

## **Recollections by Ira E. Jones, Whitman National Forest Submitted by Evan Jones**

I first worked for the Forest Service in the Spring of 1908. That summer Hugh Rankin (later Forest Supervisor of the Umatilla, Siuslaw, and Rogue River Forests), Ephriam Barnes (later Supervisor of the Minam), Joe Zipper, and I built a telephone line from the Grande Ronde River to Cable Cove (at the head of Cracker Creek north of Sumpter). It was a metallic circuit – on brackets, and all on trees except across Starkey Prairie where poles were set in cribs. Hugh Rankin had been a telegraph operator so we strung the wires tight and tied them with solid ties like the railway telegraph lines. I don't believe it was ever used, as it would break even in a slight breeze.

We had no climbers – used ladders – made these of small poles, with a single nail at each end of the rounds so it would adjust for uneven ground. We built a mile a day, starting at 6 A.M. and working till we had completed our mile.

That year, also, the Whitman built its first cabins – at Porcupine Ranger Station and at Anthony Lake. These were of logs about 12 x 16 feet, shake roof, no floors, two windows (no glass) and door of 1 x 12 rough lumber. They were both contracted and cost about \$25.00 each.

I had the title of Forest Guard and was paid at the rate of \$900.00 per year, furnished two horses and boarded myself (no travel expenses on the Forest). You could buy a good uniform for \$15.00 and a Stetson hat (stiff brim that would fall off at the least touch) for \$3.00.

### **Boundary Posting**

In 1909, I started as Forest Guard (same salary) on the North Powder Ranger District. For an outfit, I had an old Blueprint put out by some LaGrande Abstract Co., a "Use Book," and a large single bit marking ax weighing about two pounds. This had a "U.S." stamp on the end. The Ranger told me to start running Forest boundary. I said "Where shall I start?" He said "Go find a place, and start in." So I took my saddle horse and pack outfit and started West. In about two days I found a starting point near Anthony Creek. From there I ran and marked the boundary North and Northwest to the Grande Ronde River where I met Ranger W.W. Hawley who had been running boundary from the West. We retraced and reblazed old survey lines and ran new lines where the Forest Boundary followed interior land subdivision lines. We posted old cloth boundary notices so that they were inter-visible, – usually about 12 to the mile.

After completing this stretch, the North Powder Ranger and I checked on grazing. We traveled together with our pack outfit and saw all allotments. After the grazing season, I was sent to the Beaver Creek country to check on the work of building a dam and the laying of a pipeline by the City of LaGrande (for their city water supply).

## **A Ranger Examination**

That fall (1909) I took the Ranger Exam at Sumpter. It required two days—one day field work—pacing, packing, and one day written work. There were 13 who took it. Only three passed. I was laid off in December.

## **We Build a Fence**

In April of 1910 I reported back for work at the old Boundary Creek Ranger Station near Granite. Several rangers and guards had assembled there to build a pasture fence—John Day type. This fence was designed to be snow and rot resistant. I was back there in 1943 and saw several sections of that old fence that were still standing and in use. Forest Guard Wesley Slaughter, who had been there summers for most of the years between, assured me that the fence had not been rebuilt.

## **I Become a Ranger**

While at Boundary, I received a letter from Cy J. Bingham, Supervisor at John Day, offering me a job as Ranger. I called Henry Ireland and told him of the offer. He said “You stay right there. You are already Ranger and you have charge of the Granite District.”

After completing the pasture fence, I took the Forest Service team and went to the Murray Ranger Station south of Unity to build a road to the Ranger Station. All I had for equipment was a plow, the two horses, and a wooden V. After finishing the road, I was sent to several other jobs and didn't get back to my ranger district until about the first of June. However, I had a Guard, Lloyd Judy, who ran the District for me.

