

Nezperce National Forest - 1919

My transfer from the Gallatin National Forest at Bozeman, Montana, to the Nezperce National Forest at Grangeville, Idaho, was just in time for me to experience, in full, one of the Region's worst fire seasons--in fact, the worst since the holocaust of 1910. And I had seen a lot of that around Kalispell, Montana. One of the first Supervisors of the forest area included in the Nezperce National Forest was George D. Smith, and he was still living in Grangeville when I arrived on the scene. I visited with him on several occasions about early days of Forest administration in that area. After him came George V. Ring, who served as Supervisor from 1908 to 1916 when, at his own request, he was relieved as Supervisor but continued to serve as an assistant to the Forest Supervisor until his retirement in 1931. C. K. McHarg was Supervisor from July 1916 to July 1918, when Samuel Vanstone Fullaway, Jr. took over as Forest Supervisor with Frank J. Jefferson as Assistant Supervisor and William M. Noble as Forest Clerk.

The letter from the Regional Forester informing me of my transfer stated that I was to replace Assistant Supervisor Jefferson who was being promoted to Supervisor of the Selway Forest at Kooskia, Idaho. I arrived in Grangeville late in the evening on the Camas Prairie Railroad passenger train from Lewiston, Idaho and registered at the Imperial Hotel. The next morning I reported to the Forest Supervisor and was introduced to the office staff, consisting of Wm. M. Noble, Margaret Urbahn and Bessie Coyne. Supervisor Fullaway proceeded immediately to inform me that he did not intend to have an Assistant Supervisor but was planning to operate with a staff organization with each man on the staff a specialist for FIRE, SILVICULTURE, IMPROVEMENTS, AND GRAZING; and Fickes was to handle GRAZING--if I could. From what I learned in the next 2 years, grazing surely needed something. The Forest was so overstocked with summer sheep permits that it was pitiful, and most of them were foreigners from southern Idaho and Oregon. The excuse was that war made it necessary. As I recall, other staff men were Russell Cunningham, a very capable person, for FIRE; Tom Crossley for SILVICULTURE; George Ring for IMPROVEMENTS. Cassius Hurst, a Ranger, had been specializing in grazing but was in the throes of leaving the Service for other pursuits. District Rangers were Jim Dyar at Elk City, Tom Crossley at Castle Creek, John W. Bell at Riverview on the Pittsburg District, Wm. Mac Gregg at Adams on the Hump District, Bill Deasy at Riggins. Vern Collins was at Elk City with Dyar.

I found a fairly livable house and moved our furniture in and set up housekeeping for myself until the family arrived in September. Grangeville is one of the oldest towns in northern Idaho, nicely situated at the southern edge of Camas Prairie in the heart of the Nez Perce Indian country, with lots of nice people, especially after you get to know them. We were there for 5 years, and it was hard to leave when it came time to move on. About a week after I arrived,

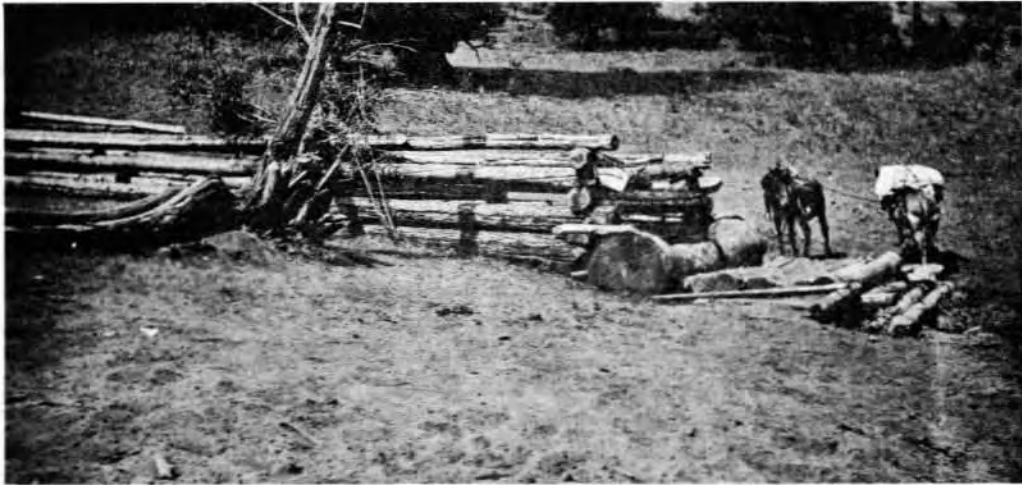
the Supervisor informed me that John Bell, the District Ranger on the Pittsburg District with headquarters at the Riverview Ranger Station on the west side of Salmon River, had a broken leg, and I was to go down there and check out his District work and give him any help I could.

Now, going from Camas Prairie down to Whitebird on the Salmon River was no small chore. Airline distance as the crow flies is only 14 miles, but the highway map calls for 21 miles of travel. That includes rising 1,300 feet and then dropping 3,135 feet over 14 switchbacks. The so-called road just dropped off the mountain and followed the bottom of the gulch until it made it into Whitebird. This would be an experience no tenderfoot would be apt to forget the rest of his life. At that time the proposed Salmon River Highway was just in the talking and surveying stages, and what I am talking about is for dry weather. When it rains on Camas Prairie, going anywhere is downright handicapped by a substance known in that country as Camas Prairie gumbo. When that condition occurs, a loaded wagon with four or six horses can make as much as 75 or 100 yards at the pull. Then the teamster gets down, takes a spade and digs the gumbo out of all four wheels--then maybe he can make another 100 yards, if he is lucky. What it does to an automobile cannot be described in any language I am familiar with.

