

SECOND EPISODE

I returned to Kalispell and worked at odd jobs around town until August 4, 1909, when I was reinstated as a Deputy Forest Ranger at \$1,000 per annum and was assigned to a proposed new Ranger Station near Bear Dance on the East side of Flathead Lake. This was the year of the opening of the Flathead Indian Reservation for homesteading, and there were a number of public boat lines operating around the lake mostly for the transportation of home seekers to and from Somers and Polson. They did a thriving business because of the thousands of people who came to Kalispell and Missoula to file an application for a drawing in the homestead lottery the Government was operating.

These people wanted to take a look at the Reservation lands they hoped to win in the lottery; consequently, there was money to be made transporting them to and from. One such boat line had a small 18-foot launch which made a run from Somers to Bigfork and Yellow Bay. The boat made one round trip every day; consequently, it was convenient to get from Kalispell to Somers on the train and then to Bear Dance by boat.

A new station was to be established at Bear Dance. My first job was to set up a camp and build a log cabin at the new station. In company with Deputy Forest Supervisor Jack Clack, we drove by horse and buggy to Woods Bay on Flathead Lake by way of Bigfork. We stopped at the John C. Wood ranch and orchard and borrowed a 14-foot, steel rowboat.

Woods Bay was named for John C. Wood, better known to everyone as J.C. He had homesteaded here in the early nineties and had planted an apple orchard which produced some very fine apples.

We determined from J.C. just about where the proposed station was to be located. The land along the east shore of the lake had been surveyed by the Land Office, and we needed to determine the location of township lines and section corners. The next morning we rowed down the Lake about 3 miles and beached the boat about where Crane Creek drops in to the lake. We located a site for the proposed cabin and made a general survey of the local surroundings. The shore along the lake a mile or so north of Bear Dance was steep and rocky right down to the water's edge. The cabin site was about 150 feet in elevation above the waterline, 200 yards inland from the lakeshore. More about that later. There was a fairly good wagon road from Bigfork to the Governor Smith orchard which was located on Hunger Creek. From that point the road was a pioneer affair built by the folks who homesteaded north of Yellow Bay. In 1909 and '10 there was very little patented land in T25N-R19W, and there were only three or four families living between Bear Dance and Yellow Bay.

After we had established the location of the proposed new station I set up a temporary camp with a 7 x 9 tent and the usual campfire housekeeping outfit. One of the first jobs was to fence the station site so a saddle horse could be kept. I started clearing a right-of-way for the fence and cutting poles and posts while also clearing the right-of-way for a road into the cabin site. On August 20 the boat delivered more equipment for a semi-permanent camp consisting of a new 14 x 14 tent with 4-foot walls weighing 90 lb., bulky too, with 20 1x12-14 and 20 2x4-14 ft. boards, a small cookstove, axes, shovels, crosscut saw, grindstone with mount, etc. All this had to be packed from the lakeshore up to the campsite, and there was just me to raise it some 150 feet, 200 yards to the campsite. At that time I weighed about 140 pounds--not what you would call husky, but not puny, by any means. Did you, my dear reader, ever attempt to set up a 14 x 14 tent on unlevel ground in a real brushy area all by your lonesome?

I laid the floor joists first. One corner was about 2 feet off the ground. There were plenty of flat rocks, so that was no serious problem. Well, during my tour as a member of the National Guard, I received considerable experience in setting up tents, so I got her done in due time and moved in. The floor was easy to keep clean, the cracks between the boards took care of that. By August 24, I had a fairly convenient and livable home in operation.

About this time I received instructions regarding the making of a Forest boundary survey to cover an area 6 miles wide along the Forest boundary from the Reservation line to Bad Rock Canyon on the Flathead River. It was to be completed before winter set in, and it required a map of the strip on a scale of either 4 or 6 inches to the mile, showing drainage, elevations, timber types with estimated volume per acre with various other items that I do not now recall. The boundary line distance to be covered was approximately 60 linear miles, with some overlap where there were jogs in the Forest boundary.

At various and unexpected times the Supervisor sent men to help build fence and road. On my return from a trip to Kalispell on August 30, I found Paul Abbott of Columbia Falls in camp. He came in with two horses but had to take them back to Columbia Falls, as we had no place to hold them at Bear Dance. He returned to Bear Dance by way of train and boat and helped set up 42 rods of crotch-post and pole fence and then on September 13 was sent to the South Fork. The last half of August and fore-part of September the weather was miserable. It rained or snowed nearly every day all fall. Work on the boundary was especially miserable as the line was mostly in brush and timber. Knowing that I had not had any experience cruising timber, the Supervisor assigned Ernie McCrea, an experienced cruiser, to help me with the job.

It was my job to locate the boundary line and keep the field notes from which I would prepare the map, and Ernie would determine the

timber type and estimated volume per acre, if any. We did practically all the job on foot and carried our camp right with us, camping wherever night overtook us. Each of us carried a packsack with a small piece of canvas to roll up in at night, a frying pan, small tin bucket to make coffee in, knife, fork, and spoon, couple tin plates and cups. Grub consisted of a piece of bacon, a can or jar of flour ready mixed for flapjacks, five to six cans of fruit or vegetables, referred to as "air tights," etc.--around 40 to 50 pounds to the man.

I ran line, using a F.S. surveyor's compass and Jake staff made from a hoe handle and recorded notes in the Standard Ranger's Field Notebook, form 289. Data was transferred to atlas-sized prepared map sheets in the Supervisor's Office in Kalispell. We started work on the survey on Wednesday, September 22. On October 7, we had unexpected visitors. Forest Supervisor Bunker, accompanied by F. A. Silcox, Assistant Forester, came in on the boat at 11 a.m. and stayed overnight with us. They left on the boat the next day. It was a pleasant and interesting interlude; but for the life of me, I cannot recall a specific thing we talked about. We completed the field work by October 16 and the office work in the Supervisor's Office by October 25.

