



# National Museum of Forest Service History Newsletter

Volume 17, Number 3

August 2005

## “Columbia National Burn”

### A History of Fires and Firefighting on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest

*By Cheryl Mack, Archaeologist, Mt. Adams Ranger District, Trout Lake Washington, Gifford Pinchot National Forest.*

Today the Gifford Pinchot National Forest is often viewed as one of the west-side’s “asbestos forests”. But 100 years ago, it was viewed very differently.

Three rangers who in 1902 made up the workforce of the Mount Rainier Forest Reserve\* knew that firefighting on this forest was a deadly business. In that year, the great Yacolt Fire of the Wind and Lewis Rivers burned over a vast area of the Forest Reserve in Washington State. In the words of Ranger John Schmitz, fires “swept through the timber driven by a strong east wind, and nothing could have stopped it after it got started.” And the rangers, whose job included putting out all fires, didn’t even try. Thirty-eight people died in the Yacolt Fire. Hundreds were made homeless, and over 130,000 acres of heavily timbered lands were burned.

By 1910, the staff of the Columbia National Forest had grown to about a dozen men, and firefighting was one of their primary duties. But even though rangers were expected to patrol vast acreages every day, climbing up to high peaks to scan for fires, what they did after they found a fire was still a problem. Telephones were the primary form of long-distance communication. But telephone lines through the forest were few and far between.

H. O. Stabler, Columbia National Forest Supervisor from 1908 to 1913, highlights this problem in his annual fire report for 1910: “I am sure that we all appreciate now the desirability of having a complete telephone system throughout the Forests. The history of the discovery of one fire on the Columbia during the past season is interesting as it affects the telephone question. A fire occurred at the north end of Spirit Lake...at noon of

August 16. This fire was seen early in the afternoon of August 16 by three Guards, all of whom reported the fire in the following manner:

Guard Skaar, located approximately 25 miles from the fire, rode 23 miles in to Guler in order that he might report the fire to the Portland office; Guard Wetherall, located approximately 30 miles from the fire, rode fifteen miles to the Hemlock Ranger Station to report the fire to the District Ranger; Guard Lewis, located approximately 26 miles due south of the fire, rode seven miles to the Government Soda Springs in order that he might report the fire by telephone to the District Ranger.”

And then there was the danger of fighting fire in areas that had been previously burned. Stabler described how “Fires in these old burns are a most difficult proposition because to head a fire it would be necessary to cut a fire [line] from 100 to 400 yards in width, and such a course is a physical impossibility where the snags are as numerous as they are...” In fact, so much of the Columbia National Forest had been recently burned that it prompted H. O. Stabler to state in his annual fire report for 1910 that “The term ‘Columbia National Burn,’ is, I regret to say, somewhat applicable...”

Over the next two decades, fires continued to burn repeatedly over the Forest. Several of these were large fires, such as the 60,000-acre Cispus fire in 1918. The firefighting crew in-

### Volunteers Needed—Reunion 2005

We need help in staffing the Museum information booth at Reunion 2005 in Portland, Oregon, September 5—9, 2005. We need members to talk to Reunion attendees about the museum and to sell museum merchandise. Please contact Dave Stack at the museum (406 541-6374) prior to September 2nd or at the museum booth in Portland.



Dole Fire Planting Camp (circa 1936). Typical View of snags following a the 1929 Dole Fire on the Columbia National Forest



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The *Newsletter* is published quarterly for the members and supporters of the National Museum of Forest Service History, a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving the history of the USDA Forest Service.

**Membership Categories**

Individual	\$30
Family	\$45
Contributing	\$150
Sustaining	\$300
Corporate	\$500
Lifetime	\$1,000

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## From The President

This has been a busy time for the museum Board of Directors as we finalize plans to kick off the capital campaign in Portland Oregon at the Forest Service Retirees Reunion 2005. I hope you are planning to attend.

The Museums annual meeting will be held September 6th at 8:00 p.m in the Grand Ballroom of the Portland Red Lion Hotel on the River, . Chief Dale Bosworth has accepted an invitation to speak at our meeting and provide his thoughts on this 100 year celebrations of the Forest Service and the important work facing the National Museum of Forest Service History.

