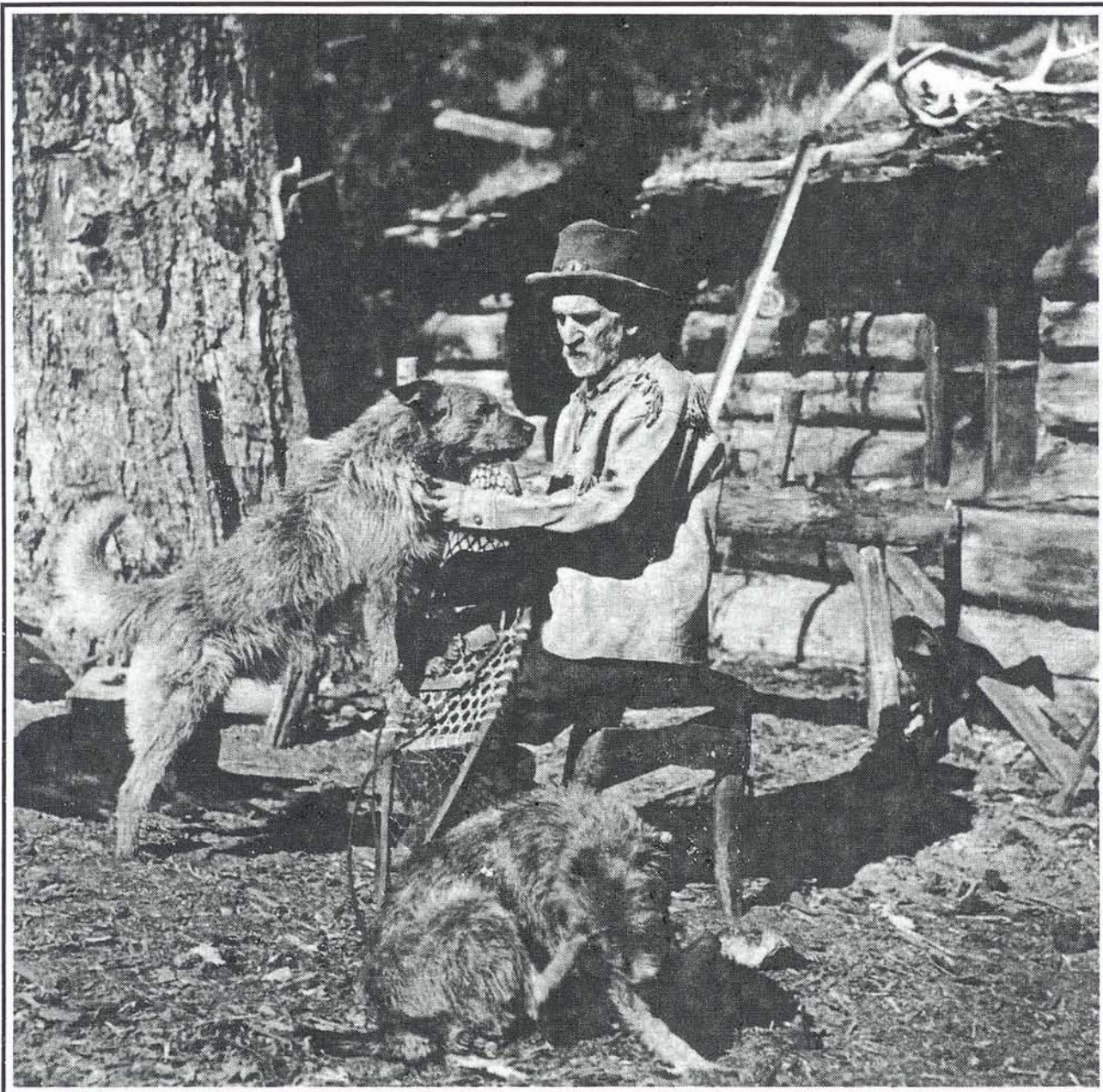


# A Century of Taylor Ranch History

---

■ James Akenson



## ***About the Author***

---

James Akenson was manager of Taylor Ranch Wilderness Field Station between 1982 and 1990. Jim shared this job with his wife Holly. Having experienced the rigors of backcountry life first hand, Jim was inspired to research the lives of those preceding him at Taylor Ranch.

Both Jim and Holly are graduates of Eastern Oregon State College, and Jim has a Master's Degree in Resource Geography from Oregon State University. Jim and Holly now live near Summerville, Oregon. Jim is currently a researcher on a mountain lion study for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

---

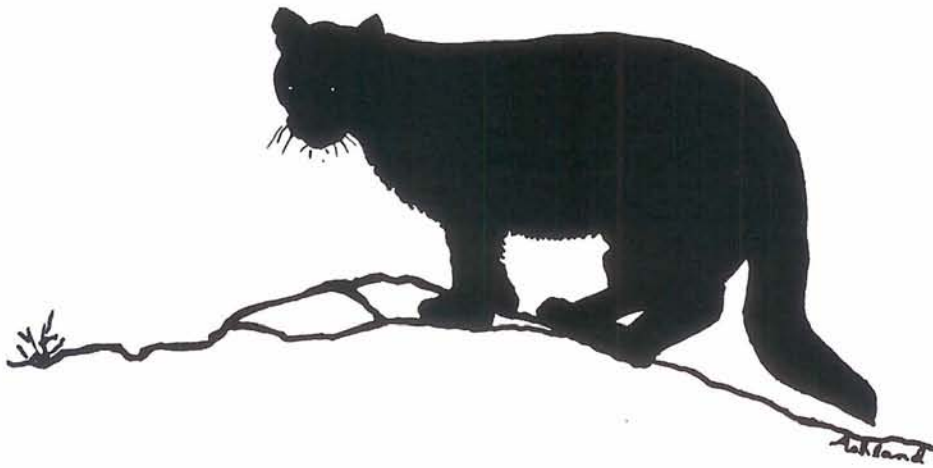
**Cover:** "Uncle Dave" Lewis mends a snowshoe and tries to keep one of his lion dogs happy. Lewis, a cougar hunter and perhaps the first outfitter in the Salmon River country, settled on what is now Taylor Ranch in 1918, although he'd roamed and hunted the territory for decades earlier. *Photo from Historical Photo Collection, University of Idaho Library.*

Line drawings by Lorraine Ashland, College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences graphic artist.

# **A Century of Taylor Ranch History**

by

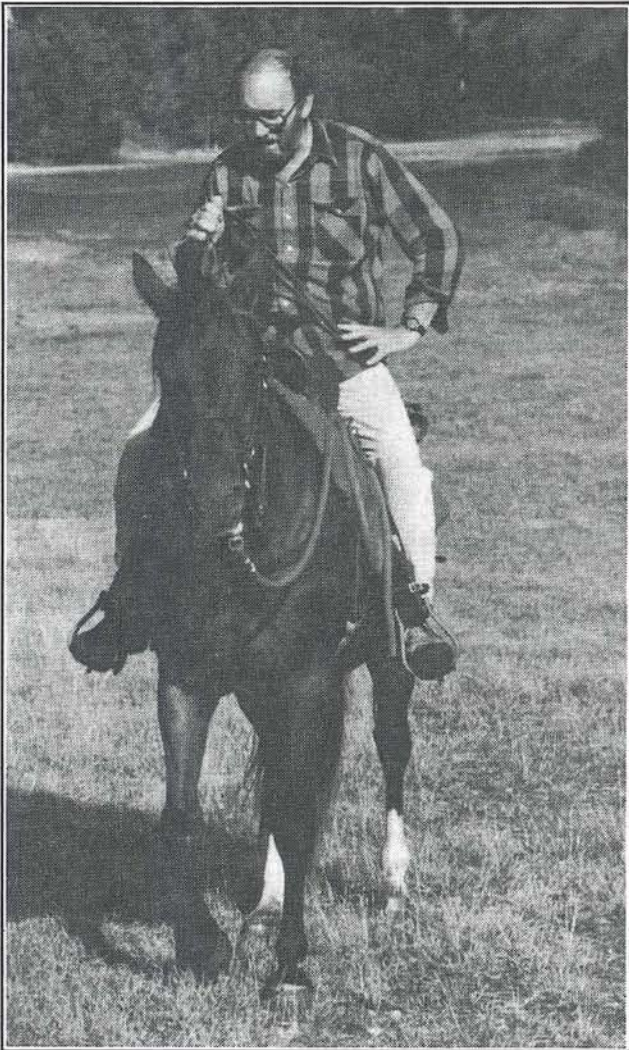
**James Akenson**



1992

## *Dedication*

---



Frank Leonhardy riding Miya at Taylor Ranch while doing archaeological survey work on Big Creek.

*In Memory of Frank Leonhardy, who inspired many to investigate the lives of those who walked the banks of Big Creek before us.*

---

## ***Acknowledgements***

---

**T**his document was compiled chiefly from oral history. Thanks to interviews, visits, letters, and tapes from the following people it was possible to link together the various eras in the colorful history of Taylor Ranch.

### **Early History**

Johnny and Pearl Carrey  
Lafe and Emma Cox  
Del Davis  
Jerry Evans  
Frank Leonhardy  
Bob Loveland  
Donn Maryott  
Myron and Aloha McCoy  
Noel Routson  
Grid Rowles  
George Savage

### **Recent History**

Ernie Ables  
Ray and Carol Arnold  
Bill Dorris  
Richard Gibb  
Bob and Cathy Gillihan  
Greg Hayward  
Maurice Hornocker  
Con and Tina Hourihan  
Cliff and Johnson  
Gary Koehler  
Ed Krumpe  
Stan Potts  
Bob and Vi Webb

