

100 Years of Conservation and Public Service on the Medicine Bow

Trails and Roads

Many of the roads systems used today in the Medicine Bow National Forest are improvements upon and variations of old Indian and emigrant trails, such as the Overland, Cherokee, and Lodgepole Trails. The era of tie hacks and miners saw the development of a crude road system in the late 1800's, but it was not until the recreation potential of the National Forests was recognized in the late teens and early twenties that intense road development occurred in the forest. Fire prevention was another motivating force in the construction of interior forest roads.

Trails

The Cherokee and Lodgepole Trails were two of the oldest transportation routes to pass in or near the forest. There were several variations of the Cherokee Trail; one major route skirted the Medicine Bows to the south, the other to the north (partially coinciding with the Overland Trail). Parts of the southern route appeared on General Land Office survey maps as early as 1870. The northern variation of the Cherokee Trail passed near Tie Siding and headed toward Sheep Mountain, where it split. The Lodgepole Trail entered the forest at the east boundary of the Pole Mountain Division. It generally followed the route of the present Forest Road #712 (Telephone Road) west and slightly south through the Pole Mountain area to its junction with the Happy Jack Road near the old ski area. It eventually joined the Overland Trail west of Laramie.

Happy Jack Road

A notable route was developed in the 1880's through the Pole Mountain District connecting Laramie and Cheyenne and became known as the Happy Jack Road. Named for Jack Hollingsworth, the route diverges from the Lodgepole Trail near Tie City to the NW part of the district and swings SW through the forest, passing through the NW corner of the old Fort FE Warren Target and Maneuver Reservation. Hollingsworth had a ranch near the foothills of the Laramie Range in the 1880's and hauled wood from the mountains to sell in Cheyenne. He reportedly always sang as he worked.

The Snowy Range Road

The Snowy Range Road from Laramie to the North Platte River was, and still is, the major east-west route through the main Medicine Bow Forest. The GLO survey plat of 1877 and 1879, shows a "range road" leaving from a point near Centennial, crossing Libby Creek and continuing along the north side of the creek. The GLO survey plat of 1898 shows a continuation of this road labeled "Centennial to La Plata" which generally followed the route of the present highway and ended east of the pass. The earliest uses of this road were for timber and mining. The 1877 GLO plat shows a "Webber's Sawmill"

in the approximate location of the present Centennial Ranger Station, indicating very early use of the area for timber production. Early tie camps were located along Libby Creek, Nash's Fork, and the North Fork of the Little Laramie River. The route was used in connection with mining during the Gold Hill mining booms.

In 1909, Forest Supervisor P.S. Lovejoy requested \$1,500 from the regional forester to cooperate on road improvements with the Albany County Commissioners and the Centennial Commercial Club. A combined total of \$2,500 was raised, and the Laramie, Hahn's Peak, and Pacific Railroad agreed to survey the Centennial-Snowy Range Wagon Road. In 1910, the first recorded auto trip took place between Centennial and Brooklyn Lake. Lovejoy drove a 1910 Franklin to Brooklyn Lake on Labor Day. The nine-mile trip took one hour.

In 1914, the forest began to develop its recreational potential. A reconnaissance was made in early 1915 for a route from Centennial to the Saratoga Road via Lake Marie and Brush Creek, and a rough but drivable road was constructed to Brooklyn Lake and Libby Flats. A 1918 editorial predicted the Snowy Range area would become one of the greatest pleasure resorts of the Rocky Mountains. The Forest Service reflected these sentiments, claiming the current "wagon road" was not suitable for auto travel and the people the Albany County demanded a good road. Construction of the road took place during the early 1920's and dedication of the Snowy Range Road was held in July of 1926.

In 1930, the route from Laramie to Saratoga was designed as a forest highway and during the 1930's, the entire route was black-topped. During the mid-to-late 1960s both ends of the Route 130 were improved with the western terminus changing from Saratoga to Days and the eastern end following Nash Fork rather than the original route up Libby Creek, now known as the Barber Lake Road.