

An aerial photograph of a mountain valley in winter. The landscape is covered in snow, with a winding road or path visible through the terrain. The mountainsides are densely populated with evergreen trees. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, creating a serene and atmospheric scene.

Winter 1986

Idaho

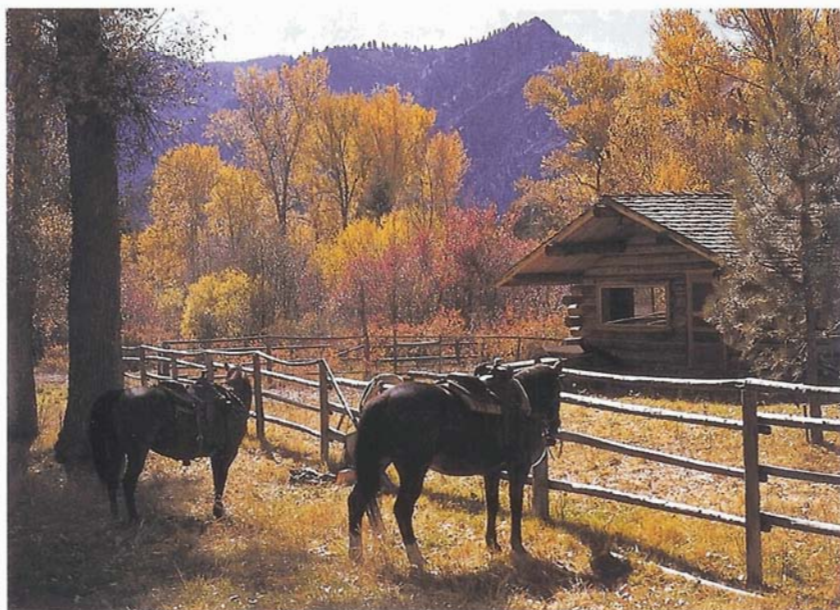
THE UNIVERSITY

Taylor Ranch:

UI's Unique Wilderness Resource

Spotlight on Landscape Architecture

Cover: An icy Big Creek winding through the central Idaho wilderness about a mile from Taylor Ranch Field Station. Photo by Holly Akenson.



Jim Akenson

Features

Taylor Ranch

Only the University of Idaho, of all the higher education institutions in America, is endowed with such a center of field study.

