

Rugged Selway country had its share of tragedy

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Archer gravesite (see story at right)

By B.K. Monroe

Here and there in vales or on slopes of the stately old Bitter Root Range are lonesome, forgotten graves where no flowers were ever strewn but where mountain grasses grow undisturbed.

This Junetime the story of just such a last bed for a mountain man, came to hand for me, a story filled with pathos and daring, of a lone man on skis, a trampoline, a mountain blizzard and a faithful dog.

L.M. Powell whose surveying job on the Bitter Root National Forest took him into the Selway wilderness in June weeks just past, told me the story of the photo he made (left), showing Charles McKenna, Hamilton young man, beside a cross-marked grave. Powell's account as given this scribe follows:

"There is a grave situated adjacent to the trail on a southern slope over-looking Running Creek, a well defined mound of earth with a bush at the foot and a cross at the head. The cross was hewn from a small fir tree and squared to about 4-by-4. The inscription is nicely carved and though weathered is still legible.

The name "ARCHER" is carved on the vertical stick. The horizontal bar has the line: "Look Before You Leap."

Continuing, Powell told the story as it had been related to him by George Matteson, present owner of the Running Creek Ranch (where the grave is located).

"Archer was killed in a skiing accident while running a trapline maintained by him and his partner, Martin Moe. Apparently Archer ski-jumped over a cliff during a blizzard. When Archer's dog returned alone to the cabin, Moe with the aid of Phil Shearer, conducted a search

for Archer. The blizzard had buried all trace of the man however, and Moe returning to the Bitter Root valley, presumably the Darby-Hamilton area, reported the incident of the trapline venture and of his unsuccessful search for Archer.

"Suspicion in such cases often reared an ugly head with the result that Moe for a time was held by the law until he was able to convince officers of his innocence. This tragedy of the hills, like similar incidents where lives were lost either by accident or through such sicknesses as scurvy, eventually resulted in truth clearing honest mountain characters of accusation.

It is believed the death of Archer occurred in the winter of 1899.

It came about after 1900 that a woman and her young son with a party in the Running Creek hills, found a man's hat along their trail and soon afterward came upon the body of Archer with the skis near and his rifle which had been fired several times, possibly by Archer in attempts to get help.

Moe, telling of the force of the storm, he had witnessed the blizzard while in the cabin, but had not heard rifle shots, possibly because of the storm.

When Archer's dog came back alone and giving barks of troubled nature, Moe went searching all the trapline distance, but snow was deep and no trace could be found.

Powell said he had heard of Archer's grave and the wording on the cross on his first trip to Running Creek in 1946 when he manned the lookout on Shearer Point. He was surprised to find the cross still standing during a survey of the old

Running Ranch this month.

He said purpose of the survey was to delineate portions of the ranch being purchased by the Forest Service as well as the remainder being retained by the Mattesons. This required retracement of the original government survey of homesteads of 1916 and monumentation of all corners.

Powell continued:

"The Moe application of homestead was dated June 26, 1910 (in the name of Martin R. Moe of Darby, Montana; the surveyor, E.R. Johnson calculated the area of the homestead to be 107.72 acres, a fact confirmed by my retracement survey.

"Several of the original cornerstones were found. These were large washed granite boulders, 20 to 24 inches in length, beautifully chiseled with the corner number and 'HES 453' (The abbreviation is for Homestead Entry Survey.)

Running Creek knew other tragic happenstances in the era; a trapper and all-around mountain man, Tom Running of Darby, wintered at various times in the Selway, but his last trap season was tragic for snow blindness came unmercifully and Tom Running was rescued by frier and brought home for the rest of his tin "Blind Tom" as he became know, stayed around with old friends of the hills, Abe Leeds and Tom Stella, both seasoned trappers and guides in the Clearwater, for three decades.

Stella himself, in the 1920 era, failed to return from his winter on Stella creek in the Selway and rescuers in the spring found he had died evidently after an accident that gave him broken limbs. His grave was made near his cabin.

