Remembering the Custer National Forest

By

Russell E. Lockhart

R. E. LOCKHART
RT. 1 BOX 157A
ST IGNATIUS, MONT.
59865

Dave Phillius and Gary Nelson have encouraged me to record some of my observations and my memory of events and people in my association with the Custer National Forest.

I, Russell E. Lockhart, was born at Red Lodge, Montana on July 14, 1917. This day was the 128th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille by French Revolutionaries.

In the manner of Mark Twain, it was the 41st year, following Custer's Massacre some 75 miles to the east. 1917 was the 28th year of statehood for Montana and the 9th since the establishment of the Beartooth National Forest. It also was the 26th year since the Executive Order had created the Yellowstone Timberland Reserve of which the Beartooths were a part.

My maternal grandfather, Charles Edwin Russell, a cattle rancher/homesteader had been appointed as supervisor of the Yellowstone Timberland Reserve with headquarters at Livingston, Montana. A photograph of him with Gifford Pinchot is on one of the photo plates following page 110 in Pinchot's book Breaking New Ground. He stands immediately at Pinchot's right. Grandfather was an Ohio high school graduate, which was a good education in those days, but had no specialized training. His background in the cattle business did give him an understanding of frontier men. He had arrived in Montana shortly after the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Grandmother, Mary (Mae) Murray, had been born in Bostom of Irish parents but returned to Ireland before finally emigrating permanently at age 10.

My father, William Eaton Lockhart, was born November 14, 1885 at Clay Center, Kansas. He was a member of a Scottish family which had

been moved by the British from Scotland to Belfast, Ireland to work in the textile mills there. The British took advantage of a drought in Scotland to accomplish the move. Actually a principal reason was that the Irish of Belfast were too difficult to control, demanding higher wages and better conditions. The Scots were more easily controlled. This led to bitter conflict between the Irish who had lost employment and the Scots who had been displaced and were thus dependent upon employment in Belfast. Later the bitterness degenerated into a conflict between Irish Catholics and Presbyterian Scots. So it largely remains so today, although the Irish seem to vent their anger more at the British than at the Protestants.

Grandfather's name was William. Family records reveal little of him, however.

Grandmother Lockhart was an Irish girl from Pennsylvania, named Belle Wylie. Their family consisted of four daughters and two sons. William died in 1901 or 02 and grandmother had moved the family to Montana in 1902. She settled in Bozeman where she had relatives.

Dad had completed seven grades before the move and went on to three years of high school in Bozeman. In 1906 he quit school because of family financial hardship.

From 1906 through 1909 he worked at various jobs. The first was as a carpenter's helper at Corwin Hot Springs, outside of Livingston and for two years as a stagecoach driver of a six-horse team. These were coaches for Yellowstone Park tourists. The Chicago-Milwaukee-St. Paul and Pacific brought the tourists to the end of track at Salesville (now Gallatin Gateway). His employer was Wylie Transportation Company operated by family members.

In the fall of 1909 he took and passed a Civil Service Examination for Assistant Forest Ranger.

In 1910 he was assigned as Assistant Ranger at Pryor Mountain, Mt. Although family records are sketchy, he apparently worked there, perhaps only during summer seasons. The winter of 1912 he took and completed the Ranger's Short Course at the School of Forestry, in Missoula, Mt. This was a course jointly agreed to by the School of Forestry and the U. S. Forest Service for men already employed.

Thereafter, he was assigned as Forest Ranger on the Red Lodge Creek district, Luther, Montana. In June of 1914 he married my mother, Mary Cecelia Russell, daughter of E.C. and Mary Russell.

In 1914 my Dad was amember of the survey party which produced the first Forest Service-made planimetric map of the Beartooth Plateau. Chief of Party was R. T. Ferguson, later supervisor of the Beartooth and of several other Montana national forests. When I last met him in 1937 he was supervisor of the combined Lewis and Clark and Jefferson National Forests. From there he was transferred as supervisor to Region 3.

