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Dear "Friends of the Frank"

Enclosed is a recent publication I did for the Payette National Forest Heritage Program that may be of interest or utility to you.

In pursuit of my interest in the history of the FC-RONR and the Salmon River backcountry, I am going to be a volunteer archaeologist-historian for the Payette NF, from mid-July to end of August, assisting Cultural Resources Manager Larry Kingsbury. The last two weeks of August I will be engaged in the excavation of a Native American historical site near the old Brownlee Guard Station near Hells Canyon; I am excited about this forthcoming event.

I look forward to the crossing of our paths this summer.

Best wishes

Peter Preston

Copies to:

Jim Porter, Melba ID: I look forward to seeing you this summer; thanks for sending me the Akensons' winter report.

Jim & Holly Akenson: I will be making a brief stop at Taylor Ranch on 4 Aug en route to Chamberlain on the mail plane; I look forward to seeing you then.

Dr Chuck Hatch, Univ of Idaho: Please alert me when you will be passing through McCall so we can share news and lunch (Larry's office 634-0750).

Dr Jerry Williams, USFS WO Historian

***FRANK CHURCH - RIVER OF  
NO RETURN WILDERNESS:  
AN HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY  
AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY***

***Compiled by  
Peter Preston  
for the***

***Heritage Program  
USDA Forest Service  
Intermountain Region  
Payette National Forest***

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**Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness:  
An Historical Chronology and Annotated Bibliography**

compiled by  
Peter Preston

**Introduction**

The Frank Church - River of No Return (FC-RONR) Wilderness, in the remote Salmon River Mountains of central Idaho, is over two million acres in size, the largest Wilderness in the United States outside of Alaska.

The FC-RONR Wilderness, and its immediate environs, has a unique history beginning in the pre-Euro-American era with transitory occupation by bands of Native Americans (Indians). Immediately following the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Euro-American and British fur trappers began exploring the northern Rocky Mountains, however, the Salmon River Mountains were generally avoided because of their difficulty of access.

It was not until the late 1800's that mineral exploration began in the Salmon River Mountains, some years after the surrounding areas began to be populated. A gold rush in 1902 at Thunder Mountain caused an almost instant population of as many as 10,000 miners and entrepreneurs, and a few enterprising "ranchers" at isolated homesteads raising cattle to feed the miners. The area's gold boom was short lived and by 1920 the Salmon River Mountains, east of the South Fork, had been depopulated to less than one hundred residents. In 1919 the "backcountry", as it came to be called, was incorporated into the old Idaho National Forest by Congressional action.

In the ensuing years, many of the isolated former homesteads became camps for big game hunters and aircraft provided transportation. The recreational value of the backcountry was recognized, prompting its designation as the Idaho Primitive Area in 1931, which was the forerunner to the FC-RONR Wilderness created in 1980.

The following pages, in two sections, provides a chronology of historic events and an annotated bibliography pertaining to the FC-RONR Wilderness. The selected bibliography includes books and like material but does not include lesser, but valuable, information sources of newspapers, personal records, oral interviews, map data, etc. This paper is intended as a reference guide for historical researchers and other interested persons.

- 1904- Post office established at townsite of Edwardsburg on upper Big Creek
- 1905- (1 Feb) Forest Service created within the Dept of Agriculture by Transfer Act
- 1905- (3 Jun) Payette Forest Reserve created, covering the forested lands of the Payette River watershed in southwestern Idaho.
- 1905- State-funded wagon road (completed 1906) constructed from Warren, via Elk Summit, to Edwardsburg; wagon road used existing pack trail as its basis.
- 1906- Yellow Pine Post Office established, oldest surviving post office in backcountry.
- 1907- Ranger station built at Chamberlain Meadows, which was then within the Bitterroot Forest Reserve.
- 1908- (1 Jul) Idaho National Forest created from the former Payette Forest Reserve and the southern corner of the former Bitterroot Forest Reserve, south of the Salmon River, which became the Chamberlain District.
- 1909- Town of Roosevelt, the center of the Thunder Mountain gold mining area, was inundated as result of a mud slide, essentially terminating mining activity in the area.
- 1911- Forest Homestead Act affirmed homesteading within National Forests.
- 1912- Ranger's line cabin built at Mosquito Springs in western Chamberlain District.
- 1914- Clover Post Office established on lower Big Creek (discontinued 1929).
- 1917- Valley County created from portions of Idaho and Boise Counties, leaving most of the Idaho NF split between Idaho and Valley Counties.
- 1919- (8 Aug) Congressional act restored over one million acres of "Heyburn's Forest" to the Idaho and Payette NF's as the Thunder Mountain Addition, covering much of the area now the FC-RONR Wilderness.
- 1922- First aircraft reported to have landed in the backcountry at Chamberlain Basin
- 1922- As a result of the Thunder Mountain Addition, appropriations to USFS provided for capital improvements in backcountry roads; Warren-to-Edwardsburg wagon road reconstructed for automotive travel.
- 1924-Continuing USFS appropriations for the Thunder Mountain Addition provided for capital improvements in trails, telephone lines, fire lookouts, and new ranger stations at South Fork, Chamberlain, Big Creek, and Cold Meadows.
- 1925- (24 Mar) Backcountry boundary between the Idaho and old Payette NF's was redrawn as a topographic line and the Thunder Mountain District was disestablished.

## AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED REFERENCES PERTAINING TO THE HISTORY OF THE FRANK CHURCH - RIVER OF NO RETURN WILDERNESS

### American Wilderness, History and Overview

Mitchell, John G.

- 1998 "Wilderness - America's Land Apart" in National Geographic, Vol 194, Nbr 5, November 1998. National Geographic Society. Washington DC. A current perspective on the national wilderness system.

Nash, Roderick

- 1982 Wilderness and the American Mind (Third Edition), Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. This is the classic textbook on American wilderness philosophy and history, providing an overview of the context in which the FC-RONR Wilderness was established and is currently managed.

National Geographic Society (NGS)

- 1973 Wilderness USA, NGS, Washington DC. An excellent overview of the wilderness system as it existed in 1973, with good philosophical statements.

The Wilderness Society (TWS)

- 1989 Wilderness America, TWS, Washington DC. A regionally-oriented overview of the wilderness system, with visions for future additions.

USDA Forest Service

- 1961 Wilderness, USDA Forest Service, Washington DC. Pamphlet PA-459. This old document provides an historical perspective on Forest Service wilderness management.

### Management and Management Issues, General

Browning, James A., John C. Hendee, and Joe W. Roggenbuck

- 1988 103 Wilderness Laws: Milestones and Management Direction in Wilderness Legislation, 1964-1987. Idaho Forest, Wildlife and Range Experiment Station Bulletin 51, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. A detailed compendium of wilderness legislation, including those establishing FC-RONR Wilderness.

Fromme, Michael (editor)

- 1985 Issues in Wilderness Management, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, in cooperation with the University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center, Moscow, Idaho. Wilderness management issues are explored by multiple authors. Of note is a generalized wilderness management action plan which became the model for the FC-RONR management symposium held at Boise, Idaho, 25-27 March 1993.

## Cultural Resource Assessments

Knudson, Ruthann, et al.

1981 A Cultural Resource Reconnaissance in the Middle Fork Salmon River Basin, Idaho, 1978. Prepared for USDA Forest Service in cooperation with the University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. An inventory of cultural sites within and adjacent to FC-RONR; includes site maps and cultural inventories.

Wildesen, Leslie E.

1982 The Farthest Frontier of All: A Cultural Resource Overview of the River of No Return Wilderness, Idaho. Prepared for USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Ogden, Utah. A very complete documentation of extant cultural features of FC-RONR, with reference to other works separately noted in this bibliography; includes prehistoric (Native American) and current era data.

Hartung, John W.

1978 Documentation of Historical Resources in the Big Creek Drainage, Central Idaho. Masters thesis for University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. A visual inventory of the early Big Creek and Monumental Creek habitations and selected cultural sites with some historical notes.

Wylie, Henry G. (Jerry)

1980 A Cultural Resource Evaluation of the Cabin Creek Ranch. USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Ogden, Utah. A detailed inventory of cultural features at Cabin Creek Administrative Site on Big Creek, as an assessment of historical value subsequent to acquisition of the property by USFS.

## History, Administrative

Scribner, S.C. (Supervisor, Idaho National Forest, McCall, Idaho)

1931 Idaho Primitive Area Report, on file at USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Ogden, Utah. A description of the geographic features and cultural developments within the eastern part of the Idaho National Forest, supporting the 1931 designation of the Idaho Primitive Area, which later became the core of the expanded FC-RONR Wilderness.

