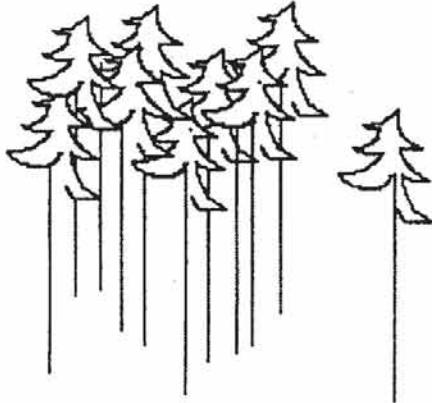


Pyramid Mountain

My Forest Service Days

by

Austin Post



.. January 1991 ..

PYRAMID MOUNTAIN

"MY FOREST SERVICE DAYS"

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"My Lookout experience mostly took place before World War 2 when fire suppression attitudes were totally different and fire lookouts - lots of them - were a fully accepted, crucial part of them. It was literally a different world; I can't say it was a better one, but most anyone that has lived in both would agree with me that a whole world, and a good one, too, has been lost, unfortunately, forever.

These totally different attitudes are quite unconsciously expressed in my memoirs. Perhaps this is their main value; this is the way things were, during, not after, the heyday of the lookout system. Not many of us who experience those times are left! For those that loved nature and took pride in doing what we fully believed was taking our part in its preservation, it was a priceless time to be alive - how fortunate I was to live when I did!" AP

(Scanned and edited from Austin Post's memoirs and archive photographs of his lookout experiences in the Lake Chelan area of Washington State. FFLA Historian 2010.)

Pyramid Trip, First Meeting with David Hale

I don't know just why Dad chose to take Phyllis and me up Pyramid. Perhaps it was due to several things: one, the mountain is so prominent when going up lake on a boat that Dad must have looked up there many a time from his own open launch, "Cupid", as a young adult. Then, there were the trips on the Fantasy. Finally, Dad and I were invited on an outing with Mr. Hallock and son Lee, Mr. Hastings and son Greg, all in Hallock's truck, into the upper Entiat country. Returning, we spent a night camping at Big Hill lookout and it is from there that the Pyramid trail takes off.

Probably it was all of these memories that made the hike attractive. Whatever the reason, on a late summer day, we arrived at Big Hill in our new 1936 Oldsmobile. We must have camped there overnight, for it takes a full day to make the hike. If I recall correctly, I was fourteen and Phyllis, equipped with her free Eastman Kodak, seventeen. I was in seventh heaven and rushed on ahead and back again like an eager, excited pup. I can remember Dad cautioning not to use up my energy too quickly. But to a fourteen-year old farm kid on an outing, energy is what one has most of. Anyway, it was a delightful hike through the alpine slopes of Crow Hill, a precipitous dive into Corral Creek, then a ramble through forest past several sheep herder campsites (a couple of these were "Poodle Dog" and "Farview" - identified with box-board signs nailed to trees). The next climb was up Graham Mountain. Around the slopes of this and another drop follows. One more intermediate mountain to skirt, one I call 'Albicaulis' after the plentiful white-bark pines. Then a lesser descent and at last one is at the base of Pyramid itself. As this is all in the subalpine zone, vistas abound and from here one looks directly up the slope of the mountain. Most summers a snowbank lingers about halfway to the summit. I don't think it survived that year. A picture Phyllis took doesn't appear to show it.

This was the place one might expect the very indifferent trail (a sheep driveway, actually), the climb up that scab rock slope, to really get awful. Quite the opposite. For three reasons: first, the sheep didn't use it and ruin it and second, it was laid out sensibly. The final reason: it was within easy reach of the fire lookout station so eager beaver lookouts had worked that

part of the trail into fine shape. Instead of a final battle, it was a nicely graded switchback route to the summit.

At over 8,000 feet even I was panting as we slowly worked our way up that final pull. The trail works around to the north side, where it reaches a col overlooking Lake Chelan far below. Here was snow, a remnant of the big cornice that forms in winter and which is present all years. This had melted down thirty feet or more from the crest. Dad went down to get some and Phyllis took a picture of this, too. Real snow in midsummer! One has to be brought up in the desert to appreciate what this means.

Then on to the lookout, now conspicuously in view only a few hundred feet higher.

David Hale was the Pyramid lookout and he continued on the job there for several years. We must have been the most remarkable visitors of the season, what with a very popular, good-looking young woman in the party! This probably was part of the reason for the really wonderful reception we got. To me the top of the mountain was heaven. Way, way up there - such grand scenery on every side. Not least was Glacier Peak, now close enough to be dominating the scene but with worthy allies, glacier-bearing peaks and rocky, ragged summits rising in ranks toward the horizon to the north and west.

Dave had plenty of snow-cold lemonade for us and maybe Phyllis remembers other goodies he might have prepared. To me the lookout building up there on top of the world was as near Utopia as one could possibly get: the wonderful air, the fabulous view which extended from the Selkirk Mountains of Idaho, the Eastern Washington plains, and way down below. Lake Chelan, a brilliant deep blue in the bottom of that incredible trench, then the snow peaks to the west. To what more could one aspire? Not to speak of the big 1,400-foot cliff, down which Dave proceeded to roll some big rocks! A few of them set off others much larger that made it all the way to the bottom where they could be seen as tiny specks, creeping across the residual snow and ice patch far below. It wasn't until I was Pyramid Mountain lookout myself that I began to appreciate what labor Dave had gone to in order to give us this show. Find a loose rock anywhere near the summit of Pyramid? Not on your life! Previous lookouts had tossed them all years ago.

That evening we were treated to a spectacular sunset over Glacier Peak. Phyllis tried to take a picture of it. With the cheap black and white film, a free camera that leaked light, and no filters, it's no surprise it didn't do the scene real justice. At the time, though, I recall it was a beauty. I was to see quite a number more in later years, with the deep shadows that form, the peaks falling into silhouette, then after the sun sinks and the earth's shadow rises the mountains and glaciers come back into view again, now in tones of gray. It's a grand spectacle one doesn't get on the lower stations. I never saw anything to compare with it from McGregor or Crater Mountain, both nearly equally high peaks but without the open view as from Pyramid. These lookout stations were enclosed by their surrounding mountains and did not have Pyramid's variety and expansive sweep, which came as a surprise. I had expected the views from these peaks to exceed Pyramid's grandeur.

The night passed uneventfully and the next morning we were on our way back down the mountain. With little to do but rush on ahead, I probably didn't see much of Dad and Phyllis, although I can remember being shouted at not to stray off the

trail. I do recall Phyllis commenting on how far I was ahead and how tired she was, but at that age scrambling around the hills was so wonderful I couldn't get enough of it. All too soon we were heading down into the low country and this second great adventure with the lookouts was a memory.

I Build My Own: "Sage Brush Point" Lookout Station

If I couldn't have a Forest Service job yet, the least I could do was build a lookout of my own. One of the limiting factors was that it had to be close enough to Lake Chelan to make salvaging wood off the beach practical - no small chore. I explored around, seeking the best site, before choosing and naming "Sage Brush Point" for a vantage. Another reason for the choice was that Greg Hastings lived nearby. He was just enough younger to be malleable to my wishes and was already endowed with a hefty, strong back which could be very useful. Also, we were friends.

The site has been an orchard for many years now so it's sort of hard to describe the location easily. It is the second and lower of two rounded granite knobs on the north shore of the lake going west from town. Many years before, someone had dug out a round reservoir on its broad summit about three hundred feet in diameter which looked much like a meteor crater. I doubt if the scheme had ever been utilized because with the coming of electric pumps the orchards were irrigated directly from pipes under pressure, so there was no need of a reservoir. When the lookout station was built, sagebrush was well grown in the circle leaving only the conspicuous, pale gray rim of clay, evidently dug out of the pit.

The station must have been constructed mainly after school. That was the most time I would have had free, and that by going there direct from the bus! The folks were lenient knowing my enthusiasm for the project and doubtless allowed me more free time to devote to it than I realized. In any case, four rather skinny driftwood logs were located on the beach and with "Chunky", the rowboat Dad built for Phyllis and me one winter, were towed to the nearest practical place from which they could be dragged, by brute force, to the site. Other building materials were easier to transport. These included old abandoned flume boards, generally about eight to ten inches wide and strictly on their last legs as building material. The hardest to find were long poles for braces. Eight, nearly twenty feet long, were required. Finally, with no other choice available, a neighbor's prop pile (props are used to shore up overloaded apple trees as the fruit matures) was raided when no one was observing closely. This expedient provided good quality one and one-half by three-inch milled fir stock and the tower was duly raised. I don't recall many particulars of this operation. Presumably this means it didn't fall down too many times in the process.

Once the legs were raised and the braces nailed (most of the nails were salvaged from old boards as well), the flume lumber was used to construct the deck, about 5 x 5 feet square, maybe fifteen feet off the ground. I'm afraid the prop pile came in for further raiding to provide framing material, but this time only short, less valuable pieces were needed which helped save our consciences. As there was to be no lining, five-foot high walls were sufficient. Ample headroom in the center was provided by the pitch of the roof. The walls were built up about two and a half feet, then a top plate nailed around the top of the "prop" studs and the space between left open to the breezes as wide open glassless windows which in summer in those parts are better than the real kind. The roof was of similar flume board construction, with no time wasted in planning any waterproofing, which at Chelan was rarely needed anyway.

The tower complete, a bunk of more flume boards was constructed. I even made a plywood fire finder complete with map and rotating pointer, this project done in the basement at home mainly with a Christmas gift coping saw.

One night shortly after the structure was complete we had a real windstorm; I looked with dread to "Sage Brush Point" when daylight came. My worst fears were realized. Where the tower had so proudly stood was now only the bare sagebrush-covered knoll! It wasn't until after school that Greg and I were able to visit the site and survey the damage. It was total for most of the structure. Little but ruins remained. This was bitter, as plans had been to install old pipe-wire guy wires that day! One day too late! Even so, we resolved to rebuild.

This was done with aid from Greg's dad, Francis Hastings. He must have taken considerable interest in the project as he

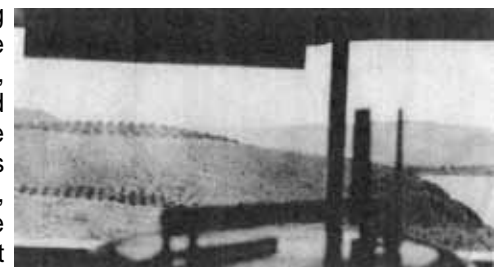
located four real posts about the same length as the beach ones we had previously used and he delivered them to the site with the tractor. This was a real boon. By now the prop pile had become a staple source of material, and though the shattered remains of the first tower were utilized where possible, 'newer' scrap lumber was added as necessary with an



increasingly clear conscience. Again, the major construction was of discarded materials and close up the structure was something else in appearance. From the highway, some half mile distant, the tower did look remarkably neat and finished.

Sim Beeson

This was fortunate, as it was to give me a clear shot at my goal of being a real lookout. Sim Beeson, the U.S. Forest Service Assistant Ranger, who had a passel of kids himself, spotted the tower and, intrigued, drove by back roads to Hastings' place, the nearest house. Here, either Greg or his Dad took him up for a look, and if I know either of them, gave him a real snow job in the process. I doubt if this mattered. Sim was taken with it to the extent of looking me up a few days later and together with Greg, and in a real USFS pickup, took us to the Forest Service office, where he presented us with a genuine, if discontinued model, firefinder on which he had spent hours shellacking a Forest Service map. In addition, an official United States flag, more maps, fire reports - the works! Oh, yes, and some official bright yellow signs, "No



Osborne firefinder and view to the east

Smoking While Traveling" and "Douse Your Campfire, Every Spark" - these to be erected along our highway. Then he wrote up a neat story about it all for the local paper, the Chelan Valley Mirror. This must have been in the summer of 1937 or 1938.

What an event in MY life! I doubt if Sim ever realized what a profound effect this generous act was to have. I have him to thank for so much of my future professional career, which was to result from that interest shown in a kid's project. Of course, neither did any of the rest of us see it as pivotal; it was just one of those special things a considerate adult does that inspires a kid at the right time. It may not have influenced Greg's life nearly as much, but to me this was the wedge. From that day on I haunted the Forest Service office, scrounged all available maps and materials and doubtless made a thorough pest of myself. Whatever, one thing they couldn't escape knowing, that the pesky "Post kid" was one eager youngster to join up, the sooner the better!

Those maps and supplies were put to good use, too. I soon knew every feature shown on the maps as well or better than anyone else who hadn't actually been to those places, and probably better than most who had. Not a single feature I wasn't as familiar with as a map or descriptive pamphlet could make it. I even scrounged up a copy of the official "Lookout Manual" and memorized it. I was rarin' to go. But it was to be another year or more before this was to be.

September 1939

An Exciting Lightning Storm

My chance to actually become a real fire lookout came very unexpectedly in the fall of 1939 and it couldn't have happened under much more spectacular circumstances. This was in the nation's 'dust bowl' era. Eastern Washington was bone dry, too. One year, perhaps that one, Chelan's rainfall was less than three inches. Even at high altitudes in the mountains only a foot or so of snow fell. That day a rip roaring lightning storm had set fires everywhere around the town of Chelan. We watched from our porch as one strike after another hit the dry, cheat-grass hills, smoke instantly following, as yet another fire blossomed. That night as it got dark fires were burning all over, a frightening sight. Protected from the dry slopes by the orchard, we were reasonably safe, but not our dry farm neighbors above. They must have been plenty worried. At the least, it would strip the hills of forage for their cattle.

Emergency!

Can I Go Up On Horton Butte Lookout Station?

We went to bed with fires still raging on all sides. Some time after we were all asleep, someone was pounding on the door. This proved to be Sim Beeson. Could the kid go up on an emergency lookout? No doubt the answer was YES even before I was consulted - a very excited kid when I was! In moments the whole family was up, Dad and I heading for town to add to the skimpy supplies available at home which could be collected in a hurry. The whole town was awake. It was some sight, fires everywhere around, everybody up, Forest Service office and the grocery stores open, everyone available joining the fire crews.

Soon I was at the office, too, being herded into a gang that was to head up lake to fight a fire at Railroad Creek. The emergency station I was headed for was Horton Butte, eight miles by trail from Meadow Creek Lodge which was located about forty miles up Lake Chelan. The date was 1939, not difficult to recall for while I was at the lodge with the owners listening to the radio, war was declared in Europe. (England declared war on Germany September 3, 1939.)

