



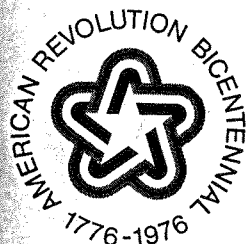
EARLY DAYS in the Forest Service

VOLUME 4

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE

NORTHERN REGION MISSOULA, MONTANA

Missoula, Montana
January 1976

TO THE FRIENDS OF THE NORTHERN REGION:

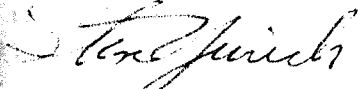
In keeping with our policy of preserving for posterity the rich and colorful history of the Forest Service, we are continuing with our series of publications known as "Early Days In The Forest Service." This, our Volume No. 4, is the latest in the series begun in 1944 by the then Regional Forester Evan W. Kelley.

We continue in this volume the well-accepted style of its predecessors, namely, to publish the letters and articles from Northern Region retirees or about-to-be-retirees just as they wrote them or spoke them. In this way we feel that not only are the sights, sounds, and feel of that era better preserved, but that the character and personality of each of these former employees is more perfectly presented to those readers who either knew them personally or knew of them.

Since this present volume is appearing during the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, we are dedicating this published collection as a Bicentennial project. It also happens that this year marks one hundred years of Federal forestry. So this volume indeed makes its appearance at a particularly auspicious time.

I hope that all of you who read Volume 4 of these early days will get the thrill of going back into history and thus feel closer to those dedicated employees who, in many cases, endured hardship and privation in order to do their job to the best of their ability. By its very nature, the Forest Service is an agency which has always attracted the best to its ranks. And I have every confidence that, as stewards and managers of much of America's forest and rangeland, the employees of the Forest Service will continue to create a colorful history.

Sincerely,



STEVE YURICH
Regional Forester

THEY PIONEERED THE BITTERROOTS

(Early Days on Elk Summit and The Lochsa)

By Carl A. Weholt as recounted by Loyd Rupe

In 1911, five men brought a bit of civilization to the Elk Summit and Hoodoo Lake region in the Bitterroots. They had been preceded by a few trappers and prospectors, but the only signs of their having been there were a few blazes on trees, marking the way they had traveled.

Major Fenn, Supervisor of the Selway Forest, assigned Adolph Weholt and his crew consisting of Loyd Rupe, Sam Weholt, Lou Lisne, and George Eckel, all of Harpster, to build a cabin and open trails in the Elk Summit area. Hoodoo Lake was a black gem, nestled in the heart of a miniature meadow, rimmed about with miniature lodgepole pine. The lake which was teeming with small black trout, drained to the north, though it could easily have drained from the south through a low saddle.

Grass grew belly deep to a tall bronco. Deer were fat and plentiful. Moose fed on the tangled mass of vegetation on the bottom of the lake. To the south, Diablo peak stood sentinel over the primitive area, while kid goats romped over its precipitous face, and billies and nannies lay unconcerned on ledges.

There were grizzlies, too. Unaccustomed to humans, and curious, they reared on their hind legs, and with their weak eyes got as good a look as possible at the intruders they were seeing for the first time. On returning from a fishing trip on East Moose, Sam and Loyd met a grizzly in the game trail. It stood on its hind legs for some time, while the boys fingered their Colt 45's determined to make a good account of themselves in case the old boy was hungry. Its curiosity satisfied, it moved off the path and allowed the fishermen to proceed.

The building of the Elk Summit cabin was accomplished in a rather primitive manner. Logs were snaked in by lariat ropes tied to saddle horns. The timbers were then hewed to shape and lifted into place. Boards for flooring were whipsawed. To accomplish this feat, a platform was built several feet off the ground to hold the log that was to be sawed. The man who handled the top end of the 8 foot saw had the best of the deal. The tall man on the ground got full benefit of the sawdust. It filled his eyes, plugged his ears, plastered his hair, ran down his neck, and filled his boots. The crew managed to get out four or five boards a day. By fall the cabin was laid up and the cracks were chinked with mud and moss.

