

## Chamberlain Guard Station

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The Chamberlain Guard Station is located in Chamberlain Basin in the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness of Idaho. This remote guard station represents an example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Forest Service rustic architecture. The historic significance of this property is related to the early development of the United States Forest Service. In the spring of 1906 Ranger David Laing built the first ranger station at the south end of Chamberlain Meadow, on the north side of Ranch Creek. It was a task of the Forest Service to inspect homestead claims for eligibility. During the early 1900s attempts were made to establish homesteads in the Chamberlain Basin, the idea being to raise livestock to sell to miners in the area. It was soon discovered that the long winter-feeding season, the inability to grow anything but wild hay, and the distance to market were prohibitive, so few homesteads were patented. The Stonebreaker, Hotzel, and Beal Ranches were later converted to dude ranches. A few remnants of these early ranches still remain.

The early rangers enforced federal law throughout the wilderness. The Ranger Station provided communication, housing and supply links for the men protecting the National Forests. The Station lies at the convergence of several pack trails that provided a network of supply lines throughout the backcountry. Miners who were traveling between the mines of central Idaho used the trails including the Three Blaze Trail. It was built circa 1900 and funded by prospectors, miners, packers and businessmen as transportation, communication and supply lines for the mines. These trails are still used and maintained today as vital routes into the backcountry.

The Chamberlain Guard Station was constructed as one of many administrative sites in the remote backcountry of the Idaho Primitive Area. The creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933 initiated a major building boom for the Forest Service. During this time, many of the buildings at the Station were constructed or relocated to the site of the present Guard Station. The use of local building materials blended with standardized plans and recycling of old settlers cabins denotes the ingenuity required of Forest Service personnel in the establishment of these early administrative sites. The remoteness of the site precluded the use of milled lumber and manufactured materials to a great degree. All supplies had to be packed in via mules, horses, or humans, until the landing field, created around 1932, provided easier access.

The Forest Service had very rigid standards for building their stations. Buildings were to be uniform, making it easy to identify them as belonging to the Forest Service. In this case it was log buildings with gabled roofs, painted a standard brown, with green stain on the wooden shingles. Even the old cabins that were moved and rebuilt for use as sheds had to conform to the predominant style of the other buildings in the Station. The cabins at Cold Meadows Guard Station (a National Historic Property) are similar in style but are generally older than the Chamberlain buildings. There, many of the buildings have square notched corners whereas, the predominated style at Chamberlain is saddle notching.

Over the years some buildings at Chamberlain became unusable or were in the way of airstrip construction and were removed. By the late 1930s it was obvious that new buildings were needed. In



CHAMBERLAIN RANGER STATION  
PRIOR TO 1937.

August of 1937, Idaho National Forest Supervisor, Henry Shank noted that logs had been procured during the summer of 1936 for a new ranger dwelling but funding for building it was not available. Shank complained to the Regional Forester, "I honestly think it is a disgrace to the Organization to require that a ranger be quartered in such a dwelling as is now available. Is it not possible to obtain sufficient funds to construct this station this fall?" Construction of a new dwelling started at the end of the 1937 field season. It was based on the Forest Service Standard Plan R-4 #53-c. In 1954 the porch was enclosed to make an additional room and the upstairs was made into a room with a bathroom attached. The building was the residence of the District Ranger until 1957. In 1958 it became the residence of the principle Station Guard.

In 1938 the Forest used ERA and ECW funds to finish building the new ranger's dwelling and build a warehouse storeroom. The warehouse #1335 was originally identified as a "commissary", a term used at that time to identify its function as storage for food stuffs (principally non-perishables and dry goods), other disposable supplies, tools, and fire fighting equipment. In later years storage of foodstuffs was discontinued and the building came to be known as the "warehouse." Its function remains the storage of tools and equipment.

The Chamberlain fly shed represents a unique early Forest Service building type and is located a few 100 yards north in a stand of pines. A fly shed is a covered corral or livestock shelter used in areas of dense insect populations. The structure was intended as temporary protection for livestock until a more permanent structure could be built. When in use, it would have been covered by a tarp saturated with bug repellent. Another fly shed exists at the Cold Meadows Guard Station. The Chamberlain fly shed was probably built circa 1921, around the time the Cold Meadows fly shed was built.

The oldest building at the Station, was built by a homesteader, in 1906 and later moved to its present location. In 1954, a new 4100 feet E/W airstrip was created, using a D-9 Caterpillar tractor walked in from Big Creek. In the process of building that strip, the D-9 was used to move the cabin, which had been placed on skids. It was moved from its original location off the west end of the new airstrip, to its present location at the north end of the Chamberlain GS complex. This became the tack shed #1620. It is a good example of early rustic construction and may be the oldest existing building in the wilderness.

During the 1960s three bunkhouses were built to house seasonal personnel such as firefighters and trail crews. The 1906 ranger's cabin, built at Chamberlain, burned in 1960. In its footprint, a replacement was constructed that is now used as a woodshed, building #1363. All of the buildings with the exception of the fly shed are in excellent condition. Collectively, these structures had an estimated life span of twenty years; preventive maintenance has preserved these buildings and allowed continuous use by the Forest Service.

The Chamberlain landing field was constructed between 1932 and 1940. Prior to that time, Forest personnel used the airstrip at Stonebreaker's Ranch. Telephone service was in use by 1930. The line ran up Smith Creek along the divide to Chicken Peak Lookout and down Chamberlain Creek to the Guard Station. By the 1950s radios were in common use.

The role of the Forest Service changed somewhat when the designation of the land changed. The Idaho Primitive Area, established in 1931, was redesignated the River of No Return Wilderness in 1980. The name was legislatively changed to the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness in 1984. Today the Forest service uses the site seasonally to maintain trails, report fires, protect the wilderness, and provide a contact with the wilderness users.

This paper was written using information from the Chamberlain Guard Station Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. A list of references may be obtained from the Payette National Forest Heritage Program, PO Box 1026, McCall, Idaho 83638.