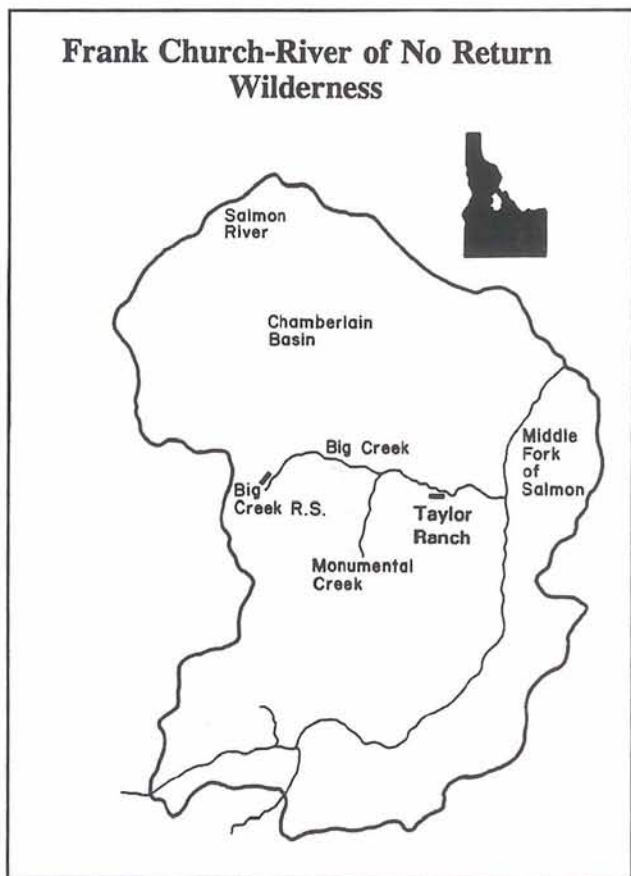
## ***Special Thanks***

---

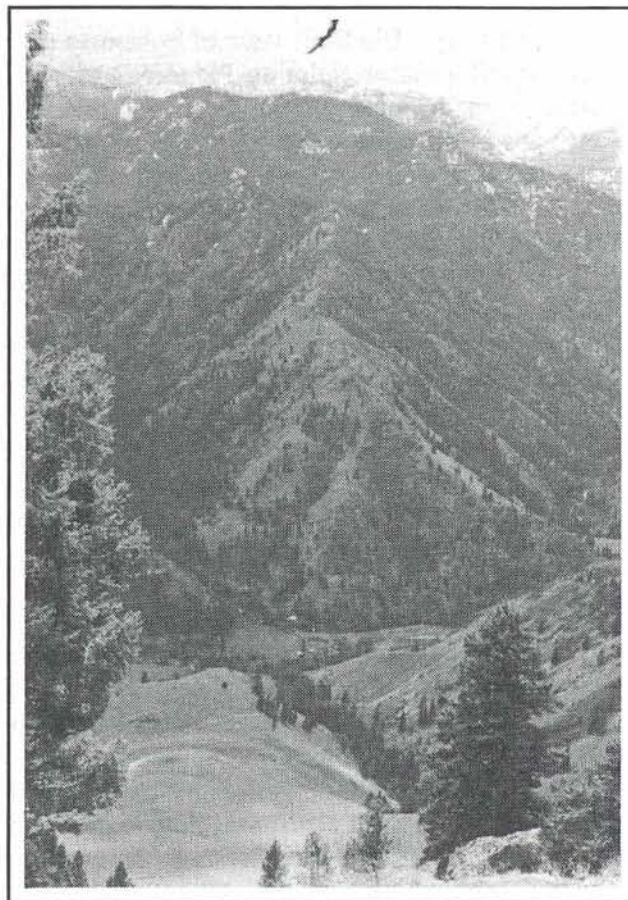
**A** special thanks goes to my wife Holly, who shared the Taylor Ranch experience with me, and helped me research the lives of those who made the site their home in years past.

## INTRODUCTION

The site where Taylor Ranch is now located has been occupied by human beings for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence indicates that aboriginal peoples resided at, or near, the mouth of Pioneer Creek while they were hunting bighorn sheep and fishing in Big Creek. White settlement spans a small fraction of the total time that people utilized this site, yet this sliver of time will be the focus of this historical sketch. During the ninety years of known residence at this site, the place evolved from placer claim, to cattle ranch, to patented homestead, to outfitting guest ranch, and most recently to its present function as a wilderness field station.



The Taylor Ranch is located in central Idaho south of the main Salmon River and west of the



*Taylor Ranch lies in the heart of the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness.*

Middle Fork of the Salmon, in the middle of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. It is situated 7 miles upstream from the mouth of Big Creek, a major tributary to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Taylor Ranch is situated at 3,835-foot elevation and can be accessed by bush-plane or by trail, which originates 34 miles upstream on Big Creek.

## ORIGINAL SETTLEMENT

### Pre-1900

Previous to white settlement at the mouth of Pioneer Creek there is a strong likelihood that Sheepeater Indians resided on this relatively flat alluvial fan. On pieces of the property where the land has not been cultivated, the remains of Indian house pits are still visible.

All indications are that the first white residents at the mouth of Pioneer Creek were the Bull Brothers, Elix and Billy. The Bulls were of Bohemian descent and staked a placer claim on Pioneer Creek. They built a sod-roofed cabin between present-day Arlow's cabin and the duplex. Their arrival on the site was likely during the fall of 1900. They abandoned their claim in 1902, heading for better prospects at Thunder Mountain.

### 1902 - 1909

Apparently during these years the ranch was unoccupied, except for occasional use as a temporary shelter for miners, hunters, and trappers. The site of the ranch was used by trappers before the turn of the century. A diary left by the Caswell brothers, who homesteaded at Cabin Creek 6 miles upstream, mentions trapping at this site.

On April 13, 1898, Lou Caswell writes, "Packed up and came down to Impossible Creek [present-day Cliff Creek]. Set bear trap. Deer very scarce. I killed pheasant [grouse]." The next day, he comments, "Killed a deer and moved down to the mouth of Flat Creek [present-day Goat Creek]. Took in Soldier's Bar [3 miles downstream from present-day Taylor Ranch]. Sunk a prospect hole. Moved up to flat [Goat Basin] and sunk another hole and then went up creek."

The entry for April 15, 1898, reads, "Dug a hole, tried 2 pans. We packed up and went across to Soldier's Bar. Explored it and panned several pans. Packed up and came home a 5 o'clock. River getting big. Warm wind."

One year later, the Caswell brothers struck gold at Thunder Mountain, a mere 30 trail miles from Taylor Ranch. This discovery began one of the West's biggest gold rushes at the close of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup>

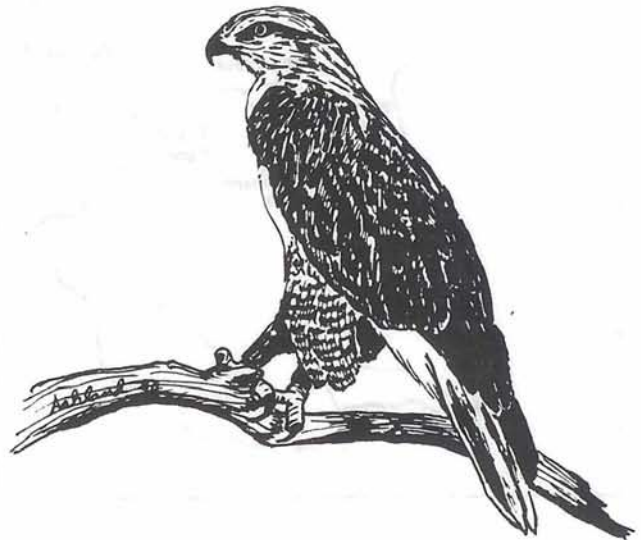
### 1910 - 1918

In 1910 John and May Conyer moved from the old Caswell homestead into the Bull cabin on Pioneer Creek. In that same year, or 1911, they built a new cabin, the present-day field laboratory, and they moved into it. The Conyer's ran cattle from the place and built fences and a corral; they also established the main pasture hayfield. May Conyer had a local reputation for outstanding cooking,

particularly fruit jams, jellies, and pies. In 1918 the Conyers moved from Pioneer Creek back to Cabin Creek to continue their cattle operation.

---

<sup>1</sup>The Idaho State Library has the original diaries of L.G. Caswell, written in the years 1895-1900. This fascinating account describes the daily activities of the three brothers—Lou, Dan, and Ben Caswell, who were the original homesteaders at Cabin Creek. This diary captures the rigors of their frontier existence. The Caswell's depict incredible resourcefulness on a daily basis. One day they were making soap from mountain lion tallow and the next building a pack saddle from scratch for an upcoming trip to town for supplies. "Town" in those days was usually Warren, several long days on horseback each way. This document provided valuable insights into the occurrence of homesteads all along Big Creek. There is no mention in this diary of a residence at the mouth of Pioneer Creek. However, it is surprising to read of the amount of human activity along Big Creek, particularly by prospectors at the turn of the century.



**PART I: THE LEWIS PLACE**

**1918 - 1933**

In 1918 Dave Lewis moved onto the site. At that time he was in his early seventies. Dave Lewis was a Civil War veteran and had been a scout and packer during the Sheepeater Indian Campaign. Besides drawing a military pension, Dave Lewis made a living from hunting cougars for bounty, guiding big game hunters, trapping, and possibly a little prospecting. Dave had received national publicity for his cougar hunting prowess, and he likely was the first big game outfitter in the region. Dave kept a dozen or more horses on the place to support his hunting activities. He would meet his clients in Warren, the nearest railroad head, 100 or more trail miles from the Lewis place.

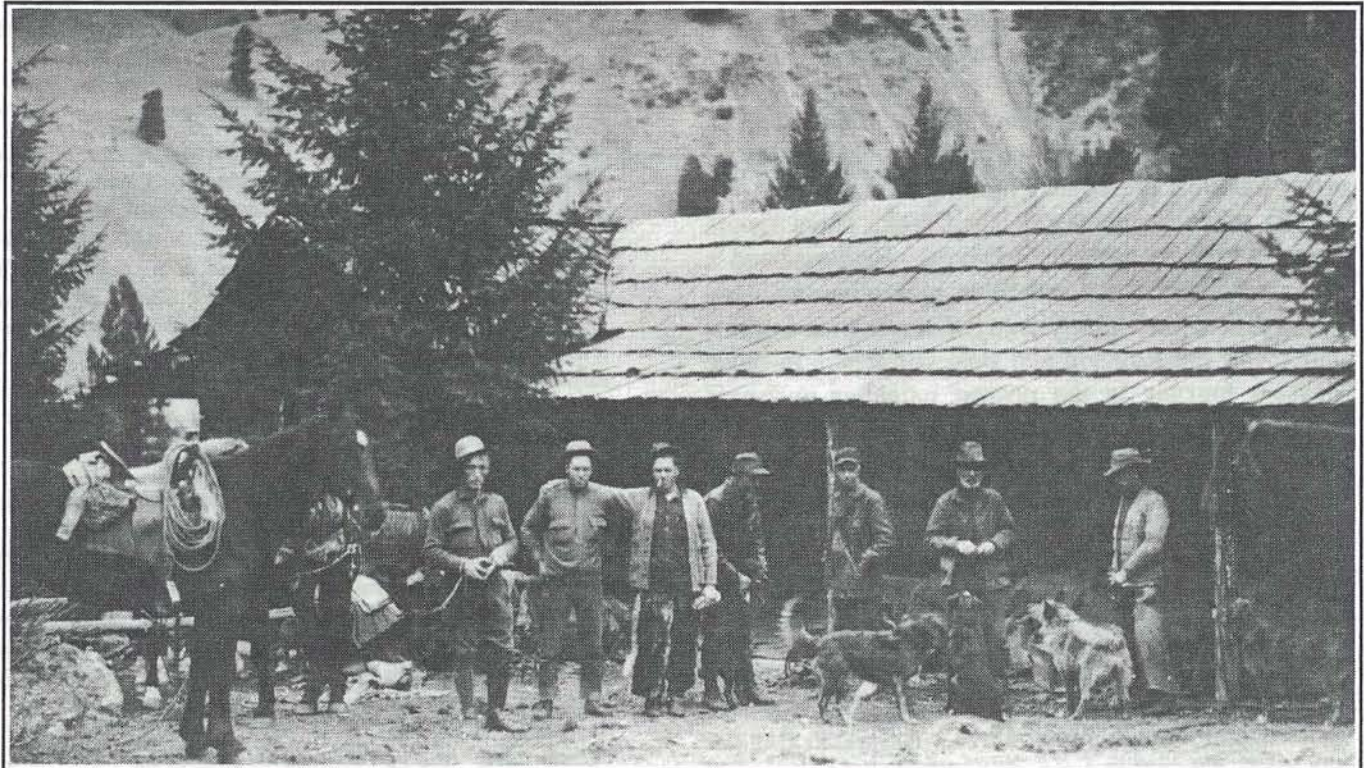
Dave Lewis' activities in the area far precede his 1918 arrival on the place. An old Warren *Times* newspaper clipping from 1888 mentions the return of Dave Lewis with hides from a fall hunt into Big

