

**History of the Telephone Communication System  
on the  
Payette National Forest, Idaho**

**By  
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Like trails and roads, the first telephones into sections of the Forests were built to serve the mining industry.

A grounded circuit was in use from Council to Bear and Cuprum some time before 1900. A spur line also went from Cuprum to Helena and from there down Haley Ridge to the Red Ledge Mine. Telephone service over this line was available to both the Bear and Hornet Ranger Stations in 1906. A record of when the Weiser Forest acquired this system can no longer be found. It was probably soon after 1906 because with the mining activity dying out, the local people left in the country were no doubt glad for the Forest Service to take over the responsibility. It is understood that the line was rebuilt by the Forest Service from Hornet to Bear in 1917.

Photographs in the file show that the line to Pollock Lookout was first built in 1912 and one from Hornet over Cuddy Mountain to Brownlee and Mann Creek was built about a year or two earlier.

By 1930, the main telephone lines on the Weiser Forest were as follows: Council-Cuprum line went via Bear Ranger Station and over the hill to Cuprum. From Bear, a spur line went to Smith Mountain Lookout and from there to Black Lake and Jackley Lookout. A spur from Cuprum was later built to Horse Mountain, Kinney Point, down Grassy Ridge and across Snake River to McGraw Lookout on the Wallowa Forest.

Price Valley Ranger Station had a line to Tamarack, where it could be switched on to commercial facilities.

A main system had also been built from Council up Mill Creek to Squaw Flat Ranger Station and on to No Business Lookout. A spur line ran from Squaw Flat to Council Mountain Lookout. At No Business, service could be switched on to the Association's Red Ridge line to McCall. The main line went from No Business across Cougar Basin to Mica Saddle and Indian Mountain Lookout; from there across Little Weiser River to Mill Creek Ranger Station. At Mill Creek, service could be switched to the Squaw Creek

line on the old Payette National Forest. In 1923 Elmer Ross, who was a good hand with telephones, built and installed the first switchboard in the Dispatcher's office in Council.

Some time between 1910 and 1912, the Idaho Forest had telephone lines to Lake Fork; Paddy Flat via Roseberry, Warren, and New Meadows Ranger Stations. By 1925, a line had been built to Big Creek by the way of South Fork, Yellow Pine, and Profile. In 1928, a line was in use from Big Creek to Chamberlain.

The main telephone lines that were in use on the Idaho Forest in 1930 were:

McCall-Warren: It was 45 miles long and was hooked up through the commercial switchboard in McCall.

Warren-Big Creek: This was built via South Fork over Elk Summit to Big Creek - a distance of 38 miles.

McCall-Big Creek: It went from McCall to Lake Fork, South Fork, Yellow Pine and terminated at Big Creek a distance of 82 miles.

Big Creek-Cold Meadows: This line went down Big Creek, up to Acorn Butte Lookout, Cold Mountain, and Cold Meadows. Grass Mountain Lookout was on a spur from Cold Meadows.

Big Creek-Chamberlain: The route of this line was up Smith Creek, along the divide to Chicken Peak Lookout and down Chamberlain Creek to the Chamberlain Station. A side spur served Sheepeater Lookout.

There were also spur lines from Big Creek Station to all lookouts south of Big Creek.

Roseberry-Reed Ranch: This system included spurs to Boulder Lookout, Blackmare Lookout, and Eagle Rock Lookout. The line was built in 1927.

McCall-New Meadows: The system also included a branch from Thorn Creek to Brundage, Granite, and Hard Butte Lookouts.

Before the Salmon River Road was built, the settlers along the river had a line from Riggins to the Key's Ranch on French Creek. A line had also been constructed from Burgdorf to Key's Ranch, and switching facilities were furnished at the ranch. After the road was built, the CCC crews rebuilt the line and the Forest maintained it until about 1956, when it was abandoned back to the Salmon River residents.

Before the telephone line was built to Big Creek, the Forest experimented with carrier pigeons, but had very little success with them.

Fred Williams, who was the first Big Creek Ranger, reported that in 1920 the Forest established the first radio stations one at McCall and one at Edwardsburg. An engineer from Region One by the name of Adams was in charge of the project. It turned out to be a complete failure.

