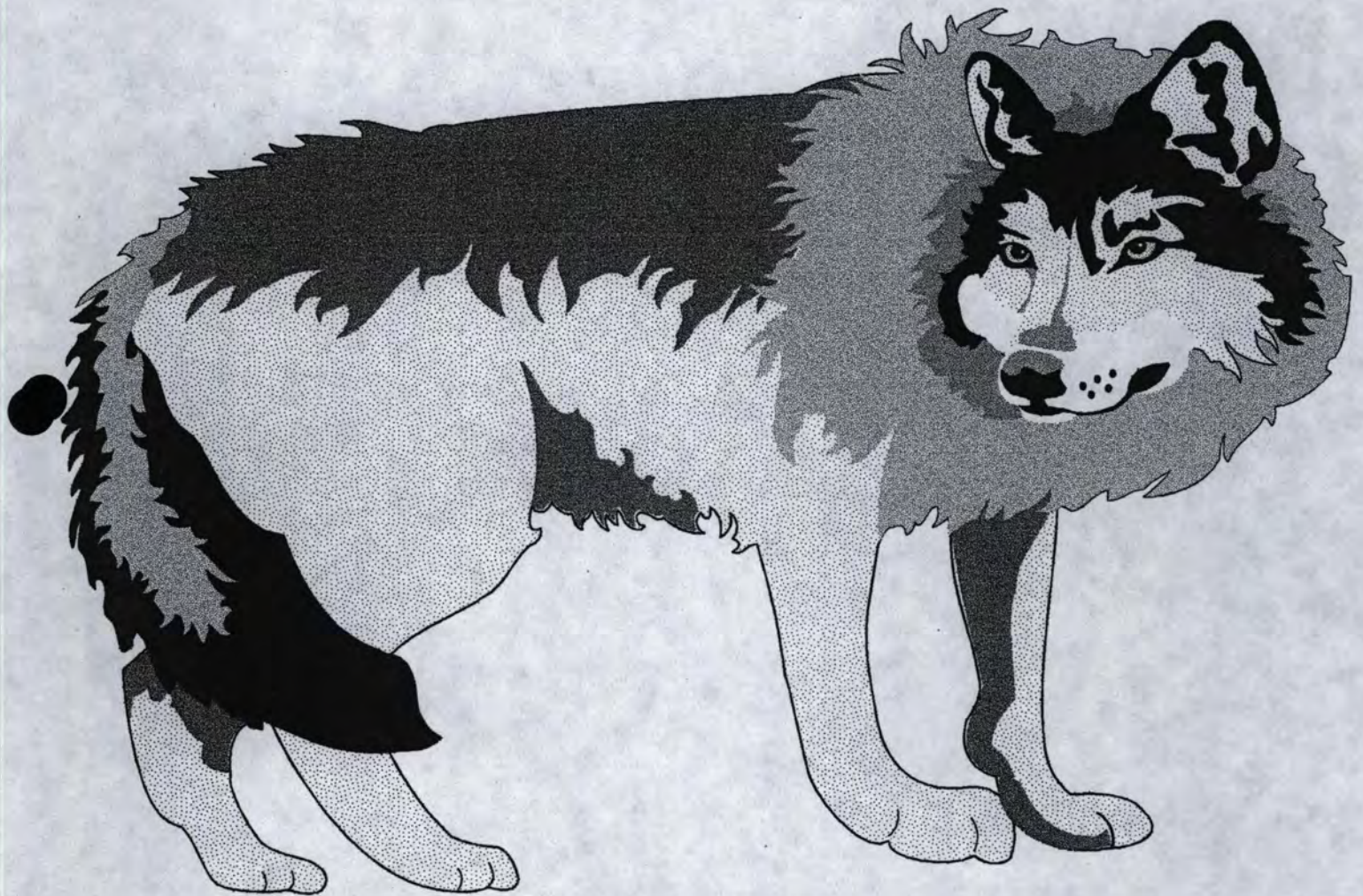


DEATH OF THE WIND SPIRITS
A Story of Early Pioneers and the
Last Pack of Wolves in Meadows Valley

by
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Heritage Program
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Intermountain Region
Payette National Forest
February, 1994