Our accomplishments this year are numerous. We have:

- Assisted the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service to publishing the 193 page “Camp Cooking, 100 Years” and we’ve sold more than 3,600 books to date to support museum programs.
- Increased public and agency awareness of the museum through newspaper coverage of the “Camp Cooking, 100 Years” cookbook and information packets sent to all Forest Service Supervisors, Research Stations, S&PF Areas, and Regional offices.
- Revised the museum site plan and hired an engineering design firm to design roads, parking and sewer and water services to support the planned museum building. The firm will also obtain the necessary building permits so these projects can be contracted later this fall. The total contract cost is estimated to be around \$49,000.
- R. Max Peterson, Chief Emeritus USDA Forest Service, and Robert Model, President of the Boone and Crocket Club were named Capital Campaign Co-Chairmen. The museum is prepared to announce the formal beginning of the museum’s national capital campaign during the reunion in Portland.
- Chief Dale Bosworth approved a \$500,000 grant to the museum in May 2005.
- Prepared and printed a new membership brochure and initiated a one-year complimentary membership to the museum to recent Forest Service retirees.
- Started working with the Forest Service in planning a repository building in Missoula for storage and care of historic artifacts.
- Proposed the development of a computer program for use by museum and Forest Service employees throughout the agency to properly identify, inventory, repair and display historical artifacts.

Dave Stack has been a driving force planning and coordinating the museum’s agenda that led to these accomplishments this year. I thank him for his commitment and leadership.

Best Wishes,  
Gray Reynolds

## From The Vice President

Preserving the history of the Forest Service and forest conservation is needed by the public and future Forest Service employees. Perhaps you have read articles, like I have, where writers portray a false history of conservation. This is what one person said in an August 2005 letter to the editor column of the *Missoula Independent*— “For 100 years, the Forest Service priority has been the same: subsidized commodity production, not conservation.” My question – do we want this fellow to write the history? .

The National Museum of Forest Service History goal is to bring people together to assist the Forest Service in preserving its history. To accomplish this we need a strong membership base to support a professional museum organization. A \$200,000 annual budget is needed to support a lean professional organization of an executive director, curator, and financial advisor. Some funds would support other groups’ efforts across the country. Our current budget is \$75,000.

We are making very good progress toward our goals, but we need more members. So ask your friends to become members and supporters for saving forest conservation history.

Dave Stack

cluded Army recruits from Fort Lewis. Ranger John Kirkpatrick described this fire in a diary entry: "It is 2 P.M. when I strike the McCoy Creek trail. I eat my lunch here and watch the progress of the fire for more than two hours. It is a fearful sight as it leaps from tree to tree and spreads out in a solid wall of fire 20' to 40' high along the side of the Mtn. Causes one to realize more and more the insignificance of the very best human efforts that can be put forth when pitted against the irresistible forces of the natural elements. Man and the best that is in him is of small consequence. . . ."

Many of these fires were reburns within the 1902 Yacolt Burn, including the Sunset Fire in 1919 (5,000 acres), the Clark County Timber Company fire in 1922 (15,000 acres), the Rock Creek Fire in 1927 (46,000 acres), and finally the Dole fire in 1929 (60,000 acres). Firefighting tactics had changed in many ways by 1929, but the Dole fire still proved to be a deadly one.

In 1929 a firefighting crew on the Columbia National Forest might consist of the District Ranger and whatever men he could hire off the streets (or the bars) of Portland, assisted by the remaining permanent workforce of the Forest (which might mean another six men). In September of 1929, Spirit Lake District Ranger Al Wang had hired twenty men from the Portland area to help fight a small fire within the old Yacolt Burn, in the East Fork Lewis River drainage. They set up base camp at a Forest Service Guard Station called Copper City. Wang was met there by Jim Huffman, the Ranger of the adjoining Hemlock District, and a handful of other Forest Service men.