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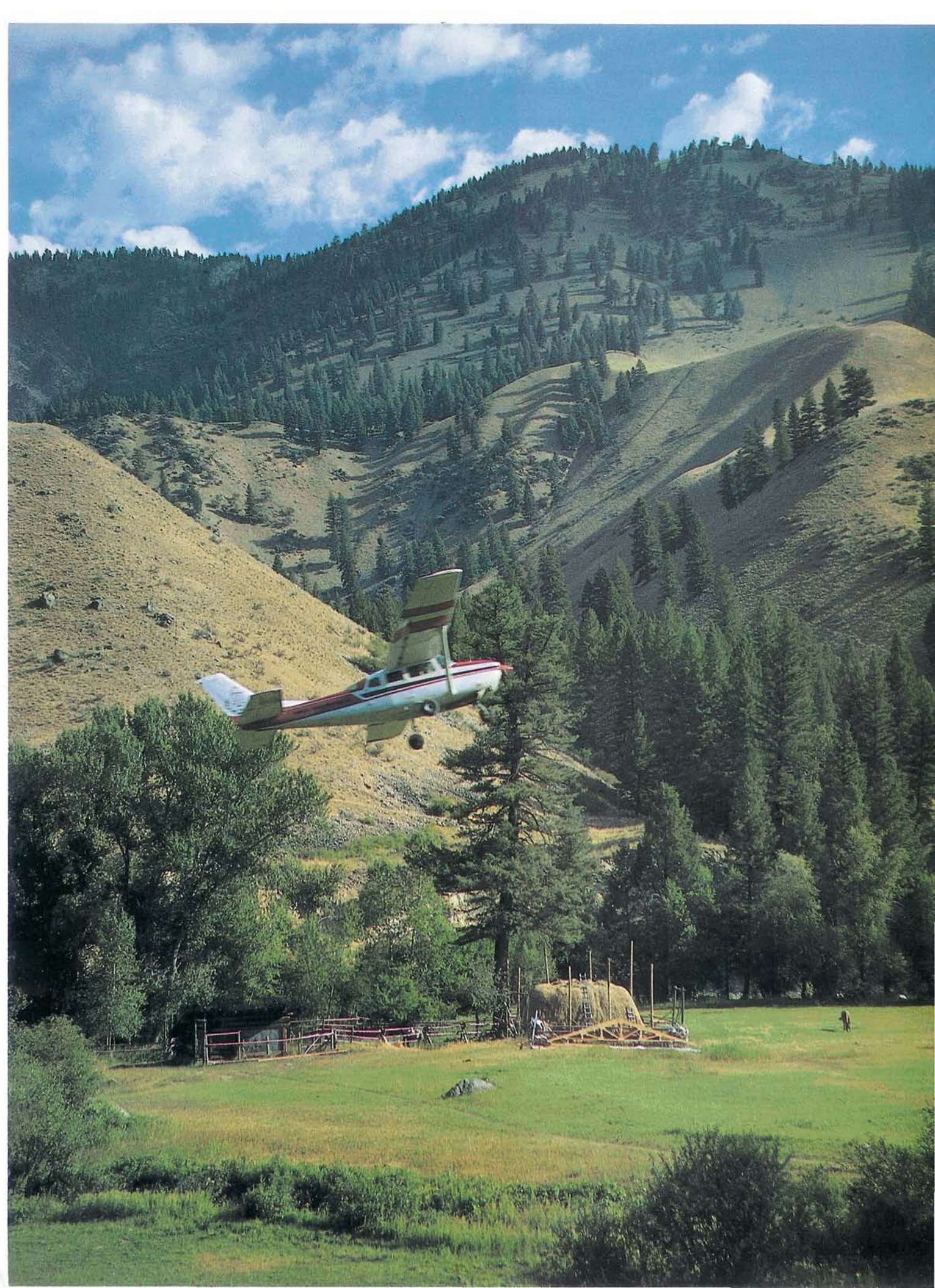
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TAYLOR RANCH

UI's Unique Wilderness Resource

by George Savage

In 1879, David Lewis, 35 or 36 years old, trekked into the rugged Big Creek drainage of central Idaho's Salmon River country. He'd been there four years before, as a scout for the U.S. Army, and had gotten involved in one of the early skirmishes of what would later be called the Sheep Eater War. He must have liked what he saw, because this time he stayed—for 55 years.

Because he did, the University of Idaho now possesses 65 acres of forest and meadows lying along Big Creek—Taylor Ranch, a truly unique wilderness research field station in the heart of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

The history of Taylor Ranch—and its acquisition by the university—is not so much the story of a place, as it is the story of three men, and how their lives touched.

The first character in this history is, of course, David Lewis. His life is the stuff of legends: a Civil War veteran; a scout for Captain Benteen, one of Custer's officers; participant in that Sheep Eater War skirmish on Big Creek; a guide, outfitter and prospector; and a cougar hunter of national repute. A 1927 *New York Times* photo of Lewis and two of his dogs—probably Dick and Whiskers—is accompanied by a caption crediting Lewis with 600 cougar kills.

That kill count rises and falls, however, depending either on the vagaries of Lewis' memory or the enthusiasm of journalists. Other accounts attribute from 200 to 1000 cougar kills to Lewis.

Whatever the number, Lewis apparently earned the

Holly and Jim Akenson have the best jobs in Idaho.

The hours are long, the pay is low, and the work is physical. Neighbors and electricity are non-existent, for half the year they do without running water, there are no phones, and the only way to reach their cabin is by a 37-mile hike or, if you have the nerve, by airplane. The nearest town, Yellowpine, is 100 miles away.

The Akensons are the managers of the University of Idaho's Taylor Ranch Field Station. Tucked away in the vast Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area along the swift currents of Big Creek, the 65-acre research center allows scientists to study wildlife and fish, air and water, vegetation, geology, and archaeology in a pristine environment.