Another party member was J. C. Whittam who was an amateur photographer of note, later supervisor of the Custer and Gallatin National Forests. Others who served on the Red Lodge District, but may or may not have been survey party members included: Elers Koch, later Asst. Regional Forester for ~~operations~~ timber management in Region One, Warren Akers, later ranger on several ranger districts of the Custer National Forest and Doc Yerkes, whom I never ran into in later years. T here were others whose names I no longer remember.

Volume 7 of the Montana Geographic Series, by Bob Anderson identifies Fred Inabit as the first to publish a plane table map of the Beartooth area. He does not identify the date of the survey, although he does

state that Inabit's first expedition was in 1907. On the foldout photo following page 64, a caption to the panorama photo states that it was taken during the first ascent of Granite Peak in 1923. I remember, but cannot locate a photo taken of my dad and R. T. Ferguson with a plane table mounted on the top of Granite Peak. I do have a photo of Dad on Mt. Fairview dated August 1914. It was taken by J. C. Whittim.

During the course of this survey a mountain was named Mt. Lockhart for Dad and a small lake, Mary's Lake, for my mother. A photo of both appears below. Physical features could then be named for living persons, but can now be done only in the most unusual of circumstances.

For some reason, long forgotten, Dad left the Forest Service in 1916 or 17 and was a dry land farmer on Sage Creek, near Pryor Mountain, when I was born. During a visit to my maternal grandparents at Christmas in either 1917 or 18 the Sage Creek farm house burned to the ground and my parents lost all personal possessions except what they had with them. Following the fire, Dad applied for reinstatement with the Forest Service.

In the fall of 1918 Dad was reinstated as acting Forest Ranger at Red Lodge, pending the return of the permanent ranger who had not yet been discharged after World War I. Dad applied to the District (now Regional Office) for permanent assignment. During the fall and winter he was offered several positions, mostly on eastside forests. The offer he accepted, however, was on the Kootenai as Forest Ranger at Troy, Mt. The fact that Glen A. Smith was Forest Supervisor, no doubt, was the deciding factor. Glen had been Supervisor of the Beartooth when Dad began his Forest Service career in 1910.

My brother, William Eaton Lockhart, Jr. was born in Troy on Dad's birthday, November 14, 1920.

Household goods were shipped by rail in those days and my Mother talked about having spent several weeks in a Libby hotel awaiting their

arrival. We had also traveled by railroad, but had not been "side tracked."

By 1921 Dad has completed the Grazing Correspondence Course given by the Forest Service in Missoula and was assigned as Deputy Supervisor of the Custer National Forest at Miles City, Mt. J. C. Whittam was then Forest Supervisor.

I began elementary school in Miles City in 1923.

Some of my most enjoyable memories of the Custer occurred during the next few years. I remember accompanying Dad to Buffalo, S.D. with a Model T pickup load of fingerling rainbow trout. The fish were in 30 gallon cream cans and we had a supply of chunk ice packed in a sawdust-filled box. Every few miles we would stop and add ice to the water in the cans. The period between "icings" became quite frequent during the heat of the day. When we arrived in Buffalo, Ranger, Glen Flathers, and the Mayor greeted us. We were a great "cause celebre." The rainbow were impressively active and in robust good health. After discussion, it was decided to empty the fish cans and the remaining ice into the large public fountain in the center of town. The fountain provided oxygen and the incoming water was cool. The fish could be removed for planting before the sun warmed the water in the fountain. It sounded like a "fool-proof" plan.

The next morning I rushed to the pool to observe the darting fish before breakfast, but they weren't darting! They were all floating belly up and dead! No one had calculated the effect of the alkali water.

Jim Templer was the Ranger at Poker Jim. Sara Templer and Mother became great friends having children of about the same age. I remember once when my brother, Jay, Jimmie Templer and I caught green frogs all day, collecting them in water buckets. In the evening we deprived the frogs of their legs and Sara fried them up for us. A great feast! My one and only offense at eating frog legs.

Jim Templer gave me my first rifle. It was a 20 inch barrel Stevens single shot, .22 calibre. It was extremely accurate at short range and both my brother and I learned to be marksmen with it.