Wang's description of their ordeal highlights the problems firefighters faced in 1929, at a time when they still relied on miles of #9 wire strung through the forest for communication with distant lookouts. Wang described how, on September 15, 1929, their crew was sent out to search for spot fires near Silver Star Mountain, but "the atmosphere was extremely smoky and it was not possible to get any definite reports of what was going on." The next day a nearby lookout on Gumboot Mountain was finally able to see the fire, and the crew began to head in that direction. But as they approached the fire, the humidity dropped and the east winds began blowing at 50-60 mph. Because the smoke was coming down in dense clouds, they had no idea where the main fire was nor how fast it was traveling. They recognized the danger, and sought shelter in the only place they could think of was a mineshaft along Copper Creek.

Wang realized they would be burned over, and they attempted to pack food supplies and equipment the quarter mile from their camp to the mineshaft. The smoke and heat made it difficult to even breathe. At 5:30 that evening, Jim Huffman, Al Wang and Bob Lambert made the last trip from the mineshaft back to camp for their bedrolls, estimating that the fire was about a mile away.

Al Wang described this last trip: "By the time we got to the camp we noted that spot fires were starting in our

vicinity and were spreading very rapidly. We got our beds and started the return trip. This was a race with the fire that was starting spontaneously all around us and seemingly closing in from every direction. The last 100 yards or so was a race for life and we made the tunnel a half minute before the full force of the fire swept over it."

The men hung blankets at the mouth of the mineshaft, and took turns throwing water over the blankets to keep them from burning. They spent 5 1/2 hours in the cold wet mineshaft, while the worst of the fire burned over them. They emerged at 11:30 that night, but could not travel because of the danger from falling snags. The next day, Wang noted: "The smoke was almost impenetrable and the day would have been totally dark, except that it was lighted sufficiently by blazing snags to enable us to get around without lights."

The crew had to pack out under very smoky conditions, with blowing ash making breathing even more difficult. Huffman was so weakened at this point that it took him nine hours to hike the seven miles to Yacolt, the nearest road. District Ranger Jim Huffman died within a month, probably from pneumonia brought on by their ordeal.

The last of the "big fires" on the Columbia was the Willard Fire of 1939, and the forest called on Civilian Conservation Corps crews to assist with firefighting. Almost seventy years later, there are few who would remember the "Columbia National Burn".

*\*After the Forest Reserves were transferred to the Department of Agriculture, the initial plan was to call the former Mount Rainier Forest Reserve the St. Helens National Forest. For a year or two it was Rainier National Forest, but by 1908 they decided on Columbia National Forest. In 1949, it was renamed Gifford Pinchot National Forest, to honor the first Forest Service chief.*



Mount St. Helens, Columbia National Forest  
Early 1920's — Typical D-6 Lookout Design)

# Museum Progress Report

## Care of Historic Items:

We continued to develop a repository in Missoula to augment other Forest Service repositories across the country to care for Forest Service artifacts. Curator Beth Humble will be employed for ten months in 2005. To date Humble and volunteers have cataloged 7,148 items using Past Perfect Museum software. We have cataloged 9,245 items or about 50% of the collection. The Harvey Mack Collection, assembled by the Cleveland National Forest in California was transferred to Missoula in September 2004.

## Camp Cooking, 100 years Cookbook:

We are partners with the Intermountain Region (R-4) in publishing, marketing, and distributing the Intermountain Region's Heritage Cookbook, which contains historical outdoor cooking recipes; historical stories and photos. The Museum purchased 3,960 books and have sold more than 3,600 books since July 2004. We pay \$5.00 and retail the book for \$10.00 per book. In addition the museum receive a royalty of \$0.50 for all books sold by the publisher. Proceeds from book sales support Museum programs.

## Assistance Provided to Other Groups:

Working with and providing assistance to other forest history groups nation-wide is an important museum program. The listing below gives you a flavor of the work we are doing. The number of contacts continue to increase.

**Big Timber District, Gallatin National Forest, Montana** — Technical assistance to establish an accession system and to search museum records for information on the Boulder CCC Camp.

