

# Bessie Notes in Recollections of Forest Service

By B. K. MONROE

Memories of Forest Service personalities came back to this writer from the very beginning of the 20th century and I have been asked to put some of them in story form for the Ravalli Republican.

First, I am sure, are the men who had been friends of the James Kerlee circle since that family first settled in the Darby area in 1888.

There were of course, N. E. Wilkerson, better known as "Than," a first ranger with Henry C. Tuttle. Their building of note was that Alta cabin that was cause for a Fourth of July celebration in 1899. Then there Thomas W. Laird, James Vance and W. H. McCoy, all of the upper Bitter Root.

That was a time of organizing a brand new idea as to community acceptance of government bossing of the timbered hills of western Montana and northern Idaho areas.

And there was an Idaho man, Major Frank A. Fenn of Kooskia who was general supervisor of the new forest reserve, all called the Bitter Root National Forest. I came to know Major Fenn personally in 1910, years after the separation of the Bitter Root and the Clearwater Forests, when he was supervisor still of the Clearwater.

My husband, Roy Monroe, who had worked on the Bitter Root through 1909, received his ranger appointment early in 1910 and he reported for duty to supervisor Fenn at Kooskia, Idaho.

All of these early day foresters were rugged characters, fine men who were ready to tackle the new job of forest protection.

In the first years, they had only the most primitive methods of getting around in the hills, Saddle and pack horses and mules, with telephone lines (after 1900) strung from tree to tree for miles.

One humorous bit comes back to me. I asked "Uncle Tom" Laird what a ranger did when he heard of a fire in the forest.

He said, "I saddle up and ride out to have a look at the fire, and go home and pray for rain." Prayers were no doubt a part of the reaction but axe and shovel and bark fires were in the front when it came to firefighting.

And of course there were no airplanes to drop parachuted smokechasers down to give first combat to fires.

They fought fire with fire, weary foot travel on rough mountain trails or riding horses as near to the scene as possible.

There was never a better ranger than Jim Vance, or Jim Gallogly, who were in the East Fork neck of the woods. Vance was a homesteader and he was Medicine Tree ranger. I remember that station as "a house by the side of the road," with his wife Maud getting quick meals for visitors, when I was just a young girl.

Although I had known Jim Gallogly earlier, it was not until after my newspaper career was well along, that I learned of his keen interest in the Lewis and Clark travels through his East Fork hills.

It was the Gallogly promotion of this interest that finally resulted in State Highway authorities ordering the name of Gibbons Pass on U.S. Highway 93 changed to Lost Trail, commemorating the Lewis and Clark party's historic lost trail episode that brought the explorers into the Bitter Root by accident in 1805.

I remember Ranger McCoy, who was an 1887 homesteader, as a scholarly sort of man in those early times. He traveled by horse and buggy in his late ranger times. Wilkerson and some of the others drove teams to buckboards, or rode horseback.

Some of the forest supervisors come to mind as I think back on the years.

First one that I knew rather well was Wilfred White and it was in his early 1900 jurisdiction of the Bitter Root that my brother Will Kerlee became ranger for the Trapper Creek district in the West Fork. The station, a log building of six rooms, was on the site of the present Trapper Creek Job Corps Center.

Supervisor White and my ranger brother started a forest nursery at Trapper Creek station and it was a successful venture, but later was abandoned when the more expansive nursery was established at Haugen.

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The collecting of seed for the nursery meant location of the pine squirrels, caches of cones and a partial confiscation of the squirrel harvest. Pine, fir and spruce seedlings went out from that nursery and are probably aging trees now after 65 years or so.

Trapper Creek was site of a Civilian Conservation Corps center in the 1930s. By that time John W. Lowell, a Texan, was supervisor of the Bitter Root. Lowell was a hard-worker for forest principles, as I recall, and a common man, well-liked by the people.

Like most of the men who had worked their way into the Forest Service, he was down-to-earth and a "salty" characteristic in his good nature. First

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"Bitterroot"

assistant, Bill Nagel was transferred to another forest. Adams was transferred to another forest and retired at Kalispell.

Jack Parsell is still an active citizen after his years of rigorous ranger life in the Moose Creek district of Idaho across the Lost Horse divide. One of his early fall jobs was to conduct rescue efforts for lost hunters.

After airplanes began to give modern transportation to forest protection, reporting forest activity took on a different angle. Bob Johnson's planes made news consistently as helpers in fire season, but in the time of the CCC camp and members taking part in forest protection, there was a most unhappy travel accident for Pilot Dick Johnson and Clarence Sutliff of the service staff.

