape, and he poked around with the tractor doing a little final touchup work here and there. He knew that he was getting low on fuel, but he wanted to smooth out the edges of the disposal pit that was only a few feet from the hole he had dozed in readiness for the tractor. He was doing this when the engine died – out of fuel! What to do now? The nearest diesel was probably in Yellow Pine almost 50 miles away. You can't push a bulldozer like you can a car when you only have to move it a short distance and I had visions of shoveling and banking dirt all around it and making a mound out of it.

Once again, Francie saved the day. The tractor was resting on uneven ground and the fuel tank was not level. Francie looked in the tank and there was a small amount of fuel that couldn't get to the engine because of the angle the tractor was in. So he unbolted the tank, propped it up in a position that would allow the fuel to get to the engine, started up the engine and quickly moved the tractor into its final resting place. And that's the end of this little tale. Maybe someday way the future, archaeologists will discover the tractor and scratch their heads in wonderment.

Francie Wallace digging a grave for the dozer, 1975 — USFS



U.S. Geological Survey

Small World

You who are old enough to remember things about WWII might remember the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, the Ski Troopers, and particularly so if you have an outdoor bent. This outfit trained for mountain warfare at Camp Hale in Colorado's high country. (Incidentally, the initial recruitment for the 10th Mountain Division came from the ranks of the National Ski Patrol cadre.) The division was sent overseas to fight in Italy. They had only limited opportunity to use their skis on the battlefield, but they did take on the German Army in the mountains of northern Italy, some of the roughest terrain in Europe. The country was so rugged that the troops couldn't use wheeled or tracked vehicles and had to resort to pack horses and mules to supply the front lines.

When the war was over, the old sergeants, who were in charge of the P & S (pack and saddle stock), saw to it that their charges were returned to Colorado and not abandoned in a foreign land. However, once back in the U.S., the army decided that they had no further use for pack and saddle stock and decided to disband the entire unit. It was reported that this upset the old mule-whacking sergeants who, like most packers, had grown downright fond and protective of their animals. The sergeants persuaded the army to at least look around for another government agency that would provide a good home for their P & S.

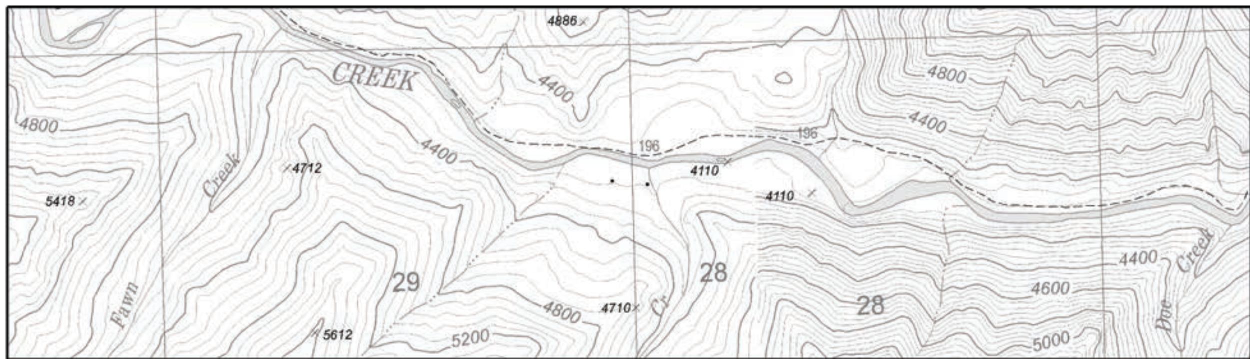
And that's where the U.S. Forest Service came into the picture. The old Chamberlain Ranger District on the Payette National Forest received two of these "army mules" as they were first called by the Forest Service crews.

One of the Chamberlain "army mules" that we named Dan had a very distinctive split ear that made for easy identification. Bill Cluff, the trail crew foreman on the district, became quite attached to Dan and made a riding mule in addition to a pack animal out of Dan. (I still remember Bill riding into the Chamberlain Station singing, "Oh Dan and I with throats burning dry and souls that cry for water – cool, clear water" to the tune of one of the Sons of the Pioneers cowboy songs.)

As Chamberlain is so remote, we seldom had many visitors except at the start of the big game hunting season. At that time, it was not unusual for a hundred or so fly-in hunters to be camped round the airfield. Occasionally, out of curiosity, some of the hunters would wander around the station.

One fall day during my first year of rangering in the backcountry, the district packer was working with some of the mules in the corral. One hunter sauntered over to the corral, leaned on the fence, took in the scene and then suddenly became very excited. "Hey, I know that mule! He was an ammunition mule in Fox Company, 3rd Battalion, Field Artillery in the 10th Mountain over in Italy!" He went on to tell us some war and mule stories.

We treated Dan with a little extra respect from then on, now that we had found out that he was a combat veteran.



U.S. Geological Survey

John Vines and the Inebriated Ranger

John Vines was one of several backcountry characters who lived along Big Creek and led a hermit-like existence. The main objective of this little write-up is to document the circumstance when he managed to get me drunk to the point where I could have been arrested for RUI (Riding Under the Influence), but first I want to give the reader some background information on John Vines and some of my earlier contacts with him. He was, in many ways, one of the "Most Unforgettable Characters I Ever Met," as they would say in the *Reader's Digest*.

John lived on an old homestead that was at one time known as Clover. Back in the early days when there were considerably more people living along Big Creek than now, there was even a short-lived post office with the name Clover, Idaho, at this location. This property is approximately 23 miles down Big Creek from the former Big Creek Ranger Station, and the only access at the time of this incident was by trail. However, an airstrip was constructed on the property in later years.

The first encounter I had with John was in the spring of 1958, my first year on the combined Big Creek/Chamberlain Ranger District, while doing maintenance work on the Big Creek trail. Two other Forest Service people and I were camped at Cabin Creek about two miles downstream from John's place and were engaged in working the trail in both the downstream and upstream direction from there. By our second or third week on this project, we were working on the section of trail that passes through a large flat area on the John Vines property. As I remember, this was about mid-May and the sun was beating down on us, and we were all hot and thirsty when we heard a shout from the general direction of a little cabin on the opposite side of Big Creek. A rather roly-poly figure motioned that he was going to come across the creek to talk to us and would meet us a short distance upstream. So we went on for a few hundred yards where there was a somewhat rickety cable car crossing and here comes John Vines with a wet gunny sack of cold beer. Man, that was a great introduction, and John Vines and the new ranger were off to a good start!

I visited with John numerous times over the years and got to know a little about his background and why he chose to live the life of a hermit in the backcountry. For one thing, he had been an army pilot in WWI in the days of the Jenny biplanes when aviation was just getting started. So he probably was in his early or mid-sixties when I first met

him in 1958. He had also been part owner of a successful restaurant in San Francisco. I gathered that he and his partner had had a falling out; a woman was somehow involved, and he had developed a drinking problem. Also, he was considerably overweight and either had experienced a heart attack or had been warned by his doctor that he was likely to have one unless he made a drastic change in his lifestyle. That led him to pull up stakes in California and move to Idaho. Just how he ended up on this particular tract of isolated land along Big Creek in the Idaho backcountry, I never found out.

He lived in a small one-room cabin with a sod roof and a dirt floor on the south side of Big Creek, opposite the trail that is on the north side. This meant that his cabin was at the base of a north-facing slope that was densely timbered and was completely lacking in direct sunshine for many months of the year. Consequently, living there was somewhat like living in an ice box. Not only was there a lot of snow that was slow in melting, but also the cabin, trees and everything else were covered with thick layers of hoar frost for much of the year. I remember receiving a brief letter from him during the winter in which he said that he wanted to see me "when the sun shines on both sides of the mountain." I'm sure that he looked forward to this with considerable anticipation, and it must have been a real momentous event when the sun finally did return to his little cabin.

John Vines crossing Big Creek on his cable car, 1967 — Maurice Hornocker

One of my better visits with John was completely unplanned and took place while I engaged in an activity quite common with backcountry travelers – chasing horses. (I once heard an old timer summarize his backcountry experience with this simple statement – "I've been in the backcountry for 18 years and at least 12 of those years were spent hunting for my horses.") On this occasion, Larry Garner and I were camped for the night in Spring Creek, about four miles downstream from John's place. We hobbled the bell mare and one of our saddle horses and turned the bunch loose to graze for the night. The next morning – no horses and nothing but tracks headed back up Big Creek to the ranger station. So we each grabbed a couple of halters and took off up the trail at a fast pace. We caught up with the stock in a mile or so, but the canyon was narrow and the terrain on either side of the trail was rough and brushy. We couldn't get around them to head them off and stop their escape until we got to the big flat on John's place. As I was considerably younger

than Larry, I got the task of running off-trail around the bunch to get in front of them. Now this is a good deal harder than it might seem, as that old bell mare knew all about hobbles and could run almost as fast hobbled as she could without them. But with the expenditure of a great deal of effort, I finally managed to get in front of them and get things stopped. Now, all of this involved a lot of hollering on our part, noise from the bell clanking around the neck of the bell mare, and a large cloud of trail dust that drew John Vines' attention. So, we had to cross the creek riding bareback, of course, as our saddles were back in camp at Spring Creek, and visit with John.

Now, John had a postage-stamp-sized garden (one of the few things that he did that required any physical effort), and it just so happened that he had harvested some vegetables the day before. He had a large kettle of new potatoes (the little red-skinned variety) and fresh green peas simmering away on the stove. As Larry and I had made the dash up the trail without breakfast, we were famished and we really went after those spuds. I don't think that I have ever appreciated a meal more than John Vines' new potatoes and garden-fresh peas.

John always had a story to tell and this time it was about an event that had taken place during the previous winter that could have been disastrous. His cabin had a sod roof and he had a little trouble with dirt and small litter falling out of the ceiling and down on top of his cook stove. He put a stop to this by tacking sheets of tar paper to the ceiling – maybe not the smartest thing to do as tar paper is quite combustible.

John's account of this little event went about like this – "I got up and started a fire in the stove to cook my breakfast, took the coffee pot out to the creek (the creek is only a few steps from the cabin – more on this later) and filled it with water. When I came back inside, the ceiling was on fire! So I threw the water in the coffee pot at the fire, ran back to the creek for a refill, and repeated this a couple of times when I noticed that I was getting short of breath and a little dizzy. I stopped for a second and told myself, "John, you better slow down or you are going to have a heart attack!" Then I put the frying pan on the stove, sliced me a couple of pieces of bacon, put them in the frying pan, made a few more trips to the creek for more water to throw on the fire, stopped to turn the bacon over, cracked a couple of eggs to put in the frying pan, a few more trips to the creek and, you know, my timing was darn near perfect because as soon as I got that fire out my breakfast was ready. But the coffee was a little late."

