

From Pat Cary Peek
February 23, 2007

To Peter Preston and Jim and Holly Akenson, regarding the dates of early residences at Taylor Ranch Field Station on Big Creek. Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

Hi Peter, Jim & Holly:

Well, here goes. Since I am but an amateur historian, I hesitantly offer what I have found. First, I don't think there's definitive proof for exactly when Dave moved from one spot to the other, and I'm not sure it makes much difference to most people! I know there are few primary sources with evidence. I think most researchers would call things like censuses, written accounts and personal interviews with people who lived at the time and knew David as primary, but in our dear Dave's case we know that he never told the census taker the truth, the papers got it wrong in lots of cases and Jesse Taylor gave as fact that he was buried at Cascade which was wrong. I can't remember, Jim, what references you had that the cabin was built before 1909?

I think the Warren Times in July, 1922 summed it up as accurately as anything. It said (talking about David Lewis) "with the exception of 1908-1910 which was spent at White Bird, he has not been out of his forest home since 1900." I am sure he was primarily in the Big Creek area even before then. From 1888 there is mention of him traveling from the Middlefork and Chamberlain Basin and we know he was in the Sheepeater War in 1879. When he settled for good at the Taylor Ranch site is another question.

With the census, however, even though places of birth were not always accurate, I think we could trust that he was in that location when the census was taken. On the 1860 census in Yoncalla, David was listed as five years old living with John and Sarah Letsom (his mother & stepfather). On the 1880 census at Yoncalla, David Lewis was listed as the 25 year-old stepson of John Letsom and occupation was hunter. **On the 1910 census he was listed in the Pollock Precinct, Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho County** (which in those days took in Valley County as well). The 1910 census listed John and May Conyers in the Roosevelt Precinct as was the Edwards'. The 1920 census has David Lewis and the Conyers listed next to each other in the Roosevelt Precinct, but of course, that just means they were in the area.

There are many letters and hard evidence that David was in the White Bird area from 1907-1910:

July, 1907: Receipt for purchases at Alexander Freidenrich Co. at Grangeville.

Sept. 1908: Fish and Game License, Roosevelt Co.

May 27, 1909: Large bear killed at Whitebird by David Lewis

Feb. 23, 1910: Letter from USDA Nez Perce Nat. Forest appointed as a Forest Guard Hunter

April 5, 1910: Letter to David Lewis at Whitebird from the county clerk "OKing Your claim against the county for cougar hides."

Sept, 1910: Lewis got written permission to live at the Disappointment Ranger Station near Cold Meadows and also the Cottonwood cabin.

By 1912, however, I'm pretty sure he was in the Big Creek area for good.

July 25, 1912 Lewis was appointed “Distributing clerk” for his precinct at
Edwardsburg.

Feb. 15, 1915 A letter from Annie Edwards to him about his guiding business.

I looked up some of Peter’s references and here’s what I found (let me know, Peter, if I’m off base!)

Memoirs of an Old Timer p. 45: I didn’t find anything that referred to when Dave moved to Taylor Ranch. It just says he was flattered by the publicity and acclaim, which I think we all know. (I did find, on p. 42, an oblique reference to Oregon and his half-brother Kit Letsom. She says he “migrated to Oregon, where he resided for a time with a half-brother”).

Middlefork & the Sheepeater War p. 93: I didn’t find any dates and no references for primary sources. As you know, Johnny Carrey & Cort Conley don’t have a bibliography or footnotes. On p. 93 they say “Cougar Dave Lewis’ first cabin site was at the mouth of Goat Creek just upstream from Soldier Bar”. That’s where I got the cabin idea but it certainly could have been a tent.

Wilderness of the Heart by Sheila Reddy: I couldn’t see anything other than she was quoting the homestead application. She said “according to forest service records, he settled on the claim in 1899, but did not establish permanent residence until 1911”.

Trails of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness by Margaret Fuller: I really think Margaret was a careful researcher. She has a large bibliography but again, no specific footnotes to point to where she got her information. Since this was published in 1987, I think she got her information on Lewis partially at least from the John Hartung thesis (see below) published in 1978. She says the Bull brothers were at Cliff Creek about 1896. John Conyers moved from Cabin Creek to Taylor Ranch in 1910 where they built a new cabin. After Conyers left Cougar Dave Lewis arrived from Goat Creek about 1918. He had lived at Goat Creek and Soldier Bar since 1894.

John Hartung Thesis, 1978, Documentation of Historical Resources in the Idaho Primitive Area, Big Creek Drainage, p. 100: I got the thesis from the library to double check what he said. He said in 1910 John Conyers moved to TR from Cabin Creek. He built a cabin, corrals and made a hayfield. David Lewis lived on Goat Creek on the W. bank of the creek. In 1918 Lewis moved to TR site and he held a housewarming party (that’s what it says, I’m not making it up!). In 1927 he patented the land. Hartung did have footnotes and he got this from an interview with Jesse Taylor by Richard Walker in Boise, Idaho on Nov. 6, 1974. Amazingly, I just saw Richard Walker at a talk that Jim gave last Tuesday. He said he has more than five hours of tapes of his interviews with Jesse Taylor and he is digitizing them. Do you have these or are they different from the one’s you have?

Keep me posted! Let me know what you think. It’s fun to dig through the “stuff”.

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