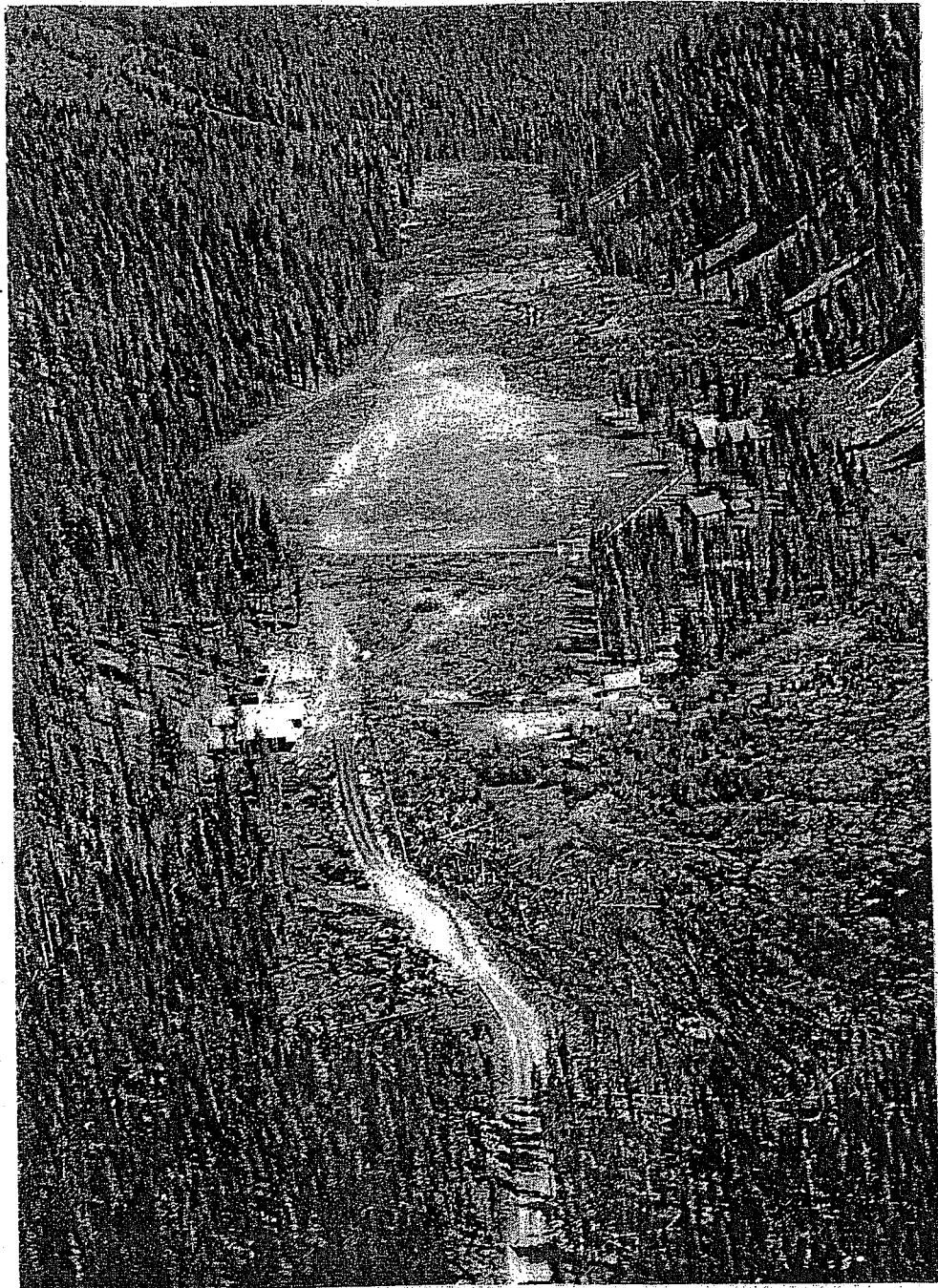




BIG CREEK 4TH OF JULY



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Excerpts from "Following My Own Trail"
Dan LeVan Jr

Sure was a "Great Day for Little Chester" when fourth of July came to the Forest Service Ranger Station at Big Creek, where the Forest Service folks always sponsored a celebration. (That was before World War II)

Folks would be coming from all around, and all of those good eats really made a fella hungry just think'en about them. And those firecrackers and all the fun everyone was going to have doing stuff with them. Then the mak'en of the home made ice cream using the snow gott'en from up on the summit to make it turn cold.

Wait'en for that day to come just about made a nervous wreck out of me, and the rest of the kids too. All of Our folks would be planning for a week or more. They invited everybody all up and down Big Creek, and all the folks that lived anywhere around. There could be almost fifty some people if they all came. Even Old Eric Jensen from down on Crooked Creek might come and bring his fiddle. If he did there would be danc'en for sure.

Some of the folks would be com'en horseback, and some would have their pickups or cars. Everybody that lived past Crooked Creek had to come horseback cause there weren't any roads past there. There weren't roads to Chamberlin Basin or the rest of the back country. But there would be somebody com'en from those places, cause everybody sure had fun at Big Creek on the Fourth.

There were some that got to Big Creek the day before so that they could get their mail and stock up on supplies cause the Post office and store were supposed to be closed, except Dick Cowman would always open up if folks really needed something. The Cowman's always had the dances at their hotel.

When the day finally came we generally woke up with a bang. Some grownup used a cherry bomb to wake up our little community, by setting it off inside a culvert.