Heading Up Lake in the USFS Forester

So, a hasty goodbye to Dad and I was in the back of a Forest Service truck with the fire crew as the driver furiously pounded around the corners on the way to Twenty-five Mile Creek. In those days the road was said to be gravel. In reality that means washboards and chuckholes. I don't think anyone thought much of it on that trip, though. I sure didn't, on this first real adult experience of my life. One I was more than eager for, but mighty nervous and shy, there in that bunch of big, powerful, strange men. I felt very much the greenhorn kid. There are no roads up the western part of Lake Chelan due to the sheer granite cliffs extending for thousands of feet above the shores. The only way to get up lake in those days was by boat. For this reason, the Forest Service had two vessels - a workboat, the USFS Stehekin, and the high speed twenty to thirty-passenger fireboat, USFS Forester. The latter was a narrow craft probably about thirty-five feet long, powered by a big Hall Scott gasoline engine which drove it along at a lively clip, maybe twenty miles an hour or more, as it threw up an enormous bow wave and wake, probably making it the fastest craft on the lake. It was so narrow that single seats on each side of the aisle took up all the space. Large windows on each side could be rolled down. (Several years later these were to come in handy when fire shovels were utilized for paddling when the boat had a stalled engine while on a lee shore. Maybe I'll get to that presently. For now, I'll get on with my first trip aboard.)

It was 'dark as midnight' all this time, with the cooler air of night and being on the shady side of the lake. I can remember the change to cool freshness as we unloaded the truck and carried tools and food down the dock to others loading the boat and then the excitement of boarding.

Next came my moment: the fire crew boss made a head count by the boat's dim cabin lights. Due to me, he came out one too many! I realized what was wrong, but was too bashful to speak up. A second count was made, with the same result. This caused quite an uproar. How could this be possible? Finally, someone remembered, "Ain't there s'posed to be some kid goin' up on a lookout somewhere?" So, at last I spoke, loud enough so the guy next to me could hear it, anyway, and the mystery was solved, to everyone's high amusement. I know it caused a big laugh. Then the guard who ran the boat fired it up, lines were cast off and the Forester was on her way, throwing that impressive bow wave which loomed white in the darkness on either side.

Meadow Creek Lodge; Climbing the Mountain; Opening the Station

It was a run of several hours to Meadow Creek Lodge where I was let off with my meager supplies while it was still dark. I had been instructed to wait there for a packer who was on his way up from Prince Creek to take me up the mountain. So I sat on the dock. After it started to get light, a friendly dog and I explored around a bit but with the arrival of the packer on schedule, my supplies were quickly loaded on a pack horse - not much of a load, even with the radio sent up from Chelan. The packer was scornful and said he could eat all my groceries in a day which to my dismay he came very near proving. (In retrospect, I'll bet he was supposed to furnish his own grub. I was green enough not to protest and was mighty glad to have his help setting up the station.)

It was only a few minutes before we were heading up the trail. I walked. We soon crossed the "East Shore Trail", the lookout route switchbacking up the mountain. All proceeded uneventfully as by degrees we gained altitude, the air gaining

the additional freshness, the views between the trees becoming more numerous. We must have reached the ridge crest in the white-bark pine belt in late morning and a short time later arrived at the isolated lookout building. This was unlined, 10 x 10-foot ('100-square footer') and built on the ground. The packer had a key and soon we were opening up the shutters and the lookout building immediately looked operational.

Checking in by Radio; An Embarrassing Experience

The next thing was to set up the radio, SPF 134. Here the packer's professed experience didn't help much. Although we followed the instructions, we got no response other than horrible static and after experimenting all afternoon we still had no contact. Finally that evening the packer hit the right button, the radio went to work and he checked in. The Stehekin Ranger, "Ross", sounded thoroughly cranky and demanded to know why I hadn't checked in before. The packer wasn't one to take guff from anyone and in very plain, blunt language, said why. Then the discussion turned to supplies, or lack of same. There was supposed to be bedding in the building, which, however, was an unlined shell containing nothing but a fire finder, table and stove. A rusty pan or two and a couple of plates about finished the inventory. This upset Ross and he angrily demanded to know if I had checked the attic and if not, why not.

To this the packer, replied in equal heat, "Ya wanna know why the hell I ain't, do ya? Wul' I'll tell ya why! There ain't no damn attic in this -n hole."

As the Ranger clearly thought he was talking to me, this rather shook me up, as evidently it did Ross! It had a very improving effect, however, and in a much-chastened tone "I" was told, "Fer chrissake, kid! Take it easy on the language over the radio!"

I was next told to hike down to Meadow Creek Lodge for blankets and fire pack in three days' time.

Finally we went to bed on the lookout station floor. As I had no bedding the packer loaned me two trailworn, canvas mantas, well soaked with horse sweat, in which I spent an uneventful, if rather gasping night. Already his free use of my supplies was alarming. I was helpless and now anxiously looked forward to his departure in the morning.

I'm Alone! I'm the Horton Butte Fire Lookout

After breakfast, meager on my part as an example which he ignored, the packer saddled up and departed down the mountain with about half of my food in his belly. But, he was gone! I was alone! What a wonderful feeling - my own real lookout station! I didn't care if I starved or froze, what difference would that make? I was really a fire lookout, a REAL one at last!

As fire lookout stations go, Horton Butte would come in somewhere more rugged and a lot more remote than most. It was situated on one nondescript ridge among hundreds, neither higher nor more spectacular than the others, and decidedly lower than the main peaks such as nearby Star Mountain (8,500 feet), which I would have chosen had I been asked to site the station. Its purpose was to overlook the Fish Creek drainage and also various slopes across Lake Chelan, which could be seen 'down there' on both sides of Round Mountain. A good view up Railroad Creek to the out-of-control "Tinpan Mountain fire" may have been the major reason they put me up there. As it turned out, I didn't report any new fires at all, as there were no further lightning storms, but I did a lot of relaying of radio messages for this fire and, strangely enough, one located on the West Fork of Flat Creek, far away out of sight in the Stehekin wilderness.

That morning I began the first of my regular reports on a schedule: eight o'clock, noon and at five in the afternoon. It must have been immediately apparent to all that the rough voice of the evening before had changed to a scared kid's rather than a foul-mouthed roughneck. Much to my relief, I was told to report to 'Bob' on Domke Mountain from then on. Bob turned out to be one of those warm, fatherly types that made the Forest Service generally such a friendly place to work and the radio a thing not to be feared, which it was with Ross on the other end. Evidently realizing I was very green indeed, Bob certainly went out of his way to be helpful and in late evening chats told me of experiences he was having on top of his one hundred-foot steel tower which boasted so few comforts I felt I was living in a palace by comparison.

So my career as a fire lookout began. Uneventfully the days passed. As directed, I made the hike to Meadow Creek. It was on this brief return to "civilization", that we heard by radio that war had been declared in Europe that day. The old couple, the lodge owners, were very despondent because of it. Being an age to make excellent cannon fodder if this continued to spread which seemed more than likely, I wasn't exactly pleased, either. Even then it seemed there must be better ways for so-called 'civilized' humans to settle their spats. Nothing since has changed my mind. But this is about Horton Butte, and after hearing the bleak news, the kind people loaded me up with some much-needed foodstuffs for which I would pay them upon my return home. These and three old, tired, rat-chewed wool blankets and a heavy fire pack, the total Forest Service contribution, made a big load and I was soon on my way back up the mountain.

Getting Water

Getting water proved to be a problem that couldn't be completely solved with the available equipment. A metal can on a packboard, used for fire fighting, was supposed to be used to provide the water supply and was to be filled every other day at a spring a long two miles down the trail. The problem was, this old pack leaked so much from various cracks and missing rivets that by the time one got back up the mountain, all the water had gone into a thorough cooling of one's back, rump and legs and irrigating the trail. I tried alternatives, such as lugging the miserable thing in my arms to tip it so it didn't leak so copiously. This obligingly soaked one in front instead, a dubious improvement, and helped only as far as preserving a pint or so of water, but not at all enough relative to the agony of the struggle involved. After a few attempts with the miserable thing with jury-rigged patches, I gave it up completely.

There was a small canteen, maybe two quarts or so. As I could go for water only every other day, this called for rigid rationing, the utmost economy. First, I drank the minimum to get by. Cooking required some. Then clean-up. If any of this dishwasher remained, it was used to scrub the table. No water was ever simply tossed out. By the time it had made the circuit, none was left to throw away. (Good thing I was a boy!)

Another event was connected with the water supply. While still attempting to use the pack one blistering afternoon, I hung my sweaty shirt over a branch along the trail on the way down, as I knew it wouldn't be needed on the steep pull back up. Imagine on my return to find no shirt anywhere! I even went back down searching all the way to the spring with no luck. This mystery wouldn't ever have been solved if a day or so later an old mule deer doe hadn't come up to the lookout. Hanging from a corner of her mouth and on which she was still chewing, was the last remnant of that shirt. *(to be continued)*

PYRAMID MOUNTAIN

"MY FOREST SERVICE DAYS"

by Austin Post

(part 2 - continued from last issue)

The Thrill of Just Being There! My Duties

Having a deathly fear that if I ever complained over any deficiencies at all I would be given orders to close up the station, I "made do" with all the inconveniences, gladly. This included sleeping under the stove, the only spot warm enough to sleep at all, and this only when the fire was burning. I quickly acquired the knack of waking up before the fire went out, I can recall moonlit nights, looking out across that grand scene, leaning over the stove shivering while the heat built up enough so I could curl up under it again.

These were not things I minded. I was so glad to be up there that I would have put up with about anything. Some of those shivery huddles over the stove were unforgettable: the wonder of being in the wilderness amid so much beauty. And, BEING ALONE, away from people, with my own thoughts and all of nature for company. To me it was a profoundly wonderful experience, and I firmly believed that establishing a hermitage in some isolated spot and spending all of my life in mystical contemplation of life and nature was the perfect existence. In many ways, I still feel that desire. It is such an intense way to live each and every moment. There is no comparison to the present furious rat race of chasing the high standard of living and being inundated with trivial tripe that makes up so much of so-called entertainment. Not to mention the unabashedly exploitive, materialistic aims of a large part of contemporary society where even serious evidence of intellectualism is considered suspect by many. Yet, along with this, there are also millions of dedicated persons struggling, hopefully to make this a better world, cultural facets such as music and the arts and much of medicine, social work, science and engineering, which are incredibly stimulating and inspiring. The brains are here when properly used. It is truly the worst and best of two worlds. Yet, if one could live several lives, for me that of a hermit on a lookout, contemplating the universe, would be one of them. (The others would all include women - lots of them!)

I recall one chilly pre-dawn huddling over the radio as at that time reception was best and fire messages which couldn't be passed at more pleasant times of day could be successfully transmitted. This time there was no traffic and I was fiddling with the dial when a very faint voice was heard, the message was a weather report, and was conventional enough, until it came to a curious phrase, "light choppy sea" which, like the rest of the transmission, was repeated twice so there was no doubt. Up until then I had supposed it was simply some far-off lookout station with the same frequency. Now I listened with real interest hoping to discover the source. Fortunately, the message concluded with the station identification, which turned out to be the lightship anchored at sea off the Columbia River! Not bad reception for a little portable radio like the SPF was considered to be in those days!

What with the relay of fire messages, keeping a good eye on my area, the Tinpan Mountain fire and reporting to the fire crews any noteworthy changes, I felt I was earning my keep. Unfortunately for me, that fire was controlled after a week or so and showers and cool fall weather finally put an end to serious threats of new fires starting. As one day followed another I really began to 'sweat it out' how much longer I could make

my job last. By now I was down to the dregs of my food. I even became an avid ptarmigan hunter and after some lengthy chases, bagged a couple with rocks, which were a gourmet's delight in my now near-famished condition. Finally, I was down to the only thing left at all, a half sack of ancient flour. Evidently the lookout construction crew had left this, as it was thoroughly stale but still usable (probably). Anticipating this critical shortage of edibles, I had mixed up some of this with water into a paste which I let sit in the sun, hoping it would form some kind of sourdough. Each morning I experimented. It was getting thoroughly sour, all right, but otherwise didn't seem to be improving much. Cakes fried of it came out universally ghastly flavored, flat and rock hard. One morning I received the sad news to "close her up and meet the boat". Unfortunately, Ross had, as I feared he would, recalled that the 'kid' was still up there. So, I didn't get the chance to test survival on my horrible sourdough bread after all. (This may have been a very good thing; the fearful stuff well may have been poisonous.)

Closing the Station

So, - so sadly! - down came the radio antenna and the shutters, and how deserted and abandoned the building looked! Finally, there wasn't anything left to do but leave. Up to then this was the saddest moment of my life. Goodbye, Horton Butte! I didn't have the courage to even look back, leaving was that painful. A bit of history: As far as I know I was the only lookout that was ever stationed there. The other 'temporary' stations were used most years, but Horton Butte seems to have been the bottom of the totem pole, the last to be manned. So I was privileged in more ways than one to have been up there for my two-week stint.

I Return Home Briefly

A brand new NYA School had just opened in Seattle and after unsuccessfully seeking a regular job, I signed up for that. I had no sooner written the folks my new address than I got a letter asking me to come home and help spray. They needed my help! Mightily disappointed, I checked out after less than a week there and headed back to those dearly beloved little green apples! I just couldn't keep away from them no matter how hard I tried!

As it turned out, this return was a blessing in disguise. No sooner had I spent a day or so spraying than who should come rushing up through the orchard than Sim, the Assistant Ranger. (Sim always rushed wherever he was headed.) And with the best of good news! Could I go up on Cooper Mountain? Eli Dragoo, its perennially late-starting lookout, wouldn't be available for a couple of weeks yet! Would I? I doubt if Sim was very surprised at my answer!

Cooper Mountain, My Second Official Lookout Job

The folks were a bit 'shook up' to lose me so soon, but knew their son well enough not to put any barriers in my way. Greg Hastings was called in to take my place in the orchard. Armed with lots of green stuff from the garden and eggs from the hen house, plus a big supply of 'boughten' food from the store, (remembering the scanty rations at Horton), thus plentifully set up, Sim drove me to Cooper Mountain. Together we opened the station, hooked up the telephone, set up the weather station and all the other things this important lookout

included. Once all was going satisfactorily, Sim waved goodbye and I was 'King of the Mountain' once more.

Sim had given me a rundown on using the telephone switchboard, one of the main reasons they wanted someone up there as the station acted as the Telephone Central between Okanogan Headquarters and Chelan. With fire season coming on, telephone traffic picked up to where they needed to have the systems disconnected except when in actual use, due to the amount of traffic on each. During really busy times, they even had two people on Cooper due to the switchboard load, though this didn't happen early in the season while I was on the station.

Despite it's relatively low altitude (5,867 feet), Cooper has a sweeping view as it is the highest rise on a long ridge that extends from the higher (over 8,000 feet) peaks of the Sawtooth Divide farther west. Not a spectacular view, but a nice one. I set up housekeeping in the 14 x 14 cab, then still quite new, on top of a sixty-foot tower. At the time this was the newest and most posh of the higher stations around, and in the Chelan District was considered the most important by the officials. So it was something of a feather in my hat to be up there at all.