Creek. A decade earlier in 1878 he had travelled the length of Big Creek as a scout and packer for the military. It is likely that Dave had seen the potential of Pioneer Creek as a homestead site during some of his earlier travels on Big Creek.<sup>2</sup>

Dave Lewis was truly a seasoned frontiersman who knew how to take whatever measures were necessary to protect his own well-being. Shortly after establishing residence on Pioneer Creek, Dave

---

<sup>2</sup>*From multiple interviews with Johnny Carrey, 1987-1989. Johnny Carrey knew Dave Lewis personally from the time when his family lived at Big Creek Headquarters, or Edwardsburg, as the remote little town was originally known. Johnny remembers Dave coming up to Edwardsburg for supplies. Dave Lewis also stayed with the Carrey family when they were living on the South Fork of the Salmon River and he was travelling through the country. Johnny Carrey is an authority on the history of the Salmon River Country, and he has authored books on the topic, most notably—with Cort Conley—The Middle Fork of the Salmon River and the Sheepeater Indian Campaign.*



*Dave Lewis with his lion dogs, local friends, and hunting clients in front of the old Conyer cabin, which served as a combination guest lodging and tack shed.*





*Dave Lewis, his blacksmith shop, and sod-roofed cabin built by the Bull Brothers.*

had a run-in with some horse thieves who thought they could take advantage of an old man. These characters took Dave's horses and headed up Pioneer Creek, leaving Dave on foot to pursue them. The horse thieves must have been a bit surprised when the "old man" met them at the pass! Dave peeled one of the thieves out of the saddle with his old .44-40 carbine. In telling Jess Taylor of the incident in 71 later years, Dave claimed he would have gotten them both if he would have had his big gun! His big gun was an 8mm given him by a Mr. Fordyce, one of Dave's prestigious hunting clients.

To other residents on Big Creek, Dave Lewis was referred to as "Uncle Dave." He possessed a keen recall of the Civil War and other military history. He particularly enjoyed sharing his frontier tales with the Routson and Beal children. In those days, a journey to the nearest neighbor upstream entailed seven fords of Big Creek and travel on a very precarious trail carved over cliffs and around bluffs. When travellers were in lower Big Creek, they usually "quartered" with Dave. He also made himself a forge and provided blacksmithing services to canyon residents and travellers needing help.<sup>3</sup>

There was one incident where Dave did turn a traveller back out in the cold. Apparently, an ungracious drop-in visitor launched into an anti-government tirade while viewing Dave's American flag on the wall. Dave was a staunch patriot and he was intolerant of this stranger's attitude. In spite of it

being dark with a nasty spring storm in progress, Dave turned the traveller out to face the elements. When his friend and neighbor John Routson asked him how he could send somebody out into the night like that, Dave responded that his only regrets were having fed the bum dinner!<sup>4</sup>

The rough-hewn logs on the south and west

<sup>3</sup>Personal interview with Noel Routson and Myron and Aloha McCoy in 1990. All three knew Dave Lewis personally. The Routson and McCoy families were upstream neighbors of Dave. Noel was on the first plane flight out of Cabin Creek in the late 1930s. He had been involved in a serious accident while working on the trail in Big Creek Gorge. Fellow crew members carried him by stretcher to Cabin Creek where a crude airstrip was rapidly constructed. This site is where the airstrip is today. The plane made it safely, hauling Noel to the hospital where he spent many months recovering from a broken back.

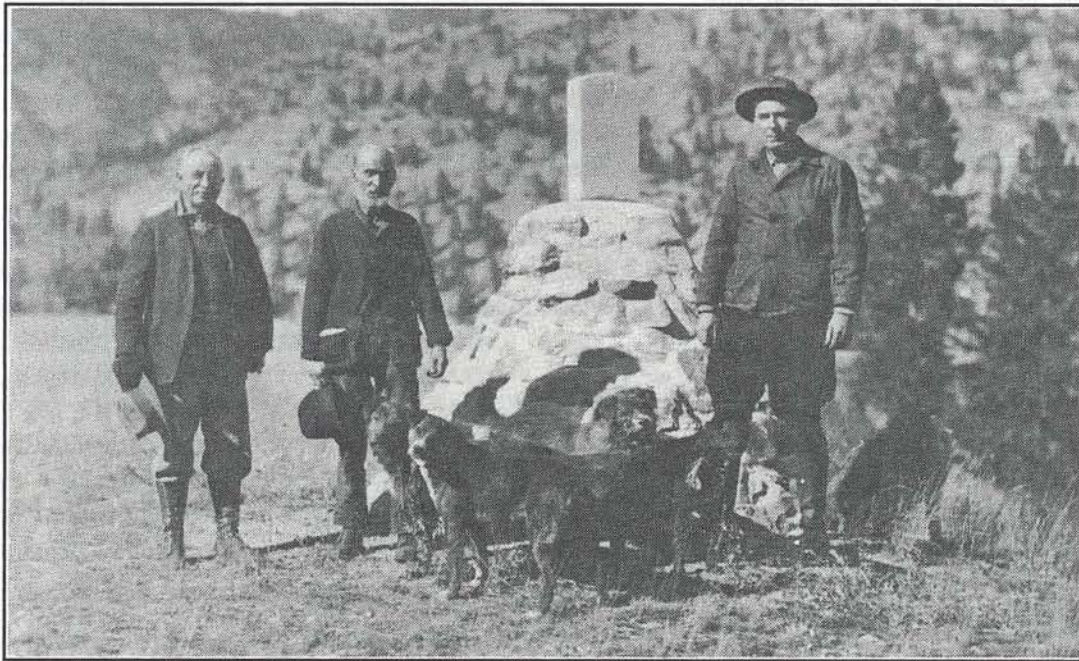
<sup>4</sup>When Noel Routson provided this information, he also shared with the author a book written by his sister Adelia Parke in 1955. The book is titled *Memoirs of an Old-Timer: The Biography of John Routson*. John Routson had a reputation for extraordinary physical endurance. During the 1920s and 1930s, John carried 75 pounds of mail on his back while snowshoeing from Warren to the Clover Post Office, 17 miles upstream on Big Creek from Taylor Ranch. This trip is approximately 70 miles! Noel said his family was very fond of "Uncle Dave," and they thoroughly enjoyed his Civil War and frontier stories. Mrs. Routson nursed Dave back to health more than once when he suffered life-threatening ailments in his later years.

sides of Arlow's Cabin are remnants of Dave Lewis' blacksmith shop. Both this structure and the old Conyer cabin to the southeast are representative of the Rocky Mountain log cabin style, characteristic of homestead settlement prior to the 1920's. Dave had another building on the place which was located approximately where the present-day duplex now sits. This sod-roofed structure was Dave's residence. He housed his guests in the old Conyer cabin, which had living quarters in the north side and a barn on the south end. Old photographs indicate a large covered porch on the west side of the Conyer cabin, which appears to have served as a tack storage place.

In 1927 the Lewis homestead claim achieved official acceptance. However, it did not occur without technical difficulties, and it took the persuasion of Idaho Governor H.C. Baldrige to push it through the U.S. Land Office at Blackfoot. Baldrige and prominent Boise lumberman Harry Shellworth were both hunting clients of Dave in 1927. These two figures were also instrumental in the

creation of the Idaho Primitive Area in 1931, and Dave was responsible for their acquaintance with the region.

While nearly 90 years old, Dave hosted a delegation of people who were evaluating whether this tract of wilderness should remain in a natural state for the benefit of outdoor enthusiasts and the wildlife inhabiting the area. Governor Baldrige expressed his first impressions of the Big Creek country while addressing the Governor's committee on the proposed Idaho Primitive Area in December of 1930. In reference to his party's trip to the "Uncle Dave Lewis Ranch," Governor Baldrige stated, "It was the wildest country I have ever seen. The general idea of this party was that this area should be perpetuated as nearly in its natural state as possible for future generations. Few, if any, areas in the United States offer the opportunities of this section for hunting and fishing. The area comprises something over a million acres with perhaps twenty-five farms in the whole territory."



*Governor Baldrige, Dave Lewis, and District Forester R. H. Rutledge at Soldier's Bar, circa 1927. The monument was erected by Dave Lewis and "Hardrock" Elliott in 1925 in remembrance of Private Harry Eagan, the only military fatality of the Sheepeater Campaign of 1879.*

## PART II: CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP

### 1933 - 1947

In 1933 Jess Taylor made a pack trip into Big Creek from the Pahsimeroi Valley near Challis. While hunting in the vicinity of the Lewis Ranch, he became acquainted with Dave, and also saw the potential for the place as a guest ranch. In the spring of 1934, Jess returned to the Lewis place, intending to approach Dave on the purchase of his 65-acre ranch. Being 92 years old at the time, Dave undoubtedly knew he needed to sell his place. Jess paid \$500 earnest money that trip and the sale was closed in the fall of 1934. The purchase price for the ranch was \$1,200.

An interesting incident held up the deed transfer in the fall of 1934. While Dave Lewis' legal administrator, Walt Estep, was returning from the ranch after witnessing the sale, he was ambushed and killed 2-1/2 miles west of the ranch by Frank Lobauer. Rumors had it that Estep had been too attentive of Lobauer's wife. In a taped interview in the early LOBBER's Jess commented, "I don't know if there had been an argument or not, but when Estep turned to go Lobauer shot him in the back of the head with a thirty-thirty, and that kind of stopped the transfer of legal papers right there."

Both Dave Lewis and Jess Taylor resided on the ranch over the winter of 1934-35. It was during these long winter evenings that Dave told Jess some of his life's adventures. One story of local historical significance was the ambush of military troops by Sheepeater Indians 3 miles upstream from Taylor Ranch in 1879.

In a tape-recorded interview of Jess Taylor done by Dr. Robert Loveland, Jess tells the story.<sup>5</sup> Dave was with a mounted company travelling down Big Creek in pursuit of Sheepeater Indians. Dave was a civilian packer in charge of mules packed with ammunition. At a big bend in the creek, Sheepeaters unleashed an attack on the troops as they were fording the stream. Being concealed behind a rock wall elevated above the scene and in a rock-lined pit at ground level, the Sheepeaters had a commanding logistical advantage. Dave saw the episode unfold from the rear of the column; he decided to hold back with his precious cargo. Soon the narrow canyon

was filled with black-powder smoke and from the Indian's muzzleloaders and dust from the general commotion of battle. Once the air had cleared, the commanding officer was found clinging to a tree. His bear-hug on the tree was even on the side facing the Indians! As a result of his performance, the officer was relieved of his command and later sentenced to a court-martial. The rock-lined pit used by Sheepeaters during this battle is still visible a short distance below the trail, one-half mile west of Lobauer Basin where the forested flat meets a boulder patch on the upstream side of the flat.

