

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD RANGER

L.J. Cooper on Warren Barney Cooper

My earliest recollections of the U.S. Forest Service date back to 1910 when my Uncle Warren "Barney" Cooper was packing up his pack string at Grandfather Cooper's place in the Upper Hood River Valley. Someone had put the knives, forks, and spoons in the coffee pot without wrapping them first in the usual dishtowel and etc. One step and a rattle and the old bell mare just exploded. A lesson in horse and mule packing I have never forgotten in all my years of packing.

Uncle Barney had returned from the Siskiyou National Forest where he had been detailed from the old Oregon National Forest (now Mt. Hood) to lay out a trail system. He had a couple of beautiful otter furs and a small bottle full of gold that surely caught the eye of a nine-year-old boy. What dreams a kid has! I thought - "when I grow up I want to be a Ranger on the Siskiyou, and fish for steelhead trout and pan for gold in the Rogue River." Many times I thought of that in the 20 years I was District Ranger on the Siskiyou; sixteen of which were spent on the Rogue River at Rand Ranger Station, Galice District.

Barney was a great joker and storyteller, and I will try to recall some of the yarns. One old-time Siskiyou Ranger told me this one: Barney carried an old fashioned "thunder mug" or chamber pot with him in camp to contain his sourdough. When he had a visitor (or visitors) he delighted in arising early in the morning, and keeping the container out of sight until the first round of hotcakes were eaten, he then would bring it forth for a second round!

When I went to the Siskiyou, first in 1925 as a mule packer and headquarters guard, and in 1926 as District Ranger, it was only natural that the old timers would regale the nephew with stories about the uncle. The first that comes to mind was when he was locating the Rogue River Trail below Almeda with Melvin Lewis and Jesse DeWitt as helpers. In those days entertainment was hard to come by, as all old-timers know. To pass time when not working, Mel and Jess would wrestle.

How things have changed! To go to the Siskiyou, Barney was also assigned the job of taking a train of pack stock to use on a trail construction Job during the winter of 1909-1910. This employed rangers from the northern forests that otherwise would have been snowbound for winter.

Barney used his homestead as Ranger District Headquarters, so there were no improvements he could make on official time. After Barney died in 1919, the headquarters was moved to the new [district] ranger's farm so it was not until the C.C.C. program [in the 1930s] that a ranger station was built at Parkdale to house the Ranger and his entourage for the Hood River District of the Mt. Hood National Forest.

Barney claimed to have climbed every snow capped peak between Mt. Adams and Mt. McLoughlin, including the two mentioned.

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