The first time we went to Warren Akers for dinner it was obvious that Mrs. Akers was particularly anxious that everything go well to impress the new deptuy and his family. She and Warren placed the food platters on the table and Mrs. Akers gave a sigh of relief and called dinner. After the blessing, all was in readiness for her great and formal occasion. Warren excused himself, left the table, and returned with a loaf of bread clutched to his chest and an oversized butcher knife in his right hand. Standing behind each of us he sawed off a hunk of bread! All formality was shattered, and a happy time was had by all.

It was at the Akers' where I first heard a radio program. The set was a Motorola which utilized a large speaker. The sound sputtered, and screeched but once in a while we could recognize voices and instruments playing. We marveled about transmission of voices and music over the thin empty air.

Years later I was a student at the School of Forestry and living in Missoula with my Mother, Brother, and Sister. Occasional dinner guests or hosts were Glen A. Smith, his wife and two daughters. Glen was at the time, Assistant Regional Forester for Range Management. He was an old friend of my family. He may first have known Dad in 1910 when Dad was a ranger's assistant on Pryor Mountain and Glen was Supervisor of the Bearttooth National Forest.

Glen was a legend in the Forest Service having earlier directed a program of reduction in numbers and season of use by permitted livestock. He had been successful because of the force of his personality as well as the strength of his arguments relating to soil, forage and water. Prob-

ably forest supervisors and rangers were influenced to the greater degree but, many grazing permittees found themselves in grudging agreement.

My Dad had been one of Glen's disciples in his program of range resource improvement. Because they had been comrades-in-arms so to speak, and after Dad's untimely death, Glen and his wife practically adopted the Lockharts.

As far as I know, Glen had begun his association with the Custer in the fall of 1908 when he became acting supervisor of the newly organized Custer National Forest with headquarters at Ashland. By January of 1909 he had become Forest Supervisor.

When he reported to Ashland, he found the office in a long and narrow, former store building, sandwiched among others of the business ommmunity on the main street. As the heat of summer began it soon became evident that the customers of the saloon across the street were using the narrow corridor between the headquarters and an adjoining building as a place to relieve their distended bladders. Never one to take direct action when sublety could be substituted, Glen set about to analyze his problem and create a solution. He reasoned that most of the customers were Cheyenne Indians and somewhat naive when it came to mechanics and electricity. He also reasoned that they were people whose culture put a premium on sensitivity.

Considering these things, Glen located a copper screen of about 4 squate feet, soldered a wire to it, and buried it at the point of greatest saturation. He ran the wire to an old Ford coil near his desk. Then he watched for a customer hurrying to relieve himself and allowed a good minute for him to get back to the screen and get started. Then Glen gave a crank on the coil and a quick and hard turn. He was rewarded by a

great whoop and an Indian brave running from the corridor as though the hounds of hell were after him. Before the day was out he had repeated the shock treatment on another unsuspecting victim. The word got around and another spot was chosen for bladder relief and Smith's problem was solved.

Glen was a great storyteller, as you can see, and over the years missed few opportunities to "job" someone just for the devilment of it.

Once while supervisor of the Beartooth National Forest, he was on a routine inspection ride with a ranger on the Beartooth Division. They had ridden hard all day and were tired by the time they arrived at their appointed place to spend the night. It was an unoccupied cabin which had a good roof and a stove. As they shared the chores of cooking and cleaning up they were obliged to carry water from the adjacent creek. As they settled in for the night bumping and scufflings gave evidence that there was a family of skunks under the floor. Glen rustled around and found a #2 trap wired to the end of a pole which an earlier occupant had evidently used to control the skunk population. Setting the trap, Smith said to his companion, "When that snaps I'll get up and drown the skunk, if you will get the next one." The ranger said, "Fine with me." Shortly the trap sprung, Smith got up, shouldered the pole and took the skunk to the creek where he drowned it, and reset the trap. The ranger was groggily aware of the proceedings. When the trap was sprung again, Smith poked the ranger in the ribs and said, "This one's yours." He got up, drowned the skunk and reset the trap. In the morning Smith took the last of the skunks to the creek, when he returned the ranger said, "My gosh, how many skunks were under there? I drowned 5!" When he went to the creek for wash-up there were 7 skunks lying on the bank and he had been "jobbed" for fair.

