

WILDERNESS OF THE HEART

hired horses from a China pack train at \$15 a head to ride in on...the new discovery is on one of the tributaries of the Middle Fork of the Salmon river, and probably in the heart of what we used to term the Sheep Eater county... (July 18, 1889).

The Alton mining discovery added not only wealth to the Smith family, but tragedy when fourteen year old Bob Smith froze to death. Bob was delivering mail from Warren to the Alton district in the winter of 1890. Evidently cold overcame him and he died on the trail. After his body was found the next spring he was buried at the Smith ranch on Elk Creek (Carrey 1968:27-28).

The Idaho County Free Press made the following report on Oct. 24, 1890:

Three-Finger Smith, and Mr. and Mrs. C.F. [Frank] Smith were in Warrens on election day from their respective places on the south fork, where they catch twenty-seven pound trout, and raise potatoes as big as beer barrels, and babies that weigh fifteen pounds apiece. Frank had just come out from Alton district and is as enthusiastic as ever over the great ledges of rich ore over there.

Three-Finger Smith's ranch was located at the confluence of the South Fork of the Salmon River and Elk Creek, north of Elk Creek; a mile and a half south of Salon Hall's Bridge. The location was on one of the major trails into the Thunder Mountain mining area and the wilderness area.

Three-Finger Smith was remembered as generous man; a man who had mined in good times as much as a thousand dollars a day (Elsensohn 1965:91), but times changed. His son Henry was quoted saying, his father, "was penniless when he died [in 1892]. His coffin was made of an old sluice box" (ibid.). Smith was buried on his ranch on the South Fork.

BIG CREEK HOMESTEADERS

The William A. (wife, Annie) Edwards and Annesley Napier Edwards homesteads, later to be known as Edwardsburg, provide a unique history of an Idaho pioneer family in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. A mining prospectus written by William A. Edwards in 1928, included a biographical sketch of the family:

"I [William A. Edwards] was born and reared in Newton County, Georgia, the son of Judge and Mrs. E.F. Edwards. I attended Emory College, which was then located at Oxford, Ga., and graduated in 1889 with the highest honors of my class" (Edwards 1928:1).

After graduation from Emory College, Edwards entered the law department of Georgetown University in Washington D.C., graduated, and was appointed a law examiner in the General Land Office. He then transferred to the office of the Assistant Attorney General for the Interior Department, where he remained for ten years. During that period he became a specialist in mining law (ibid.).

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Edwards goes on to add:

"During that time I married Miss Annie Napier, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs H.V. Napier of Macon, Ga., and an honor graduate of Wesleyan University. We have one child, a son.

"In 1901 my health broke down and I was compelled to resign and seek an outdoor life. Because of my knowledge of mining law I decided to go to some new mining camp in the Rocky Mountain States. When I reached Spokane the Thunder Mountain boom in central Idaho was in full swing, so in the spring of 1902 I left my wife and son in Spokane and joined the rush to Thunder Mountain, which at that time was about two hundred miles from a railroad and sixty-five miles from a wagon road. ...The boom, being based on excited and exaggerated tales, which grew as they spread, had no solid foundation and collapsed as quickly as it grew. However, about twenty-five miles from Thunder Mountain, in the Big Creek country, there was an immense mineral belt...Returning to Spokane for the winter, I went back into the Big Creek country in the summer of 1903 and acquired mining interest there. In the spring of 1904 my wife and son accompanied me in there on an adventurous trip and we established ourselves in a tent while I built with my own hands a log house in a beautiful little valley. Here we have lived up to the present time, over twenty-four years" (Edwards 1928: 1-3).

William Edwards filed a homestead claim on February 15, 1919, and received patent.

Soon after, his son, Annesley Napier Edwards, filed. In a letter to Forest Supervisor J. Raphael, William Edwards noted:

On January 5, 1920, a few days after this section was taken into the Forest, my son Napier Edwards, came of age and desiring to make homestead entry on certain land adjoining mine he applied for a free use permit...Under date of September 22, 1920 this permit was issued and...he has erected excellent seven room house...(Edwards, personal correspondence 1922).