I have quite a few memories of the three weeks or so I spent on Cooper. The first, potentially the most embarrassing, was a VERY close call of reporting the moonrise as a fire, practically the first night! There had been a respectable lightning storm, so I had an excuse. The only thing that saved me, though, was that it kept brightening so rapidly I couldn't quite believe a fire could spread so fast! Even so, was I ever surprised when the rim of the moon began to show through the trees on that distant ridge - and glad I'd held off on the report I had been all ready to phone in!

I Get Used to Lightning Storms

Which does remind me of lightning storms. Back in the 1930's, lightning was a nearly daily experience during the blazing hot summers. In Region Six, mainly located in Oregon and Washington, about two hundred storms occurred yearly (quoting from the Lookout Handbook of that era). I had quite a few during my two or three weeks on Cooper and the building was struck several times.

This is quite an experience to which one doesn't instantly get accustomed. For those who haven't experienced it, it goes something like this: Generally it's dark as Hades out, and as a lookout you have the lantern turned off so you are dark-adapted in order to spot fires. The storm has been grumbling and flickering off at some distance and you are wondering if it really was the thing to do when you 'pulled' the switch on the telephone to isolate it from the line. Either the wind is blowing enough to shake the tower and rattle the shutters or it's dead calm and totally quiet between thunder grumbles. If the latter, you generally get advance warning in the form of static electricity and at times, Saint Elmo's fire. The first lets you

know by the way your hair stands up, along with other odd sensations. Next, if it really is beginning to get serious, you begin to hear a faint 'zapping' sound, a bit like a cat's hiss. If this continues, you can just about bet there's going to be a big jolt. By that time the prudent lookout's fanny is solidly planted on a substantial chair and feet firmly set on the insulated stool. This insures a satisfactory three-point landing when one comes down again after the initial lightning strike. The hissing may either fade or a lightning bolt may soon come close enough so that you won't hear anything for some time following the incredible crash. When the building is struck at night, the flash is so bright and is accompanied by such a loud crackle (no words properly describe the sound of such close thunder) that one is both temporarily blinded and deafened.

Telephone Blues; I Paint the Building

When compared to the standard of my dreams, Pyramid, Cooper was tame, although it sure was wonderful to be up there, getting paid to boot. Being early in the season, there wasn't much activity on the telephone switchboard and I soon employed myself in painting the outside of the building, reaching everything but the very top of the flagpole. To paint this as high as possible, I tied the brush to a long stick, and then stood, balancing, a foot on each of the two corner shutter supports some seventy feet up! Sure something, what fool things kids will do!

With the telephone in the lookout building, this meant that if one went down to terra firma for any reason, like the three-times-a-day weather recording, not to mention less mentionable non-mentionables, the phone was sure to ring. With eighty-odd steps to run up, this meant lots of exercise, especially as more often than not, the caller had hung up and the line would go dead

just as you got there, breathless and perspiring. You stand around waiting for them to try again - no luck, so, finally you go down again. What happens? The phone rings! Same thing all over again. This goes on for some time, and when the call finally does come through, you can bet there will be a flea in your ear about paying attention and answering promptly!

Cooper was a good station for all its distance from the really high country. I seemed to be doing things to satisfaction and Eli didn't seem to be stirring himself. So I was told to hang tight, to heck with Eli, the station was mine for the summer! This last bothered me more than anything else. I sure didn't want to get stuck there for the duration! I can remember going around and around over it with Sim. According to him it was a lot more important station than Pyramid and the job lasted a lot longer, paid more, a better deal all round. None of this registered with me. Pyramid was my goal!

Eli Dragoo - Is He Coming or Not? The Remaining Two Dozen Eggs

Then a period of real confusion set in. One day it was, "Eli's coming tomorrow so start packing." The next call



cancelled that. Then Eli was on again. This went on for some time. Finally another, "He's really on his way, no kidding!" This time I put everything into boxes and, although the message was cancelled again, kept them that way, a horrible inconvenience, stumbling over them and turning them inside out every time I needed something. But the word then came that Eli definitely was not coming, I'd be there for the summer and I'd better learn to like it, too!

Oh yes, I almost forgot the choicest item of all. Coming from a ranch with those five hundred laying hens, which provided the only cash we generally had when we had any at all, which wasn't often, we were accustomed to eating plenty of 'checks' - eggs too small, deformed, or cracked, to trade at the store. As the one commodity we had in plenty, I had taken several dozen up with me. When the "Eli's definitely coming, no kidding" message had inspired my packing spree, I had exactly two dozen eggs left. With one day to go, I divided them as follows: eight for lunch, eight for dinner and eight for breakfast the next morning. This way I was all ready to refill with fresh on my brief stop at home on my way to Pyramid. So in twenty-four hours I ate two dozen eggs! Then came the news I was to stay put for the whole summer!

After nearly a week of waiting for yet another change with no luck, I gave up, regretfully putting everything back on the shelves and into the cabinets, resigning myself to the inevitable. I didn't even ask about Eli any more, he just wasn't coming. (Possess yourself in patience, Post - Cooper it is to be, alas.)

Then, the very next day after I'd put everything away, maybe around nine o'clock, I hear some rig coming up the road. A truck, by the sound of it. I go out on the catwalk to better judge - yes, sounds like a pickup. Will the driver stop off at the lookout for a visit? A few do, although most go on by. This one is taking the stub road, it will be stopping. I wait, watching. It's a pickup all right, forest green. I see the USFS badge on it. It stops below and Mono Faletto steps out, looks up.

"Hi, Post! All ready to go?"

"Go? Go where?"

"Pyramid, that's where!"

Eli is coming after all! Wild excitement reigns. My things are flung over the rail to drift down any which way. Mono gathers them up and dumps them into the back of the pickup in a disordered heap.

"Didn't they tell you? Eli's on his way up right now. He'll be here any moment!"

I'm so happy, I don't care how messed up things are! But they could have told me! If so, I'd have had the stairway handrails all the way, bottom to top, in nice fresh, sticky, wet paint! I'd been saving this as a special present to greet Eli with and they bungled it for me!

Eli does come in his old car and looks admiringly at all that newly painted building, everything but the railings, and smiles.

"Saved me a big job."

I tell him how they messed up my plans to greet him and his smile deepens. By now we have all my stuff in the pickup, so with a last wave to Eli, Mono and I climb in and we're off!

Jerry Ryan; On the Way to Big Hill Lookout

Probably a day or two was spent at home and in town making up a new food list. Whatever, I was to go up with Jerry Ryan to Big Hill, his station for the summer, and from there, clear out trails and check the telephone line towards Pyramid as far as possible. I don't recall if this was my first meeting with

Jerry or not. In any case, he proved to be a happy, vigorous, extremely likable kid about my own age. We were outfitted at minimum cost in identical forest green outfits (from J. C. Penney's), which fairly closely resembled the expensive official uniform. This, with the 'USFS' badges we each pinned on the left shirt pocket, turned a couple of green kids into experienced professionals or reasonable facsimiles thereof, at least to our minds. So it wasn't long before we were off on our grand adventure in Jerry's old Model A Ford.

Jerry's enthusiasm extended to his driving, at which he was very skilled. Floorboarded to the limit, the Model A kicked up monstrous clouds of dust over the washboard gravel road, which in those days began at the last apple orchards a mile or so short of the Bear Mountain cliffs. Always having a good time no matter what he was doing. Jerry was the perfect partner for my more serious and asocial self. Of course I was in seventh heaven, on my way to the high country and Pyramid as the goal. So it was a carefree pair as we barreled down the dusty, crooked road on the way to Twenty-five Mile Creek. Just the name of the stream brings back some of the excitement of that first trip up the mountain to open our own stations for the summer.

Soon we were crossing the creek and the Model A was in low gear starting up the big grade. Once past the cattle bar, made of round pipe that liked to spin and rattle loudly in protest as the tires turned them, and beginning the switchbacks up Grouse Mountain, one was truly headed for the high country. Not much later, as this is the eastern and shady side of the mountain, one enters the ponderosa pine belt and the hot and dusty lowlands are left behind. As the road continues, the air takes on the fresh pine forest scent which becomes more bracing as altitude is gained, rapidly now due to the steep grade.

This soon brings one to the turnoff to Grouse Spring, a pause not to be slighted in Jerry's Ford, otherwise it means a boiling radiator and a return for water. This did happen on a later trip up the mountain when, sure enough, we forgot and the "A" blew off just in the worst possible place, where the road builders had come to some rock outcrops and the road was subsequently no more than wheel-track wide.

I was detailed to return to the spring on foot with a couple of canteens. When I got back, it was to find Jerry stalled crossways in the road where he had attempted to turn around. As the road at that point was perched on a steep cliff and only as wide as the Model A was long, it was a ridiculous sight and Jerry was sitting there overcome with mirth. Actually, it was rather serious as there was insufficient room to turn the crank to start the beast again. So once the radiator was refilled, together we dragged in a few logs and built a small platform over the cliff to roll the car aft far enough to turn the crank. As Jerry said, anyone coming alone wouldn't have believed their eyes! Of course, only a person of Jerry's temperament and driving skill would have attempted such a harebrained stunt in the first place.

The road continues to climb until it tops out at Chesapeake Saddle overlooking Lake Chelan. I recall the first time Dad drove up there, we stopped, hoping to get a view of the lake, but the forest was still dense enough to cut off all but the most fleeting views. This was of little matter because the next vista point was Junior Point Lookout Station, which had a beautiful view of the mountains and a bit of the lake, too. It is here one first comes to the white-bark pine, which is the true beginning of the subalpine zone. Here the air really becomes fresh, such a wonderful thing to the lowlander from the desert. The road then takes off directly up the ridge, the steepest part

of the entire climb. Soon giving this up, it goes by a steep, narrow grade up the slope directly west, below Junior Point. Once this is gained the road takes it easy, as this is the main ridge. It simply follows along by low grades on to Shady Pass where the Big Hill turnoff is located and the main road begins its descent to the Entiat valley.

On that first trip up with Jerry, we must have turned off to chat with John Cunningham and his wife, the longtime Junior Point lookouts. As were all the 'old timers', John was a humorist and engaged in a perpetual battle with Eli Dragoo in attempting to spot a fire first in the other's territory. Unfortunately for John, later that summer Eli had the satisfaction of spotting a smoke first, practically in John's dooryard, to the latter's painful chagrin, which he wasn't allowed to soon forget! But such rivalry was the rule in those days with the established lookouts, and woe to the careless novice that didn't keep an eagle eye peeled for smokes - which soon taught everyone to keep on their toes.

By this rather long prelude, we have reached the turnoff to Big Hill. I've taken some time to describe the road, as this is the one thing that probably hasn't changed much, at least as of this writing. The lookouts are long gone, mourn the loss, the telephone line, too, and I understand that most of the forest, which in those days covered all the slopes and ridges, has burned, at least on the south and west side of the ridge. If you should ever go up there, it might be interesting to compare what you find with these 1941 conditions.

Fire had gone through the forest north of Shady Pass some years before the road was built, killing and blackening most of the trees for a mile or so. This was another place where woodcutters, probably from the Entiat valley, had salvaged timber although in no such scale as on Cooper Mountain. The road follows the broad, undulating ridge most of the way north to Big Hill, then reaching steeper slopes, switchbacks directly to the summit in one ridiculously steep pull. At the beginning of this switchback, the Pyramid trail takes off. (Even on foot, that road is steep. Jerry, with his Model A, had the satisfying task of towing several new cars up that slope during the summer.)

Working Out of Big Hill

The lookout building was on top of a thirty-foot tower built of substantial logs, well braced. At least none of us had any qualms about it standing up to anything nature could throw at it, and I'm sure it would be still standing today if the Forest Service hadn't tossed out the lookout system. The shutters were closed and everything locked up when Jerry and I first reached it. So our first task was to open the place, check the telephone, install new batteries, and get the station into operation. I don't recall any problems and we soon were hauling up the food boxes, packing things away and otherwise getting things in order.

Jerry was an avid baseball fan. Wenatchee games were broadcast on the local radio and I recall many an evening with Jerry glued to the speaker of his portable. The announcer had

a pet phrase that he indulged often, especially when the local team was losing, which was, "The ball game is never over until that last man is out!"

One of Jerry's propensities was to avoid dishwashing until the last pot and pan was used and all of his cupboards were jammed with dirty dishes. I recall one of these situations where Jerry was seeking unavailingly for an empty space to hide one last plate and I made the naive suggestion that it might be easier simply to wash it instead. To this, while cramming the crockery into a cranny, Jerry replied delightedly, "THE BALL GAME IS NEVER OVER UNTIL THAT LAST MAN IS OUT!"

About once a week with no other choice he'd dig out all the dirty dishes and soak off the worst of the mess.

As Big Hill was serviced by a road, even though a rather

miserable one, visitors were fairly frequent. Later that summer on Pyramid I could always tell when a pretty girl had been there as Jerry's voice on the telephone would be so excited. He would call me practically bubbling over and give a glowing description of every detail in dress and form. Alas, none of these beauties ever made the ten hard miles to Pyramid. I was eager to get on to my own station, but this was to be in another two weeks or so. Sim first sent me opening up the nearest trails - Big Creek, then Corral Creek. These I cleared of downed trees most of the way to Lake Chelan, as far as possible and still be able to return to the lookout before dark. Depending on the amount of stuff to be cleared, I spent several days on each route.

I doubt whether these trails even exist anymore. The official tendency these days is devoted more to office-conducted planning and technical fixes. Much of the public now considers a weekend with the camper at some huge roadside campground, complete with TV and hot showers, to be a "wilderness experience". It is this public which now gets most of the official attention. Also, with present fire suppression methods engineered around aircraft and smoke jumpers, maintaining little-used, secondary trails isn't given a very high priority and most have been neglected, if not written off completely, along with the fire lookouts and guard stations.

During the stay on Big Hill I was still set on my goal of Pyramid and chafed a bit at the delay, but in retrospect those days spent alone in the woods with a 'one-man' cross-cut saw (a handle on only one end, and shorter than a regular two-man saw) hiking those trails and clearing the accumulation of fallen or broken timber from them is really a very choice memory. I carried Dad's old 3-1/4x5 'postcard-size' folding camera and took various pictures, mainly of Lake Chelan or Pyramid. It is a real loss that all of those old negatives and enlargements I later made from them are gone forever, lost in changes of residence accompanying my numerous marital disasters.

With these trails cleared as much as considered practical, I was given the okay to proceed with opening the Pyramid trail and telephone line. This was more like it! On my way toward Pyramid at last!

(to be continued)



PYRAMID MOUNTAIN

"MY FOREST SERVICE DAYS"

by Austin Post

(part 3 - continued from last issue)

The Art of Hanging Wire

Speaking of those old Forest Service telephone lines, there was quite an art in their construction. A very heavy, galvanized, soft iron wire (Number 9) was strung on convenient trees where available. This being a National Forest these were generally in abundance along the backcountry roads and trails. Some person wise beyond the average had devised the system where the wire was held in position by "slip insulators", made of two identical porcelain halves that were placed over the wire and bound together with a double wrap of good old Number 9. A large hole resulted which the wire could slide through freely. Even splices, if properly made, would pass through the opening. The purpose of this was to allow slack in the wire to move easily should a tree fall across the line and thus the wire wouldn't be broken. Thousands of miles of these lines were established which connected nearly all of the Forest Service headquarters, guard stations and lookouts.

A large staple was utilized to secure the insulators to the trees, and this, too, was a special art. If properly done, even the insulator would be pulled down before the wire would break. Naturally, it was also an art to hang the wire so that the slack would be sufficient to prevent the wire being broken but neither too high nor too low for most efficient use. Then, not last, was the skill one acquired (or didn't as the case may be) in making a properly tight and neat "Western Union" splice where wires were joined. This was a real art in itself and one was judged, quite rightly, on one's ability as a lineman to make a perfect "Western Union".

Dave Hale was to give me training in this skill and was a critical and exacting teacher. As a result, I quickly made a practice of turning as nearly perfect a splice as possible. In working lines where a crude, sloppily made splice was spotted, one would stop, don the tree climbers, head up the nearest tree, release the insulator and, once more on the ground, cut out the misfit and replace it with a properly turned piece of work. Actually there was more than personal satisfaction in this. Poor splices, even ones that looked tight, could introduce bad connections in the line and shouldn't be allowed to exist.

Toward the end of my Forest Service experience at Chelan, manufactured sleeves supplanted the field-made Western Union splice and the art was quickly lost. Sleeves were a simple affair into which the ends of the wire were slipped and then a crimping tool would be used to crush the sleeve onto the wire. There can be no doubt that this is a much more efficient splice in the long run and has the advantage that any novice, if using reasonable care, can make as good a splice as the most expert. And so another art was lost in the process; with everything reduced to the lowest denominator.

I was, quite naturally, one of many who deplored this modern touch, and had one experience to prove that it had its failings. Working the Mithell Creek line from Lake Chelan, the three-man crew came to a tremendous tangle of wire where a half-mile of wire had slid down the mountain. This we laboriously dragged uphill to the break, climbing innumerable trees and feeding the wire through the many insulators in the process. Finally we had had the broken ends in 'come alongs', and had debated whether to do a regular 'Union', which we all preferred,

or use the sleeve as the new rules specified. Finally we opted for the sleeve, which turned out to be a disaster, as the wire had been stretched, its diameter reduced. When the strain came, the wire pulled out of the sleeve, a half mile of it sliding back downhill into its tremendous tangle, accompanied by many a blistering comment! Needless to say, for that crew, it was back to the good old "Western Unions" from that point on!

The Pyramid Trail and Telephone Line

As much of the Pyramid trail was near timberline, not much stuff usually blocked it, or if something did, it could often be easily cleared. The telephone line was a different matter. Located at such high altitude it was mostly buried by snow in winter or subject to severe frost and rime buildup. As a result, the line was put up with the anticipation that it would be on the ground come spring - which is to say, it was put up as lightly as possible so the insulators would pull free and drop rather than break the line. The next spring one's chief job was climbing trees and slipping the insulator tie wires back through the staples, resisting the urge to do a real 'job of it' by fastening them securely and, instead, doing so very lightly. To do otherwise was to invite having the wire broken in innumerable places the next winter. This process had been impressed on me by Dave Hale from his several years' experience.

Being me, and of an artistic bent, I couldn't resist hanging the wire in as long spans as possible where the opportunity presented itself. In open slopes where no trees at all were situated, tripods had been erected and the wire hung from these. I managed to move a few so that they were located at the edges of swales and the wire could hang freely from one lip to the other - in one case for quite a respectable distance, eliminating three or four tripods in the process. Later, Dave Hale was to note these changes and chide me about it. In one place, he said, the wire would later sag so low there was a chance deer would tangle their horns in it. I was somewhat humiliated when this sagging sure enough happened, as when I'd hung the wire it was suitably high. Over the summer, though, the long span gathered up the slack from the shorter ones and the sag had greatly increased. So much for improvements made for the sake of artistry! But Dave Hale was kind enough to appreciate my creativeness and seemed more intrigued with my changes than critical.

While working the Pyramid line, a freak incident occurred which was thoroughly provoking. I had spent several evenings with a file and stone honing my Forest Service axe which, as one might expect, was hopelessly dull on arrival. I had really worked this one over, even scraping down the handle like the professionals did until it had a flexible, delightful, live feel to it. So tuned, it sliced through green logs like a razor and was a real joy to use. The very first try out after the final sharpening, however, was to cut a green alpine fir that had broken off about twenty feet up and fallen across the telephone line and trail. This was near where the Silver Ridge trail joined in. It was a perfect time to test my super-fine honing job, as this wood cuts extremely fast with a sharp tool. This time, after only a stroke or two, there was the ominous crunch of metal-to-metal contact and sure enough, the axe had a giant nick right in the middle of the blade. I'm sure, being completely alone and therefore less inhibited than would have otherwise been the case, I must

have had some vocal comment to make about it, possibly something like, "My gracious! What could have done this?" (Or some reasonable facsimile thereof.) A few careful blows later revealed I had hit a telephone line staple, completely grown over. A million-to-one chance, disregarding Murphy's Eleventh Law, which states emphatically that hitting that staple, was inevitable and unavoidable. What makes it the more remarkable was that the staple had been driven in the tree a good thirty feet up and the wire never was hung that high in such situations. So, someone years before must have deliberately driven it with the sole purpose in mind of making sure I'd hit it with a freshly-honed axe!

Which has gotten us as far as Crow Hill, the first of three mountains which that insanelly laid out trail goes over.

A Bit of History - J.B. Richardson

J.B. Richardson was a locally famous man of the outdoors who was frequently referred to as the 'Mountain Goat' due to his white beard and ability to scramble all over the wildest parts of the Cascades. He'd spent much of his lifetime doing all sorts of jobs for the Forest Service, locating and building trails and a good number of the lookout stations on both the east and west sides of the mountains. He told me of the construction of the Pyramid Lookout when the entire building and accessories, including a 200-gallon water tank, were packed in on mules from Twenty-five Mile Creek, a total trail distance of fifty-two miles. An avid photographer, he recorded the glaciers where few, if any, others had ever taken pictures.

For twenty years or more, Mr. Richardson was the 'Old Stormy' Mountain lookout which mountain is the most prominent and interesting in view from the town of Chelan. During those depression years a number of socialistic groups had formed that had hopes of saving the world, which admittedly certainly needed it and still does. I'm not certain which of these J.B. had joined, but they had monthly meetings in Lakeside (which is now a part of Chelan itself), which he attended whenever he could get away from Stormy. The story as I heard it was that he occasionally had to take 'French leave' in order to do this. Upon his return from one of these he made the shocking discovery that the lookout building had burned to the ground in his absence! Ray Kresek's 1984 book, "Fire Lookouts of the Northwest" lists a change of lookout building styles on Stormy Mountain as having occurred in 1930, which may date this event. In any case, J.B. must have had a rather embarrassing time of it having to return to town and report the fire!

I Name Glaciers After Mr. Richardson and the Pilz Family

Reference to J.B. Richardson as a mountain goat was in no way considered disrespectful - he was just about as much at home in the mountains as the goats themselves. Years later, after I became a hydrologist with the Geological Survey, I had the pleasure of officially naming "Richardson Glacier," which is located on the northwest side of Clark Mountain and one of his favorite mountain areas. I also named nearby "Pilz Glacier" after the pioneer family that had a beautiful home on the shores of Lake Chelan at Canoe Creek, and with whom J.B. often spent the winter months.

I met Mr. Richardson shortly after the war began in Europe. As Boeing obtained major contracts to build warplanes, aircraft construction training schools were set up by the company in various communities to train sheet metal mechanics, etc. One of these was located in a disused school building at Rock Island, southeast of Wenatchee. The glow of the bright lights of Seattle called and in the fall of 1941, after my Forest Service Pyramid job was over, I signed up for the

two or three-week course. Transportation was to be furnished by bus from Wenatchee, so I got a room at the YMCA. I didn't realize it at first, but J.B. Richardson was also 'batching' there. At that time I knew of him by reputation only, but on hearing he was there I introduced myself and in the short time which remained, called several times to find out more about his photography of glaciers, of which he had a valuable collection. Also, of course, I was interested in the lookouts. J.B. would get out his albums and we would go through favored sections of them. If I had realized what Boeing was to be like, let alone Seattle, I'd have said, "Skip it, I'll stay right here in Wenatchee and pick J.B.'s brain!" - which as it turned out would have been a far more useful and interesting way to spend my time. As it was, I spent only a few hours with him, probably the most eminent authority on the lookouts, mountains and glaciers of the entire North Cascades. As far as I know, no one ever did record his experiences, a regrettable loss to history.

What I did learn regarding the Pyramid area, both from his comments and photos, was that the first lookout station was located in a tent on top of Crow Hill. J.B. had a photo of this showing the fire finder and telephone as well as the tent. Presumably, Big Hill and Pyramid were chosen for more complete coverage - events he could have described in detail. Anyway, to get back to the trail that started this discussion, J.B. laid that out, too, planning only on the most practical grades possible. But the person that got the contract to build it was a sheep man and paid no heed to the route laid out so carefully. Instead, he built it so that it led from one pasturage to the next with little regard to grade or other considerations. And so it has remained ever since. The only part of the trail that follows J.B.'s grade is the best part - that of no interest to the sheep man, the final grade up the mountain above timberline.

On the Way to Pyramid

We have gotten as far as Crow Hill. This sheep trail hasn't done anything phenomenally silly yet, although it's going to soon enough. It has ascended to the open, west side of the mountain and stays high until nearly around to the northwest. This offers a grand view of Pyramid (below), now only a bit over three airline miles away, but nearly seven by the trail.



Here occurs the trail's worst goof: it drops by what are supposed to be switchbacks four hundred feet to a saddle and if that isn't bad enough, then drops another three hundred feet or so into the Butte Creek basin. Only about half of this descent was necessary and the trail shouldn't have gone nearly so high on Crow Hill in the beginning. So presumably J.B.'s route was an easy grade all the way down to the highest saddle north of



Pyramid trail, lower left, goes around the back side of Crow Hill, foreground, descends into Corral Creek Basin, then ascends Graham and Albicaulis Mountains before the final climb to the summit.

Crow Hill and then held that altitude to the next up grade at Graham Mountain. Much of the big hike up over this mountain could have been avoided completely. Instead, the route climbs about six hundred feet to the next meadow area then drops most of it again into (west) Corral Creek. One more mountain must be crossed, the one I call 'Albicaulis'. It may be that this climb was unavoidable due to bedrock outcrops. Of the three ascents before the final one, it is the easiest and most reasonable. In any case, it brings one to the foot of Pyramid; the bare scab rock slope then leads directly to the summit, although the trail switchbacks up the west side on a continuous, sensible grade.

I haven't said much about the telephone line since Silver Ridge, where I ruined that axe on the ingrown staple. Oh, yes, the tripods. For the most part they were located on the west side of Crow Hill. Once the trail dropped down into thicker timber the line was back on trees in the conventional way and not much to be said of it. This continued on to 'Albicaulis' Mountain where to avoid a bare area and cut off some turns it went directly up the slope for some distance to stay in timber. This was a place where the wire inevitably went down in winter. So Dave had fixed it so that it would simply pull loose enough at the top to drop on the ground and the next spring one climbed up there and by brute force dragged the wire back up and resecured it to the tree at the top again. That is, if it hadn't broken in a place or two anyway. I experimented with cutting the free section into shorter segments with slack between each so any one of them could be pulled down without breaking the



Pyramid Mountain from Albicaulis ... a mile to go, and 2,000 feet to climb - almost there!

wire. So putting the line back up was much simpler. This worked the one year it was tested, except the wire still broke in one place.

Getting a bit ahead of my narrative, I'll insert here that Charlie Cone, the 1942 Pyramid lookout, and I had the job of putting up the line that spring and were doing this with a lightning storm grumbling some distance off in the Entiat Mountains area. We had just pulled the two ends together - that is, close enough so I was spread-eagled, holding both ends with pliers and "come alongs", stretched to my limit, when a surge of electricity, generated in the wire from one of those distant lightning bolts, gave me the shock of my life. As a result, the wire was dropped and gaily wended its way back down the mountain. I don't recall exactly what was said at the time, although the situation certainly called for some expressive comment, but I know we decided then and there to abandon the line job and simply get Charlie's stuff' up to the lookout, open the station and leave the wire for him to do the next day. It was a full enough day for me as it was. I had to go all the way back to Big Hill and resume my twelve-hours-on and twelve-hours-off routine on the Aircraft Warning Station with Frank Bigelow. This is another story in itself that I'll get around to describing in a bit.

Which gets the telephone line as far as the base of Pyramid. It was strung on conventional trees a bit farther, but soon came to the last of these. Rather than have poles up through the scab rock, an insulated wire was run directly on the rocks - an ordinary household Number 16 rubber-insulated wire. As the stones are not permanently fixed and tend to creep each winter, one had to follow the wire up and repair places where it had been broken. This was simple enough and a great relief from the steep sections of the regular line where a break generally meant a struggle to get the wire back up the slope again. So, now, via the telephone line, we have actually reached the summit of Pyramid.

In those days, the friendly lookout building was waiting and each time one looked up it was closer. About halfway up the bare slope a shallow gully held the snowbank mentioned earlier which lingered through most summers. Other than this, the south and west sides of the mountain are completely bare, lichen-blackened, frost-heaved, reddish granite slabs. To make a trail suitable for pack animals, these stones had been lifted out and by filling in the holes with smaller fragments a semblance of a smooth bed was attained. This was worked by the lookouts as a way to get exercise until that trail was manicured into something of which to be proud. In places where the fragments of scab rock were particularly big, the trail was a regular trench, three or more feet deep.



The trail up the mountain is still in great shape after 60 years with no maintenance. We are on the final grade switchbacking up the west side of Pyramid through Alpine Larch glades.

Pyramid Lookout

With the bracing air over 8,000 feet and the magnificent view on all sides spreading ever wider as one approached the summit, it was always a thrill to make that final last few hundred feet. And then one was there, on top of the mountain, beside the well-made, solidly-planted building on its expertly-fashioned rock and mortar foundation. What a fantastic place!

If still closed from last year, it was but a few minutes to slip in the shutter bars - in this design, simply half-inch steel rods with a ninety-degree bend in each end, and a cotter pin, or more likely a bent nail, to secure it in eyebolts in the building and shutters. A simple system, but not without its faults. The worst was the constant hammering in a high wind as the shutters took up the slack when blown up and slamming down again as the gusts shook them. And this could get more serious in a real gale. During one of these, a shutter blew off completely, fortuitously catching on a rock only twenty feet or so down the 1,400-foot cliff. It was a struggle to retrieve it, but this was accomplished the next day.

It is quite impossible to express the real feeling up there on top of that mountain. Now that the building is gone the feeling isn't at all the same. The friendliness is gone. It is a barren rock with some "junk" - the old foundation, the steel pipe on which the fire finder was secured, and a few remnants which wouldn't burn or otherwise be disposed of handily is all that is left. Which is very sad for one who has known the mountain when it was home, where it had a building so neat and polished one was proud to maintain its quality. The view is much the same, but one isn't looking at it from the comfort of the lookout, enjoying the sunsets, the moon the sunrises, and having a job to do guarding that beautiful alpine wilderness. No more contact with the other lookouts on Big Bill, Junior Point, Cooper Mountain, and various other stations, many one could identify by their friendly lantern, lit of evenings. This was also part of the unofficial 'job', showing the light at least for an hour or so each night. Most did - some, such as I, simply as a friendly gesture and to be a part of the fraternity. Pyramid, being the highest, could also see the most, including many of the other stations. In addition to those already mentioned, there were Nelson Butte, Vie Mountain, Dunken Hill, Cairn Mountain, Tye Mountain and Stormy Mountain as regulars, and several I had no direct contact with at greater distances.

Flashing the Passenger-Mailboat

The Pyramid lookout had the unique job of flashing the daily 'mail boat' - generally the M/V Speedway and sometimes the M/V Flyer in those days. These were the passenger and mail boats, and Pyramid was expected to give the up lake vessel a series of flashes with the shaving mirror each morning when weather permitted, which was most of the time. This wasn't as hard to do as one might imagine. A small bit of the mirror silver had been scratched off the back in the middle so as to make a sight-through hole. One squinted through this, holding the frame with both hands. First, one aimed the bright sun's reflection on some nearby object where it was easily visible; from there the bright spot was directed at objects farther and farther away. It is amazing how far away one can see that spot of light - several miles, under good conditions. To flash the boat, though, one needed to line it up with some other, closer object and then tilt the mirror so that the flash would cross the boat's position. Expertly enough done, one could send Morse Code that way over distances of dozens of miles.

In the days before radio and telephone, heliograph mirrors rigged up for this use were frequently used to transmit messages. About the turn of the century (1900, that is) one

Fourth of July it was even attempted to transmit a message from Portland to Seattle by way of Mount Hood, Mount Adams, and Mount Rainier. It failed, as the Mount Rainier party didn't make it, but messages were successfully sent between Mount Hood and Mount Adams. Mr. C. E. Rusk, who lived in Chelan for a few years somewhere between 1910 and 1920, describes this attempt in his book, "Tales of a Western Mountaineer". (While living in Chelan he organized a mountain climbing expedition to Mount McKinley, Alaska with the hope of proving or disproving Dr. Frederick Cook's claimed first ascent. He asked Dad to go along as photographer, but as your grandfather had just planted a young orchard he felt he must decline. The trip proved a near disaster due to a party member who apparently attempted to take Rusk's life so presumably Dad was fortunate to have missed that trip.)

As with so much lore connected with Pyramid, flashing the boat and how to do it with the shaving mirror heliograph was passed on to me by Dave Hale. As I had been on the boat when it was signaled by the Pyramid lookout, I knew the thrill this was to see, and heeded well Dave's admonition to 'never miss' an opportunity. From the receiving end it is spectacular: the whole mountain disappears in that incredible flash. It is all but impossible to believe that a foot-square mirror, not a very good one at that, could reflect so much sunlight. Makes one realize how bright old Sol must be.

In an attempt to make it appear that code was being transmitted, a series of variously spaced flashes was sent which in reality were quite meaningless. But most of the passengers, who had been alerted to watch and were treated to the sight, didn't know this and hopefully were further impressed.

"Hey, look! There's some guy way up there on top of that there mountain and he's sendin' us a message! Wow! Ain't that somethin'? Golly, that sure must be some mirror! Bet it's six foot across! Wonder how he does it? Must be Morse code, see how it keeps flashin' sorta' irregular like? I wonder what he's sayin'?"

My Job as Pyramid Lookout Begins

So far this seems to be random recollections without any particular order. Seems I haven't even gotten there on my first official trip in to take over the station and begin the great adventure as the long anticipated Pyramid lookout. So, this time we will climb the mountain with Bob Foote, the District Ranger, acting as packer. Bob had 'had it' with the office routine and promised himself a few days respite relaxing on the mountain top, rather to my dismay, because I was much in awe of Bob, the ultimate high-muck-a-muck in the Forest Service as far as I was concerned. As I had cleared the trail and telephone line as far as 'Albicaulis' Mountain, I went as fast as possible so as to work the rest of the line while Bob brought the supplies. I recall the wire was down in a nasty tangle at this, the worst spot in the whole line, but it proved to be the last problem of any magnitude. I was shortcutting up the mountain by way of the insulated wire on the rocks as Bob headed up the last switchbacks to the summit. So, we arrived within minutes of each other.

Already a lightning storm was building up over the Wenatchee and Entiat country and approaching Pyramid. We hurried to open the station and unload the packstring. Bob relaxed hopefully on the bunk, but after only a few minutes realized this was going to be a real humdinger of a storm and regretfully mounted the saddle horse and, with the pack string, took off fast for the office. So much for his vacation! But I was philosophical. This way I didn't have the Boss looking over my shoulder after all!

(to be continued)

PYRAMID MOUNTAIN

"MY FOREST SERVICE DAYS"

by Austin Post

(part 4 - continued from last issue)

Lightning; I Record 42 (?) Strikes in the First Storm

It was well Mr. Foote did return to the command post as this would prove to be the biggest storm of the season. (Bob always had the reputation of opening up the Pyramid station the day of the first big storm.) My recollections are not infallible, but I recorded a total of forty-two lightning strikes in that one storm if I still have it right. Either that or forty-seven, but I think it was the smaller figure. Whichever, it was the record both for Pyramid that year and considerably more than any other lookout in the District. Later, Sim and I went around and around over this, I claiming that Pyramid was the best station for detecting fires and Sim giving me a rare compliment by saying it also could be the guy reporting them. I can definitely say this last wasn't the case. I 'looked alive', true, but so did everyone else and no one missed any smokes visible from their stations that time. They didn't dare! But Sim's further remarks were correct in one respect - that only a few of those back country fires I reported were actually chased, and none of them blew up into major conflagrations.

So, now I'm actually alone at last on station. And just in time, as Mr. Foote was barely off the mountain before the storm reached the area and lightning strikes warned me it was time to 'pull the switch' on the newly hooked up telephone. With lightning strikes now coming down all over the Entiat, it was only a matter of time before Pyramid would be in the thick of it. The station had a reputation for attracting lightning.

Though excited and a bit nervous, I certainly wasn't scared. No reason to be. I'd already been through lightning on Cooper Mountain and had sufficient faith in the lightning arresting system to feel safe inside the building. I had no intention of venturing outside as long as the storm was in the vicinity. Also, there was plenty to do. Almost all of the strikes that went down into the timber were followed instantly by smoke. Another one. There's another! I hadn't even seen that strike. So it was a continual rush to get bearings with the fire finder, and scribble numbers and notes. This became even more exciting as the day progressed and the storm continued to worsen. By now the building had been struck a number of times, and the lightning in all quadrants was so continuous as to be a nearly constant crashing and barrel pounding so loud as to exclude all else. The storm continued on and on into the night. It must have been around midnight when the sound began to diminish - now pitch dark, the only lights being the forest fires, and these were flickering all over. Finally, though, things quieted down,



At age 19 here I am all dolled up in my fancy, fake, forest-green "USFS uniform" from J.C. Penneys, complete with official USFS badge! Note the missing shutter; it blew off the previous night.

the crashing replaced by utter silence, not a breath of air was stirring. Was it safe to plug in the telephone? This required going outside. As the silence continued 'unabated', I made the dash around the building, shoved in the switch and rushed back inside again.

Through a continuous roar of static, the telephone was a steady parade of calls -- lookouts reporting fires, the rangers and guards asking questions and fire crew information being passed along. Finally, I crowded in and was told to report only the worst fires and watch the rest. So I did report maybe six or ten that were really kicking it up and then, thoroughly weary, sat back to keep watch. As nothing seemed to be 'blowing up' and the storm was now definitely spent, I reported this and was told to check in with the rest of my reports at daylight and to get some rest.

Deciding when a lightning storm is over can be quite as difficult as determining when it is time to take extra precautions when one may be beginning. The most startling and hurtful session, I only too well remember, happened totally unexpectedly. This followed a big storm, which had apparently faded. The night was both pitch dark and still as a ghost. It had been an hour or more since the last lightning and the storm seemed to have spent itself. Only rare, far distant grumbling was reminiscent of the recent fury. I was sitting there, leaning back in the chair more than half asleep, when without any preliminary warning, all hell broke loose in a direct lightning hit on the building! I nearly jumped through the ceiling - and the next instant came down practically on the top of my head on the floor. A very rude way to be informed that the storm had one more surprise. Only moments later, the moon broke out and the world was normal again. That is, except for the big, hurtful lump on my head and a very unpleasant kink in the back of my neck.

Saint Elmo's Fire

Saint Elmo's fire can be really weird stuff to watch. Having read about it, my first experience of it on Pyramid was more of intense interest than fear, although it sure is eerie. On pitch-dark nights during periods preceding lightning, balls of light an inch or two in diameter often formed on the lightning ground rods, the guy wires and other objects, glowing softly in a sort of blue light. Most often they didn't stay fixed, but moved around or came and went. On a few occasions they were seen inside the building on the stovepipe or the fire finder, or other metal objects. However, a time or two the tips of my fingers would begin to glow. Somehow this was getting a bit too personal and I didn't like it. I don't recall any particular sensation other than a slight tingling accompanying the light, much like the static electricity that makes one's hair stand up.

My strangest experience with Saint Elmo's fire was on Pyramid. On this occasion, after it got thoroughly dark I first noticed balls of blue light forming outside the building and flowing in a string vertically upward. This was puzzling, as I couldn't think of anything out there for it to follow. While I was watching, another line formed going horizontally which, together, took the form of a cross. If I'd been more religious, no doubt I would have seen this as some form of message from the deity, like 'Shape Up', or something. As it was, I watched it, puzzled, for it continued to form and reform a number of times,

always in the same place. It took some resolution not to see anything supernatural in it, but I refused to be stampeded although I sure couldn't figure out why it formed that way. It disappeared for good after a lightning bolt struck the building, and following that the lightning was so fast and furious I was busy making out fire reports for some time. It wasn't until the next morning that there was a chance to check out possible causes of the cross. This was immediately apparent; the vertical line was the telephone line heading down the mountain from the lightning cutout switch and the horizontal one was a wire that the wind had loosened so it swung around at right angles to the telephone line. Thus, a very prosaic explanation was on hand after all.

A Lightning-Blasted Tree

Speaking of strange happenings, another occurred after Dad and my cousin Terry Cagle visited me at Pyramid for an overnite. When they were returning to Big Hill a lightning storm came up and I was rather concerned, as several strikes came down in the vicinity of the trail, on a couple of occasions seeming near where I imagined they would be. It was a relief when the storm let up and the telephone was back on the line to get Jerry Ryan's report that they had made it through all right. The remarkable thing was that the big larch tree, which had the five mile sign on it, was struck in a most peculiar way. It was hit only minutes before Dad and Terry came to it. The lightning had entered the tree near the top and gone down the center, splitting the trunk into a mass of slivers the length of the tree. These were still attached to the stump, and formed a remarkable flower-like 'blossom', being spread in all directions from the center stump, their tops arching to the ground. As those limbs on the trailside blocked it, it was a good thing no one was in the immediate vicinity even if the lightning itself failed to hurt directly. I've never seen another tree so struck. It must have been a real freak occurrence.

I Chase a Fire and Learn the Quick Energy of Sugar

For several weeks there was a lightning storm almost every afternoon and several more occurred at night, so the duty certainly was not without its compensations - that is, one felt they were doing a useful and necessary job.

In the second largest storm, I reported seventeen fires. It may have been this one that set a fire in South Pyramid Creek which I was told to extinguish. This adventure proved to be a fiasco. I descended the mountain in total darkness, then finally in the timber, groped and felt around, getting out the flashlight and batteries only to discover all were practically dead, the light useless. More groping across the creek in the vicinity of where the flames were seen but still no sign of anything. Hours and hours of this fruitless struggle, then, tired out by the scramble, I finally gave up and started the big pull back up the mountain. Eventually I was above the timberline but now really exhausted. This was from over-doing it, the way an eager kid will when determined to make a showing on a new adventure. Sweat-soaked and easily chilled, a classic situation for hypothermia, I finally broke out of the fog and clouds into clear starlight. An icy wind and an instant drop of some twenty degrees in temperature accompanied this change. Things were now getting serious. Numb with the chill, I was simply too exhausted to move quickly and staggered a few steps, then had to pause again. By this laborious means, the trail was reached, which helped, although not enough. Part of the problem was that I was famished, so I decided to break into the "One Man Ration" which was part of the fire pack. Even though at the time I was only slightly aware of what a

ridiculous pack it was, consisting mainly of heavy canned foods of little energy value, I now opened this, sacrilege in itself, and probed the contents. One of the goodies was a large can of heavy, cake-like B&M Brown Bread, which could be opened with a twist-off key. I still vividly remember the battle it was, attempting to insert this key with numb fingers. Finally, using both hands to hold the key, and with the can gripped between my knees, this was accomplished. Only moments later the faulty tear-strip ripped off! This totally prevented any further success there. The rest of the pack was pawed through. The canned goods were now beyond my reach, the tiny can opener supplied being far too small to even pick up, let alone manipulate. What else was there? For some time I fumbled around, at last coming up with a paper bag which contained six cubes of sugar. What a lesson in quick energy! In moments I was up and to my amazement, proceeded on up to the lookout without a single stop!

And mighty glad to get there! Cooking was mainly done on a portable gas stove to save wood; the regular lookout stove used only when it was below freezing or other such emergency. Before long the Coleman was humming and hot drinks and food were being enjoyed. Oh, yes, the fire - later, when the fog cleared below, no sign of the abortive fire was ever seen again! I still cannot account for not being able to detect any sign of it at all on that mad scramble. I'd seen the flames flickering from the lookout for some time, and something had to be burning down there!

