

**Fourteen summers  
with the  
Payette National Forest**

**By**

**Bob and Joyce Dustman**



**Bob Dustman**

**1947**

## Fourteen summers with the Payette National Forrest 1947-1960

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Our narrative is divided into three sections: *Bob's first two summers in Big Creek, 1947 and 1948; Bob, Joyce, and Big Creek – the summers of 1949 to 1957; and Three summers in McCall as a fire dispatcher – 1958 to 1960*<sup>1</sup>

*We dedicate our narrative to Ted and Joy Koskella who have been our good friends since 1950 when Ted was appointed Ranger of the Big Creek District, a position he held for five years.*

### Bob's first two summers at Big Creek<sup>2</sup>

#### The first summer, 1947

I will begin by mentioning that I joined the Navy in May of 1943 — the day before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and also the day before my graduation from high-school (Middleton, Idaho). My younger brother, Jim, joined the Navy two years later. But the year before that Jim, then 17 years old, was hired for summer employment on the Big Creek Ranger District by the ranger, Dan Levan, and spent much of the summer as a fire lookout at Sheep Horn Mountain. Younger people were encouraged to work for the U.S. Forest Service (FS) at that time as World War II had caused a shortage of eligible candidates, that is, people 18 years or older. Jim and I were both discharged from the Navy in 1946. The following spring Jim suggested that we drive to McCall, Idaho, and talk to Dan Levan regarding the possibility of summer employment at Big Creek. Mr. Levan agreed to hire us for the summer when the beginning of fire season approached; the two of us were eventually assigned to fire lookouts, Jim to Horse Mountain and I to Rock Rabbit. Horse Mountain is located on the north side of Big Creek River about 20 miles below Big Creek Ranger Station while Rock Rabbit is approximately 14 miles north of the ranger station, about midway between Big Creek and Chamberlain Basin. Jim arrived in Big Creek a few days before I did as I was obligated to participate in a training cruise to Juneau, Alaska on a destroyer (I was in the active reserves for a short time after the war). The cruise was of some benefit as it reminded me of the reasons why I was so happy when I was discharged from the Navy the previous year and dampened any desire I might have had to re-enlist. A friend and I, both enlisted men, had a contest to see

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<sup>1</sup> We have attempted to be factual in our writing but the reader should be aware that our recollections are of experiences that occurred a half century ago and that memories do fade and can change with time. If you, the reader, find factual errors please contact us.  
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<sup>2</sup> Copies of additional photos taken by the authors of places and people encountered during their summers with the Payette National Forrest are archived at the Heritage Program, Payette National Forest and also at the Central Idaho Cultural Center, both in McCall, Idaho.

who could go the longest during the cruise without saluting an officer. I don't recall who won the contest but I do know my salutes were few and far between and not at all sincere {*Plate (Pl.) 1 a-d*}.

At this point we should mention that the term *Big Creek* in our narrative may refer to the river, the ranger station, the ranger district, or to a small village located near the ranger station. Hopefully, the context within which *Big Creek* is mentioned will clarify which of the definitions is correct. Two roads provide access to the ranger station and both climb over fairly high summits (8,000 – 9,000 ft.), high enough so that driving into Big Creek is generally not possible until late June or early July because of snow. One road enters from the south and climbs over Profile Summit while the second enters from the west and traverses over Elk Summit. However, a small airfield at Big Creek provides access to the area before the roads are clear of snow.

After my training cruise was completed, towards the end of June, I reported to the Payette National Forest (PNF) headquarters in McCall and signed on for a summer job in Big Creek. A ritual for some of us who planned to work in 'the backcountry' was a trip to the Stockwell store. I signed over a power of attorney to the store so my summer pay-checks would be mailed to the store. This action enabled me to purchase a supply of groceries and other essentials prior to leaving for Big Creek. Later, orders could be radioed or phoned from Big Creek to Slim Vassar, fire dispatcher for the PNF, who would relay the request to Stockwell. The goods would then be delivered by the next airplane, car or truck that happened to be scheduled for a trip into Big Creek. As the length of time between store personnel bagging an order and the delivery of an order could span a period of several days it was not wise to request perishable goods such as fresh meat which might be inedible on delivery. At the end of the season's work another visit to the Stockwell store was required for a reckoning of the difference between my summer wages and the money I owed the store.

I did not have my own vehicle at that time so I, similar to supplies from the Stockwell store, had to wait for the next available transportation to Big Creek. In the interim I was assigned to the PNF warehouse under the supervision of Don Park where I was asked to sweep floors and do other chores. During my last day in McCall before leaving for my 'real job' I worked with Matt Kangas painting black and yellow safety stripes on poles. I don't recall the purpose of the poles but I do remember that Matt, a full-time FS employee, was a quiet and pleasant person.

My first visit to Big Creek was on a FS truck carrying a load of supplies to Levan's district. In 1947, and for a few more years before a more direct route to Yellow Pine was completed, the drive from McCall to Big Creek required going to Cascade and then turning east and following dirt roads past Warm Lake to Landmark with an additional 50 mile drive in a northerly direction via Yellow Pine {*Pl. 2 a*}. The section between Yellow Pine and Big Creek, nearly 25 miles in length, was particularly slow with the loaded truck having to climb over Profile Summit on a narrow and very rough road. The most exciting part of the trip was a 180 degree turn in the road a short distance after reaching the summit, a turn that required careful and slow

navigation. About a mile later we crossed the headwaters of Big Creek and then followed the creek for another 8-9 miles before the road left the river and finally brought us to the ranger station in early evening hours.

If you view from the air the landscape within which the ranger station is situated you will observe a narrow valley running in a north-south direction that is bounded on the south by Goat Mountain and on the North by McFadden Point. A mile or so south of the ranger station the road leaves the river that then flows between a 300 foot-high hogback and Marble Mountain – the ranger station lies to the west of the Hogback.

A small airfield separated the ranger station into two sections: a 'packer's shack', a barn and corral, and the 'old' ranger house were on the east side of the airfield and adjacent to the Hogback. Employees who were responsible for the horses and mules and for leading pack strings often lived in the packer's shack when they were in Big Creek. West of the airfield were a newly erected ranger house and warehouse, both were framed but not completely finished. The basement of the warehouse was being used for storage but upstairs only a small office and an even smaller room that housed a telephone switchboard system were being used. All of the buildings, with the exception of the 'packers shack' that was built with boards, were constructed with logs from lodgepole pine trees. Fifty yards or so south of the new ranger house were three large tents (12x14 feet in size, I believe), each erected above a wooden platform, that accommodated temporary employees such as myself. Each tent had one or two cots, a sheepherder stove for warmth and cooking, and wooden crates that served as cupboards. Cooking utensils and tableware could be selected from a collection of well-used, basic implements that were stored in the basement of the warehouse. The tents did not offer a lot of security. I was told that a fellow had hung a ham from the ridgepole above his bed and that in the middle of the night he awoke to find a bear had entered his tent and was after the ham. The man had a manta covering his bed and being justly startled he quickly raised up causing the manta to move towards the bear which beat a hasty retreat (a manta is a fairly large piece of canvas used to wrap around materials to be loaded on a pack animal). One could argue the case that the man was more at fault for this exciting incident than the bear. Approximately 100 yards south of the tent were a small store and hotel and gas pumps that were managed by Mary Weymouth and her husband {Pl. 2 b,c & Pl. 3 a-d}.

In 1947 full-time employees at Big Creek included Dan Levan, Myron B. (Skook) McCoy, alternate ranger and packer, and Ed James who was also a packer. A summer employee, Earl Higenbotham, fire dispatcher, time keeper, work organizer, etc., was a good mentor for me as were the three full-time employees. Earl and his wife, Thelma, who did some cooking for Levan whose wife had died not too long before, lived in an old shack about a half mile south of the ranger station that is referred to as the Sharple's cabin.

A non-FS packer, Larry Garner, I believe, who lived along Johnson Creek, a few miles south of Yellow Pine, took me and my belongings to Rock Rabbit. While I was familiar with workhorses, having been raised on a farm, I had had little experience with saddle horses and wasn't aware that stirrups on my saddle should be adjusted for the length of my legs. My lack of

knowledge in this regard resulted in a blister on my backside that hurt for several days. We got a late start and didn't leave the ranger station until early afternoon. Our ride took us along the road to Beaver Creek and then up Beaver Creek a mile or so where we left the main trail and followed the Estep Trail (now trail 207) to the top of Ramey Ridge where we bedded down for the night in a pleasant, open area that we shared with wandering deer. The next morning we had a relatively short ride to the lookout.

Rock Rabbit lookout consisted of a small log cabin, a 60 foot-high steel tower, a privy, and a rock pile that was inhabited by a colony of rock rabbits (pikas or coneys)<sup>3</sup>. It seemed reasonable to assume that the lookout's name was associated with these animals. It didn't take long to unload my goods and get settled in. In the cabin were a cot, a table, a shepherd stove, a very small cellar dug below one corner of the room, and again, a few wooden boxes that served as cupboards – also – a sizable number of deer mice that lived on left-over food supplies from previous fire lookouts (the proof for this was in the pellets). Close to the north side of the cabin was a large barrel that lookout personnel were supposed to fill with water to be used in the event the cabin caught fire. After viewing the size of the barrel and estimating the number of trips to the water source it would take to fill the barrel I decided to chance the loss of the cabin. The nearest water was at a spring located about three fourths of a mile north of the lookout and some 300 feet lower in elevation. My decision was not a major dereliction of duty as someone had constructed a wooden trough that ran from below the edge of the roof into the barrel and it was conceivable that a major rainstorm would fill the barrel within a few days. That didn't happen, the barrel never filled, and the cabin didn't burn down {Pl. 4 a-c}.

What was to become welcome reading material left by previous fire lookouts was found in both the cabin and the privy, that was located to the east of the cabin near a bluff. The larger part of the library consisted of magazines but one person had left a most enjoyable book, *Outlaws of Half-a-Day Creek* by James Hendryx. I recently did a Google on the title and found that this book and others by Hendryx are sought after.

I well remember a lengthy article in a Life magazine I found in the privy concerning the King Ranch in Texas. Bob King, king of the cowboys, who at that time was in charge of the ranch illustrated the toughness of people of that era. One day his mother who was pregnant with Bob was riding a pinto mare that was with foal. During the ride Bob's mother spotted a small band of Indians heading their way. She spurred her horse and had put some distance between her and the Indians when she went into labor. She lay under a mesquite bush and gave birth to Bob while her mare dropped her foal. By now the Indians were closing in on them so she quickly mounted her horse while Bob got on the foal and both rode to safety.

Fire watching at Rock Rabbit was usually done from a small windowed room located at the top of the tower. In the center of the room an alidade was mounted on the top of a pedestal approximately five feet in height.

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<sup>3</sup> The lookout was completed and first manned in 1926 (communication from Marlee Wilcomb, Central Idaho Cultural Center, McCall ID).

The alidade, a circular metal ring marked off in degrees, had a sighting device that permitted the determination of the azimuth (angle) of a fire, or other physical points of interest, from the tower. But before that could be done it was necessary to calibrate the apparatus by using paste to affix a circular map to a metal plate, with Rock Rabbit being at the exact center of the map. The map and plate were then mounted on the top of the pedestal. Then if you sighted on Sheepeater lookout, for example, and the line-of-sight went through the map representation of Sheepeater the alidade was likely set up correctly. If not, the metal plate would be rotated so that the line-of-sight did go through Sheepeater lookout as shown on the map. It was wise to 'sight in' on a couple of other points to ensure accuracy. All went well as long as I restricted my sightings to prominent points located to the north of Big Creek River or to points on the south side of the river. It was impossible to get a close alignment of points on one side of the river with those on the other side. Several years later I was told there had been two groups of surveyors with one group working north to the river and the other group working from the south to the river. An error by one group or the other may explain the discrepancies I observed.

When a fire was spotted its azimuth from the lookout was immediately phoned to Higgenbotham at the ranger station. Fires would often be seen by other lookout personnel who would also 'call in' their azimuth readings so that an accurate location of the fire could be determined. Higgenbotham and the ranger could either initiate fire control action or phone Slim Vassar at the FS office in McCall who would, if necessary, send smoke jumpers to the fire or send 'ground pounders' (individuals who hiked to fires). Twice a day, Higgenbotham would conduct a roll call to ensure that the lookouts and personnel at guard stations were OK.

In 1947 and for the next few years a party-line phone system was the major means of communication on the Big Creek District. The lines (# 9 wire) that conducted phone calls were hung from trees on insulators and were subject to breakage from falling limbs and trees. Each lookout, guard station, and non-FS resident was connected to a major phone line that fed into a switchboard located in the dispatcher's office. Phone call privacy did not exist as any one on your line could 'rubber in' on other people's calls. Each phone 'hookup' was assigned a phone address that consisted of a combination of short and/or long rings. For example, the address of the ranger station was one long ring; Rock Rabbit's address was a short followed by a long ring. Each phone had a crank and the length of a ring was determined by the distance the crank was turned.

During the day we were not supposed to use our phone except for business calls. However, at night, if there was no fire traffic, several people, FS and local citizens, would often be on the phone to hold 'gab fests', each person taking his or her turn talking and thus giving a different definition to 'party line system'.

My usual schedule at Rock Rabbit was to crawl out of bed about 6 AM, climb to the top of the tower and take a good look around the countryside for any 'smokes' that might have occurred during the night although such an event was unlikely unless there had been a recent lightning storm. After

breakfast, if I needed water, I would hike to the spring with an empty five gallon water bag on my back. Five gallons of water weighs 40 pounds and my return to the lookout was not easy, particularly during the first couple of weeks before my physical conditioning had improved. The water bags, I had three to choose from, leaked onto the backs of my legs which was noticeably uncomfortable on a cold morning. I often worked on my woodpile for an hour or so in the morning. I used a saw, about 4 feet in length, to cut logs in blocks of about 18 inches long and then, using a double bit axe, split the blocks into pieces that would fit in the small stove. Most of the wood I worked with was lodge pole pine that is rather easy to split and by the end of the summer I had split enough wood to last an additional season. The next spring a trail crew passed by the cabin and noticed that my woodpile was quite small. The Chamberlain Basin area, about 10 miles to the north, and also large meadows near Rock Rabbit supported a substantial population of elk that were hunted in the fall. I am convinced that lazy elk hunters were responsible for my decimated woodpile.

While doing chores in the morning I would occasionally look for 'smokes', but beginning about 11 AM when the wind typically began to blow, light at first but increasing in intensity as the air warmed, I would climb the tower and spend most of my time there until late afternoon when the wind and heat began to diminish. Another chore was related to a class in philosophy I had taken at the College of Idaho the previous semester. I was supposed to have completed a review of a book written by Emmanuel Kant in 1781 titled *Critique of Pure Reason*. Fortunately, my instructor postponed the due date until the beginning of fall semester and I spent many hours in the tower reading the book and writing my review, all the while doing frequent smoke scans of my outside surroundings. The book was difficult to read and even harder to summarize but I did get an A grade for my efforts. I heartily recommend the book for those who have difficulties falling asleep at night.

A fun daily chore was to practice pistol shooting. Before I officially signed on with the Forest Service I purchased a Smith and Wesson K22 revolver and 2500 rounds of ammunition. Each morning I would fire off about 50 rounds at a target I had placed on a nearby stump. By the end of the summer I had become fairly proficient with the gun and had left the stump in bad shape. Also, I enjoyed doing mapping on the wooden steps that led to the top of the lookout tower. The steps were bolted to a steel frame and were fairly easy to remove and once removed fit nicely on ledges in the corners of the room and at a decent height for carving letters and numbers on them with my pocketknife. I first made a template so that my lettering would appear to be reasonably official. On the first step I carved "As the Crow Flies" and then on successive steps, perhaps four or five, I carved arrows that pointed towards important landmarks and then the names of the landmarks and the number of miles of each from Rock Rabbit. The tower has since been demolished and I have often wondered if the decorated steps are still in existence.

As you might imagine the views from the lookout were outstanding. There was only one obstruction that prevented a 360° view, Dead Mule, a ridge top that was about a mile to the southwest of Rock Rabbit and some

200 feet higher. Sunrises and sunsets were often magnificent, and also exciting to experience after a nighttime thunderstorm were clouds that filled the valleys and left only the highest peaks visible that appeared to be islands in an ocean. The clouds would flow like water around the 'islands' in a manner that reminded me of my not so long ago time at sea. During two nights I watched an aurora borealis that seemed to be far to the north of Rock Rabbit. At the time I believed I was watching lightning flashes but those don't occur when the stars are shining.

Lightning storms typically occurred in late afternoon although I experienced some exciting storms during the night. I would know a storm was coming before I saw it by listening to 'clicks' on the phone caused by distant lightning strikes near or on the phone line. As the storm drew nearer the clicks became more frequent and louder. When the storm approached the lookout I would always disconnect the phone although that was probably not necessary as the tower was grounded through a cable buried in soil beneath it. An added protection was a stool that was rigged with insulators that served as short legs. Theoretically, it was safe to use the phone during a thunderstorm if you were standing on the stool, but I was reluctant to test that theory. I found the storms to be exciting but also a bit frightening. In addition to the noise of thunder, hailstones would drum on the metal roof that was only a short distance above my head. Fortunately, most storms were brief. I recall one rather mean storm that occurred during a Friday night towards the end of fire season. The next day I phoned my brother on Horse Mountain Lookout to see how he had fared during the night but there was no answer. My first thought was that the storm had disabled his phone or the line leading to it. After a few more calls Saturday and again on Sunday with no response, I was beginning to be concerned. Happily, on Monday morning he answered my call. Later, after we had concluded our stints on our respective lookouts, I queried him regarding my inability to phone him that weekend and found he had taken the weekend off to help Les Curtis put up hay for his livestock. Les was living on a ranch at Cabin Creek that was not far from Horse Mountain.