A.N. Edwards' homestead was described in a report written by Forest Ranger Lee O. Miles on November 3, 1921:

[LOCATION:] On Big Creek, tributary of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River; at the junction of the Edwardsburg-Yellow Pine Trail and the Edwardsburg-Thunder Mountain Trail, about 25 miles from Yellow Pine Basin, 25 miles from Roosevelt and 38 miles from Warren, Idaho.

[CULTIVATION:] Crops raised are clover hay, vegetables such as potatoes and carrots, and small fruits such as berries...When the grain must be irrigated, water from Lick Creek has been filed on for this purpose...Comprises virtually all the arable land on the flat east of Big Creek, between the Davis claim on the south to the Wm. Edwards claim on the north...Lodgepole grows rather densely in pure stands on all this area, having followed fires which burned forty and one hundred twenty years

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ago, respectively.

The property was examined again on June 3, 1927, by Forest Ranger Dan H. LeVan., and, A.N. (Napier) Edwards received patent on Aug. 9, 1928, signed by President Calvin Coolidge.

Napier Edwards died in a Cascade hospital on December 16, 1965. The death announcement noted Napier was born Jan. 5, 1898, at Macon, Ga., and came to Big Creek when he was three years old. He had been educated at home, and carried mail from Yellow Pine to Big Creek. He was buried at the Big Creek cemetery. The article noted, "weather conditions will dictate the time of services."

Hockaday added:

Action to complete a withdrawal of land for the Big Creek Administrative Site (adjacent to Edwardsburg) began in 1923 and by the end of 1924 a log dwelling and a commissary-storeroom building had been constructed (1968:40).

In 1944, Dan H. LeVan was the Ranger in Charge at Big Creek (Hockaday 1968:45-46).

As noted, the Caswell brothers, Ben, Lou, and Dan were early settlers in the Frank Church-River of No return Wilderness area. The brothers built a log cabin at the confluence of Cabin Creek and Big Creek in 1895. In a series of hand-written diaries, Lou Caswell left a record of daily life in the wilderness from 1895-1900 (Idaho Historical Society, Historical Collections: MS2/437).

Excerpts from 1895 note:

- Feb. 1: Took horses over Big Creek. 18 inches of snow.
- Feb. 28: Johnnie and Frank Murphy started for the South Fork but came back the same day. 2 feet of snow on head of Cave Ck.
- May 6: Got some tea, salt, pepper, allspice and soda from Dutch George.
- May 14: Stayed on Rush Creek and moved to Monumental.
- May 16: Landed at Mule Creek camp ground right side up.
- June 3: Cleared ground and packed down boxes. Piped off shelf.
- June 10: Opened sack of flour.
- June 19: Prospected.
- June 20: Staked off claim on Thunder Mt. Surveyed ditch.
- July 17: Ben prospected for ledge. Found it.
- Aug. 1: Killed deer. Struck rich pocket.
- Aug. 2-3-4: Rocked all day.

The brothers continued to work their Thunder Mountain claims, moving back and forth between Thunder Mountain and the cabin on Cabin Creek. Ben appears to have supervised the mining claim, while Lou kept track of the ranch, its garden, trapping and the animals.

The diaries give an indication of the mobility of these early pioneers, and the close relationships between the people living in the wilderness and those living nearby. Entries beginning in February of 1897 give some idea of their lives and travel:

Feb. 26: Finished snowshoes. Got ready to go up the river or

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- Warren.
- Feb. 27: Started for Warren. Got to Camp and Billy Hopkins camp. They wasn't home.
- Feb. 29: Went to Bert McDowell and Chas. Degrundy cabin. At home.
- Mar. 1: Went up to Chas. Hopkins and Bud Dawsons cabin. They both had a cold. Bert went up with me and layed over till the 3rd.
- Mar. 3: Went to S. Fork. Stopped with Sam and Keffer overnite.
- Mar. 4: Went to Billy Duniways. Charley and Bud stayed with Ira Beard.
- Mar. 5: Went to Mit Hanleys. All home, got there at 20 minutes to 1.
- Mar. 6: Went to Warren. Loaded up. Saw old Jack, all under the weather. Came back to Mits.
- Mar. 7: 4 o'clock. Started for S. fork. Charley went back to Warren to get a letter from the school ma'am. Stopped at Billeys [Smead]. Had a dance. Curley Brewer and wife there.
- Mar. 9: ...Getting ready to have another dance.
- Mar. 10: Sam Smith went after Smith girls.
- Mar. 11: Had a dance. Danced most of nite.
- Mar. 12: They danced again about an hour. Went to Clarks.
- Mar. 13: Went up to Billeys. Stub, Alice, and Ada went home and Billey Smead went hunting. Stopped with Beard.
- Mar. 15: Started for Big Creek. Camped near Summit.
- Mar. 16: Got over to McDowell and DeGrundys. The boys went home.
- Mar. 17-18: Layed over.
- Mar. 19: Came down to Camp and Hopkins.
- Mar. 20: Layed over and fixed snowshoes.
- Mar. 21: Came home.

Another famous wilderness pioneer living east of the Caswell brothers, was David "Cougar Dave" Lewis. Lewis filed on his homestead at Rush Creek and Big Creek in June of 1924, however, according to Forest records he settled on the claim in 1899.

Lewis' life is interwoven within the biography of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, the Territory, and Idaho, the State.

Author Roy Lindley stopped at Lewis' cabin, and Lewis invited him to stay as his guest. During the visit Lewis indicated he was a Civil War veteran (Elsensohn 1971: 280). After the war Lewis had gone to sea, only to find, "the life of a sailor too tame for his restless spirit" (Cascade News 6/26/ 47).

Lewis prospected in California and Oregon, then made his way to Idaho in the 1870's. He joined Col. W.C. Brown as a civilian Packer in the Sheepeater Campaign of 1879. While traveling with the troops through the wilderness mountain country he found a place he wanted for his home.

Lewis developed a reputation as a skilled mountain man and hunter, particularly as a cougar hunter. Photographs of "Cougar Dave"

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show him surrounded by his hunting companions, a pack of terriers.

In 1922, Lewis wrote a letter to the Forest Supervisor, providing additional information about his homestead claim. The letter was hand-written with an indelible pencil on a school tablet:

Since I saw you I have made arrangements for a shotgun. Find inclosed \$3.25 for axe which please send by Parcel Post to Clover, Idaho. I and the Dogs wintered well. We got 13 cougars and a good catch of other furs. In regard to filing on my claim, it would be most convenient at Cascade for about the last day of June.

I still remain your friend,
Dave Lewis, Clover, Idaho

Lewis' homestead claim was examined by Forest Supervisor S.C. Scribner on July 28, 1927. He made the following notes in his report:

CLAIMANT: Mr. Dave Lewis, Clover, Idaho. Mr. Lewis is a bachelor and resides on the land.

SETTLEMENT AND RESIDENCE: Mr. Lewis first settled on the claim in 1899, but did not establish permanent residence until 1911. He filed on the claim in June 1924. Residence established in July 1911 has been maintained continuously to date. About 12 acres now produce hay and garden products. Equipment found includes plow, harrow, mowing machine, set of carpenter tools, rakes, blacksmith outfit, etc. Sufficient household furniture and cooking utensils needed to provide for the comfort of claimant were also found.

IMPROVEMENTS: Dwelling 12 x 25 feet with addition 12 x 25 feet constructed of logs and consisting of 4 rooms, valued at \$800.00. Tool house of logs, 10 x 12 feet, valued at \$100.00. The dwelling is habitable year-long. Pioneer Creek crosses the claim near the dwelling and furnishes a good domestic water supply. There is approximately one-half mile of fence while the balance of the area is protected by bluffs along either side of Big Creek. All improvements were constructed by present claimant. Approximately one-half of the 12 acres is irrigated, while the balance lying along Big Creek is sub-irrigated...The entire area of 12 acres has been under cultivation since about 1916...The hay produced in 1925 was fed to cattle owned by Conyers, a rancher living farther up Big Creek [near the Caswell ranch on Cabin Creek].

GRAZING: The only stock owned by claimant consists of 8 head of work and saddle horses.

Scribner had realized the difficulty of asking Lewis to ride to a town to give his deposition. He wrote the following letter to the Forester in Washington D.C.:

This claim is located in the interior of the Idaho Forest near the confluence of Big Creek and the Middle Fork Salmon River. The Claimant, Mr. David Lewis, is a splendid citizen, a man 84 years of age, and becoming rather feeble. I visited his claim

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and saw him about the middle of October, and he was rather disturbed over a letter from the local Land Office requiring him to submit affidavits...[on his claim].

You will appreciate the position of Mr. Lewis, when you consider his age, and the fact that it is 75 or 100 miles from his place to the nearest notary; that winter is approaching; and that he was not strong. The greater part of the trip to a notary would have to be made by him with a saddle and pack horse. In order to help him out as much as possible, I took his deposition...There is no question as to Mr. Lewis' compliance with the homestead laws...Because of his advanced age, Mr. Lewis is desirous of securing patent and putting his affairs in final shape. I shall be glad to be informed of the results of your efforts (Scribner 11/2/1927).

Lewis received patent on February 1, 1928, signed by Calvin Coolidge. He continued to live on Big Creek until one morning in the spring of 1936. After rising and eating breakfast he realized he was ill. He hiked twenty miles to a friend, who drove him into Boise. The next day, at age 93, Dave Lewis died. An article in the Idaho Statesman, dated June 25, 1936, acknowledged the loss of this old pioneer:

...He was part of the forest. The thickets and valleys were his doorstep, the mountains his attic...The mountains will miss Cougar Dave.

CHAMBERLAIN BASIN

In 1910, Julian Rothery was assigned as Acting, then as Forest Supervisor of the Idaho National Forest. In correspondence he remembered:

At that time, the Idaho Forest, and nearby Forests, represented the great wilderness area in the United States, a practically unbroken mountain mass, stretching from the Snake River Plains to Canada and from the Montana line to Oregon. Roads were few and poor, and trails hardly more than the trappers' blazed ways...I usually figured about 30 days in summer to go to Chamberlain Basin and Middle Fork and return, and one or two winter trips about the same. (Rothery 1940).

Nineteen year old James "Jimmy" Hand made a hazardous trip through Chamberlain Basin in 1889, one of the first recorded. He started with four horses, but all four perished in the rugged terrain. He apparently found something to touch his heart in the wilderness, for he returned:

His next trip was in 1891, when he and Andy Eason returned to Chamberlain, having packed in from Lewiston, Idaho. They stopped at an old cabin in Chamberlain Basin that was supposed to have been built by the Hudson's Bay trappers and had at one time been used by John Ramey, the early trapper after whom a creek is named (Elsensohn 1971:73-74).

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ables are raised which is considerable less than what the land will produce, but a great deal of the stuff planted is eaten by the game in this country, chiefly deer. Deer are also very troublesome in that they eat quite a lot of cultivated grasses...

About 40 acres of the area is now under ditch...

GRAZING: The claimant at present owns 11 head of horses and mules, including colts...The claimant also owns 12 domestic fowls.

Stonebraker received patent on March 1, 1920, signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

Ralph Davis applied for a homestead claim at Moose Meadows on McCalla Creek in 1917. Although Davis abandoned the claim Forest Examiner W.B.Rice made the following note while visiting the claim:

There is a trapper's cabin in the northeast corner of the area, but there is no evidence of settlement either by applicant or other parties. The only improvement on the tract is the trapper's cabin mentioned above which is 10 x 12 feet, in fair shape and valued at \$25.00.