Hoken P. Grotbo was alternate on the Ashland Ranger District in the late 50's. Hoke was a practical man of great integrity and ability, but a man who loved a practical joke. I was fire staff on the forest and was at the station one day getting ready to confer with Hoke on some fire business. Jack Curtis, Forest Supervisor, John Forsman, Range Staff, Walter Sundell, Ashland Ranger, and Jack Royal, Ranger at Fort Howes, were organizing to take an inspection trip.

Jack Curtis traveled in a black Pontiac sudan which was his pride and joy. Nobody else ever drove when Curtis was in the party. Curtis was a bird-like man of boundless nervous energy and quick reaction time.

After they had loaded and the doors were closed, Curtis started the engine, looked back over his shoulder, and let the clutch out. But, the car didn't move! So, Jack gave it more gas until the engine roared, but still the car didn't move. Out of the side of my eye I could see the right rear wheel barely clear of the ground and spinning. Hoke stood off to the side with a sheepish grin on his face.

Curtis got out and, after making a flying inspection around the car, got back into the driver's seat and tried again to back up with the same result. By this time the passengers, smelling a rat, got out and located the problem. Hoke never admitted that he was the guilty party and Curtis never pursued it. He was a great guy to get along with.

When I was lands and fire staffman on the Custer, John Forsman range staff, and Bill Lucas, supervisor, took Pete Hanson, regional forester for a range inspection trip on Pryor Mountain. They were met with the horses by Ranger George Engler and alternate ranger Hal Smith. This was the period when the Washington Office was making a determined drive to get all forest officers in uniform; Pete was the only one in brand new threads. Everybody else wore jeans. Pete let everyone know in no uncertain terms that he was aware of their attire.

The inspection ride led from the grassy top through a thicket of douglas fir to more grassland on the west slope. Engler announced that a lunch stop would be made at Black Springs in the bottom, judged to be where noon would overtake them. All went well except that Pete missed no opportunity to chide the others about their lack of compliance with the uniform code. Hal Smith led off; part way through the thicket Pete's pants hung up on a dead branch stub and ripped a great tear. No one else had any problems. Pete blustered, fussed and fumed, as only Pete could, all the way to the spring. When they arrived the spring was dry and the black gnats descended upon them in a cloud. They had to eat a dry lunch and feed the gnats, especially Pete where his bare shank was exposed. George Engler, never one to offer pointless sympathy, said "That's what happens to pilgrims who ride out of uniform." Pete was livid with apoplexy and promised them that they would be in regulation uniform by winter.

Although I wasn't on the trip, I was filled in on the details by a gleeful Forsman.

During my second year as lands/fire staff it was determined that I would hold a fire training session for fire overhead on the Red Lodge district. Attendees came from all districts and a great deal was accomplished. I had advised the regional fire management officer that we would hold a practice fire on the final day and he had agreed to attend, since the Custer was not considered a fire forest. In any case, it would be evidence that we were serious about doing a proper training job. I can no longer remember this gentleman's name but, in the context of what happened, it may be just as well.

At the appointed time we all journeyed to a lodgepole stand on

Red Lodge Creek where Hal Smith had sold post and poles to ranchers the previous fall. Prior to cutting, this had been a fully stocked stand and boles were clear to 20-25 feet. After cutting, all tops had been lopped and the brush had been piled in widely scattered piles. I selected an isolated pile and asked everyone to gather around with their hand tools. I tested the humidity by holding a wet finger aloft (not an approved practice, but I had forgotten to bring a sling psychometer). There was no wind, but, in retrospect, the finger dried rather quickly. Anyway, reassured because of lack of wind, the height of clear boles and the ready crew of 20 or so, I touched off the pile. It began to burn rapidly and some of the fellows began to dirt the fire down. Because I wanted more realism, I asked them to desist and let the fire get a start. It started alright, leaping into the canopy and racing like a runaway freight train to some 40 acres. Within the first hour, the crew had a fire line to mineral soil around a good share of the fire, when the ranchers began to arrive. Among them were fellows I had known as a kid when I spent summers on granddad's ranch. One of the first arrivals wanted to know "Who was the damned fool who touched this one off!" When I told them that I was the culprit and gave my name, I knew that many of them either knew me or at least recognized the name.