During the last week of my stay on Rock Rabbit I almost ran out of food. I did have a box of cornmeal that had been left by a previous occupant of the cabin but more recent cabin occupants had chewed a hole in the side of the box and eaten some of the cornmeal — that was obvious as the cornmeal was laced with mouse droppings. I believed the cornmeal would be safe to eat if I first boiled it and then fried it after I had formed the cooked 'mush' into small cakes (think pancakes). They really weren't bad with syrup, I didn't become ill from eating them and no, I wouldn't do that again. My dinner on my last Sunday at Rock Rabbit consisted of a box of K-rations that I removed from my fire pack (a back pack containing essential items to be used only when you were away from the lookout and fighting a fire). K-rations were used by the military in World War II and were nutritious and life sustaining and although not being tasty were superior to cornmeal pancakes. I have a vague memory that 1947 was a bad fire year and that my lack of additional supplies may have been due to packers being busy supporting large fire crews.



A few days later a rainstorm passed through the area and brought the fire season to a halt. Levan, the ranger, phoned and asked me to work on the trail leading to Upper Ramey Meadows. The trail wound through a thick stand of lodgepole pine and a sizeable number of them had fallen across the trail. Using my saw and double-bit axe I managed to cut through some of the trees the next day. The following day I was again on the job and while working heard someone yelling my name. It was Levan who was there to transport me and my belongings to the ranger station. We were at the station by late afternoon. That evening Thelma cooked a great dinner and I was invited to join Levan and others at the table. Dan amused the group by talking about the number of grouse he saw as he rode along the trail towards Rock Rabbit — many while some distance from the lookout but fewer and fewer as he approached the lookout. I never did understand the gist of his story.

A day or so later I was assigned my last job of the season. A crew at the mouth of Monumental Creek, about 12 miles below the ranger station, needed another saddle horse and I was asked to ride a horse to their camp. Fortunately, a person with a vehicle drove me back to the ranger station. The road, now closed beyond Smith Creek, was narrow and quite rough and with two fords across Big Creek. The first ford was a hundred yards or so south of the mouth of Beaver Creek with the second was located about two miles further down stream after the road had climbed a distance up and then down a hillside.

#### *The second summer, 1948*

When I returned to Big Creek in 1948 I was expecting to be again assigned to Rock Rabbit but that didn't happen. Instead, I worked at the ranger station, helped clear trails, and learned to climb trees and to repair and hang telephone line. Not being on lookout was not all that bad as I had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a number of interesting non-FS people who I otherwise wouldn't have met; working trail provided me with firsthand exposure to a substantial portion of the Big Creek District.

A few days after my arrival at Big Creek I worked with three or four other employees on a short stretch of trail along Beaver Creek. My recollection is that we built new trail along the north side of the creek to eliminate having to ford the creek in a couple of places. Each morning we would leave the ranger station about 7 AM and ride horses 5-6 miles to the mouth of Beaver Creek where they would be tethered. We would then hike up the trail a half-mile or so to the work site. Dan Levan and Skook used dynamite to break large boulders into smaller boulders that could be moved by hand and then two of us used picks and shovels to fashion a trail out of the rubble. We also had a wheelbarrow. The wheelbarrow was employed to haul dirt to cover rocky areas of the trail to protect hooves of pack animals (dry horse manure can also be used but there wasn't much of that). You might expect that on a mountainside dirt would be readily available but that may not be the case when working in rocky terrain. Good sources of soil were often some distance from the portion of trail that needed covering and thus the effort required to move dirt was substantial. I was not in great physical shape at that time having been at college during the past months and I

remember that after the ride back to the ranger station I would be so tired that it was all I could do to fix a quick meal before I flopped for the night.

Another early season project was to straighten a bulge that had developed on the north side of the new warehouse. Fairly large steel I-beams were trucked in. These were cut to length with a hacksaw and holes for bolts were drilled through them; both jobs were done by hand as electricity was not available. Holes were also bored through the logs and long bolts were fed through the vertically positioned beams and the logs. The tightening of nuts attached to the bolt ends slowly, but surely, removed the bulge.

The maintenance of trails and telephone lines was an essential chore each spring. An important telephone line was one that connected Big Creek to Yellow Pine and then on to the FS headquarters in McCall. We were responsible for the segment between Big Creek and Yellow Pine. For the most part the line followed the road to the mouth of Profile Creek where it crossed the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River; the remaining 4-5 miles to Yellow Pine was on the Boise National Forest. I received my first tutelage on tree climbing from Earl Higgenbotham while working on this line. Later when working with trail crews I was given some responsibility for repairing lines that paralleled trails and, as I will briefly discuss later, I was assigned to work with a FS road crew to reroute sections of the telephone line as the crew remodeled the road between Profile Gap and the mouth of Profile Creek. Climbing trees was relatively easy on the Big Creek District as most lines ran through stands of lodgepole pine. Lodgepole pines have a thin bark and a climber can use short spurs when climbing them. With short spurs the climber's boots are a bit closer to the tree and provide more stability {Pl. 5 a,b}.

I had the opportunity of accompanying Skook McCoy on a trail trip. Skook was a rather short man, was quiet in manner, and had a good sense of humor. He also had the reputation of not backing down to anyone, regardless of their size. He was one of three brothers: George who I never met and Gil who, with his wife Blanche, ran the FS office in Chamberlain Basin. The first night of our trail trip we camped on Crooked Creek, perhaps at Crescent Meadows. I recall walking up-stream a distance with my telescoping fly rod and catching a number of trout that we fried the next morning (I also recall that I had left my knife on a rock while cleaning the fish and I had to walk back up the creek for it). The trout we didn't eat for breakfast were eaten at lunchtime while riding along the trail. Most other details of the trip escape me other than we stopped by Horse Mountain lookout that was manned by my brother the previous year and on our return to Big Creek a short-lived wet, cold storm hit us when we were riding across Lick Creek Summit.

During the trip Skook told me that a few years earlier, somewhere along lower Big Creek, Frank Lobauer shot and killed a young man by the name of Estep. According to Skook, who hauled Estep's body to Big Creek on a mule, Lobauer was of the opinion that Estep had been fooling around with his wife. On his return trip to Big Creek Skook, Estep, and the livestock spent the night at Copper Camp. When Skook arose the next morning he found that during the night varmints had chewed on Estep's ears. A slightly different version of

the killing is related by Ed James in his autobiography *Hanging and Rattling* (coauthored by Dulcimer Nielsen and published by Caxton Printers, 1979). Ed stated that Lobauer and Walt Eastep (the name given by the authors) had been partners in a business venture and that Eastep was shot because he refused to pay a debt he owed Lobauer. Frank was in prison during my first couple of summers with the FS but I did become acquainted with him after he was released from prison (ca 1949) and was once again in Big Creek.

I also enjoyed hearing another story that Skook told me. He was returning to Big Creek from McCall early one summer on a day that new FS recruits were involved in fire and safety training. He said that before he reached the ranger station he saw a large plume of smoke rising from the Hogback. A training fire had gotten away from the recruits and Skook didn't want any part of it so he turned around and headed back to town.

Ed James, a half-breed Indian in his early 50s, was the packer and crew boss of another trail maintenance excursion that I participated in. The amenities associated with camping while doing trail work were quite limited. For example, we didn't have tents or stoves with us. At night each person wrapped his sleeping bag in a manta and hoped the manta was rainproof if a storm occurred during the night. I remember few details regarding this trail trip but I do recall that while camped in Hand Meadows (a mile or so NW of Rock Rabbit), Ed woke all of us about 3 AM as a lightning storm was headed our way. Ed had us gather wood that he stacked in the shape of an inverted pyramid. His fire survived the downpour of rain that accompanied the storm that soon was upon us.

Ed had spent a number of years in Big Creek area as a trapper, a hunting guide, and as a packer and thus was knowledgeable regarding history of the area and had interesting stories to tell about 'old timers' and people who were currently residing in the area (see his autobiography). After reading his book I was of the opinion that he was every bit as tough as Bob King as evidenced by the following story. One winter Ed was trapping along Monumental Creek that flows into Big Creek approximately twelve miles below the ranger station and living in a cabin that was an additional thirteen miles up Monumental Creek. One morning he hiked to the mouth of Monumental Creek to check his mailbox and found a note informing him that one of his daughters who lived in Payette, Idaho was seriously ill. He was determined to see his daughter as soon as possible and as he would need money when he reached Payette, he walked back to his cabin where he gathered up furs that he sold to Walt Estep; Estep lived two and a half miles below the mouth of Monumental Creek. Alternating on skis and snow shoes Ed covered approximately 120 miles before reaching McCall, Idaho; his trip included having to climb two high summits, Elk Summit and Warren Summit. Without stopping to rest, his trip to McCall required a day and a night of effort. Near the end of his trek someone had phoned ahead to McCall and asked that a train be held so that he could ride and rest from McCall to Payette. When he arrived at his house he found that his daughter was OK. A routine tonsillectomy had been magnified into a more serious illness. The original message had passed through too many hands before being deposited in Ed's mailbox at the mouth of Monumental Creek.

But Ed had his lighter moments. He and I had been working trail and by afternoon both of us were tired (as he would say, "my tired hurts"). We sat on a log to rest and have a smoke. After a few minutes of quiet he turned towards me and said, "Bob, I have been trying all day to think of something nice to say about you" which I found to be quite humorous. Another time we were talking about 'fool hens' (Spruce grouse). Ed said that when a mother grouse spots danger she sends an audible signal to her chicks; the chicks respond to the signal by clutching a leaf in their feet and turning upside down. Personally, while I have seen a number of fool hens I have not had the pleasure of witnessing this behavior {Pl. 5 c, d}.

Dan Levan and a fellow by the name of Axelrod who had a cabin at Profile Summit had been feuding about something or another and Dan asked me to drive to Profile Summit and disconnect Axelrod's phone from the main line. This turned out to be an easy job; all I had to do was climb a tree and unwire his line from the main line. However, as I was doing the disconnect Axelrod suddenly appeared below me and using strong language wanted to know what I was doing. I informed him I was doing what I was told to do and that if he had a beef to talk to Levan. A couple of days later I was asked to return to Profile Summit and renew Axelrod's phone service so evidently the two of them had worked out some fractious issues.

During the last half of August I was asked to move in with a road crew that was working on the road between Profile Summit and the mouth of Profile Creek. As part of their remodel job the road crew needed to remove trees to which the telephone line was connected and my job was to reroute the line. This was good duty. A camp had been established just off the road near the mouth of Missouri Creek. One member of the crew was a cook, and a very good cook. All went well until Labor Day weekend when the crew left for a three day vacation and left me to watch after the camp. The cook had prepared a nice roast for me so eating remained first rate until the crew returned — all but the cook. The cook had evidently 'hung one on' over the weekend and just didn't make it back. My stint with the road crew and with the FS was nearing an end and I was again looking forward to my next season in Big Creek. 1949 would be different as I was planning to be married the next spring soon after my wife-to-be graduated from high school. Her presence in the forest, however, was already established as during the Labor Day weekend I had carved her initials high in a tree near the camp used by the road crew.

The evening before I and two other summer employees were to return to 'civilian' life, we and Ed James decided to drink a few beers to celebrate the end of the season. The four of us got together in one of the tent houses to tell tales about this and that. Two of us had been in the navy and had stories to tell, as did Ed who had been gassed in France during the first World War and also had a background as a bronco rider prior to being in Big Creek. The remaining person was the youngest, perhaps just out of high school and, as I recall, didn't have a lot to say. Along about two AM, after we had each downed more than enough bottles of beer, Ed asked if we would like to hear an authentic Indian war chant. Of course the rest of us were eager to hear the chant. Ed began his chant at a slow tempo and with little volume. The

tempo then increased as the chant became louder and louder until suddenly Ed let out a scream, latched on to the youngest member's collar with his left hand and with the other hand grabbed a butcher knife which he raised as if he was surely going to dispatch the young man. He then replaced the knife on the table and began to laugh about the joke he had just played on us. I was quite taken in by his 'joke' and was very happy that the incident was only a 'put on'. We continued to exchange stories until daylight. My 120 mile ride to McCall in the back of a pickup a few hours later was not very pleasant.

### ***Bob, Joyce, and Big Creek – the summers of 1949 to 1957***

We were married Saturday, June 4, 1949, in Boise by a Justice of the Peace for ten dollars and in the year 2006 have been married 57 years; less that twenty cents per year – what a deal. We loaded our vehicle, a used 1941 Willys pickup that cost \$769 when new, and soon after the wedding drove to McCall where we rented a cabin. When I reported for work at the FS office Monday morning I was told the road over Profile Summit was still snowed in and that we would be flown to Big Creek as soon as weather permitted a flight. For the next few days I was assigned tasks at the warehouse similar to those I had done two years earlier. Finally, the weather improved and we were driven to the airport where we and our belongings were loaded on the Travelair which resembled the Spirit of Saint Louis but with more windows; Jim Larken was our pilot. Joyce had not flown before and was doing quite well until Larken saw mountain goats near Logan Mountain, only a few miles from the Big Creek airfield. He then made a few tight circles above the goats so we could also view them. Then, to make matters worse, when he made a pass over the airfield in Big Creek we found that horses and mules were on the field and he had to do more circling while the livestock were chased into a corral. Joyce said that after we landed and had firm footing the Travelair and airfield seemed to be circling around her {Pl. 6 a-d}.

From above, the airfield appeared to be rather small, and it was. A saving grace was that planes touched down on an uphill slope and took off on a downhill slope. But pilots had to be aware they were landing and taking off over a swampy area at the bottom (north end) of the field. Joyce and I watched one small plane touch down sooner than it should have and when it taxied to the top of the runway it was covered with mud. {Pl. 6a-d}

Joyce and I checked in at the office that was in the new warehouse and were assigned a tent and mummy bags. We then selected cooking and tableware stored in the warehouse basement and got our tent in order. That night, however, we slept at the nearby hotel. The previous summer Mary Weymouth told me that if I had a wife when I returned to Big Creek in 1949 my bride and I would be given a free night's lodging. Mary had evidently forgotten her promise as the next morning when we checked out she gladly took our money.

### Rock Rabbit Lookout

Neither of us can recall activities we participated in before Skook McCoy packed us to our summer home at Rock Rabbit. Remembering the mice I encountered in 1947 we brought several traps with us and within a couple of weeks had considerably thinned their population. Late one afternoon we discovered a rat that had infiltrated our cabin. We were unable to chase it out the door so I finally dispatched it with my Smith and Wesson pistol; there should still be a bullet hole in the bottom log at the southeast corner of the room.

About two weeks after we moved to the lookout Ed James, on his way to Chamberlain Basin with a 'short string', brought us mail and a few provisions we had requested. Ed was the last person to visit us before we left the lookout at the end of the summer, although we did see the heads of a few pilots as they flew close by the lookout {Pl. 7a}.

An incident that seems worthy of mentioning was the morning I developed a bad gut ache that I thought was an appendicitis attack. I phoned the ranger station to inform Levan of my illness. He suggested that when I felt up to it I should walk to the mouth of Beaver Creek, about eight miles, where Higgenbotham would meet me with a vehicle and then I would be driven to Stibnite where I could be evaluated by a physician (Stibnite is 6-8 miles east of the mouth of Profile Creek). At Levan's request, Joyce remained at the lookout in my absence. She said that after I left she received phone calls from other lookouts, all males, who offered to walk to Rock Rabbit and help her by splitting wood, packing water, etc. — great friends! Fortunately, I was back at the lookout a day later. My problem was not appendicitis but an ulcer for which the physician prescribed a change in diet. I carried a fairly large box of oatmeal with me on my return to Rock Rabbit and had no further symptoms that summer.

Water, of course, was a problem, particularly when you have a wife who believed that the floor and our clothes should be scrubbed once in awhile. Now, instead of making two water trips a week the schedule called for a five-gallon bag every day and on washday, two bags. One washday instead of making two trips I decided to carry two bags at one time with one hanging down my front and the other on my back, a total of 80 pounds. I did make it to the lookout with the water but decided I would restrict myself to one bag at a time from then on. Actually, Joyce was quite sparing with our water. She washed clothes with saved dishwater and then used that water to scrub the floor; by that time the water was almost worn out. She also carried a few bags of water from the spring while I kept an eye on the lookout {Pl. 7b}.

There were a number of ground squirrels at Rock Rabbit that would scatter when we approached them. We decided to tame them with pancakes. Each morning we placed a pancake or two on the ground near the cabin and within a couple of weeks they lost some of their fear of us. By the end of the summer squirrels would sit on our laps while eating. In retrospect the squirrels were considerably more entertaining than TV although we were not then aware of such a comparison as neither of us had yet seen a TV. We also enjoyed watching three crows that would roost in the top of a tall lodgepole pine tree behind our cabin. When the air heated and thermals were growing

they would cast off and soar into the distance. An occasional visitor was a large buck deer that would walk past the cabin; we named him Frederick because of his regal appearance.

### A one-man fire

Late one afternoon a lightning storm passed through our area and set fire to a Douglas fir snag on Ramey Ridge, about two miles from our cabin. We reported the fire to Higgenbotham who relayed our report to the dispatcher in the McCall FS office and requested that two smoke jumpers be sent to extinguish the fire. The dispatcher said that it was too late in the day to send jumpers and that I would have to handle the fire by myself. I gathered up my fire pack, water bag, shovel, and Pulaski, a tool with an axe on one side and a grubbing hoe on the other, and took the trail to the south that runs on the east side of Dead Mule; the trail we had traveled when going to Rock Rabbit. It was getting dark by that time and once I had lost a bit of elevation I could no longer see the fire. When I was at the base of Dead Mule I turned on my head light, left the trail and headed east on Ramey Ridge, all the while dodging trees. After some twenty minutes of hiking I was surprised when I ran into a well-traveled trail as I knew there was no other major trail in that area. After scratching my head for a minute or so I realized I had walked in a circle and was back on the trail I had left earlier. I again struck out to the east and this time I managed to walk a fairly straight line and finally saw the burning snag. Strangely, the fire, about 15-20 feet above the ground, was burning out of opposite sides of the tree. While I was trying to extinguish the fire by throwing dirt at the flames I was suddenly struck by the fact that the tree would eventually burn through and I would have no idea as to the direction it would fall. I ceased throwing dirt and backed away a safe distance where I sat on the ground and watched the tree burn. Sure enough, in a couple of hours the upper portion of the tree did fall. I rather easily extinguished flames that were at the base of the fallen portion and then threw dirt on the top of the stump that remained standing until flames and smoke on that end had also disappeared. Later in the night I became cold and had to light a small warming fire – I didn't have a sleeping bag. At dawn, filthy dirty, I walked back to the lookout to get a one-man crosscut saw that I used to tidy up my job {Pl. 7c}. According to instructions I inspected the fire site once a day for the next few days to ensure there were no remaining embers. At a later time, Slim Vasser told me that gnats often gather around smoldering material that might not be giving off visible smoke. If you see gnats, start digging. He was right, of course.

### Socializing on lookout

In the evenings we would join in on 'party-line' phone conversations and developed good relationships with other lookouts and with local non-FS people who sometimes also participated in our 'gab fests'. Unfortunately, we never had the opportunity to meet face to face with some of the people we frequently talked to. One of these was a gentleman, Bill, at the Grass Mountain lookout on the Chamberlain District, about 16 miles NE of Rock Rabbit, 'as the crow flies'. Due to Bill's friendly nature and soft, smooth voice

I pictured him as being a handsome movie-star kind of person. However, a few years later I saw a picture of him and found that my image was dead wrong. One evening Bill mentioned that he had a dog and two horses at Grass Mountain. He said that one day his dog had walked behind one of the horses that was tied to a nearby hitching rail. The horse kicked the dog in the head and rendered it unconscious. Bill said that after that incident whenever the dog neared the hitching rail he would growl and bark while looking around for the invisible evil thing that had previously attacked him.

Prior to leaving for Rock Rabbit we became acquainted with a young couple, George and Mary Hensen, who were to spend the summer on Acorn Butte lookout.<sup>4</sup> After a few weeks at their lookout, George and Mary became hungry for mail and asked if their accumulated mail could be dropped to them from a plane the next time one was in their vicinity. They received word one morning that the Travelair would soon be in their area and to keep their eyes open. The pilot made a low pass over the lookout and chucked the mail out of a window. Mary and George did not see the mail fall and searched for quite some time to find it, but with no success. After the Travelair landed at the McCall airport the pilot noticed that the mail had wedged between a wing strut and the wing instead of dropping to the ground. As far as I know that was the first and last attempt at 'air mail' delivery to lookouts on the Big Creek District.

Nineteen forty-nine turned out to be a rough fire year. On August 5<sup>th</sup> thirteen smoke jumpers were burned to death on a fire at Mann Gulch on the Helena National Forest in Montana. And, at about that time, a large fire was burning east of McCall, Idaho. While we didn't see smoke from the Mann Gulch fire, smoke was quite visible from the closer fire. For several days in late afternoon, Joyce and I would view a mushroom cloud that rose high in the air; cold ashes from the fire would sometimes fall on our lookout. It is our remembrance that there were a number of large fires on the Payette and surrounding National Forests that summer. The fires were undoubtedly related to a dietary deficiency on our part. We were running out of food and were told that pack strings were busy on fires and that we would have to tough it out. Our larder consisted of a few cans of sauerkraut but not much else.

Similar to my experience in 1947 a rain-snow storm came through the area in late August and fire season was nearing its end. At about that time bull elk began to bugle in the meadows below us. Their bugles were exciting to hear and for me, sounded somewhat similar to the bellowing of Hereford bulls. We were finally told that a packer would soon be at our lookout to transport us and our few possessions to the ranger station. Rather than riding horses to Big Creek we opted to hike off the mountain and meet Earl Higginbotham and the FS pickup at the mouth of Beaver Creek. Our map

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<sup>4</sup> George had served as a gunner on an aircraft carrier in World War II that was hit by a Kamakazi aircraft. He had been playing cards below deck when general quarters was sounded and finished his hand instead of immediately hurrying to his station. This short delay saved his life and he was the only man in his crew to survive. When we knew him his hands still shook when he held a cup of coffee.



showed two trails that led to Beaver Creek: the Estep Trail that we traveled on our way to the lookout and the Mulligan Creek Trail. The latter appeared to me to be the shorter of the two so Joyce and I hiked down Mulligan Creek — a bad choice on my part. The trail was little more than a dry, steep creek bed that required a lot of jumping from boulder to boulder. Our legs were in bad shape the next day and Joyce was forevermore suspicious of any shortcuts I suggested. We were looking forward to a delicious meal that Thelma Higginbotham was preparing for us, but to our dismay our stomachs appeared to have shrunk from our limited rations during the past couple of weeks and we were unable to do justice to a fine dinner.

Our summer at Rock Rabbit must have been a success as Joyce and I were still speaking kindly to each other when we left the lookout. Both of us would be attending college as well as looking forward to another summer in Big Creek. However, there was some sadness as 1949 was Dan Levan's last year at Big Creek where he had been an FS Ranger for 25 years.

*A new ranger, a trail trip, a sneaky hound*

In 1950 and during the following four years the district ranger would be Ted Koskella, an excellent choice to replace Dan Levan {*Pl. 8 a*}. During his five years at Big Creek we found him to be an excellent ranger and also a good friend. He rapidly ascended the professional ladder in the Forest Service and by the time he retired many years later he had been a Regional Forester at Albuquerque, NM and at San Francisco, CA. And, as we soon learned, his wife, Joy, was also a personable and very competent person who contributed substantially to Ted's success.

Joyce and I again were flown to Big Creek in the Travelair — there were no goats on the mountain or livestock on the runway to be circled this trip. We rather quickly moved into a tent house, gathered up the necessary pots and pans, and were in business. A week or so later seven of us set out on a memorable trail trip. Skook McCoy was in charge of the group and also the packer. He was not at all pleased to find that Joyce and Harriett McCoy, wife of Skook's nephew, Bob McCoy, would be joining the 'official' trail crew. After a couple of days, however, Skook had changed his opinion after finding that the two women were fine cooks and that they assumed responsibility for other camp chores. A cougar hound that belonged to someone at Chamberlain Basin also accompanied the group. At the most northern point in our trip we would be reasonably close to Chamberlain Basin and Bob McCoy, whose father, Gil, was in charge of the Chamberlain District, was planning to take the hound to the FS office there {*Pl. 8 b-d*}.

The first day we rode up Smith Creek, past the Werdenhoff mine to the Mosquito Ridge trail and then on to Mosquito Springs that is on a ridge separating the Big Creek and Krassel ranger districts. That night Joyce and I zipped our sleeping bags together and placed them on the ground under a large fir tree and covered them with a manta. During the night a thunderstorm moved through the area and in spite of the manta we awoke to find a small stream of water entering our sleeping quarters. Our bags remained damp for most of the remainder of our 10-12 day trip.

The next morning I helped Joyce and Harriett cook breakfast and had laid a large slab of bacon on a log where I cut slices from it for our meal. Later, when we were preparing to move to our next campsite I walked to the log and found that the slab of bacon had disappeared and that the hound was also gone. Had he shown up with bacon-breath he would have been a dead dog. As I never saw the hound again I suspect he made his way to Chamberlain. However, we did get an animal from Chamberlain that summer. Bob McCoy had ridden there to visit his parents and returned with a mare that had recently healed from a broken leg after being held in a sling during the healing process. Joyce bought the mare for \$50. The horse turned out to be a bargain as she was an 'easy rider' and after I had learned to handle pack strings Joyce and her horse would often accompany me on trail trips.

Over a period of about a week we cleared trails from Mosquito Springs to Upper Ramey Meadows via Cow Corrals, Crane Meadows, and Hand Meadow. We sometimes worked out of our camp for a day or two and would be very pleased when we returned to camp in the evening to find that Harriett and Joyce had a fine meal waiting for us. We were at Upper Ramey Meadows during a weekend and had time to explore a meandering small stream, Ramey Creek, that contained a large number of small trout. During one afternoon we caught upwards of a hundred fish that we cooked and ate for breakfast the next morning. I realize that was a lot of fish for seven people to eat, but we were young with healthy appetites, and the trout were small. A day later we were going to head out for Big Creek and in doing so we would pass by Rock Rabbit where Joyce and I had stayed the previous summer. Bob, Harriett, Joyce, and I decided we would rather sleep inside than outside so in the afternoon we hiked to Rock Rabbit carrying our sleeping bags and a few provisions. The next morning Skook and the remaining two trail crew members stopped at Rock Rabbit and the seven of us rode to the ranger station.

This was Skook's last year as a FS employee; the next year he was working for Brown's Tie and Lumber Co. in McCall. We would miss his companionship and his sense of humor. Joyce remembers him complaining about a weak cup of coffee by saying, "You could read the Lord's prayer through six feet of it".

### *Life at the Big Creek Ranger Station*

In about 1952 we moved into the old ranger house that was located east of the upper end of the airfield (regretfully, the house burned down a few years ago). It was an old, but spacious house by Big Creek standards, with a kitchen, a large dining and living room area, a bedroom, and a bathroom with a tub and shower. Dan Levan had lived in the house for many years. Near the rear (east side) of the house was a large woodshed that was stacked with blocks of wood, most from lodgepole pine trees. As lodgepole pine is easy to split an hour or two of labor with an axe would yield enough wood to fire a range in the kitchen and a heating stove in the living room for some time. Coils embedded in the range carried water through the fire box and provided hot water for bathing and other household uses. A number of windows had

been installed in the house that provided the dining-living room area with ample light during daytime hours and offered views of a tourist campground to the south, the airfield, the new ranger house, and warehouse to the west, and the barn and a small pasture between the house and barn to the north. Light in the evening was from gas lanterns that we usually hung from the ceiling. A small stream ran past the west side of the house; water from the stream was used to water a lawn that surrounded the house and melded into the small pasture. We had a phone that enabled us to call the new ranger house and the warehouse. All in all the old ranger house was a delightful place to live. We lived in the house during two summers and after that were housed in a newly built two-bedroom apartment in the warehouse. Much of the work on the interior of this apartment and a smaller one was done by Ted Koskella during a winter when he and his family remained in Big Creek.

Joyce and I would usually be flown into Big Creek two or three weeks before the road over Profile Summit was free of snow. This was a particularly enjoyable time as there were only a handful of people at the ranger station. In the evenings we often played cards with Ted and Joy, canasta and pinochle, usually, and from time to time there would be slide shows if someone had received newly developed 35 mm slides in the mail. The stars during walks across the airfield after one of our evening social events could be spectacular. One forgets the degree to which air pollution has dampened those choice visual displays in areas that are more densely inhabited.

Joyce and Joy Koskella enjoyed riding their horses on nearby roads. Joy occasionally accompanied Ted when he was riding about the district and when the two of them were 'on the trail' Joyce and I would move into their house and look after their children. The first year there were two daughters but by the end of Ted's tour in Big Creek in 1954 an additional two daughters and a son had joined the family {Pl. 9 a-c}.

One of my chores each spring was to inspect fire packs that were stored in the basement of the warehouse. The inspection ensured that each pack contained specified items such as rations, a first aid kit, and a headlamp. Each season I replaced batteries in all of the headlamps. Fire tools such as axes, shovels, and Pulaskis were examined and those with dull and/or nicked blades were sent out for sharpening. There were always enough other chores to keep me busy before the road opened, other employees arrived, and we got serious about trail work.

#### *New water box and learning to pack*

A small creek ran between the tent-house area and the hotel- store buildings before taking a northerly swing and running near the west side of the old Ranger House. The stream provided culinary and drinking water for employees at the ranger station and it was decided that a new and more efficient water box should be installed in the creek to better insure water cleanliness. The site of the water box was located a hundred yards or so upstream from the tent housing. As the box was to be made of concrete a substantial quantity of cement, sand, and gravel had to be moved to the work site from a stash near the tents. The sand and gravel were obtained from a quarry about four miles south of the ranger station, near the mouth of Jacob's

Ladder Creek and hauled to the ranger station in a pickup truck. There was no road between the stash and the water-box work site so it was decided that the materials would be moved on mules and that I would have my first 'hands-on' introduction to learning to tie loads on pack animals. The loads were prepackaged bags of concrete and gunnysacks that were partially filled with sand and gravel. Two gentle mules, each with a forgiving nature, were selected for my use. The three of us, and my saddle horse, did an adequate job.

#### *A nasty stretch of trail*

It was probably the next year that my knowledge regarding packing skills was considerably expanded. Joyce, Bob McCoy, the official packer, I, and two other employees set out on a trail maintenance trip that was to extend over a period of about three weeks and cover some rough wilderness territory {Pl. 10 a,b}. We headed east from Big Creek over the Lick Creek trail to Cougar Basin, down the West Fork of Monumental Creek to Monumental Creek and the McCoy Ranch, up Holy Terror Creek to the top of Lookout Mountain, down Telephone Creek to Rush Creek, up the South Fork of Rush Creek, past Two Point Peak and Mormon Mountain, and finally to Sheep Horn Mountain. On our return to Big Creek we dropped down from Sheep Horn to Two Point Creek and after crossing Rush Creek climbed up Range Creek to Lookout Mountain. From there we rode to the McCoy Ranch before traveling the remaining distance to the ranger station.

We were told that the trails to the east of Rush Creek had not seen a maintenance crew for fourteen years so we were not surprised to find there was a lot of work to be done. We would sometimes camp at a favorable spot and work from it for a few days before moving on. One of our extended camps was at, or near, the mouth of the South Fork of Rush Creek. We had been working trail up the South Fork on previous days and on this particular day we rode our horses to the spot where our day's work would begin. It was late in the afternoon and we were near the ridge top when we turned back towards camp. Soon after that Joyce and Bob McCoy, who were riding ahead of me, rounded a corner and saw three rams a short distance above them. Joyce had the camera but was so enthralled by the scene she forgot to take photos of them. By the time I caught up with them the sheep had disappeared. We were in one of the most rugged and spectacular mountainous areas you can imagine

We must have stayed a bit too long at our present camp site as a mother mouse had given birth on one of Kayo's saddle blankets. Kayo was our only white mule. Neither we nor Kayo noticed the mice until we placed the blanket on his back and the babies began to squiggle about. Fortunately, Kayo was getting along in years and had experienced almost all there was to be experienced by a pack mule and he quickly calmed down. Another sign of Kayo's senior-citizen status, and that of his friend Duke, a black mule, was evidenced when they would stand up after having lain down for some time. Both would always stretch their back legs by lifting them off the ground and then extending them to the rear, one leg at a time, of course.

One particular stretch of trail was one that neither Joyce nor I will ever forget. Portions of the trail that had been blasted out of a steep rock wall had sloughed off to the point that riding across it appeared dicey, at best *{Pl. 10 c}*. I dismounted my horse and slowly lead it across the bad sections to safety while Bob McCoy untied the lead ropes that attached each pack animal to the one in front of it. This was done to prevent one mule from taking other mules with it if it fell off the trail; the drop-off below the trail was impressive. Both Joyce and Bob McCoy led their horses, with the mules following, across the dangerous areas with no mishaps until all had crossed safely. Then, one of the mules began to buck for no good reason that I could think of and unloaded his packs. One of the packs rolled down the hill a considerable distance before stopping but fortunately we were beyond the 'drop-off' area and I was able to retrieve it. I don't recall harboring ill feelings towards the mule, probably because I was so relieved that nothing worse had happened. We did not attempt to repair the bad stretch of trail as explosives would have been required to put it in shape and also we would not have to cross that section of trail on our return to Big Creek.

We continued on towards Sheep Horn Mountain, sawing logs that lay across the trail using a two-man McCoullough chain saw. The saw was quite heavy and required two people to carry and to use when sawing, one holding on to a handle attached to the front of the saw, the stinger, and the other grasping two handles at the motor end. The saw could be dismantled and loaded on a mule but in areas where logs were relatively frequent it seemed more expedient to carry it. We were a couple of miles from Sheep Horn where we were going to camp when it was time to call it a day. We ditched the saw in some brush and proceeded on to our campsite. There was a small spring near Sheep Horn Mountain that was adequate for the crew but not for the livestock so the next morning Bob McCoy took the animals down a trail to a campsite on Two Point Creek where water was plentiful. The other members of the crew went with him. Joyce and I remained on the hill with our sleeping bags and a few provisions and the next morning hiked to where the chainsaw was hidden and commenced to cut more logs. Suddenly, we were surprised to see Ranger Koskella and his 'short string' riding up the trail towards us. He was on an inspection trip and was dumbfounded to find that Joyce and I were sawing logs while the other crew members were holed up on Two Point Creek. As an aside, Joyce was not a paid employee.

Being a packer is a dawn to dark job. At the end of a day Bob McCoy and I would put hobbles on the bell mare and also on a few saddle horses and then turn all of the animals loose so they could forage during the night. We would also unloose the clapper on the bell mare's bell so the ringing noise could be heard as she moved about. The mules, more so than horses, closely follow a bell mare so if you can find her the rest of the livestock is likely to be near. (Bell mares are often white in color as they are more easily seen than darker colored horses during nighttime.) With darkness approaching Bob McCoy and I would determine the direction the livestock were feeding. As soon as morning light appeared we would start a fire so that Joyce could get a pot of coffee and breakfast started while we looked for the pack string by following tracks if we could find them — this was not always possible in rocky

terrain — and listening for the bell. Often, it seemed, after feeding during the night the horses would seek a spot where the early sun was shining and quietly rest there (remember, no movement, no bell ringing). When we found the animals one of us put a lead rope on the bell mare, we removed all the hobbles, and then put halter ropes on our saddle horses that we rode bareback to camp with one of us leading the bell mare. The halter ropes acted as bridles and enabled us to control our steeds. If lucky we would be back to our camp within an hour after we left; if not, as I will later relate, hours might pass before you had them 'rounded up'.

*Rhubarb and runaways at McCoy Ranch, no rats, an exploding can*

On another trail trip Joyce, I, and Rogerx were traveling to Rush Creek Point Lookout and had spent a weekend at the McCoy Ranch that was located on the east side of Monumental Creek about a mile below the mouth of the West Fork of Monumental Creek. At the McCoy Ranch was an abandoned two-story house and a large meadow where livestock could graze, the primary reason why we stopped there. Also appealing was a functional wood-burning stove in the house that we could use to cook our meals {Pl. 11 a,b}.

