

## THE ROAD TO SUNLIGHT BASIN

as of the year 1907-08

When the first white men climbed up over Bald Ridge from the East, their tired saddle horses and pack animals paused at the top of a high pass. They were then on the top of Dead Indian Hill. Here they were able to see below them from this lofty height, a great vista of valley, most secluded by the lofty range of mountains that surrounded it. This valley was later known as Sunlight Basin, and the ~~upper~~ Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River made a deep transverse valley and canyon to the East of the scene which these hardy adventurers looked upon.

### An Ancient Game Trail

Here at the top of Dead Indian Hill was a much-traveled game trail, for the wild life at each season traversed this trail from the plains and foothills to the high mountains, now the Yellowstone National Park. Later pack trains followed this old game trail as it was the only practicable accessible pass into this beautiful valley. Indians on migratory hunting trips or on war parties with their villages born by travois and pack animals made more distinct freshening of this ancient trail; and about the summer of 1876, the first hardy prospector bound for Cooke City, a recently discovered mining camp located on Soda Butte Creek just beyond the head of the Clarks Fork, cut down a tree as a drag and fastened it to the axle of their two wheel cart by a chain. He put on another chain to his lower side wagon wheel as a rough lock. This chain made fast to the cart and no doubt offered a prayer for a safe descent. Later other two wheel carts followed this. Then as the trail could be more easily followed due to the tree drag having made a rude roadway, wagons of four wheels safely negotiated this dangerous ascent. Often aided by snubbing ropes fastened from the upper side of the wagon to convenient trees. Not always was the descent safely made for many



wrecks were sure to occur. Some wagons were turned over, some broken, horses injured and sometimes the prospector or trapper or hunter or settler, as the case might be, suffered injury and loss. This did not discourage, however, a considerable influx of hardy mining men into Cooke City and the Sunlight Country.

#### Steep Grades - Many Rocks

Lacking exact figures on the altitude of the top of Dead Indian Hill -- I would estimate it to be 8700 feet and the bottom of the grade at Dead Indian Creek at 5200 feet -- the distance from top to bottom was from one and one half to one and three quarter miles -- the difference in altitude being 3500 feet in slightly less than two miles. These grades or pitches had a 30% pitch. The top grade known as The Berry Grade and the "White Pitch" or Beaver Slide near the bottom of the hill were two of the steepest grades, but there were other very rocky and one very narrow grade, the latter close to the bottom of the hill. About half way down the hill, the road left the timber and came to a small coulle and though the up-grade out of this coulle was but slight, yet it was sufficiently steep to cause the rough locks to be removed and the drag tree dropped. Then if the traveler was a good mountain teamster, he on gaining the end of the Coull immediately and carefully readjusted his rough locks, unhitched four horses to drag his tree again to the wagon -- and took a careful look to see that the chain would not slip -- for he had yet the several steep pitches to negotiate and the Beaver Slide was still before him. At the foot of the hill near the creek were always a great pile of big Bull Pine trees each well worn from the two mile drag over sharp rocks -- a deep ring was chopped in each tree butt -- or lower end about two feet from the end -- this circle cut was chopped deep so that the drag chain was not so much exposed to wearing against rocks -- also to lessen the chance of the chain slipping off the drag tree.



Average Loads and Time Required

Seldom did a wagon go over the mountain after December 1st. Most all supplies were hauled in in the early fall -- buying by ranchmen and by prospectors was a once-a-year performance, however. Many an old-timer found himself sitting up all night on top of the mountain keeping a fire going to prevent a load of potatoes or vegetables or canned goods from freezing. Most of the earlier buying of supplies was done in Red Lodge, Montana. It was a four-day return trip with a load. It was often longer if bad weather was encountered. From Cody, Wyoming to the Basin was a long three day trip in and two days out -- and longer too if conditions were not favorable. A good six-horse team in the hands of an experienced freighter could, under favorable conditions, bring in from 3600 to 4000 pounds net load. No bridges existed -- all creeks or rivers had to be forded (except bridge at Cody). Freezing and thawing weather in the fall and winter made a greater hazard. It was a very hard day's work for a six-horse team to take an empty 3½ inch wagon up Dead Indian in going out empty for supplies and often a complete day was required to go from Dead Indian Creek to the head of Paint Creek to camp for the night. All equipment was of the best. Most wagons were double-tired on rear wheels and had a fifth wheel - or an iron circle under the front axle from which rough lock chains were fastened. The less experienced teamster thought he would take off all teams except his wheel team for he thought four or six horses too many to drive down the hill or down Baldy Ridge in going to town. The experienced freighter would always keep on his six horses -- or four, as the case might be -- for the lead team would be able to help handle the wagon tongue while the wheel team were setting back all they could to check the wagon -- the leaders also kept the tongue from excessive jerking as big rocks were encountered. Three and a half cents a pound was the low rate for freight in the summer and fall.



#### First Work Started on Road

In the spring of 1909 -- work was started as a means of which the White Pitch and the narrow shoulder near the bottom were eliminated. Each of the settlers donated what was to be the equivalent of \$100.00 in labor -- some furnished teams. Some of the men at the mines furnished some labor. The Forest Service surveyed the new grade and a Forest Ranger contributed his services all during the time the road was being graded. The Cody Trading Co. and the Newton Co. both of Cody, Wyoming each donated \$100.00 in supplies. No county assistance was given on this initial piece of road. About three-fourths of a mile of road was a result of this first effort.

#### Other Road Improvements

In 1911, the Forest Service let a contract to Sanford Kaples of Crandall Creek for the construction of approximately one-fourth mile of road which started from the very top of Dead Indian Hill and switched-back until it reached the so-called Rocky Pitch. This piece of construction eliminated the dangerous Berry Grade heretofore in use. In 1912 the Forest Service let a contract to H. J. Marvin of Sunlight for the construction of a grade from the end of the Kaples Road crossing the old road at Rocky Pitch and following a grade of not to exceed 12% to terminate at the beginning or top of the first road as constructed by the local people of Sunlight and the Forest Service, which is heretofore mentioned. This last mentioned grade as built by H. J. Marvin was approximately one and one half miles in length.

#### Road Completed down DEAD INDIAN HILL

This road, though a narrow single track wagon road, was a decided improvement over the old dangerous road. All bad grades had been eliminated and freight wagons could come down the mountain with brakes only and no drag of a large tree was any longer necessary. Sometimes and only if snow or ice were encountered,



was a rough lock required. No longer did any but a few tourists travel to Cooke City, but at this time 1910- to 13, the Winona Mining & Milling Co. were active and developed their property and a considerable tonnage of freight was required. So the new road was a great advantage for heavy freighting, even though at the time no work had been done on the so-called "Timber Cabin Road" from the head of Blain Creek up Bald Ridge and to the top of Dead Indian Hill. Great credit is due relative to the efforts made to construct the Dead Indian Hill Road, to H. W. Thurston, then Supervisor of the Shoshone Forest and to J. M. Schwoob of Cody, Wyoming as both these men had the interests of Sunlight Basin and the Crandall Creek interests at heart, likewise the residents of Sunlight Basin performed most difficult work in the beginning of road improvements. The scars of roads on Bald Ridge can be seen at a great distance as one looks westward from the lower country. There were four distinct scars of old roads or wagon trails. One farthest north on the Ridge was known as the "Sheep Creek Road", the the "Natural Corrals Road", then the "Old Cooke City Road" - and farthest south on the Ridge was the "Timber Cabin Road" - the latter was most in use in later days, when the travel went almost entirely to Cody, Wyoming. It will be known too that obtaining logs for building purposes, corral poles and fence posts, caused a considerable of the heavy deep scars or ruts that were used by the settlers on the east side of the range to build homes and fence lands with timbers thus obtained. It was not until the Dead Indian Hill Road was partly improved that new settlers came to Sunlight to take up homesteads, for prior to road improvement, only the few original settlers lived in the Sunlight Basin Country.

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PAINTER P.O., WYOMING

Actual list of residents  
Dwelling in Sunlight Valley 1907

From foot of Dead Indian Hill then up the Valley of Sunlight Creek.