## **Fighting Fires**

About the 16th or 18th of June I started fighting fires. The first was on Camp Creek. Ephriam Barnes and I took 6 men to the fire. After getting a trench around it, the men left about 5 p.m., leaving me alone without food or water, on the understanding they would send the Guard from Boundary Creek with my horse. The fire kept breaking out and I got so thirsty and all in that late that night I crawled up on a log and went to sleep. After some rest I woke up at daylight and got the fire back under control. The Guard did not arrive until about 4 p.m. By that time, my throat was so dry I could hardly swallow or talk but the fire lines held.

After that I was on several smaller fires until early July when word came from the North Powder District Ranger that he had a fire near Howard Meadows, south of LaGrande. He first saw it from Anthony Lake. He rode to his ranch (also his headquarters) on Anthony Creek, where he stayed all night. Next day he rode about 12 miles to Porcupine Ranger Station and spent the night there. Next morning he showed some campers how to catch fish, then he borrowed a horse from a sheep man and went to LaGrande. At LaGrande, he went to the Foley

Hotel and called for a reporter. Next morning the paper had a column and a half story about the Howard Meadows fire—said the Ranger had come 50 miles for help, riding three relays of horses, and that the City watershed was in great danger.

Twenty-eight men were hired and dispatched to the fire in two four-horse teams (there was a road to Howard Meadows). They arrived about 2 p.m. I had gotten there about an hour earlier. After cooking dinner, we were ready. The Ranger said “You go ahead and put them to work.” I said, “It’s your fire.” But he said “Go ahead, I will be out later.” After about two hours he came out on horseback, said I was doing O.K., and then left for his Ranger headquarters, not to return.

We got a line around the fire which by that time covered about 50 acres. Most of the men were transients. I tried to weed out the poor ones to send back in the wagons. I only wanted to release 8, but the men had partners and when I got thru, I only had 12 men left. I got by with them until the third day when a new smoke developed about half a mile away. It crowned and really took off. Supervisor Ireland and District Forester Cecil had been by the day before while inspecting the LaGrande Dam and Watershed. The Ranger went for them and Ireland and Cecil went to LaGrande for a crew and the Ranger to North Powder for another. We established two camps and Cecil returned to Portland. Henry Ireland stayed with me two or three days then returned to Sumpter and sent M.L. Merritt to help me. The North Powder Ranger failed to show up on the fire line. Needless to say he didn’t last long. I stayed on this fire until Fall rains started about September 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **The Ranger Finds a Wife**

After leaving the fire I was put to running boundary around the Baker Water Supply watershed. While on this work I lived at the Johnston ranch on Goodrich Creek. Johnston had a sister keeping house for him. After two years, I persuaded her to change her name to Jones and keep house for me.

After I was married in 1912, I asked Superintendent Ireland to give me a Ranger District (both the North Powder and the Sumpter Districts were vacant). He said “Yes, how would you like the Sumpter District?” I really wanted the North Powder District as Sumpter was also the Supervisor’s headquarters and I was too handy and was sent out on jobs, but I said O.K.

### **Construction Jobs Interfere with Ranger Work**

After taking the Sumpter District, I didn’t see much change in my work. I was still sent out on odd jobs and much of the Ranger District work was handled out of the Supervisor’s office.

One summer I was so busy with other jobs that I only got out on the grazing once and only saw one band of sheep. I had five bands and about 500 head of cattle and horses, so when grazing report time came, it was quite a job. There were

also several timber sales to mining companies.

The Ibez Mine applied for 400 cords of wood. They were told I would be up and make the sale, but before I got there they had cut the 400 cords, before making a payment. Then the mine went broke and so far as I know, the 400 cords are still there—unused and unpaid for.

### **A Runaway Team**

In 1913, Superintendent Ireland, who had been Master of the Sumpter Masonic Lodge, was asked to conduct a funeral at Audry—about 30 miles south. We had a team of young and partly broken mules. We thought this would be a good trip for them so we hired a two-seated hack, hitched them up and started off. The front seat was set high up, and the brake was worked from it. I drove and Henry Ireland worked the brake. R.M. Evans and Harry Wilson (a local jeweler) rode in the back seat.