In the spring of 1935, Dave left the place and headed for Big Creek Headquarters, stopping to visit friends along the way. Jess had told Dave he could reside on the ranch as long as he liked. Dave got drenched in a spring storm while riding upstream, and by the time he reached Big Creek, he was suffering from pneumonia. An ambulance was brought in on the newly constructed road between Yellowpine and Big Creek. Dave was taken to the Cascade Hospital where he died at the age of 93. Dave Lewis' death marked the passing of one of Idaho's premier citizens and frontiersmen.

A 9,300-foot peak at the head of Pioneer Creek bears his name, along with a tributary branch of Rush Creek. Also, maps from the region prior to the 1940's refer to Dunce Creek as Dave Creek. It appears that this was a cartographic oversight when these maps were revised, and Dunce Creek possibly should be called Dave Creek.

Jess Taylor moved from his place in the fall of 1935 to begin a building contracting business in the Boise area. During these years, Jess was financially unable to develop his dream of a guest ranch. He hired caretakers to keep the place up as much as possible. Jess' first caretakers were Art and Margaret Francis. Art was a packer and cougar hunter. They did not stay long before acquiring their own place further up Big Creek. During the years 1939-

---

<sup>5</sup>In 1972, Dr. Robert Loveland interviewed Jess Taylor and tape-recorded these discussions. This tape is a very informative historical document. Jess describes in detail all phases of his 40-year ownership of the ranch. In this tape, Jess conveys most of the information about Dave Lewis that is used in this manuscript.

40, Ace and Hap Reed were Taylor Ranch caretakers. The couple had a child and it appears they spent only one winter at the ranch.

One of the more colorful caretakers of this time period was Tex Martin. Tex was on the place during the early 1940's. Tex had been a moonshiner in the prohibition years and he maintained his moonshine practice during the time he was at Taylor Ranch. During those years it was a common occurrence for packstrings to be "way-laid" in lower Big Creek.



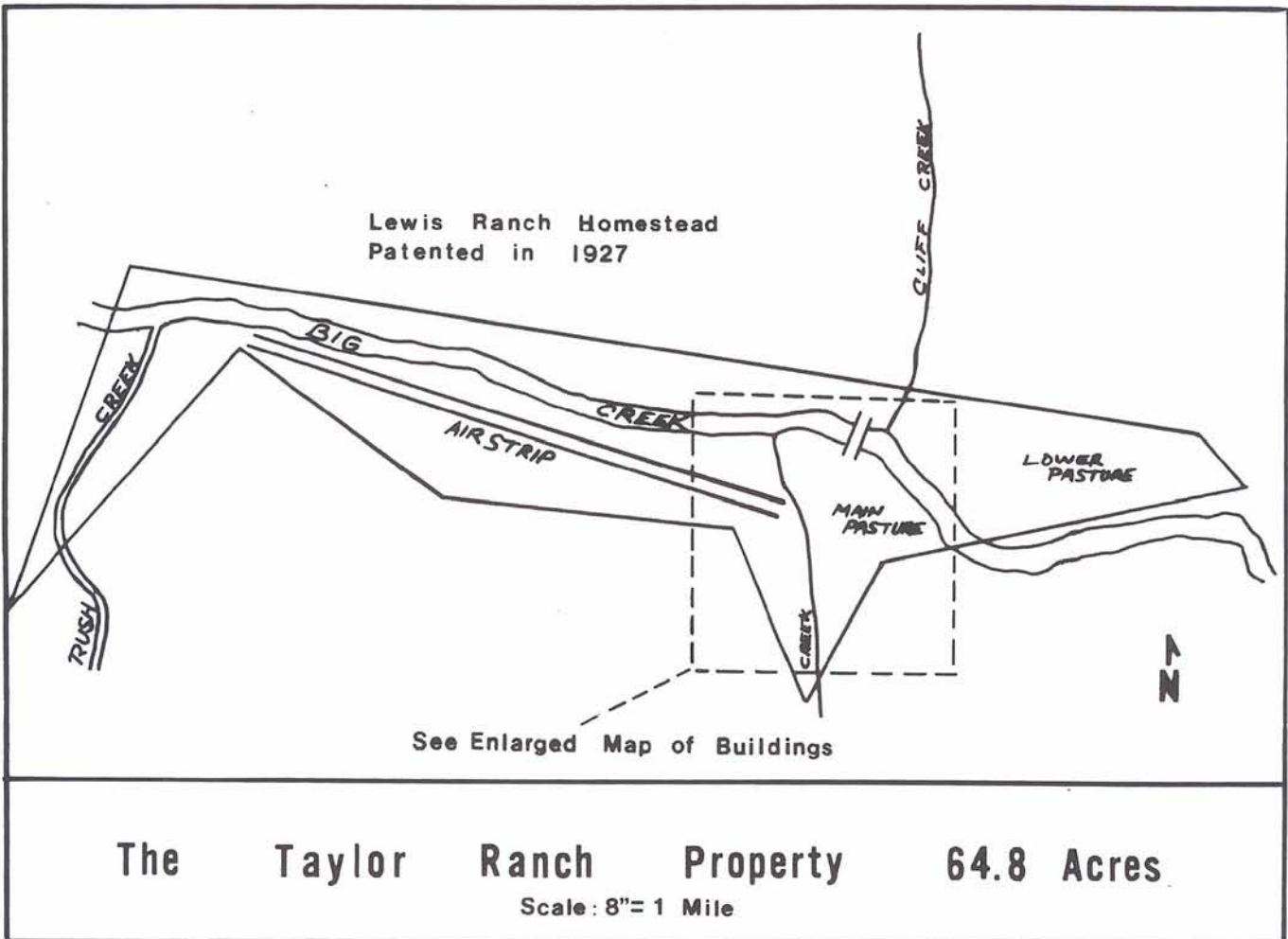
**PART III: TAYLOR RANCH TAKES SHAPE**

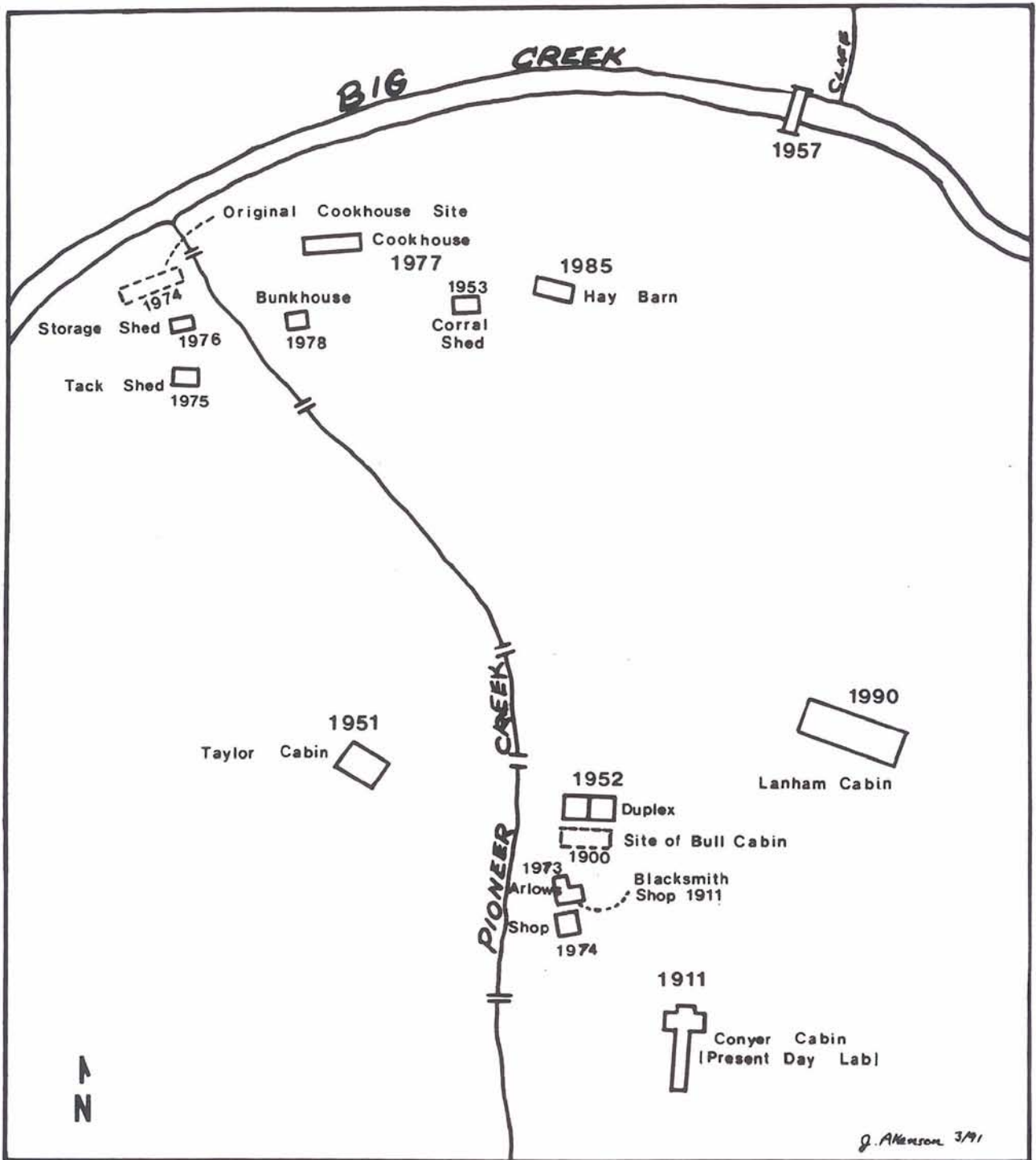
**1948 - 1952**

In 1948 Jess acted upon his dream to make his backcountry place into a guest ranch. Also in that year, he met and married Dorothy, who was a Boise realtor at the time. In 1948 access into Taylor Ranch entailed a flight into Soldier's Bar and then a 2-1/2-mile hike upstream. Amazingly, the Taylors brought a 500-pound Monarch stove into Soldier's Bar. The stove was stripped down in weight as much as possible and then hoisted into a tree with ropes and raised high enough to be lowered onto a horse. The Taylors used one of their draft team members to haul the incredibly awkward top load up to Taylor Ranch. Jess had built a support system on a decker pack saddle to balance the stove. Every so often the ropes had to be tightened, and the two fords of Big Creek required special attention. The

Taylors accomplished this incredible feat without mishap.

The first major project Jess and Dorothy undertook was the construction of an airstrip. For equipment they used a big draft team, an old slip-scoop scraper, and a garden plow. Jess packed the slip scraper by mule from Big Creek to his ranch in 1935. The Taylors fashioned a drag device from a birch tree to help level the surface and they successfully converted a timbered, brushy flat into an airstrip, with two-way approach and take off. The Taylors spent close to a full year on the airstrip construction, filling beaver runs, pulling or blasting stumps, and plowing and grading every inch to make it flat. The first landing occurred in 1949 by a pilot from Mackay Bar Ranch. Bill Woods and Jim Larkin also flew into Taylor Ranch in the early days. Heavy cargo was flown in by Ford Travellairs





Taylor Ranch Buildings and Year Constructed

Scale: 1"= 60'

when the strip was first made, but this aircraft soon became obsolete in favor of lighter and more maneuverable Piper Cubs and Cessnas.