This might sound like a pretty good little backcountry story, but it was much better when John told it. One of the things that I regret most about my time in the backcountry is that I did not make an effort to tape record some of the old timers telling their stories. These guys are all gone now and there will never be any replacements: Lafe Cox and his tale of driving a loaded stock truck up the snow-covered grade coming out of Monumental Creek when the grade got so steep that the horses in the back lost their footing and crashed against the tail gate, thereby raising the front wheels completely off the ground. He lost all ability to steer but didn't dare let up on the gas or they would never have made the summit. Dewey Moore with his tale of leaving the Steens Mountain country because he had a bad back and then getting bucked off old Cedar just as he topped over Profile Gap at the head of Big Creek, thereby curing his back pain. Former Chamberlain Forest Ranger Val Simpson and his tale of the supervisor chewing him out for neglecting to instruct the Sheepeater lookout not to clean his paint brushes and dispose of excess paint by painting

the rocks around the lookout. And probably the best storyteller of all, Eggs Beckley from the Sulfur Creek Ranch on the Middle Fork, who had his very own vocabulary and unique way of talking. I used to follow him around at the Idaho Outfitter & Guides meeting just to listen to him talk. We have lost their voices, and the printed word just doesn't come close to relating a good backcountry story the way these guys told them.

Well, so much for the introduction to John Vines and now onto the RUI tale that is the main part of this write-up. One fall, about mid-October, shortly before the Forest Service pack and saddle stock were scheduled to be trailed out of the backcountry for the winter, several Payette National Forest wildlife people and I made a pack trip down Big Creek to establish browse transects on big game winter range. I won't elaborate on the purpose of browse transects other than that they are a method of determining the extent of utilization of browse plants by big game animals and are one method of keeping watch on the health of the all-important winter range. We established a camp at the mouth of Coxey Creek and worked up that drainage for a day. The following day we left the camp in place with the intention of returning for the night after working in the Cave Creek area farther down Big Creek. This involved traveling over the Coxey Bluff section of the Big Creek Trail. This is the highest part of the entire 40-mile-long trail and a lot like the Charlie Russell painting, "Meat's Not Meat 'Til It's In The Pan," in that the trail is only about 30 inches in width on a near vertical cliff face. If you or your saddle horse missed a step, you would fall about 75 feet straight down the face of the cliff into the creek. (I always wondered what would happen if you encountered another pack string traveling in the opposite direction.)

We also had to ride past John Vines' place. When we were opposite his cabin, he came outside and called for me to come over for a visit. "Can't do it now, John, I have to stay with these guys but I'll stop later today on our way back to Coxey!" This was in the fall when the days are getting short. When we reached John's place on the way back to camp twilight was upon us, but I knew that John was counting on a visit and that I had to keep my promise.

Now, to get some idea of just what I was faced with regarding horsemanship at this point, the reader needs to know that horses have a mind of their own. On a day trip like the one we were on, the rider usually has to urge his mount along and make him step right along as you move away from camp. But once you turn around and head back to camp, no more coaxing the horse – he's ready to travel and you have to rein him in on occasion. Also, horses are quite gregarious in that they like to stick together and don't take to being split apart from the group. So, when I reined in old Duke and made him drop behind the rest of the horses that were on their way back to camp, he didn't like it at all. Then when I forced him off the trail and down the steep bank into Big Creek, he was downright uncooperative. Now Big Creek is a pretty sizable stream, even in October, and there is no well-established ford at the Vines' place. Duke would hesitantly take a step, his hoof would slide off the side of a big rounded rock underwater and out of sight, and we sort of half stumbled and lurched along. I was afraid that he might lose his footing and go down so I took my boots out of the stirrups, and got a firm hold on the saddle horn with the hope that if he did fall, I could somehow push myself away from the horse. It is not uncommon for horse and rider to get tangled up and drown under similar circumstances.

I did make it across okay and John was his usual jolly self and glad to see me. He had obviously been looking forward to someone to talk with ever since the Forest Service

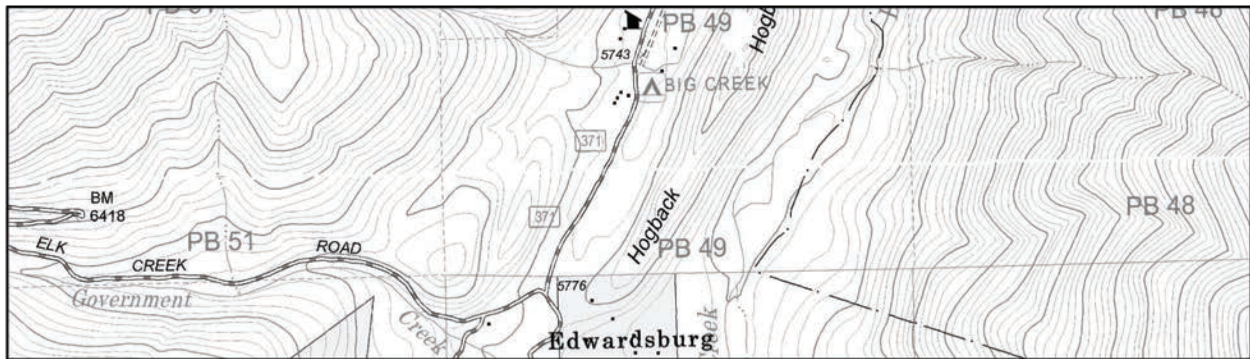
group rode past his place that morning. Now, John was a drinking man and although I'm not (my alcohol consumption is limited to an occasional beer or a glass of wine and I avoid the hard stuff), he insisted on making a couple of "Big Creek Hillbilly Speed Ball Specials" to celebrate our visit.

The first thing he did was to retrieve two tall glasses from his dishwashing system. I mentioned earlier that there was a small stream near his cabin. Well, more explanation is needed. This little stream is on the maps as Buck Creek. It flows quite steeply off the mountain just behind John's cabin. As part of his campaign to avoid anything linked to work, like washing dishes, he had placed a large galvanized wash tub in the stream and rigged a length of two-inch diameter pipe to spill a continuous stream of ice cold water into the tub. All his dirty dishes, no matter how greasy they might be, went into the tub under the theory that the water was so cold that nothing harmful could survive there. Well, he fished around in the tub and came up with two glasses. As you might guess, they were pretty cloudy and a long way from the ads that you see on TV for spotless glassware if you use a certain detergent in your automatic dishwasher.

We had a great little visit as I was undoubtedly one of the last persons to cross the creek and talk with him that fall before the long winter set in, greatly curtailing visitors in the backcountry. We discussed the usual backcountry politics – his feelings about his neighbors along Big Creek, the aerial mail service that he depended upon for supplies, and the number-one topic of all those who live in the backcountry – the Forest Service. I remember him saying, "I really believe in this wilderness stuff that you are always talking about. I defy anyone to say that I have made any improvements to this place." This was certainly true as he didn't even have a decent outhouse – his toilet consisted of a pole nailed between two trees. And he didn't spend much effort gathering firewood; just went out in the surrounding woods and gathered down-stuff, somewhat like you would do for a one-night campfire. But in spite of, if not because of all his lazy ways, John was truly loved by those of us who got to know him. I considered John Vines to be part of the backcountry – just like the rocks and the trees and the water in Big Creek.

By this time the "Big Creek Hillbilly Speed Ball Special" was really getting to me, and I knew that I had better get out of there before I would spend the night passed out on the dirt floor of John's cabin. So I took my leave of John's hospitality, untied Duke, jumped up in the middle of him, gave him his head, that is, let the reins go slack, and away we went. Whichever way he wanted to go was fine with me. This time we splashed across Big Creek like it was a little mud puddle, lunged up the steep bank onto the trail, and clattered up and over the rocky Coxey Bluff like it was a bridle path. It's a good thing that horses can see in the dark of night because I sure couldn't. I rode like I thought I was Dean Oliver at the rodeo. If there had been a traffic cop waiting in ambush, I surely would have been pulled over and given a ticket for Riding Under the Influence. But old Duke got me back to camp in fine shape, and the rest of the Forest Service group wanted to know what I had been up to. Lo! The Poor Ranger!

John Vines' cabin, 1967. — USFS



U.S. Geological Survey

The "Rest of the Story" Behind the Photo of Napier Edwards with his Mail Sack

First of all, for those of you who know little or nothing about Napier Edwards, he was the last of the Edwards family for which the community of Edwardsburg – at what we now call Big Creek – was named. He was an only child, a lifelong bachelor and backcountry recluse who was somewhat of a thorn in the side of the Forest Service. He wrote a long string of letters to the U.S. Congress and other authorities accusing the Forest Service of bad deeds such as introducing mosquitoes to the backcountry to bedevil the local people and deliberately setting forest fires to get the local men to fight them while Forest Service agents looted their cabins. I have no real memory of the date, even the year, that this photo was made of Napier Edwards on the Big Creek Airfield with McFadden Mountain in the background, but I well remember the encounter with him that day.

Pilot Dave Schas and I, riding shotgun, were on the mail run in Travel Air 9038. We landed at Big Creek, taxied to the old wooden mailbox on the southwest end of the strip, left Nape's mail there, turned the airplane around for takeoff (no small feat on skis) and waited some time for Nape to show up in case he had mail to send out.

After about half an hour or so with no activity, we got back in the airplane, took off to the north and made the turn to the south back over the airfield toward Profile Gap. Then we spotted Napier shuffling along on his skis in the vicinity of the Big Creek Lodge headed toward the mailbox.

Dave said, "We gotta go back. If we don't, the old coot will write to the Postmaster General complaining about the mail service."

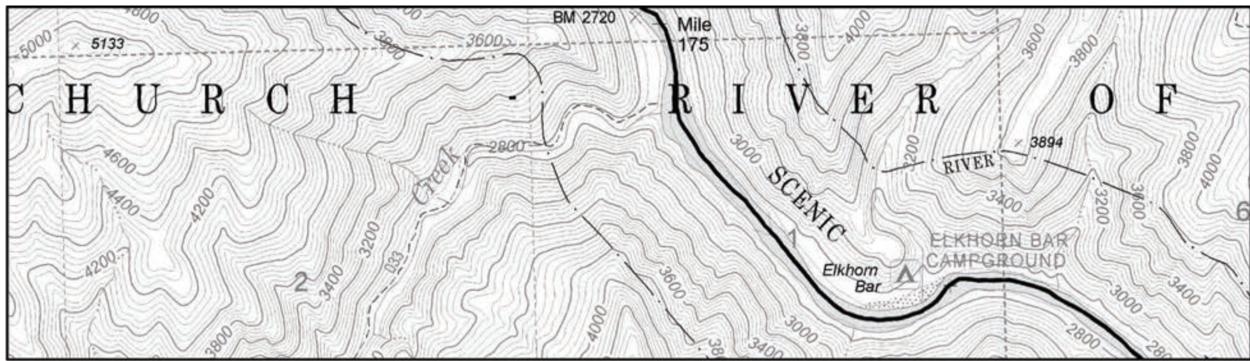
So, once more we flew around the Hogback, landed and taxied to the mailbox. By this time, Nape had picked up his mail and was skiing back south toward the Lodge. I hurried out of the airplane, ran up behind him, and called for him to come back and talk to us.