We made it alright until we reached the top of the Whitney hill and started down. Henry shoved the brake handle forward, but it jabbed the mule in his rump and away they went. It was about two miles to the bottom of the hill. Every attempt to use the brake only made them go faster. The road was narrow and crooked, but fortunately, it was early morning and we met no one. We made the bottom and after half a mile got them slowed down, but we had all lost our hats.

We made the rest of the trip OK. On the way back we gave a ride to a man who had been fishing in Camp Creek. When we stopped to let him off at the Whitney Mill, one of the single trees dropped off. The mule gave a jump, the tongue dropped down, and away they went again. After a short distance the tongue ran into the ground and broke. We all jumped out. I got mixed up with the lines and was dragged 30 or 40 feet before I got loose. Aside from ruining a suit and losing some skin, I came out alright. The team broke loose, ran into the slab pile at Whitney and stopped.

### **A Run-in with a Cattle Man**

In the Spring of 1917, a sheep bridge, at the Allison mine, across the North Fork of the John Day River, washed out. The D.O. Jusii sheep allotment was just across the river. Without a bridge it was necessary to trail the sheep five or six days to reach the allotment, so we decided to move them across the Desolation Cattle Range. There was some private land on the range leased by Ben Colvin. He told us not to cross, but we thought we could make it without getting on the private land. So Ranger Judy and I went down to handle it. Colvin had gotten the Road Supervisor to refuse permission for the sheep to use the County road. I called the County Commissioner and got his permission to put the sheep over the road if we agreed to clean it out afterwards, which we did. Then I called Colvin, told him the sheep were at Desolation Creek bridge; that if he wanted to see them cross, to be there early in the morning. Next morning at daylight he was

there, and said, "Don't cross them sheep." The herder was told to start them. Colvin got in his car, drove to Pendleton and got a lawyer to write a letter demanding damages, but no damages were ever paid, and the sheep reached their allotment without further difficulty. Later, listening in on the party line at the Dale Ranger Station, the Ranger's wife heard two women talking about this deal. One said "It looks like when the Forest Service starts anything, they always go through with it, as the Deputy Supervisor and a Ranger did when they put the sheep across the cattle range."

### **The New Ranger Proves to be a Dud**

In 1919, a new Ranger was transferred to the Dale Ranger District in May or June. Later a fire broke out on his District near the Allison mine. It was reported to the Supervisor's Office and the new Ranger rounded up a crew at Ukiah. They got a line around the fire, then about 50 acres. He then laid off all of the crew, leaving only one inexperienced man to watch it.

He told me over the phone what he had done. I said it was a little early to lay off all the men with no mop-up work done, but he assured me that he had lots of fire experience and that it was safe. No one at the office had seen the new man and we knew very little about him. The next day I got a call from George Drake, then on the Umatilla, saying the fire was putting up a lot of smoke. I called the Ranger who said the fire had gotten away. I went to the fire, which now covered 600 acres or more. We got a crew from Pendleton and Baker. The Pendleton crew were mostly transients. Most were I.W.W.'s and we had a great deal of trouble with them.

After the fire was out, we preferred charges against the Ranger, among them: (1) He had bought a bunch of horses and paid for them by rental while packing on the fire. (2) He had bought supplies for his personal use and charged them to the fire. There were also other charges. I was sent to Spokane to meet the man at the Davenport Hotel. I went over the charges with him. He denied them, but rather than fight, he resigned.

### **Some Official Titles**

When I first started work on the Whitman there were seven Ranger Districts. Each Ranger had only one Guard—on duty only during the summer months.

In the early 1920's you could not get a raise without a change in title (due to the old statutory roll). One of the peculiar results of this—at one time on the Whitman there were four men with the title of Forest Supervisor—R.M. Evans, Johnnie Irwin, Otto Zimmerli, and myself. I have had a great many official titles during my Forest Service career, among them: Laborer, Forest Guard, Deputy Ranger, Ranger, Deputy Supervisor, Supervisor, National Forest Examiner, Superintendent of Construction, Project Engineer, and Assistant Supervisor. There may have been others.

