

1615 Rhode Island Ave., N. W.,
Washington, D. C.,
February 7, 1940.

Mr. Allen O. Calbick,
278 5th Ave., E. N.,
Kalispell, Montana.

Dear Mr. Calbick:

My best thanks for yours of
January 20 and the very interesting
photographs which came with it. I am
delighted to have your story. It is
just what I wanted, and I am very much
in your debt.

With every good wish,

Faithfully yours,

GP

GP:AMH

278-5th Ave. E. B.

Kellispell, Montana

January 20, 1940

Mr. Clifford Pinchat

Washington D. C.

Dear Chief:

In answer to your request for some of my experiences, etc., while in the Forest Service, I will do the best I can, though, as I am no writer I'm afraid they will be of little value to you.

While I've never had the pleasure of meeting you personally, I have always felt as though I had and have followed your career with interest.

In explanation, I wish to say that in 1907, when I first went to work as a ranger, the forest was so large and unpopulated and the rangers were so few, that that it is necessary to write this in the first person and give my personal experiences.

In the spring of 1907, when I finished high school, my father wisely wanted me to decide to go to college, but having lived in the mountains nearly all my life, I could not think of leaving them, for at that age, four years in some eastern college seemed an eternity. So when in June, I heard there was to be a ranger's examination, I decided to try it. As you know, the ranger examinations in those days were very simple and practical. As I remember it, we had to pack a horse, fell some trees with an axe, box a compass and answer a few questions in land measurement. I did not hear anything from the examination until November, and the day after I got the returns, Mr. Page S. Sunker, the Forest Supervisor, got in touch with me and offered me a job which I gladly accepted and reported for duty the next day.

Mr. Bunker was Supervisor of what was then the Lewis and Clark South Forest. This Forest, which soon after became (with its boundaries changed) the Flathead Forest, is situated in Northwestern Montana bounded on the north by Glacier National Park and incorporated something over one million acres. The main body is traversed by three rivers, the Middle Fork of the Flathead, the South Fork of the Flathead and the Swan River, all flowing in a northerly direction, heading in the main range of the Rockies and separated by high ranges of mountains. The Forest Service was very young at this time, and had not received much money from Congress, so very little work had been done in the way of improvement. As an example, the Swan River, approximately 50 miles long was traversed by a main trail, as was also the South Fork with a length of about 125 miles and the Middle Fork about 80 miles long had a trail up it for a distance of about 20 miles. Of course, these were not good trails, merely those used by trappers, patched up and improved in spots. As the country was all heavily timbered there were no side trails.

As I remembered, there were only three ranger cabins on the forest at this time, although six or seven were built in the next two years. In the meantime, we used old trappers cabins or tents for shelter, or went without, and as very little property was furnished by the Government and we had to provide our own pack horses, we generally did without.

This forest was in charge of one Supervisor, one Deputy Supervisor, one clerk, six rangers with some few temporary men in the summer. So you can see that we were scattered pretty thinly over this area and due to the slow transportation (about sixteen miles a day) did not see much of each other.

As I said earlier, I went to work in Nov. 1907 and was assigned to the Coram District on the south fork. This district had a government cabin located about two miles from the Great Northern Railway, but connected only by trail. Here I met Frank Opalka, an old timer, with whom I worked intermittently for several

years and thoughts of him together with Holbrook, Kruse, Thompson, Hoke, Shields and Dick Lean, who have also passed on, bring up many fond memories.

We, Opalka and I, were busy all that winter of '07 and '08 packing telephone wire up the river a distance of about 20 miles. It was slow work due to the fact that the snow was deep and horses were few and it sometimes took us 3 days to make a round trip. Of course, part of the horses had to pack feed so the movement of wire was not very fast.

Game was very plentiful, especially deer, mountain lion and lynx. I remember on one trip out we caught up with Charlie Ordish, who still lives in Kellsell. He had been hunting lions for a couple of days and had killed three and caught two alive. With him was Bill Murray and they were packing the hides of the dead lions and dragging the live ones down the trail. There was quite a little snow in the trail which formed a cushion and the lions arrived at our cabin, a distance of seven miles, very much alive but not in good humor.

The spring of 1908 I moved 50 miles up the river to Spotted Bear. Here I spent the summer in patrolling, surveying administrative sites, etc., together with a ranger by the name of Hugo Kneiff.

We very seldom got out to civilization and went as much as two months without tasting potatoes as it was a seven day round trip out and as there was so much waste to them we did not bother packing many in. I remember another time we ran out of tobacco and after trying tea leaves, kinikinick, etc., for several days, I ran into a couple of fellows and gave them a quarter of elk for a two-bit can of tobacco. That fall I again moved back to my old station and just before Thanksgiving, John H. Clark, Deputy Supervisor, since retired, and I were ordered to go out and bring in a party which was supposed to be snowed in on the divide between the South Fork and Swan Rivers. We started that night and by train and boat reached the mouth of the Swan the next morning. That day we hiked 18 miles to the head of Swan Lake and the next morning started across the divide to the south fork. We travelled as light as possible just taking a little

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poke of grub and our snow shoes. We did not even carry an axe as it was only about 20 miles to where the party was supposed to be and we expected to be there by night. However, I fell and broke a snow shoe and had to stop and patch it up and as it was foggy and snowing all day and travelling heavy we did not make it, so we sat on a log all night without a fire.

The next morning we started at daylight and came to the abandoned camp of the party about 10 a.m. Here we found an abandoned axe which we took with us and followed the party down to the river. Here we built a raft and crossed the river finding the party about two miles farther and O.K.