A lab is now available with a microscope, sinks, herbarium, rodent collection, and a small library of reference materials. The Akensons hope to add a portable computer to the lab. The sparseness of equipment and lack of technology can be an advantage: the isolation, the peace, the lack of interruption are stimulating to thought and interdisciplinary discussion.

The Big Creek drainage could be called the Serengetti Plains of North America. Herds of elk, deer, and bighorn sheep roam the steep breaks and canyons; moose browse on white willow bark. Big cats, coyotes, racoons, and rattlesnakes are common. The occasional backpacker or outfitter is a welcome rarity to be invited in for coffee and news of the outside world.

Jim misses friends and family, and Holly, like many pioneer women before her, craves female companionship. Women rarely pass through the wilderness, and hunting talk gets old quickly. Still, they love their life on Big Creek.

In their journals (see pages 18 and 19), the Akensons record not only their encounters with

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Holly, Jim, and Golda strike a gothic pose before going to work in the hay field/air strip.

Weekly mail and grocery flights to Taylor Ranch keep the researchers in touch with the rest of the world—and fed.

Jim Akenson



Galen Leonhardt



Jim Atkinson

Built around 1900, this building was first used to store tack and other equipment. Recently remodeled, it now houses the laboratory.

nickname "Cougar Dave." However, the nickname may never have been heard by the principal himself.

The "Cougar Dave" sobriquet does appear in print in a 1948 issue of *This Week*, a national Sunday supplement. In an article titled "Lost World U.S.A.," an essay on the Idaho Primitive Area, the authors described "Cougar Dave" Lewis as a man who lived for 50 years ". . . in utter isolation"; a man "who developed a hatred for cougars . . . and a cordial dislike for people"; a man with "lizard cold eyes" who, old-timers told them, would sometimes "drop his rifle, climb the tree, and with his bare hands wrestle the cougar off a limb and down to the dogs below."

Well, those old-timers may have been having a bit of fun with some dudes. Or perhaps it was that only 12 years or so after his death, Dave was on the way to becoming a legend.

At any rate, in the letters written to him by his many friends and hunting clients—and the range of his acquaintanceships is surprising—there's no mention of any "Cougar Dave." On the contrary, the salutations consistently address "Uncle Dave." And, fulfilling the implications of *that* nickname, the letters portray a far different man from the brutal hunter described in *This Week*.

A July 1926 letter from Dr. Alfred W. Adson, surgeon with the Mayo Clinic and a hunting client of Lewis, stands as a typical case in point.

I very often think of the delightful time we had at your place, and the hunt up the canyon; even though we failed to capture any bear, I enjoyed the hunt a great deal, and shall never forget it; neither shall I forget the very pleasant evening we spent on Rush Creek, after I succeeded in getting my first buck. All in all, I could not help but marvel at your splendid physique and your agility, at your age [82], in climbing those hills, at a rate about twice that of the rest of us. Your general philosophy of life and your happy faculty of seeing the good in everyone impressed and inspired me, and I sincerely hope to have the pleasure of again visiting your place sometime before so very long.

The following year, another client, Elmer D. Davies, attorney, of Nashville, Tennessee, writes (again to "Uncle

Dave") of his hopes for a hunting trip the next fall.

I will certainly be glad to see you and I know that in all probabilities we can spend several pleasant evenings together. . . . I want you to take a good long rest this winter after you get snowed in and buy yourself a good suit of drinking clothes next fall, because I expect we will have to use them."

Harry Shellworth, a prominent Boise lumberman and member of the state Chamber of Commerce, wanted Calvin Coolidge to meet Lewis (not the other way around). And Idaho Governor H.C. Baldrige, invited him to dinner at the Governor's mansion in Boise. (Shellworth and Baldrige were instrumental in the creation of the Idaho Primitive Area in 1931 and, by extension, of the present-day Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. In 1927, both had been introduced to the Salmon River country by Dave Lewis.)

By all the evidence, Lewis was no cold-eyed recluse, but a warm, intelligent man who loved the wilderness and enjoyed sharing it with others.