Some of the men at the Ranger Station were already feeding the horses and mules to get'em in the corral where they would have to stay most of the day. Us kids got to put up the flag in front of Headquarters, and say the pledge of allegiance. The Fire dispatcher would be in the office calling all of the Lookouts and guard stations for morning roll call, and wish'en them all a happy fourth of July.

All of us were busy with chores and jobs, as we worked up an appetite for the community breakfast the the women were cooking for everybody.

Sourdough pancakes, bacon, fried eggs, and fried taters didn't last long when everyone tied in to the job of eating. There was coffee for all day made in the big hanging caldron with a camp fire under it.

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Everybody helped get the dishes done cause the folks from around were starting to come in, and it would start to get noisy with all the talking and laughing like folks do.

All of us kids knew about the nation's Birthday, but we knew lots more about all the fun we were going to have. We liked the firecrackers best but we always had to wait until some grown ups were around before we could play with them. Lots and lots of the little baby-finger firecrackers were handed out to most everyone, to start out with. Then we'd get some bigger firecrackers. We liked these best for blowing up dirt hills, or putting them under lard pails to make louder noises. But, the best noise was when some of the men put a couple of Cherry bombs in one of those big long metal culverts again. There was always a pile of them stacked up where the road crew stored them by the commissary. There was so much noise it even made the valley echo all around. Never will forget those times. Man that was fun to hear. Even all the grownups clapped and cheered.

The horses of some of the folks coming in got a little bit skiddish about all the fire crackers going off, but they all settled down soon enough: so would the dogs. The dogs would come out from their hiding places wagging their tails and bouncing around like they had been there all the time.

There was lots of things to do with the fire works, like punching a hole in the bottom side of an open can so the firecracker fuse stuck out, then we sat another empty can on top and lit the fuse then ran far enough so we could see how high the top can blew in the air. It went about half as high as the trees. Twisting two or three fuses together for a big bang blew the can nearly as high as the trees. Almost every time when we were busy fixing some thing to blow up some grown up guys would sneak up and let go a firecracker right behind us and scare the heck out of us.

(One 4th of July the folks took all the firecrackers and stuff away cause we dropped a firecracker into a coke bottle and blew it apart. No one got hurt, but our feelings did without no more fireworks.)

Not to long after breakfast Dad and a man or two would say, "Well who is going after snow with us?". Didn't take long for most of us kids to get lined up to go. It always took two pickups to make the trip up to Profile Summit where we could always find a snow drift on the north side of the summit where it was shaded by the tall trees and steep banks. Most of the time the snow was very close to the side of the road where it had been plowed up by the bulldozers that opened the road for the mines.

It didn't take too long to load up the snow in the

because of a middle of summer snowball fight that all present joined in.

The snow was covered with heavy double tarps which were held down by a passel of kids who happily froze their rears off while returning to headquarters 10 miles away. By the time the snow arrived most of the people coming to the celebration were there at the Ranger Station. Some folks were setting up more tables. The crowd was getting pretty big.

Soon as the snow got back it was packed around the container in the ice cream freezer that had the stuff for the flavors of ice cream. We always had four freezers working. Actually in was four freezers in use, while us kids did most of the work turning the crank. None of us worked too long turning, because the crank got hard to turn when the ice cream started getting hard inside, and adults took over. We were pretty busy packing more snow into the place where it went. Like they said, "If you are going to eat ice cream you got to help make it".

While the ice cream was being made folks would start doing things. Some of the older folks got cribbage games going, some played pinochle. The ladies were visiting and doing different things, like bringing out cakes and pies and special dishes.

Most of us kids would go down by the horseshoe pitching area where some of the men started shooting matches. We always liked to watch the shooting cause some of those men and women there in the Primitive area back country were really dead shots. They most always could shoot a hole in center of the ace of spades, or some other ace at sixty feet. A few of them including dad could light a match sticking in a log when they shot the 22 rifles. Pretty soon they would get to betting on their shooting. I saw three different guys shoot a spinning silver dollar out of the air. Those guys sure were good. A few were trappers and cougar hunters. Everybody there were foresters, miners or mountain men--backwoods people.

There was always horseshoe pitching tournaments where men, women, and kids got to join in. It was always fun. Everything was fun. Everybody was having fun. Everyone was happy and laughing a lot, and just enjoyed being together.

There never was a regular dinner time. The food was always there and everybody just ate when they wanted to eat. Everybody was eating something all the time. The fried chicken was the best.

Way too soon it started getting dark so folks started settling down and everybody watched the fellas shoot off the night fireworks out on the landing field where they wouldn't start any fires.

After that things sort of came to an end with all the fun. Folks were still visiting as the picked up their

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things and started walking down the road to the hotel where the dance was going to be. There was waltzing and square dancing , and Virginia reels, and some polkas.

Never could understand how those folks could dance so long, and so hard and never get tired. I would get tired of staying up, so after the eats were served I would get permission for me and my sister to walk back down to our house at the Ranger Station to go to bed. Sometimes my sister would stay with the folks and I would go by myself. I never did get scared of hearing the coyotes singing up in the hills around the station. I knew that some of them were watching me, but I never got scared. There was never anything to be scared of back there in Big Creek country.

Took me a long time to go to sleep cause I'd get to thinking about all that happened during the day. I couldn't sleep but I was sure tired.

The next day we would think about and talk about yesterday then think about next year.

When the war started after Pearl Harbor everything went toward winning the war. We did without, but we didn't mind. We observed the 4th of July, but we didn't celebrate big like we did before. But boy those were sure days to remember.