Now this is the part that really made a lasting impression on me. He had to get those skis moving in the opposite direction. Instead of doing this by making a kick turn, as most of us skiers do, or maybe just stepping the skis around in a circle as those no longer nimble enough for a kick turn might do, he kicked his boots out of the one strap bindings, turned

around, kicked back into the bindings from the opposite direction and skied back to the mailbox. His skis that were darn near as wide as those on the Travel Air stayed in place right on the snow while he pulled off this maneuver.

I was so impressed with this bit of backcountry ski technique that I took his photograph.

Napier Edwards at the Big Creek airfield. — Earl Dodds



U.S. Geological Survey

The Trail Crew and River Booty

This is a little account of an unplanned event of no real consequence that, nevertheless, lives on in the memory of those involved as one of the high points in their summer work experience in the Idaho backcountry.

As most of the old Big Creek Ranger District was truly backcountry with very few roads, the system of approximately 600 miles of trails on the district was of great importance to us. That was how we got around our almost 800,000-acre portion of the backcountry. Consequently, we spent a lot of time and effort on trail maintenance and even built a few new trails.

One of my personal projects as ranger was to complete the trail down Chamberlain Creek from the Chamberlain station to the Salmon River, a distance of approximately 20 miles. This involved the construction of 4 miles of new trail on the lower end of Chamberlain Creek, from the mouth of McCalla Creek to the river. When this job was completed, I was proud that we then had water grade access to the Salmon River from the Chamberlain station, much as was the case with the trail down Big Creek to the Middle Fork from the Big Creek Ranger Station.

A few years following its initial construction, this last four-mile section of the Chamberlain trail became so brushed in that it was a hindrance to travelers. So we sent the two-man trail crew and the Chamberlain packer down the creek with instructions to cut the brush and bring this section of trail up to standard. This proved to be no small task as not only was the brush quite thick, but since this was one of the lowest parts of the district in elevation, it was hot in mid-August and there were rattlesnakes and poison ivy to contend with.

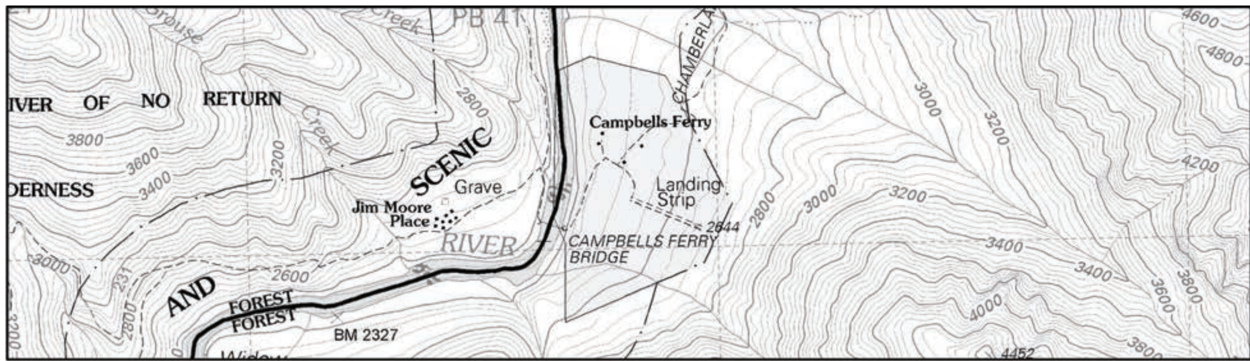
When the crew finally got to the mouth of the creek and there was the beautiful Salmon River running nice and clear and cool and inviting, they decided that it was time to take a break and do a little skinny-dipping. I think that they had to move a little up or down stream in order to find a suitable hole for swimming but in the river they went. When they were doing so, one of the guys looked across the river and discovered an eddy with something in it going round and round in the current. It looked like a bottle so he said to the other guys, “Hey, why don’t one of you swim over there and get that bottle!” And after some debate and persuasion, the most athletic guy in the group went upstream and used the current to get across and retrieve the bottle.

A little explanation is needed on this matter of river booty. This section of the Salmon River is highly regarded among river runners as providing one of the premier whitewater experiences in the United States. The Salmon is Idaho's famous "River of No Return." Whitewater boaters from all over are attracted to run challenging rapids in one of the deepest and scenic canyons in North America. It is not uncommon for a rubber raft to flip in one of the rapids whereby everything gets dumped into the river. The heavy stuff that is not tied to the raft goes to the bottom (like your favorite shotgun). The lighter objects float on down the river and become what is known as river booty and are subject to salvage by a lucky finder.

And river booty is what the trail crew had found floating in that eddy. For when they got the bottle back on their side of the river and got a good look at it, it proved to be one of those white, opaque, plastic bottles about two quarts in size that are so popular with backpackers and floaters. There was a strip of duct tape on the side, and in large letters made with a felt tip pen was the word, "DRAMBUIE" (a premium liqueur) and the bottle was more than half full!

The confluence of Chamberlain Creek and the Salmon River. — USFS

The crew decided right then and there that brushing out the lower end of the Chamberlain Creek trail was not such a bad assignment after all. In fact, this was just about the best thing that had happened to them all summer.



U.S. Geological Survey

Vern Wisner and the Ruger Arms Company

In 1994 I received an inquiry from Carol Furey-Werhan who was doing research for a book she was planning to write about the life of Frances Zaunmiller Wisner, one of the more colorful residents living along the Salmon River in the extreme northern part of the Big Creek Ranger District. Carol wanted to know if I knew any interesting little stories or tales that she could use in her book. I told her the following account of Frances' husband, Vern, and his dealing with the Ruger Arms Company that I had picked up during my tenure as ranger in the Salmon River backcountry. She thought that this was exactly the type of tale that would go well in her book and asked me to make a written account and send it to her. And this I did, and as the write-up was intended to be a minor part of the book and the book would provide the necessary background and introduction, I did not include this in my write-up.

Carol Furey-Werhan pretty much rewrote the little story using her own words and included it as a minor part of her book. Now that I would like to add this story to my memories as a stand-alone document, I recognize that it needs an introduction. Also, I want to add a little in the way of a postscript and "The Rest of the Story."

INTRODUCTION

Campbell's Ferry is located on the Main Salmon River approximately 46 miles upstream from Riggins, Idaho, the nearest town. This is a remote area with no roads. The usual access is by trail, boat, or airplane, using a short, extremely challenging airstrip on the property. This section of the Salmon River is classified as "Wild" and is part of the Wild and Scenic River System. Campbell's Ferry is surrounded by the huge Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, one of the largest wilderness areas in the U.S. The property has a colorful past dating back to the turn of the 20th century when a ferry was established at this location to aid in transporting miners across the Salmon River during the Thunder Mountain Gold Rush. Campbell's Ferry is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. More detailed information is available in the book, "*Haven in the Wilderness, The Story of Frances Zaunmiller Wisner*," by Carol Furey-Werhan and on the Internet at www.campbellsferry.com.

For those who might not know much about the Salmon River, I want to provide a little more briefing. Although entirely Idaho's river in that from its source in the Sawtooth Mountains to its mouth on the Snake River in Hells Canyon, the river is entirely within the state; this waterway is truly a national treasure. It is often said that it is the longest stream in the U.S. that is entirely within one state. It is completely free-flowing in that there are no dams or other man-made obstructions. Sections of the river are paralleled by U.S. highways, while other sections can be accessed by low-standard roads and pack trails. There are sizable sections that have no roads or trails. Whitewater rafting and kayaking are popular on the main stem and several of the larger tributaries, and considered to be world class. Power boating (jet boating) is permitted and popular on the main stem. The entire Salmon River country is recognized among hunters and fishermen for its outstanding fishery and big game herds. In many ways, it is an outdoor recreation paradise and a national treasure.

VERN WISNER AND THE RUGER ARMS COMPANY

Sometime in the late 1960s, Ruger Arms announced that it would produce a new premier hunting rifle – a single shot rifle that they named Ruger Number One (that is the model number). The company announced that it would produce this rifle in a wide range of calibers which included most of the more popular sizes such as 30-06, 270, 7mm, etc., (these are all fairly modern, high powered cartridges) and the old 45-70. Now the 45-70 is an ancient turnip-thrower dating back to the Spanish-American War and beyond. It shoots a large diameter, heavy, slow-moving bullet that many old timers like, although most gun people consider the 45-70 to be hopelessly outclassed by the more modern calibers.

Well, ole Vern Wisner had one of those old Spanish-American War Springfields in 45-70 that he had used for many years quite effectively. So when he heard that Ruger was going to produce its new Ruger Number One in 45-70, he ordered one.

Shortly thereafter he received notice from Ruger that his order had been accepted but that the demand for the 45-70 was so low that it would be awhile before they made any guns in that caliber as they were tooled up to make more popular guns such as the 270s and the 7mm. Well, this did not sit too well with Vern, but he settled down, somewhat impatiently, to wait for Ruger to make his rifle. This pending event became a daily item of conversation for anyone who happened by the Ferry back in those days.

Months went by and finally he received a letter to the effect that Ruger had decided not to make any rifles in 45-70 as there had not been enough orders for that caliber to justify tooling up for them. The letter requested that Vern select another more popular caliber as these were better hunting rifles anyway. The letter was signed by Bill Ruger, President, Ruger Arms Co.

Now, this really did upset ole Vern and he caught the next mail plane to town. As soon as he got there (Grangeville), he went to the pay phone outside the hanger building and called Ruger Arms in Southport, Connecticut, and asked to speak to Bill Ruger. The girl on the other end said, "But sir, Mr. Ruger is the president of this company. Won't you speak to someone else?" Vern said, "Well, I'm the president of my company, too, and I want to talk to the president of your company!" The conversation went on like this for some time during which Vern apparently convinced the telephone receptionist that he was a genuine

Idaho backcountry character. Finally she said, "Sir, Mr. Ruger is out of the office for lunch right now, but if you will give me your telephone number, I'll have him call you back at about 1 o'clock." So Vern gave her the number of the pay phone and went back inside the hanger to wait.

While he was in the hanger, he related his experience on the telephone to the people working there. They all had a little chuckle and then one of them said, "Why, Vern, you just got the classic put-off. None of those secretaries for those big companies ever let just anybody talk to the president. You'll never hear from the outfit again." But much to everyone's surprise, at the appointed time, the phone rang in the outside booth. Ole Vern answers and a gruff voice on the other end says, "Does someone here want to speak to Bill Ruger?" Vern says in an equally gruff voice, "Darn right there is! Say, do you make those guns of yours to sell and so people can hunt with them, or do you just talk about them and advertise them in magazines?"

There followed about half-an-hour of bantering during which Mr. Ruger pressed Vern as to why he thought he needed such a big cannon anyway. What did he intend to shoot – elephants? Vern countered with accounts of his hunting experiences in the Salmon River country and how his old 45-70 Springfield was one of the best game-getters in Idaho. Vern painted such a rosy picture that he ended up inviting Mr. Ruger out for a visit and to do a little hunting himself.

