

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS IN THE MAGRUDER "CORRIDOR"

Lewis and Clark, with the members of their expedition, were the first men, other than the native Indians, near the "Corridor." The closest they came to the "Corridor" was when Clark explored the Salmon River as a possible route and when they passed the mouth of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River. They did not learn much of the Nez Perce Trail (south Nez Perce Trail as opposed to the Lolo Trail) from the Shoshone and Salish Indians. There is a possibility they got some inkling of the existence of a southern trail from the Nez Perce Indians. A reprint journal account, edition of 1814 to which all members contributed, in three volumes, published by the New Amsterdam Book Company, New York, 1902, says in part in Chapter XXX, page 149: "Friday, 20 (1806). If trace of the baggage is too indistinct, the whole party is to return to Hungary Creek, and we will then attempt the passage by ascending the main southwest branch of Lewis' river (Snake River) through the country of the Shoshonees, over to the Madison or Gallatin Rivers. On that route the Chopunnish (Nez Perce) inform us there is a passage not obstructed by snow at this period of the year. That there is such a passage we learnt from the Shoshonees, whom we first met on the east fork of Lewis' river, but they also represented it as much more difficult than that by which we came, being obstructed by high, steep, rugged mountains followed by an extensive plain without either wood or game. We are indeed inclined to prefer the account of the Shoshonees because they would have certainly recommended that route had it been better than the one we have taken; and because there is a war between the Chopunnish and the Shoshonees, who live on the route, the former are less able to give accurate information of the state of the country. This route also, is so circuitous that it would require a month to perform it and we therefore consider it as the extreme resource."

The above statement seems to refer to the Snake River route as known by the Shoshonees, but they might have found the Nez Perce Trail known by the Chopunnish (Nez Perce) if they had decided to take that route.

Rev. Samuel Parker traveled through part of the "Corridor" in 1835 with a band of Nez Perce Indians. The part of his trail in the "Corridor" was from Salmon Mountain to Burnt Knob. A part of the Parker Trail was later known as the Shoup-Elk City Trail.

Captain John Mullan had the Nez Perce Trail explored as a possible route for the Mullan Wagon road during the period 1853 to 1856. Mr. Tinkham was the party chief who did this reconnaissance. The route was not considered practical.

After the discovery of gold at Alder Gulch in 1862, the Nez Perce Trail and its various forks were used extensively by miners, merchants, and others in traveling from the head of navigation on the Snake River at Lewiston, Idaho, to the Montana gold mines. It was during this period that a merchant and packer, Lloyd Magruder, and members of his party were murdered and robbed on

the east side of Magruder Mountain. The murder occurred during October 1863. A good account of the murder is given in "Vigilantes of Montana" by Professor Thomas J. Dimsdale.

W. W. de Lacy's map of the Territory of Montana, which included portions of the adjoining territories, shows the southern Nez Perce Trail fairly accurately in relation to the lower West Fork of the Bitterroot River, the Nez Perce Fork, Deep Creek, the Selway River, and Magruder Creek. de Lacy was a civil engineer with the Mullan party for a time. His map was more accurate about drainages than later maps produced by the Forest Service and others, as late as 1920.

An account of a reconnaissance for a wagon road route from Lewiston, Idaho, to Virginia City, Montana, made in 1866 says: "The only known route used by the stage and wagons ran from Walla Walla southward to Boise, Idaho, on to Fort Hall where travel divided; some going to Salt Lake City, others to Virginia City. To the north, the Mullan road ran from Walla Walla to the Coeur d'Alene Lake and along the Bitterroot to Missoula. Even further north was the circuitous route by way of Clark's Fork of the Columbia and Lake Pend d'Orielle. On these roads pack trains were used. Directly across the mountain east of Lewiston, were two passages; the Lolo route striking the Bitterroot Valley halfway between Fort Owen and Missoula, and the south Nez Perce's trail to the headwaters by way of Elk City. Mining parties had crossed the mountains by both routes but no pack trains had come through. Although the Idaho legislature had endorsed the Lolo route, the superintendent planned to examine both for comparative advantages."

"On July 12, 1866, Nicholson, Traux, and Tahptic-tash ascended the Bitterroot River to its headwaters and traveled westward across the mountains along the southern Nez Perce's trail. Bird and the rest of the party retraced the Lolo route between Fort Owen and Fort Lapwai. The Nicholson detachment hurriedly climbed the 6,000-foot summits and periodically descended 2,000 to 4,000 feet into the canyons, such as those at Brush Creek and the Little Clearwater. Within eight days they arrived at the mining community, Elk City. They had established a new speed record for the 177-mile journey from Fort Owen. Nicholson left his companions here and headed westward to Silverwood's Mountain House where a good stage road led into Lewiston. He reported the distance by this route 233 miles as compared with 200 by the Lolo forks, with mountainous terrain extending 35 miles further."