The Smoking Tree Incident

Possibly the fire was in such a strange place no one could have found it in the dark, like a smoke chased by a fire crew that visited Big Hill from the Entiat later that season. Their experience followed a two-day futile search. By radio checks they were informed that the smoke was regularly seen by several lookouts (I being one of them). Finally, they discovered the fire completely by chance. Having stopped for lunch under a big, old growth fir, one of them happened to look up as they reclined there and saw smoke rising from the top of the tree! The others then saw it, too, and the rest of the day was spent falling the monster. Sure enough, the rotten center had been set on fire by lightning and the tree had been acting like a smoke pipe ever since. They told me they had passed under that same tree repeatedly in their search as it was exactly where the fire was reported but no one had ever thought to look upward! I'm afraid I can't expect the same for my fire, however. In the total darkness I must have missed the right spot and the fire had gone out soon after last seen from the lookout. It had never been a very strong blaze, only flickering up on rare occasions, but what a satisfaction it would have been to extinguish it, or at least find it.

Even so, I still have some sneaking suspicion my "fire" might not have been flames at all. Possibly it might have been the creek reflecting in the moonlight due to the interplay of clouds. But if it were this, why didn't the same thing happen on other nights?

Mountain Goats in the Night

A vivid memory remains of those first days on the mountain. One night I was awakened by the whole building trembling. There was considerable noise with it, but it wasn't until I sat up that the cause of this 'earthquake' became clear. Five mountain goats were outside in the bright moonlight, and two were busily scratching their rumps on the guy wires! Since the building acted as a pretty good sounding board, it was sort of like being inside an oversized violin with the goats sawing

away on the strings. They were so interesting to watch that I became over-bold and foolishly let my presence be known. The goats took off at high speed and only returned one other time that summer. However, I went to see them around Cardinal Peak later in the season, that seemed to be their regular habitat.

The Vibrating Shutters Incident

Another event took place after a fierce windstorm, which, as previously mentioned, had shaken a shutter so violently that eventually, tearing its hinges loose, it disappeared over the cliff. By luck it caught on a projecting rock only a short distance down and the next day I managed to get a rope around it and drag it back up. Then with the help of a husky stick to support a mutilated corner, it was put back in place. It was this stick that was to lead to the next nocturnal awakening to find the whole building trembling. Again I sat up, but no goats this time. An earthquake? Out of bed - abrupt silence. Back in bed. The noise begins again, so this time I go outside, look all around. Nothing, again all is quiet. But as soon as I retire the noise starts up again! This time I simply shrug and turn over, the mountain evidently isn't falling apart, so why worry? Then, by pure luck, I see the cause of all the commotion. Down the stick I used for a shutter prop scurries a squirrel! The silly thing had been having a ball tearing around the building on top of the shutters and each time I got up it would abruptly stop! So much for my second earthquake!

I Attempt to Beat Dave Hale's Record

Dave Hale was a big, long-legged fellow and had a well-earned reputation for both strength and endurance. He had told me rather smugly that his record time 'hiking* from Pyramid to Big Hill was two hours and fourteen minutes. Naturally, I immediately determined to beat his time! At the first opportunity to make the trip lightly loaded I left Pyramid by dashing directly down the slope and by taking every possible shortcut, running where possible, I managed to make the road in just under two hours. I'd beat his time for sure - or so I thought. The trouble was when I gaspingly did reach the Big Hill lookout it was exactly two hours and fourteen minutes since I'd started the dash! Anyway, I'll bet no one else ever shortened our mutual record.

After the fourth week or so things were well settled in. The lightning storms didn't go on forever and breaks of various lengths occurred between them, giving time to relax and do the various chores at a leisurely pace. So, this is a good time to describe some of that lookout's special features, to which I added a few myself.

Somewhat Unnerving Experiences

Nerve-wracking, indeed, for the newcomer, were the first trips to the 'John', which was a substantial seat mounted on timbers overhanging the mighty cliff. Although providing one with a grand prospect of mountain and dale which one could pleasantly contemplate at leisure on balmy days, it also had disadvantages, as it was equally exposed to view, vagaries in the weather and to every wind that blew. The latter, when the skies were clear, had a curious habit also somewhat disconcerting to the uninitiated. While the results of one's pleasure were descending into the mysterious depths of the canyon far below, the paper used in the performance, caught by the light summer breeze, wafted upward to eventually disappear in the heavens high above and still rising. There must be a moral to this somewhere but as yet I've been unable to figure out just what it is.

Telephone Stories

One of the prizes Pyramid sported was a "Howler" on the telephone. This was a device by which a rather unearthy,

horrible screech could be broadcast to wake the delinquent or to alert of emergencies when one was at a distance from the phone. They were very rare on lookout stations, and some former lookout had probably 'hooked' this one somewhere when the Ranger's attention was elsewhere. Its ability to awaken one from sound sleep was one thing, but this wasn't its prized use on Pyramid. Rather, it was its ability to 'whisper' everything that went on over that line. To hear it one had to be dead still, but totally silent hours are the rule more often than not at those high altitudes. One had only to pause in whatever they were doing to pick up the conversation. In this way Pyramid was informed first hand of all the doings which went on. One only eavesdropped until satisfied the conversation was of no particular interest, then went on working. But should it call for immediate attention, like a smoke being reported right under your nose, for instance, one could respond with alacrity.

Thus the Howler once saved me from a very red face. A tiny fire that I should have seen first was reported by another eye and, alerted in time, I had my report ready as soon as the line was clear. In several other cases this device enabled me to report fires I really couldn't see except for the tiniest traces of smoke showing over distant ridges.

Needless to say, I didn't explain how I was such a wizard at seeing through mountains and basked in the glory of the surprised and impressed Rangers' voices when such phenomenal feats of eyesight were demonstrated. This was particularly satisfying when various other lookouts, closer but lower, when asked to verify my reports, couldn't see a thing!

When I told Jerry Ryan that I could hear him over the Howler, to test my claim he quit calling me by ringing and, instead, would simply say into the mouthpiece in a normal tone of voice, "Hullo, Purramid" to which I would respond by picking up the receiver and replying in the usual fashion. From this moment on Jerry never called by using the ringer unless I didn't hear him, which caused him to razz me about not paying attention! Fortunately, this seldom happened.

Another telephone stunt was due to an old speaker voice coil I had taken out of a junk radio in the Chelan dump months before. Somewhere I'd discovered that if hooked to the telephone line it, too, had the power of 'whispering', although even lower than the Howler - one had to put the coil directly to the ear. This proved to have another feature: when shouted into loud enough, others on the line could very faintly hear your voice! I had all kinds of fun with it. Especially when working telephone line, so far from a phone it was "impossible" for it to be "me", when I'd overhear some innocent voices talking, I'd begin shouting some message of which these others would pick up fragments.

These mysterious faint messages caused all sorts of consternation. The choicest moments were to get everyone's attention by shouting someone's name or some garbled information and then follow this with total silence. Wild speculation would result, but cooler heads correctly judged that it was the work of some prankster. Naturally, I kept mum about the fascinating device. For a real expert at such things, the opportunities would have been limitless. It wasn't until the end of the season that Jerry Ryan was to discover my secret, and, being Jerry, was as delighted with it, as I was myself.

Yet other trick was a personal convenience. This was devising a means of answering the phone without having to get out of bed. The Pyramid telephone was located on a bracket suspended from the center of the ceiling directly over the fire finder, a unique location and one vital to the arrangement. It was a Kellogg model that had the handset hanging from a hook

on the phone, which also was vital. My solution was to rig up a continuous cord through pulleys, which was arranged so that while comfortably prone in the sack I could lift the handset off the hook by pulling both cords and then slide the receiver down for use. Once the call was completed the phone was returned to the hook the same way, only in reverse order. This method was efficient and practical, but it did introduce a curious sound into the system, because when in use it made a distinct buzzing which mystified my various callers. Jerry was to discover this, too, on his visit, and claimed I never did get out of bed, that he'd heard the buzz at all hours! The one thing it didn't do was ring the various longs and shorts, which identified and called the various stations.

For the record, Cooper was five shorts, Junior Point a long and a short, Big Hill a long and two and Pyramid a long and three. History, indeed! How many of us are alive today that can recall that vital bit of information?

The Pyramid Experience

As I've mentioned, there is truly no adequate way to describe what it is like to spend a summer all alone on a mountaintop like Pyramid. All of the really isolated stations had a lot of things in common which appeal to the personality that seeks solitude - life far away from the continual bustle and clamor of modern society. I've experienced much the same thing at sea. Being alone on the R/V Growler at Columbia Glacier in Alaska gave the same opportunity of slipping farther and farther into nature until reminders of this modern world become undesired intrusions. My Pyramid experience came early in adult life before I'd cogitated much over such things but rather only had this fierce desire for independence - to get away from many things which seemed so stifling and regimented. To be alone was a great part of this longing, where I could think my own thoughts, do things as I wished to do them. For such a person the isolated fire lookouts presented an almost idealistic situation and not a few of the 'regulars', older people for the most part, were on those stations out of choice.

True, quite a few youngsters went up on the stations with little knowledge of what they were getting into and found it anything but a rewarding experience, as demonstrated by various horror stories in Ray Kresek's book. But for a lot of us, I'm sure the majority, the stations provided the space we desired. Probably there weren't many who were as determinedly seeking the 'highest and the bestest' as I was -



Looking north from ~8,000 feet elevation to Square Top Mountain. One can see why this region is considered more of a National Rock Pile than a National Forest!

the harder to get to and the more difficult to ascend, the better I liked them.

Yet, as I later discovered, it was more than these things, and here Pyramid was unique. It had variety none of the others equaled. The view on one side was the whole sweep of the deserts of Eastern Washington. The thickly forested valleys and the high, ragged, relatively dry, bare ridges of the Eastern Cascades came next. Then to the west (glorious sunsets!) were the snow peaks of the crest with Glacier Peak, here its snowy eastern side shown to best advantage, standing high above the rest. To the northwest, the Stehekin wilderness, which from this direction well lived up to the description that Chelan National Forest was really a 'national rockpile'. In this direction it was one ragged, rocky spire after another with very little timber or snow visible. This wilderness came right to its dooryard as Pyramid marked the transition between the more subdued timber country south and east and the rocky wilderness, which to enter one had only to face north. Then, most unique of all, the incredible trench of Lake Chelan, the deep blue water surface more than 7,000 feet below. It was when compared with this incredible variety that other high lookouts like McGregor and Crater Mountain, lost back in the wilderness, were found wanting.

Perhaps to persons living in such high altitude states as Colorado, Utah or Wyoming, Pyramid's 8,245-foot altitude may not seem very impressive. To these let me say this: a mountain's real height is from its base rather than from sea level. In most Rocky Mountain states, the mountains rise from plains or valleys already 5,000 to 9,000 feet above the sea, which in any case is hundreds of miles distant. So, a 14,000-foot peak is seldom more than a mile or so above its base, and not many of them rise sheer for much of that distance. Compare this with the Northern Rockies such as Glacier National Park, or the North Cascades, and a tremendous difference will be apparent; the latter mountains are far rougher and are even higher from base to crest, despite the fact the altitude isn't nearly as great. But, even among these, Pyramid's rise in three miles of over 7,000 feet from the surface of Lake Chelan is remarkable. And this isn't counting the total relief. The lake is over 1,400 feet deep at that point! With such numbers in mind, those who have not seen this country can better appreciate why it is so spectacular.



Looking down Pyramid Creek 7,245' to Lake Chelan from Pyramid Mountain. As if this is not remarkable enough, the lake is over 1,400 feet deep of which 400 feet is below sea level!

(to be continued)

PYRAMID MOUNTAIN

"MY FOREST SERVICE DAYS"

by Austin Post

(part 5 - continued from last issue)

Getting back to the isolation, it would be quite misleading to give the impression that being on these lookout stations was to be cut off completely from the 'real world' of society. The telephone was the connection in those days. It was still considered more reliable than radio and all of the main stations were connected to the network. This provided just the right amount of intercommunication for the likes of me. The lookout fraternity was a friendly place. At least once each week, generally Saturday night, there was a general confab in which all but the most recalcitrant joined in. (In other words, even I took part, at least for a few minutes!) On one such general meeting the Entiat Ranger was finagled into connecting all the Entiat District lookouts into our line and we introduced ourselves, some twenty or more strong. It proved to be a most interesting collection, including a couple of college students from the East Coast. I recall sticking to the phone through all these introductions, which was about my limit. The only stations we couldn't reach were those with radios only.

So, it was lord of all this tremendous country I've described and as time passed, slipping farther into the mystical world of nature in its-beautiful, natural state. What a privilege to have been there!

The Eerie "Silent Period"

Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon on Pyramid and one I haven't experienced anywhere else, was the 'silent period' - another of the many things I first heard about from Dave Hale. One speaks of the silence of the mountaintops, but in well-watered country like the Cascades, even on the drier east side, the sound of running water is everywhere. From Pyramid it was a subdued roar, faint but present at all times. All, that is, except during this eerie period of total silence.

Dave had told me that on quiet evenings if one were to go outside, a spot on the rocks to the north of the lookout being most favored, and sit quietly, one would experience this unaccountable silent period. He had been so impressed by it that I was eager to experience it myself. I would go out and sit there, waiting. It was really an incredible thing, coming as the shadows were extending long across the myriad peaks of the Stehekin wilderness - the most beautiful period of the day. While listening to the faint steady roar of falling water far below, gradually the sound would fade and for perhaps five minutes there was this total, unearthly silence - not a sound whatsoever. It was as if time itself was suspended. One waited, almost breathlessly, for sound to resume, and when it as mysteriously gradually came back it was almost as if the world was reawakening, resuming its normal course. This experience was so unique that I was spellbound, just as were other lookouts before me, never missing it if possible. No matter how many times it was experienced, it never lost its emotional impact.

Of course, there is some very prosaic way to explain it. My thought is that it has something to do with some atmospheric condition, such as an inversion, which changes level with the cooling air of evenings, creating a reflecting layer, perhaps, which prevents the sound from rising to the mountaintop as it passes through the altitude of the summit. It didn't occur all the time. Conditions had to be almost ideal. For me it was one of the near-mystical experiences that summer provided which

would influence my later life. One of these may seem strange but it isn't, not a bit of it. This is a love for SILENCE. We live in a society dedicated to noise, any kind of noise, so-called music - background, white sound, "Musak" - anything to banish SILENCE! With the years, this endless noise gets increasingly annoying. It's no wonder there are so few philosophers nowadays. How could anyone be, surrounded by this continuous, mindless racket?

And speaking of the prosaic, a lot of the things a lookout does are just that - the continual checks for smoke, the daily round of check-ins, the routine of just living, much the same as everywhere else. Then, for eager beavers like myself, the painting and maintenance and repair work, and like as not, changes, perhaps not needed, like rearranging the furniture.