**High Desert Museum, Bend Oregon** — Loaned a book on the history of radios to assist research.

**Red Butte Aerodrome Preservation Project, Arizona**— Provided information on Forest Service uniforms circa 1928 to group working to interpret the history of the aerodrome located within the Kaibab National Forest, Tusayan District.

**Stanislaus National Forest, California** — provided information on Forest Service uniforms.

**National Forest Foundation** — loaned historic photograph for Foundation publication.

**Cordova District, Chugach National Forest, Alaska**— Display of Forest Service artifacts for District office.

**Central School Museum, Kalispell, Montana** — Long-term loan of historic artifacts.

**Sanders County Historical Society, Thompson Falls, Montana**— Short-term loan of historic CCC artifacts.

**Forest Service Information Project** — The Museum proposed to the Forest Service a project to develop an Internet based system to exchange information between Forest Service units and cooperators and public. A two-year project was approved April 2005.

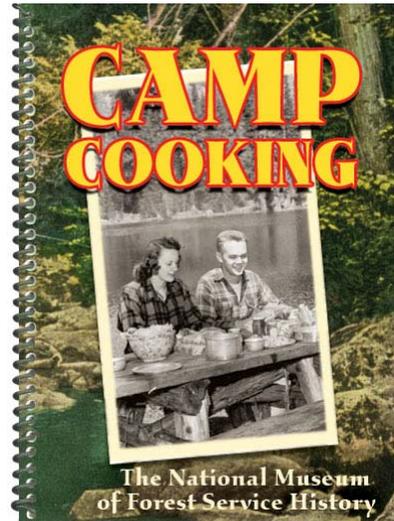
**Beartooth Highway (MT) Display Committee** — Museum member Dale Petersen and two other volunteers are researching the history of the highway. A Museum and/or traveling exhibit concept will be developed.

**Assisting the Southwestern Region (R-3):** Museum Board Member Jane Westenberger met in July with Carl Holguin, Regional Director of Public Affairs, to discuss how the Museum can assist the Region in re-vitalizing history activities. The Regional Office of the Southwest Region does not have any personnel formally assigned to history activities, however several people have been very interested, particularly in the collection of documents and memorabilia that has been in existence in the Region for many years.

A collection of historic objects were originally located at the Continental Divide Training Center, but was



The Harvey Mack Collection Arrives in Missoula, September 2004



moved to the Prescott Forest Supervisor's office in Prescott Arizona when the Center closed. A few years ago it was transferred to the Regional Director of Public Affairs office in Albuquerque where it has been stored. The informal history “regional team” needs a common database to catalog historic items and a museum handbook to guide activities. A California unit may have developed a history program. Jane Westenberger will research. The Museum will continue its efforts to support Region 3.

**Membership:**

A new three-fold, membership brochure in color is now available. The brochure describes the importance of preserving Forest Service history and museum programs.. The theme of the brochure is “Joining Together to Remember and Preserve Our History”. The Board approved a one-year complimentary membership for new Forest Service retirees. There are a total of 649 members as of August 5, 2005.

**Forest Service History Memorial :**

This program honors living and deceased persons and groups who have contributed to the mission of the Forest Service. History comes alive through the experiences of people. There are now 182 persons recognized. A biographical book is available for viewing and names are listed on the Museum web page.

**Grants:**

Completed the \$45,000 Forest Service grant, which supported collection cataloging, museum information literature and the summer visitors program. We received a Max and Betty Swanson Foundation Grant of \$825 to support the Char Miller lecture.

**Capital Campaign:**

The capital campaign will be full gear following the Reunion 2005 this September. Max Peterson, Chief Emeritus, USDA Forest Service, and Robert Model, President of the Boone and Crockett Club, will lead the campaign. The \$500,000 to the museum approved by Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth will be a huge incentive for all prospective donors. We printed 250 campaign folders and 10,000 campaign information cards. The folder includes a DVD with Max Peterson and Gray Reynolds introducing the campaign.