Ernie and I returned to the Bear Dance Station on October 26 and started work on the cabin. We cut 40 house logs on the slope back of the cabin site, worked on the approach road and built a temporary landing dock where the boat could deliver the lumber and other materials needed for the 14 x 16 cabin, all of which had to be handpacked up that hill.

The construction of the Bear Dance cabin turned out to be a, more or less, hit or miss project, and the elapsed time was about 3 months. Two men working steadily could have built it in about 10 working days, at the most. Ernie and I cut the house logs in less than 2 days. The slope back of the cabin site was steep, and the right-sized trees were well scattered. Getting the logs down to the building site, mostly hand skidding, was hard work and time consuming. The weather turned cold after the logs were cut, and when they were peeled they became a huge icicle. A peavy or cant hook was useless. After the logs were peeled, the only way we could move them or hold them in place was with ropes, so we used a 40-foot soft twist rope, half-hitched to each end of the log.

The downhill end of the 14 x 16 cabin was about 6 feet above the ground. The two side and sill logs were 28 feet long, as the cabin was to have a 6 x 14 porch on each end. The downhill end of the sill logs were supported by two fir posts, 18 inches by 6 feet. We had quite an experience putting the two sill logs up on the two posts. We had cut two Douglas fir logs, 8 inches by 28 feet. When the logs were peeled (removing the bark), we had two 26-foot icicles. We had good luck with the first side log and got it securely anchored in

place. We had the second log almost in place on the post when a hold slipped, and the 26-foot log went all the way to the lakeshore just like a torpedo.

There were three of us working on the job, and there was no way in the world we could get the log back up that hill to the cabin site so we cut another log; and the only suitable tree anywhere near the cabin site was a white fir, a species usually considered, at that time, to be unuseable for any purpose. We cut the white fir and got it in place. Supervisor Bunker just about took my bark off for using it when he saw it, but he did admit that it was about all we could do, as it was a hard logging chance, and we had no means of moving a log of that size any distance. In 1970 I noticed that the white fir was still there and doing the job as good as any other log.

The second week in November, Frank Opalka and Charley Emmons helped me put the sill logs in place, and I put the floor joists in by myself and managed to get the bottom end logs in place. We used a flat, tenon-type corner which was relatively simple to make, but one had to be careful with the frozen logs, as the frozen part of the log might split out and spoil the joint. Supervisor Bunker came down on December 16 and gave me part of 2 day's work on the cabin. Then after Christmas Ranger Dick Dean and Ellis Hoke came. They helped me finish putting up the walls of the cabin and part of the rafters and then left. They were right nice people, and I learned considerable from them about a number of things.

Here is where I made another mistake that brought a reprimand from the Supervisor. The printed plan for the cabin was sent out from the Washington Office; and the plan showed the windows, one on each side, to be a two-sash, double-run window which would put the window sill about 12 to 14 inches above floor level. For a 14 x 16 cabin, that did not appeal to my ideas, based on some experience in constructing small cabins, so I put the windows in "cottage style" with each sash sliding horizontal. When Dean and Hoke told Bunker what I had done, he blew up and really told me off. It was a question of dotting all the i's and crossing all the t's according to the plans made and provided.

We built a cabin on Sun River in 1908; the Supervisor and I were in agreement that the horizontal style was the more practical way to do it, both for utility and appearance. Well, I finally got the roof finished, the gable ends closed in, and some shelves for cupboard space. Some time in the fall, the Supervisor sent down a sizeable Coles airtight wood-burning heating stove which I now moved into the cabin and set it going. Then I moved in my canvas cot and personal trappings and set up housekeeping. It was cold, and we were having an unusual amount of below-zero weather. I went to bed early with a good fire going in the heater. Along in the night it really turned cold, and about daylight I woke up. Coming



Mrs. Fickes and Miss Louise Ellis. May 1949 -
Bear Dance Cabin, built in 1909 - 1910 by
C.P.F., with some help from Rangers Dick Dean,
Ellis Hoke, and Allen Calbick.

Photo by author

out from under the covers, I started to look around, and there was plenty to see. And, of course, dear reader, you will not believe it. I hardly could.

All around the log walls were festoons (I guess that would be the right way to describe it) of real icicles, some 4 to 6 inches thick. The heat thawed the logs and started the water dripping. Then the fire died down or burned out, and when it got cold--well, there you have it. I was inside an ICE CAVE, sure enough!

That's how the Bear Dance cabin got built and how it was initiated. What the water did to that flat-grained larch flooring resulted in a miniature roller-coaster effect that made walking on it somewhat precarious. Oh yes, on January 10, 1910, I was promoted from \$1,000 per annum to \$1,100 per annum. Up until November, all my travel to and from Bear Dance was by boat or on foot. By this time the pasture fence had been completed, and I had managed to build a shelter for hay and grain, so I brought my saddle horse in from pasture and kept him at the station. Getting to and from became more convenient and, also, I had some company.

After the cabin was finished, it developed that the volume of work on the District was insufficient to keep the Ranger busy, and at times I became quite restless for something to put in the time with. My father was in the construction business in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and when I was 21 in 1905, I had put a legacy received from my maternal grandfather into the business. The so-called Copper Panic of 1908 had caught Dad's business over-extended, which meant that contemplated ranch investment money was not available. He had been urging me to come back and help him in his effort to save something from the wreck. Also, there was a young lady in Kalispell who did not contemplate life on a Ranger District as being altogether desirable from her point of view. So, on April 30, I submitted my resignation and moved back to Kalispell where I worked on various jobs until November when I went back to Pittsburgh and spent a year with my father. Thus endeth the second episode.