Anyway, I took the Salmon River Stage, at that time a new half-ton GMC pickup; and it was loaded, but we made it without any serious difficulty, although the seat of my pants did feel a little damp when I got out of my seat. That old road went right down where the highway has 14 switchbacks. The next problem was to get over to the Riverview Ranger Station with my saddle gear and war bag. I ran into a rancher who said he was going right by the station and would be glad to give me a lift.

Rancher Bell was originally from Montana, so we did some pretty good visiting and got acquainted without much trouble. There was Mrs. Bell and two or three children at home, and the house was fairly crowded, so I slept on the long front porch overlooking the Salmon River Canyon, an awesome but pleasing sight. Being late June, it was very warm, not to say hot, even at midnight.

One of the interesting things I observed while on this assignment was the method used by Salmon River stockmen in making a range water trough. A 30-inch, or larger, yellow pine tree would be cut down, and a log 20 feet or more in length would be cut. Then a row of 2-inch auger holes were bored into the log about 2 feet apart, clockwise at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock, the two holes to meet in the middle of the log. After all the holes were bored, kerosene was poured into the holes and set on fire. After a week or 10 days of burning, the fire was put out and the trough rounded out with the axe and adz. Then the completed trough was hauled or dragged to the nearest spring where it was needed. They last forever, and you don't move one of them very far.



Log water trough near Graves Peak L0.



Graves Peak L0 under construction. 1920. Bill Deasy,
Forest Ranger.

Photo by author

I was just getting real acquainted with and interested in the problems and activities of the District when the Supervisor called up and told me to come in to Grangeville--pronto! This was about July 1. When I checked in with the Supervisor, he informed me that there had been several fires started around the Elk City township, and he thought they might be incendiary. One whole township of 36 sections had been eliminated from Forest supervision because of many mining claims and other patented lands. Since I was a complete stranger to the area, it was Fullaway's idea that I ride in there and see what I could find out. So I rented a good saddle horse from Mackey Williams of Mt. Idaho, a rancher and horse dealer, and took off in the guise of a cow man from Montana looking for new grass. It turned out that Fullaway was somewhat naive about the caliber of the residents of the Elk City area. They knew that I was on the way, and what for, before I got to the Forest boundary near Harpster, a Post Office and store on the South Fork of the Clearwater River. But they all went along with the deal until I officially resumed my real identity because I was needed to ramrod a fire crew.

In later years when I became more or less well acquainted with many of the Elk City folks, we made quite a few jokes about the Montana cowpoke detective. The alleged fires were mostly carelessness and on private land in the township where the U.S. Forest Service did not have the responsibility. While still incognito I spent a few hours at the old French Gulch Ranger Station, which was Gardner I. Porter's headquarters when he was a Forest Ranger. I read some records and correspondence which, if available today, would be of prime interest to historians. Alas and alack, at the time we had no sense of the future value of such things. More's the pity. As it turned out, I did not see Grangeville again until the last of August.

It was at Elk City that I met Cunningham, Dyar, Collins, and Fred Thieme for the first time, also a mining engineer remittance man who loved his Scotch and was a most entertaining person. I cannot recall his name. I also recall seeing a young guy leading a couple of pack mules and was told, "That's Clayton Crocker, and he's packing for the Selway."

By the middle of July the woods were full of fire and more starting every day. I was at the Red River Ranger Station when I received word that there was a fire on the head of Meadow Creek, and a crew of 25 men was on the way, and I was to take the crew to the fire and put it under control--try.

I scouted the fire, and it was not doing very much in the open lodge-pole timber. Where the trail crossed the creek there was an open meadow of 10 or 12 acres about 200 yards from the nearest perimeter of the fire, a good place to put a camp. I went back down the trail to meet the crew and hurry them along so as to be ready to hit the fire at daybreak. The crew turned out to be 25 Mexicans, and the foreman was a man from Mt. Idaho, a small community just south of

Grangeville, who could speak some Mexican. I camped them near the creek bank where there was a fairly wide place in the creek and good water. I told the foreman where to hit the fire in the morning at daybreak.

The pack string had unloaded the camp and headed back to the Red River Station. I followed them, as I planned to run an emergency telephone line from the end of the telephone line at the Red River Hot Springs to the camp. The Supervisor insisted that we maintain communication wherever possible.

Right after World War I, the Forest Service received tons of so-called emergency wire, several thread-like strands of well-insulated copper wire, 5 miles to the spool, weight 5 or 6 pounds. The wire was on spools just like ordinary sewing thread. I tied the end of the wire to the telephone line at the Hot Springs, stuck a small stick through the wire spool, got on my horse and started up the trail, hanging the wire on tree limbs and brush along the trail. By 8 o'clock, I had the line strung within a mile of the fire camp, when I ran out of wire, so I connected up the portable telephone, hung it on a tree, called the Red River Ranger Station and started for the fire camp.

In a short distance I ran into a smoking, freshly burned-over area. This was a half mile from the fire camp in fairly open lodgepole with very little brush. I went back to the telephone, unsaddled my horse and staked him in a little open place where he could get a few bites of grass and hot footed it down the trail. I came to the campsite--not a soul in sight and only a few pieces of camp equipment lying around. WHAT THE--?? Then I heard voices.