More Animal Visitors

Probably nearly all lookout stations have their animal visitors and Pyramid was no exception. True, the mountain goats didn't come in the building (as they did at Desolation lookout in the Skagit valley) at least while I was there, but one day I saw two huge eight-point Mule Deer stags that came up the trail almost to the building. Each morning there was a family of Golden Mantled ground squirrels that came scampering up the mountain for their handout. These amusing creatures provided hours of interest. Not content to give them a completely free meal, I had rigged up a very slippery ladder three or four feet high, made of Number 9 telephone wire, which the critters had to climb to get their daily hotcake. This strange looking affair baffled my Dad and cousin Terry when they came up to pay their visit come midsummer. I had gotten permission to go down to meet them on the trail and had made a shortcut down via the telephone wire, missing them completely as they were far ahead of their expected schedule. As a result, they found no one at home, and it was a half an hour or more before I showed up, sweaty and blowing, after a rapid scramble of several miles each way.

They pointed to the contrivance. "What's THAT thing?" was the first question. "Wait 'til tomorrow and we'll show you!" was the answer.

The squirrels were there right on the dot for their handout and many were the laughs they provided, for they can't really climb all that well but would never let that stop their battling to retrieve the free meals - which they eventually got after many hilarious gymnastics and sundry tumbles.

The Sexual Connection

Preceding a few rare lightning storms, even on the summit of Pyramid the weather became excessively warm and sultry and the air seemed to be almost bursting with static electricity. This seemed to act as a signal and the top of the mountain suddenly swarmed with thousands of insects. As these were not seen at other times in any numbers, evidently they collected at the summit of the mountain singly or in small numbers on other days and hid in the rocks awaiting this stimulus for their time of mating. Flying ants, in particular, but also ladybird beetles and various other insects only rarely seen would suddenly emerge from hiding. Soon they were in such numbers that the rocks and building were covered with them, each and every pair frantically engaged in copulation.

Especially for the flying ants, the act certainly couldn't have been a very pleasant one for either partner as the female first sought ferociously to bite off the male's head, wings and legs; failing this, it dragged that hapless insect remorselessly around for some minutes until it was released at the act's culmination. But, as soon as one was disengaged, another took its place, the queen waiting quietly until the new connection was made, when the same wild struggle for release recommenced. As thousands of their kind were all engaged in this activity, they simply climbed all over each other in their frenzy, forming tangled heaps of locked, struggling insects. This sexual melee continued until the lightning storm closed in, then, in an instant, as though at a definite signal, they would mysteriously vanish as suddenly as they had appeared. As relatively few were seen in the air, evidently most must have crawled under the rocks again.

During one of these rare events, a spectacular insect nearly three inches long flew into the lookout house, making a crash landing on the table. This gave me a wonderful opportunity to examine it closely. It was sheathed in, glistening black armor, with slim black wings, bulging, iridescent eyes and long, waving antennae. Evidently some form of Horntail fly, it was a fantastic creature, which seemed especially designed to be the principal actor in a horror movie. This was a female as she was equipped with an ovipositor nearly as long as the rest of her body. Her location was soon discovered as three much smaller, glistening black males found the open doorway and a climactic battle ensued with all four engaged in a wild free-for-all on the center of the table. The struggle was a standoff, all the males simultaneously attempting, although none succeeding, in completing the sex act. Curiously, with a hinged, needle-shaped, penis-like organ shaped much like a cat's curved claw they were seeking to reach an opening well forward under the female's body. This inconclusive epic was interrupted by a tremendous jolt as lightning struck the building, followed by other strikes in the surrounding forests, which effectively distracted my attention. When I again thought of the insects, all four had vanished. Never before or since have I seen anything else like them.

It wasn't all hot lightning storms as the season passed into autumn. Storms containing rain cut down the fire danger and on one of these it rained so hard Jerry and I were both given permission to come down and resupply. So I made a rapid dash to Big Hill. In pouring rain we skidded and spun our way downward in the Model A. Jerry was able to demonstrate his skill at taking the hairpins by cramping the wheel and skidding all four tires around the turns at breakneck speed. I don't think I would particularly appreciate that as much now as I did then, but fortunately that rainy day we had the road to ourselves.

High Country Rambles - Square Top and Cardinal Peak

With the summer drawing to a close at higher altitudes, cloudy days permitted other excursions. As there was no remote chance I'd get an okay to go where I really wanted to, the telephone line and trail came in for more maintenance - that is, officially. Where I really went was for the summits of nearby mountains. A bare, rocky summit directly north, slightly over a mile distant, was the first goal. To reach it one has to descend into the basin at the head of South Pyramid Creek. An easy scramble then leads to the broad summit, which, due to its shape, I call 'Square Top' Mountain.

This easy hike led to more ambitious ventures. Cardinal Peak, which the newest map now shows at 8,590-foot altitude, was the goal, perhaps partly because the small flock of

mountain goats that had visited Pyramid that second night made it their home. To get there and back by the fastest of scrambles would take at least three hours, which was about the maximum I could absent myself from the station. So, the next opportunity was devoted to this. I don't recall how long it did take but I'm sure it must have been more than that amount of time. Whatever, it proved more than just interesting - it was fascinating. Not only did I see the goats, but 'discovered' two glaciers. The first of these almost led to my undoing.



View NW from Pyramid Mountain to Square Top (right), Cardinal Peak, (center), Mt Maud, 7 Fingered Jack and Mt. Fernow (in distance, left). During the Pleistocene, a 90 mile long glacier filled the Chelan and Stehekin valleys and only the highest peaks, such as those shown here, rose above its surface.

To get there, much the same shortcut was used to reach Square Top, then through delightful open meadows adorned with alpine larch (*Larix lyallii*), following the sheep driveway over Grouse Pass. A very uncooperative, skiddy, loose-gravelled, granite slope at the angle of repose then leads steeply upward to a secondary summit (8,339 feet), which quickly attained the name 'Skidgravel' Peak. Skipping its summit, going west soon opened the view of Cardinal, now close, indeed. The exciting part was that I had discovered my flock of goats just ahead. They immediately took off at full speed up the slope and disappeared over its crest.

Glissade and Goatrx Glaciers; I Have a Very Close Call

Only minutes later I was up there myself, looking into the rocky basin on the north side. To my considerable surprise, the goats couldn't even be located at first. Then some dislodged stones brought my attention to them, already far off, climbing the slope toward a higher pass to the north. They had skidded down what appeared to be a steep snow slope to the bottom of the basin, which was the reason they had gained so much distance on me. Whatever they could do I could do, or so I thought. A lesson followed - one can't necessarily go where mountain goats can. The 'snow' slope turned out to be solid glacier ice! Only by good fortune did I manage to stop myself by grasping a tiny outcrop of bedrock, some twenty feet down, before sliding, totally out of control, several hundred feet on steep, flinty ice. Even so, it was a tricky job to creep back up. Chastened, I found a safer, if much slower, route down over some rocks alongside the tiny glacier, which got the name 'Glissade' from the use the goats made of it.

On later inspections this small glacier proved to be of considerable interest. Those years, 1941 and 1942, the ice was totally devoid of any firm; it was hard, bare ice, period. This disclosed it to be beautifully banded, presumably annual,

which had a decided concave curve not in accordance with the slope. Even yet that banding has me a bit puzzled as to just how it took that form. As that was now nearly fifty years ago, it would be interesting to see what it is like now, whether the same general form still exists. In my one aerial photo taken in the 1960's, the ice was covered with snow, so its structure was hidden.

My interest on that first visit was mainly to see where the goats had gone, so scant attention was paid to the deceptive little glacier. Hurrying up the final slope the goats had taken, not much to my surprise I found they were nowhere in sight as the next pass was reached. Instead, a much larger glacier dropped steeply into a shattered granite gorge. Here the goats had descended, as their abundant tracks showed. I didn't attempt to follow. This ice also obtained a name, 'Goatrax' Glacier.

The newest U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000 topo maps don't even show either of these glaciers at all. So much for modern mapping techniques, which consist of aerial photos set up in stereo plotters located in some far-off city with operators who probably have never seen a mountain, let alone a glacier, and to whom staring into a plotter must be a very boring way to feed the brats and keep up payments on the TV and new car. Sorry, but I'm NOT impressed with the results!

The goats now definitely beyond further observation, I looked around at other things. First, I was now practically on top of Cardinal and the summit was only a few hundred feet distant. Right next to me was a large, well-constructed, man-made cairn, so old that the lichens growing on it hadn't been disturbed for years. I've never found anyone who knew anything about the origin of that strangely located monument. Presumably it must have been erected by surveyors when the original "Stehekin" and "Methow" 1:125,000 quadrangles were compiled nearly a century ago. But even as a survey or intersection point it seems a bit strange, and no reference to it shows on any map I've ever seen. What it did prove was that some party had been up there a long time ago.

It was now far past time to hurry back to Pyramid, which I did, taking advantage of 'Skidgravel' Peak's loose slope to descend in moments what had taken most of an hour to ascend. With no further adventures it wasn't long before I'd checked in again, with every intention of returning to this fascinating place at the first opportunity, and this first real exploring venture was history.

And return I did, a week or two later, to ascend Cardinal's middle peak which is the highest. At the time I wasn't sure: there are three and the very broken-rocked south one looked about equal - points of crucial interest only a mountain climber would understand. The north peak separated by a saddle at the head of 'Goatrax' Glacier, is much more solid granite and I didn't feel it was within my safety margin to attempt alone.

On this second trip I explored around a delightful tiny lake situated at the foot of Glissade' Glacier, seeing that in recent centuries this ice had not covered the pond, but had built small moraines to its margin. In the steep slope heading on 'Skidgravel' Peak, was the fragmentary remnant of a much larger glacier, which had built a considerable moraine in the canyon below. While looking over this scene, a small plot of trees was noted on a knoll just east of the remnant glacier, which looked to be an ideal campsite for any further, more extensive, explorations. This oasis is located at the highest altitude (7,700 feet) for any trees up to twenty feet high I've yet seen in the North Cascades. Timber at higher levels may be present in the Okanogan Highlands where extensive areas at

such heights are located and snowfall may be even less than in the Chelan Mountains.

On departing I again took the Skidgravel flying return. At the base of this slope is located 'Skidgravel' Gap, which provides an easy access to the remote basins at the head of South Fork Bear Creek. I've never heard of anyone ever going there. Surely these must be some of the least frequented areas in the Cascades, although, by this pass it isn't all that far from the Entiat River Road - not more than twelve to fifteen miles.



Visitors

I had a total of eight visitors that summer - District Ranger Bob Foote as my packer, then my Dad and my cousin Terry Cagle. A shepherd brought up his grub order for me to phone in, leaving a quarter of lamb that taught me that my aversion to mutton was due entirely to poor butchering techniques rather than the meat itself, which was delicious. There next was an apple rancher from the Entiat and his eight-year old son. I remember them mainly because the kid had to run to keep up with his long-legged father and as a result is probably the only person in history that ever ran all the way up Pyramid Mountain! At the season's end, Jerry Ryan came over to see the place I had bragged about so much. He pretended not to be impressed.

A visitor whom I found very interesting was Leonard Frost, an amateur outdoors photographer from Leavenworth. Later I was to look Leonard up and hike in the Stuart Range with him on a couple of delightful outings. On the occasion of Leonard's visit to Pyramid, though, for a while it was a near thing. He arrived hot and sweaty, as did most, on a blistering hot afternoon. Likewise, as soon as the sun sank low and the temperatures plummeted, poor Leonard began to freeze, as did all desert dwellers at this altitude. By a fluke, I'd just put a coat of fresh aluminum paint on the woodstove, so was reluctant to fire it up. Seeing Leonard's freezing condition, this was finally done and it was a tossup whether the stifling smoke of burning paint or the rise in temperature won the battle. The paint did bum off, the building was partly aired and poor Leonard was able to come back to life.

Closing the Station

What with fall storms bringing cooler cloudy weather, the high lookouts were told to "Close 'er up" and head for lower country, which about wound up my season on Pyramid. The

summer had been so satisfying I hoped to return for many a year to follow. Because of World War II and the later abandoning of the lookout system by the Forest Service, this was not to be. As a result, this was both my first and last season as the Pyramid lookout. Fortunately, I didn't know it at the time.

After a winter in Seattle with a boring job at Boeing, a break came in early March with a weekend outing to Mount Rainier that included an extraordinary descent on skis from Camp Muir to Paradise Lodge. Back in Seattle, I stuck out Boeing another week or two, but that was the limit. No matter how they threatened the 'ARMY NEXT' if you quit, I did, and was soon back to Chelan and, of course, a visit to the Forest Service Office. Wow - was I jumped on!

"Hey, Post? How would you like to go up on Big Hill?"

The Aircraft Warning Service - On the Way to Big Hill

Of course I was delighted - no less than Sim and the others! It seems they'd spent weeks looking for someone to spell Mono Faletto, who, with Frank Bigelow, had been isolated all winter on the Aircraft Warning System (AWS) station set up there earlier in the season. Poor Mono had been developing a serious case of cabin fever, and all through this excitement I'd been cooling my heels and raising my blood pressure at Boeing!

YOU BET I'D LIKE TO GO UP ON BIG HILL! If I'd only known sooner!

So within a day or so the USFS Forester is under way for Big Creek and not much later I'm starting up the trail, heavily loaded. Mono is to meet me about halfway; he will have snowshoes with which I will negotiate the higher slopes.

It was a long, long pull. For one thing, I'd had a sedentary job all winter and was badly out of shape. The early April snow presented a real struggle. I was soon in it well up to the knees and it continued to get deeper and more difficult. Soon the trail's trace was only the blazes, and because of its many switchbacks, a lot of time was lost struggling back and forth in heavy, soggy, wet snow when it would be much easier to simply go directly up the slope. I didn't dare deviate for the chance of passing Mono, so continued the weary struggle.

Finally, I topped the ridge that leads steeply upward, but here the snow was all but impossible on foot. Thankfully, Mono soon came flying down the slope and we stop for greetings and a switch of gear. Mono warns that the snowshoes aren't much use on the steep slopes. Soon enough I discover this for myself. They don't sink in enough to grip and one slips down two feet for every foot gained, or if it's a sidehill to be negotiated then it's a quick slide down into the nearest tree. Soon I abandon the use of them except for smoother places, of which there are few. Often the only way to get up is to crawl, and even that is no picnic. It is an increasingly slow struggle.

Eventually the main ridge was reached, here the going better. Around dark I'm up to the last steep pitch below the lookout. Frank has been watching my infinitely slow progress for some time and has everything ready. He meets me at the top, helps me out of my load and then escorts me up the steps to the paradise of being there. There's lots of Frank's staple foods, white beans or rice, macaroni. I stuff myself, such a blessing to be there! No doubt I go on duty - Frank's twelve-hour watch had been up for hours. But that's nothing - I'm there!

AWS; On Big Hill with Frank Bigelow

There was about ten feet of snow at Big Hill on my arrival in early April, and there was ten feet of much more compact snow on the first of June. From that time on, the snow began to disappear at about four inches a day and on the Fourth of July the first car made it up to the lookout. How's that for melting? I didn't think it would be possible.