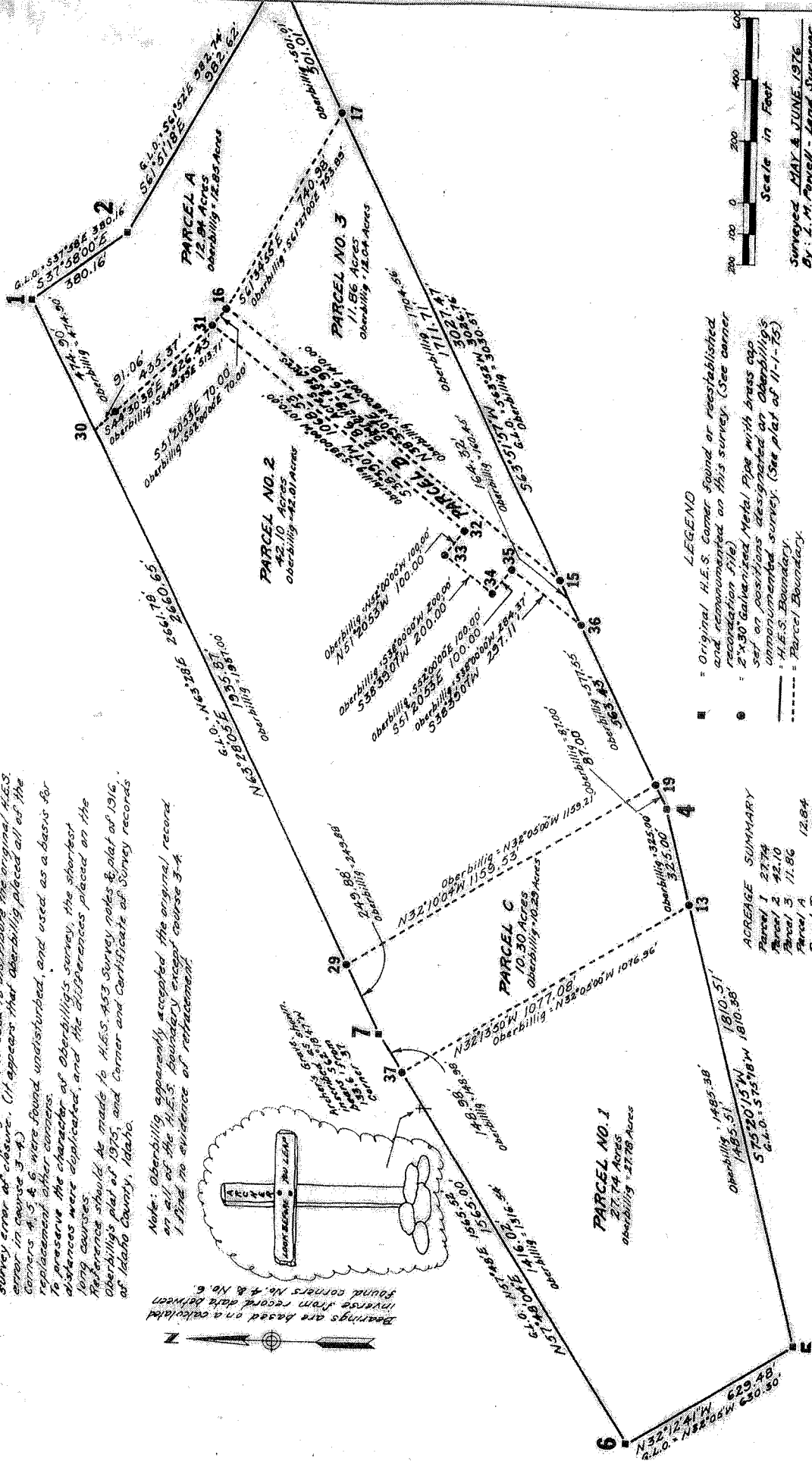
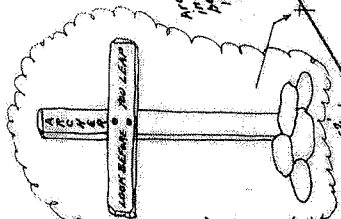
**RETRACEMENT SURVEY
OF
H.E.S. 453 - SURVEY OF 1916
and
OBERBILLIG SURVEY OF 1975**

This survey was performed with a one second theodolite, electronic distance meter, and 300 foot steel tape. A weighted balance program was used to distribute the original H.E.S. survey error of closure. (It appears that Oberbillig placed all of the corners 4, 5 & 6, were found undisturbed, and used as a basis for replacement; other corners to preserve the character of Oberbillig's survey, the shortest distances were duplicated, and the differences placed on the long courses.

Reference should be made to H.E.S. 453 Survey notes & plat of 1916. Oberbillig's plat of 1975, and Corner and Certificate of Survey records of Idaho County, Idaho.

Bearings are based on a calculated inverse from record data between found corners No. 4 & No. 6.

Note: Oberbillig apparently accepted the original record on all of the H.E.S. boundary except course 3-4. I find no evidence of retracement.



Surveyed MAY & JUNE 1976
By: J. M. Povey - Lead Surveyor
Montana Registration No. 2156 S