Over the next two years, the Taylors resided in a wall tent while they worked on constructing their four-room cabin and guest cabin, the duplex building east of Pioneer Creek. Jess put his carpentry skills to good use and these log structures are as solid as they come. Most of the building logs were cut up Pioneer Creek and skidded to the construction sites by draft horses. Also during this time, they built the log corral shed and basically put the ranch grounds

into a home in the wild. The cabins they built speak well of Jess' skills as a man and a rugged individual. The only thing he couldn't change were the rattlesnakes!"

Taylor Ranch was equipped with a phone by the early 1950's. Phone lines connected Big Creek residents and Forest Service lookouts with each other and with the outside world through switchboards at Big Creek, Landmark, McCall, and Cascade. There was a telephone line down Big Creek to mines on Crooked Creek as early as 1931. The old oak crank-phone, and Dorothy's operator's license, are

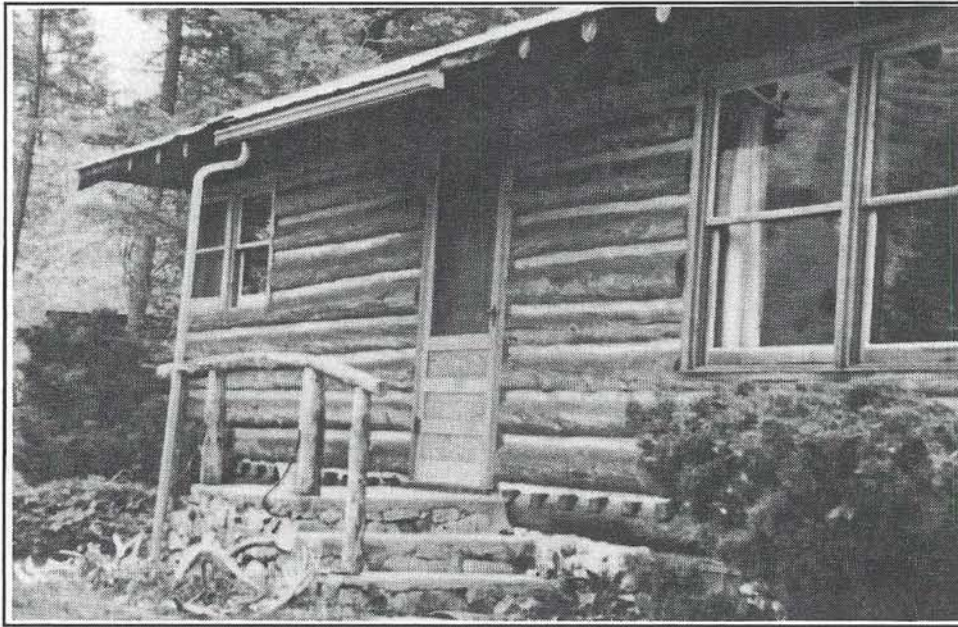
hanging in their original place in the Taylor Cabin back room. The phone line insulators are still visible along the Big Creek trail. Local residents and trail crew personnel were responsible for phone line maintenance. The combined effect of continual phone line repair, and the advent of radio communication, led to the end of the backcountry phone network in the early 1960's.

#### 1953 - 1963

These were the prime years of the Taylor's outfitting business. During the 1950's they completed the hill portion of the airfield. They cleared the lower pasture of brush and planted it in

grass hay. Jess had mowing machines on both sides of Big Creek and he put up hay off the main pasture, airstrip, north pasture, and lower pasture. Dorothy kept well-manicured flower gardens and Jess specialized in growing exceptionally good potatoes.

The Maryott family from Los Angeles were summer guests of the Taylors in 1950 and 1951. They rented a campsite from the Taylors on the west side of the mouth of Rush Creek. Donn Maryott, a 13-year-old at that time, recalls excursions to Cabin Creek. He states, "Once we took air mattresses up to Cabin Creek and rode back down. It took several chilly hours but what a super experience. We felt



*The present-day Taylor Cabin.*

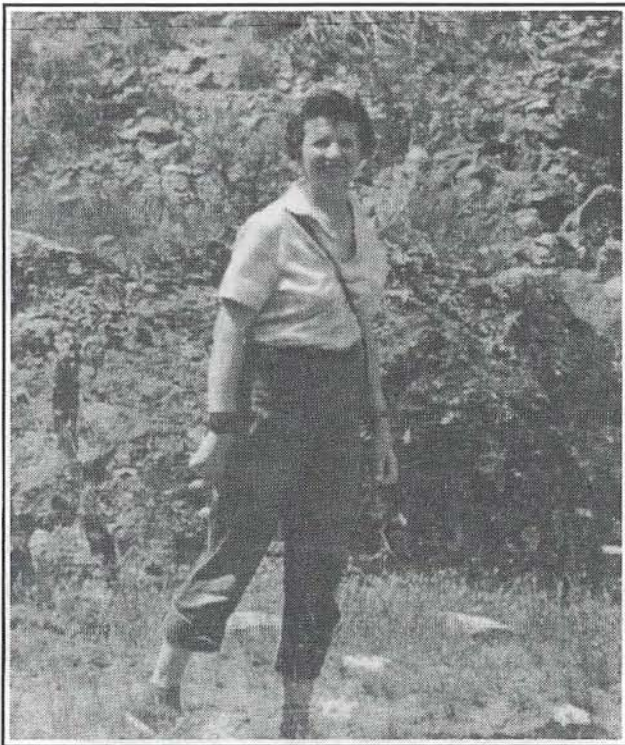
into its present-day layout.

The two winters the Taylors spent in wall tents were some of the coldest on record. They still preferred a canvas shelter to the company of wood rats in the two original cabins. During the fall they hosted hunting clients and in the spring and summer their guests were fisherman. Jess developed a reputation as one of the best bighorn sheep guides in the country and Dorothy was considered as fine a cook and hostess as there was. Their business had a well-established clientele before they had even completed their new buildings.

Donn Maryott knew the Taylors at this time and he wrote about them, "I watched them turn that land

like we were equal to Powell on the Colorado!"<sup>6</sup>

For a period, the Taylors made weekly hikes to Cabin Creek to receive their mail. Jess successfully lobbied for mail service to Taylor Ranch by the late 1950's. In those days Johnson Air Service in McCall was the mail carrier and Bob Fog was the first pilot to fly the Taylor Ranch mail. Bill Dorris was the main mail and grocery carrier from the mid 1960's until 1974.<sup>7</sup> The era of airmail succeeded the slower ground delivery methods, which in winter involved a lengthy dog-sled trip from Yellowpine



*Dorothy Taylor on the Big Creek Trail near Taylor Ranch.*

into Cabin Creek. Lafe Cox was the dog-sled mail carrier in the late 1930's and early 1940's, linking Big Creek residents with the outside world.<sup>8</sup>

During most of the 1950's, the Taylors spent winter months at their Boise home. Bill Sullivan was the winter caretaker and Jess' packer for fall hunting trips. A leather craftsman, Sullivan handmade all his bridles, halters, and ropes. In the early 1960's, Jess contracted the outfitting business to Larry Garner and then to George Doval.

Jess and Dorothy returned to Taylor Ranch each March to prepare for the first clients who were coming in for steelhead season. Dr. C.C. Johnson from Boise was a regular fisherman and close friend of the Taylors. When he first came in to Taylor Ranch in 1953 he stayed in the duplex building when it was brand new. He recalls spectacular spring steelhead and fall salmon fishing on Big Creek as late as 1970. Dr. Johnson recalls Jess telling him of more practical salmon fishing methods applied in earlier years. The salmon gig, or spearhead, on the wall in the Taylor Cabin is a relic that Jess used at his favorite log jam downstream from the ranch.<sup>9</sup>

---

*<sup>6</sup>Donn Maryott described his impressions of the Taylors and their hard-earned accomplishments through written correspondence with the author from the early to mid 1980s. His insights into the Taylors' personalities was very valuable. According to Donn, the experiences he had while staying at Taylor Ranch have been highlights in his life, even though he was just a teenager at the time.*

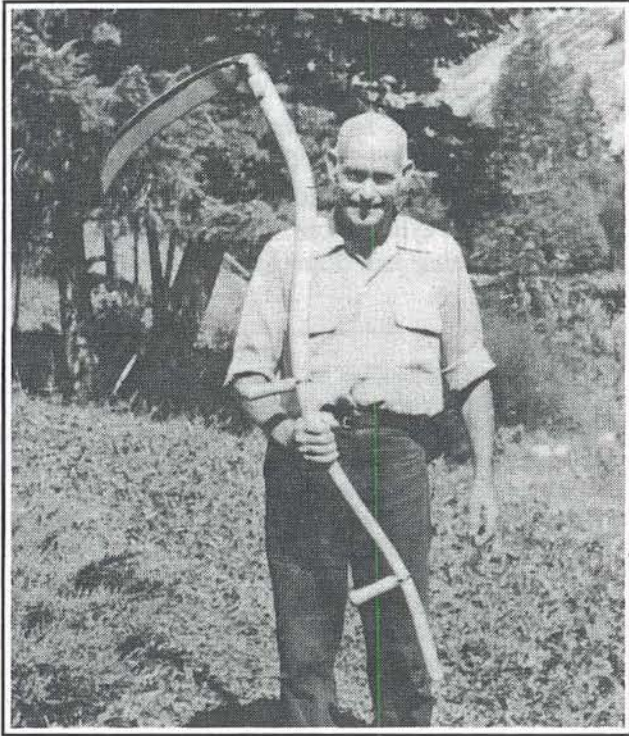
*<sup>7</sup>Bill Dorris has recently retired as a backcountry pilot. He holds an impeccable record of over 30 years of flying, without mishap, in some of the most demanding conditions found anywhere. Bill flew much of the radio-tracking for Maurice Hornocker's mountain lion projects, and for close to three decades flew the Fish and Game "greenup counts" for elk on Big Creek. Bill provided valuable insights into early-day aviation and the history of airplane use for mail delivery.*

*<sup>8</sup>Lafe and Emma Cox lived at the old Mile High Ranch in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They were mail carriers at the Clover Post Office, which was located at the ranch. Lafe first met Dave Lewis when he went with his father Clark into Big Creek and the Middle Fork of the Salmon River country buying cattle. Although a youngster in 1925, Lafe still recalls their long cattle drives from the backcountry out to Cascade. Lafe and Emma were invaluable references for many aspects of this history, plus they arranged for the author to meet Noel Routson and Myron and Aloha McCoy, also important sources.*

*<sup>9</sup>Dr. C.C. Johnson knew Jess and Dorothy Taylor better than anyone alive today. He provided invaluable insights into the accomplishments and special qualities of the Taylors. "Doc" was the Taylor's general physician and close friend. He recalled an incident in 1969 when he helped a client at Taylor Ranch who had a kidney stone. He kept him sedated for 2 days until he could fly him out in his Cessna 180! One of Doc's fondest memories of the ranch is when his son Dan landed a 32-pound salmon in the "Big Hole" on Big Creek in 1965.*



