

Cougar Dave - Mountain Man of Idaho

They walked a half mile almost straight up to get to the flat ridge top (now called Soldier Bar) about 500 feet above the river where Eagan died. The Governor was huffing and puffing when they reached the top. The monument was impressive. "How in heaven's name did they get it up here?" he said still catching his breath. Shellworth laughed and looked at Dave.

"That's a long story. Dave felt his comrade should be remembered, so he wrote to Colonel W. W. Brown who was with the army at Vinegar Hill. He got the ball rolling and the officials gave the go ahead for the monument. That slab of granite weighs about 350 pounds. Joe Elliott had to customize a packsaddle with scaffold style supports on the sides, then he loaded it on the back of his big black mule named Dempsey with a block and tackle. They carried it all the way from Big Creek."

"Harry here just happened to be there at my place when Joe showed up," Dave put in, chuckling. His blue eyes, once so piercing, were now a faded blue, like denim that's been washed a hundred times, but they still looked out at the world with wry amusement. "I don't know what in tarnation we would have done if he hadn't been there."

"I was more than glad to help. We got sand and rocks from the river and got it going. It took us all day but we got the job done."

"It's a fine tribute to a friend," Johnson said as he looked at Dave. The old man took his hat off and the others did the same. His blue eyes clouded over and he gazed across the mountains, remembering the night that a young man's agony had left a mark forever in this canyon and in his heart.

When the hunt ended and the men and animals dispersed across the mountains and the state, the talk of a preserved area in Central Idaho did not end. The Governor, Shellworth, and District forester Rutledge remembered their discussions and began the process that would eventually make the dream voiced around Dave's campfire a reality. As a consequence of their influence, as well as many others, in July 1929 a legal provision was in place through which the Forest Service could preserve wild lands.

The *Idaho Sunday Statesman* on December 28, 1930 printed a three-page article about the proposed primitive area. It said in part:

"One of the main reasons for restricting development in the section is that not another place in the United States offers so great a variety of big game and in such great numbers. All kinds of big game are represented—it is probably the outstanding hunters' paradise in the nation. The purpose (of the primitive area) is: To conserve primitive conditions of environment,



Left to right: Idaho Governor H. Clarence Baldrige, David Lewis and R.H. Rutledge, district forester from Ogden, Utah, in 1927 at the monument for Private H. Eagen who was killed during the Sheepeater War.

Photo courtesy University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho.
"Cougar" Dave Lewis Papers.

habitation, subsistence and transportation for the enjoyment of those who cherish the early traditions and history of this country and desire to keep in some degree the traits, qualities, and characteristics upon which this nation was founded, and to afford unique opportunities for physical mental and spiritual recreation or regeneration."

A committee was appointed by the Governor to study the issue and draw up a plan. Harry Shellworth was chairman and the illustrious group included Cowles Andrus, father of future Idaho Governor Cecil Andrus and several other prominent Idaho businessmen. On March 17, 1931 the Idaho Primitive Area was born.

Three years had gone by since Dave applied for a patent to the ranch. Letters were written back and forth by him and his supporters. Finally the district forester in Blackfoot Idaho wrote a letter to Washington D.C., Department of the Interior. Dated November 2, 1927 the letter stated: