

*The following is a transcription of a document by William Roy Bandy. The original, a typewritten carbon copy on onion-skin paper, was found in the materials sent to Glenn Borkenhagen by Bandy's grandson Dirk Reith during August 2019. This seems to be the most comprehensive version of the survey of the area in the east Pryor Mountains and mentions that Roy Romberg was deceased at the time of writing. Bandy states "In the nearly thirty years that have elapsed . . .", which indicates this was written around 1966. It also records the township in which they worked, T8S R28E PMM.*

Big Horn Canyon, the site of the Yellowtail Reservoir in southeastern Montana has always presented a challenge to all land surveyors engaged in the survey of boundary lines along and across it. That great gorge separating the Pryor Mountains from the Big Horn Range is several thousand feet in depth, walled with perpendicular cliffs, limestone palisades, and sliderock slopes on both sides.

The first cadastral engineer, or land surveyor to confront the barrier was Rollin J. Reeves, an astronomer and surveyor who was instructed by the U.S. Commissioner of the U.S. General Land Office to survey and monument the North Boundary of Wyoming Territory in 1879. Starting at the northwest corner of Wyoming Territory in August of 1879 with an elaborate outfit, including in addition to the usual quota of chainmen, flagmen, axmen and cornermen he had astronomers and mathematicians with the necessary equipment for making observations of the Sun and stars for latitude. The boundary was to follow the 45th parallel of latitude, and observations for latitude must be made at least every 27 miles.

They completed the first sixty miles of the Montana-Wyoming boundary line by October 5th 1879 when deep snow forced them to abandon the line for the winter. This portion of the line crossed the north end of Yellowstone National Park, over Electric Peak and on to a few miles east of Cooke City to a point on the north shoulder of Index and Pilot peaks, famous land marks.

In the spring of 1880 Mr. Reeves picked up the line where he had quit the fall before and projected the Boundary Line eastward. Thirteen miles beyond the sixty mile corner Mr. Reeves again faced a barrier that slowed him up considerably. It is best described by his official field notes of the line which are quoted as follows:

“From the 73rd mile eastward the whole region is almost impassable. We lost one man (Mr. Hopkins) in the 75th mile and it is supposed that he must have fallen down one of the numerous horrible canyons which are notorious in that region. His horse and coat were found, but not himself, though vigorous search was made for him along the streams and lower elevations.”

Leaving the mountains at the 91st mile the boundary line passes through grassy bench land, across the Clarks Fork River, along the south slope of Pryor Mountain and on to the Big Horn River. Waiting there for three days while log rafts were constructed to make the river crossing, Mr. Reeves reports that the next real barrier was encountered at Devil's Canyon, an impassable gorge leading out of the Big Horn Mountains to the Big Horn River. This was at the 145th mile from the northwest corner of Wyoming. Devil's Canyon is described by the surveyor as being about a quarter of a mile wide at that point, and impossible to cross. Their

trip around the head of this canyon to get down to the Boundary Line on the other side is described in his field notes as follows:

“All hands left the line taking their tools with them and started in a southeast direction to follow the pack train which had gone on ahead to cross the canyon at the nearest passing point. We followed up the southwest side of the great canyon all day and went into camp just before dark 20 miles above where we had left off work. Have been climbing the Big Horn Mountains all day have ascended 2000 feet above the witness corner. This is Friday night August 27th. Saturday August 28th, marched all day and about 3 p.m. found a crossing at the head of the canyon, returning down the other side of the canyon camping that night at an elevation of about 10,000 feet about 5 miles south and 7 miles east of the objective point on the west edge of the Big Horn Mountains. Have traveled 18 miles.

“August 30th, 1880: It rained and snowed all day today, and we spent a miserable day in camp.

“August 31, 1880: It being impossible to take the pack animals farther west on the line on account of the deep rocky character of the western slope of the mountains; the party with the necessary tools are now taken down the mountain to a point on the east side of the canyon opposite the 145 mile corner. The distance across the canyon is measured by triangulation, and the party goes in to camp without blankets and without supper”

This is about the 156th mile corner.

The next record we have of land surveyors in the Big Horn Canyon is in 1916, when the U.S. General Land Office surveyors under the direction of Surveyor Charles M. Pidgeon undertook to extend the rectangular system of Public Land Surveys into the canyon area by dividing the land up into townships and sections. At that time the east end of Pryor Mountain and all of the land between the Pryor Mountains and the west bank of the Big Horn River was surveyed into sections with the exception of eleven sections (eleven square miles) of the roughest part of the east slope of Pryor Mountain which was thought to be too difficult to survey. It was that unsurveyed maze of perpendicular cliffs, limestone pinnacles, and sliderock that I was directed to survey in the fall of 1936.

My party consisting of two crews of six men each had spent the summer surveying section lines in the mountainous areas north and east of Cooke City, Montana. They were experienced mountain climbers, some having been with me on the Park boundary surveys. All were willing and dependable workers and were as hard as nails, all of which contributed immensely to the success of the job ahead.

In addition to Roy Romberg, the transitman in charge of the other party, who has passed away, were the following: Jim Minnie of Billings; John Masterson of Miles City; Sam Roberts of Helena; Oliver Tingley of Butte; Blackie Postle of Helena; Sieb Hottenstein of Moore; Bob Pyle of Billings; Harry Bean of Bridger; and

George Kortum of Anaconda as truck driver; with Mr. Hodgkiss of Red Lodge as cook. In the nearly thirty years that have elapsed I have lost contact with some of those boys, but I am proud of the fact that of the ones I have been able to keep track of there are presently a State Cadastral Engineer, a Captain in the U.S. Navy, a Colonel in the U.S. Air Force stationed at S.A.C., and a District Surveyor for the U.S. Bureau of Fish and Wildlife.

We put our pack animals out on winter pasture and moved the outfit by truck into the township on September 25, 1936. Camp was established at a small spring at the very head of Lost Water Creek, near the summit of Pryor Mountain in the western part of Township 8 South, Range 28 East, the township in which we were going to survey. The camp was surrounded by heavy timber that formed a wind break. Plenty of dead trees were standing nearby for camp wood. The weather was ideal for field work, with sunshiny days and frosty nights that froze some ice on the water buckets. We were anxious to complete the survey before snow fell, which might occur at any time this season of the year. The next day we found section corners from which to start the survey and proceeded to survey as fast as we could. Within a week we had completed all of the lines except two of the east and west miles that start near the top of the mountain and go east down the roughest portion of the face of Pryor Mountain into the canyon. Each of the two crews could run one of these miles down over the maze of cliffs to the objective corner 3000 feet below in one long day. However, they would then face a 3000 foot climb back up the hill to camp, a part of it after dark, and through snow, for it had snowed on the higher elevations. If they did not like the idea of climbing back to camp at the end of the day they could spend an October night at the foot of the mountain out in the open without blankets, supper or breakfast and climb back to camp the next day. Neither of these was very appealing.

There seemed to be a possibility of getting a ride in the truck back to camp if it could be worked out. The forest map showed an old wagon trail down the west side of the Big Horn River from Lovell, Wyoming. If George Kortum, the truck driver could get the truck down that trail by going back from camp to the Pryor Gap road and down south of the Pryors through Wyoming to Lovell, we could ride back to camp with him. But there were a lot of ifs involved, we did not know whether that trail was passable for trucks, and whether George would find the right road, but we thought it worth trying. Everyone thought a poor ride was better than a good walk any time. So, on the appointed day both crews left camp early in the morning, the truck taking them as far as possible. There was snow on the mountain, but it did not extend very far down the slope. After letting us out, George turned the truck around and headed back west and south through Wyoming for the old trail which none of us had ever seen.

The two crews headed for their respective starting corners. Romberg took the north line and I took the south. We ran out of snow about half way down the mountain. A man was left at the quarter-section corner to set it after we closed our line on the section corner. We completed our line about 4:30 p.m. After signaling the man directions for setting the quarter-section corner and coiling up the 5 chain steel tape we

headed down the mountain towards the road. No sign of the truck was seen although he had been traveling about eight hours since we left him. We were all anxiously watching. Watching over north for Romberg's crew we shortly saw them trailing down the mountain looking for the same thing we were. Before long, though, we were elated to see the truck pull out on an open ridge and turn around. A shout of joy arose from the crew. The Good Lord was on our side. Good old George had done himself proud.

George said he had been traveling steadily ever since he had left us at 8 o'clock. He had traveled 90 miles, he said, but had spent some time repairing washouts and throwing rock out of the road. After the other crew arrived everyone piled in to the bed of the truck, a canopy topped carryall and we headed for Camp. It proved to be a long, bumpy and crooked road along the hillside, but the truck felt good to the tired boys. Soon we were traveling in darkness which slowed us up. The boys sang a while showing they were in good spirits, then as the road got better they were quiet.

Out of the canyon at the cross roads the gas gauge showed we would have to go into Lovell to fill up. In Lovell we had to roust out the filling station attendant to give us gas, as it was now about 10 p.m. Climbing the Pryors on the Crooked Creek road we ran into snow and mud. Before long we had to wake up the boys to help put the chains on the truck, a disagreeable chore in the dark. But the dependable Dodge kept chugging along and carried us into camp around 2 a.m. The cook had long ago gone to bed after keeping the food warm on the stove until bed time. There was no sleeping after we got there. The cook very graciously got up and served the supper the best he could and every one went to bed feeling they had earned their pay that day. We had the satisfaction of knowing we had completed the job in spite of the snow and late season. I declared the next day a Sunday and everyone slept in.

The following day we broke camp and headed for Helena, where Mr. J. Scott Harrison, Supervisor of Surveys sent us out on McClellan Creek to survey some Forest Reserve land before disbanding for the winter.