



# Running Line

## Recollections of Surveyors



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management



## A New Camp Cook

I was glad to find Inez willing and desirous of sharing in the camp life, though she was a little dubious as to whether she could please the men with her cooking. I encouraged her by saying the boys would be easy to cook for because they were always hungry. So I bought her a White House Cook Book and she was in business!

Being raised in Missouri, camp life in a tent on the Western Frontier presented many problems Inez had never heard of, most of which arose when she was alone in camp and had to cope with them as best she could. A wind storm might swoop in and flatten the tents, or work the stovepipe loose from the stove with a fire going. She would have to grab a gunny sack and fit the pipe back on the stove before the canvas caught fire, with soot flying all over and settling on the table and dishes.

One morning while washing dishes at the stove, she looked back at the cupboard and spied an animal watching her over the edge of the gingersnap keg. She had never seen a packrat before, and its big ears, bug eyes, and long whiskers looked pretty savage to her! She had never shot a gun, but she hurried to get the old revolver I kept under my pillow. Taking rest on the table, she fired at the beast. When the smoke from the black powder shell cleared away, up popped the head again, with eyes glistening and tail slapping the side of the carton. She shot the remaining shells with no result, except to riddle the messbox. Not to be outdone, she courageously wrapped a gunny sack around the gingersnap box and nailed the package tight in an empty egg crate. When we returned to camp she proudly pointed to the egg crate and asked us to take a look and name it!

incidentally, see a lot of new country. Regulations prevented anyone from living in a Government-maintained camp unless they were employees of the Government, so she volunteered to give the cooking job a try.

I entered on duty in Cheyenne on April 10, 1911, and was assigned to survey six townships north of Cody. The Surveyor General outfitted me with a new Young and Sons solar transit and the necessary surveying equipment. I was authorized to proceed to the field, employ a crew, purchase tents and mess equipment, tools, and supplies for running a camp, and hire horses and wagons for transportation. The land to be surveyed had been surveyed 30 years before, but the original survey was defective in alignment and

measurement, and in many instances cottonwood stakes, which no longer could be found by the settlers, were used for corner monuments. This was a free resurvey by the Government, using iron posts for corner monuments, to aid the settlers and promote the development of the country.

### Moving Cross Country

In mid-August 1912, we were on a long move overland in wagons from one section of the country to another—from Martin Ranmael's homestead farm about 10 miles southeast of Cooke City to the W.T. Broderick homestead



*Mess wagon on the move in eastern Montana, 1915.*

and the Hilton Lodge east of the Little Horn River and south of Wyola, Montana. Mr. Ranmael, a native of Norway, had waited several years for a survey because his homestead was such a difficult place to reach. When he built his house the nearest road to his place was at Cooke City. He was most friendly and courteous, and a man of unusual dexterity. According to reports he had built his nice house, all with smooth shingles and weatherboarding, entirely from native logs, using only the broadaxe, foot adz, and handsaw. It was a showplace, really.

Having completed surveys around Ranmael's place the first part of August, we were directed to proceed to the Little Horn area some 150 miles east, by a roundabout road. Mr. Ranmael bade us a fond farewell as we left with wagons piled high with camping equipment and supplies. At that time, there were no swank motels or garish hamburger stands dotting the landscape and it was the custom throughout the West for travelers to stop overnight wherever darkness overtook them. They thought nothing of pitching camp on the edge of a town rather than go to a hotel or rooming house.

The first day out, we found Sunlight Basin almost impassable because of some bad mudholes and steep hills. One time we got stuck with the bedwagon and had to carry a part of the load by hand ahead to dry ground. In Sunlight we met

Forest Supervisor R.W. Allen, who was helpful in advising us about roads. We passed over Dead Indian Hill, the famous landmark where anyone going west must drag a good sized tree with the limbs still on it, to keep the wagon from getting ahead of the horses! The first night out we camped on the head of Pat-O-Hara Creek at the foot of Hart Mountain. There the wolves kept us awake with their blood-curdling howling.

The second night out we were at the Cody Bridge. There we replenished our supplies and also soaked ourselves in DeMaris Hot Springs, the outdoors bathing pool of boiling sulphur water that gave the river its Indian name, "Stinking Water."