The campsite was by a bend in the creek with a bank 5 or 6 feet high. The foreman and crew were all sitting in the water with blankets over their heads and no one any the worse than being a little wet, hungry and scared as hell. The foreman told me that about midnight the wind started blowing, and he realized that they were in for trouble. He felt their only safe chance was to get into the creek. So he had the crew throw everything that would burn into the creek under the cut bank and then got all the men in the water. The meadow area did not burn, as the grass was fairly green. As soon as we got them out of the creek and fed, all but two or three quit and headed down the trail. As near as I could find out, the fire had jumped several miles clear over to Green Mountain.

Late that evening I got back to Red River Hot Springs, run by an elderly couple who had homesteaded near the Hot Springs. Right nice folks. In February of 1919 at Bozeman I was down with the flu during the big epidemic and came near "cashing in my chips." I guess I was not as rugged as I thought. I passed out while eating supper, and the folks put me to bed, and it was 36 hours before I came to.

NEZPERCE



Red River Hot Springs - 1919.

U.S.F.S. photo by author



Burnt Knob Cabin - 1920.

U.S.F.S. photo by author

As soon as I could, I got in touch with Elk City (Jim Dyar was the Ranger) only to learn there was another fire somewhere between Anderson Butte and the Meadow Creek divide, and there was a 25-man fire crew on the way for me to put on the south side of the fire, or wherever I could find it. This was a crew of experienced lumberjacks without a foreman, so I made a foreman out of the most likely-looking candidate and headed up the trail to the Meadow Creek divide to locate a campsite for the fire crew. I located a spring about a quarter mile from the Meadow Creek Trail, and it was necessary to cut a trail into the campsite at the spring while the pack string stood and waited. I told the crew, "No supper until we get the camp set up at the spring," and they really "moved the timber." The next day the crew came in about 4 o'clock after working since daylight to put a trail to the edge of the fire. I had tried all day without any success to get someplace where I could get some idea of where the fire was and how to get to it. It looked to me like the alleged fire was too far away for us to get to it in time to do any good.

The next morning most of the crew walked out after some wrangling about travel time, and by afternoon the whole crew was gone. I followed them to Elk City. After some discussion with Fullaway in Grangeville and Cunningham and Dyar in Elk City, about the fire situation, it was decided that Fickes should work his way out to Grangeville, visiting several fire camps enroute. Thieme, who had just had a crew walk out on him in Mallard Creek, would see what could be done about the several fires in the Meadow Creek area. This was the last week in August, as I remember it.

The first fire camp I came to was located on Cougar Ridge at an old homestead where I found oat hay for my saddle horse and a place to sleep in the hay barn. The foreman was a young fellow by the name of Andrus from Dillon, Montana where his father operated the Andrus Hotel. He had worked on the fire that burned out the Rattlesnake drainage north of Missoula, Montana and had been sent with a crew from that fire to Grangeville. He was a good pusher and was doing a good job. He was down to a sleeveless shirt, levis with plenty of ventilation, cut off at the knees (a somewhat prevalent style in 1970), no sox, and a good pair of loggers. No hill was too high, too steep, nor brush too thick--he just plowed through, and his crew tried to follow him. No Wobblies in his crew.

That was the year of the yellow jackets. There were millions of them wherever you went. Men were stung on the lips and face while trying to eat--bite into a slice of bread, and there would be a dozen yellow jackets trying to beat you to it. Pack strings were continually getting into the yellow jacket nests. The first mule in the string would brush a nest, and about the third mule in the string would receive the first wave of bombers. It was a lucky packer who didn't have to reload most of the mules in his string. Of course, if they were empty, it

wasn't so bad. And one thing for sure was you would not lead those mules by that same nest again. A mule can remember more than any elephant ever thought of remembering.

The next fire camp I hit was where I first met Tom Crossley. The camp was on the far side of a small meadow I came to, and as I rode across the meadow, a character with a big hat, white shirt, khaki pants and an old hog leg hanging on his right hip, walked out to meet me. I guess that he had heard through the grapevine that I was coming, as he addressed me by name and introduced himself. This was Tom Crossley. We howdied and went on from there. He had a crew made up mostly of Wobblies, and Tom figured he had to run a bluff on them in order to keep some kind of control on the crew. From there I rode into Grangeville. I had a bath and got clean clothes, read my mail, wrote to my family, and checked into the office.

"How do you feel?" said the Supervisor. "Well, purty good, I think," I answered, somewhat reluctant to be enthusiastic, and gave a little resumé of the past few weeks, including the pass out at Red River. There was some suspicion that I had faked it--why, I never learned for sure. "Well," he said, "there is a fire on the Salmon slope right in the middle of the Slate Creek Stock Association range, and we haven't been able to get a fire crew in there. The cow men are working on it, and I want you to go in there and see what you can do to help in any way you can until we can get some firefighters on the job." So, boots and saddles, and away old Brownie and I went over the Buffalo Hump road, along which occurred much mining history. It lead to Florence where the gold placer mines saved the Union in 1864.

I found the cow camp and made myself known--and also my mission. Their camp was not near the fire, so old man Harness, the boss said, "I'll show you, but you better have a fresh horse. Ben, catch that grey of mine for the Ranger to ride." (Ben Large that was, born and raised a "Salmon River Savage!") Ben roped the grey. He was as good with a catch rope as anyone I ever saw; I changed my saddle to the grey and rode to the fire.

A couple hundred acres, in fairly open country, the fire was burning grass the cows needed for milk for white-faced calves. If the wind came up and the fire made a run, it would get into the darnedest lodge-pole "dead and down jungle" anyone ever saw. Before we could get two 30-man crews on the scene, it did just that.

I suggested that the cow men, a dozen or more, do what they could on the rear and south edges to try to keep it from spreading in that direction. The wind was from the southwest most of the time. Fullaway sent me two 25-30 man crews. One crew was all lumberjacks with a good, experienced foreman. All the crew, except the cook and timekeeper, were Wobblies (IWW). They started talking fire time and how soon they could get travel time back to Spokane where they were hired.

The Forest Service had a rule about work time that must be put in at actual firefighting before the worker could expect to receive pay for time spent in travel back to the place of hire. Either the fire must be controlled before travel time, and transportation would be allowed or he must have worked a minimum number of days--in this case, as I recall, 15 days. The pay was 30 cents per hour and board and transportation to and from the fire, if the fire was controlled or minimum met. The Wobblies used this rule as an excuse for causing us all the trouble possible, and it was a constant source of wrangling in every fire camp. There were some cases where a fire foreman let guys scare him into giving travel time where it was not earned. It could, on occasion, get pretty rough; but there were only a few cases where the foreman or Forest officer fell for it.

The two crews on this fire got in about a day and a half of work when it began to cloud up with light showers, enough to cool the air some and slow up the burning. I hit the Wobbly crew camp about noon, and the whole crew was sitting around camp bullying the little old time-keeper who wasn't having any of it. If they did not work, he would not give them any time. A little guy about 5 feet 6 or 7 inches, 130 pounds, had a full beard, was well trimmed, wore glasses, spoke the Queen's English, and was cocky as a bantam rooster, by the name of Goozee. When I arrived, the foreman jumped me about the travel time and when they could get it. I told them, "When you get a fire-line around this fire, and I consider it fully controlled, we will see about the travel time."

They had built several hundred yards of line and were doing a good job, the fire was dormant, and with good luck and no wind we could hold it. I took the foreman and went out on the fireline to see what they had done. I had three camps on this fire, and I had to cover the work on all three at least twice a day. The crew was working through an old lodgepole burn with down timber, four to six logs deep in places, and reproduction up to 18 to 20 feet high. It was a real job for experienced lumberjacks, which these boys were.

The foreman and I crawled through the jungle for some 500 yards or so when we ran into a rockslide, where there was nothing to burn. Then we went back to the end of the fireline. I asked the foreman about how long it would take the crew to cut through to the rockslide. He was an experienced woods foreman and a pretty good man, and sometimes I thought he was just pretending to be a Wobbly because he had to work with these men--about 12 hours he estimated, which was about my own idea of the job.

I was fairly certain, the way the weather was acting, that it might rain or snow most any time. So I told him, "You put the line through to the rockslide, give me three men to patrol the line as long as necessary, and I will approve your working and travel time to Spokane where they were hired." "All right," he said, "will do." I went

back to the camp and told the timekeeper what the deal was and told him to keep his eyes open. By 3:00 o'clock of the second day the crew had the line through to the rockslide and it rained and snowed for the next 24 hours. This was September 26 in the year 1919.

The other hired crew on this fire was of a radically different type. Out of the 30-odd men, mostly just common laborers, there were nine young men, 18 to 24 years old, from the Bowery in New York City--typical city slum toughs--loud mouthed, dirty, blasphemous, vulgar, just plain nasty. From what various members of the gang said, it seemed that they had shipped aboard a ship sailing around the Horn to Seattle and had made so much trouble aboard that they either jumped ship in Seattle or were kicked off as good riddance. Anyway, here they were, a part of my crew, just as though I didn't have enough troubles with the fire and the Wobbly crew. (Fullaway and I had words about it later on. He sat in his swivel chair all summer long and tried to tell us boys on the fireline what we should do and shouldn't do, etc., never having been on a forest fire of any kind himself.)

These birds knew absolutely zero about the use of an axe, shovel or grub hoe. So we tried to get some, at least a modicum, of grub hoe work out of them. But all they did was bully rag the other members of the crew who were trying to do some work, at least enough to earn their board. Why anyone would hire this trash in the first place was a real mystery. Maybe the Spokane police found that to be the easiest way to get them out of town. This camp was near a couple of homesteads, and two women had been hired as cooks, and they were good at it--the grub was the best. One of them was an old timer around mining, logging, and other construction camps; and she could and did give these toughs some language they couldn't compete with.

I came into camp on the third day, and these bullies had the young timekeeper cornered (a young fellow somewhat physically handicapped but not mentally aware of it) and were trying to bully him into giving them full time and travel time back to Spokane where they were hired. I was on my horse, and I rode up to the timekeeper's tent where I usually slept when there was any sleeping to be done. The leader of the gang finally saw me and turned his diatribe on me. That morning I had strapped on my Luger pistol holster, the gun was in its place and it was somewhat evident. The butt was a convenient place to rest my hand when not otherwise engaged. "Close your trap, you, and start traveling down that road and don't let me hear a sound out of you as long as I am in sight. Now get going," I told them. Part of the gang started walking before I was through talking, and with a few mumbled grumbles, the big guy started after them. I looked around, and the lady cook was standing behind me with a shotgun in her hands. I am sure she knew what to do with it, and how. I followed the gang down the road to where it joined the main Buffalo Hump road where there was lots of travel to check if they tried to start any fires. From what I heard afterwards, the gang gave Fullaway and the Forest Clerk

a bad time, and the sheriff finally put them in jail until they could be escorted out of the Camas Prairie country. Then it rained and snowed on September 26, 1919, the last day of the 1919 fire season on the Nezperce National Forest; and I was reunited with my ever-loving family.

In my humble opinion the Nezperce is in all ways the most interesting Forest in Region 1. It has something of everything that all the other Forests in the Region have and some that are not to be found anywhere else in the Region--topography that extends in elevation from 1,176 feet above sea level at Pittsburg landing, the northwest corner of the Forest on the Snake, to He Devil Mountain at 9,383 feet at the southwest corner. The south boundary is the Salmon River Canyon, "River of No Return." When first created, the eastern boundary was the rugged Bitterroot Range, the boundary line between Idaho and Montana which was established by a surveyor's error in choosing the wrong divide as the Continental Divide. The error was not discovered until the survey reached a point on the divide between the Clark Fork of the Columbia River and the Coeur d'Alene River from which they could see Pend Oreille Lake. The survey stopped at the 116th meridian which became the west boundary of Montana. Had the surveyor made the right turn on the Continental Divide at Lost Trail Pass, the Flathead and Bitterroot valleys and Butte would have been part of Idaho, and some state history might have been considerably altered. Administratively, the north and east boundary of the Nezperce was the Selway-South Fork of the Clearwater divide with the Bitterroot Forest administering the part of the Nezperce east of the Divide. The area north of the Divide was in the old Selway National Forest.

Silviculturally, the Nezperce has all the merchantable timber species found elsewhere in the Region. Its grazing problems have a range not to be found elsewhere in the Region. The Nezperce area produced more placer gold than any similar area anywhere. It is claimed that the placer gold produced at Florence on the Nezperce saved the United States from bankruptcy in 1864. The bark of a Snake River shrub or bush, which produces, when properly distilled, a potent medical laxative, grows on Snake River.

During the years 1920, 1921, and 1922, I covered the Forest with an extensive grazing reconnaissance, spending time in every drainage of the Forest which had at least 10 or 20 acres of forage cover, collecting herbarium specimens of every identifiable plant to be found on the Forest, whether it had animal forage value or not. All this resulted in the 1922 Extensive Grazing Report, printed on what was called atlas-sized paper, illustrated with numerous photographs of grazing areas. Leon Hurtt, Grazing Specialist in the Regional Office of Grazing, complimented the Nezperce Forest on submitting the most comprehensive Forest Grazing Survey report received by the Regional Office of Grazing.

NEZPERCE

Sheep headed east
to summer allot-
ment.

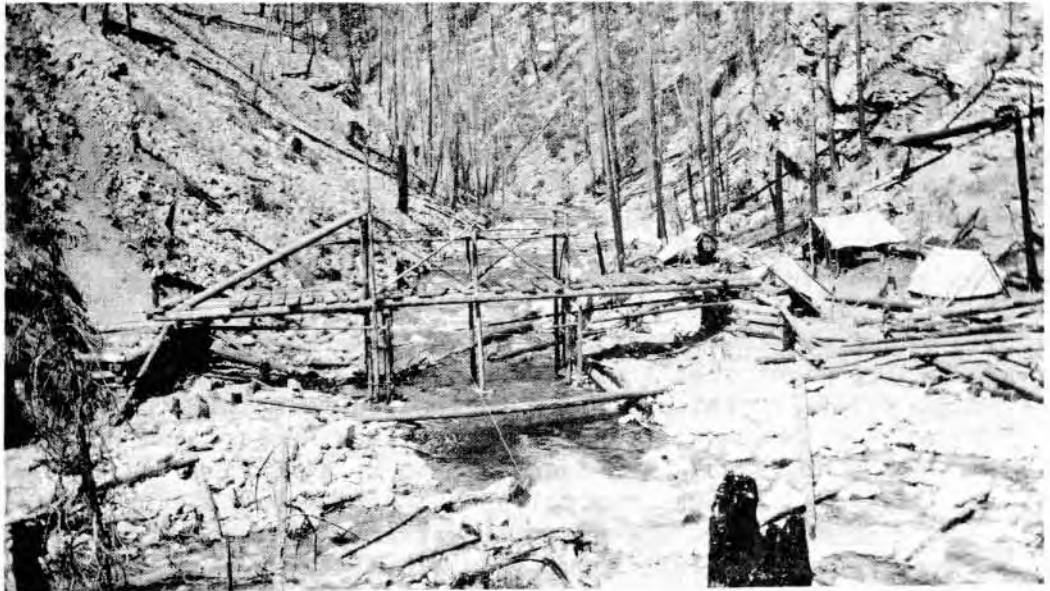
Photo by
sheepherder



Sheep crossing
Johns Creek. 1920.

Nezperce Sheep Co. -
permittee.

Photo by
sheepherder



1920. We built a bridge after the sheep crossed on a log.
A 1919 fire camp was burned out at this spot.

U.S.F.S. photo by author

In 1966 I paid a visit to the Nezperce Forest office and was introduced to all the staff present at the time. When the Forest grazing man heard my name he asked if I had anything to do with the 1923 Grazing Report. When I admitted being guilty of its preparation, he immediately began asking questions about certain phases of the report, particularly with reference to the Snake River side of the Forest. He also volunteered the statement that the grazing programs that I had recommended were still being followed with no significant changes.