The Blodgett Pass trail was another project assignment. It extended from Elk Summit, over the Bitterroots to Hamilton, Montana. When Loyd Rupe packed supplies over the trail, he found it necessary to reduce his packs to 35 pounds to keep the horses from tipping over backwards, as they clawed their way up the rock bluffs. The bleached bones of rolled animals could be seen far below--bleak evidence that an unfortunate hunter or trapper had met with disaster.

On the Montana side of the pass, Loyd felt that he had entered Paradise. Broad valleys, green pastures, and civilization stretched before him. His enthusiasm was dampened somewhat when a man he met on the road told him that ticks were numerous in the valley. Loyd charted a course right down the middle of the road thereafter.

Weholt instructed Loyd to hire three men in Hamilton to improve the Blodgett Pass trail. He picked up a husky doublejack man named Gus, an Italian, to turn steel, and a powder man whom the crew dubbed Armstrong. In addition to the food supplies, Loyd loaded his string with dynamite, caps, steel, and fuse to use on the trail project. At the end of the season, the trail was steep and hazardous. On the numerous switchbacks the horses heads would protrude into space as they made the turns.

It was planned to build a trail around the sound end of Big Sand Lake, but in laying out the route, Loyd got into quicksand. Had it not been for a lot of washed in poles, he could easily have lost his horses.

A heavy snow storm hit early in September. On the following Sunday three of the men went to Diablo Peak to hunt goats. Adolph and Sam each got trophies, "so tough you couldn't stick a fork in the soup." Loyd got a two year old billy that was pretty good eating. The trip had been an arduous one and Loyd was so "done in" that he lay down to sleep alongside the camp fire and burned the stock off his rifle.

After the snow hit, Major Fenn dispatched a man from Kooskia to tell the men to come out. It had been a good summer, and an eventful one. The memory of wild game, fool hens, grouse, mosquitoes, blowflies, the sour dough jug that exploded in the middle of a pack, wonderful scenery, and comradeship, stuck with the men the rest of their lives. Perhaps the thing they remembered best was the unbelievable supply of little black trout in Hoodoo. Three men would go out on the lake with a raft. Two men would fish while a third was kept busy taking the fish off the hooks and dropping them in a tub.

It took rugged men to challenge the many traps that Nature had set for those who pioneered its remote uncharted areas. Major Fenn was one such pioneer. He was respected by the personnel, and was knowledgeable of the problems of the forest. The supervisor's office was two small rooms on the second floor of a brick building in Kooskia. His office force consisted of an administrative assistant and an office gal. Adolph Weholt came in from the back country to assist with reports and mapping during the winter.

Number One was a ranger station 15 miles up the Middle Fork of the Clearwater. The semblance of a road had been scratched out that far. From #1, crude trails led to some of the most accessible back country.

Weholt had chosen his crew from husky mountain kids from 18 to 20 years of age. The wages were \$75 per month. The workers furnished their own riding horses, and boarded themselves. After a tryout in the corral full of half wild horses, Loyd Rupe was judged the most adept at handling stock and throwing the diamond hitch, so he was chosen as the official packer.

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The Lochsa was still swollen from the spring runoff when the crew reached the forks of the Selway and Lochsa at Lowell. Lou Lisne, Sam Weholt, George Eckel, and Adolph Weholt crossed without incident. The pack string also swam across nicely. Loyd, however, was just breaking in a colt. He finally spurred the critter into the water. Three times the colt and Loyd went under. Loyd said later, "I choked that saddle horn till it turned black." He finally made it across, white wooly chaps and all.

In 1909, Adolph Weholt and his crew built a trail from Selway Falls to Moose Creek. When they got to the foot of Goat Mountain, cliffs blocked their path, so they went around the mountain and came back to the river. By following the trail, it took a full day to advance 4 miles up river.

It took seven days to make the trip from #1 to Elk Summit. When they reached Moose Creek they had to swim the stock across the rushing ice cold stream. When they forded East Moose, the salmon were so thick they splashed around the horses legs and bellies. Up Moose Creek they followed blazes left by trappers. Up to 6 feet of snow lay in sheltered spots near where they were to build the Elk Summit cabin.

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