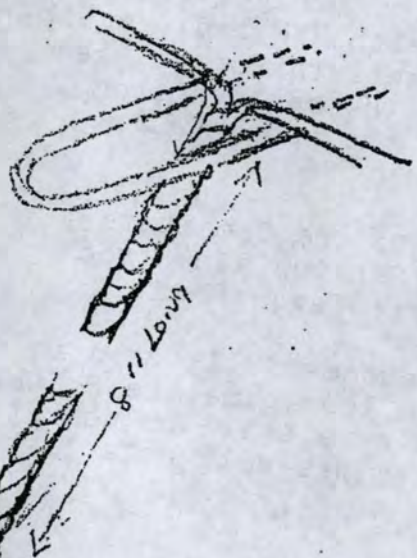
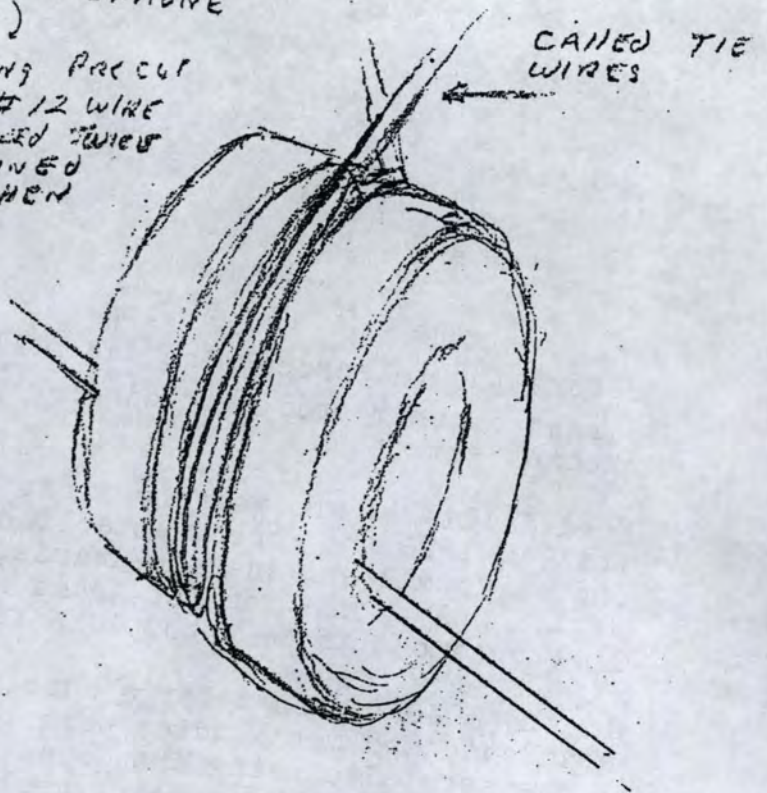
In the 1940's when a large number of lookouts were being abandoned and more radios were being used, miles of telephone lines were also being abandoned. In the early 1950's, telephone service was being replaced with VHF radio equipment. The Hornet Creek line from Council to Hornet was sold to the Hornet Creek ranchers and the section from Hornet to Bear and Cuprum was sold to the people along the route and in Cuprum.

The McCall-New Meadows line was sold to the Gem State Telephone Company, as was the Forest Service line from McCall to Sylvan Beach along the Warren Wagon Road.

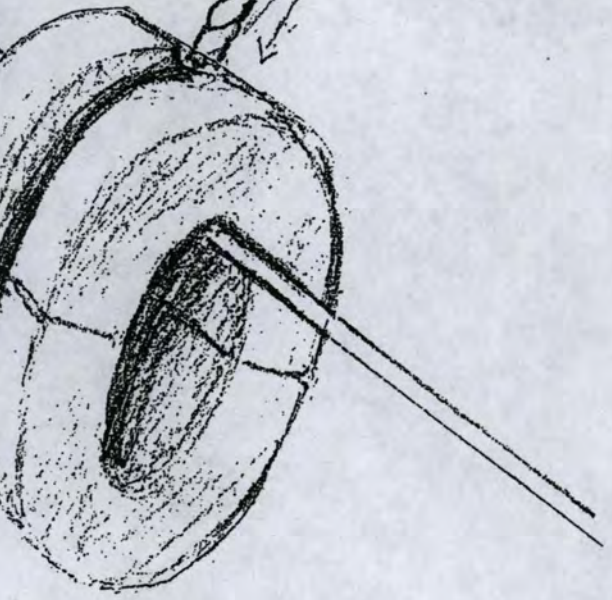
The first portable radios that were successfully used in the field were called the S.P. sets. Then came the S.P.F. sets, which were very successful and were still in use at certain locations after the VHF system was well established.

HALF SECTION OF MOIDED  
 CERAMIC INSULATORS PLACED  
 ON EACH SIDE OF #9  
 GALVANIZED TELEPHONE  
 WIRE (LINE)

20 INCH LONG PRECUT  
 PIECES OF #12 WIRE  
 WERE WRAPPED TWICE  
 AROUND JOINED  
 HALVES THEN  
 TWISTED.



2 INCH TELEPHONE  
 STAPLES DRIVEN INTO  
 THE TREE USED AS  
 A POLE



SKETCHES BY  
 DAN LEVON JR  
 1999