It was quite satisfying when I recalled the 90 degree and more slopes, the hundred degree and more temperatures, the rattlesnakes, the untold billions of crickets that rose in waves ahead of your saddle horse, all of which were a handicap to getting the job done. Over in Big Canyon I also remember Jimmie Powell's delicious sourdough bread and the best tasting apricots I ever ate. That Salmon-Snake River country produces some of the finest fruit found anywhere. Then there was the dozen or so 6-8 inch rattlesnakes running from under a flat rock I was standing on. Where in hell was the mom? Then there was the section corner I was looking for in the deep grass when something hit my Jacob staff and almost knocked it out of my hand--a big old yellow rattler about 5 feet long. We got the grass all counted and tallied in spite of the, what you might call, handicaps.

Oh, yes, I almost forget to tell what old Jimmie Powell called Forest Rangers. Jimmie had settled in Big Canyon many years back. Some said he was hiding from the law--it was a good place for that--and he never came out to so-called civilization. The cow outfit that owned the spread saw to it that he received supplies and mail. One cold, windy, rainy day, Bill Deasy, the District Ranger and I stopped in to get some lunch, which we always paid for. There were two or three men from the home ranch also there, and we had quite a visit. Later on, one of them told me about what was said after we left. Seems like Jimmie, who despised anyone connected with any kind of law enforcement, was really commenting on Bill's and my characters in sulphurous language. Someone present commented, "Why, Jimmie, you shouldn't be too hard on those boys. After all, they are officers of the law," or words to that effect. Jimmie said, "Officers, hell--they're nothin' but damned outlaws."

Then there was the dog-striped cat episode at the Hall-Gibbons-Hall ranch--one night that I will long remember. Involved were Glenn A. Smith, Chief of Grazing in the Regional Office; Bill Deasy, District Ranger; Earl McConnell, Assistant District Ranger; and myself. In the spring of 1923, Glenn came down to do some range inspection. Bill Deasy had a young Australian shepherd pup, about the most ambitious, investigative character I ever saw. He roamed many yards on both sides of the trail as we rode along, investigating every bush, tree or rock he came to. We--Glenn, Bill and I, (Earl was already there) rode into the Hall-Gibbons-Hall ranch on Kirkwood Creek to spend the night. The bunkhouse where we slept was a large square

building with a door in the middle of one wall, and there was a double bed in each corner of the room. Glenn and I each had a bed on each side of the door. Bill was in the bed at the left rear, and Earl was in the bed at the right rear. The pup was under Bill's bed. Earl covered his head with the bed tarp while the three of us lay there talking over what we had observed during the ride. All at once the pup gave a short bark, and out he went through the screen door where there was a convenient hole. We heard him go under the rear of the bunkhouse. There was a brief scuffle and a wild howl from the pup, and in he came through the hole in the screen and with him that well-known and unwelcome odor with a skunk label. What with Bill's efforts to get the pup from under the bed and outside and our laughter and encouraging remarks, there was quite a bit of racket going on. Awakened by the racket, Earl popped his head out from under the tarp, "What the hell's--phewie--?" It took us some time to get settled down and somewhat inured to the distinctive aroma.

Then there was the swinging cable bridge, suspension that is, across the Salmon at Riggins. It was quite an experience the first time one rode a horse across it. John Taylor came down in 1920 from the Regional Office to inspect some land claims. Some of his white hairs are the result of his initiation, and he never forgot to remind me of the harrowing experience I led him into. Then there was the time Bill and I were riding down the trail along Rapid River when a rattler fell off the cliffs just ahead of Bill's horse. A step further along, and the snake would have been wrapped around the horse's or Bill's neck.

One of the most interesting construction jobs I ever had anything to do with was in the winter of 1921 and 1922 when we built the trail around Suicide Point on Snake River to eliminate a piece of narrow trail on a steep and dangerous slope. Very few folks, even Snake River old timers, would ride a horse over this trail and especially when it was wet. After World War I there was a large surplus of TNT explosive, and the Forest Service could get any quantity it desired for just paying the freight. At that time the Forest was working a large number of trail construction and maintenance crews, and it seemed to be good business to give the trail foremen some winter work. This job would be about 75 percent heavy rock work, and for that reason, experienced rock men were needed. On account of the extremely high temperatures during the summer months, it was desirable to do the work during the winter months. The camp was to be located at Big Bar just above Suicide. By the way, the point was not named until after the trail was completed. At one point there was a half tunnel section that juts out over the river, and the rider could look straight down into the water many feet below. Although the trail was short of being a mile long it took the three of us, Deasy, the foreman, and myself, a long week to figure out the best location.

At that time there was a mail boat up the river from Lewiston once a week, and all the supplies for the camp were shipped from Lewiston by

boat to Big Bar. So, we ordered a couple tons of TNT, selected a crew of ten men, set up camp about the middle of November and went to work. The point was named "Suicide" by Glenn Smith the day after the pup-skunk episode when we rode down the river to Pittsburg Landing.

This was where I learned about a fish called sturgeon. I had heard stories about these fish but did not take much stock in what I heard. In January I visited the camp in order to see how they were doing, etc. At breakfast the first morning I was in camp there was some talk about the sturgeon set line--and had anybody thought to look at it lately. They knew darned well what was on it; but anyway, after breakfast I fell for their bait. Since I had never seen a set line for a sturgeon I went down on the sand bar where the end of the line was tied to some willows. I started to haul it in, and after some 30 feet or so I got some response. Then after another 10 feet or so the thing on the other end decided that was as far as it was going. To shorten the story, it took five men to haul in that sturgeon which was over 9 feet long. It fed the crew for a couple weeks--delicious eating too.