Well, this must have impressed Mr. Ruger considerably because just before they broke off their conversation, he said, "Mr. Wisner, I personally will see to it that your rifle is shipped today."

So once again, ole Vern settled down at Campbell's Ferry to await the arrival of that much talked-about and sought-after rifle. Only this time, when the mail plane came in a few weeks later, lo and behold, there was a wooden crate addressed to Vern Wisner, Salmon River Air Star Route, from Ruger Arms Co., Southport, Connecticut! Inside was not just a run-of-the-mill production line rifle, but a truly fine piece of gunsmithing with an unusually beautiful stock of fiddleback walnut. A Ruger Number One in 45-70, Serial Number 5, a showpiece! (Those of us who looked at it with some envy guessed that Bill Ruger must have taken the rifle out of his display case and shipped it off to that old mountaineer out in Idaho who just had to have a 45-70 Ruger rifle.)

If Mr. Ruger's objective in sending this obviously highly-prized rifle to the backcountry of Idaho was to make an old man happy in his last days, he certainly succeeded. Vern was way too old to hunt the steep slopes of the Salmon River. His eyesight had deteriorated to the point that it was doubtful that he could even see the front sight on that rifle. Yet he loved to show it off and tell how accurate it would shoot and how he had called up Ruger Arms and demanded to talk to Bill Ruger, the President of that outfit…

He kept the rifle hanging in the gun rack in the front room of the house at the Ferry. It stood out from the other old, well-used guns on the rack like a jewel in a bunch of cobblestones. After Vern died (March 13, 1974), Frances kept the 45-70 on the rack for a while and I never failed to fondle it on my trips to the Ferry. Then on one trip, it was missing, and I asked Frances about it. She said, "Well, I caught a river floater trying to break into the house, and I knew he wasn't after me, so I sent it to Grangeville for safe keeping."

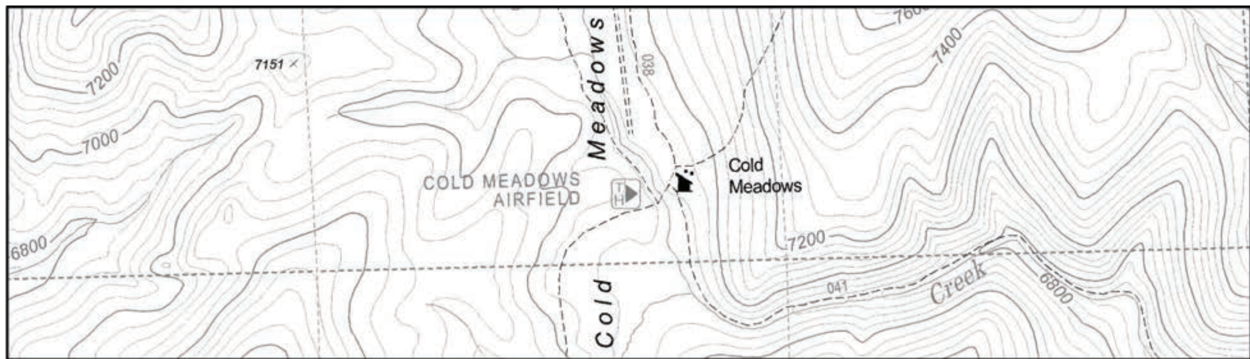
The Ruger is now owned and cherished by Zeke West, a boatman who operates out of the Whitewater Ranch, four miles upriver from the Ferry.

POSTSCRIPT

Although I was content to end this story with the rifle being in the possession of Zeke West at the Whitewater Ranch, Carol Furey-Werhan was not. She wanted to find out just how Bill Ruger was able to ship this rifle on such short notice after the Ruger Company had sent Vern several letters stating that they were not going to produce any rifles in the 45-70 caliber. She told me that she probably made somewhat of a nuisance of herself by calling Ruger Arms on several occasions and requesting to speak to Bill Ruger. Finally, one of the women in the office, who apparently had been with the company for years and knew a lot about the various personalities there, told her something to this effect, "Miss Werhan, President Bill Ruger is entirely capable of doing just what you suspect happened. He took that rifle out of the company display case and sent it off to that old codger in the wilds of Idaho who just had to have a 45-70 rifle, but he's never going to admit to having done so."

Keep in mind that the serial number on this rifle is No 5. That means that it is the fifth Ruger Number One Rifle ever made! It would be interesting to make a visit to the gun sections of Cabela's or the Sportsman's Warehouse and see what the serial numbers are on the Ruger Number One rifles that are currently in stock.

Francis and Vern Wisner (unknown pilot). — Wayne Johnson



U.S. Geological Survey

Jim Tracy — I Just Did Something You've Never Done

Jim Tracy was another young fellow who spent a summer working on the Big Creek Ranger District that I grew to like in a big way.

Jim came to my office during the winter wanting to work in the backcountry the next summer as he had something going on in his personal life that he wanted to get away from for a while and be on his own. We talked about giving him one of the fire lookout positions, but no, he said that would be a little too confining for his personality and he would much rather have the job manning the Cold Meadows Station where he would be free to roam over a large area. Cold Meadows is just about as remote and isolated a location as there is in the Idaho backcountry.

Jim was from Emmett, Idaho, on the banks of the Payette River. He had his own horse, Snipper, that he wanted to use while he was in the backcountry. At that time the Payette National Forest was wintering their pack and saddle stock (P & S) at Ola, a small town on Squaw Creek, not far from Emmett. So I told him to get someone to truck Snipper to Ola and turn him in with the Forest Service P & S, and we would trail his horse into the backcountry along with the Forest Service stock.

This worked out just fine, and Jim and Snipper spent the summer at Cold Meadows where the two of them worked a lot of trail, packed supplies to the Grass Mountain and Acorn Butte lookouts, and generally served as the Forest Service presence in a large chunk of backcountry.

Toward the end of the summer, Jim had to quit and head for home to go back to school. I offered him an airplane flight into McCall, and he could leave Snipper at Big Creek and we would trail him out to Ola along with the Forest Service P&S stock in November. But Jim didn't like this idea. He and Snipper had done a lot of bonding during the summer, and I think he was afraid that someone else would ride his horse. So what about Snipper? Jim decided that he and Snipper would just hit the trail and ride all the way home.

Now, an older person would have come up with all sorts of ideas as to why this was not a very smart thing to do. But for a young fellow who has yet to reach his 20th birthday and

with a little of the Idaho cowboy in his blood, this seemed like no big deal; in fact, it would be an adventure.

The trail distance from Cold Meadows to the Big Creek Ranger Station is 33 miles. No trouble for Jim as he even made a little side trip to say good bye to the lookout on Acorn Butte who he had packed supplies to during the summer, and he and Snipper came trotting into the Big Creek Station one afternoon in late August. I put him up for the night and fed Snipper a little Forest Service oats and helped get the two of them on their way the next morning. He was headed for the Cox Ranch on Johnson Creek, a little on the other side of the small town of Yellow Pine, 30 miles away by low-standard road and with a climb through Profile Gap that is 7,605 feet in elevation. After that, he still had over a hundred miles to go!

In the early afternoon, the telephone in the office rang and here was Jim reporting in from Yellow Pine. (At that time, we still had the old crank telephones with number-nine wire strung on trees between Big Creek and Yellow Pine. We were probably a couple of decades behind the rest of the Forest Service in replacing this old system with something more modern, but then, we liked it that way.)

I said, "Gee, Jim, you got over there in record time. You surely didn't run that horse, did you?"

He replied, "No, but I just did something that I bet you've never done."

"Yeah, what did you do, Jim?"

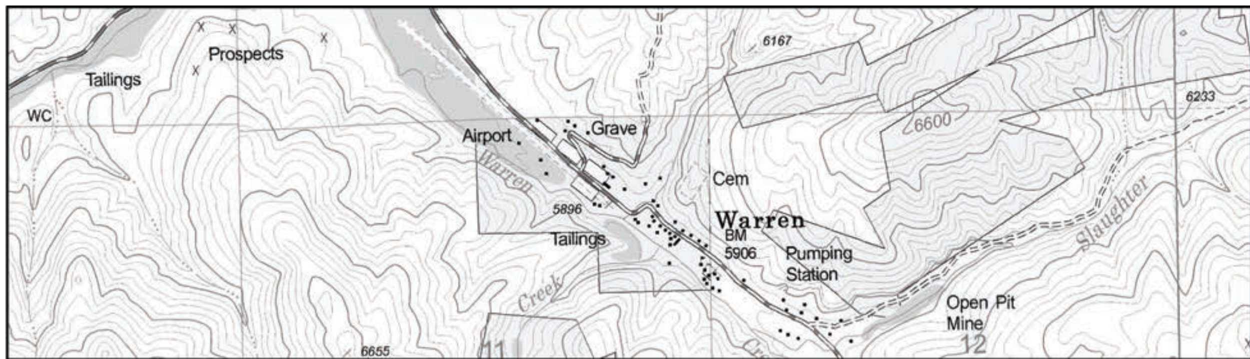
"I just **hitchhiked with a horse**!"

Now for the rest of the story: Jim was only a few miles out of Big Creek when he met Carl Jones, one of the big game hunting outfitters, trucking a load of hay and supplies into Big Creek for the fall hunting season. Carl told Jim that he would go and unload his truck and then would pick up Jim and Snipper on his return and give the two of them a ride to Yellow Pine. Not only did he do this, but Carl took them all the way out of the backcountry to his home near Weiser in the Boise Valley. Jim still had a little way to go to Emmett, but by travelling on farm

Jim Tracy at Cold Meadows. — Jim Tracy

roads and spending one night in the fairgrounds in Payette, where he put Snipper in one of the livestock stalls, he didn't have any trouble.

I don't see Jim very often anymore but when I do, I greet him with, "I bet I just did something that you've never done!"



U.S. Geological Survey

Snowed In at Warren

Flying in a light airplane has been a major means of transportation in the Idaho backcountry for many years. Most of the isolated ranches and properties where people are in residence along Big Creek, Monumental Creek, and the Middle Fork and Main Salmon River have an airstrip on the property or nearby. In addition, the Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Aeronautics have built and maintain a number of public airfields. On the Big Creek Ranger District there are four of these airfields: Chamberlain, Big Creek, Cold Meadows and Soldier Bar. All four are open to the public and receive sporadic use during the summer and fall seasons by hunters, fishermen and wilderness travelers. The Postal Service runs an Air Star Route on a regular basis to provide mail service to those people who live in the backcountry. Consequently, airplanes are very much a part of the backcountry scene. I did a lot of flying as a passenger during my time as ranger and had a number of experiences that will stay with me for a lifetime, but there is one particular flight that I will never forget.

