

Forest Service Reminiscence of Charles Congleton

Written December 8, 1960

I was born, one of 12 children, on a farm at Slade, Kentucky on October 26, 1884, (Apparently there was a one day discrepancy in the birth date first given the Forest Service, since it shows October 27.) and lived on this farm until 1904 when I set out to go west, having in mind to join my brother near Greenland, Colorado where he was telegraph operator for the railroad. However, after stopping off near Denver and working on a dairy farm from June until December 20, 1904, I decided, instead, to join a cousin, Billy Congleton, who as a rancher in the Paulina valley on upper Crooked River.

I took a train to Shaniko, Oregon and from there took the old horse stage to Prineville, arriving there on December 24. No mail was carried on Christmas Day so it was necessary to lay over in Prineville until the 26th before I could catch the mail stage to Paulina. The period from December 1904 to the spring of 1907 was spent doing general work on the Billy Congleton ranch in Paulina Valley and the Laughlin (The old Triangle) ranch.

In April 1 1907, three or four of the Paulina Valley ranchers signed a petition certifying as to my general reliability and qualifications for forest ranger and recommending me for this job in the Paulina area. Accordingly, armed with this petition, I made application to A. S. Ireland, Forest Supervisor of the Blue Mountain West Forest Reserve with headquarters in Prineville, Oregon. On April 15, 1907 I was hired as a Forest Guard. There were no specific headquarters, but Paulina was my mailing address.

During 1907 the work consisted mostly in searching out section corners, running out and marking forest boundary, counting sheep and working out allotment boundaries between sheep permittees. At a meeting held the previous winter, there had been allotments made to permittees and the boundaries shown on a map, but no one knew where these were on the ground. Frequently, when the map boundaries were located on the ground they were found impractical and adjustments had to be made. This was further complicated by misunderstanding by the permittees on where the lines were and the fact that there were more sheep permitted than the area could accommodate. Regarding numbers, C. H. Adams of the Washington Office while inspecting the upper drainage of Mill Creek and Marks Creek in 1907 said "This is the heaviest stocked piece of National Forest range in the United States". These areas had a 1200 head band of sheep on about every four sections. There were no inside fences and cattle and horses permitted at this time often ranged over adjoining sheep range as well as on the areas on which they were permitted.

In August, 1907 I was promoted to Assistant Forest Ranger and in January, 1908 to Deputy Forest Ranger. A trail had been planned in 1907 to start at the Forest boundary on McKay Creek, to follow the summit and end at the Rock Pile Ranch on the South Fork of the John Day River. This trail had been started in the fall of 1907. An allotment of money was received in 1908 for it and I was put in charge of its construction. This occupied most of my time during the field season and the trail was still only as far as Bear Meadow. However, I did spend most of the month of August fighting the Paulina Mountain fire which was the largest fire to have occurred

up to this time in the Blue Mountain West Forest Reserve. It burned about 8,000 acres and cost more than \$8,000.

In the spring of 1909, I continued construction of the ridge trail and completed it to its destination at the Rock Pile Ranch in August and had just moved camp to Little Summit Prairie in preparation for beginning the construction of a trail from there to Squaw Meadow when word came that I was being sent to the Colville Forest to help examine 300 June 11 claims.

I reported to the Colville in September and examined June 11 claims until the weather made it impractical to continue, then returned to Paulina at Christmas time where most of the winter was spent making feed lot counts on permittee's cattle. We only counted the grown stuff, and in those days, it was not uncommon for calves to be left unweaned until after the count was made so they would still go as calves.

In February and March of 1910 was the time that W.A. Donnelly, W.J. Nichols, Jim Gilchrist, Grover Blake and I killed all the bugs in Badger Creek as was reported by Grover in his article appearing in the May 1957 issue of "Timberlines".

In April 1910, I returned to the Colville and continued examination of June 11 claims until June when I was sent to examine June 11 claims on the Wenatchee. Most of those claims on the Wenatchee were in unsurveyed country and many of them were located in big timber in the White River Valley after the June 11 law had been passed. Some of these made for interesting decisions. C. J. Buck came in July and gave me help on some of these. I returned to Paulina on August 1.

Glee Laughlin of Paulina and I were married on August 24, 1910. Our oldest boy, Ross, was born July 6, 1911. Ila was born March 25, 1914 and Lowell was born April 16, 1917. Lowell is still on the ranch, Ila is married and lives in Astoria and Ross owns a radiator shop in Prineville.

Beaver Creek cattle often drifted into Potter Meadows, Squaw Meadows, and even into the head of Rock Creek. This tendency was probably greater following the formation of the Forest Reserve which ended the Range Wars than had been the case while the wars were going on. During 1909 and 1910, pressures were being increased to persuade the stockmen to keep their livestock within the areas on which they were permitted. The result of this was the construction of a drift fence from Wolf Mountain easterly across upper Wolf Creek basin to the ridge south of Little Summit Prairie and thence westerly on the same location that the fence exists today. Except for the head of Wolf Creek basin, this fence followed the deadline that had been established during the Sheep and Cattle wars. The old deadline included about four sections in upper Wolf Creek basin on the cow side that were cut off by this fence. (There was a period just prior to the building of this fence when agreement was had between the sheepmen and cowmen and the Forest Service that these four sections in the head of Wolf Creek basin would be used by both sheep and cattle in trade for the same kind of arrangement on Squaw Meadows. These areas were known as "Neutral" range.) Incidentally, years later the fence was changed to include the four sections on the cow side, so now it essentially follows the old deadline. The big old saddle blanket blazes originally used to mark the deadline can still be found in places along this fence line.

An appropriation was received in 1909 for a barn, house and office at Rager. The story goes that Supervisor Ireland kind located the place he wanted the house built and set a stake there. Later he contracted with two freighters to deliver the lumber from the sawmill on Maury Mountain to the Rager site. He explained to them roughly the location above the Fred Powell place, but no one was there to show them the actual spot. When they arrived with the lumber and couldn't find

the stake, they unloaded at the nearest spot generally answering to the description they had. The next spring Ireland hired a carpenter and sent him out with instructions to build the house where the lumber was, believing it was where he had set the stake. It developed that the lumber had been unloaded some distance south of the staked location and, therefore, the house was built there. Although there was much talk about moving it, the house remained there until in the 1930's when the CCC organization moved the house and office to the present site.

In January 1914, I bought 160 acres on Beaver Creek. This started out to be a place for the family to stay in reach of school and a place to keep a milk cow and my horses. In those days school buses didn't come to pick up the kids and take them to school. Later, I took up a 160 acre homestead joining the purchased 160. When the Desert Homestead Act was passed, I took an additional 320 acres joining the first and took the other 160 on Dipping Vat Creek. This was added to by a timber and stone claim by my wife in Dipping Vat and later by purchase of vacant Public Domain under the Isolated Tract Act and still later by purchase of Road Grant lands around both the home ranch and in Dipping Vat.

By the middle twenties it was evident that the interest in ranching was going to replace my interest in Forest Service work. I resigned from the Forest Service on June 15, 1927, having served my entire time on the Paulina Ranger District. I have been with the ranch ever since.

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