Some 45 years after Lewis came into the Big Creek country to stay, he was persuaded to make his *de facto* possession of the property a legal reality. In 1924, he patented 65 acres around his cabin. Apparently some difficulties ensued which delayed the final "proving up" of his homestead, but whatever the difficulties or technicalities may have been, they yielded to the intervention of his admirers, notably Shellworth, District Forester R. H. Rutledge, and Governor Baldrige. Indeed, in November 1927, the Governor applied a bit of "friendly persuasion" to the Register of the U.S. Land Office at Blackfoot:

I feel sure that Mr. Lewis has complied with the homestead laws in living upon this place. Owing to the long distance from the county seat or any other place of settlement, I hope that whatever seeming technicality there may be in his compliance with this part of the law be waived. . . .

He is an old Civil War veteran and also engaged in the Sheepeater War in that section of Idaho. From every viewpoint he is entitled to consideration, as I see it. Therefore, I hope that you will do your utmost to see that patent is issued on this homestead entry of Mr. Lewis.

Soon thereafter, Dave Lewis, at the age of 83 or 84, became the legal owner of the land he'd lived on for almost half a century.

Being landed gentry didn't change Lewis very much. He went on hunting, guiding, and corresponding with his many friends—until a few years later his life intersected that of Jess Taylor, the second character in this brief history and the namesake of Taylor Ranch.

Taylor, like Lewis in his earlier years, had been something of a wanderer. Born in Oregon in 1898, Taylor recalled living in tents as a child, his family accompanying his railroad contractor father from job to job. By age 18 he was building ships in Texas; several years later he tried his hand at ranching, only to be driven out by drought, federal regulation, and the Great Depression.

In the fall of 1933, Taylor loaded up the necessities and packed into the Big Creek country for some hunting. In a very fine *Context* (former UI alumni magazine) arti-

cle for March-April 1975 based on taped interviews with Taylor, David Johnson tells what happened.

Jess Taylor hunted the Big Creek drainage and was attracted by the baying of Lewis' cougar hounds. The two men met, hit it off right away, and the aging Lewis promptly accepted \$500 earnest money from Jess for the option to purchase the homestead with its two cabins. Total price: \$1,200.

They arranged that Taylor would return the following year to "get everything fixed up legal" with Lewis and a man named Walt Estep, one of Lewis' ranch administrators. Upon Taylor's return, the three drew up and signed the necessary papers, and Estep set off to have the deed recorded in Cascade.

But just as some hitch had occurred in Lewis' patenting of the property, now, too, a complication intervened in Taylor's purchase.

Johnson tells the story:

Well, unbeknown to Jess, Estep had a running feud going with a man named Lobear who lived in the mountains along Big Creek. When Estep left with the legal papers he ran into his enemy. Evidently, Lobear elected to put a quick end to the feud.

"I don't know if there had been any argument or not," said Jess, "but when Estep turned to go, Lobear shot him in the back of the head with a thirty-thirty. And that kind of stopped the transfer of legal papers right there."

Lobear, being an honest man of sorts, came down to the ranch and told Dave Lewis and Jess, "I just killed Estep." In due time the sheriff from Cascade was notified and he came in and got the frozen body which, as a matter of record, had its ears chewed off by some hungry critters.

"They put Lobear in the pen for a term," said Jess. Asked the reason for the shooting, Jess rationalized, "Oh well, there had been a little trouble and I think Estep was too attentive to Lobear's wife."

At any rate, the sheriff opened Estep's pack, recorded the deed in Cascade, and thereby made Jess rightful owner of the Taylor Ranch.

After only seven years of ownership, Lewis relinquished his property. Yet, how much could "paper" ownership mean to a man who'd "owned" the whole of the Big Creek drainage for over 50 years?

Perhaps, too, the sale was prompted by a premonition. That year Lewis wintered over on the ranch with Jess Taylor. When the spring thaw came, Lewis got the wanderlust. Taylor reluctantly saddled the horses and saw Lewis across Big Creek. He never saw him again. Shortly after reaching Cascade, Lewis died of pneumonia. He was 93 years old.