During my early years as ranger, the Payette National Forest contracted with Johnson Flying Service for all the flying associated with the smokejumper program and to service the Forest Service stations in the backcountry. Johnson Flying Service also had the contracts with the Post Office Department for the backcountry mail route and with the Soil Conservation Service to conduct snow surveys at a number of locations. In addition, they did a lot of flying for the outfitters, the recreating public, and for the isolated backcountry ranches. Johnson Flying Service was highly regarded in aviation circles as pioneers and experts in backcountry mountain flying in Idaho.

Dave Schas was the second pilot for the Johnson Flying Service operation based in McCall. He worked under the direction of long-time Idaho bush pilot Bob Fogg. Dave and I were about the same age and had been smokejumpers at about the same time. I spent a lot of time flying with Dave on official Forest Service business and as a companion on some of his other flights. He took me along on the mail run several times and to do the snow measurements on the Deadwood Summit survey course. I accompanied him on one of his personal fishing trips in the lower South Fork, but the flight that I remember most vividly was to retrieve an outfitter's basecamp gear at Cold Meadows in the dead of winter.

Now, Cold Meadows is well-named. The coldest temperature ever recorded in Idaho was minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit at Island Park Dam. I have always felt that Island Park held the record only because there were people there to read the thermometer while no one is at Cold Meadows in the winter. The 4,500-foot airstrip there is exceptionally long for a backcountry airstrip. However, as the elevation is 7,000 feet, most pilots are particularly cautious when it comes to landing there. And as remoteness goes, Cold Meadows is about as remote and removed from civilization as it is possible to find in the Idaho backcountry. If you go any deeper than this into the backcountry, you start coming out the other side.

There was a period of time in the 1950s and 60s when the wildlife biologists in the Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Fish & Game were convinced that the population of elk was out of balance with the habitat, particularly the big game winter range. The feelings were that there was plenty of summer and fall elk range but that the amount of area available to the animals in the winter and early spring, due largely to the heavy snowfall in central Idaho, was only a fraction of the summer and fall range. Therefore, the biologists wanted to harvest more elk in order to reduce the size of the elk herd and bring the number of animals in line with the capacity of the winter range to sustain a healthy population. One of the means they were using to bring this about was to lengthen the hunting season. So for several years the big game hunting season went from about mid-September to the first week in December in most of the backcountry. The hunting outfitters who operated out of base camps in the river canyons thought that this was a great opportunity to handle more guests and make more money. However, those outfitters who operated in the high country, like Larry Garner at Cold Meadows, were contending with winter conditions during late season hunts. The Forest Service required the outfitters to completely dismantle their camps at the end of operations and clean up the areas. This was asking a lot when there were several feet of snow on the ground and the bottom seemed to have fallen out of the thermometer.

Larry Garner dismantled his base camp, made a big pile of everything on the edge of the airfield and made arrangements with Johnson Flying Service to retrieve it. And that's where Dave and I became part of this little adventure. Dave needed someone to help him and I volunteered.

The weather was so unsettled that year and Johnson Flying Service was so busy flying hunters out of the backcountry that it was sometime in January before we flew to Cold Meadows in the old Travel Air N9038 to do this task. Bob Fogg knew that it would be necessary to change the landing gear on the Travel Air from wheels to skis for a landing at Cold Meadows. He didn't want to do this until all of the flying that required wheels to retrieve hunters from the lower elevation airstrips along the Middle Fork had been completed.

Now, old Travel Air N9038, built in 1929, was an institution in itself among the Idaho bush pilots. It was a real workhorse of an airplane, sort of like a flying truck, and was used to fly all sorts of things in and out of the marginal backcountry airfields from smokejumpers to dead elk that the hunters had bagged. I always thought that it looked like a big brother to the "Spirit of St. Louis," Charles Lindbergh's airplane.

We flew back to Cold Meadows without incident. From the air the central Idaho backcountry was dressed for winter – all white with the exception of a few south-facing

slopes in the South Fork canyon. Cold Meadows looked completely deserted and lifeless. Of course, everything was buried under several feet of snow, and there were no tracks of game animals. This is high country and all the game had left for lower elevations.

Dave was a little hesitant about setting the airplane down in all that cold powder snow. He made a pass at the strip and as soon as the skis touched the snow sending a long plume of powder behind the airplane, he would gun the engine, packing down a strip of snow and then taking off and making a go-round and repeating the process. After about four passes, he decided that the snow was packed to the extent that the airplane would stay on the surface and not sink down in the deep snow, so we landed and taxied up to the pile of gear, and shut down the engine. (I often thought about this situation in later years when using snowmobiles. A common occurrence with snowmobiles is to drive the machine off a packed trail into deep, unpacked snow and get it stuck to the extent that a great deal of back-breaking effort is required the get the heavy machine back onto a packed surface. If that had happened with the Travel Air, we would have been in for a world of hurt.)

I soon found out why Dave wanted some company on this flight. We were faced with a rounded mound of gear, maybe seven or eight feet high to start with and then covered with four feet of snow. About everything that had been in use in the base camp for the three months of the hunting season was in the pile – tents, stoves, cots, sleeping pads, kitchen equipment, lanterns, gas cans, pack and riding saddles and a lot of loose odds and ends. Some of the canvas items had gotten wet and then frozen and were about as pliable as a sheet of plywood.

We had brought a snow shovel with us and we shoveled snow and wrestled with this stuff for several hours. By the time we got it all loaded, the cargo space in the airplane was so overloaded that we couldn't use the regular door for entrance. So Dave crawled through the window on the pilot's side and instructed me to follow him as he taxied to the far north end of the airstrip. He said something to the effect that there was no need for me to crawl through the window, as he had a job for me on the north end of the airstrip. So away we went, Dave taxiing the Travel Air up the airfield and me following along behind hoping that he would not take off without me and leave me in this snowbound wilderness.

When we both got to the north end of the runway, which incidentally is at the very head of the Cottonwood Creek drainage, Dave leaned out of the open window and handed me a length of rope with a carabineer tied on the end of it. He instructed me to snap the carabineer into the fitting on the strut that is normally used to tie the airplane down at night. Then I was to hold onto the end of the rope and act as a pivot point while he gave the airplane full power and attempted to turn around 180 degrees to be in proper position for takeoff.

The Cold Meadows Airstrip is quite long, but also quite narrow. Turning a loaded, ski-equipped airplane around in loose powder snow is no easy feat. I wrapped the end of the rope around my wrists, got a firm grip on it and braced myself as best I could while Dave ran the engine up to full power and applied full rudder for a turn to the left. But he just overpowered me, jerking me off my feet and dragging me full length, face down in a blizzard of flying snow as I was in the slipstream of the plane's engine. Dave then cut down on the power, leaned out the window and hollered something to the effect that I had to get a better brace and hold tight as we only had one chance to swing the airplane

around. So I did the best I could, and the plane turned a little each time before I was overpowered. There is a shallow bank on the northwest end of the Cold Meadows airfield. After several attempts, we had swung the Travel Air around partway and the right ski rode up on the bank causing the left wing to drop and dip a few inches into the powder snow. But around she came, off the bank and lined up for takeoff.

I crawled through the window on the right side and off we went. As soon as we got up to cruising altitude, we could see a storm coming our way out to the west. Dave said, "Where do you want to spend the next few days until this storm blows over?" I replied, "Not at Cold Meadows! Let's at least see if we can make it to Chamberlain." (Chamberlain is about 25 miles west of Cold Meadows and about 1,200 feet lower in elevation and has a nice Forest Service cabin.)

When we got over Chamberlain, it still didn't look too bad to the west so we kept going. Soon we were over the South Fork of the Salmon, then Warren Summit and the all-but-abandoned old mining town of Warren, then Steamboat Summit that we just barely sneaked through. Now all we had to do was to make it over Secesh Summit and we would be in the North Fork of the Payette River drainage and all downhill to Payette Lake and McCall. But as the airplane got closer to Secesh Summit, things started to get bad. Here we were in a narrow canyon that was getting narrower all the time and roofed over with a dense layer of storm clouds. We were flying just under most of the storm clouds, and ahead the two sides of the canyon seemed to dissolve into storm clouds. There was no hole to sneak through. I was getting antsy about this situation but afraid to tell Dave how to fly when suddenly he put the airplane into a sharp turn to the left and we reversed directions. Back over Steamboat Summit we went and landed at Warren just as it started to snow big time.

Warren is an old gold mining town that was founded during the time of the Civil War. The town has been all but abandoned for many years. The elevation of the airfield is slightly less than 6,000 feet, and the field receives a limited amount of use even in the winter as the town is on the aerial mail route. Warren is about 40 miles northeast of McCall and completely snowbound for much of the winter.

We no sooner got out of the airplane than we were welcomed by Jack Pickell, the post master and unofficial mayor of the town of Warren, Idaho, population seven just before our landing and now nine for the next three days. Like a good horseman who takes care of his mount before tending to his personal needs, Dave was immediately concerned about the welfare of Travel Air N9038. The first thing we did was to tie her down good and tight, both wings and the tail. Then he borrowed an empty five-gallon can from Jack and drained all the oil out of the engine so we could take it inside and keep it warm next to Jack's wood-burning stove. Next, Dave was concerned about snow accumulating on the wings and possibly forming ice that can change the aerodynamics of the wings and make it impossible to take off and fly. So we got into the cargo inside the airplane and unloaded all the loose canvas we could find – tents, ground cloths, and mantis (square pieces of heavy canvas used for packing all sorts of loads onto pack animals) and did our best to cover the wings. Dave was worried that the skis might freeze to the snow under them so that they would no longer slide. He wanted to somehow jack them up off the snow to prevent this from happening. I thought that this was not such a good idea, as being a skier,

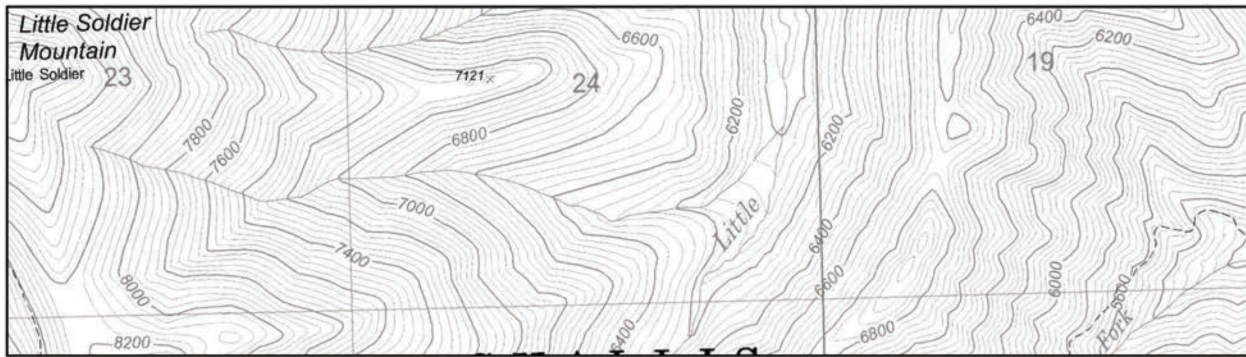
I had had experience with downhill skis that had been left outside overnight and knew that if conditions were just right that moisture can condense out of the air forming frost much like occasionally happens with the windshield of a car. So I suggested that we bury the skis under 18 inches or so of powder snow to keep them away from the night air, and that's what we did.