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SALMON MEADOWS, MEADOWS, OLD MEADOWS, NEW MEADOWS, MEADOWS VALLEY, all names of a valley criss-crossed with ancient trails. Trails used in the past by Native Americans, elk, fur trappers, deer, explorers, bear, pioneers, and wolves. This is a story of early Meadows settlers, their lives, and the last pack of wolves in the valley.

In 1879 Norman B. Willey made a trip from Indian Valley to Warrens, describing the area:

LITTLE SALMON VALLEY,

IDAHO TERRITORY, April 10, 1879

EDITOR STATESMAN:--The mail route which extends from Indian Valley to Warrens after leaving the former place, generally follows the valley of the Weiser river quite to its source, a distance of about 40 miles. Council valley, where there is a post office, is a level and apparently very fertile enlargement of the valley, 15 miles north of Indian valley, Hornet creek, a large branch of the Weiser comes in here from the west...About 8 miles above Council valley post office the wagon road practically ends. Mr. (Calvin) White, the mail contractor has located a trail along the stream some 12 miles through the canyon to where the country again becomes open, but the ancient trail and one latterly most traveled goes over the mountains west to the river. Last summer the troops took their wagons over this route, under Mr. White's guidance into the Little Salmon valley...From Fort Price there is a good natural road for about 8 miles in to Little Salmon valley.

This valley, I venture to say, is one of the prettiest tracts of agricultural land yet unsettled that can be found within the limits of the United States. It is an open prairie some ten miles long by three wide, affords excellent grass without sage-brush, and at least three-fourths of it awaits but the plow of the husbandman to yield the most abundant crops. Little Salmon, a branch of the Salmon river, runs northward through it, and streams large and small come in from the hills on each sides. A large portion of the surrounding hilly country is heavily covered with pine, spruce and tamarack, but there is very good summer range for the stock outside the valley...

Wild geese, swans, ducks and cranes abound and just now make the air vocal with their discords...Salmon do not come into this valley, the rapids and falls below apparently preventing them, but trout are very abundant. Towards the northern end of the valley is a hot spring. I have not seen it, but am told a large volume of hot water flows out of the ground, sufficient

to keep the stream open in winter for a mile or two below. Mr. Cal. White commenced work here on the first of last June (1878). He built a fine double house, fenced and broke about ten acres and as late as it was, raised a splendid crop of wheat and barley, with some potatoes and other vegetables. His wife, the only woman in the valley, with their seven children lived here during the entire Indian troubles of last summer, not wholly unconcerned it is true, but still boldly and courageously, and fortunately without molestation. Other settlers permanently established here with stock, &c., about them are Messrs. Jennings, Jolly, Cooper, Williams and Smith. More families are expected within the coming summer...

Of course the fact their being such a valley here is no new thing. It is on the direct road from Lewiston to Boise Basin, and hundreds, perhaps thousands passed through it in the early days. The Goose Creek House (Packer John's cabin) at the foot of the mountains, a mile from White's, was a noted hostelry, and abounded in good cheer in those days, and here some of the earliest political conventions of the Territory were held. But it has not been inhabited permanently for many years and is now a ruin. (Willey 1879).

One of the families to move to the valley, and into the Goose Creek House, was Thomas Clay, his wife Elizabeth Klein Osborne Clay, and their family. Thomas Clay was hired by Cal White to carry mail from Indian Valley to Warrens. Elizabeth Clay would become one of Idaho's most notable women pioneers, her story touching all who heard it.