**Museum Site Design:**

On May 18, 2005 we signed a \$49,000 contract with DJ&A Consulting Engineers of Missoula for infrastructure design and permitting. The design is based on the revised site plan completed by Landscape Architect Bo Nielsen. DJ&A will design the sewer and water systems, entrance road and parking areas to serve the planned museum and national headquarters building. The museum will connect with the city sewer and water system. The infrastructure needed to serve the museum site is: water - 1,660 ft. of 8 inch pipe; sewer - 1,214 ft. of 4 inch force main, 400 ft. of 8 inch gravity pipe and a pump lift station. The road and parking blacktop surfacing area is 28, 986 sq. ft.

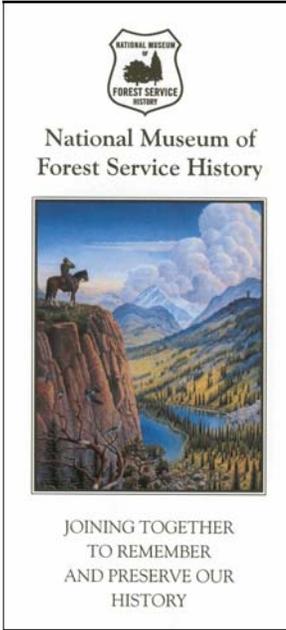
**Bungalow Cabin:**

Jack Fisher is leading volunteers this summer to add a back porch to the museum site cabin. The cabin was originally constructed with a back porch.

**Financial Information — January– July 2005**

**Total Income \$77,143.** Primary income categories and amounts: Capital Campaign \$20,508; Memorials \$1,570; Unrestricted Donations \$1,388; Grants \$24,287; Dues \$10,470; Cookbook \$11,043 and Cooperative Groups \$5,560.

**Total Expenses \$64,549.** Primary expense categories and amounts: Employee Salary and Overhead \$17,022; Program Supplies \$2,150; Capital Campaign \$16,397; Infrastructure Design \$10,839; Membership \$2,169; Newsletter \$1,564; Office Operations \$2,290; cookbook \$6,076; Utilities \$2,289 and Cooperative Groups \$1,672.



**Bungalow Cabin Back Porch Construction**

*Welcome*  
*New Members*

*361 to 8/05/05*

Darrell W Anderson  
Susan Anderson  
Vic Applegate  
Robert Bulchis  
DJ&A Consulting Engineers  
Donald G Campbell  
William O Deshler  
Carlos L Elwood  
Lester Fluckiger  
Otis W Foiles  
Rita Gjefle  
Skip Hegman  
Patricia S House  
Jon H. Jourdonnais  
Betty A Kafentzis  
James A Langdon  
Tim Light  
Dan McEvans  
Larry Mellstrom  
Robert G Nesbitt  
W. R. Nieting  
David & Joy Rittersbacher  
Mark R Smith  
Dave Turner

**Monetary Donations**

*6/1 to 8/5/05*

Christine Bliven  
Bruce Brown  
John Drake  
John Emerson  
Fred Haeussler  
Bonnie Jackson  
Thomas Johnson  
Judy Kiely  
John Morrison, Jr.  
Donald W Nelson, Jr.  
Paula Nelson  
Chris Risbrudt  
Andrew & Barbara Schmidt  
Martha L. Seeley  
Archer W. Wirth  
George Wynn

**New Forest Service History  
Memorials**

**In Honor of Fred W. Haeussler** by Fred W.  
Haeussler

**Memorials**

The National Museum of Forest Service History offers Forest Service History Memorials for those wishing to honor or memorialize people who worked for or with the Forest Service, living or deceased. For more information contact the Museum.

