

## **Paul and Karl Gilbert – Early Forest Rangers, San Isabel National Forest, Colorado**

In the early 1900's, two national forests were established in southern Colorado. The original San Isabel National Forest was *roughly* located north of the Cucharas River, east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, south of the Arkansas River, and west of the Colorado plains. Another forest, the Las Animas National Forest was located south of the Cucharas River, east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, west of the Colorado plains, with the southern boundary located in New Mexico, likely near the Canadian River. The northern portion of the Las Animas NF, the Las Animas Ranger District, was moved from the Las Animas NF into the San Isabel NF in 1910. All the original southern ranger districts on the forest were eventually consolidated into the current San Carlos Ranger District.

Paul and Karl Gilbert, two brothers from southeast Colorado were two of the first Forest Rangers on the San Isabel National Forest. They both worked for the Forest Service on the early San Isabel NF from around 1918 to 1945. They served on many of the original ranger districts on the forest. In the early days of the Forest Service, Ranger Districts were located at backcountry locations and not in towns as they commonly are today.

**Karl Gilbert:** While a full history is not available, the best information indicates that Karl Gilbert served on the San Isabel NF during the years from 1918 to 1937 and possibly longer. He worked on at least four districts, including:

- Malachite -Blanca-Huerfano District, Malachite and Gardner Ranger Stations 1918 – 1920 (combined with San Carlos RD in 1952; Malachite Ranger Station was located west of Gardner, CO and east of Red Wing, CO).
- Las Animas District, La Veta Ranger Station 1921 – 1924 (located in the town of La Veta, CO) (called the Las Animas District in 1921 through at least 1928 but also called the Spanish Peaks District as early as 1907 and combined with San Carlos District in 1978).
- Undetermined location(s), although since all other parts of his career were spent in the southern-most districts, it is likely that he was on the Greenhorn or Las Animas Districts during this time, 1925 - 1928.
- Greenhorn District, San Carlos Ranger Station 1928 – 1929 (the Greenhorn District combined with Hardscrabble District in 1929) (Greenhorn Mountain is northwest of Walsenberg, CO, southeast of Westcliffe, CO. The Hardscrabble District seems to have been headquartered out of Wetmore, CO and the Greenhorn District (would have been immediately to the south and probably headquartered out of Gardner, CO. Both of these districts are now part of the San Carlos District, The current San Carlos District, headquartered in Canon City, CO and encompasses all of the southern San Isabel NF).
- Las Animas District, La Veta Ranger Station 1928 – 1937 (located in La Veta, CO)

**Paul Gilbert:** While a full history is not available, the best information indicates that Paul Gilbert served on the San Isabel NF during the years from 1919 to 1945. He worked at several backcountry locations on at least three ranger districts, including:

- Westcliffe District, Alvarado Ranger Station 1919 – 1920 (Alvarado Ranger Station, located southwest of Westcliffe, CO). Some of Paul's children remember living in a campground near Westcliffe for a year and were unable to attend schools due to the distance from town. An Alvarado Campground exists today on the San Isabel NF.
- Malachite-Blanca-Huerfano District, Malachite Ranger Station 1921 - 1923 (unclear of exact location – during this most likely at Malachite or Red Wing).
- Las Animas District, La Veta Ranger Station 1924 – 1925. (This ranger station was located in the town of La Veta and some of Paul's children remember living here but not liking it – they felt it was “too” large of a town).
- Malachite-Blanca-Huerfano District, Malachite Ranger Station, Red Wing Ranger Station, and Gardner Ranger Station 1926 – 1945 (unclear of exact location – early years were likely at Malachite and Red Wing and later years at Gardner Ranger Stations).

Paul and his wife raised eight children together with the children growing up at the various ranger stations around the forest. The children found a way to make occasional money by collecting arrowheads (their father and uncle paid them a nickel for each arrowhead – a practice allowed in those days) and fighting forest fires for 40 cents an hour. Paul's wife said that the children were hers until they were old enough to carry a gun or fishing rod and then they were their father's.

With their father and uncle dedicated to natural resource conservation, five of Paul's eight children went on to obtain college degrees from Colorado A&M College (now Colorado State University) and four of Paul's sons entered the natural resource field. Son Karl Gilbert began work for the Forest Service then transferred to the National Park Service where he worked a career as Park Superintendent of numerous National Parks and Monuments. Paul Gilbert worked a career as a Wildlife Biologist and Manager for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Dr. Douglas Gilbert worked for the Colorado Division of Wildlife, as a faculty member for the University of Montana, Cornell University, and as Head of Colorado State University's Department of Fish and Wildlife Department. Warren Gilbert served in the Soil Conservation Service.