Baird, Dennis, and Lynn Baird

1987 "A Campfire Vision: Establishing the Idaho Primitive Area" in Journal of the West, Vol XXVI, No. 3, July 1987, Manhattan, Kansas. A definitive history of the events leading to the establishment of the Idaho Primitive Area.

Trueblood, Ted.

1975 "The Forest Service Versus the Wilderness Act" in Field and Stream (Sept). Trueblood's article, questioning USFS removal of evidence of human activity predating the 1964 Wilderness Act, is an historical illustration of the public's concern of the management of the Wilderness areas, including the FC-RONR.

Larson, George C.

- 1975 "The Salmon River Run" in Flying Magazine, Vol 97, Nbr 2, August 1975. Comprehensive article about aerial mail delivery to remote locations in the Salmon River backcountry and FC-RONR Wilderness.

Parke, Adelia Routson

- 1956 Memoirs of an Old Timer, Signal American Press, Weiser, Idaho. A history of the Routson family residence on Big Creek in the early 1900's, providing historical information about neighbors and events on Big Creek.

Preston, Peter

- Payette National Forest Heritage Program monograph series: USDA Forest Service, Payette National Forest, McCall, Idaho.
- 1994 Crossing the South Fork. A history of the logistical importance of the South Fork crossing to gain access to the Salmon River backcountry.
- 1995 Chamberlain Basin's Historic Three Blaze Trail. A short history of the trail that provided access to Thunder Mountain by crossing Chamberlain Basin.
- 1996 Life on the Warren Ranger District, 1932-1936. An edited, annotated excerpt from Memoirs of a U.S. Forest Ranger by A. Eugene Briggs (1963). Includes a few items of backcountry history, especially pertaining to 1931 forest fire in Chamberlain Basin.
- 1996 Early Fur Trappers in Chamberlain Basin. A review of historical data pertaining to regional fur trapping activities, with inconclusive evidence that trapping occurred in Chamberlain Basin in the 1830's. Also includes location of Nez Perce trails in vicinity of Chamberlain Basin.
- 1997 (Editor) Memoirs of an Old Prospector, autobiography of Noel Routson, brother of author Adelia Routson Parke, with additional data about their family's life on lower Big Creek in the early 1900's.
- 1999 The Early Days of the Idaho National Forest and the First Forest Rangers, 1908-1924. (Pending publication) A comprehensive history with much data on the Thunder Mountain Addition of 1919; notes early rangers, ranger stations, and other historical information.

Reddy, Sheila D.

- 1995 Wilderness of the Heart: An Early History of the Land and the People of the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness. Sketches of selected historic people, places, and events; a few inaccuracies noted.

Tate, Stanton D.

- 1995 Jumping Skyward, Cabinet Crest Books, Heron, Montana. Recollections of a USFS smokejumper based in McCall, Idaho, in the 1950's, with chapters devoted to his activities in the Salmon River backcountry.

Wisner, Frances Zaunmiller

- 1987 My Mountains: Where the River Still Runs Downhill, Idaho County Free Press, Grangeville, Idaho. A collection of newspaper articles about life and observations on the isolated section of the Salmon River.

## History, Native American Presence

Payette National Forest Heritage Program monograph series: USDA Forest Service, Payette National Forest, McCall, Idaho. Includes the following authors and titles:

Jones, Melanie

- 1993 Native Americans of the Payette National Forest. An overview of Native American presence.

Reddy, Sheila D.

- 1993 The Empty Land: The Search for the Nez Perce on the Payette National Forest. An overview of Nez Perce presence in the 1800's.
- 1993 Peeled Trees on the Payette National Forest. Information on use of cambium as a food source by Nez Perce Indians.
- 1995 American Indians of Idaho, the Payette National Forest and the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness. Includes some information about Native American presence in the FC-RONR Wilderness.
- 1995 Shadows in the Wilderness. The story of the Northern Shoshoni Band (Tukudika, the "Sheepeaters") in the FC-RONR Wilderness.

Stoddard, Steven E.

- 1996 A Recent Radiocarbon Date for Intermountain Flatbottom Pottery from the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, Idaho. Pottery shards discovered in the FC-RONR Wilderness, dated to 1650-1750, attributed to Tukudika Indians.
- 1996 A Projectile Point Typology for the Payette National Forest. A reference catalogue which has application to identification of projectile points found in the Salmon River backcountry and FC-RONR Wilderness.