- Sam Thompson Cabin and garden patch in canyon of Dead Indian two-thirds mile below old road crossing of creek. Sam an old-timer from the Rosebud and Livingston Country. *? Made Vodka from Potatoes in grow!*
- Uncle Billie Campbell Cabin and a few acres of cultivation just after crossing Elk Creek, cabin 100 yards South. W. V. Campbell, Uncle Billie, a fine old-type of mountain man. *Dugdaley-Moore Property*
- Adolphus Beam Ranch and cattle, nice buildings, Corral, good cattle at mouth of Beam Gulch. Wife and daughter Pearl (then about nine years of age). Prosperous...an old timer...came to valley in about 1890. *(Across from Riddle, Sny got new Game House) Pearl married J. Horner*
- John R. Painter Ranch, cattle and horses. First saw-mill in valley, family originally from Philadelphia. Took long ditch from mouth of Little Sunlight. Homestead well-cultivated. First and only piano in the valley. Mining and prosperous. Best equipped stock ranch in miles. Wife. Daughters: Mary Painter has homestead north of Painter...homestead up Painter Gulch. Marguerite Painter, a daughter and splendid young woman, looked after cattle and other interests. William, a son, worked about the ranch. Herman Dodd employed on Ranch.
- Ella Tighe A widow of Jack Tighe. Ranch well under cultivation. Some few cattle, nice log cabins at a point north of trail Creek Valley. Boarded travelers and some mining men. Homestead of about 160 acres, north of bank of Sunlight Creek.
- Williard Ruscher Homestead on South side of Sunlight Creek. Cattle and horses, some mineral claims.
- Ranger Cabins U. S. Forest Ranger, Jessie Nelson, wife and daughter, Dorothy. J. E. Rollinson, Assistant Ranger. Ranger cabins on South Bank of Creek just about a mile to east of Mouth of Hauf Gulch.
- Siras Davis Homestead Ranch just below mouth of Little Sunlight. All fenced and mostly cultivated to hay. Original buildings built by Frank Chatfield in 1880. Wife, Kittie Davis, a widow of Frank Chatfield, both same from Cooke City, Montana. Originally from the Galatine.
- Bert Martin  
Doc Whitney These two men had a nice cabin on a sulphur claim, on the north side of Sunlight Creek about six miles above the mouth of Little Sunlight. They engaged in mining, claims in Sulphur and on some upper streams. Both handy men, good miners and mountain men.



Ous La Fond Had a homestead on Sunlight Creek just above Gravel Bar. The creek crossed the homestead three times as per the road. La Fond was a miner with claims on Copper Creek and was itinerant.

Ed Boughten  
Mart Boughten Ranch opposite the Si Davis Ranch and adjoining the Ranger Station to the West. Good cabins of logs, some cattle and horses, land good and cultivated. Morticed posts and rail fence. Mouth of Hauf Gulch. Wife and daughter Jessio. Ed Boughten, the father, had a small cabin with limestone fire-place west of the main house. Ed Boughten was perhaps the oldest trader in Wyoming territory and his son, Martin, perhaps the oldest white boy born in the territory. The elder Boughten was a trade and freighter at Fort Laramie in the early Sixties. This ranch was originally the Charlie Hoff Ranch.

Lee City

Also  
Hardee Cabin  
& Mines

This group of log cabins known as Lee City was located close to the mouth of Copper Creek. James Osborn, engaged in prospecting was the founder. He was an old confederate veteran. With him that year were Julius Eling, a Swede, and a Scott named McClung, another Scott, Dan Ferguson and one or two other somewhat itinerant miners whose names I cannot now remember. Newton and Hargraves owned mines in the Copper Creek district. John Painter, Dad Houghes and John Weaver (Red Lodge) owned and worked mines and had a good cabin on Galina Creek. These mines had proved good but were then idle.

In The  
Entire  
Settlement

All houses, barns and buildings of logs, very well built. The A. J. Beam house and J. R. Painter house were built of logs squared in the new saw-mill and were later sheathed with ship lap outside and matched pine ceiling inside, both with shingled roofs. All other log cabins were comfortable and well built, all having dirt roofs. Most all fences were pole fence or lazy fence--mighty well built, very little wire fence in use. Every one took pride in keep up their places and all were in splendid order.

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These places above mentioned, and people mentioned were the only actual residents of Sunlight Valley in 1907-1908. There were this year, 1908, approximately 750 cattle and 180 horses grazing in Sunlight Basin. The winter range was good. About 180 head of cattle and 100 head of horses were grazing in the Crandall Creek Clarks Fork District.

3-3-34-

J. K. Robinson.



1907 Crandall Creek Director had the following  
and Clarks Fork above the river trail.

Dun and  
Dillworth

Had a homestead (each) on a tableland above the Clarks Fork Canyon, on the north side just above the mouth of Russell Creek. They had Cattle and some horses, both were Red Lodge men and scarcely ever came into the Sunlight or Crandall Country due to natural barriers of the Canyon.