A small box of personal effects remains: letters; photos of Dave and hunting companions (including Governor Baldrige) and Dick and Whiskers; newspaper clippings of world events and medicinal advice; shopping receipts ("Evp." apples, \$3.25; 3 lbs Eagle Chocolate, \$1; 20 lbs coffee, \$7; 200 .22 cartridges, 80 cents—Alexander Freidenrich Co., Ltd., Department Store, Grangeville, 1907); an 1896 calendar; a certificate of membership from the National Geographic Society; a rusted muleshoe, a tarnished fork. Not much for a very long life, but then, Lewis didn't seem to need as much as most folks.

Lewis' instincts were sound; he had left the ranch in

the right hands, although for 12 years following his death, Taylor did little or nothing with the ranch, running a contracting business in Boise.

Then, in 1948, Taylor decided to return to Big Creek. He'd had offers for the ranch, but, he said, "I just felt the place belonged to me and it was really right that I should keep it and do something with it."

His decision had an unforeseen consequence. Wrote David Johnson:

Jess brought all his assets together and put them into a house in Boise, hoping to sell it and move to the ranch. He was 50 years old and quite handsome, and the realty company sent a very attractive middle-aged lady out to list the house.

Her name was Dorothy, and though she didn't sell the house, she soon married the proprietor.

That same year, Jess and Dorothy Taylor made the ranch their primary home. They scraped out an airstrip and built a four-room log cabin, by hand. For nearly 20 years thereafter, the Taylors operated an outfitting and guiding business from the ranch, much as Dave Lewis had done for many years.

In the mid-sixties the third major figure in this history appeared on the scene: Maurice Hornocker, a graduate of the University of Montana, and a Ph.D. student at the University of British Columbia. Hornocker had contracted with the University of Idaho and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to conduct mountain lion research. The Big Creek drainage looked like the place.

In those days, at least a half-dozen private holdings lay along Big Creek. Hornocker looked them over and settled on Taylor Ranch as "ideally located" for his project.



Uncle Dave Lewis and cougar dogs, probably Dick and Whiskers.

He introduced himself to Jess Taylor, explained his purpose, and asked to rent part of the ranch. Taylor was amenable to the idea.

Full circle—from a man who acquired a national reputation by killing cougars to a man who would build an international reputation by understanding and preserving big cats.

For the next four years, Hornocker wintered over, conducting his lion research and acting as part-time

Selected Journal Entries



Holly Akenson

Bobcat along Big Creek at Taylor Ranch.

Winter on Big Creek.

Members of bachelor herd of bighorn sheep soak up the winter sun.



Jim Akenson

December 25, 1982

Hiked up to 3rd bench to look at elk use of the area. Saw 15 elk (two spikes) east of benches, salt lick heavily used by sheep and elk (tracks). Fed horses and dogs. Break ice at box—another cold spell coming on.

January 18, 1983

Ice "went out" on Big Creek. Quite a spectacular show! Saw a beaver float down in height of flow. Late afternoon Ray flew in with our mail, groceries and other things.



Holly Akenson

January 19, 1983

Today Jim and Gary took the hounds up to Cabin Creek to try and recapture a collared cat. We pinpointed the cat on a hillside west of Cabin Creek using the radio...we even saw it at 40 yards. We turned the hounds loose on the cat, but the cat eluded them. Gary was very disappointed in the dogs. The highlight of the trip was seeing an albino deer west of Cabin Creek.

February 14, 1985

I was looking for ungulates during first observation when I saw a coyote carrying a large object above the third bench—was two coyotes and a freshly killed fawn. Neither coyote was collared. Observed, aged, classified and "behavored" 32 sheep at Cliff Creek lick at 25m distance—excellent opportunity and sheep were not concerned. In aging rams, and looking at horns at Taylor, I think horn growth is similar to Geist's description for "high quality" populations since yearling males seem to be Class 1, ¼ curls.

Jim on an ancient mowing machine cutting hay with mule team, Toby and Topper.