ELIZABETH KLEIN OSBORNE CLAY'S STORY

Elizabeth Klein was born in Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany in 1845, immigrating to the United States with her younger sister Anna in 1863. The sisters lived in San Francisco for a year, then traveled to Idaho Territory, arriving in Lewiston in 1865. The summer of 1866, the young women and a group of friends decided to travel to the back country, their destination, the mountain mining town of Warrens. Riding horseback for the first time the young women suffered, but were remembered as good sports and for their charm, as lonely miners detained them along the trail, anxious for company and news of outside settlements. It was on this trip she met her husband (Dryden 1940:1-2).

On October 23, 1867 Elizabeth and William Osborne were married. The 1870 United States Census for Warrens, Idaho Territory recorded the Osborne family: William, miner (age 41, origin Massachusetts), Elizabeth (age 25), Willie (age 2), and Caroline (age 1/2 yr.). In 1874, the family and two younger babies, Edward and Annie, left Warren for the Salmon River county. Osborne and his brother-in-law, a Mr. Mason, placer mined bars along the river (Dryden 1940:3-5).

Life along the river was pleasant for the group until the spring of 1877 when Osborne and Mason were killed at the inception of the Nez Perce War. Osborne, an experienced Indian fighter, was shot through the heart as his wife and children huddled next to him. The Indian raiding party freed the women and children, sending them to the stockade at Slate Creek (Dryden 1940:11).

Elizabeth Osborne was a tiny woman weighing only eighty-five pounds when her husband was killed. Opportunities for supporting her children were minimal. After thinking over her options, Elizabeth decided to return to Warrens. The mining community, empathetic to the trauma Elizabeth and her children had suffered, moved her to Warrens and arranged for a house where the family could live comfortably. Rather than depend on charity, she bought a wash tub, a scrub board, and took in washings to support her family (Dryden 1940:15-16).

She and the children lived in Warrens from the autumn of 1877 until 1879 when she married Thomas Clay. Clay's mail route covered one hundred and fifteen miles, from Indian Valley to Warrens and back. The trip took seven days one way; each night Clay laid over at cabins previously stocked with supplies. In winter the trip was made on snowshoes. In February, Clay was on a return trip to Warren to marry Elizabeth when he ran into trouble. His daughter Minnie Clay Dryden remembered the story:

The traveling had been unusually hard all the way during this trip, so the night that was supposed to be his wedding night, was spent out in the lonely cabin where the mail carrier had food, and a sort of a bed. The bride spent the night and the next day in great anxiety, as she hadn't the least idea what might have happened to him. Men were sent out to look for Mr. Clay, and on the third day after his planned wedding date, he arrived in Warrens. They had the wedding and all miners and friends likewise celebrated (Dryden 1940:16).

Elizabeth knew her growing family needed to settle on land where the children could learn to work and provide for the future. After a baby girl was born to the Clays in 1880 the family moved to Meadows Valley, settling that fall in Packer John's Cabin at Goose Creek.

The winter of 1880-81 was bitter, the cold unrelenting, killing livestock. It was a turning point for many settlers. That spring Calvin White took his family back to Boston, and the Smith family returned to Missouri. The York and Stewart families moved south to Salubria Valley, dropping the population of Meadows Valley to a lonesome low. Bachelors living in cabins in the pines around the meadows included: Mr. Jennings, old Mr. Cooper, Lyman Smith, John A. Wilson, Wilse Williams, Charley and Bill Campbell, and a half-breed Cherokee Indian called Sam.

Elizabeth and the children were often alone at the Goose Creek cabin while Tom continued to carry mail to the mining camp. He would spend one night with his family on the way in to Warren and one on the return trip. It was a difficult and lonely time. One fond childhood memory Annie Osborne Krigbaum always had about the cabin was a family of squirrels living in the old log walls.