**Capital Campaign Donations**

*3/8 to 8/5/05*

Steven Anderson  
Roger R Bay  
Joan Biddison  
R T Bingham  
Perry Brown  
Gary Brown  
Charles W. Burk  
John Drake  
Bob S. Gibson  
Donna M. Hanson  
Richard Hauff  
Hank Hays  
Allen Hearst Jr.  
Mary Jennings  
Beryl Johnston  
George Lafferty  
Douglas R Leisz  
Robert W. Merz  
Michael Milodragovich  
Bud Moore  
Wallace R Otterson  
Phil Perry  
John V. Puckett  
Gray F Reynolds  
John Sandor  
David W Scott  
Lynn Sprague  
David Stack  
W. Jane Westenberger  
Forest Service Research Executive Team – Ann  
Bartuska & others

## Preserving Forest Histories — Bungalow Group Shows How

Earl and Ann Reinsel, Tom Schenarts, Jim Shadle, Dennis Elliot and others have prepared a first draft history of the Clearwater National Forest, Bungalow Ranger Station 1913-1971. The Ranger Station was located on Orogrande Creek and the North Fork of the Clearwater River, about 15 miles from Pierce Idaho, before it was moved to Missoula. This history project began at the end of 2003 when members of the National Museum of Forest Service History asked for a brief history of the Bungalow District for visitors to review as they toured the Bungalow ranger's family residence at the Museum site west of Missoula, Montana. The information presently gathered and compiled represents but a small portion of what could be considered a complete history. But, it is a start. We ask that people who worked, lived or have knowledge of the Bungalow district to add their memories and experiences. Please send your information directly to the Museum. New information can be added periodically.

Members are encouraged to start similar history projects nationwide to document history of Forest and Research units. Many districts consolidated during the 1960s are good candidates for these history projects. Retirees who worked on these units 30 years ago are still around. All it take is just one person to pull a small group together. All we asked is for you to share the results with the museum.

### THE FOREST RANGERS

The seasons over and they come down  
From the ranger stations to the nearest town  
Wild and wooly and tired and lame  
From playing the "next to natures" game.  
These are the men that the nation must pay  
For "doing nothing" the town folks say.  
But the facts are-different, I'm here to tell  
That some of their traits run right through---well,  
Woods and mountains and desert and brush.  
They are always going and always rush.  
They camp at some mountain meadow at night  
And dine on a can of "Rangers Delight"\*  
Get Up in the morning when the robins sing  
and break their fast at a nearby spring.  
And then they start for another day  
With corners to hunt and land to survey.  
That trouble settled they start for more,  
They're never done till the seasons o'er  
They build cabins and fences and telephone lines,  
head out the homesteaders and keep out the mines.  
There's a telephone call, there's a fire to figh;  
The rangers are there both day and night.  
Oh, the rangers' life is full of joys,  
And they're all good, carefree boys,  
And in wealth they are sure to roll and reek,  
For a ranger can live on one meal a week.

\* *Rangers Delight* are canned tomatoes

The above masterpiece of amateur poetry was found in a ranger cabin on the Eldorado National Forest, Clififornia. (Probably dates from the 1920s) Edwin F. Smith Collection 2004.14.4

### BUY DRAWING TICKETS TO SUPPORT THE MUSEUM

During REUNION 2005 next month in Portland Oregon the Museum will sponsor a drawing for Hokey, Smokey's helper. Hokey was carved and donated by Al Groncki of Yreka, CA. Hokey is 25 inches tall. Al carved Hokey from a redwood tree salvaged from the Jackson State Forest, Fort Bragg, CA.



There are three ways to obtain a HOKEY Ticket.

1. Purchase a ticket for \$5
2. Donate \$25 or more to the building fund
3. Become a paid museum member.

Drawing tickets must be obtained by 5 PM on September 8th. The drawing will be held at the REUNION Send-Off Breakfast, September 9th.



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**Note: Your mailing label shows the date your membership expires. Please mail dues payment 1 month prior to the date listed above. This space is blank for complementary issues.**



Glenn, Lee & Buck at the Big Creek Blister Rust Camp, 1928. Leland L. White Collection 2005.26.20

Can anyone identify the Camp's location?

## Coming Events

### Reunion 2005

Sept. 4-9, 2005, Red  
Lion Hotel on the River,  
Portland, Oregon.

### Museum Annual Meeting

Tuesday, September 6,  
2005, Red Lion Hotel on  
the River, Portland, Ore-  
gon, at 8 PM in conjunc-  
tion with the Reunion  
2005.