As we would be there for two days Joyce decided to make a chocolate pie that she covered with meringue; she had beaten egg whites by hand which required a lot of time and effort. The pie was excellent but Rogerx was not satisfied with it and stated that he liked nuts on his chocolate pies. Considering that we were in the wilderness on a trail trip Rogerx's comment did not endear himself to Joyce who has yet to forget his criticism. A second specialty dish was rhubarb. Someone in the past had set out rhubarb plants near the house. Joyce cooked up a pot of rhubarb to which she added sugar to reduce its sourness. The three of us ate the tasty dish but, unfortunately, a few hours later the diarrhetic effects of the rhubarb hit us. Within a span of about five minutes the three of us had gone through the door, each looking for a place to 'go'.

We were planning to hit the trail on Monday morning and I had gotten up early that day with halter ropes in hand. The animals were not to be seen in the meadow so I followed the trail to where it crossed the creek and found the critters' tracks headed up the West Fork of Monumental Creek; I suspected they were on their way to the ranger station. I trailed them for two miles or so and finally caught up with them in a narrow canyon. They were quite skittish and would not let me get around them to herd them back down the trail. However, I was able to catch Joyce's mare but riding bareback and having only a halter rope to guide her, I was unable to control her well enough to turn the other animals down the trail. I rode Joyce's mare back to the McCoy Ranch where I put a saddle and bridle on her and again headed up the West Fork of Monumental Creek. By this time the horses and mules were evidently tired of playing games with me and I was able catch the bell mare. As expected, when we started down the trail the remaining animals fell in line behind us. When we arrived at the McCoy Ranch it was the middle of the afternoon and too late to break camp. That night I placed my sleeping bag in the middle of the trail near the spot where the animals had crossed

Monumental Creek the night before. They were all in the meadow the next morning and we continued on towards Rush Creek Point.

Another anecdote regarding this particular trip involves rats. On earlier trips to the McCoy Ranch it was fun to climb the stairs at night to the upper level of the house with a flashlight and my pistol. The place was infested with rats and I would usually bag a few of them. But this time there were no rats — well, almost none. After breakfast the following morning Joyce and I were sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee when a rat fell through wallpaper that covered the ceiling and landed on the floor near us where it laid twitching and frothing at the mouth until it died. Having quick minds we figured the rat must have been eating soap. A few months later I was reflecting on this incident and it dawned on me that we had been watching a rabid rat expire and that an outbreak of rabies had most likely been responsible for the absence of other rats.

One other recollection from our trip to Rush Creek Point occurred near Bear Trap Saddle that is approximately half way between Lookout Mountain and the lookout at Rush Creek Point. It was time for lunch and I could see an open area ahead of us so I guided the pack string around some fallen trees and when we neared the lunch spot I unloaded the grub boxes carried by Jean, a red mule and the official carrier of grub boxes, and started a fire so Joyce could fix lunch. Rogerx and I then walked back to the downed trees and commenced to cut them from the trail. While we were doing this we heard a loud 'crack' that sounded like a rifle shot that seemed to originate near the lunch area. We ran to see what had happened and found that Joyce had neglected to partially open a can of peas before setting it in the fire to heat and the can had exploded. A year or two later when riding past that area I got off my horse and after a few minutes of searching found the badly bent-up can that I kept as a souvenir. Somehow, the souvenir (conveniently?) disappeared.

#### *Dewey Moore and I look for Lobauer's remains*

We earlier related that Frank Lobauer had spent time in prison for having killed John Estep. Frank was released from prison ca 1949 and returned to Big Creek. At that time he had a white burro, Jimmy, I believe, that he used as a pack animal when traveling between Big Creek and his mining claim located north of Ramey Ridge in the neighborhood of the West Fork of Ramey Creek. One day a year or so later he left Big Creek and set out on foot for his mine; I was told he had sold his burro because of financial difficulties. Several days later Dewey Moore phoned to say that a friend had stopped by Frank's claim and could see no evidence that Frank had recently been there. Dewey and I agreed that the two of us would look for him. The following Saturday Dewey rode a horse to the mouth of Beaver Creek where I met him after driving from the ranger station. I walked and Dewey rode up Beaver Creek to the Estep Trail and then followed the Estep trail to the top of Ramey Ridge. While climbing towards Ramey Ridge, I, being on foot, investigated a few off-trail areas where Frank might have stopped to rest or obtain water. Dewey said that Frank's usual route to his mine, at least when leading his burro, was to continue on the Ramey Ridge trail towards Dead

Mule and then break off to the right and proceed down a draw to his cabin. As that route had already been checked out by Dewey's friend, we figured that he must have taken a shortcut to his mine, a shortcut that would have saved him a considerable amount of distance by going directly down hill to his cabin rather than looping around towards Dead Mule. Dewey parked his horse by the trail and the two of us started down the north-facing hillside which we soon found to be covered with fallen timber. We decided that we would have only a slight chance of finding Frank as he was a small man and if he had fallen and hurt himself or suffered a heart attack he would have likely rolled under a log and would be difficult to see even if we were close to where his body was lying. We called it a day and turned back. To my knowledge, Frank's body was never found, but see footnote<sup>5</sup>.

Although I got along well with Dewey, Ed James stated in his biography that Dewey was a troublemaker. FS personnel would not have disputed Ed's opinion as Dewey wrote many letters regarding the sorry treatment he had received at the hands of the Forest Service. Ted Koskella once remarked to me that Dewey had written to the FS office in McCall that the only decent FS person on the Big Creek District was Bob Dustman. I was afraid that my career on the PNF would be tainted from that time on.<sup>6</sup>

#### Omar Campbell and Eastern Brook trout

Omar Campbell was hired as Alternate Ranger at Big Creek ca 1951 and 1952, a position he was well qualified to fill. In the fall of his first year at Big Creek a pilot informed Omar that several years earlier he had seeded Logan Lake with Eastern Brook trout. Omar hiked to the lake and verified the pilot's story by catching a number of large fish. Soon after Joyce and I arrived in Big Creek the following year, Ted Koskella and I hiked to Logan Lake and tried our luck, I with a fly rod and Ted with a spinning rod. The fly rod was of no use as I was unable to cast beyond brush along the edge of the lake. Ted and I then took turns making three successive casts with his spinning rod. Out of three casts we would almost always catch one or two trout that ranged in size between 13 and 17 inches — the most successful fishing trip I have ever had. On July 4 of the next year Ted and I again hiked to Logan Lake only to find the lake was still covered with ice. Word regarding the large fish was soon spread about and the lake was frequented by quite a number of fishermen. The 'whoppers' were soon difficult to find and after a few years the lake was inhabited by many small, skinny trout with large heads; the fish would grab onto any kind of bait tossed their way.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Preston who worked at the Big Creek ranger station in 1996 has since researched the death of Frank. Joyce and I were aware that a boot with a foot in it had been found on the Big Creek District ca 1953. Preston is convinced the boot and foot had belonged to Lobauer. (See "Trapped", *The tragic story of the Lobauer-Estep murder affair on Big Creek*. Heritage Program, Payette National Forest Service, Intermountain Region. U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 2002.)

<sup>6</sup> Dewey and his daughters Virginia and Addie had a small ranch at the mouth of Acorn Creek, approximately three miles below the mouth of Monumental Creek. The oldest daughter, Virginia, married Ed James when she was about 18 years old and he was in his 60s.



*A nice dog, smoke jumpers, and a not so nice dog*

Omar owned a large kennel-trained black Labrador dog that accompanied him much of the time. Late in the summer of the second of his two years as Ranger Alternate, Omar left Big Creek for a short vacation and asked Joyce and me to keep the Lab in his absence. We were still living in a tent house at the time and the presence of a large dog in our tent was quite noticeable. While Omar was gone four smoke jumpers dropped on a fire atop Marble Mountain and a day or two later, after the fire had been extinguished, Joyce, the black Lab, and I set out with extra saddle horses and two pack mules to fetch them and their gear to the ranger station so they could be flown to McCall. To get to the jumpers we rode up the Lick Creek Trail and then turned north where the crest of Marble Mountain intersected the trail. We 'bushwhacked' to the jump site, always staying on the crest of the ridge or as near to it as we could. Joyce's horse fell twice on slick rock but with no damage to either the horse or rider. When we reached the jumpers they decided that rather than riding a horse, they would take a shortcut to the ranger station by dropping down the mountain to Big Creek River and then scrambling over the Hogback.

After I had loaded the jumpers' gear on the mules we returned to the ranger station without any problems, except for one incident. Napier Edwards, who lived about a mile south of the ranger station, owned a nasty dog. The Lab was leading our 'short string' as we were riding on the road past the Edwards' place. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted Napier's dog slinking along the edge of the road and then watched him leap onto the Lab's back. The Lab quickly grabbed Napier's dog by its nape, shook him a couple of times and then deposited him in a small irrigation ditch that was also just off the road. While Napier's dog hustled back to his home, the Lab, without looking back and appearing to hold no grudge, again assumed the lead position. Joyce and I credited the Lab as having responded in a mature and gentlemanly manner.

*Napier Edwards an old-timer and mailman*

Napier Edwards had lived in Big Creek since 1904. A story has it that Napier, then two years old and in the company of his mother, was carried over Elk Summit on the shoulders of a man called Sheepeater Bill and that during the trip he peed down the back of Sheepeater Bill's neck. The latter supposedly made improper suggestions regarding the punishment and replacement of Napier.

Joyce and I were invited into Napier's house on one occasion and found it to be full of newspapers and magazines that were piled on the floor. When walking through the house we were restricted to narrow aisles. Joyce and I saw Napier quite often as he had the contract for mail delivery from Yellow Pine to Big Creek on Tuesdays and Fridays. He and his aforementioned dog rode in a Jeep that would arrive at the hotel about 5 PM where the mail was distributed. During the summer we, and our friends, were always eager to see Napier and his Jeep deliver the mail. Joyce's mother,

Jennie Cornell, found that if she mailed a box early in the morning at the post office in Middleton, Idaho, where she lived, the box would reach Cascade, Idaho in time to be transferred on to Yellow Pine where Napier would take it on the last leg of its journey. You couldn't find better mail service than this — less than ten hours between packaging and delivery. Jennie was an excellent gardener and would load a large box or basket with vegetables and fruits that were in season. Joyce would share the produce with other FS employees who were very nice to us on mail days. (Pl. 11c,d)

Like Dewey Moore, Napier did not like the Forest Service and he, too, wrote many letters regarding unjust treatment at the hands of PNF officials. I don't recall, however, that he ever officially tainted me as being a particularly fine FS employee even though our relationships with one another were usually cordial.

#### A surprise trail trip and a surprise fire

A packer had taken a trail crew down Big Creek where they were working their way towards the lookout at Rush Creek Point. I received a call at the ranger station one morning informing me that the packer's father had died and that the packer had flown from the Cabin Creek airfield to be with his family; the airfield was not far from where the crew was working. I was asked to join the trail crew as there was no one in the crew who knew how to handle livestock. I quickly bundled up my sleeping bag, a few other necessities, and a small sack of oats that I loaded on a packhorse. I knew that I wouldn't catch up with the crew that day and would need to layover one night. With the oats I would be able to tether the horses during the night and not risk having to hunt for them the next morning

The next day I joined the crew at Rush Creek Point. The following morning we packed up and moved camp towards Bear Trap Saddle. Late in the afternoon after we had set up camp a wild thunderstorm came through the area with several lightning strikes hitting not far from us. Fortunately, no fires were started. Over the next few days we worked our way to the McCoy Ranch and after another day's ride we would be back at Big Creek, on a Friday afternoon. My sojourn with the trail crew required that I work through the previous weekend and I was looking forward to four-days of R & R. The final leg of our trail trip was arduous, a long climb up the West Fork of Monumental Creek to Cougar Basin and then another climb to the ridge between Cougar Basin and Little Marble Creek. From there we would connect with the Lick Creek Trail and then it was 'all down hill'. However, when we had reached an area where I could view the ridge line northwest of the ranger station I saw airplanes in the distance buzzing around Mosquito Ridge. Although I didn't see smoke I sensed that the activity might be related to a fire and if that was the case I would undoubtedly be working on a fire during my planned days off. That was the case. When we arrived at the ranger station Joyce informed me that four smoke jumpers had dropped on a relatively small fire on the west side of Mosquito Ridge and that one of them, Chip Beatty, I believe, had injured both legs. My understanding was that his chute had hung up in a tree and then slipped off with the jumper falling a fair distance before hitting the ground. The fire later 'blew up' while the other

three jumpers were caring for their injured buddy. The latter, undoubtedly loaded with pain killers, was eventually transported to Big Creek on horseback to await a ride to McCall by airplane. Joyce told me that the injured jumper was unable to use stirrups and sat on the saddle the best he could while riding 10-12 miles (my estimate). She further said that she and other FS residents marveled at the size of his swollen legs.

The next day I took the pack string to the fire site that was on the Krassel District side of Mosquito Ridge and checked in with the fire boss, the Krassel ranger. He asked that I turn the livestock over to someone else and help with the fire. I placed the saddles and blankets in an open area near the top of the fire and placed my sleeping bag nearby along with sleeping bags of other fire personnel. That night the fire roared up the hill twice, close enough to us that burning embers landed on sleeping bags. After the second 'blowup' I slept with my clothes on and my boots close at hand, ready to run. Actually, neither we nor the packsaddles were in any real danger.<sup>7</sup>

The fire was large enough that a cook and a rough kitchen were brought in. Although we were in a primitive area the cook would dish up steaks, cold milk, ice cream and other welcome but unexpected items as food and equipment drops were made from the Ford Tri-motor in the evenings. When the fire was under control I was left in charge of a skeleton crew that would 'mop up' the fire and then I was to hand the site over to three or four men who would patrol the fire site for a few additional days. The cook, who was considerably older than me, was quite a talker. When walking off the fire to the road where vehicles were waiting for us he kept right at my elbow jawing away. I figured I would quiet him down in a few minutes by walking as fast as I could. That didn't work — I, who thought I was in good shape ran out of gas and had to slow down. He was beside me and still talking when we ended our hike.

#### *A hotshot trail crew, a thief, a dirty fieth, and a fire*

It may have been the spring of 1952, soon after Joyce and I flew into Big Creek for another summer of work, when Ted Koskella informed me he had hired an excellent trail crew for the season and that they were already on the job. Two of them lived on the district and had a good knowledge of the area while a third member of the crew was a husky young man, HYM, from McCall, I believe, who was full of vim and vigor. A few days later Ted flew out of Big Creek on a business matter and soon after his departure the trail crew returned to the ranger station. Someone tipped me off that while working the Big Creek trail HYM had been stealing items from unoccupied cabins. I went to the barn where HYM had his bed and gear and told him what I had heard, that he was fired, and that I would step out of the barn for a few minutes while he placed all of the stolen items on his bed. I further informed him that if I later found that he had failed to return one or more stolen items I would

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<sup>7</sup> The pack string was assigned to a young man who became a smoke jumper the following year. A few years later he was in the Ford Tri-motor with a load of jumpers, perhaps as the 'spotter'. The jumpers dropped on a fire and not long afterwards the aircraft was caught in a box canyon and crashed; there were no survivors.

immediately inform the Valley County Sheriff of his thievery. After I reentered the barn and saw that he had left a rifle and other stolen items on his bed I drove him to the snow line on the north side of Profile Summit where he got out of the FS pickup and began to hike towards Yellow Pine. I was a bit edgy at that time as Jerry was fully capable of stomping me pretty good if he wanted to, but he didn't. I have since wondered if he was 'on the lam' for other misdeeds when he signed up with the FS to work in the back country.<sup>8</sup>

The Big Creek store and hotel had a new owner that year, HF, a wealthy man who had had a successful plumbing business in Salt Lake City. Early in the season he walked to the FS warehouse, introduced himself, and told Koskella and me that he wanted to support the Forest Service as best he could and that if we needed help to let him know — sounds like a pretty good fellow, doesn't he?.

On a Saturday morning after Profile Summit was free of snow and I had had an opportunity drive our Willys pickup into Big Creek, a few FS employees asked if I would drive them to Yellow Pine so they could do some shopping. We were in Yellow Pine no more than an hour or so and already one of the group, a second member of the trail crew, Ernie, was drunk. When we returned to the ranger station I learned there was a fire burning near Acorn Butte. I talked to Ernie and as he was beginning to recover from his revelry at Yellow Pine I included him with the other 'shoppers' to go to the fire and loaned them my pickup as they could drive to the mouth of Monumental Creek. The drive would give Ernie another hour to sober up. I later received a call from the leader of the crew saying 1) they had stalled my vehicle while fording Little Ramey Creek and were leaving the pickup in the middle of the creek and 2) Ernie had stashed several bottles of beer in his fire pack and was again 'blotto'. The crew talked Ernie into staying behind while they hiked to the fire. The next morning the fire crew radioed that they had found the fire the previous afternoon and that Ernie had joined them about 3 AM — good sense of duty on Ernie's part. Actually, Ernie was a good sort and I still remember one of his sayings, "If there is anything I hate it's a liar and a dirty fieth".<sup>9</sup>

Now, recall that my pickup is stuck in the middle of Little Ramey Creek. I contacted HF and after describing my problem I asked if he would be willing

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<sup>8</sup> HYM was not the only employee we had to fire. One afternoon we received reports from lookouts that a fire was burning on the north side of Big Creek Ridge, across the river from Acorn Butte. Among those calling in fire coordinates was a lookout east of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, but nary a peep was heard from our man at Acorn Butte, even though he would have had a spectacular view of the fire had he bothered to look as the fire was almost directly across the river from him. When I contacted him he acknowledged that he had been lying on his bed reading instead of keeping 'a watchful eye' on the forest. A day or so later I rode to Acorn Butte and transported him and his belongings to Big Creek so that he could return to his home.

<sup>9</sup> The third member of the 'hot shot' crew was a grumbler but a fairly good packer. He once told me that he and a friend were busy canning meat from an 'out of season' deer one spring when the ranger happened to stop by their cabin. He seemed rather proud of the fact that the ranger wasn't aware of their activity.

to extract my vehicle from the creek and possibly tow it back to the ranger station. He agreed to help me and the two of us drove to Little Ramey where he easily pulled my pickup to dry land and I was in luck; I was able to start the pickup and drive it to the ranger station. After the two of us had returned to Big Creek, I diplomatically asked HF how much I owed him. I was expecting him to respond with, for example, "no problem, glad to be of help". Instead he named a hefty price that came out of my pocket.