Terry Maurer

April 15, 1986

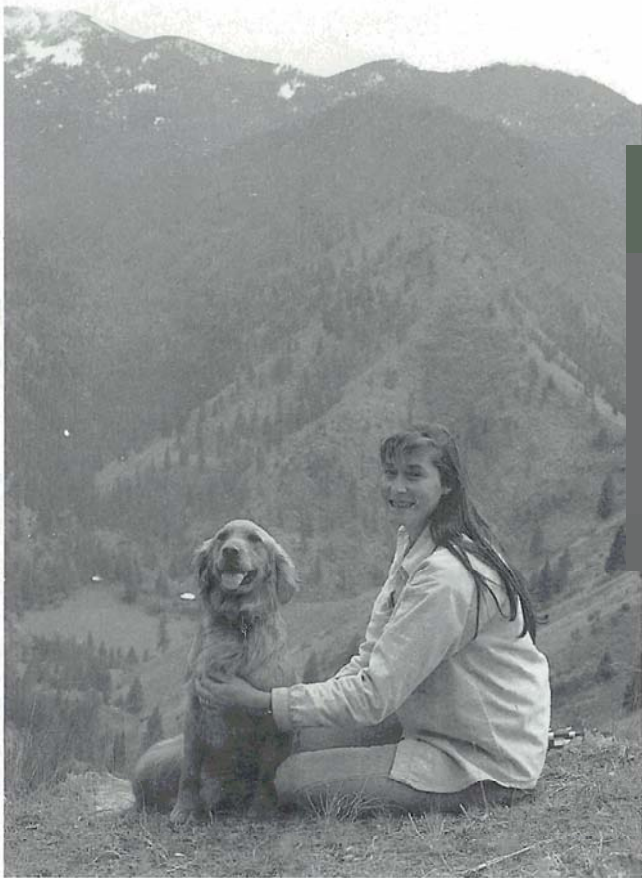
Hooked the mules up to the harrow again, this time we harrowed and seeded main pasture. Had a minor mishap when I got my foot tangled in a harrow tooth while getting seated—got dragged a few feet before Holly and I got the team stopped—scary moment!

May 6, 1985

Today was a good day. I'm finally caught up on my chores. Observed animals at 8 a.m. Wrote up sheep migration information and made mylar aerial photo overlays of sheep locations. Keyed out and pressed violets. Made cardboard field case for aerial photos.

June 23, 1986

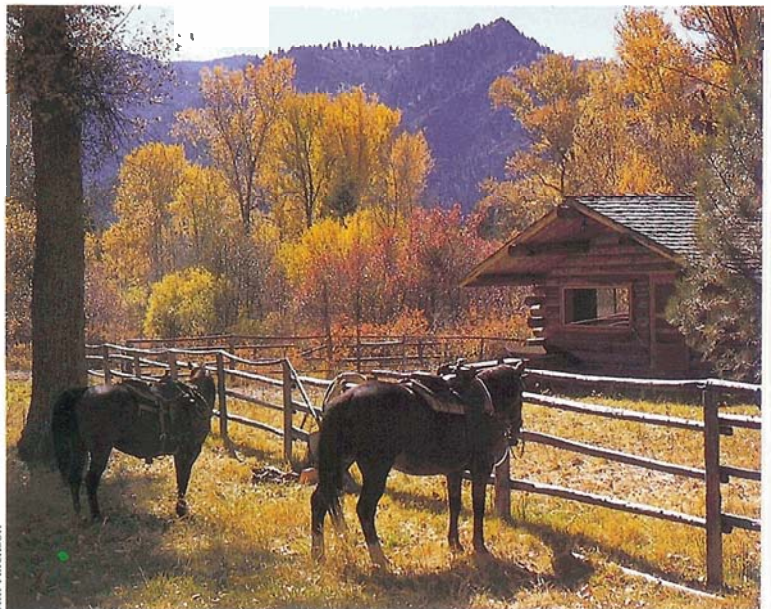
Holly, John and Deb took four horses up to Whiskey Springs to spend four days trapping and plant collecting. After helping them get packed, I worked on the hay barn access gate—east end. Tony left for four days up Waterfall Creek. Changed all the irrigation ditches. Woodrats must have moved in this place. Grasshoppers as thick as I can remember—time to cut hay in the main pasture before they eat it all.



Michele Shean

Climbing high above Taylor Ranch to observe newborn lambs on a lambing cliff, Holly and Golda stop to enjoy the view.

Fall afternoon at Cabin Creek, formerly an outfitter's ranch, now part of the wilderness area.