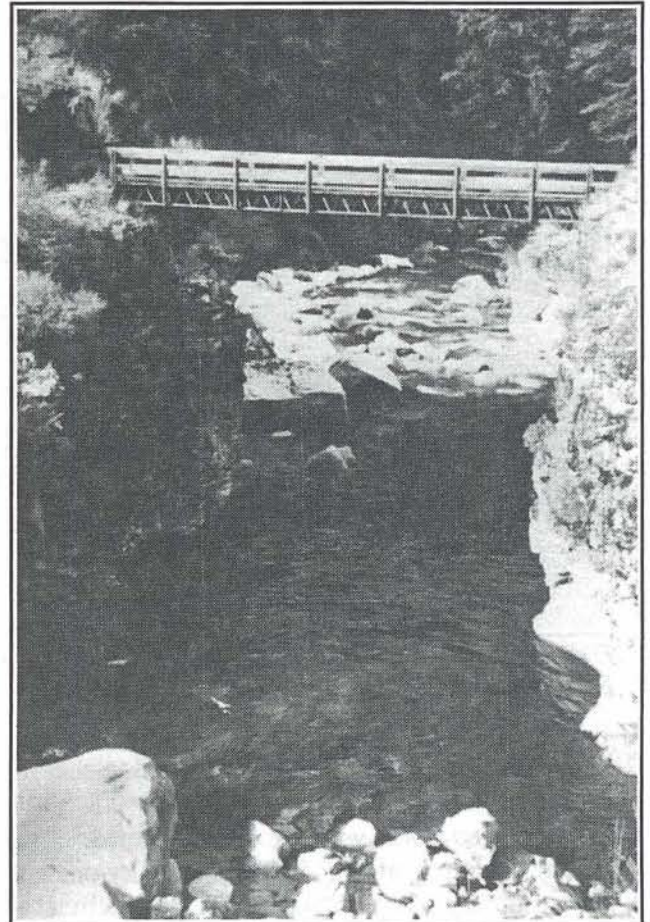
Donn Maryott says about Jess, "He was a superior fisherman, I have a picture of him holding a 35-pound salmon that he caught in the big hole about a mile downstream."



*Jess Taylor at work on the ranch.*

There were many trail modifications made in the Taylor Ranch vicinity in the 1950's. Jess did contract trail work for the Forest Service to supplement their income. He was responsible for putting the Rush Point and Cliff Creek trails into their present-day layout. Also during this era the old suspension bridge at the mouth of Cliff Creek was replaced by the Forest Service with the present steel-span bridge. Segments for this bridge were flown

into Taylor Ranch by a Ford Travellair. Swinging bridges were also replaced with rigid steel spans on lower Big Creek (Bighorn Bridge) and across the Middle Fork of the Salmon (Big Creek Bridge). Most packers were happy to see the old swinging bridges replaced . . . and so were their mules!



*In the late 1950s, Bighorn Bridge replaced the old "swinging" suspension bridge a mile above the mouth of Big Creek.*

**PART IV: TRANSITION: GUEST RANCH TO RESEARCH STATION**

**1964 - 1973**

During July of 1964, Maurice Hornocker made arrangements with the Taylors to use Taylor Ranch as winter headquarters for his upcoming mountain lion research. Hornocker contracted with Idaho Fish and Game to conduct the lion work, which was the first major study ever on the big cat. He was also doing this research for a doctoral degree through the University of British Columbia. Maurice hired a local professional houndsman, Wilbur Wiles, as his field assistant. Between the years 1964 and 1967, Maurice and Wilbur rented the winter use of Taylor Ranch and provided caretaking services. Maurice and Wilbur stayed in the old Conyer cabin (present-day field laboratory).

As part of their research, they kept captive mountain lions in a pen they constructed along Pioneer Creek above the lab building.

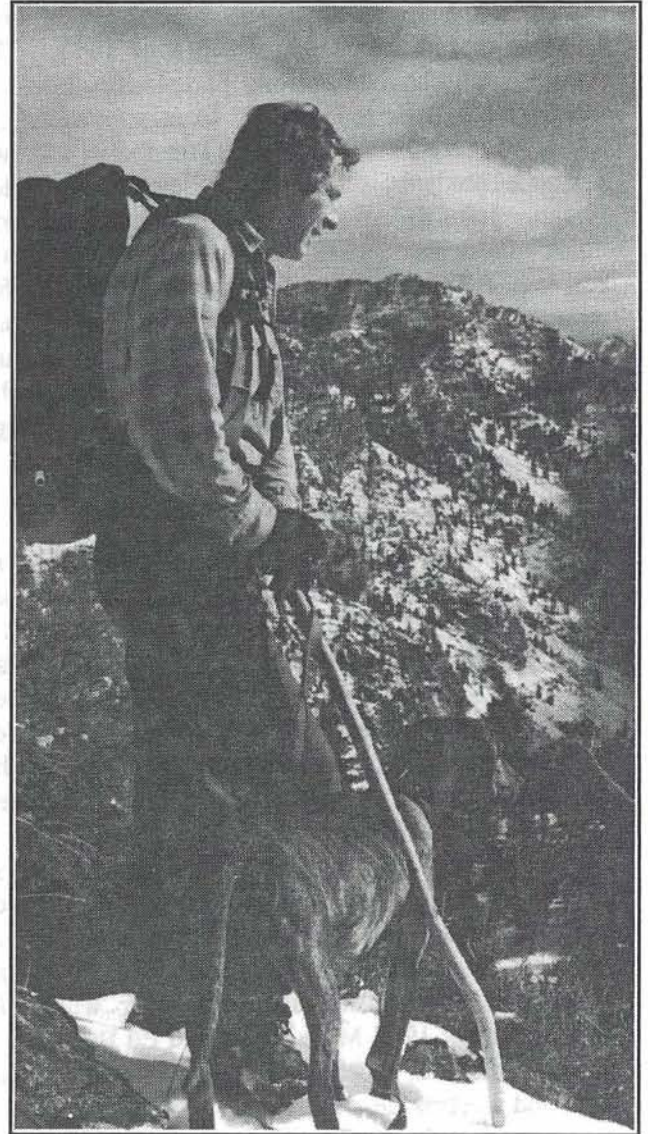
His research drew national attention, most notable was a National Geographic film documentary done in 1973. However, the most significant result of this research was changing the status of mountain lions in Idaho from bounty animal to a big game species.

The Taylors leased out their outfitting business to Stan and Joy Potts of Wells, Nevada, from 1965 to 1969, when the Potts' purchased the business. The Potts' had been operating an outfitting business at Chamberlain Basin prior to this date.

The Taylors listed the ranch for sale in the mid 1960's, but could not find a suitable buyer. In the fall of 1967, Maurice held discussions with Jess regarding the possible sale of Taylor Ranch to the University of Idaho. At the same time Maurice convinced University officials of the rare value of Taylor Ranch as a wilderness field station. As a result of these discussions, a purchase agreement was reached in 1969. Part of this agreement provided that the Taylors maintained lifetime tenancy of their cabin and use of the airstrip.

In 1972 the Wilderness Research Center was officially established in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences. Discussions on the center dated back to 1968 and they received support from the Dean of Forestry, Ernest Wohletz. In 1970

Maurice Hornocker was chosen to head the WRC Committee which established the center's mission and conducted a hiring search. Later that year Al Erickson was hired as Director of the center and



*Maurice Hornocker with cougar dog near Taylor Ranch.*

Arlow Lewis was hired as the full-time caretaker of Taylor Ranch. Arlow had been working for the Potts' in their outfitting business at Chamberlain Basin and Taylor Ranch. Before that time, Arlow had been a ranch hand near Wells, Nevada. Arlow lived in what used to be Dave Lewis' blacksmith

shop. He added on a bathroom to this building in the early 1970's. Dave Lewis and Arlo Lewis were not related, despite the same last name.

In 1972 the ranch acquired a team of white grade mares for haying and heavy ranch work. When it was time to hay, the Potts' outfitting crew was made available to help Arlow. Stan and Joy Potts were featured in *Life Magazine* in April of 1972. The article emphasized the strong partnership they had developed in their modern-day frontier existence.

In the early 1970's, Maurice Hornocker had two graduate students conducting research at Taylor Ranch. John Sidensticker looked at mountain lion home ranges using radio telemetry for his doctoral research. This was the first use of telemetry for mountain lion research. Maurice and Wilbur had depended solely on tracking and recapture data just a few years previous. The other study was done by Jim Claar, who looked at big game winter range conditions and utilization.

#### 1974 - 1981

In 1974 Floyd Newby replaced Al Erickson as WRC Director. In 1975 Dean John Ehrenreich assumed the directorship and Ken Sowles became Assistant Director and Taylor Ranch Manager. Also in 1975 a summer student honorarium was started through the Wilderness Research Center. College of FWR seniors submitted research proposals to the center and three were chosen to carry out their projects at Taylor Ranch.

The student honoraria went on for 5 summers. A bighorn sheep study was initiated in the spring of 1975 by Ernie Ables and graduate student Jim Bennett. Bennett and his wife Carol spent two years living at Taylor Ranch during the sheep work. In the summer of 1975 Mike Falter and Ed Buettner, a graduate student, researched the aquatic biology of highland streams near the ranch.

At the ranch, outfitter Stan Potts and his crew built the cookhouse building. It was approximately 200 feet west of the current location. During the mid-1970's, Governor Cecil Andrus made a visit to Taylor Ranch. Andrus felt the cookhouse needed to be moved to reduce visual impacts. This factor, in combination with erosion and drainage problems, instigated the first cabin move at Taylor Ranch. It was a major undertaking to move this building even

200 feet, to its present site on top of what once was Dave Lewis' onion patch. The structure was raised in the air, put on log skids, and then carefully moved across log rollers using chains, come-along jacks, and the horse team. Jess Taylor was on hand to engineer this immensely laborious project.

In the spring of 1976 an abnormally heavy runoff caused Big Creek to flood and deposited a thick coat of sand on the airstrip. In earlier years Jess had constructed a log barrier in Big Creek to break high water flows, but this year's runoff ran several feet over the top of the current break. It took several weeks before Arlow, Con Hourihan, and the team could get the airstrip back in usable condition. They literally moved tons of sand off to the side with Jess' old slip-scoop scraper. They then had to reseed the combination hayfield/airstrip. The present-day berms on both sides of the airstrip are testimony to this major natural event.

Around this time the mail contract came up for bid and Ray Arnold became the Taylor Ranch mail carrier. From the late 1970's to the present, Ray and Carol Arnold have been the lifeline for Taylor Ranch residents, providing mail and grocery delivery and the 7-day-a-week backcountry radio service.

During the mid to late 1970's, the lower buildings assumed the present-day arrangement. First to be constructed was the tackshed, then came the storage shed 100 feet to the north. Prior to these buildings, tack and camp equipment were stored at this site in wall tents. The final building to be completed was the bunkhouse adjacent the cookhouse. Con Hourihan was chiefly responsible for building these structures and finishing the newly moved cookhouse building.

In 1977 Stan Potts sold his outfitting business to Con Hourihan and the University decided to continue the lease of the facility for this business. One graduate project was based at Taylor Ranch in 1978. John Hartung, under guidance from Jim Fazio, documented the historical resources along the length of Big Creek and major tributaries. By 1979 Arlow was failing in health and Con and Tina Hourihan were handling the heavy work requirements of the ranch while conducting their outfitting business. In that same year, Con and Tina were hired as caretakers. Con and Tina lived in what is now the laboratory building. Arlow continued living at Taylor

Ranch until his death in the summer of 1980. Jess Taylor died the following year and Dorothy passed away in 1983. The Taylor's passing truly marked the end of an era.