## **Lookout Houses**

The first Lookout House was on Dixie Butte. It was about 6 x 8 feet, built of 1 x 12 rough boards with 3 single sash windows. Later others were built. Prior to 1934, I personally built lookout houses on Little Baldy (renamed Mt. Ireland after Henry Ireland's death), Dixie, Vinegar Hill, Jump-Off-Joe, Desolation Butte, and Bald Mountain. These were all standard 12 x 12 with cupolas except on Desolation Butte which was a 50-foot steel tower.

## **The Lookout sees an Elephant**

The lookout man on Bald Mountain got quite a shock one summer. The trail from Burnt River to John Day valley runs right by the lookout. A traveling circus moving from Burnt River to John Day decided to follow this trail as it was several miles shorter than the road. So, unknown to the lookout man they walked, among other things, a camel and an elephant right past the lookout. The man on the lookout was reading, or napping in the cabin when the camel and the elephant walked by and he saw them for the first time. It so startled him that he sure thought he must be dreaming.

## **Ranger Work Projects**

During early days the Rangers were bunched at least once a year for a week or ten days on some construction project—usually a telephone line. We always had a penny-ante game with a ten-cent limit with a rule that lights had to be out at ten. It was hard to hold the men together longer than about ten days. They began to think of things that needed to be done on their districts. Strange excuses were offered such as that they had to split wood for the wife.

But we got lots of work done. I think the biggest days work was on a telephone line from Tipton to Whitney. We were stringing a #9 metallic line on the P.T.&T. poles along the Sumpter Valley Railway. We got a push car from the R.R. On one day we strung out and tied 6 miles of metallic #9 wire on 10 pin cross arms (already on the poles) and walked back to Tipton, then coasted on the push car to Austin.

## **We got Supervisor Bingham**

One spring, while on one of these jobs, Supervisor Cy Bingham, from the Malheur, visited camp and sat in on our penny-ante game. He got away with our money. When he returned in a few days someone had fixed a cold deck. This time he brought along one of his rangers. We sure took him to a cleaning. In one hand he held four queens, but our man had four aces, so we took his money and later had a treat of candy, nuts, and etc. Supervisor Ireland was with us that night. He didn't know about the cold deck. I sat near him and gave him what advice I could, and advised him to drop out when he rode along on a pair of kings.

## **Road Building Evolution**

Road building had quite an evolution. We first started with a plow, a wooden V and a slip scraper. Then we advanced to a Martin ditcher and a Fresno scraper. Starting around a hillside, we first opened a trail by hand then for one horse to walk in and we shoveled out by hand until we could get a team over, then used a ditcher until wide enough for a small grader. The first bulldozer was a 2-ton Holt tractor with a floating blade that was worked on a counter balance beam that

extended back on both sides of the tractor. All rock work was done by hand drilling and using only caps and fuse for blasting.

## **The Whitman's Timber Sales**

The first large timber sale on the Whitman was made in 1910 to a newly organized company, called the Baker White Pine Lumber Company, for a tract of timber near Tipton.

I scaled the first logs that were cut on this sale during the winter of 1910. My residence was a 12 x 14 wall tent, no floor, a board bunk, and straw mattress. The logging was done by team and sled. Along about mid-January (of 1911) it got down to 30 degrees below zero and the small Sibley stove kept the tent warm for only a few minutes at a time. The floor was frozen except around the stove. When not at work I stayed in bed most of the time. I got to thinking about my folks in Texas, asked for some leave, and took off for a warmer climate.

We were very proud of the Whitman. For several years we led the Nation in total receipts. The Whitman was also a great training ground for forest officers, among them Regional Foresters, Assistant Regional Foresters, and Fiscal Agents. Henry Ireland deserves much credit for developing these people.