*A rather strenuous hike and a missing spotting scope*

Les Curtis and Bill Sullivan {Pl. 12a} were regular visitors at Big Creek. You may remember that we earlier mentioned that Les lived at Cabin Creek and that my brother Jim had helped him harvest hay in 1947. I don't know much about Sullivan but Les worked for the Forest Service one year as a packer. During that summer Les, Joyce and I were on an early season trail-maintenance trip to Lookout Mountain. On our return to Big Creek via the West Fork of Monumental Creek we were within a mile of Catherine Pass about mid-afternoon when we ran into snow that was too deep for the pack string. Joyce and I decided to hike through the snow and continue on to Big Creek while Les and the pack string would make a U-turn and return to Big Creek via the Monumental Creek and Big Creek trails, a two-day trip. We opened the pack that contained our sleeping bags and other personal belongings to retrieve our coats as we knew we would not reach Big Creek before dark. We began our hike and left Les to repack our gear and return to the McCoy Ranch where he would spend the night.

Our hike to the ranger station was fairly strenuous and required climbing over Catherine Pass and another several hundred feet to the ridge top between Cougar Basin and the head of Little Marble Creek and then a long downhill haul to the Lick Creek trailhead with a final two mile walk to the ranger station. It was getting dark by the time we were home.

Les arrived at the ranger station late the next afternoon. Joyce and I removed the manta from our pack and I unrolled my bedroll to retrieve a 20x spotting scope that I had taken with us only to find that it was missing. Either I had done a lousy job of securing it in the bedroll or it had fallen on the ground while Les was rearranging and repacking our belongings. I wrote the spotting scope off as a complete loss. But, as luck would have it, a hunter that fall discovered the scope alongside the trail and left it at the ranger station where it was waiting for us the following year. Earlier in our narrative I may have unfairly suggested that hunters steal wood from lookout stashes. I will now acknowledge that my statement was too broad as some hunters are honest and good citizens (probably most of them).

*Sylvan and Joyce have narrow escapes*

Sylvan Davey was hired to man the lookout on Rush Creek Point and Joyce and I were to transport him and his belongings to his new summer home. In addition to going to Rush Creek Point we would be carrying supplies to the lookout at Acorn Butte. This was not Sylvan's first year on the PNF as the previous year while fighting a fire on the PNF a limb on a falling snag punctured his skull and he was hospitalized for a time.

When talking to Sylvan about our ride to the lookout it was evident that his experience with horses was quite limited so we put him on Duke, a bay horse that was one of the most foolproof horses on the district. Late in the afternoon of our first day of traveling we camped at Crescent Meadows. The next morning we made our jaunt to Acorn Butte and when dropping down from the lookout we turned onto the the Coxey Creek trail that would put us on the Big Creek trail near Coxey Hole, a dandy place to fish {Pl. 12 b,c}. From there we proceeded down Big Creek and finally reached the trail that branched off from the Big Creek trail and would take us to Rush Creek Point. We had to ford Big Creek River. There was a flat, sandy area near the ford that Duke had evaluated as being an excellent place for a roll, and he gave it a go. Poor Sylvan was surprised, not really understanding what was happening and he barely escaped participating in Duke's strange, from Sylvan's point of view, behavior. After a couple of good rolls a refreshed Duke was ready to proceed across the creek and up the trail with Sylvan back in the saddle. {Pl. 12 d}

A more worrisome incident occurred on the ride back to the ranger station. Joyce and I were riding on the old road between Monumental Creek and the ranger station with me leading the pack string and Joyce bringing up the rear when I suddenly discovered that the road was no longer passable as Big Creek River had channeled through a section of the road. However, I saw that someone with horses had maneuvered around the washed-out area by riding up a steep hillside beside the road and then making a sharp turn to the right for a few yards before turning left and finally dropping down to the road on the far side of the 'washout'. My saddle horse and the bell mare made it to the first turn and a few feet beyond, but Jean, the first mule behind the bell mare, had decided to take a short cut and was hung up with her neck stretched out. I was able to reach over the bell mare with my hunting knife and cut Jean's lead rope. She immediately turned back down the hill onto the road we had just traversed and with all of the mules being tied together about half of them ran down one track while the others ran down the other track. It appeared to me that Joyce was going to be 'clothes-lined' off her horse. But, at the last moment the mules formed a single line and ran past her. The outcome could have been so much worse.

#### A yellowpine snag on fire

The sun had already set one evening when one of the local citizens knocked on our door and said he had earlier seen a tree on fire near the second ford across Big Creek River, about eight or nine miles below the ranger station. I roused out Roger Cornell, Don Wilson, and one other employee and the four of us jumped into the FS pickup with our fire packs and tools that included a two-man crosscut saw. It must have been 10 PM by the time we had crossed the second ford and parked our vehicle. There was no sign of a fire so we climbed the hill west of the river and scouted the area for a time and as we still did not see fire or smoke we holed up for the night on the side of the hill. The next morning one of us saw a wisp of smoke below us, close to the river. We soon discovered that a lightning strike had hit a yellow pine snag and the fire was burning from the top. It was evident that we

needed to use the saw and fall the snag before we could extinguish the fire. As soon as the saw had cut through the bark and into the wood we realized the snag was hollow as smoke was coming out of our cut. And, as it turned out resins heated by the fire were dripping onto our saw blade and causing it to stick. The first aid kits we carried in our fire packs saved the day. We were able to lubricate the saw with burn salve and soon had the snag lying on the ground where we quickly eliminated the fire {Pl. 13 a,b}.

#### The bull elk incident

We had another 'knock on the door' incident, also by a non-FS person. The individual reported that a bull elk had gotten its antlers entangled in a telephone line. We were not surprised as we would occasionally find bull elk and buck deer that had died after similar encounters with telephone line, but we had never found one that was entrapped in wire and alive.

The elk was about half a mile below the Mosquito Ridge trailhead, alongside an old mining road so three of us were able to drive to the site. We had taken rope and wire cutters with us. The animal was a few yards above the road and we could readily see from torn up soil and the animal's heavy breathing that he had been fighting the wire for some time. It had been over an hour since we were informed about the elk and who knows how long it had been entrapped before that. Very likely the wire had sagged low enough between trees that when the elk moved through the area his antlers were snared by the wire.

I was able to secure ropes around the elk's hind legs and then I climbed a short distance up a tree where I tied the other ends of the ropes to a limb. This was done to prevent the animal from charging us once it was free. The other two employees handled the more dangerous aspect of the job and were finally able to cut the animal free of the wire. I then waited until my companions had moved out of danger before I cut the restraining ropes. The elk was not at all interested in us and instead walked slowly down to the road and across it to a flat place near the creek where he stood heaving. After a few minutes he ran across the creek and disappeared into brush and trees {Pl. 13 c,d}.

#### Radios replace telephones; bah and humbug, for a time

In the early 1950s short-wave radios replaced the #9-wire phone system used on the district. Crews then rolled the wire into bundles that were left alongside of trails and after another year or so the wire had been loaded on pack animals and deposited at the ranger station. I am certain that the antlered animals strongly supported this change in communication systems.

The new radios were not able to talk directly to radios in McCall because of intervening mountains. As a matter of fact, I doubt that Big Creek personnel could have contacted anyone outside of the immediate area if a 'fix' had not been made. A road was bladed from Elk Summit to the top of a nearby hill that was named 'Radio Point'. There, a small building was erected that housed a repeater radio that could reach McCall and many other points. Radio transmissions from Big Creek traveled up a telephone wire to the

repeater that would relay the messages to other stations. Calls into Big Creek also went through the repeater. This was a fine system except that the repeater radio often quit working. When the repeater was inoperative an eleven-mile trip to Radio Point had to be made to swap out the nonfunctioning radio with one that hopefully would work. That doesn't seem like a big deal as there is a road from the ranger station to Radio Point. A topographic map, however, shows that the elevation at Radio Point is 9,100 ft, about 3,400 ft higher than the elevation at the ranger station and that about three-quarters of the way to Elk Summit the road passes through a notch in a ridge. Beyond the notch, Goldman's Cut, the road follows the north side of a ridge for about a mile; this stretch of road can be covered with snow well into July. An additional difficulty is a 300 foot drop in the road between Goldman's Cut and Crystal Spring that is midway between Goldman's Cut and Elk Summit – 300 feet that must be regained when climbing to the summit (in the summer Crystal Spring is an especially beautiful area with many wild flowers, but less attractive when you are packing a radio and walking through snow). Snow level determined the method of travel: vehicle, horseback, or walking after the vehicle or animals had been parked at snowline. Bob Burkholder, Big Creek ranger in 1955 and 1956, and I were caught in a snowstorm at Elk Summit while on our way to Radio Point on a Fourth of July. However, I must admit that each successive summer was accompanied by improved radio technology and fewer trips to Radio Point {Pl. 14a-d}.

When short-wave radios were first being used call signs had not yet been systematized. Call signs then were the names of the locations of transmitting and receiving stations. For example, I can still hear Slim Vassar and his strong voice calling Missoula with, "Missoula McCall, Missoula McCall, Missoula McCall".

#### *Smoke Jumpers, the house that Jack 'filt', and a poker hand*

Most years prior to the beginning of fire season several smoke jumpers would be detailed to Big Creek to work on a variety of projects. I was told that they had been responsible for the falling and peeling of lodgepole logs that were used in the construction of the new ranger house, the warehouse, and the woodshed near the new ranger house. They were usually housed in a framed building at the NW end of the airfield that was presumably constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), probably in the 1930s.

The 'jumpers' were always welcome company, always congenial, and capable of tackling major tasks that Big Creek personnel would not have the time or resources to accomplish such as, for example, constructing a log fence around the perimeter of the airfield. One spring one of the jumpers, Jack, was responsible for the naming of the privy that was adjacent to the CCC buildings. Jack came down with an intestinal disorder. After Jack had endured his illness for a couple of days his companions named the outhouse *The house that Jack 'filt'*.

On a few occasions jumpers would visit our apartment for an evening of penny-ante poker. During a poker-playing session one of the players had been consistently losing and after a particularly bad hand announced that he would play one more hand and then leave. You guessed it — his next hand



was a dandy, an ace high straight flush, in sparkling diamonds. He then had no intention of quitting the game and continued to play until the rest of us decided we had had enough for one evening {Pl. 15a-d}.

*It wasn't spotted fever*

It was late in the day when Joyce, I, and a pack string were on the Big Creek trail riding towards the ranger station. We decided to spend the night at Copper Camp that would leave us with a modest ten-mile ride the next morning. During the night I awoke several times with a splitting headache. When I crawled out of my sleeping bag the next morning I knew I was sick and I felt even worse when I found that the livestock had decided to head out for the ranger station. After walking up the road a couple of miles I caught up with the 'runaways' and was able to turn them around and return them to Copper Camp. Getting the packs loaded on the animals took a long time as I would have to lie on the ground and rest after placing the pad, blanket and saddle on each animal and also after I had tied a load on a saddle. Once we were on our way I alternated between riding and leading my horse and whenever we crossed a stream I would stop for a drink of water. When we arrived at the ranger station we found that the Koskella's had weekend guests and that one of them was a nurse. She took my temperature and said that it was well above normal.

Three or four days later I had not shown improvement so Joyce drove me to the hospital at Stibnite. I was feeling sicker than I had ever felt before and when we met the doctor I told him I thought I had spotted fever. He took one look at me and said that I was not nearly sick enough to have spotted fever. On the drive back to Big Creek and a short distance up Profile Creek I asked Joyce to stop so that I could lie down beside the road. While I was lying down my head was resting on a pile of dry horse manure which did not bother me at all. The doctor had not given me a diagnosis, but a few years later I was telling Wilmer Shaver about my illness and he said he had had a similar experience (Wilmer worked at the Cold Meadows Guard Station). His physician told him he probably had a mosquito-induced illness. It was a few weeks before I was fully recovered. The moral to this story is, *don't get spotted fever.*<sup>10</sup>

*A nearby fire, jumpers and a distinguished quarterback*

One afternoon Slim Vassar radioed that a fire was reported to be burning on the ridge to the west of the ranger station and that I should join four smoke jumpers who were also being sent to the fire. I was moving in on the fire about an hour later when the jumpers exited their plane. Three

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<sup>10</sup> Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a serious generalized illness that occurs from bites by ticks that are infected by the bacteria *Rickettsia rickettsii*; if not treated the disease can be fatal. In the spring there were many ticks on the Big Creek District. I recall picking about 40 of them off my body and clothes one evening after working near the mouth of Monumental Creek. Ticks also feast on livestock and frequently attach themselves to the underside of the animals' necks where they are not easily dislodged. The ticks can then grow to an enormous size as they continue to feed on blood —not a pretty sight.

landed in fine shape but the other one had banged into a tree and was unconscious for a few minutes before he was able to remove his chute and go to work. One of the jumpers told me that the 'banged-up' one was a quarterback for the University of Idaho's football team and that he held a school record; he had thrown more interceptions than any previous quarterback at that school. Of equal importance, we had the fire under control and then extinguished within a couple of hours. I spent the night at the fire site and returned to the ranger station the next morning.

#### A near disaster

Eight smoke jumpers had put out a fire and were at the ranger station waiting for the Ford Tri-motor to ferry them to McCall. As I recall, Jim Larken landed the Tri-motor at Big Creek about six PM. When it was time to load the plane the jumpers wanted take their 'jump gear' with them which Larken thought was a bad idea. Larkin finally conceded and a few hundred additional pounds were put on the plane. I remember watching the Ford starting its run down the field at a slower than usual pace. The plane finally left the ground near the swamp at the lower end of the airfield and then began to settle and it appeared to me there was a terrible disaster in the offing. The plane disappeared from sight and then finally could be seen to be airborne — WHEW! In a conversation earlier this year with a friend of mine, Loyle Washam, who was one of the jumpers on the Ford that day, said that he has a clear remembrance of the incident and that he, too, thought they might crash.

#### Rides in the Ford Tri-motor, a DC-3, and a Bell J-2

The Ford tri-motor was a sight to behold with a lot of power that was not matched by speed (cruising speed was 90 MPH). I had two opportunities to fly in the Ford, both with Jim Larkin as pilot. The first ride was an evening flight to Chamberlain Basin. Johnson Brothers Flying Service had contracted to haul timbers and other bridge building materials to a smaller airfield on lower Big Creek, probably at Cabin Creek. They figured the most economical method for delivering the materials was to fly big loads to Chamberlain in the Ford and then use the Travelair to ferry lighter loads from Chamberlain to the smaller airfield that was not far from the bridge site.

Jim said he had been flying most of the day and was tired. After we left McCall and had gained altitude he asked me to steer the plane towards Sheepeater, a prominent peak a few miles west of Chamberlain, while he napped and then to awaken him so he could begin his approach to the airfield. He did fall asleep and after I awakened him he landed the plane and we unloaded the bridge materials. I was both pleased and honored to have 'steered' the Ford.

My second flight in the Ford was to the airport at Stanley Basin, Idaho, to retrieve a group of jumpers who had been on a fire in the Stanley Basis area and return them to McCall. My clearest memory of this trip was flying through a rain squall and watching raindrops dribble into the cockpit from leaks around the front canopy.

I was at the FS office in McCall one afternoon when two fires were spotted in an eastern section of the Big Creek district. I was invited to ride in

the copilot's seat of a DC3 so that I could not only view 'our' fires but also help the pilot locate them as I was presumably familiar with the Big Creek district and this particular pilot was not. Once we were airborne and over mountainous terrain I was pretty much lost and of little help and, as it turned out; the pilot didn't need my help as he had been given map coordinates of the fires.

At each fire the 'spotter' selected the safest looking landing spot for the jumpers that was reasonably close to the fire. The pilot would then make a pass over the fire and the spotter would drop a small weighted parachute that was designed to mimic a smokejumper's fall to the earth. Two or more passes over the landing spot might be made with a weighted parachute being dropped during each pass until one landed on or close to the selected 'safe' area; the spotter then know where to exit the men. Smoke jumpers tend to be a fun-loving and rather rambunctious group of young men (there are now women jumpers as well). However, I noticed that they were tight-lipped, quiet, and serious while waiting their turn to jump, as they should have been. There was no hesitation on their part when the spotter tapped them on the shoulder indicating it was 'time to go'. I was most impressed by their performance. Had I been in their boots I would have to have been pushed out of the plane, most likely with a piece of door frame in each hand.

On another occasion I was asked to ride with a helicopter pilot who was to pick up two jumpers who had extinguished a fire and were on the top of a ridge waiting for us. The helicopter, a Bell J-2, was small and not very powerful — it could ferry only one jumper and his gear at a time. We had little difficulty finding the jumpers who were in a clearing on a ridge west of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. First one jumper and his gear were flown to an airfield on the Middle Fork and after thirty minutes or so the helicopter returned and the second jumper was on his way, leaving me alone on the ridge top, hoping the pilot would not forget me. The pilot did not forget and we also landed at the airfield where the two jumpers had been deposited. Both the pilot and I bought a bottle of beer at the airfield to drink on the way home. I am not at all proud of the following, but somewhere over the mountainous terrain I chucked my empty bottle out of the copter (the doors had earlier been removed from the copter) and I wondered if the bottle was making a nice whistling sound as it fell and also if there was a remote chance that it might hit someone on the head.

Discarding used items in the forest was not much of an issue then. When working trail we would bury our garbage near our camp sites even though we knew that it would be dug up by animals and scattered about. Accumulated garbage at the ranger station was hauled to a dump located beyond the north end of the airfield. At the public campground in Big Creek, garbage was discarded into an underground pit which was frequented by rodents and flies. The pit was sited near the lower end of the campground.