Then there was another first for the Region and the Nezperce. R. B. Adams of the Regional Office was in charge of communication facilities for the Region, and he was more or less responsible for the construction and maintenance of our grounded telephone lines and the development of the split tree insulators. He was good at it but hard to get along with. We were all dummies when it came to electric telephone lines. Also, Adams had been experimenting with wireless communication along with some others here and there. In 1921 it was decided to try out communication between two Forest stations, and the Nezperce was selected as the site of one of the stations. The other was to be on the Payette in Region 4. Square Mountain on Hump Ranger District was to be the site of one of the wireless stations, and Adams came down to install and operate the Region 1 station.

I do not remember just where the Payette station was located, but the airline distance between the stations was around 30 miles. We were building a smokechaser cabin at Moores which is close to Square Mountain, so the radio crew was established in the same camp. It was necessary to set up two poles 80 feet long and 180 feet apart. I personally stayed on the job until Adams had established communication with the Payette station. I also talked over the air, which was a first for me, as far as wireless communication was concerned. The two stations operated for about 6 or 8 weeks.

The winter of 1920-21, Supervisor Fullaway was transferred to the District Office, and Adrian C. Adams was transferred from the Lewis and Clark at Great Falls, Montana to be Supervisor of the Nezperce. Fire Assistant Cunningham was also transferred to the District Office. During the summer of 1921, A. J. Devan came to the Nezperce to be



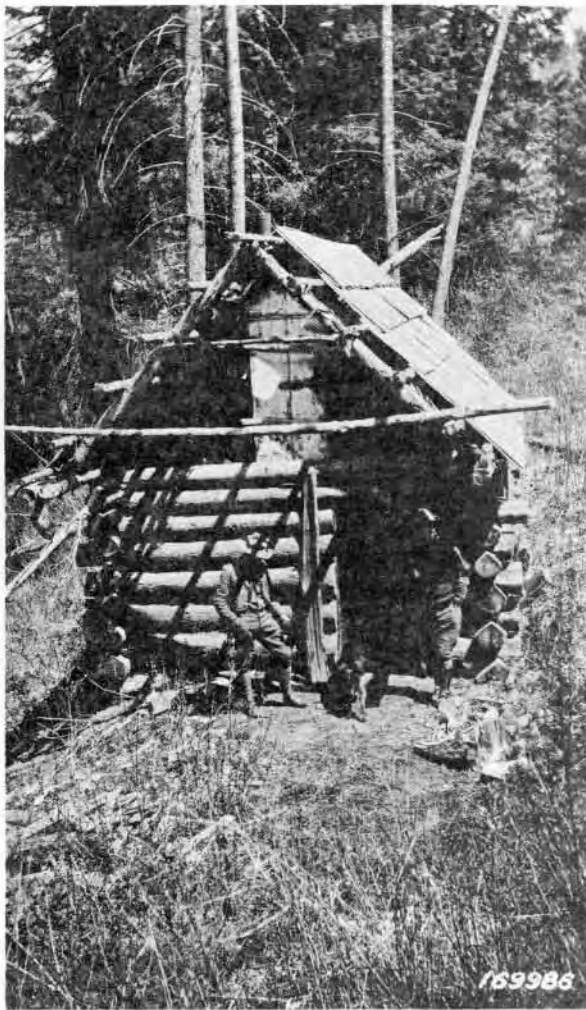
June 11 claim near Berg Cr. on Salmon River.
John B. Taylor and Ranger Bill Deasy. About 1920.

U.S.F.S. photo by author



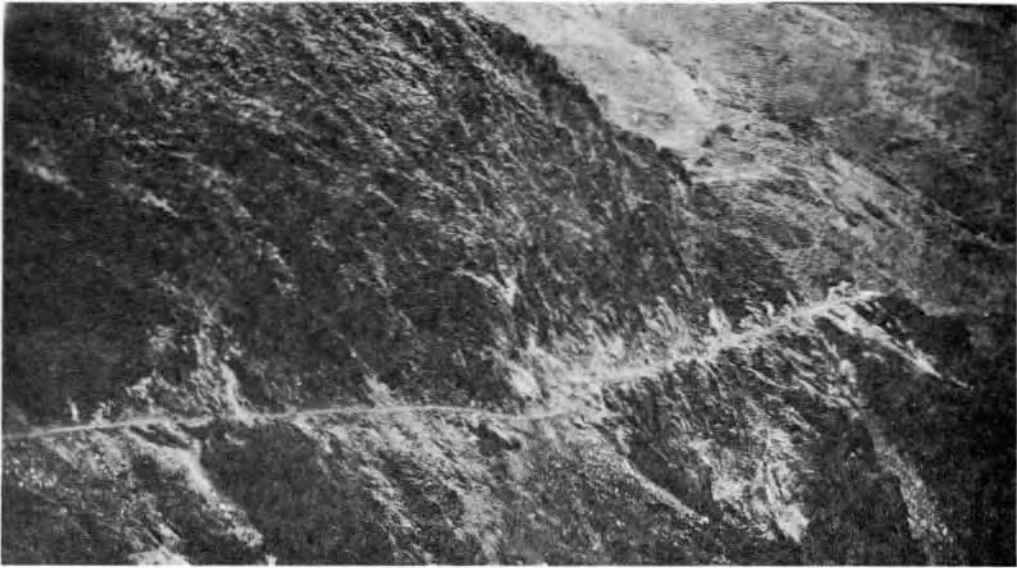
John Taylor inspects home-
steaders' water supply.