Jack Pickell took us in tow and we spent the next three days in the hospitality of his home waiting for the storm to pass and trying to find something interesting to do. He loaned us snowshoes and we hiked to several of the old mine adits. Then we visited and talked to each of the people who were wintering in Warren, three couples and one old bachelor. It didn't take long for Dave to find out that the bachelor was making home brew, and we made lengthy pit stops at his place for each of the three days that we were grounded. Generally, we were very, very bored as Warren in the month of January is not the liveliest place to spend three days. If I ever had any illusion that there is something romantic about being snowbound and wintering in the backcountry, this experience cured me of that notion.

On the morning of the fourth day we awoke to a bright, clear, sunshiny day with the temperature around zero. So we removed the canvas from the wings of the Travel Air, borrowed a kitchen broom from Jack, and I went to work sweeping snow off all the horizontal surfaces. Dave put the warm oil back in the engine and shoveled snow off the skis so that they were no longer buried. (The skis were in good shape for a takeoff, and my suggestion that we bury them in snow was probably my biggest contribution to this entire escapade.) Dave started up the engine and let it warm up for an extra-long time. We said goodbye to Jack Pickell and the town of Warren, took off with no difficulty, and in no time we were back in McCall.

This was maybe not the greatest wilderness adventure of my time in the backcountry, maybe not a true wilderness experience at all in the minds of some of the purists, but it certainly was a great wilderness aviation adventure that I will never forget.

Travel Air N9038 at Warren. — Earl Dodds



U.S. Geological Survey

A Smokejumper Story

Undoubtedly the most exciting times of my life were the summers of 1949 and 1950 when I was one of the smokejumpers at the McCall Smokejumper Base. I racked up a total of 28 jumps, a respectable number at that time when smokejumping was pretty much a seasonal job for college students. This is no longer the case as smokejumping has become a life-long career for many guys, not a few of whom have over 400 jumps, and as many as 200 of these actual fire jumps. Consequently, I am a little reluctant to write this as I am certainly not an expert in this field.

Smokejumping at McCall in 1949 when I started was still somewhat in the pioneer stage. The Forest Service was still very much involved in perfecting equipment and techniques for parachuting firefighters, i.e. smokejumpers, to make initial attacks on forest fires when the fires had just started and were small. Of course, things have changed a great deal over the years, but this little story is about conditions as I remember them at that time.

The summer of 1949 was a particularly busy one for firefighters with a number of large project-sized fires on the Payette National Forest and lots of small lightning-caused fires for the smokejumpers. At times we were so busy that the turnaround from one fire to the next was often a matter of a few hours. That is, you had no sooner returned to base from one fire than you were given a little time to refresh your fire pack and get a new parachute, and you were on your way to the airport for another jump. We thought this was just great and everyone loved all the excitement.

At McCall the program centered on the use of two airplanes: the famous Ford Tri-Motor and the lesser-known single-engine Travel Air 6000. Even in 1949 these were old airplanes, but they were great for smokejumping as they were slow and afforded a stable platform to jump from. Their slowness was a detriment though when it came to deadheading to far reaches of the backcountry, like the Middle Fork of the Salmon River area, in pursuit of smokes. So on this particular day when the Forest Service overhead knew there would be a lot of smokejumper activity, they borrowed the much more modern Douglas DC-3 from the Missoula, Montana, smokejumper base. I believe this was the first time the McCall crew got to jump out of the "Doug" as it was called.

As I remember it, the little incident in this story took place about mid-August of 1949 and started the morning after a particularly violent lightning storm on the eastern part of the

McCall smokejumpers before their first jump, 1949. (Earl Dodds, Clyde Garrard, Reid Jackson, Walter "Kentuck" Brafford, Dave West.) — Earl Dodds

Payette National Forest. Shortly after daylight the Doug took off from McCall headed east to the backcountry with a full load of twelve jumpers, including me. The first smoke we found was somewhere on lower Big Creek and it was starting to grow in size so the spotter put eight jumpers on it. That left four of us in the airplane. Then the Doug flew out of Big Creek at its mouth on the Middle Fork, turned south for a few miles, and found another smoke in Little Soldier Creek. LaVon Scott, "Scotty," and I were the next two on the jump list so out the door we went. I don't remember much about the actual jump other than that we both hit the jump spot without treeing up – the dread of all jumpers.

It's what happened next that made this jump so memorable. The Doug made a low pass over the jump spot to drop our fire packs – only nothing was dropped. Then the airplane gained a little altitude and made a big circle over the deep canyon downslope from us for another pass. Just about the time the airplane was on the far edge of the circle, and probably the better part of a mile from us, out comes a cargo chute with our fire packs. "Look, Scotty, that's our gear!" We watched in wonderment as the cargo chute floated slowly down and out of sight behind a spur ridge.

Luckily, there were still two jumpers in the Doug with fire packs. The pilot and the spotter got their act together, made another pass over our jump spot, and dropped the fire packs of the two unfortunate jumpers still in the airplane. These two guys didn't get to jump that day. I have often wondered what would have happened if Scotty and I had been the last two in that Doug load. I suppose we would have tried fighting fire with our bare

hands as we wouldn't have had our Pulaskis and shovels. And we might have been pretty hungry and cold that night without our sleeping bags and fire rations.

The two of us managed to get the fire out and mopped up in short order and were anxious to get back to McCall for another jump. While we were still in the airplane, we had been instructed to stay put after the fire was out and the Forest Service packer would find us. No one showed up for a couple of days so we decided to pack our jump gear and fire-fighting tools over to a nearby huge boulder that seemed to dominate the landscape and was a good place to sack out until the packer found us. As I recall, this rock was about the size of a school bus. Day four came and still no packer and the food supply was getting pretty thin. So I told Scotty I was going to see if I could find our two fire packs that had somehow been unloaded from the Doug in the wrong place and were now somewhere in the bottom of the canyon far below us. He said, "Have at it, but it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack."

It must have been my lucky day, because I hiked down the slope and right to the two packs that were lying in the bottom of a dry gulch and were in good shape. I removed the two food bags and left the rest of the stuff right where I found it. I wouldn't be surprised if our fire-fighting tools, hard hats, and the cargo chute are still there to this day.

Scotty could hardly believe that I had found the fire packs so easily, but he was sure glad to get the food resupply. With the food, we could have stayed there on that rock for another three days.

The next day the packer showed up with pack mules for our gear and a couple of saddle horses for us and took us to the Bernard Guard Station on the Middle Fork. The Travel Air came and got us the next morning, and we finally made it back to McCall.

I'm going to use this opportunity to tell the reader a little about smokejumping as I remember it in 1949, even though I might not have everything quite right and things have changed a great deal over the years. From what I have written so far, it sounds like all you do is find a smoke and jump out of the airplane, but there is a lot more to it than that.

A successful smokejump involves the skills and coordination of three people: the pilot, the spotter, and the jumper. The pilot has to keep the airplane at the proper altitude and air speed and headed into the wind at the proper angle. I believe the proper altitude in my day was somewhere around 1,200-1,500 feet above the ground. The temptation is often to go for a lower altitude with the feeling that the closer the airplane is to the jump spot, the better the chance of getting the jumper into the spot. However, this is not the recommended procedure because if anything should go wrong and the main parachute does not open properly, a situation that is not all that infrequent, the jumper needs a little time to size up the trouble and use his reserve chute.

The spotter is the guy who selects the jump spot, determines the drift, and slaps the jumper on the shoulder telling him to jump, NOW! The spotter and the pilot have to work as a team in determining the all-important drift. Here's a hypothetical situation: The pilot finds a smoke in a stand of timber on the side of a small hill in Chamberlain Basin. The smoke is drifting from the south to the north, and lo and behold, there is a small grassy meadow right under the drifting smoke and about ¼ mile from the fire – a natural jump spot. So the pilot flies the airplane on a line over the fire and then the jump spot. When

the plane is directly over the jump spot and right above where the spotter would like for the jumpers to land, he throws out either a crepe-paper-like streamer or a small drift chute that has been engineered to fall at the same rate as a jumper hanging below his parachute. (If I remember correctly, this is about 22ft/sec.) Let's say the streamer doesn't go straight down, but due to wind, drifts off to the north and lands in the timber about 300 yards past the meadow. That's the drift, and on the next pass the spotter signals the jumper to exit the airplane when the ship is 300 yards south of the meadow counting on the drift to get the jumper right in there.

Once he leaves the airplane and experiences the opening shock of his parachute, the jumper is on his own. (I always found this to be the best part of the jump. The noisy airplane is quickly moving away from you, and you are hanging there in silence in the sky with very little sense that you are actually falling to earth.) But the jumper had better not just hang there; it's now up to him to control the chute in such a way that he will, indeed, land in the designated jump spot. In my day, we didn't have much ability to control the chute. However, it was engineered with two slots in the back that gave it a forward motion, and you could pull on a line that would partly close one of the slots causing the chute to turn. So you did have a little opportunity to pick your landing spot. Some of the guys with a lot of jumps have become very good at landing in the designated area.

Now for the landing – I think everybody sweats out the landing to some degree. If you are dropping into a grassy meadow or pasture land, where most of the practice jumps take place, there's not much to be concerned about. But that is seldom the case on an actual fire jump. It seemed to me that when you were about 100 feet or so off the ground, you were coming in so fast that you were pretty much committed, and there wasn't much you could do to avoid that downed tree or that pile of rocks. So you try to do exactly what you were told to do during training: keep your feet pretty close together, bend your knees slightly, and the instant you make ground contact roll forward on the balls of your feet, then to your shoulder and do the summersault type maneuver (Allen Roll) that you have practiced many times during training. The idea is not to take all the jolt of the landing on your feet and legs but to spread this out as much as possible.

There is one more part to a successful smokejump, and that's the cargo drop of the fire packs with the tools for fighting the fire and the provisions for the jumpers to spend the next several days in the great outdoors. This part of the operation is pretty much the pilot's show. His objective is to get the fire packs on the ground without hanging them up in a tree. He need not be concerned about having enough elevation to give the jumper an opportunity to use his reserve chute in the event of an emergency, so he usually tries for a low pass over the jump spot. Not anywhere as low as a crop duster, but a little on that order. This gives him a better opportunity to place the load exactly where he wants it, and he need have little concern about drift. The spotter has to shove the fire packs out the door upon the pilot's signal, but that doesn't take a lot of moxie. I think the experienced jumper pilots take as much pride in making a good cargo drop as the jumpers do with their jump.