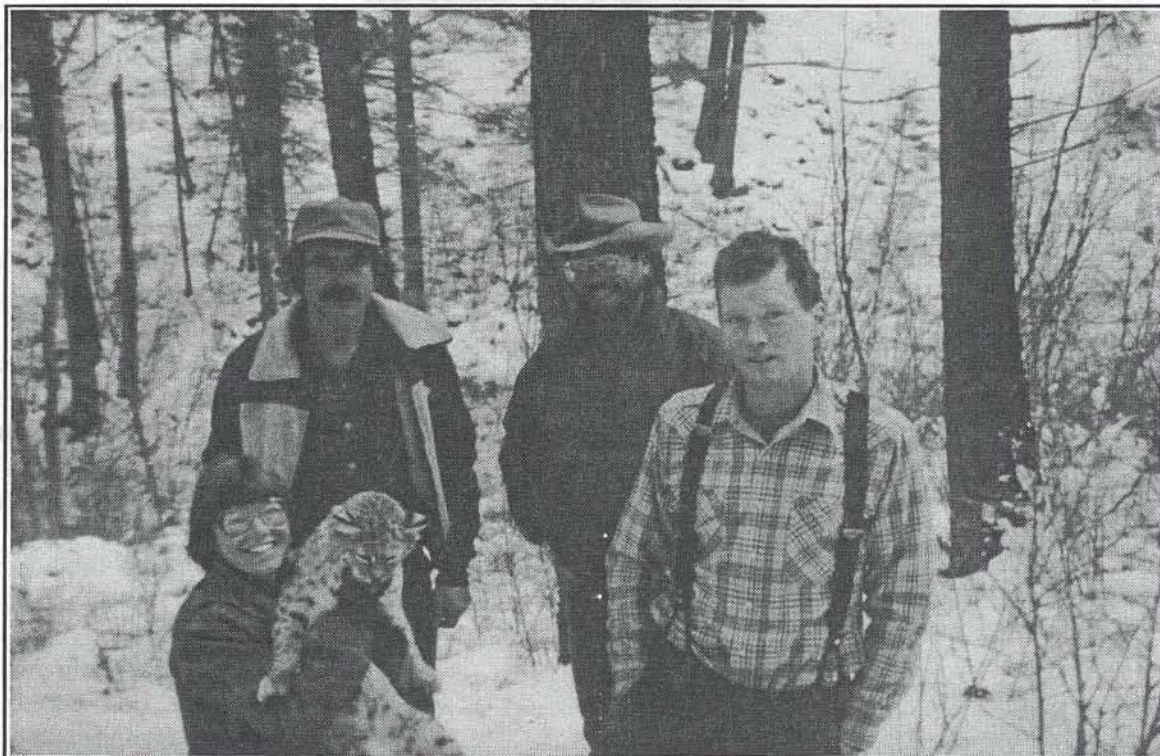
In December of 1979 Ernie Ables became the interim Director of the Wilderness Research Center. Two graduate projects began in January of 1980. Greg Hayward researched habitat partitioning among forest owls under the direction of Oz Garton. One of Greg's field assistants was Pat Hurd who became Pat Hayward a few years later. Sue Tank investigated habitat relationships of wintering passerines on Big Creek, under Winnie Kessler. Both these projects went on for two years. During winter months, Tina cooked meals for the project crews. In the summer the researchers helped Con and Tina put up hay and firewood with a team of horses.

In 1980 the Idaho Primitive Area became the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. The

area of protection went from approximately 1 million to 2.3 million acres.

Wilderness designation assured that natural processes would continue in this area forever, unaltered by the activities of man. As a wilderness field station, Taylor Ranch benefitted from this reclassification of surrounding National Forest lands. The Wilderness Act and the Wilderness Research Center had a shared objective of protecting and understanding natural forces operating on Big Creek and in other wild places.

In the winter of 1981-82, Gary Koehler began investigating the ecology of Big Creek bobcats for his doctoral research under the direction of Maurice Hornocker. Over the next three years, Koehler and his crew covered immense distances, capturing and tracking the radio instrumented bobcats. In fact, Gary estimated that he and his crew had covered on foot an equivalent distance to travelling to San Francisco and back to Taylor Ranch!

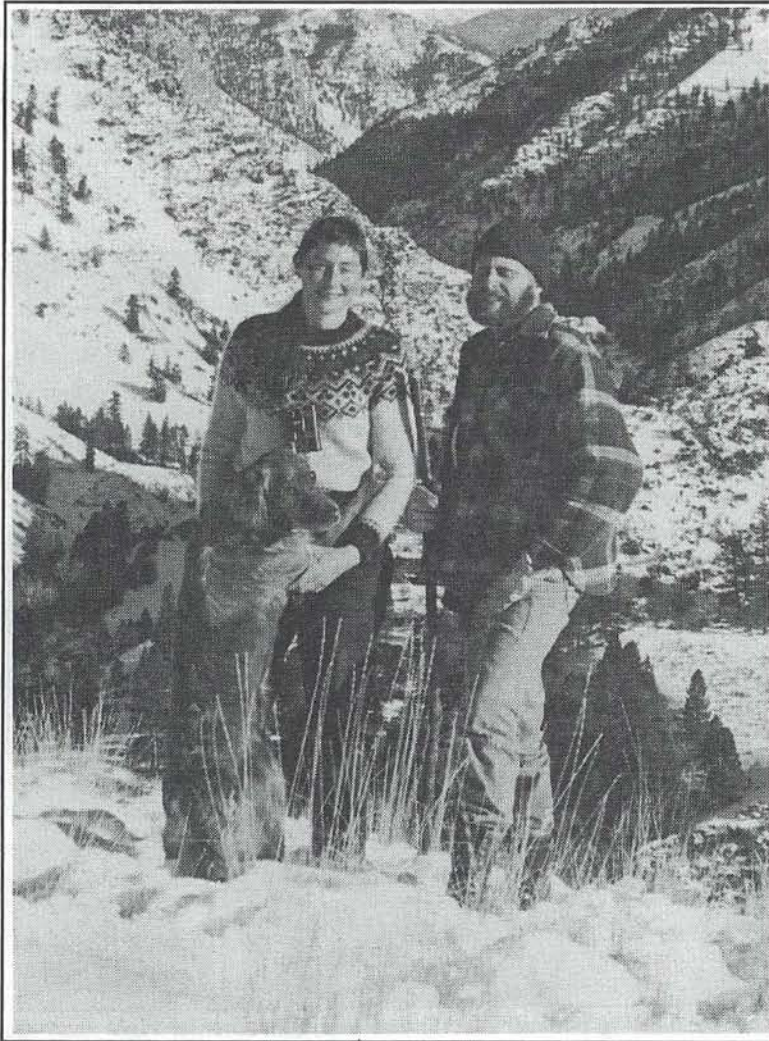


*The Bobcat Project crew: Mona Koehler holding bobcat; Alec Sutherland, Tim Koehler right rear; Gary Koehler left rear.*

## PART V: RECENT EVENTS

## 1982 - 1990

The Wilderness Research Center went through many changes in 1982. Ed Krumpke was selected to be the center's Director. The University decided not to renew the outfitting lease. The WRC converted the caretaker position to a manager with both research and caretaking responsibilities. Con and Tina chose to continue their outfitting business from a base at Cabin Creek 6 miles upstream. Jim and Holly Akenson were hired as Taylor Ranch Managers in 1982. Jim and Holly lived in the laboratory building their first two years at Taylor Ranch.



Holly and Jim Akenson with "Golda" on Rush Point Trail; Taylor Ranch and Big Creek in the background.

In the summer of 1983, Frank Leonhardy began a major archaeological investigation based from Taylor Ranch. This study spanned three summers. Frank looked at the settlement and subsistence patterns of Sheepeater Indians living in the Big Creek drainage. With the assistance of students from a field course, Frank excavated a cluster of house pit sites 1/4-mile downstream from the ranch.

Frank had two graduate assistants, Robbin Johnston and Fred Thomas, who helped direct field operations. Fred Thomas did a master's project on the utilization of mountain sheep as a food source and hunting strategies used by Sheepeater Indians on bighorn sheep.

Frank Leonhardy, Robbin Johnston, and a field crew conducted an extensive survey over approximately 113 square miles around Taylor Ranch to document as many archaeological sites as possible. Leonhardy also wanted to determine if there was a relationship between native vegetation types and settlement patterns of the Sheepeaters; he hired Bill Alexander to document and map forest types over this area.

A National Weather Service recording station was re-established at Taylor Ranch in August 1983. There had been a station at the ranch in the late 1970's, but Arlow's failing health made daily recordings difficult and the station was removed.

In the fall of 1983, Taylor Ranch acquired a pair of mules which Maurice Hornocker donated to the ranch. By the next summer these older mules had become a team and once again the chatter of the mowing machine reverberated in the canyon during late June and early July. Members from the bobcat and archaeology studies comprised the hay crew.

Field work on the bobcat study was concluded in the spring of 1984; however, Gary and his wife Mona continued residing in the duplex while Gary initiated a re-evaluation of the mountain lion population for Maurice Hornocker. Houndsman and biologist Kerry Murphy worked with Gary, attempting to capture and radio-instrument as many Big Creek mountain lions as possible.

In the spring of 1984, Jim and Holly moved from the lab building into the Taylor Cabin, which had sat vacant since Jess' death. Holly began a master's study in the winter of 1984-1985 with guidance from Ernie Ables, on behavior and relationships of bighorn sheep, deer, and elk on the Cliff Creek winter range.

Gary and Mona hand-raised a bobcat and pen-raised three mountain lion kittens as part of the predator ecology studies. After being pen-reared to an appropriate age, the lion kittens were released to fend for themselves. The large chain-link enclosure on the east side of the property was originally built in the early 1970's when Hornocker and Sidensticker kept captive lions as part of their research. The pen was reactivated for this purpose.

Several major maintenance projects were undertaken in 1985. University of Idaho President Richard Gibb recognized the importance of these facility improvements and arranged for the financial support. The largest project was the pole barn construction. Rafts of poles were floated down Big Creek and the mule team hauled them to the construction site, similar to the way Jess Taylor transported logs 35 years before. Ed Krumpe made truss kits and had those and other materials flown direct from Moscow.

The mountain lion study was in full swing the winter of 1985-86. Howard Quigley, from the Wildlife Research Institute, led a team of biologists and houndsmen continuing the lion instrumentation effort. They captured 21 mountain lions over two years. Holly continued winter range observations of sheep, deer, and elk; watching the animals with a spotting scope from Taylor Ranch.

In the spring of 1986, Holly, Jim and Ed initiated a student internship program at Taylor Ranch. Like the summer honoraria of the 1970's, the internship provided opportunities at Taylor Ranch for undergraduate students. The interns assisted on research projects and did ranch work. They performed data collection on noxious weed surveys, range condition transects, and a bighorn sheep ecology study. The interns helped put up hay and firewood, did general ranch maintenance, and learned backcountry horsemanship. They also worked with Forest Service wilderness rangers, learning trail construction techniques and other backcountry skills.