#### Fire school and safety meetings

Fire school was held each year prior to the beginning of fire season and was attended by employees who would likely be involved in fire suppression that season. In addition to teaching principles of fire dynamics

and fire suppression a strong emphasis was given to safety practices which makes sense as FS employees who were working trail or fighting fire were exposed to a number of dangers and they and personnel on lookouts, if injured, might not readily receive adequate medical attention. Other topics of instruction included house keeping, so that lookouts and trail crews would not poison themselves with their cooking, the use of alidades (for lookout personnel), skills in map reading and compass use, etc. I was asked to teach compass and map reading skills one year. I can assure you that the rumors were false which suggested that school trainees were, for some time, being found wandering about the forest, completely lost, with a compass and map in their hands.

For the most part the classes were enjoyable, informative and interesting as the instructors were rangers, fire control staff, and others with years of forest experience. The training generally covered a period of two or three days with the final day being devoted to fighting fire. Under the supervision of men who were experienced fire fighters, the recruits received 'hands-on' training in fire-fighting techniques they had learned in earlier classes. Fire school was also valuable from a social point of view; old FS friendships were renewed and new recruits became acquainted with FS employees from the McCall office and from other ranger districts. A nice spin-off from fire school was the encouragement of district personnel to focus on safety procedures. At Big Creek, we would often begin the workweek with a safety meeting for available employees and discuss issues such as sharpening of cutting and climbing tools, use of these tools, and working with livestock {Pl. 16a-d}.

I don't recall that we had any lost-time injuries on our district but I do remember that while working on the telephone line between the mouth of Profile Creek and Yellow Pine one of our employees cut his foot badly with a double-bit axe. I drove him to the hospital in Stibnite where his wound was treated. When we returned to Big Creek the ranger assigned him to a desk job, thus avoiding having to report a lost-time accident.

Under certain conditions an injured person in the 'backcountry' could receive first class medical care as illustrated by the following. During one of my last years in Big Creek a young man stationed at a lookout on a nearby forest shot himself in the leg while honing his 'quick draw' skills. Soon after he reported the accident two smoke jumpers 'dropped in' on him and had just finished patching him up when a helicopter arrived to fly him to a local airfield. An airplane, earlier dispatched to the airfield, was waiting for the young man and flew him to a town that had a hospital.

Fishing, another fire, and fishing friends

As you may have gathered from our earlier statements fishing was pretty good on the Big Creek district. There were a number of lakes and streams that could be accessed as well as beaver ponds at the mouth of Jacob's Ladder Creek, located 3-4 miles south of the ranger station and not far from the road. In addition, there were salmon spawning beds in Big Creek between the ranger station and the mouth of Jacob's Ladder Creek. It was always exciting to see salmon that had swum from the ocean to our remote area in the mountains, although most of them were rather badly 'beaten up' by their journey and after spawning would die with some being devoured by bears.

During a salmon run one of our employees had spent several hours attempting to snag salmon (very illegal). He paid for his mischief as he had been out in the sun for several hours unclothed from the waist up and received a painful sunburn. That evening he had to hike to a fire carrying his fire pack. He was unable to carry the pack on his back and instead hung it from his waist which he later told me was very awkward and uncomfortable. Sometimes, appropriate paybacks for crimes do occur.

Salmon fishing in Big Creek River was not allowed in areas where spawning beds existed, of course, but salmon could be legally caught in the river north of the ranger station (the demarcation line between legal and illegal may have been at Smith Creek). A popular spot to catch salmon was near the mouth of Little Ramey Creek and during salmon runs there would often be several cars parked close by. I had friends from Boise Valley who occasionally fished there and usually caught salmon {PL 17a}. I was quite happy to see them on one of their fishing trips.

A group of smoke jumpers had landed on a fire on the north side of Big Creek Ridge. The next morning Ted Koskella, I, and a few other Big Creek employees rode horseback to the fire along with a pack string that would be used to carry jumper gear to the ranger station. Our route followed the Big Creek Trail to the bottom of trail 061 that was about three miles below Monumental Creek. At this point we forded Big Creek and followed trail 061 towards the ridge top and then left the trail and turned east to the fire site. By then, the jumpers had the fire under control and were pulled off the fire a day or so later. The rest of us stayed at the fire site to mop up hot spots and after another couple of days all but three of us were released. My colleagues and I were to patrol the fire and extinguish any smokes that might occur and I was to leave when I believed the other two men would be sufficient to complete the task. The Travelair flew overhead and dropped provisions for us that included a hindquarter of beef. We ate almost nothing but steak for the next two days and there was plenty left the following morning when I began my hike to the ranger station, a hike that I estimated to be 20+ miles in length.

I didn't return to Big Creek River via trail 061 as I was concerned about fording the river on foot. Instead I stayed high on the hill for a time and then followed a ridge that dropped down to intersect Monumental Creek a short distance from its mouth. A portion of my trek was on a mass of fallen trees, perhaps victims of a micro burst. For some distance I walked on logs, jumping from one to another as needed. I finally reached Monumental Creek

that I easily forded and soon after I had crossed the bridge that spanned Big Creek River and was ready for some easy hiking on the Big Creek Trail. After I had covered another couple of miles I was at Copper Camp and my feet needed cooling. As I was dangling my feet in a small creek that crossed the trail and was contemplating an additional ten mile-long hike my two salmon-fishing friends who were returning to the ranger station in their vehicle stopped and asked if I would like to ride with them. I and my feet were very happy and thankful for the ride {PI 17b-d}.

Red Potter, an elk, and two burials

Our first son, Todd, was born in December of 1955 which meant that Joyce would not be accompanying me on pack trips the next summer. When we climbed aboard the Travelair in 1956 with Todd, a dog, a crib and baby accessories as well as food, clothes, etc., for our ride to Big Creek, Jim Larkin, the pilot looked us over and said – “where’s the goat”?

Once at the ranger station we had a number of visitors who stopped by to see Todd. One of them was Red Potter, an interesting and congenial miner with a rather slight build and heart problems. When Joyce responded to Red Potter’s knock on our door she asked him if he would like a cup of coffee. He assured her that he would. Then, when Joyce asked him if he would like cream or sugar he answered by saying, “I take my coffee black, my whiskey straight, and my women stout.” Potter was then single but, according to him, he had been married several times. I have wondered if his marital life might have been more stable had he preferred smaller women.

A week or so later Red dropped by our apartment to say that he had been gone from Big Creek for a few days as he wanted to trail his horses over Profile Gap that was still covered with snow. He said that one of his horses (I think he had two or three) had been injured during their walk over the snow and had died at Belvedere Flats (about six miles up the road from the ranger station). He further stated that the next morning he was going to bury the horse. I told Red that as the next day was Saturday I would give him a hand if he wanted it. He responded by saying he would welcome my help and that he and ‘The Old Swede’ would stop by for me. When he showed up the next morning he was by himself so I asked him about the Swede. Red responded that the Swede was in a box on the back of the truck. The Old Swede turned out to be dynamite that we used to excavate a grave near the dead horse. Sticks of dynamite were placed in the ground and their fuses lit. He told me to run up to the road and stop any traffic that might be coming down and he would flag down people coming up the road (there was no one to flag). My previous limited experience with dynamite involved wiring a number of sticks of dynamite to a battery so that at the proper time all of the sticks would fire at once. On this occasion, when I heard an explosion I began walking towards the new grave only to hear other explosions while pieces of dirt and rock were flying by me. I quickly stepped behind a tree that prevented me from being hurt – another lesson learned.

Incidents from my final Red Potter story occurred in late summer of 1957. Red had a dog and whenever you saw the dog you knew that Red was close by and if you saw Red the dog was near. I had walked to the store and

saw the dog wandering about, but there was no Red Potter. I asked at the store if anyone there had seen Red that day and no one had. Finally, I phoned Wilbur Wiles who lived nearby and told him of my concerns. Wilbur soon found Potter dead in the general vicinity of his cabin. I was told that he had probably died while poaching an elk. The Valley County Sheriff took Red's body to Cascade for examination and then returned the body to Big Creek where his burial was held. He was buried not far from his cabin; the burial site can be seen from the Logan Creek road. If there is an after life I hope that Red gets his coffee black, his whiskey straight, and that he avoids stout women {Pl. 18 a,b.}

### Wilbur Wiles and cougars

A man of great respect who lived in Big Creek during our summers with the FS and who was still living there in 2005 is Wilbur Wiles. In the early 1950s Wilbur had a number of hounds and was running and killing cougars. On a cold winter day his hounds treed a cougar that Wilbur shot with his 38-caliber revolver. The cat was only stunned and when it hit the ground ran to a deadfall and flipped over on its back, as the dogs were close after him. The cat grabbed the head of a favored dog in its paws with the intent of doing it damage. Wilbur ran to the scene, placed the barrel of the gun against the cat's head and pulled the trigger. The gun did not fire, perhaps because of the cold temperature, Wilbur said, and the cat let go of the dog and grabbed Wilbur's arm. The dog again attacked the cougar which released Wilbur's arm and grabbed the dog a second time. Wilbur then slugged the cougar in the jaw with his fist and cut its throat with a hunting knife (this incident told to me by Wilbur is also related in Ed James' biography).

At some point in time Wilbur was asked by a research group at the University of Idaho to assist them in a survey of cougars in the Big Creek area to determine their numbers and the extent of their range. His job was to do what he did before — tree cougars with his hounds. The researchers darted the animals, recorded measurements of them, and then released them after identification tags had been attached. Wilbur told me that this became 'old hat' for some of the cougars that were treed several times. He further said that the number of cougar in the area examined was considerably smaller than he had thought and that he was no longer going to hunt and kill them.

I visited Wilbur in 2004 and found that he was still quite robust and independent for a man who must have been nearly ninety years of age. He told me that two or three years before my visit he had fallen off the roof of his cabin and badly damaged both legs. He managed to crawl into his cabin where he spent the night. The next morning he crawled out of the cabin and into his pickup and found that he could start his vehicle and get it into gear. He drove himself to the hospital in Cascade, Idaho, a drive of about 90 miles of which the first 50 miles were on a dirt road {Pl. 18c,d}.

During my eleven summers in Big Creek I saw only one cougar. In 1950, I believe, a fire broke out towards the mouth of Telephone Creek that drains down the east side of Lookout Mountain into Rush Creek. Soon after the fire was reported a group of smoke jumpers were dropped on it and the next day several of us at the ranger station were sent to the fire — I drove the

Willys pickup. To access the fire we drove over profile summit, turned east at the mouth of Profile Creek, passed through Stibnite, and finally climbed a steep, rocky road to a trailhead at the Sunnyside Mine on Lookout Mountain. We hiked the trail north for three or four miles until it intersected the Telephone Creek trail a couple of miles south of the lookout and then we walked down Telephone Creek to the fire. After the fire was under control I was released to return to the ranger station. While walking up Telephone Creek on the way to the pickup I turned a corner and saw a cougar that was also walking up the trail, about 40-50 yards ahead of me. I followed it for perhaps a minute and then I accidentally stepped on loose rock; the cougar immediately leaped off the trail and was out of sight.

A few days later I returned to the Sunnyside Mine to ferry a couple of fire fighters and their gear to Big Creek. I had made one too many trips up the steep, rocky road and a tire went flat. Not long after this Joyce and I drove to McCall, having completed our summer season at Big Creek. Fortunately, Bob and Harriett McCoy were also driving to McCall at the same time. We had only gone a few miles when a second tire on the Willys went flat. We dinked around with the McCoy's spare tire and even though it was not really compatible with the Willys' wheel we somehow made it work and were able to limp the rest of the way with our fingers crossed. Waiting for us in McCall were four new tires that I had ordered after the first flat occurred. As I had been using the Willys for government work I was able to buy them through the FS at a reduced price.

At the conclusion of the 1957 summer we realized that we would not be returning to Big Creek in 1958 as Joyce was again pregnant and the next summer would give birth to a second son, Ted. We figured it would be too risky to attempt a drive from Big Creek to McCall when Joyce was ready to give birth. As a consequence of the coming event I was offered the position as assistant dispatcher in the McCall office and the opportunity of working with Slim Vassar in 1958 and, as it turned out, also during the summers of 1959 and 1960. It was an offer I would never have turned down.

### Three summers in McCall as a fire dispatcher (1958-1960)

I had been the fire dispatcher in Big Creek during the past few summers which gave me a 'leg-up' on my new job. One difference between the Big Creek and the McCall job was that the hours were going to be better. At Big Creek, during fire season, I turned our FS radio on at 7 AM and off at 9 PM, seven days a week and would be attending to any messages that arrived during those hours<sup>11</sup>. When I had to be away from the radio Joyce would

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<sup>11</sup> During a portion of one summer (perhaps two summers), areas within the Big Creek district were sprayed to eliminate an infestation of bugs that were killing trees. WWII airplanes, based in McCall, were employed to do the spraying. I played a part in the spray project as I was asked to do a weather check at 3 AM each morning and radio the information to McCall. If conditions were OK, pilots would be alerted and would be over the infested areas as soon as daylight permitted. Although the ranger station was not in a targeted area a pilot made a couple of very welcome passes over us to eradicate our mosquito population.



cover for me. The hours would be about the same in McCall but there would be two of us. As I remember, during fire season Slim Vassar or I would open the dispatcher office at 7 AM and work until 3 PM while the other would work from 1 – 9 PM. The schedule could, and did change suddenly and dramatically following lightning storms that ignited a number of fires or when a large fire occurred that required a large number of 'on the ground' fire fighters and the use of fire retardant drops over a sustained period. The former condition was the more exciting of the two.

On at least two occasions I turned the radios on at 7 AM and found there had been nighttime thunderstorms over portions of the forest. For an hour or so it was nearly impossible to keep up with radio traffic. Data for each fire report had to be written down and marked on a map board to show the reported location of a fire. Often more than one report would be called in for one fire and then a triangulation was made from the reports to obtain a more accurate fire location. When several different fires were known to be burning a judgment had to be made as to fire priority — which fire should be manned first and how many men should be dispatched. Fires in small fuel, fast burning areas were of high priority while fires on high ridge tops in the backcountry would often wait their turn. Under these conditions there was almost always a need to alert the smoke jumper camp and request action from their personnel. If I could not keep up with the action I would phone Vassar who would come to the office to assist me.

When large fires occurred I was of little help; Vassar and other older and wiser heads who had had years of experience handling large fires would discuss the recruitment of necessary crews and the logistics of getting the crews and essential equipment to the fires while I listened in.

In 1960, my last summer with the PNF there were two large fires burning at the same time, one that had started in the Snake River Breaks and from the start was running fast. The other fire was burning between McCall and New Meadows. During this period the regional fire control officer from Ogden had flown to McCall and then over the two fires. I was on duty when he dropped by the dispatcher office and reported that the nearer of the two fires seemed to be well under control. About 10 minutes after he said that, lookouts began to call saying that the fire had blown up. Having seen the fire a short time earlier, the fire control officer had difficulty believing these reports. The cause of the 'blowup' was a large plane (B-17, I believe) that crashed while approaching the fire with a load of fire retardant. I was told that a smoke jumper who was working on the fire had seen flames coming out of the aircraft before the crash. The crew on the aircraft was thought to consist of a pilot and a copilot but when an examination was made of the wreckage it was found that there was one more limb in the plane than two people were supposed to have. Reportedly, a pilot who wanted to fly retardant-dropping planes had hitched a ride to gain knowledge concerning the procedures employed.

During the days the large fires were burning I had little time for myself and my family. Joyce remembers that about the only times she and our sons saw me was when I would go to our house and flop down for a few hours sleep. Not all of my work time was spent in the dispatcher office. One day I

drove two barrels of helicopter gas to Big Creek where it was stashed in the event a large fire started in that general area. Todd, two and a half years old, rode to Big Creek with me. The highlight of the trip for him was when we stopped at Lick Creek summit and he peed in the middle of the road.

Times were looser then. On one my days off a helicopter landed near the smoke jumper complex that was not far from our house. Todd and I hurried to see the copter. The pilot, who I had previously met, asked if we would like to take a short ride with him, which we did. Another day the two of us drove to the airport. A smoke jumper was there who had missed earlier training jumps and needed practice jumps prior to being certified to jump on fires. Bob Fogg, the pilot, saw Todd and me and asked if I would ride along and retrieve the jumper's static line after he exited the Travelair. I responded that I would really like to do that but I had Todd with me. Fogg solved the problem by strapping Todd into the copilot's seat. It is difficult to imagine that these kinds of incidents would occur now. And, a few years earlier when I was a high school senior, I was the substitute school bus driver when the regular driver was unable to drive. He had been gassed during the first world war and would occasionally have to report to the VA Hospital in Boise for treatment. No one seemed to mind that I was driving students to and from school and, without a commercial driver's license.

The summer of 1960 would end our working relationship with the PNF. I was in graduate school at the University of Utah and would soon be gathering data for a doctoral dissertation and completing other school work essential for graduating. Joyce and I were sad about not returning to the PNF, especially Big Creek, and for a few years when spring was well underway we would have warm and pleasant feelings. Then we would remember, 'no, we won't be returning to the woods this summer'. After our sons were old enough to enjoy camping and fly fishing we stayed in the campground at Big Creek several times. A few years ago our youngest son, Ted, and I were reminiscing about those camping experiences. He made a statement that also expresses my feelings, "there is something magical about Big Creek".

I have visited the campground at Big Creek eight times during the last ten summers and am pleased to say that the place has not changed a great deal. There are a few more cabins, an increase in air traffic, but a reduction in car traffic. It is still possible to hike one of the local trails and not see another person and, in season, pick huckleberries.

***Jim and Bob Dustman***



***Pl. 1-a Jim was a fire lookout on Sheephorn Mountain in 1945 and on Horse Mountain in 1947. He died in a car wreck in 1950.***



***Pl. 1-b Bob was a fire lookout on Rock Rabbit Point in 1947. He continued to be a summer employee in Big Creek through 1957 and then was a fire dispatcher in McCall during the summers of 1958-60.***

**Horse Mountain Lookout**



**Pl.1-c**

**Rock Rabbit Lookout**



**Pl.1-d** Bob took the photo of Rock Rabbit tower and cabin while riding in Jack Walker's plane ca 1995 (The tower has since been removed; Jack is a well-known miner in the Big Creek area). The lookout was not been manned after the early 50s.