## **A 1909 Ranger Meeting**

The first Ranger meeting I attended was held at Mt. Vernon during the fall of 1909. Henry Ireland (others) and I attended from the Whitman. We took the narrow gauge Sumpter Valley Railway from Sumpter to Dixie. Steel had just been laid from Austin to Dixie, and we were the first to ride over it. At Dixie, we took a team and hack for the rest of the way. Going over on the railroad, we were charged 5 cents a mile but when we returned they charged us 10 cents.

The road was not a common carrier and they had changed the rates. When we sent in our expense account it came back for an explanation, – why the difference in rates.

## **Horse Play Sometimes Backfires**

A great many people said I'd never live to an old age for I used to like to have fun at other people's expense. We had a Ranger who was a very good bread cook

and he always bragged about it. So, once when a bunch of us were at the old Blue Mountain Ranger Station (since torn down), this Ranger was to make the bread. We emptied the baking powder can and filled it with flour and got quite a kick out of watching him. He sat by the oven door and kept watching the bread.

Said, "I don't know what's the matter. I can make better bread, of course." The bread didn't raise but we ate it. He never again mentioned his bread-making ability.

Another time, Henry Ireland, Frank Mattson, the North Powder Ranger, and I were at Anthony Lake Ranger Station and cooking supper. I was making bread, Mattson was cleaning fish. The Ranger spoke up and said "I don't like fish and don't even want to eat from a pan in which fish have been cooked." I reached over to where Mattson was working, picked out a small fish head, wrapped it in biscuit dough, marked it and saw to it that the Ranger got this biscuit. He was quite surprised and thoroughly disgusted when he broke it open.

K.P. Cecil often paid us a visit. He was kind of a Roaming Supervisor, to coordinate the Umatilla Wallowa-Malheur-Whitman Forests. K.P. was hard to wake up in the morning, so one morning at Desolation Creek, I went in and gave him a big dose of sneeze root. He woke up sneezing but only covered up his head, thinking he was catching cold. The men were outside standing around the fire laughing so pretty soon it dawned on him that he was being jabbed. He had a Model T Pickup and when we went back to Baker my bed roll was tied on top of other things on the back. I kept watching it. Finally K.P. Said "You don't need to watch that. I can see it thru the rear view mirror." But when we got to Sumpter the bed had fallen off and had been drug behind till it was about worn out. I often wondered if he didn't chuckle just a little over this.

Once my plans backfired on me. We were at Baker. Howard Stratford, the Chief Clerk, had quite a family and towards the end of the month he was frequently short of funds. One of these times in early winter when he was running his car with his last year's license plate, I went across the street and phoned him and said "I am Sheriff McKenney and you will have to buy a new license plate or I would have to stop you from running your car." Soon after I went back to the office, Howard came in and said, "Say. I. E., the Sheriff has just called me and says I must get a new license plate. Won't you loan me \$5.00 till payday?" I had to come through—but he paid it back.

### **A Detail to the Siuslaw Area**

During the depression I was loaned to the Resettlement Administration and had charge of W.P.A. workers on the Siuslaw Forest. We had three main camps in former CCC Camp Buildings. They were located at Mapleton, Cape Creek, and Hebo. At one time, we had 44 side camps with as high as 1100 men. All foreman positions had to be approved by the Democratic organization. I remember one foreman sent out who was absolutely no good as a foreman. I fired him and got a

call from the Portland Resettlement Administration to come to Portland and get squared up with the State Democratic Chairman. I went in. The Chairman was at the Congress Hotel. I had known him many years at Pendleton, so I told him the man he had sent out as foreman was no good as a foreman. He said "I know, but he is my father-in-law and I have to take care of him." However, he was not sent back to me.

We used to run into Portland twice a week and pick up "winos" off of Third Street. They would stay till the first payday, then back to Portland and get drunk and back to camp the next week. When we first set up camp we used porcelain dishes. These were condemned so we bought heavy restaurant chinaware. When this work project was abandoned, all camp equipment was surplus and distributed to forests in R6. At the final closing we had a surplus of 900 lbs. of dry beans. The Forests that got the dishes had to take a supply of beans.