Their plane caught in a down draft and crashed down in the hills. Two CCC boys aided in the rescue of the injured fliers and helped to get them to Daly Hospital here. They both recovered, Dick Johnson to fly for a few years more until another crash that took his life. Sutliff was deputy supervisor on the Bitter Root with G. M. Brandborg later.

Thurman Trosper followed Brandborg as supervisor and there was more plane activity, as spraying for budworm and other forest pests was projected in the East Fork.

A Johnson pilot then was Mira Slovak, a young Czech who had flown a plane from behind the Iron Curtain the previous year to reach freedom in this country. He was a daring flier and since has become a world figure in speedboat events.

Slovak put on an unannounced air show near Hamilton after work one evening, and afterward gallantly paid a \$50 fine in justice court here for endangering highway traffic.

There were other forest rangers and supervisors that I knew in the years, but association in the service has kept my recollections mainly

CCC camp was dedicated at the then Deep Creek ranger station.

Next was Fred Stell, who retired after leaving the Hamilton office and who with Mrs. Stell makes almost yearly visits back to the Bitter Root from Arizona.

There were only trails into Deep Creek until a road was made during the early 1920s and since the road has been improved to good standards, each year.

Tom Donica, once a ranger on the Kaniksu forest, came back to his native Bitter Root in his retirement years, and he was a 1920 trapper in the Deep Creek area.

Then there are Ed Mackey, ranger on the Lolo for many years, now retired, and Sam Billings, who came from the East a good many years ago to be ranger on the West Fork. He too retired a few years back.

Both of these good rangers had years they liked a lot and they appreciated the country and its touches of history.

A pilot, Bob Ryman of the Johnson service, flying back from the Selway, crashed near Hamilton when a student pilot struck their plane and three persons lost their lives. The student had not logged his flight.

This was during Harold Andersen's time as supervisor. Andersen's time saw the holocausts of the Sleeping Child-Rye Creek forests, and the Saddle Mountain of the Lost Trail country.

He started reclaiming the burned forest by planting young trees and terracing the hills against erosion.

Practical forestry was Andersen's plan and he left plenty of evidence that his work, in spite of disastrous fires, had been good.

# Earlyday Foresters Were Hardy and Practical

(Continued from Page 1)

CCC camp in his jurisdiction was on Deep Creek in Idaho and Russell Fitzgerald was ranger.

The CCC boys in that camp all came from Buffalo, N.Y. and I visited the Deep Creek camp. The district is presently called Magruder, to commemorate the Lloyd Magruder episode in Vigilante history.

Magruder was killed, along with others of his freighting party, by road agents as he was returning to Lewiston, Idaho from a trip to Virginia City with his gold dust pay for supplies. Fitzgerald, a native of the Bitter Root, worked for the name change, as did Gallogly for Lost Trail.

After his death, Fitzgerald's ashes were scattered over the forest he loved.

Adrian Adams will be remembered by many of us for his quiet, scholarly personality and his conservation ideals.

He was second to take the post of assistant supervisor under John Lowell, after the first assistant, Bill Nagel was transferred to another forest. Adams was transferred to another forest and retired at Kalispell.

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I am glad that in later years I came to know Elers Koch, who in 1909 was named supervisor of the Lolo forest and who wrote a couple of books about the mountain country of that section of the Clearwater country.

He was the father of Tom Koch, local attorney and member of the pioneer Peter Koch family of Bozeman renown.

Clyde Shockley was another Darby ranger who began in Wilfred White's era and he served the Darby district several years. Like the others of whom I have mentioned, he has gone beyond the ranges.

Still around is Brandborg, who succeeded John Lowell as supervisor of the Bitter Root. I went along on tours of study that "Brandy" organized. One example of overuse of the land was a Grantsdale hill where grazing had left the ground grassless.

There were two deputy supervisors during Brandborg's years as Bitter Root supervisor. First was Fred Neitzling who was here when that first CCC camp was dedicated at the then Deep Creek ranger station.

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On the job as supervisor now is Merrill Tester, formerly of Libby, and the Bitter Root keeps pace with all the other Montana forests in methods of timber uses and conservation of natural resources.

John Lowell had offices in the old Ravalli County Bank's second story. Later the Ford building housed the forest office until a modern one-story building on North Third Street was erected.

The Forest Service now has a leased occupancy and at last has ample room for its several desk workers.