"The superintendent therefore, planned to improve the Lolo route as the most direct passage to the Hell Gate, thence to the commercial centers of Montana."

Trappers probably ventured into the area soon after the Lewis and Clark expedition, but it was not good beaver country and the word got around fast so most trappers and the fur brigades avoided the area. Miners also found the area unproductive, hence only traveled through it.

In 1895 the "Corridor" became part of the Bitterroot Forest Reserve. Forest Service employees started fire control and trail development in the area.

Than Wilkerson, an oldtime Ranger who spent years in and around the "Corridor" along with Ranger James Vance, describes this early trail work: "The second year of service, 1900, our work began to multiply and expand. We began to retrace and cut out the down timber in the old Indian trails." The Nez Perce trail and its branches were main line trails. Wilkerson Creek and Vance Creek, both in the "Corridor," bear the names of these Rangers.

The main line trail into the Salmon Mountain Ranger District went up the Nez Perce fork from Allen Station at the end of the county road, over Nez Perce Pass to Kit Carson, thence over Pole Mountain, Hell's Half Acre Creek, the Upper Crossing, Buck Knob, and Salmon Mountain. This trail was constructed in 1914. Prior to that, only the ridge top trails were used.

The "Corridor" remained part of the Bitterroot Forest Reserve and Bitter Root National Forest until July 1, 1908, when it became part of the newly created Nezperce (one word) National Forest. The Bitterroot (one word) National Forest continued to administer the Salmon Mountain District which included the "Corridor" until it again became part of the Bitterroot April 7, 1931, with a correction proclamation July 3, 1931. It has been part of the Bitterroot since as part of the Magruder Ranger District.

Salmon Mountain Ranger Station was established in 1911 and a cabin built there. It was active for a few years and the remains were burned about 1940. The Deep Creek Ranger Station, now called Magruder Ranger Station, was established in 1922, when a trail was constructed down Deep Creek from Kit Carson. Fire suppression was about the only activity of the Forest Service in the area prior to 1910 along with a little trail clearing.

The road into Deep Creek and the "Corridor" was first surveyed in 1919 and 1920. It was finally constructed along the trail during the period 1928 to 1930, from Allen Station. The road reached the Deep Creek Ranger Station July 7, 1930. This road was rebuilt and in some places relocated by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the period 1933 to 1940. The CCC also extended the road system to Paradise, Hell's Half Acre, and Observation Point where they met in 1936 by a crew building road from the Nezperce National Forest. The road system has been the same since that time except for improvement, some relocation of the Hell's Half Acre road, and reconstruction and oiling the road over Nez Perce Pass in 1967-68.

At no time has any of the "Corridor" land been in private ownership. There is no record of any attempt to homestead any part of the "Corridor" or to carry any of the mining claims to patent. The only improvements, other than Forest Service Ranger Stations, lookouts, and guard cabins have been a number of trapper and miner cabins. The remains of trapper cabins are to be found at Sabe Saddle, Nick Wynn Point, Scimitar Creek and several other places. Miner cabins and the remains of miner cabins are found on Deep and Storm Creeks.

The only persons known to be buried in the "Corridor" are the three Indians north of Nez Perce Pass. As nearly as can be determined, they died of disease,

probably smallpox. There is a report of an Indian burial on a frame in Scofield Creek.

The Bitterroot National Forest has an administrative site named Kit Carson. Ranger R. C. Fitzgerald in a report dated February 2, 1935, says, "Not known positively, but local legend has it that Kit Carson stopped here on one of his trips through the country." The earliest mention of Kit Carson's camp in Forest Service records is 1915 in Than Wilkerson's diary and E. E. Avery's 1920 road report. Also the original hand carved "Magruder Murder" sign had Carson's name on it along with hundreds of others. The name on the sign may not be authentic because the sign was made and placed in the spring of 1864 and Kit Carson died May 23, 1868, at Fort Lyon, Colorado, at the age of 58 after serving as a brevet brigadier general in the Civil War. Carson was active in the fur trade and then as a wagon train guide especially in the southwest. Samuel Parker notes in his journal for August 1835, a description of Kit Carson's duel with Shunar at the rendezvous so it is possible, but not known if Carson was on the site.