I would like to give the reader a little more insight into smokejumping. There is a world of difference between a practice jump made during training and an actual fire jump in the mountains. For one thing the jump spot for a fire, more often than not, is on a partial clearing on a steep, somewhat rocky south-facing slope. Sometimes the terrain and timber

are such that the spotter can't find anything like a clearing, and you have to jump into the trees. In that case, he tries to find a stand of young trees that are not so tall that they pose a let-down problem should the jumper hang up.

The smokejumper trainers and the squad leaders all caution against developing an "old hat" approach to the actual jump. It is best if everyone stays focused, tends strictly to business, and is a little scared and apprehensive. In my case, the smokejumper overhead need not have been concerned that I was not scared. With only 28 jumps to my credit, I never got into a "this is old hat" attitude when it came to jumping out of an airplane.

However, I do remember one jump when I was more than just a little scared. I believe this was somewhere near Warm Lake on the Boise National Forest. It was late in the day; the air had gotten a little rough, and the spotter was having trouble determining the proper drift. The first two guys had jumped, (we usually used a two-man stick) and both had missed the jump spot. One guy was hung up in a tall ponderosa pine. I was the second man for the next stick. That meant I was not in the door with one foot on the step as was the first man, but I was hunched right behind him intending to follow the first guy as closely as possible. The spotter had the pilot make a couple more passes over the jump spot while he dropped more streamers to figure out the drift. All this took a little time – seemed like a lot of time to me. I'm standing there all hunched over thinking, "What am I doing here anyway? A guy could get hurt or even killed doing this!" But my courage overcame my fear and out the door I went on the spotter's signal. I tried to do everything just like I had been taught during training. I hit the jump spot, had a good landing, a fair roll, and didn't get hurt. When I picked myself up and unhooked from the chute, I felt like I had really accomplished something. I looked up at the airplane and thought, "Just a few minutes ago you were up there half scared and now here you are on the ground after a great jump, feeling as though you are ten-feet tall and darn near invincible. What an experience!"

That's smokejumping and that's the feeling that keeps some guys coming back year after year to tally up over 400 jumps.

Practice jump — Earl Dodds

My Best Ski Story

Sometime in the late 1960s I captained a little expedition to British Columbia in search of powder snow. I had two companions on this trip, Phil Cloward, at that time the Ranger at New Meadows, and Dick Lynch, who had worked seasonally for me on the Big Creek District. All three of us were members of the Payette Lakes Ski Patrol and had honed our skiing skills at the Brundage Mountain Ski Area.

To most skiers, the ultimate experience in the sport is to make first tracks in a steep field of cold powder snow. If the snow is deep enough so that you can make a turn and the snow flies up in your face, that is what is known as a "Face Shot" and most skiers would agree that it doesn't get any better than that. Skiers will go to considerable expense and travel great distances, like halfway around the world, and rent helicopters to get to glaciers and high elevation snowfields in the Alps, South America, Alaska or British Columbia in pursuit of powder snow.

I had been to the Roger's Pass area in British Columbia with a group of Alta skiers and knew that this was a world-class area for powder snow skiing. The downside of Roger's Pass is that there are no ski lifts, and one has to climb for every ski turn you make. Also, you have to hire a guide to keep you safe from avalanches. As part of captaining this trip, I had done a great deal of research and made arrangements for a guide as well as looked into lift-served ski areas in that general part of British Columbia.

Off we went in a pickup truck with a shell camper that Dick had borrowed from his relatives. One long day of driving from McCall can take you across the border into British Columbia and on to Canada's Glacier National Park at Roger's Pass. (Not to be confused with the U.S. Glacier National Park in Montana.)

We spent several days climbing on the famous Illecillewaet Glacier but the skiing was not up to expectations. It had been some time since there had been any new snow and there was a lot of fog and hardly any sunshine. So, I was not doing very well in my capacity as trip leader on this expedition. After about four days of huffing and puffing up through the fog for a few turns in marginal snow conditions, we all decided enough of this. Let's go find a chairlift! I had researched a ski area named Todd Mountain near Kamloops, British Columbia, (since renamed Sun Peaks) that had what was billed at that time as the longest chairlift in North America and served an area with 3,000 vertical feet of skiing – about the same as Idaho's famous Sun Valley. So we left Roger's Pass, got onto the Trans-Canada Highway to Kamloops and then some 40 miles or so back in the mountains to Todd Mountain.

The skiing at Todd was good but not exceptional, as it had been some time since there had been any new snow. But we really lucked out here, and my status as trip leader took a turn for the better. The beginner ski area was located directly under the lower part of the big chair lift. The three of us were on the same seat on the triple chair when I looked down and recognized one of the instructors teaching a class right below us. It was Jim McConkey, formerly from Alta, Utah. There is something unique and individual about the way some people stand in their skis and make a turn. I remember the way my friend

Emery Conner floated down the hill like a butterfly. Well, Jim McConkey had a style all his own that I remembered from watching him in action with considerable envy when he was the hottest skier on the mountain, and I was on detail as a Forest Service snow ranger at Alta. (For more on Jim McConkey, including a photo of him gelande jumping an airplane, google "James W. McConkey ski.")

"Hey, McConk, how goes it?" I hollered down to him. "It's Doddsy!! Hey, look me up when the lift closes." This we did and McConk came up with something we all were glad to hear, "The instructors are having a little fondue and beer party right now, and I'm inviting you three as my guests."

Now my two companions were dedicated beer drinkers, and that good Canadian pilsner beer was just what was needed to start turning this expedition after north-of-the-border powder snow into somewhat of a success. As my past acquaintance with Jim McConkey was the key to getting the invite to the party, my rating as a tour guide was at an all-time high. Dick and Phil were really enjoying themselves when McConkey dropped by our table and pointed out that there were a few snowflakes in the air and that a storm was on the way. He asked about our plans for the rest of our trip, and I told him that we only had one more day to ski before we had to hit the road in a serious manner to get back home on schedule, and that we were going on to the Big White Ski Area for our last ski day. I knew from my research that Big White had a reputation for great snow conditions and a half-mile-long T-Bar lift that looked pretty good in their brochure. (An artist's rendition, not a photograph.) McConkey said something to the effect, "You ought to change plans and stay here. We're in for a big dump tonight, and you can't believe how good this place can be when we get a big dump."

But, no, the trip leader insisted that we were moving on, so I pulled my reluctant partners away from the party, loaded up in the truck, and we started for Big White. It was snowing a little on the 40-mile way back to Kamloops where we got on the highway for Kelowna about 100 miles away. It rained all the way to Kelowna. Then the rain turned to snow again as we left Kelowna and climbed up in the mountains on the way to Big White. This was no highway, more like one of the forest roads around Idaho. Every mile there was a sign – 34 miles to Big White, 33 miles…., etc., and it was snowing hard, just like I dreamed about when planning this expedition. I remember one scene in particular. I was sitting in the middle between the other two when we got to a place where the road had been cut through a small spur ridge, and the snow had drifted into the road cut. When the truck hit the drift, the powder snow flew up over the hood and onto the windshield. I slapped each guy on the leg and said, "Looky there, Face Shots for the truck! Tomorrow is going to be one of the Best Evers!"

We finally made it to the parking lot at Big White sometime well after midnight. We put the tailgate of the truck down in a horizontal position and crawled into our sleeping bags in the back of the truck. We were pretty well worn out from a day of skiing at Todd and all the driving so we slept in a little late the next morning. We could hear a snowplow working to clear the parking lot alongside the pickup – ours was the only rig in the lot – but we just stayed put for a while.

I was the first one out of bed. When I opened the door there were about 6 inches of primo powder snow on the tailgate and maybe 12 inches or more on the ground. The snowstorm

was over, the sun was up, and everything looked like a skier's dream. Powder snow and sunshine, bluebird weather. This was going to be a Best Evers day, as Barb Pyle would say! I felt good about leaving Todd the day before and finally finding powder snow. Who could ask for anything more?

Well, one more thing. We needed a mountain to ski on, and where is that T-Bar that looked so good in Big White's brochure? Is that it? Ugh, I goofed!! It might have been a half-mile long, but it was on a slope not as steep as the Little Ski Hill back in McCall. With all that champagne powder we could ski straight down the fall line and never get up enough speed to make a decent turn. No Face Shots there today!

And there went my rating as a tour guide! I'm still hearing an occasional little snivel about pulling out of Todd Mountain with its long chairlift and 3000 feet of steep terrain in a snowstorm and leaving all that good Canuck beer behind in the company of Jim McConkey, a Canadian Ski Hall of Fame skier. And then driving most of the night to get to a hill not much better than McCall's Little Ski Hill. Shame all over me – it's a wonder they didn't kill me!

But here is a little postscript to this in the way of "The Rest of the Story". My oldest son Mike, who is a ski bum at heart, a lot like his old man, took a quarter off from college and went on a big ski-bumming safari with a buddy. They lived in a small camper on the back of a pickup truck not much different from the one that Dick Lynch provided for this trip. The two of them hit something like 35 ski areas, all the way from Marmot Basin, Alberta to Taos, New Mexico. Sometime in the month of January, I got a telephone call from Mike who in a somewhat excited voice says, "Hey, Dad, you know that little story you tell on yourself about pulling out of Todd Mountain at the start of a big dump and missing out on a great powder day? **Well, Blaine and I are at Todd, and it's snowing, and we ain't leaving**!"

"The Rest of the Story" Behind the Photo of Angel Arch with the Person Standing in the Base

This is an account of an event that took place over 55 years ago and made such a lasting impression on me that I can recall most of the details as though it happened yesterday.

But first the reader needs a little background information. The person that put together this trip to Utah's Red Rock country and the person looking through the viewfinder of the camera to record this incident was my old adventure-sharing partner, Spike Baker. Now, it would require a pretty thick book to begin to do justice to all of Spike's many escapades, travels, skills and accomplishments, and I will only briefly touch on a few of them here. Spike is a perfectionist in everything he does and he has done a great deal. He's a super outdoorsman, a hunter, backpacker, skier, river runner, desert rat, and mountain climber. He and his wife Judy designed and built a home that is a showpiece of timber frame construction. Once the basic infrastructure of the house was completed, he went to work making much of his own furniture which includes a number of detailed and intricate pieces. (I believe that he could build a piano if he really wanted to.) He is into stained glass and picture framing and has an artistic flare about everything that he does. He often says that he is happiest when, at the end of the day, he can look back on having created something that day that will last well into the future.

One of his lifelong hobbies, and one that he has received a great deal of recognition for, is outdoor photography. He has photographed mountain and desert scenery as well as wildlife, and particularly birds, all over the world. I mean this literally, as in recent years Spike and Judy have become world travelers and he has photographed wildlife on all seven continents – from polar bears in the Arctic, to penguins in the Antarctic, to lions in Africa, and thousands of exotic birds from the jungles of South America to Denali in Alaska. In short, he has "Been there and done that!" as the saying goes. Someone really ought to do a full book on him as there would be no lack of interesting material.