Jim Akenson

In 1967, the university purchased for \$5,000 the option to buy Taylor Ranch at a total price of \$100,000 (a few years later, another parcel of land some 7 miles up Big Creek from the ranch sold for \$1.4 million).

"The only reason we got the ranch at that price," said Dick, "was, first, because the university was the purchaser, and, second, because under the terms of our agreement, Jess and Dorothy had the right to live there until death."

In 1969, the UI picked up the option and the next year established the UI Wilderness Research Center.

Today, Ed Krumpe, of the UI Department of Wildland Recreation Management, is director of the Wilderness Research Center, with responsibility for administering Taylor Ranch and overseeing research conducted there. The ranch's managers, Jim and Holly Akenson—both of whom hold degrees in natural resources and wildlife disciplines—live on Big Creek year-round.

If Dave Lewis could walk into the ranch now, he wouldn't find too much changed. There's the airstrip, Jess and Dorothy's cabin, a new hay barn—prefabricated at the College of Forestry, flown in piecemeal and assembled—a bunkhouse, and field laboratory. But he'd also find his original cabin, and very much in use as the station's new lab. More important, he'd find Big Creek unchanged, and the mountains rising above it, and the wilderness beyond.

And Lewis would get on well with the Akensons. Jim and Holly share his love of the wilderness and have no problem whatever with solitude; yet, like Uncle Dave, they enjoy a bit of a chat with visitors—those few who drop in on the "white knuckle" mailplane flight or those more energetic who hike the 37 miles from the trailhead.

He'd fit right into the ranch's activities, too. Except for the necessities of the weekly mailplane (every couple of weeks in winter) and shortwave radio, the ranch functions without electricity or the gasoline engine. Here horsepower is really that—or the next thing to it: mulepower. The airstrip grass is cut with an old muledrawn mower; firewood is hand-bucked and muleback-hauled. Haying, too, is conducted by muscle and mule. The background "noise" of Taylor Ranch is birdsong, rustling branches, and the mumble of Big Creek.

Jess Taylor would like what's happening at his ranch, too. Jess died in 1983; Dorothy followed in 1984. The Akensons live in the cabin Jess and Dorothy built. Jess's rocking chair is still there, by the window looking across the ranch and over Big Creek, to the mountains on the other side.

Maurice Hornocker went on to earn his doctorate from the University of British Columbia, and in 1968 joined the UI College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences as professor of wildlife resources and leader of the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit. Among his first responsibilities was drawing up a plan for the use of

Taylor Ranch. Hornocker is currently director of the Wildlife Research Institute (not to be confused with the Wilderness Research Center), a privately funded entity headquartered at the UI.

Only 90 years separate Dave Lewis' settling in the Big Creek drainage from the university's acquisition of Taylor Ranch, but those 90 years also separate the "Age of Superabundance" from the age of depletion, pollution, and endangered species. No place on earth is left untouched by man's activities, but the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness is close.

And that's a major reason why the Taylor Ranch Field Station is important. Said Hornocker, "Because wilderness is a balanced, healthy system, it provides a baseline for evaluating land condition—not just in terms of wildlife, but soils, water, fish—you name it. It's the ideal outdoor laboratory against which we can measure the effects of our activities in non-wilderness environments.

"By our activities, we change things; whatever we do—plowing, logging, mining—let's do it. But let's know what's going to happen. Let's do it right."

The knowledge gained from research conducted out of the Taylor Ranch Field Station will help us "do it right."

George Savage is director of information services at the College of Forestry.