We camped with them that night and the next morning as we had about 60 miles of hiking ahead of us through wet snow, I suggested to Jack that we build a raft and go down the river on it, as the water was high due to the heavy fall rains. This was agreed on and we made the 70 miles, as the river ran, in eleven hours. We had neither of us followed the river down before, so, of course, came to several places that gave us quite a thrill, as well as a good soaking. But it beat walking. The winter of 1908 and 1909 I spent in various places on the Forest, but will not bore you by going into detail. In the spring, I was transferred to the upper Middle Fork or Big River as it was commonly known. This was a real primitive area right up against the main range. There was lots of game-- elk, bear, deer, mountain goats and moose and no trails.

For the next year I worked with an old Texan who came to Montana with a trail herd from Texas. He was a squaw man and had mighty fine woman. A little later, a ranger by the name of Ellis Hoke joined us and we spent the summer building a Ranger Station, ship sawing all the lumber we needed. This cabin is still used. It is about 25 miles from the railroad and at that time a rough, poor trail extended only part way in so in order to have any lumber we had to ship saw it.

We expected to winter on the river so in the fall we made a trip with 9 pack horses across the main range, following game trails most of the way to the

prairie and little cow town of Lufayer. Here we bought a grub stake and packed back to our camp making the round trip in 6 days.

It was in Sept. of 1909 that the supervisor, Fage S. Sunker and I while making a trip of exploration between Big River and the South Fork, ran into 2 bunches of Grizzlies--5 in one bunch and 2 in another, one of which I killed with a sixshooter.

Late in the fall, or rather in the early winter, I was notified by Mr. Sunker that a ranger school was to be conducted in Missoula beginning Jan. 1, 1908, and I was one of the two selected to attend from our forest. The proposition was that we were to have our salaries and expenses paid while attending this school and it was to last three months. Mr. C. I. Porter who is now assistant regional forester of District No. 1 and I were room-mates. This, I guess, was the beginning of the school of forestry in the University of Montana. However, it was a very poor beginning, as we were all men used to living outside and sleeping in tents, and when we were confined to a warm school room for several hours--about half of the boys would be to sleep and at the end of the month, we were notified that there was no way in which a forest service could legally pay our salaries and expenses and as most of us felt that we could not receive enough benefits from a short term to justify our staying, we returned to our respective forests. When I returned to Kallispell, I was requested by Mr. Sunker to take Dick Shields and Ellis Hoke on a trip into Big River to see that everything was all right, because when we left earlier in the winter, we had stored our food supplies and considerable Government property in a tent. Accordingly, we started out early in February to make this trip and as it is impracticable to follow the course of the river on account of cliffs, canyons and snow slides, we decided we had better go in from Summit on the Great Northern Railway. This we did, following a southwesterly direction, going through a country which none of us had ever been over. It was bitter cold and snow shoeing was very heavy and we were compelled to lay out one night without

blankets, but as the snow was about five feet deep where we camped, by digging a hole 10 feet square in it and building a fire, we spent a fairly comfortable night. We hit the trail bright and early the next morning and arrived at our camp an hour or so after dark that night, all very tired and according to my diary, we slept till 10:30 a.m. the next day. The second day after we arrived in camp it started to snow hard, and continued to storm more or less for the next six weeks.

As we had crossed two high divides on our way in, we decided we would wait until the snow settled before attempting to make it out, as we snow shod some every day and found that the snow was so light we sank in up to our knees. I was afraid to attempt the trip because I felt that Dick Shields, a man past 50 years of age, would not be able to make it.

We had plenty of grub, so waited for the weather to break, which it did the middle of March and made the trip out to the railroad, a distance of nearly 30 miles between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

We spent the rest of the winter and spring on the South Fork and Swan Rivers doing various jobs and I returned to Big River in the latter part of June.

That summer 1910, will be remembered as the worst fire year we ever had here and of course we were entirely unprepared for it--that is in the way of lookouts, trails, equipment, etc., because up until that time we had paid little attention to fires as we had had not large ones.

On August 2, a fire with a five mile face crossed the divide coming down onto Big River from the south fork. So far, no one had been on it and in fact, did not know of its existence as the country was full of smoke. There were only three of us in the entire Big River area when I discovered it, so I immediately went out for help. I got what was considered at that time a large crew, 20 men, and returned to camp Aug. 5. Of course, every one had to carry their own beds, tools, etc., and hike in thirty miles.

We had as equipment, axes, saws, shovels, mattocks and canvas buckets. So you can see that we were unable to do anything with a fire of this size.

It started to rain the middle of September and the fire was finally out after burning an estimated 13,000 acres on my district, and in connection with fires, I have often wondered if this wasn't Nature's way of cleaning up her back yard. Instead of letting the timber die of old age, become bug-infested, full of blister rust or choked with brush and wind falls, she sent a fire along and cleaned up the rubbish and gave a new stand good clean ground on which to grow.

Of course, I know a fellow probably would be shot if he advocated this but you know, Nature is a pretty wise old girl, and when man tries to improve on it we generally get things unbalanced.

The next two years I worked for the Forest Service was in general a repetition of the past three.

I have just skimmed over the surface trying to touch a few high spots to show that in the early days we were not so tied up with red tape, office work and so many departments. But as this seems necessary in all Government work, there should be no complaint.

I am only trying to show that we were then sent out on our own and told in a general way what was to be done. Then it was up to us to do it the best we could without inspectors from the supervisor's office, the regional office and Washington, D. C. to see whether we had done it according to specifications.

Hope this is something along the lines you wanted and that it will be of some slight value to you. Am sending a few old pictures which might be of interest. If it isn't too much trouble, would appreciate it if they could be returned.

yours respectfully,

Allen O. Calbick

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