It was my good fortune to accompany Spike on a number of his early-day exploits. We did such things as climb Castle Peak, 11,820 feet in elevation in the White Cloud Mountains, raft the slot canyon of the Bruneau River in the thinly-populated southwestern corner of Idaho, backpack off trail along the high ridges in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River backcountry, hunt elk in the high Sawtooths and Chamberlain Basin, and make a couple of winter safaris to the better-known ski resorts in Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. But of all these excursions, the one that has first place in my memory is our first visit to Angel Arch.

One of Spike's passions some 50 years ago was the red rock country of southern Utah. He became fascinated with the huge block of remote, lightly explored red rock desert south of Moab along the breaks of the Colorado River northeast of Cataract Canyon and not far from the entrance to the Grand Canyon. At that time there was no special classification on this country. Like most of southern Utah, it was just desert land under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Spike made numerous jeep trips in the area over a

period of several years, and his photographs and reports played a part in establishing the boundaries of what later became Canyonlands National Park.

The red rock part of this trip started in Moab, Utah's unofficial Red Rock Capital and headquarters for the long-established and world-famous Arches National Park, one of the gems of the national park system. Previous to this trip, Spike had contacted Bates Wilson, the superintendent of Arches National Park who had a long-standing interest in the area that we planned to visit. In fact, Bates was probably the recognized expert on all things red rock in southern Utah. He had long had his eye on this particular piece of country for possible addition to the national park system as he knew that a lot of the natural features were of national park quality – features like The Needles, The Maze, Chesler Park and Angel Arch.

As I recall, Bates made special mention of Angel Arch and told us exactly how to find it and where to set up Spike's camera for the best picture. He told us that the axis of the arch is pretty much north/south and the best picture-taking opportunities are on the east side of the arch during the first half of the day when the face of the arch is in full sunlight.

I don't remember how it came about but somehow we arrived at the arch late in the day when the east face of the arch was completely in shadow while high above us the west face was still in full late-afternoon sunlight. As we were considerably lower in elevation, we were in shadow and had to climb for quite some distance before breaking out into sunlight. So we started hiking at top speed up the steep draw on the west side of the arch. A couple of hundred yards or so below the base of the arch, Spike says. "I'm going to climb up to the right with the camera and tripod," (Like all serious photographers, Spike uses a tripod for all his work.) "and I want you to climb up to the left and get in the arch to provide a sense of scale as to just how huge this thing is."

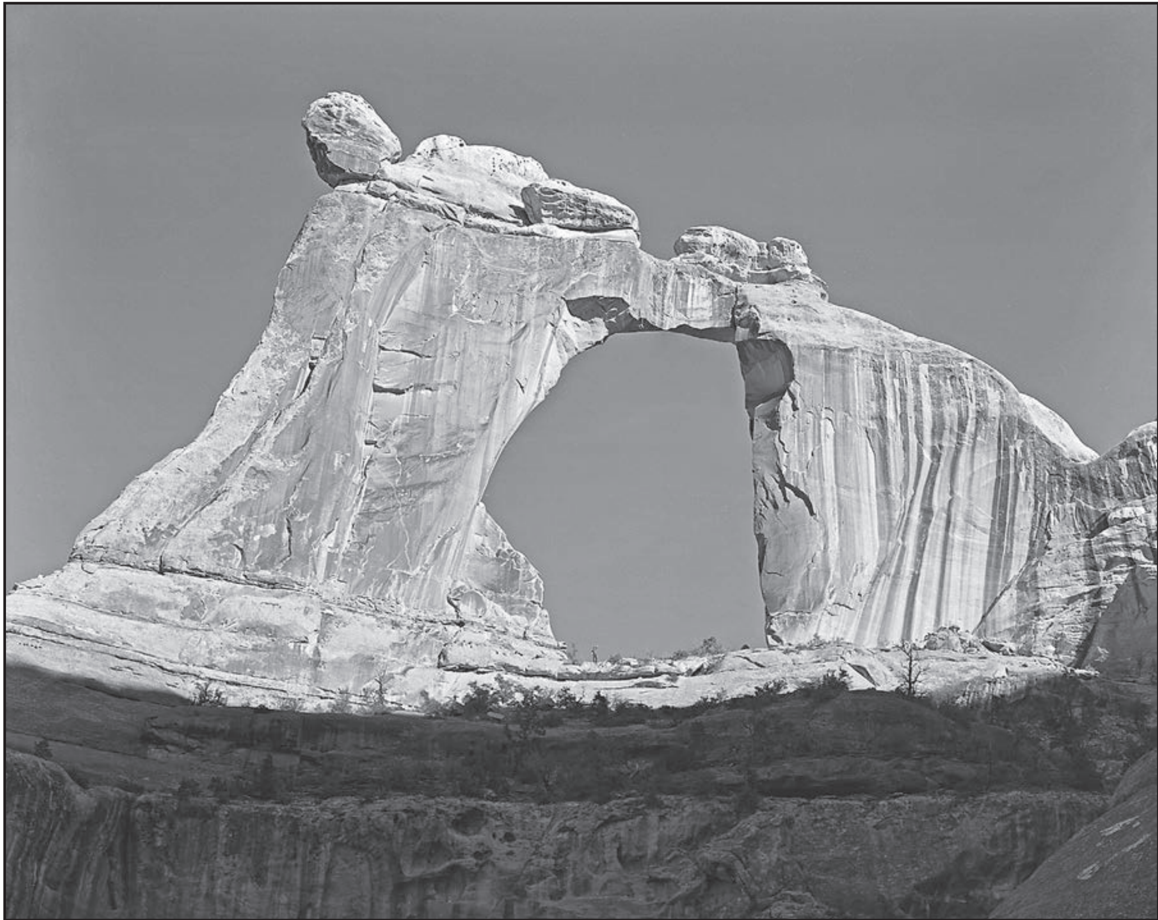
So I kept climbing just as fast as I could up the layered red rock formations. Every few minutes, Spike hollered something like, "You better hurry! We are going to lose the sun!"

With considerable effort, I managed to break out of the shadow and into the sunlight, and then I had only one more layer of red rock about eight-feet high to go and I would be there. The face of the rock was almost smooth with no footholds. I ran to and fro along the base of this last formation trying to find some way up. In desperation, I found a loose jagged rock about two-feet high leaning against the wall. I climbed up on this and gained enough height to reach over the top of the wall. When I stood on one foot and stretched out full length, I was able to just touch with my fingertips the trunk of a small juniper bush growing above the wall. And then, one more holler from Spike that I was almost there but we were fast losing the sun and I better hurry, and I decided to jump for it. Now jumping off that jagged rock was not the same as jumping from the floor of a basketball court, and I would have been in a world of hurt if I missed the handhold and fallen over backward, but with the grace of God and a lot of luck, I got one hand around that juniper and then the other hand. I was able pull myself up and Spike took the picture, "Got it, should be a good one!"

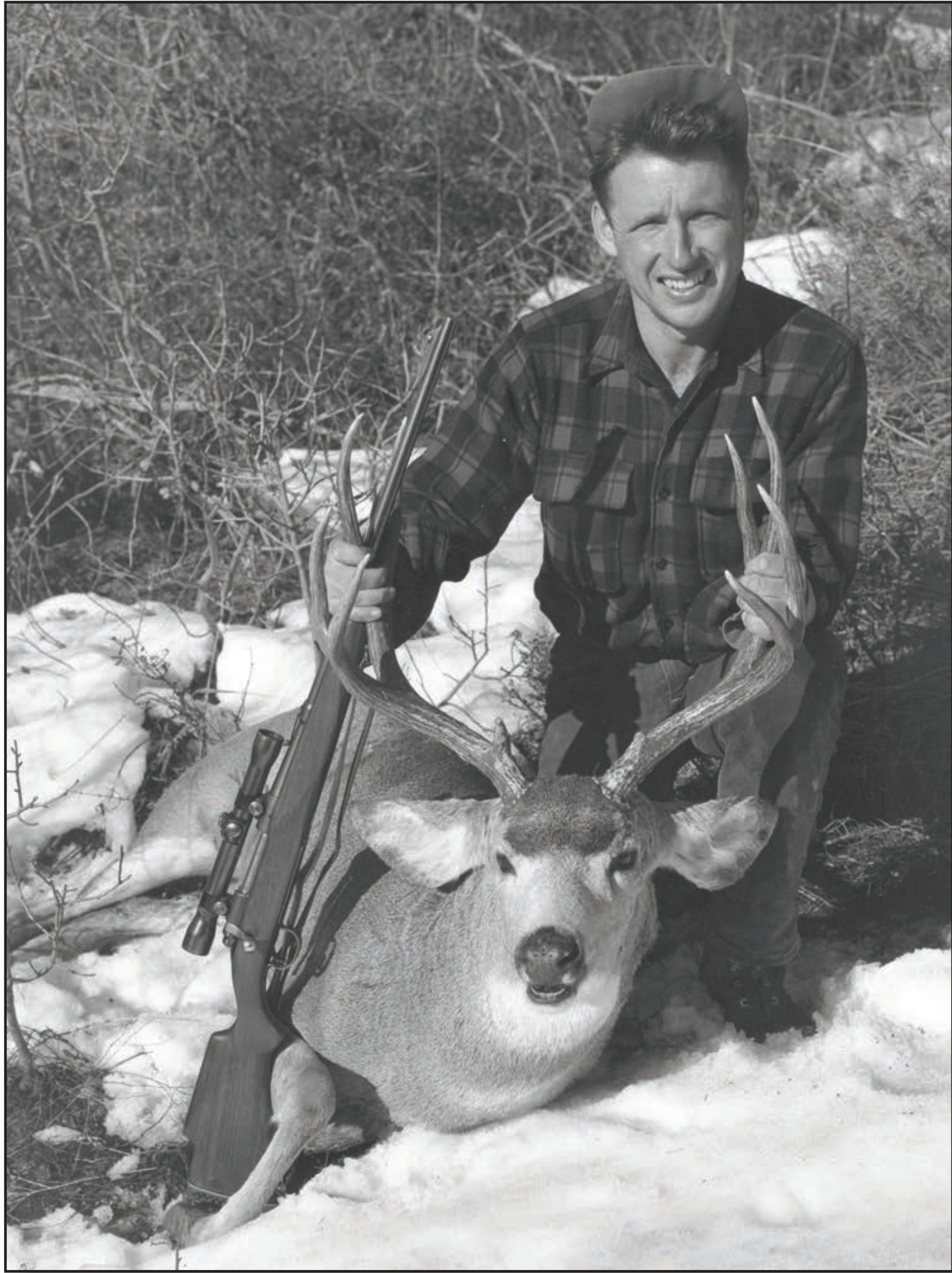
Now, take a close look at the picture. That little tiny ant-sized figure in the base of Angel Arch is me. And note the line between the sunlight and the shadow from the setting sun

across the bottom of the picture – another five minutes and the base of the arch would have been in shadow and no picture.

Angel Arch is truly colossal and one of the wonders of the Southwest, don't you agree?



Earl Dodds at Angel Arch — "Spike" Baker



Earl Dodds near Mill Creek Guard Station, Council District, c. 1955 — "Spike" Baker