An application was made by Wm. Mitchell on Disappointment Creek at the mouth of Hungry Creek. The claim was examined by Assistant Forest Ranger Walter G. Mann on June 30, 1910. He made the following remarks in his report:

CLAIM: One cabin built by trappers some three years ago. There is about two acres cleared of brush by Warren E. Cook in 1907. Mr. Cook also planted strawberries, raspberries and rhubarb, most of which is now bearing fruit. Mr. Cook was a Forest Guard at that time.

ECONOMICS POSSIBILITIES: Mr. Mitchell wishes to go into the cattle business. This station is very valuable to the Forest Service as a winter headquarters since it is the only place in that section where a ranger can winter horses and have a year-round station. About 20 acres can be cleared and put into garden, and some hay might be raised for emergency in the winter. This station is situated in a very rough country and is really the only garden spot in that section where there are rolling bunch grass hills on which horses can graze for the greater part of the winter...

RECOMMENDATIONS: I recommend against the listing of this land.

Mitchell's application was rejected.

CHANGES IN THE HEARTLAND

By the early 1900's, pioneers were writing about the "good old days," and analyzing changes that had taken place in Idaho. Governor W.J. McConnell was one of the first-comers to take up farming and ranching to supply miners with fresh produce. He remembered 1860's prices:

It was a high-priced market we had entered. Early potatoes

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first brought forty-five cents a pound; early beets, tops and all netted the same price as early potatoes; cucumbers were two dollars a dozen, green corn two dollars a dozen ears; tomatoes, forty-five cents a pound, early York cabbage, about half mature, brought seventy-five cents a pound; watermelons were twenty-five cents a pound (McConnell 1924:65).

The isolation of Idaho's frontier and the massive influx of people in the late 1800's, soon decimated wild game herds. In a grazing report, Forest Supervisor Walter G. Mann (1918-1920) analyzed growth and decline of ranching in the area:

The livestock industry in the Chamberlain country was short-lived with a rapid build-up, and in most cases a more rapid breakdown. The industry developed from the need of meat rather than the adaptability of the area for livestock. At first the game animals supplied the miners with their meat, but about 1885 the scarcity of game brought higher prices for domestic stock. Attracted by the possibilities of fancy profits a number of men located on the meadow lands of the lower elevations, where they believed stock could be wintered on the grass. Fred Burgdorf was one of the first to attempt such a venture. Andrew Nelson, Freeman Nethken, and William Mackay were others operating on the South Fork of the Salmon River before 1900. One man was reported to have lost his entire herd of 125 cattle during a severe winter. Profits from the cattle helped maintain the business. A close, unlimited market, with steady high prices, coupled with free grass, made it an attractive industry for the Warren area.

The same procedure followed during the Thunder Mountain boom in 1900. By 1905, nearly every sizeable bar and meadow was taken for a cattle ranch. Those upon which improvements were made include: Cold Meadows by W.H. Caswell, McCoy Ranch, Roots Ranch, Stonebraker Ranch, Hotzel Ranch, John Chamberlain Ranch, Campbells Ferry, Moose Meadow by Ralph Davis, and others. Most of these attempts did not last longer than the mining boom. Scarcity of winter forage, lowering prices, distances to market after the miners' demands slackened, and the generally severe winters experienced during that period, helped to eliminate them (Mann n.d.:2).

The 1920's were an era of awakening of the value and vulnerability of the remaining wild lands. One of the key players recognizing the need to protect Idaho's heartland was District Forester Richard H. Rutledge.

An Idaho native, Rutledge began a career with the Forest Service and served as Regional Forester from 1920-1938 (Baird et. al.:50-58). He and others started the process to preserve Idaho wilderness areas. After years of effort Idaho's heartland was established as a Primitive Area (1931), then designated as the River of No Return Wilderness on July 23, 1980, and later on February 27, 1984, re-