Ed Krumpe was responsible for developing a stronger research emphasis. This included converting the old Conyer Cabin into a field laboratory. Taylor Ranch received much media coverage in 1986. The University of Idaho News Bureau produced a film documentary of research activities at the field station, which aired on Idaho Public Broadcasting stations and many other stations around the country. The alumni magazine *Idaho*, *The University* also had a feature story on Taylor Ranch.<sup>10</sup>

In the summer of 1986, the ranch acquired a new mule team and retired the old mules. An old hay-fork from a University of Idaho barn was installed in the pole barn. Figuring out the rope, chain, and pulley mechanics of the hay fork proved to be a challenge; even early-day hay-maker Bob Webb had to scratch his head to recall the mechanics of the 70-year-old carriage assembly. The hay-fork greatly reduced the toll of stacking the estimated 18 tons of hay cut from Taylor Ranch pastures.

During the winter of 1986-87, the mountain lion study was concluded by Institute biologists Howard Quigley and Tony Wright. Later in the winter an ABC film crew filmed Maurice and his staff catching a lion near the ranch. This film sequence, and a discussion of the study's intent, was featured on the program "Good Morning America." There were other cougar activities that winter at Taylor Ranch. The ranch acquired an orphaned mountain lion kitten which had taken refuge under a porch at Monumental Ranch. The cat was raised for 5 months then turned back to the wild.

---

<sup>10</sup>Since acquiring Taylor Ranch in 1971, the University has generated several publications which have broadened exposure of the facility. A 1973 *Context* article by Dave Johnson featured Jess Taylor's reflections on the ranch's history, and his vision on future use. In 1986, exposure for the ranch broadened. Jim Wood and Terry Maurer produced a film documentary titled "Taylor Ranch: Idaho's Wildest Classroom." The magazine *Idaho*, The University featured several aspects of past and current activities at Taylor Ranch. George Savage wrote an article titled "Taylor Ranch: UI's Unique Wilderness Resource." George's article vividly describes the connection of the three most significant people in Taylor Ranch history: Dave Lewis, Jess Taylor, and Maurice Hornocker. Stephen Lyons illustrated the current lifestyle at Taylor Ranch through an interview with the author and his wife, Holly Akenson. Jane Prutchett summarized Frank Leonhardy's findings on the Sheepeater Indians in an article titled "UI Anthropologist Tracks Idaho's Shadowy People."



*Student interns Ray Guse, on rope, and Lewis Wardle operate the grapple-style hay fork.*

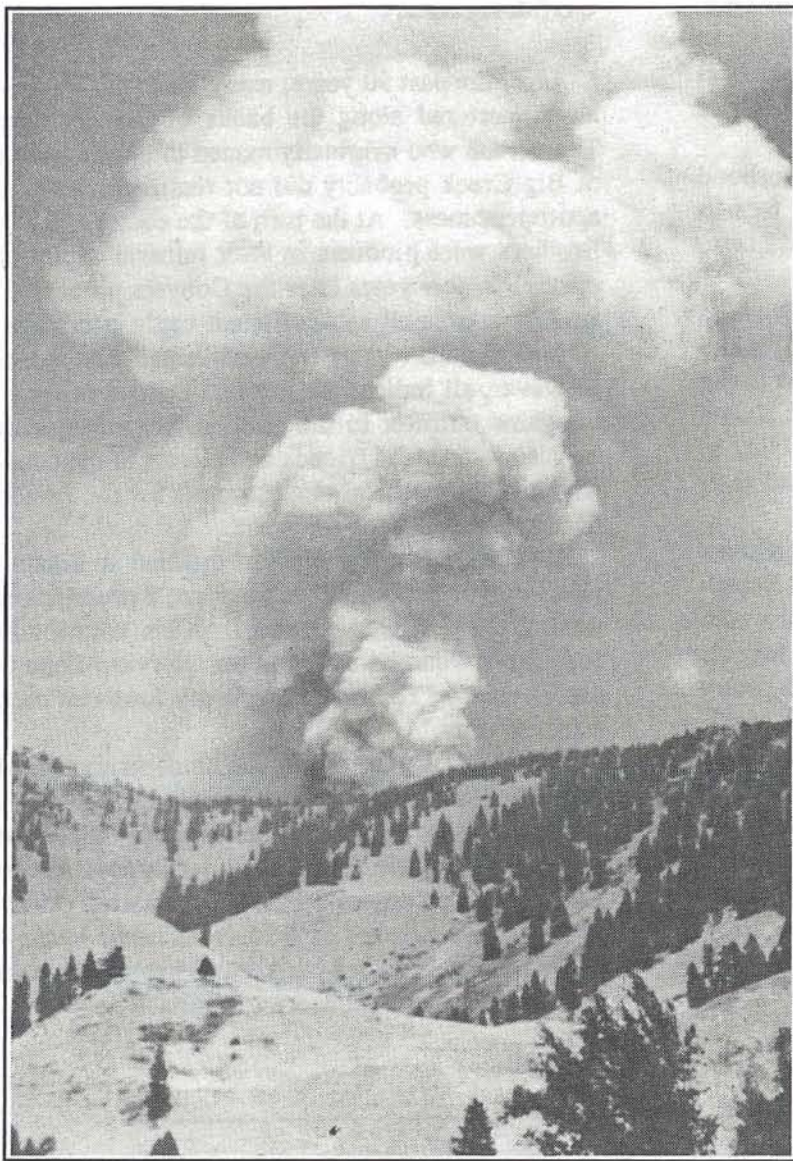
In cooperation with Idaho Fish and Game, Jim and Holly conducted a 3-year study on bighorn sheep lambing areas. Radio-instrumented bighorn ewes were tracked to their lambing areas where lamb production and survival were monitored by a field crew.

By the spring of 1988, a serious erosion problem on the west end of the airstrip demanded attention. Sixty rock-filled gabion baskets were imbedded in the bank to curb the cutting action of Big Creek. Using the mule team on a haul-back block, and a converted slip-scoop scraper, rock was laboriously hand-picked from a gravel bar, placed in the slip-bucket, then emptied in the baskets. A crew of 7 people and 3 mules moved approximately 50 tons of rock in this manner in two weeks time.

The big event of 1988 was the nearby forest fire activity. Latent fires from early summer lightning storms were whipped into action on September 6 by

hot, dry north winds. In a two-hour period, the Golden Creek Fire raced 7 miles to the south, perched within view of the ranch above the Cliff Creek cliffs. Having watched the huge plume of smoke grow, Jim contacted Forest Service officials. At first, fire officers were not too concerned, but upon being informed of seeing trees engulfed in flames they quickly dispatched a smokejumper plane. Heavy winds aloft kept the jumpers in the plane that day and we spent a restless night at the ranch watching the eerie orange glow out the Taylor Cabin windows, wondering when to initiate a horse and mule evacuation.

Conditions for flying improved the next day and a crew of 26 firefighters were brought in to protect the ranch. An elaborate sprinkler system was set around the buildings, but the fire never advanced much from atop the ridge. The fire fighters maintained a presence at the ranch for another three



*View of the 1988 forest fire from Taylor Ranch.*

weeks until a fall rain reduced fire danger and cleared the canyon of smoke.

A variety of summer research projects was ongoing at Taylor Ranch in the late 1980's. Jim Peek established vegetation plots and transects on selected Big Creek rangelands. Steve Bunting and Penny Morgan evaluated the spread of spotted knapweed near the ranch. Wayne Minshall and graduate assistants from Idaho State University surveyed aquatic invertebrates on Big Creek over two summers. The Wilderness Research Center and the

Idaho National Engineering Laboratory cooperatively established an automated meteorological and atmospheric monitoring station.

The decade of the 1990's began with a colossal cooperative undertaking at Taylor Ranch. Dean John Hendee organized an effort by the Idaho National Guard, the Forest Service, and the University of Idaho to airlift a four-plex building from the old Lanham Ranch at Cabin Creek 6 miles upstream.<sup>11</sup> Heavy lift Chinook and Skycrane helicopters were used to airlift the cabin wall segments and bundles of building materials from Cabin Creek to Taylor Ranch. National Guard crews, primarily from the 158th Engineering Corps out of Boise, worked concurrently at the two sites to dismantle and reassemble the structure.

This move accomplished the second cabin move in Taylor Ranch history and put the facility into its present-day arrangement.

Activities of this caliber do not go unnoticed in the back-country. With more than 30 "units" tuned in on the short-wave radio, it became routine for the backcountry neighbors to call and see how the cabin move was going.

The radio system does provide a social link for the isolated residents within this wilderness. All sorts of interesting information gets conveyed over the radio by helpful "neighbors." A miner with a toothache was once advised to hold kerosene in his mouth; the miner later called back to express thanks for the suggested source of relief, which apparently made his trip to town tolerable.

---

<sup>11</sup>*The Cabin Creek site, where the Lanham Ranch was located, has the oldest history of homesteads on Big Creek. Cabin Creek has experienced multiple ownerships since the Caswell brothers originally homesteaded there. Cathy Gillihan, a daughter of Rex Lanham, is in the process of formulating a history of the entire Big Creek drainage. Bob and Cathy Gillihan currently operate a lodge at Big Creek. They each have close to 40 years experience in the area, and they provided the author with much valuable information on both early and recent Big Creek history.*



Before her death in 1987, Francis Wisner from Campbell's Ferry on the Salmon River was quick to get on the radio with advice from her 1896 medical handbook. It was amazing how often these home remedies helped a person in a pinch.

The backcountry radio creates a "neighborhood effect." Even if a person had not been met face to face, hearing them on the radio for years made them seem like a long-time friend.

Over the years Taylor Ranch has hosted visitors from all parts of the planet. Recently, wildlife and wilderness managers from South Africa came to the facility. Nick Steele commented, "Taylor Ranch was just what I had envisioned the western U.S. to be like, and it took several trips abroad to find such a place."

Last year Dean Hendee brought in scientists from the Soviet Union, along with the Forest Supervisor and a contingent of Forestry faculty and students. Having an interpreter, and a common understanding of Latin names for plants, the group of researchers congenially drafted ecological monitoring strategies in a manner that would make foreign diplomats envious!

Before the Soviets boarded the plane to leave Taylor Ranch, Yuri, the head of the Soviet Academy of Sciences vigorously shook my hand and bid farewell. The translator said, "He says you are very lucky to be here." He was right!

## CONCLUSION

Over the past 90 years, many kinds of "Pioneers" have quartered along the banks of Pioneer Creek. The person who originally named this little tributary of Big Creek probably did not realize its long-term appropriateness. At the turn of the century, the Bull Brothers were pioneers in their mineral exploration efforts. A few years later the Conyers pioneered an attempt at a small self-sufficient cattle operation.

Dave Lewis was more frontiersman than pioneer. However, all indications are that Dave was the first big-game outfitter in the Salmon River Mountains. He also introduced friends and clients to the country who had the political clout to push for the first legislative protection of the area.

Jess and Dorothy Taylor fulfilled a dream of making their backcountry home into a premier guest ranch. Jess Taylor summarized his contributions accurately when he stated in an interview done two decades ago, "Taylor Ranch is my footprint on the sands of time."

Maurice Hornocker and his students pioneered a scientific understanding of mountain lions. Maurice and University of Idaho officials were indeed foresightful with their vision of a wilderness research center, with a "one-of-a-kind" field station centered in the largest expanse of wilderness in the lower 48. Taylor Ranch is a very unique and special place with a long tradition of pioneering efforts. ■