**Yellow Pine**



**Pl. 2-a** *The photos were taken ca 1951. The open field in the foreground is now covered by young yellowpine trees that obscure a view of the town.*

**Big Creek**



**Pl. 2-b** *Big Creek village sported a house, hotel, store, and a gas-repair building; the structures still exist.*

**Pl. 2-c Big Creek airfield and surrounding mountains**



- 1) The ranger station is to the right of the upper portion of the airfield; an old ranger house, barn and corral were to the left of the upper airfield (the house has since burned down).**
  - 2) The Hogback, to the east of the airfield, is about 300 feet higher than the airfield.**
  - 3) Stretches of the Big Creek River can be seen to the east of the Hogback.**
  - 4, 5 and 6) are Marble Mountain, Goat Mountain and Logan Mountain.**
- The photo was taken ca 1977 from McFadden point that is about two miles north of the airfield.**

***Buildings at the Big Creek ranger station in the 1950s***



***Pl. 3-a Barn & Corral and old ranger house east of the airfield. The hill behind the buildings is the Hogback.***



***Pl. 3-b New ranger house, woodshed, and warehouse west of the airfield.***

**Goat Mountain and McFadden Point**



***Pl. 3-c Goat Mountain borders Big Creek valley on the south. The photo (ca 1953) was taken from a point north of the lower end of the airfield.***



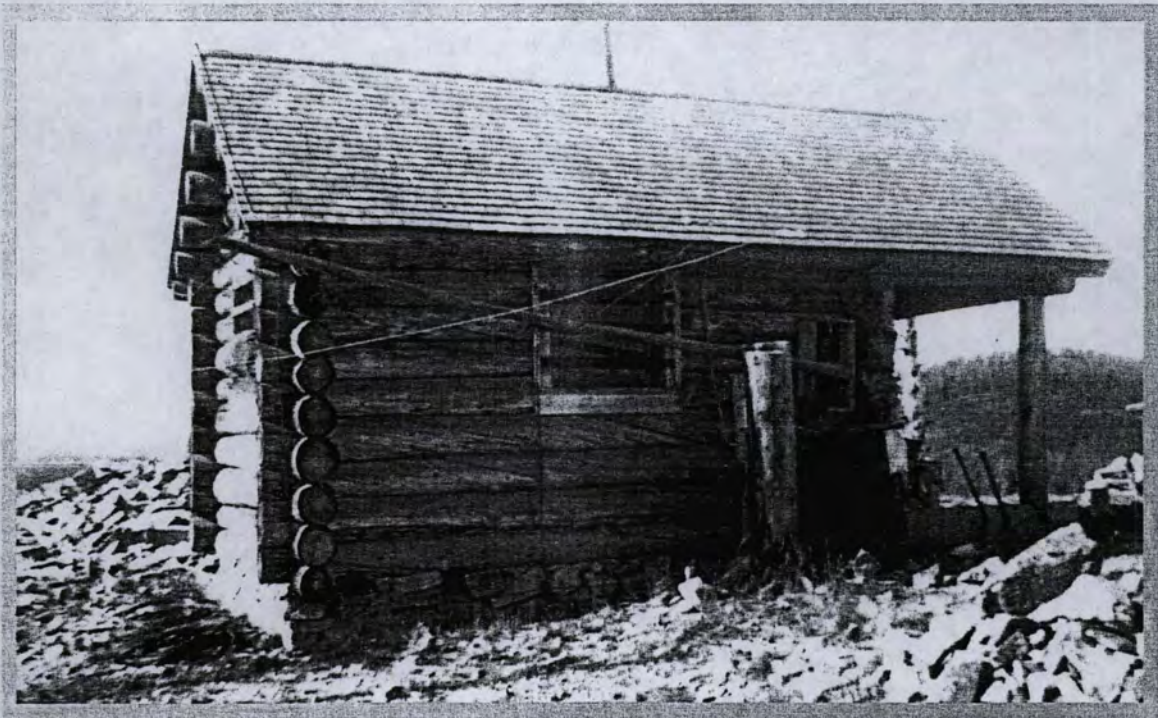
***Pl. 3-d McFadden Point encloses the valley from the north. Big Creek river begins its turn to the east at the base of the mountain and continues on to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.***



**Two views of the cabin at Rock Rabbit Lookout**



**Pl. 4-a** The front (west side) of the cabin. Please notice the sizable wood pile that had disappeared by the next spring. I conjecture that hunters pilfered the wood during the fall hunting season.



**PL. 4-b.** This view of the north side of the cabin shows the handmade wooden gutter that drained into a barrel near the front of the cabin.

**Tower at Rock Rabbit**



**Pl. 4-c The 60 foot-high tower was sited a short distance west of the cabin. The 9x9 foot room at the top of the tower was accessed through a trapdoor in the floor.**

**USFS employees**

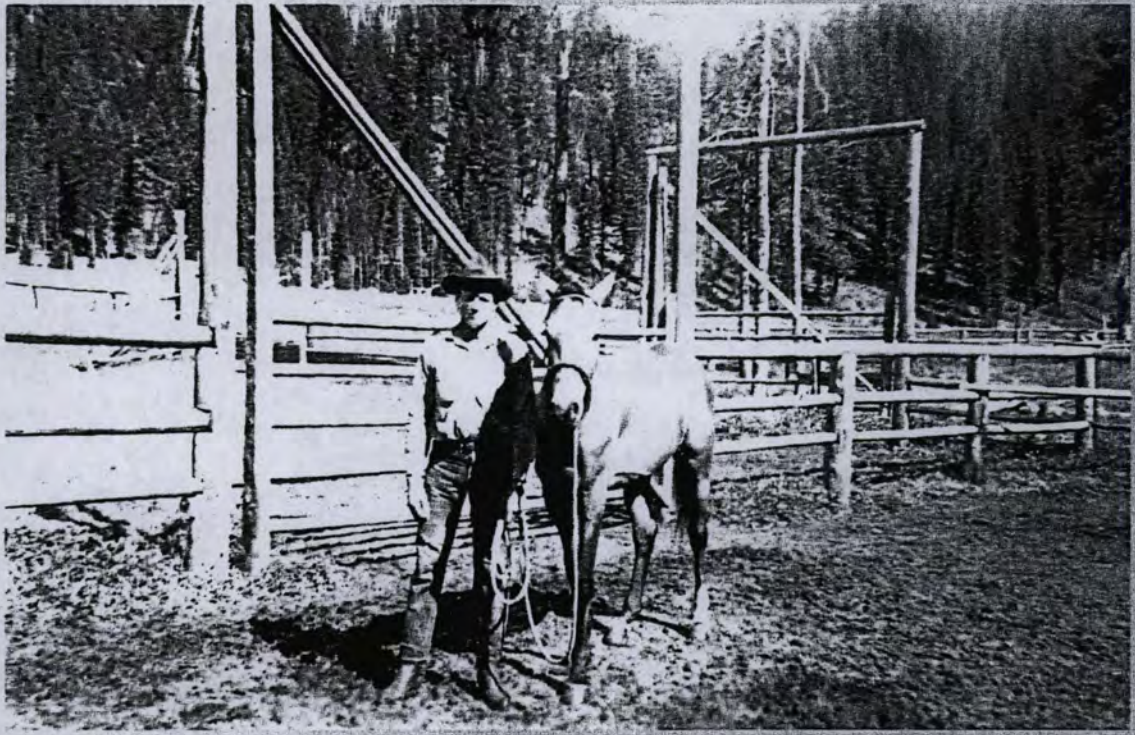


**Pl. 5-a Earl Higgenbotham, Wilmer Shaver, and George Hensley. Earl and George were stationed at Big Creek while Wilmer was in charge of the Cold Meadows Guard Station.**



**Pl. 5-b Bob Dustman repairing a telephone line.**

**Ed James and Muck**



**Pl. 5-c Ed broke and trained the young horse in Big Creek.**

**Fool Hen**



**Pl. 5-b** The Spruce grouse (fool hen) is a relatively tame bird that is commonly seen on the Big Creek district.

**Livestock on the airfield**



**Pl. 6-a** *If livestock were on the airfield when pilots wanted to land or takeoff the animals would be herded into the corral behind the barn. Deer could also be a problem if they ran across the airfield during those critical times.*

**Travelair leaving the Big Creek airfield**



**Pl. 6-b** *The Travelair was an important workhorse, carrying smoke jumpers to fires and transporting people in and out of the back country.*

***Travelair on final approach***



***Pl. 6-c The CCC buildings where smoke jumpers were housed when they were in Big Creek are shown in the right center of the photo near the road.***

***Travelair about to laand***



***Pl. 6-d Pilots needed to clear the swampy area at the lower end of the airfield when landing and taking off. The swampy areas were eliminated and the airfield lengthened ca 1960.***

**Ed James with supplies**



**Pl. 7-a Ed James unloading supplies at Rock Rabbit Lookout. He was our only visitor for nearly two months.**

**Joyce packing water**



**Pl. 7-b Joyce is returning from a spring with five gallons of water on her back. Bob took the photo from the lookout tower.**

**Bob after a night of working on a fire**



**Pl. 7-c As you can see, fighting fire is a dirty proposition.**

**Joyce holding a young grouse**



**Pl. 7-d The grouse was probably a 'fool hen'. Joyce released the grouse after the photo was taken.**



**Ted Koskella**



**Pl. 8-a** Ted was returning from an inspection trip on the Big Creek Ranger District. The warehouse is about 200 yards in front of him.

**Joyce, her horse, and George Hensley**



**PL. 8-b** The photo was taken in the tent-house area that was a short distance south of the new ranger house.

**Joyce sitting on our front porch**



**Pl. 8-c To Joyce's right can be seen a water bucket, a chopping block and the handle of an axe used to split wood, all important household items.**

**Harriett and Bob McCoy**



**Pl. 8-d Harriett and Bob riding from the corral past the old ranger house. The identity of the person immediately behind Harriett is not known.**

***The old ranger house***



***Pl. 9-a A sizeable woodshed was located behind the house; both buildings burned down a few years ago.***

***Joy Koskella and Joyce Dustman***



***Pl. 9-b Joy and Joyce are riding south on the road between the warehouse and the airfield.***

**The Koskella family**



**Pl. 9-c Joy is holding Jana while Ted has Sheelagh. The children in front are Ricky, Lauren, and Karen. In the background are the airfield, corral, and barn. (photo ca 1953)**

**Bob McCoy nearing Cougar Basin overlook**



**Pl. 10-a** Bob McCoy and the packstring are on the Lick Creek Trail and will soon have a nice view of the Cougar Basin area (Pl 10-b). Joyce and Bob Dustman were ahead of the packstring and took the photo.

**Cougar Peak and Bear Lake**



**Pl. 10-b** The trail from the overlook switchbacked several times while dropping down to Cougar Basin. We spent a night at Cougar Basin and also hiked to the lake to fish.

***A nasty stretch of trail***



***Pl. 10-c Bob McCoy is carrying a crosscut saw while Joyce is leading her mare. Lead ropes connecting the livestock had been removed to prevent the fall of one animal from taking others down the hill with it.***

**McCoy Ranch house**



**Pl. 11-a** *The house looked over a meadow that extended to the southwest. Holy Terror Creek flows behind the house and empties into Monumental Creek.*

**McCoy Ranch meadow**



**Pl. 11-b** *The meadow is bordered on the west by Monumental Creek (viewer's right) and on the east by the base of Lookout Mountain. The photo was taken from near the house.*

***Napier Edwards (viewer's right) and a miner***



***Pl 11-c Napier is standing in the shadow of the warehouse at Big Creek.***

***Jennie Cornell***



***Pl. 11-d Jennie, Joyce's mother, shared her freshly grown vegetables with us during our summers in Big Creek.***



**Les Curtis and Bill Sullivan**



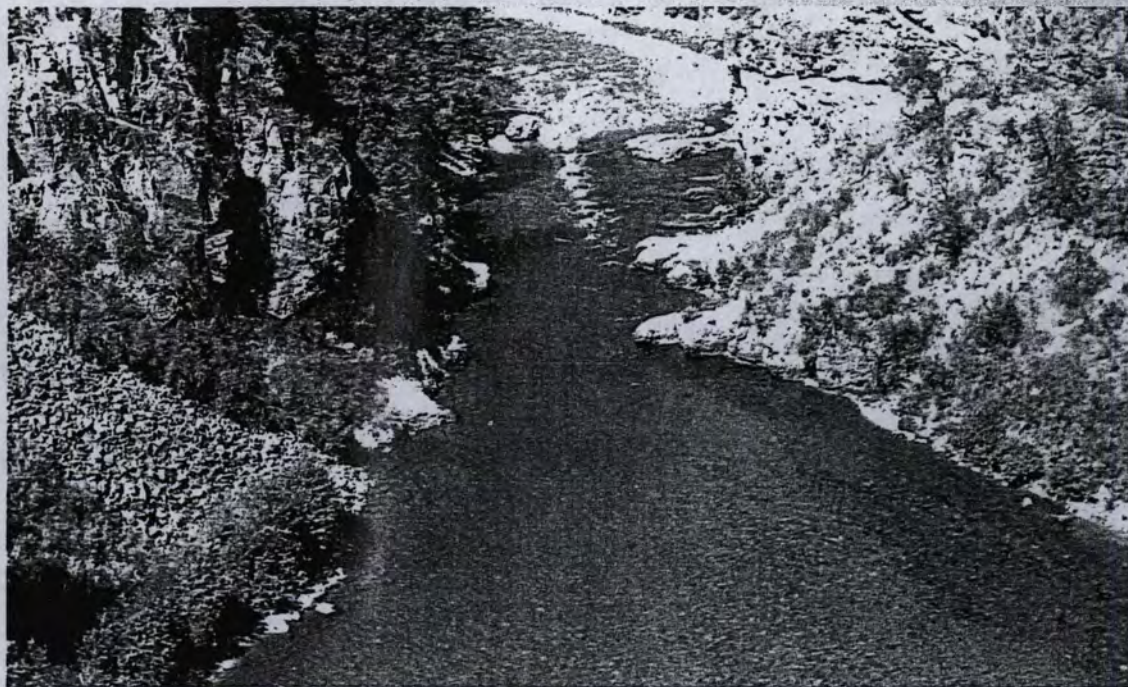
**Pl. 12-a Les and Bill are parked near the warehouse in Big Creek.**

**Acorn Butte Lookout**



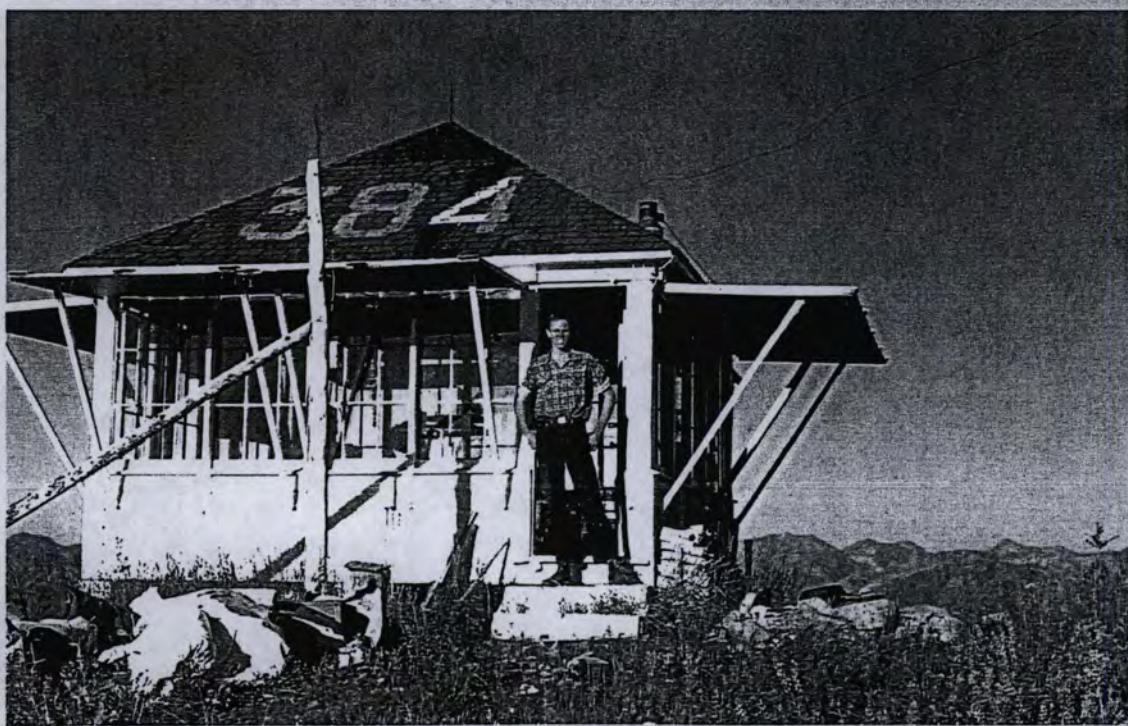
**Pl. 12-b Don Wilson, in the doorway, Roger Cornell, and I had worked trail from Crescent Meadows to the lookout and were caught in a snowstorm.**

**Coxey Hole**



**Pl. 12-c** *Coxey Hole has the reputation as being a good place to fish. Big Creek trail is above the bluffs on the left side of the river.*