These were still the days when Boards of Review were convened on fire disasters and I fully expected to be summoned by one. However, the fall and winter dragged on without a summons. That winter while on detail in Missoula, I learned that ~~Bill Crumb~~ W.R. "Bill" Krumm, the fire weather observer and forecaster on loan from the Weather Bureau had advised that that particular day was one of a "subsidence situation" which he had been able to identify through weather research. In laymen's terms it was analagous

to the weather pattern which leads to chinooks in winter on the east slope of the Rockies. In such situations, warm and very dry air flows down the slopes of the mountains. It apparently had been reasoned that I was a victim of circumstances beyond my control and no action was ever taken against me.

That summer the Ashland ranger district was hit by drought and fire weather of 4% humidity. Humidity that low is very abnormal. Some people even doubted that measurements of such low level was even measureable by our sling psychrometer. Be that as it may, we had to cope with it.

Ranger Walt Sundell called to report this low humidity with his fire weather measurements. In the face of predicted dry lightning storms and an laready prolonged dry spell, I asked Walt if I could be of some help. He said, "Well, we don't need you, yet; but it doesn't look good, if you can make it we'd be glad of your help." So, I immediately left Billings for Ashland.

Next morning the air was so dry that my nostrils colapsed when I took my first deep breath of the day. The fireworks, following evening lightning storms, began early with several scattered small fires reported by ranchers. Initial action was taken by per diem guards. Hoke Grotbo and his crew went to all fires to see if he could determine the cause or to mop-up. Hoke returned that night pretty well worn out but convinced that the fires were hold-over lightning fires from dry storms of the previous day.

I questioned Hoke about the possibility of these fires being man-caused. He said that he had found no such evidence. Neither he, nor I, could conceive that one of the ranchers had set the fires, and no one had reported strangers in the area.

By this time, there was confusion as to which fires were manned, which were burning, and which were controlled, or which were out. Hoke found a large blackboard and chalk and I recorded the information in tabular form as it was received. Because information constantly changed,

particularly as new fires were reported, I arranged for photos to be made of the board every few hours. In this way we were able to maintain a current record of action while preserving the historical record of our efforts.

The next day we had a rash of fires reported and Hoke and his crew and all ranchers who could see smoke, fought them again. By nightfall we had at least 20 new fires, one of which was reported to be of several hundred acres. A crew of ranchers were on that one with a small dozer. Sundell decided that this one presented serious hazard problems and left to take charge on the ground.

During the peak of the hubbub, three young men drove up in a car with California license plates and asked if I could use a D-9 Cat. They claimed to be with Morris-Knudsen, the famed road construction contractor, and stated that company policy was to make such equipment available in times of emergency. They said that the cat and trailer would be along in a half hour or so. I had barely heard of a D-9 Cat, but knew that it was probably too big for any practical use we might put it to.

I was extremely busy, but told him that when it showed up we would put it to use and thanked him for his offer, but did not question him closely. I never mentioned this visit to anyone, even to the Board of Review which followed. But, after I talked to experienced fire personnel from California later, I became convinced that these people were arsonists getting their kicks by bamboozling Montana hicks. Needless to say the D-9 never appeared.

New fires continued to be reported all of that day until we had some 32, as I remember. When I telephoned the actions of the day to John Forsman, who was acting forest supervisor, he asked if we needed help saying that the Region had advised him that they had a 300 man crew with

air transport and overhead standing by in Missoula. I told him that I wanted to confer with Sundell who was out on the largest fire and would call back. I obtained the fire weather forecast which was continued warm and dry with isolated afternoon and evening thunderstorms. I tried to talk to Sundell by SPF short-wave radio but the interference was terrible and we had a very unsatisfactory conference.