U.S.F.S. photo by author



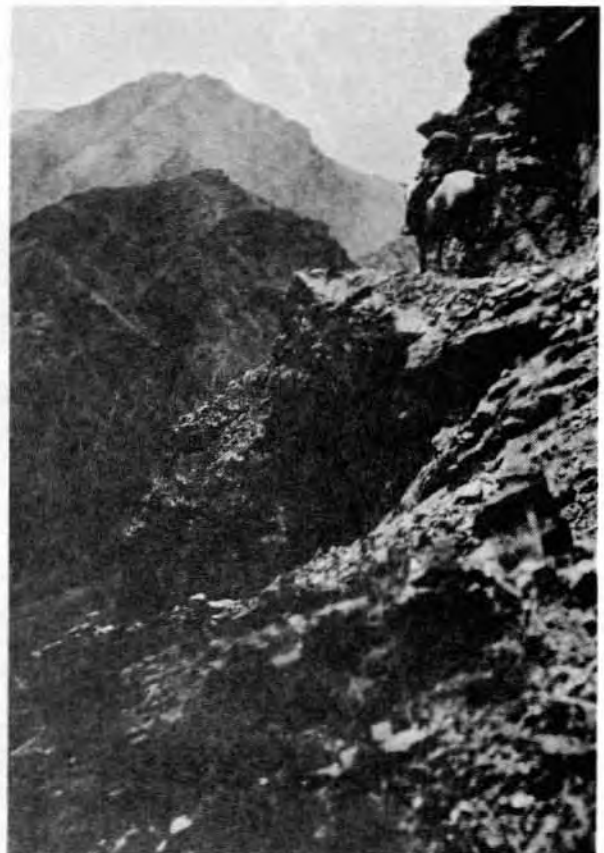
John Taylor and Bill Deasy
at June 11 Claim Residence.

U.S.F.S photo by author



South approach to Suicide Point - Snake River.

U.S.F.S. photo by author



Suicide Point on Snake River. Ranger Bill Deasy on grey horse.

U.S.F.S. photos by author

Fire Assistant. He was on the Forest for over a month before he reported in to the Supervisor's Office. Devan proved to be a disturbing influence in what had been a fairly harmonious operation. At least two District Rangers had an affinity for boot-legged liquor and were not getting the job done. Fullaway knew about their failings but ignored it. When Adams came it was up to me to try to keep things going until he could familiarize himself with our operation. The Forest was doing a considerable amount of improvement work of all kinds--roads, trails, telephone lines and lookout structures. The new Supervisor seemed satisfied to let the Assistant Supervisor ramrod the job. The summer of 1923 it was decided to run an emergency telephone line from Heavens Gate Lookout to the McGaffee Cow Camp in the saddle at the head of Old Timer Creek. Early in July, Bill Deasy and I took several rolls of emergency wire and a telephone up to the Cow Camp. The McGaffees were in residence; and we boarded with them and proceeded to string the wire. We finished at the Cow Camp late one afternoon, and I rode back to Heavens Gate to complete the connection with the line from the Seven Devils Camp.

It was late when I finished so I put the spurs to my saddle horse and was heading down the trail at a slow lope toward supper through a stand of dead lodgepole pine. In the middle of a stride a steer jumped out of the brush, the horse swerved in his stride enough that my left knee contacted a dead tree with considerable force. I thought it was busted--period. I got down off the horse, found I could stand on it, got back in the saddle and rode on into camp. By that time the knee had swollen so they had to cut the pants leg off in order to get at the swollen knee. Mrs. McGaffee was a trained nurse and knew what was best to do for it. We applied hot packs and then cold packs to it all night in an effort to reduce the swelling and ease the pain. I lay and suffered all the next day and night, and then I decided I had better get out to a doctor. The next morning, Bill saddled my horse, helped me get on, and away I went. There was one gate to manipulate, but Fred told me to leave it open if I had to. Bill stayed on the job to finish the telephone installation. It was a long 18 miles of side hill and some steep grades to Riggins, but I made it in due season and was put to bed in the Riggins Hotel with some more hot packs. I caught the stage to Grangeville the next morning and was on crutches until late fall.

I spent the rest of the field season in the office while the new Supervisor covered most of the inspection and supervision work I was to have done. To make a long story short, a personnel situation developed, and the District Forester sent Dwight Beatty down to investigate the complaints that had been instigated by Devan. The result was that Adams was transferred to the Flathead as Administrative Assistant. Fickes was reprimanded, afterwards withdrawn, for presuming to get the job done and was transferred to the Madison Forest at Sheridan, Montana in March 1924. The fire assistant left town between two suns when it developed that an automobile was being purchased personally with Government mileage. Leon C. Hurtt became Supervisor of the Nezperce.



C.P.F. 1920-22

Typical Snake River Range. Granite Creek.

These McGaffee White Faces weighed 1180 at 2 years.

U.S.F.S. photos by author



Snake River sheep range.
Hall-Gibbons-Hall Sheep
on Kirkwood Creek, 1920.