Joe Lewis

Had a homestead on Clarks Fork on the river bottom north side. A good cabin and some few cattle. A very steep trail led from the Dillworth bench down to the river. This was just opposite (nearly) the mouth of camp Creek. All wagons, and farm machinery taken there as to the Dun & Dillworth place by pack animals in sections.

Dutch Charlie  
(C. A. Bowden)

Had a squatters claim on the north side of Clarks Fork about two miles from the old ford at the (above) mouth of Crandall Creek. He was a hunter and trapper. Had a few ponies, small cabin and corral.

Ed Van Dyke

Was next up the River and just across the Clarks Fork ford from the mouth of Crandall Creek. Van Dyke was a hunter, had a few horses and a cabin. Put up a little hay, claimed it a homestead. Had been married to Sant. Naples Sister. Two children, girls, one named S

Bill  
Grenough

Put up some hay in small timothy meadows on Ghost Creek north side of Clarks Fork on Bear Tooth Trail about two miles up Ghost Creek from Van Dykes, one room cabin and corrals. Had some cattle and a bunch of horses. A good mountain man. Took some hunting parties out. Located there were Mrs. Dol Decker and her three daughters, Mary, Olive and (I forget the younger one). All before listed usually made all outside contact with Red Lodge.

Mike Ward

A former Cooke City Miner. Had a one room cabin on Luddy Creek north side of Clarks Fork. — Mike commuted his needs with Cooke City. All the above listed lived on the North side of the Upper Clarks Fork.

In Crandall Creek were Martin Rammel and his brother (part time) They had a nice log house on Lodge Pole Creek about three-fourths-mile before Lodge Pole empties into Crandall Creek. Good natural meadows, good corrals, some horses. Martin did some mining work and allied his interests to the Cooke City end. Arney (laen, his brother spent part time there. This was a natural stopping place for many (though few) travelers.

Ranger station was situated in one of Martin Rammel's cabins about one-fourth mile west or down stream from Martin's home.



Frank Sparhawk was the first permanent ranger stationed there. Dave Fleming and Robert Morton were most always to be found about Martin Rammel's Ranch.

Dan Thacker

Operated a mining claim close to the junction of Lodge Pole and Crandall Creek. John Tabor that winter assisted him.

John Tabor

Had built a splendid new log house, barn and corrals on the west side of Crandall Creek about a quarter of a mile below Lodge Pole.

Wm. Caples

And his son, Sanford Caples, lived with Mrs. Caples on the west bank of Crandall Creek just north of the mouth of the North Fork of Crandall Creek. They had irrigated meadows, a nice ranch, good house barns, corrals, some few cattle and quite a few horses. Sant. took out hunting parties and did some mining, he was a good mountain man. Just at the S.W. end of the Homestead is the grave of John Crandall who as a prospector in the late seventies was killed with his prospecting partner by Nez Perce Indians, a miners pick driven through both skulls.

From here up Clarks Fork is about sixteen miles before you come to the next permanent homestead or ranch.

John Gilbert

Lived here at the mouth of Old Man Creek in a nice ranch house with irrigated meadows with his wife and two sons, John and Clyde. They had some cattle and horses, and sold butter and milk to Cooke City. They did some hunting, mining and freighting; from Gardner to Cooke.

Jack Mac-  
Donigal

Next we come to Jack MacDonigal's Ranch at the mouth of Pilot Creek and on the South Side of the Clarks Fork, a beautiful setting, natural meadows and lofty peaks all about. Jack had some good cattle. He was then an old man but quite sufficient unto himself. Cooke City was his port of trade.

Jim Smith  
(Alkali Jim)

Last of all up this river was Jim Smith (Alkali Jim) just two miles west of Jack MacDonigal and on the same side of the river. Jim was an old time mountain man, a good freighter and a good stockman. Had good cattle, good horses and good buildings. He put up lots of hay. Some he hauled and sold at Cooke City. Jim was shot and killed on the Gilbert Ranch about 1913.

Up stream and up the road from the Smith Ranch, no further settlement occurred until you reach Cooke City, Montana. The old Charcoal Camp and the line stump are the only distinct land marks. The Smith Ranch was about 16 miles from Cooke City and close to the Montana line and just South of Crazy Fork of the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone.

3-6-34

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