Late that night I called Forsman and told him that the situation didn't look good and asked him to order the men. The next day the overhead team from the Bitteroot under Bernie Swift showed up, but the 300 men were held in Billings.

Everything quieted down that day, I think now, because the Californians were gone. Bill Lucas arrived and sent me to bed because I had not slept since the bust had started. After 6 or 7 hours I came back and started putting information together for Individual Fire Reports and other reports I knew would be due.

That winter a Board of Review was called with Fred Mass, fire staff on the Deerlodge, as chairman. The other board member was Harvey Robe, Assistant Regional Forester, Budget and Planning who was somewhat short on fire experience but long on intelligence. Fortunately, the Board gave us plenty of time to prepare. The photos of the dispatcher board were invaluable for the chronogical record of actions. Hoke Grotbo and Walt Sundell and I prepared a presentation for the Board. As we began, and the chronology of the fire situation unwound, the Board asked questions, but appeared to be somewhat incredulous because of the way we had handled such a fire bust with our limited resources. Bill Lucas, forest supervisor, called a halt for lunch after we had explained action on the 32nd fire. Harvey Robe ate with Lucas and I and was very interested in whether there were other fires, but didn't appear to be critical.

After lunch, Fred Mass asked how I had calculated my request for 300 men. There was an approved method for such calculations which had only been adopted for that fire season. These instructions must have been among the mountains of correspondence which I should have read but hadn't. However, I had based my calculations on the chains of fire line which I either knew or assumed that I had, my knowledge of fuels, and the weather forecasts. It was a "seat-of-the-pants" estimate which I had used as a district dispatcher, but assuredly not a system which was commensurate with my exaulted polition as a fire staffman. However, when Mass worked through the approved regional system he came out with 300 men and the Board of Review was over.

Regional office review of the Board's report apparently found no cause for action as I never heard another thing about it.

In 1955 while serving as Lands, Fire, Timber and Engineering Staff Officer of the Custer, I was appointed to do the first work load analysis on the lands acquired from the Soil Conservation Service, known as the National Grasslands. The administrative unit chosen for the analysis was under the direction of "Doc" Cornell. This unit roughly corresponded to a national forest ranger district, although of greater size. "Doc" was a guy who could see humor in all situations, a fortunate thing because of his crushing workload.

I was not a workload expert. My only experience had been as a participant in analysis of my own Boulder District on the Deerlodge National Forest. However, I was provided with the standard list of district forest ranger jobs together withtheir time allowances. These were adapted, as necessary, to the equivalent jobs which the SCS had required "Doc" to do. The job was somewhat hampered because "Doc" had not been required to keep a detailed diary. However, because of "Doc's" wholehearted cooperation and good humor we were able to complete the job in good time. When we

totalled up the time allowances they came to over two man years of ranger calibre work. "Doc's" comment was, "Great, does that mean that I will get a GS-18?"

In 1956 with the help of Arnold Winsness, the "on-the-ground" administrator at Medora I prepared requirements concerning well-site protection for attachment to federal oil and gas leases covering national grassland areas of the developing Williston Oil Basin. I believe that these or very similar requirements are used today.

During the winter of 1957 I was detailed to the regional office at Missoula to write the first cooperative fire agreement for the National Grasslands and the Northern Pacific Railway.

While at this job, I was recruited by Howard Ahlskog, Forest Supervisor to become the timber staff officer of the Kootenai National Forest in Libby. These were the "wind-down" days of the spruce bark beetle epidemic.

Ernest Grambo, the previous timber management staff officer had been promoted to Denver as Assistant Regional Forester for Timber Management. When I arrived at my desk in the Kootenai Supervisor's Office it was graced with a fluorescent pink hardhat and the note, "Russ, here's your Stetson," Ernie.