Terry Maurer

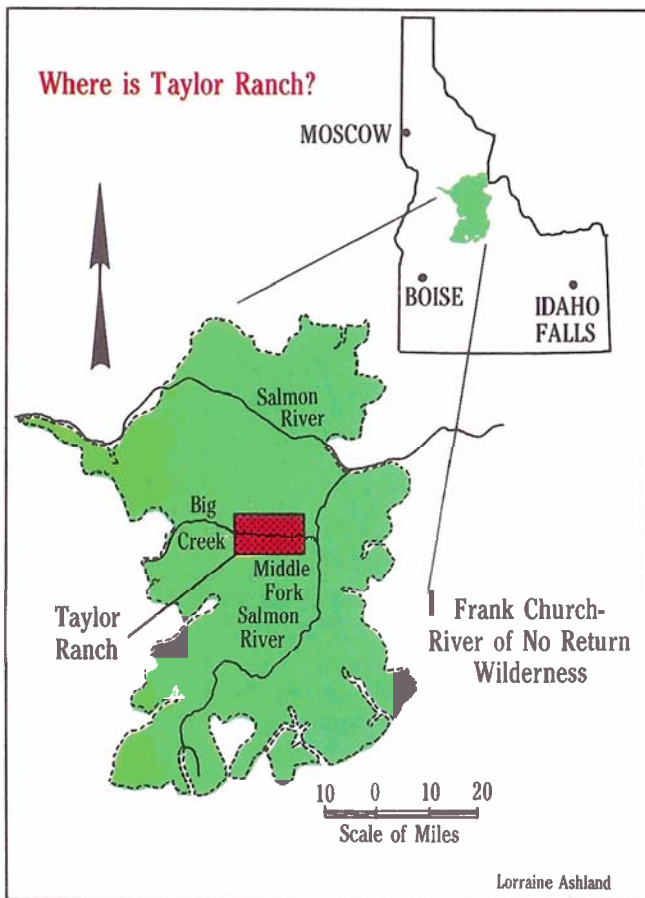
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wildlife, but the daily chores of living in the back-country. Also noted are the visits of nationally respected animal researchers like Maurice Hornocker, of UI's Wildlife Research Institute, who launched his breakthrough study of mountain lions in 1965 from Taylor.

Taylor Ranch Field Station is important not only because of its research potential, but because those 65 acres are the fact behind the slogan: "Idaho is what the rest of the country was."

The Akensons recognize their good fortune at having a part in the ranch's history and development. Holly reflects, "I don't think we'll be here forever, but forever we will say, 'Wasn't that the most incredible place we ever lived?'"

—Stephen Lyons



A mature full-curl bighorn ram.

Jim Akenson

Topper loaded with gear for a winter spike camp for Maurice Hornocker's cougar project.



Holly Akenson

FLASH!!

A video news story on Taylor Ranch Field Station prepared by Jim Wood of the UI News Bureau will be offered to 150 TV stations nationwide for viewing as part of local newscasts. Wood's story was selected for inclusion in "How About," a program prepared by Mr. Wizard Studios and funded by National Science Foundation and General Motors Research Laboratories. Watch for it after January 1, 1987.

UI Research Projects at Taylor Ranch

ON-GOING PROJECTS

Mountain lions: the second phase of Maurice Hornocker's earlier research; focuses on territorial existence and maintenance. (See November 1985, *Idaho: the University.*)

Human habitation: a major study by Frank Leonhardy, associate professor of anthropology, of pre-historic and historic habitation of the Salmon River mountains by the Sheep Eater Indians.

Bighorn sheep: a behavioral study by Holly Akenson for master's thesis.

Rodents and small mammals: collection by Holly Akenson.

Botanical survey and herbarium collection: by Holly Akenson and Ed Teasdale, professor emeritus of range management.

FUTURE PROJECTS

Air quality: area will serve as a comparison environment for acid rain studies.

Water quality: area water will be analyzed to determine nutrients.

Fish: population studies in relation to water quality.

Insects: populations studies in relation to tree health and disease.

Coyotes: interaction with other predators.

Fire management: regulation via natural fires; fire as a forest management tool.

Impact studies: recreational use on wilderness.

Wilderness self-regulation: compared to human management techniques.

PAST

Mountain lions: Hornocker's initial study from 1965 to 1972; focused on predator/prey relationships.

Bobcats and coyotes: by Hornocker from 1981 to 1985; emphasized predator interaction (mountain lions were included).

Historical evidence: a master's thesis in 1978 by John W. Hartung that examined some of the area's historical resources (cabins, mines).

Bighorn sheep: a population and behavioral study.

Ethnobotany: edible plants in Big Creek canyon.

Plant community survey: in Big Creek canyon by a forest ecologist.

Rattlesnakes and rodents: undergraduate research projects.