We continued our trip, crossing the Big Horn River at Kane, Wyoming and camping at the foot of the mountain. The next day Inez and I took a shortcut and walked ahead while the men doubled up the teams and pulled each wagon up one at a time. For us it turned out to be more of a climb than anticipated. About noon we got hungry and discovered we had inadvertently left our lunches in the wagons! Seeing a sheep wagon over by a spring, we swung over to it. There was no one home, but a part of a mutton hung in a tree wrapped in a flour sack. It looked like "manna from heaven" to us. Inez fried some mutton chops, opened a can of tomatoes and a can of corn and we had a feast. We left a thank

you note for the nice sheepherder. About 4 p.m. we luckily joined up with the wagons and joyously climbed aboard. It was a great relief to again settle ourselves in a spring seat. We could enjoy the interesting scenes of nature much better from that vantage point. As the caravan continued along the old crooked Indian trail that is "nobody knows how old," my brother, Willis, spotted a covey of ruffed grouse and bagged a few young ones for breakfast with his "38 Special" Colt revolver.

It was getting near sundown before we found water for an overnight camp. We began to wonder if we could find water before darkness closed in on us in that vast solitary wilderness. We were at an elevation of 9,500 feet, with not even a road in sight. The big snow drift ahead looked promising, so we pulled down and parked the wagon on a level spot below the drift and found a small trickle of water seeping from beneath it.

Everyone was tired and hungry and no time was lost in getting supper started. Groceries were hurriedly dug out of the wagon. Some got the stove out and set it up, others got wood. Potatoes were peeled and ham cut. It was not long before the fragrant smell of frying ham filled the mountain air! Road dust was wiped off the granite dishes and supper was ready, with

plenty of gravy and hot biscuits. A tent was put up for my wife, and the horses were fed their oats. After supper the horses were hobbled, a cowbell put on one, and all turned loose to graze during the night. The men slept out beneath the star studded dome.

### **Breakfast on the Big Horns**

Waking up during the night and hearing the gentle tinkle of the cowbell, I turned over and went to sleep again with the comfortable feeling that all was well! At least we still had a saddlehorse. The next morning the stream had quit running, the pools were frozen over, and there was ice on the water pails I had thoughtfully filled the night before. It was a little breezy, so one of the boys put a piece of striped canvas under the edge of the wagon box to protect Inez from the cold north wind, "the fierce kabbabinokka" of Hiawatha fame, while she made breakfast. After breakfast we all went up on the snow to frolic so the boys could write home about snowballing in August. The snow was too hard to make snowballs, and it was hard to stand upon. Although we were well above timber line and it froze ice every night, many alpine flowers and shrubs were seen growing



*Fall camp in northeast Wyoming in 1913.*

along the edge of the snowbank, struggling to live out their life cycle in spite of the many handicaps. As soon as the snow edge moved slowly upward, uncovering the dormant plants, the impatient buttercups, clustering rock asters, snowdrops, and other alpine flowers lost no time in doing their "thing" to brighten their part of the world. Even with an inch or more of snow yet to go, the sun's life giving rays penetrated the icy pane, causing the struggling bulb to push up through the ice, straighten up, and unfold in all its glory. We stuck some of the flowers on our hats.

The idea to take a picture of the breakfast scene came to me on the spur of the moment as I glanced at the busy camp there at the foot of the

huge bank of last winter's snow. As I stood there downwind from the outdoors kitchen waiting for breakfast and enjoying the aroma of frying mountain grouse and the coffee pot, the rising sun at my back cast its warming glow over the colorful scene ahead. I then snapped the picture catching a perfect view of my wife, Inez, as she stood, rosy-cheeked that frosty morning. Standing between the cookstove and the red and green painted wagon, she dominated the scene. With the stove loaded with frying pans and skillets, she deftly speared herself a choice piece of grouse with that ever busy left hand of hers! So intent was she, my picture taking went unnoticed.



*"Breakfast on the Big Horns." Photograph from an oil painting by Montana artist Shorty Shope. It was painted from a photo that Roy Bandy took of his wife Inez preparing breakfast on an August morning in 1912.*