Goose Creek Cabin was built by Packer John in 1862 (Highley 1940:10). Located on the wilderness trail between Lewiston and Idaho City, the cabin was the meeting site in 1864 for Republican delegates to Congress and the House of Representatives for the Territorial Legislature. The delegates, on horseback with loaded pack animals, came through the wilderness to meet at the mountain cabin. As Goulder points out, while "horses grazed peacefully in the limitless pasture" the delegates cooked their dinner over campfires, and debated issues important to the convention. Two notables attending the convention according to Goulder were:

...Dr. Robert Newel and Colonel Wm. Craig, both of Nez Perces County...They had both been mountaineers, hunters and trappers in the Rocky Mountains. Together they had hunted buffalo, trapped beaver, and fought Indians and knew all the passes and trails through the mountains and across the great wilderness from St. Louis to Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia. They had both married daughters of Indian chieftains and had raised families...Both were now delegates (Goulder 1909: 280-285).

Newel, Craig and those attending in 1864 left a physical record at Packer John's cabin, signing their names on the window casing. In later years the Clay children would remember reading the signatures of the early lawmakers in the wood frame (Dryden 1940:17).

In the summer of 1882 Thomas Clay moved his family out of Packer John's cabin, to a ranch settled originally by the Jolly Family. The Clays bought a team of horses, twelve milk cows and hogs (Dryden 1981:16). As the season moved from autumn to winter the temperatures again dropped, reaching deadly lows. Outside the ranch house trees popped in the cold. This was the winter a wolf pack moved out of the mountains and into the valley.

THE HUNTERS

The Nez Perce, the Northern Shoshone, the Weiser Indians and the wolf had hunted in Central Idaho, using the same trails, eating elk, deer, moose, and to some extent the buffalo. All were seriously impacted by the advent of mining in the 1860's. Miners killed large numbers of deer and elk, using wild meat as a primary food source until wild herds were decimated. Needing meat to replace dwindling wild resources, livestock herds were brought in, further effecting grazing. The prey base for the wolf was no longer adequate, starvation an ever-present possibility.

When the wolf replaced its wild prey base with livestock, wolves came under attack, as a result they were nearly hunted to extinction. In the United States between 1850-1900 approximately 1.5 million wolves were killed. In a 1990 study O'Loughlin reports:

By the 1930s, wolves were seldom seen in the Northern Rocky Mountains. Elk numbers in the state did not begin to recover until the 1920s; recovery was possible largely because of hunting regulations and transplants from herds in Yellowstone National Park. It was shortly after this, in the 1940s, that scattered reports of wolves began in Northern Idaho along the Canadian border (O'Loughlin 1990:4).

VOICE OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

In the winter of 1882-83 deep snow and bitter cold effected everyone living in Idaho. A weather report from Warren noted:

The snow fall at the Knott mine up to date (March 1, 1883) has been seventeen feet, while we have had two cold waves so far during the winter. The first at New Year's when the mercury went to thirty-two below zero, and the second on the 18th and 19th of January when it went forty-four below and kept going until quicksilver placed for a test in a cup congealed (Idaho Tri-weekly Statesman 3/13/1883)

Early settlers were vulnerable in their isolation. However, the physical balance between man and nature was more in equilibrium for the pioneer who lived in the outdoors with skill and assurance. An example of that composure is best expressed in a story told about Thomas Clay before he and Elizabeth were married:

The winter of 1875 set in early and snow was already 12 inches deep, catching Mr. Clay unprepared, his string of (mail) cabins not stocked for the long dreary months. Hurrying as much as possible he loaded three pack horses, saddled his riding horse and started from Indian Valley to go the length of the line. The pack horses traveling ahead reached a ford and drinking place in the Weiser River near the present site of Ladwig's sawmill at Tamarack. At the edge of the stream a decrepit horse had died some weeks before and his frozen carcass provided feed for a band of 12 wolves who refused to leave their feast until Clay came to the ford. At his approach they moved away singly and in pairs to the nearby timber. One of their number, however, was more reluctant to depart than the others. He leaped to the saddle of one of the pack horses, ripped the canvas covering with his claws, pulled out a small square of bacon and sat contentedly but hurriedly eating his dessert. It was so much better than frozen horse meat that he would not relinquish it but made away through the snow to the timber. He was fortunate in that Clay never carried a gun, but relied on a trusty blade beaten out from a rasp of steel (Highley 1940: 10).