**Sylvan Davey at Rush Creek Point Lookout**



**Pl. 12-d** *Sylvan is in the process of moving into his new summer home.*

**Sawing down a burning Yellowpine snag**



**Pl. 13-a Roger Cornell, Don Wilson, and unknown falling a snag that was struck by lightning.**

**The fire is out**



**Pl. 13-b After the snag was cut down all burning material was extinguished.**

***Antlers of a bull elk entangled in telephone wire***



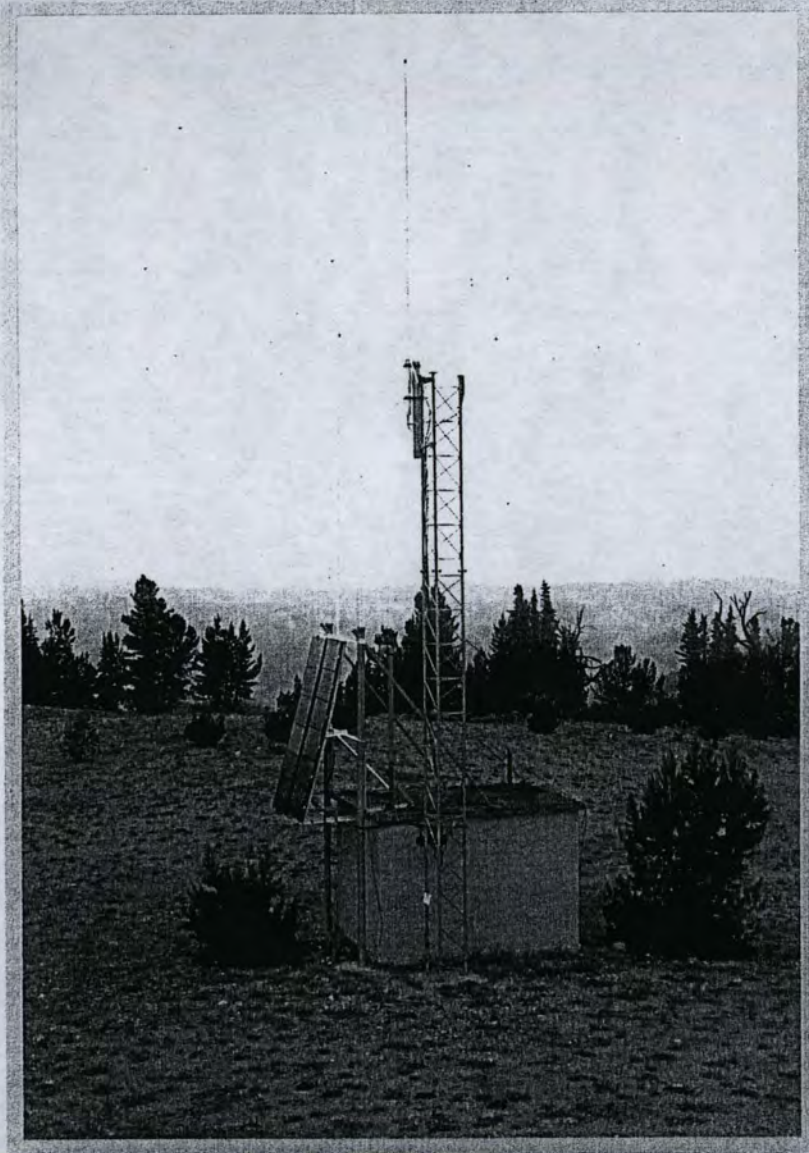
***Pl. 13-c The elk had evidently been thrashing about for some time before we arrived at the scene. Care was taken to avoid being injured by the elk.***

***Removing wire from the elk's antlers***



***Pl. 13-d Ropes tied to the elk's back legs were also secured to a nearby tree to prevent him from charging us after he was freed.***

**Radio Point**



**Pl. 14-a** The photo was taken ca 2003. In the 50s there was only the small building; the outside hardware was installed later.

**Al Dahlgren and Ray Mullins**



**Pl. 14-b** Dahlgren was ranger at Big Creek in 1957; Mullins was a coach at the Middleton, Idaho highschool. They were hoofing it to Radio Point.

**Bob Burkholder in a snow storm**



**Pl. 14-c** While making a trip to Radio Point, Bob Burkholder, Big Creek ranger, and Bob Dustman were caught in a snowstorm at Elk Summit. We still had an uphill climb before reaching Radio Point.

**Bob and Joyce Dustman**



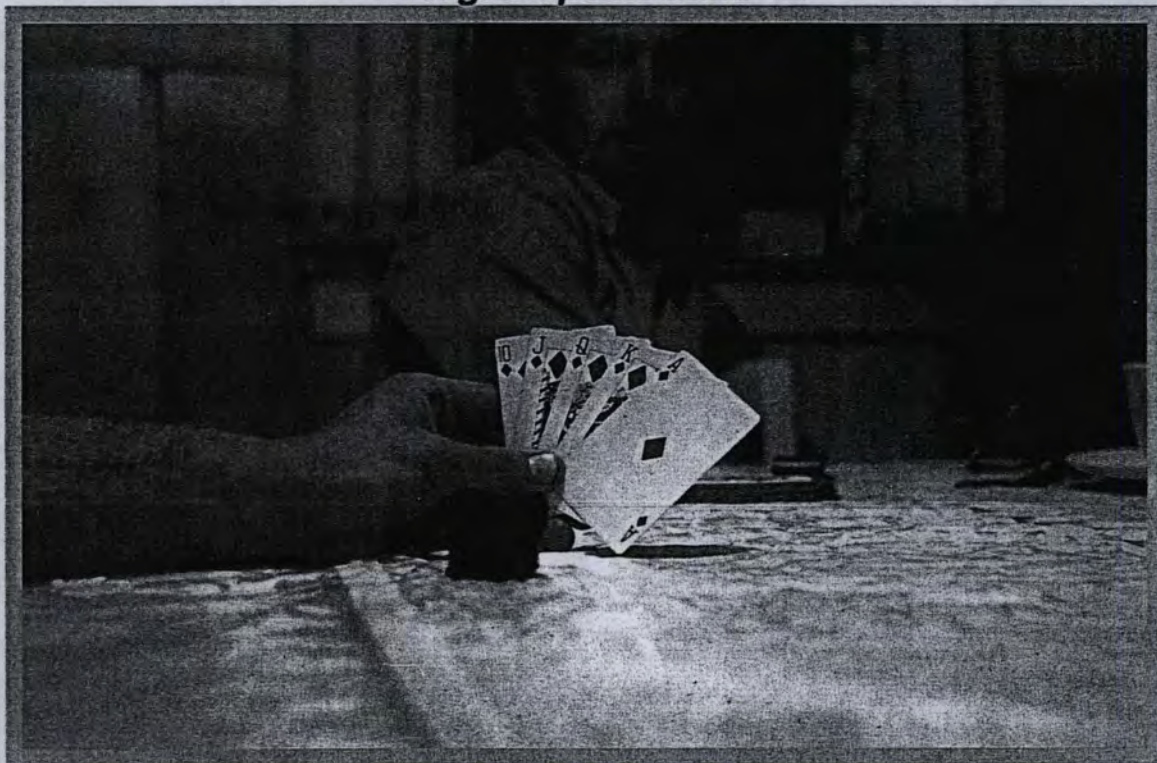
**Pl. 14-d** At this time (ca 1954) we were living in a newly built apartment in the warehouse. We are standing in front of the entrance to the apartment.

**Smoke jumpers building a fence around the airfield**



**Pl. 15-a** *Loyle Washam and his companion were erecting a lodgepole pine fence. They would be recalled to McCall when fire season started.*

**A great poker hand**



**Pl. 15-b** *This hand may have enriched the smoke jumper winner by as much as two or three dollars.*

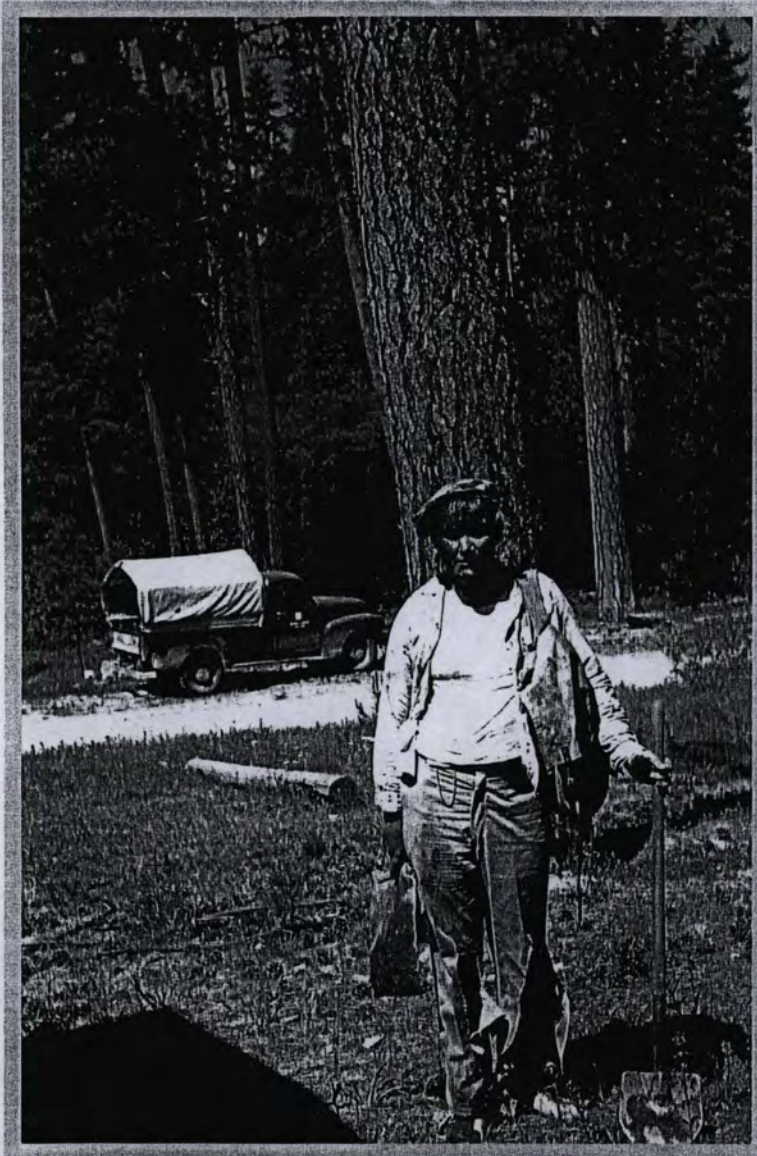
**Smokejumpers suiting up for a fire**



**Pl. 15-c & -d** The jumper to the far right in the upper photo is Loyle Washam. As he is not wearing jump gear he may have been a 'spotter' on this day. The aircraft is a DC-3.



***How not to fight fire***



***Pl.16-a The trainer demonstrated supreme incompetence in fire-fighting abilities which highlighted appropriate procedures.***

***Setting up an alidade for training***



***Pl.16-b Lookout personnel will learn how to set up and use an alidade so that fire locations can be accurately determined.***

**The training fire**



**Pl. 16- c & -d** *The fire was set in a stand of yellow pine the last afternoon of fire school. Although the fire burned well and hot the students had it out in about four hours. It was an important exercise.*

**Earl Owen and friend**



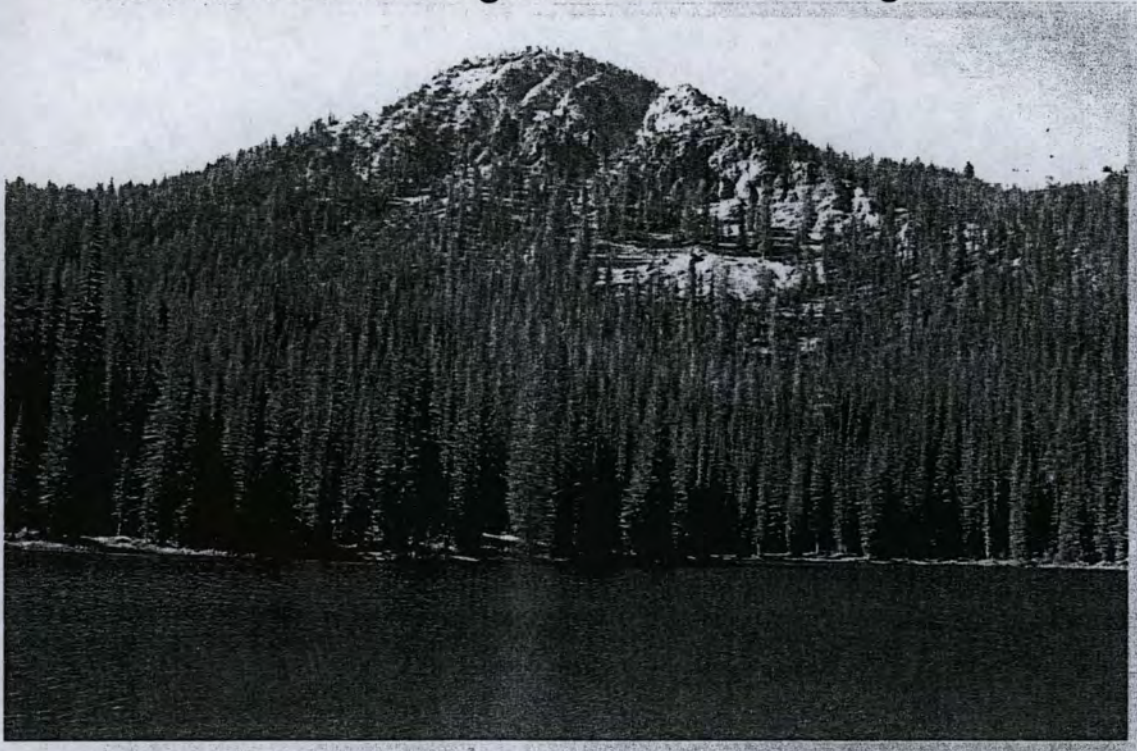
**Pl. 17-a** The men caught the salmon in Little Ramey Hole. Earl had worked for the PNF in Big Creek in the late 30s and/or early 40s.

**Beaver Ponds**



**Pl. 17-b** The beaver ponds are located about 3.5 miles south of the ranger station on the east side of the road. The ponds are fed by Jacobs Ladder Creek and empty into Big Creek River.

**Two lakes within walking distance from the ranger station**

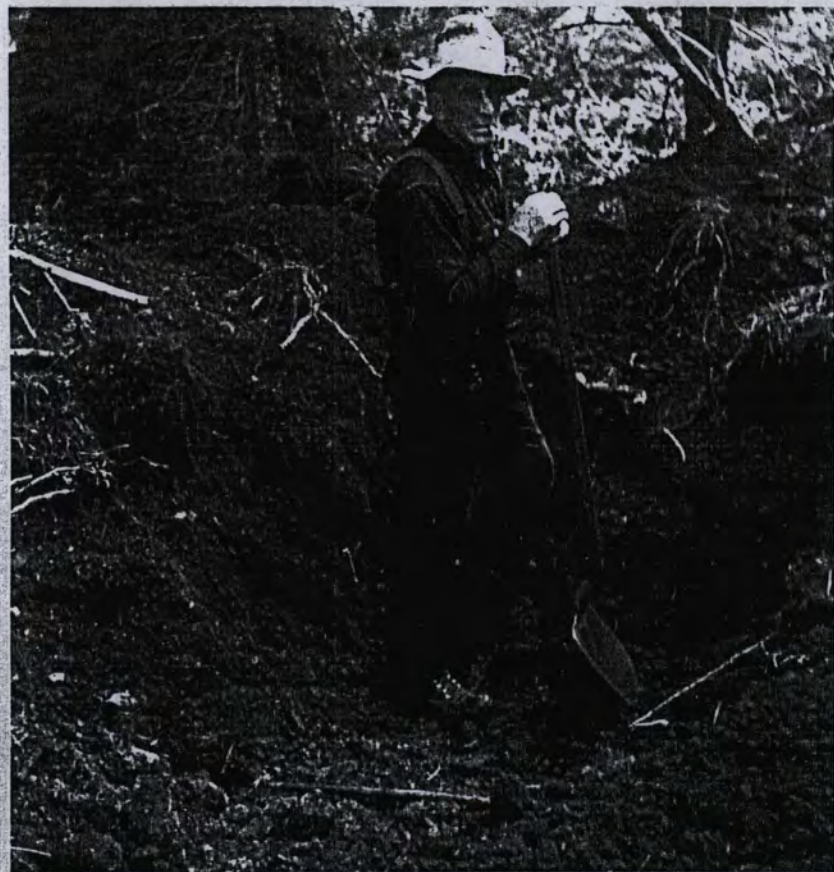


**Pl. 17-c** The trailhead to Lick Lake is two miles south of the ranger station. The climb to the lake is about two miles in length with a 2,000 foot elevation gain. The trail is usually in good shape.



**Pl. 17-d** The trailhead to Logan Lake is on Logan Creek above the Potter cabin. The distance and elevation are similar to those for Lick Lake, however, the trail is not as good.

***Red Potter digs a grave for his horse***



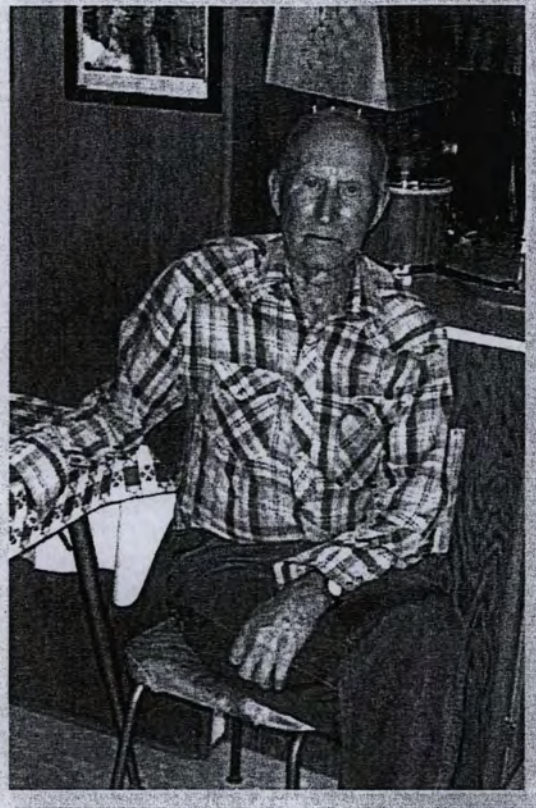
***Pl. 18-a Potter's horse was buried at Belevedair Flats,  
about six miles south of the ranger station.  
There is no head stone.***

***Red Potter's grave***



***Pl. 18-b Potter was buried near his cabin on  
Logan Creek, about a mile from the  
Ranger station.***

***Wilbur Wiles and his cabin***



***Pl. 18-cd The photos were taken in the summer of 2001. Wilbur's cabin is about three-quarters of a mile south of the ranger station.***