Clay's confidence in the outdoors is apparent in his unwillingness to carry a gun. But, no matter how easy Clay felt in the forest, he must have had serious apprehensions about leaving his family the winter of 1882-83. Problems created by the deadening cold tipped the balance in favor of nature, leaving humans and animals at risk.

One winter night the wolves of Meadows Valley circled the Clay cabin, attracted by kitchen scraps. The family dog slept outside, curled up in a warm corner next to the fireplace. As the wolves prowled close, the dog dashed out, ready to protect his territory. A pack of ten wolves attacked, killing the dog on the door step. In the barn, farm animals smelling blood became excited and began bawling. Clay stepped out into the winter night, firing into the pack with a pistol. The wolves disappeared, shadows in the forest.

The pack presented additional problems for settlers in the valley. Hunger plagued the wolves that winter, although they did not attack humans, they did kill domestic livestock. Clay and the bachelors in the valley must have felt a weighty responsibility to protect Elizabeth and her children from any additional anxiety, remembering the trauma they had suffered during the Nez Perce War.

Lyman Smith made a vow to break up the pack. Smith was a marksman. Using his Sharp's rifle, he systematically shot seven of the wolf pack that winter.

Old man Cooper lived near Packer John's cabin with his dog. One clear moonlight night Cooper heard his dog barking frantically as he raced towards the cabin. Cooper opened the door, and the dog catapulted inside, with a wolf on his heels. The wolf, intent on killing the dog, hadn't noticed the man. In an instant the scene changed. The wolf whirled around trying to make his escape, but Cooper reached for his gun, drew a bead on the wolf and killed him. The eighth wolf was dead.

Cherokee Sam killed the ninth wolf. Sam wintered on the west side of the valley in a cabin. Sam had the wolf in his sights, and like Smith he was a marksman. The shot fatal.

Valley temperaments mellowed as spring approached. The remaining lone wolf no longer seemed a threat as memories of winter faded. The wolf without his family appeared almost tame, and was often seen at the edge of the forest, watching the human families. The population increased in the spring when Calvin White and his family returned from Boston to their mountain home.

The Clay family replaced their dog, adopting a stray hound. The dog was a hunter, scouting the forests close to the Clay ranch. The lone wolf shadowed the dog, following him through the trees, but never attacking. When the dog returned home he would find the wolf

there ahead of him, setting on the hillside, appearing bored. If the hound approached, the wolf would look him in the eye, snap his teeth, and disappear into the underbrush. It became a game. For years the wolf was seen around the valley, a lonely spirit, gliding through the trees, then he was gone.

THE WOLF TODAY

"The wolf is on the way back," reports Wayne Melquist, State Non-game Wildlife Manager for Idaho Fish and Game (Non-game Threatened and Endangered Species Program). In a telephone conversation, Melquist noted there are several hundred wolf sightings each year, however the number of lone wolves in Idaho is estimated to be between 10 to 12; no reproduction or pack activity has been documented. Dark grey candid, thought to be a mating pair of wolves were noted in Bear Valley, but the male was found poisoned in 1991; its mate has not been sighted.

The danger of a wolf attacking a human is nearly non-existent, however risk to domestic pets and livestock is possible. Reintroduction of wolves would result in wolf populations of 10 pair, about 100 wolves in an area for three successive years. "A recovered wolf population in the central Idaho area would kill about 10 cattle (1-17) and 57 sheep (32-92) and up to 1,650 ungulates each year," reports the Environmental Impact Statement on Gray Wolves (1993).

The question is, are we willing to share the landscape with the wolf? The wolf is a knowledge we don't have, an understanding of freedom we don't possess, but the opportunity is there.

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