Life on Big Hill with Mr. Bigelow went smoothly enough although as the months dragged on with the never-ending twelve-on and twelve-off schedule we eventually talked each other out. Frank, then in his seventies, was an interesting pioneer that had spent many years farming a homestead located in a dry, flat-floored valley located in the hills northeast of Chelan. I can well remember Frank's wrath when I showed him a new map including the area.

"PARADISE FLAT HELL! THAT'S POVERTY FLAT as I know only TOO DAMN WELL!"

Finally starved out, as were practically all of the 'dry land' farmers during the drought of the thirties, he had experienced all of the hardships and travails such a life demanded. The name Poverty Flat, according to Frank, was well earned indeed, which I certainly would not doubt. Even life on an irrigated apple orchard offered little enough return for hard labor in those days.

As the months passed, eventually even Mr. Bigelow's stories of homesteading days began to pall. I'd heard all of them so many times by then. No doubt, with my very limited experiences to recount, Frank found mine even more annoying. I did most of the heavy work, like cutting firewood, hauling stuff around and clean up, and Frank did the cooking. The garage below as yet had not been made over into a separate sleeping room, as it would be before another winter set in-a vast improvement, as the off-duty guard then had a separate place to relax and engage in more active activities which weren't possible while together with the duty member. We both did our work conscientiously and had a mutual respect for each other, so probably we got along about as well as any two could cooped up that way for months on end with the rarest of breaks. However, as I was to discover, Mr. Bigelow was an unusually easy person to live with under such circumstances.

To describe the job, it was listening for aircraft engines and reporting anything and everything of that nature on a twenty-four hour day seven days weekly basis. There was one break for Frank. Finally, in late summer, he went out for a week to attend a funeral. This proved to be a signal lesson for me, as I'd gotten thoroughly tired of Frank's stories, Frank's food, Frank's everything. Who do they send up for a temporary replacement? A loudmouth, compulsive talker who couldn't tell a straight story to save his life, was forever cooking up some wierd concoction or otherwise squandering our scant supplies, and not only that, seemed totally indifferent to the job and the fact we were up there to keep quiet in order to listen for airplanes. After a day I was thoroughly sick of him. Inside of a week I could gladly do murder, and when Frank FINALLY got back I was so overjoyed to see him I could have kissed him! From that moment on anything Frank said or did, no matter that I'd heard about it a thousand times or had eaten the same thing for four months straight - it was OKAY BY ME! At least the stories were true and the grub for all its plainness was nourishing. Even if we did live on a monthly food bill between us of \$15. (No kidding, that is the true figure. Frank's tastes were spartan.)

As Mr. Bigelow took the job very seriously and, although perhaps not quite so dedicated, I also wished to be conscientious, we did maintain a very quiet camp. No radio or even conversation was ever loud enough to prevent hearing what was going on outside. Of course, when gales were blowing we could relax somewhat, yet it was in the thick of one of these that we heard one of the very few planes we did report. This one came so close it surely must have been lost, but we never heard more of it. If it did crash anywhere near, the fact was kept secret.

(to be concluded in next issue)

PYRAMID MOUNTAIN

"MY FOREST SERVICE DAYS"

by Austin Post

part 6 - continued from last issue)

Nature Rolls Some Snowballs

On a twelve-on and twelve-off schedule one doesn't travel far on 'time off. Even so, after some of the snowstorms, when the sun came out and the whole world was a fairyland of snow-laden trees and beautiful cornices on the higher ridges and peaks, I snowshoed as far as Crow Hill and got some rather good pictures. On one of these outings, I was to discover a rather unique situation for which conditions must have been just right that day. Some of the latest snowfall of very sticky, soft snow about a foot thick had tumbled off the cornices and rolled down the steep slopes below. Most of these snowballs had immediately stopped or broken up, but a few rare ones had continued all the way to the bottom of the hill. In the process, they became gigantic. The largest were at least ten feet in diameter and eight to ten feet wide. This seemed to be the maximum size before they became unstable and collapsed under their own weight. But several perfect ones had stopped intact, presenting a scene that would have amazed and delighted any child who had ever enjoyed the sport of rolling snowballs!

The best photo I took that spring was at the lookout during a big storm when the sun momentarily broke through the dark clouds and a stand of snow-buried alpine firs was highlighted against a coal black background. This presented the mood of the wintery scene far better than the many views taken after the storms had cleared, although then so many fantastic snow scenes abounded one was apt to expend whole rolls of film. In the loss of those negatives, that stormy view is the one missed the most.

Another very fast ramble was clear to Pyramid Lookout and back in less than seven hours! It was a beautiful day and I wanted to get some pictures of the big snow cornices that were still present on the mountain. The picture of the lookout highlighted by big cumulus clouds was taken that day.

Not much else exciting happened during those four months and as mountain jobs go, it was tedious and dull. It was wartime, so one considered it from that standpoint, much as being in the service. To me, the mountaintop with its solitude and changing moods of sun and storm made up for the long hours if not the confinement. Tasks like falling dead trees and splitting wood kept it at least moderately active.

I don't know why Sim wouldn't let me go on Pyramid that summer of 1942, which, of course, I greatly wished. Perhaps he felt I was one of the few that would stay at it on the AWS station with its isolation and long, tedious hours, but this seems rather unlikely. For whatever reason, I was told to stay on Big Hill and Charlie Cone, one of the Chelan High School principal's sons, got my Pyramid station. The small nod in my direction was an assignment to help Charlie put up the Pyramid phone line, but they still didn't give me any time off to do it. Consequently that day ran nearly twenty-four hours straight for both Frank and me and even at that, Frank was mad that it took me so long to get back.

The Last Visits to Pyramid and Cardinal Peak

By this time my days in the hills, even on AWS, were numbered. For one thing, my draft number came up in August. I think the Forest Service got an extension due to my job, but

this was temporary. With the war now raging in both Europe and the South Pacific, at age twenty I was cannon fodder, period. Now it was just a matter of hours.

So, before much longer, my notice to appear before the draft board came and that was only a couple of weeks off. I requested the office get my replacement as I was going to Pyramid for one last look around - possibly, for this lifetime. With no alternative, someone was found and now in September I was finally on my own. I'd told Charlie Cone I was going up on the mountain before I left for the service, so he hadn't locked the station when he left it some time before after a very short, uneventful fire season.

Gathering up supplies to last a week, I was off for my last fling in the hills before heading off to the wars. The trek to the Pyramid lookout was heavy in more ways than one - this might be my last trip in there, ever. It was nice to be home on the mountain again but the gloomy feeling that 'this may be the last' seemed to hang over everything.

With no responsibilities I felt rather like an intruder and was glad to be on my way to Cardinal the next morning. The weather was cloudy but not threatening. There was no sleeping bag available so I had some heavy tarps and blankets for my camping gear. With this enormous load, balanced on a trusty packboard, which I'd built in the school shop, some years before, it took a long time to top out on the summit of 'Skidgravel' Peak. I had planned to camp in that high altitude oasis I'd seen the year before. I found that reaching it wasn't as easy as expected. The remnant glacier had also covered an area leading down to the campsite, and stagnant ice, lightly covered with debris, still mantled the slope.

A route was found through this by carefully picking my way and soon the glade was reached, which fully lived up to expectations. It was a beautiful spot, completely bound around with cliffs either up or down, overlooking the remote basin and sundry rugged ridges. Not far below a waterfall plunged down a cliff, its roar adding to the wild remoteness of the scene. There aren't many places I've been in the hills where it can be judged with reasonable certainty that no one has been before, but this surely was one of them. A fine, level campsite was soon found and the massive pack unloaded. A good bed was made up, even some small logs (which probably are still there - like tracks on the moon, there probably hasn't been much to disturb them!) were arranged to hold in the various covers. With nothing much to do but make myself comfortable, it was a pleasant evening surveying the grand wilderness that enclosed on every side. After a hearty meal over a cheerful campfire, it was hit the sack and let's hope for a terrific tomorrow.

An Unpleasant Awakening; Further Exploring

Which started inauspiciously, indeed. Awakening all toasty warm and comfortable, I gave the covering canvas tarp a mighty heave and was rewarded with a shower of snow that thoroughly chilled me. What the hell's this? Yes, indeed, around four inches of snow over everything! As I'd already rendered the sack almost unusable, the worst was hastily brushed out and I followed, hurrying into clothing fortunately still dry and shivering a fire going, which it wasn't all that loathe to do. Then breakfast - glad to see the clouds rising and breaking. The worst of the snowstorm, at least, seemed to be over.

I'd planned on camping somewhere on the north side of Cardinal the following days. Packing my entire outfit, now much heavier than before due to the soaking, I found it a tough pull to the high pass beside the old cairn. Here, to my dismay, I saw that the route down the col to the west was no place to go, laden with that monstrous burden, let alone attempt to struggle up it again. Also, the weather wasn't all that settled even yet. With no other choice, if I was to stay in the area, it meant going back to that last night's camping spot, the big struggle to bring this load up to the top totally wasted. So be it.

Now to enjoy my time here as best as possible. The first thing was to climb Cardinal and not much sooner said than done. While about it, a scramble along the ragged, crumbling ridge to the south and I was on the virgin south summit as well. From here it's evident that the center peak is the highest after all. I still didn't want to tackle the north summit - it again looks like a real scramble not to be attempted with no real equipment (not that I'd know how to use it even if available).

These wanderings used up most of the short daylight and slipping under my massive pack again it was a mostly downhill plod back to yesterday's camp. I did stop off long enough to see if it would be practical to shortcut from the small lake direct to the camp knoll but just as it had looked from the other side, too much relic ice of the glacier remained to try it. So, it was the same struggle over 'Skidgravel' again.

The second night in the camp spot passed uneventfully. When I awakened and looked out next morning much more mindfully, it was cloudy bright with no nice chilly surprises like yesterday's snow. Another breakfast and a look around. I had enough chow to last for several days, but it certainly didn't look all that promising, so where to go? All the meadows were now snowy, drenched or soaking - it looked like rain a lot more than sunshine. Pyramid is the obvious choice - just hole up in the lookout for the duration unless something for the better, weatherwise, should turn up. The still gigantic pack is hoisted aboard again and it's goodbye. Cardinal, will I ever see you again? (Well, yes, but so far only from an airplane.)

Goodbye to Pyramid

So, a couple more days at Pyramid. It's cloudy and chilly, as if the weather is feeling almost as blue about the future as I am. Somehow I don't feel much like Army material. The Navy seems better. The Coast Guard? From what I'd seen of it at Port Townsend it didn't look all that inspiring. But, I elected to try for it first as the least undesirable of the three. How's that for enthusiasm for my new calling?

With time rapidly running out, I regretfully close the lookout, lock up, and it's off to the low country. Back at Big Hill, it's goodbye to Frank, and in Chelan it's goodbye to the office staff and the folks, no doubt not an exactly joyous occasion any more than it must have been in innumerable households those days. At least no sweethearts to miss - or wives - not yet! Then it's direct to Seattle to try for the Coast Guard. Six-month waiting list! Well, I've got something like three days left to make up my mind. It's the Navy Recruiting Station next. Would it be the same thing there? I sure hoped not!

A Chief Yeoman was behind the counter, typing something with one finger.

"I - er - uh -", I began uncertainly.

The Chief didn't even look up. "Do I hear a voice? Hold up your right hand and repeat after me: 'I do solemnly...'"

"Uh,- I - ..."

"You're in the Navy!" he barked. "Go over to the table and fill out these forms."

Return to Chelan - Postwar Forest Service

Returning from the Service in 1946 was to find much change. The major one was that the Forest Service just wasn't the same. In some ways it wasn't even recognizable. In the old days you worked by the month for the huge stipend of \$135.00 per. Now it was eight-hour days and NO OVERTIME. Just how these eight-hour days, five days a week, were to be worked out on jobs that didn't fit the clock didn't matter. RED TAPE WAS NOW KING, and woe to anyone that put an extra five minutes on the time sheet!

This, foolish and annoying as it was, wasn't the worst. The outfit WAS different — different objectives, different staff. A few 'old timers' still, but most gone and the new were of a different breed. Paper pushers — no up and coming Ranger had time to leave his swivel chair and dust up his shoes in the outdoors, unthinkable! No, promotion led in quite the opposite direction, the added layers of administration well proving it. Only the lowest of the low would imagine actually getting good old forest dirt on their uniforms and you could safely bet where they'd be in another ten years if they did! Right where they were now! That is, if they could stomach it that long.

Beginning 1948; Last Gasp at Chelan

After two seasons on bridge and trail crews, the 1948 season started out bad at Chelan and got worse rapidly. What few old timers who remained seemed to have hung up their spurs, and the trail crews I was in charge of consisted of green kids out for a lark. It got so bad I fired one such punk. The next week here he was, sent back again, with the sorry excuse they couldn't find anyone else! That was the final straw. I headed for the office, saying no more of this for me!

Skagit District, Mount Baker National Forest

I had a pretty good idea that the remaining old timers would be holing up in the last holdouts - that is, the most remote and inaccessible Districts. These were Winthrop in Chelan National Forest and Skagit in Mount Baker National Forest. I opted for the coast, wanting a change, as this seemed the best bet as well as the most rugged terrain. So, a day or two later I'm at Marblemount, meeting Slim Welsh, the Skagit District Assistant Ranger, signing up for a trail maintenance job with the promise of Crater Mountain Lookout Station when fire season takes off. Sounded lots better and not only that, the crew I soon joined was composed of older men. Oh, yes, it was better - by about 100,000,000 times!



The firefinder pipe stand is all that remains of the Pyramid Mountain fire lookout station since 1954. Here, 1941 lookout Austin Post and son Charlie examine the scene in 2003.

Climbing Crater Mountain

I was worried that trail work would keep me off Crater Mountain, but Assistant Ranger Slim Welsh remembered his promise and on one of the few sunny days of that incredibly cloudy summer he, with the pack string, an ex-Marine whose name I don't recall, and I were on our way. All went well and the gear was dropped off at the end of the pack trail.

A former tramway had been used to get stuff up a sizable cliff. As it was now out of commission, Slim and I, both used to such things, soon had packs rigged and were clambering upward, following painted 'X' marks up really nice, solid rock. This, surprisingly, came out on a sizable open if rather steeply pitched slope, up which a regular trail led to the building at 8,350 feet.

The Marine wasn't yet accustomed to such heights and despite having gone through horrendous battle experiences in World War Two, was scared half to death. This rather surprised Slim and me at first, but once we realized his panic was real, we put him on a rope for encouragement. Once up, he point-blank refused to go down again. So Slim and I returned for the other loads while the Marine opened the station.

Slim's Embarrassing Moment

Crater Mountain has its share of memories. True to form, there was a lightning storm late that first afternoon. I recall it mainly because of the tremendous sunset-lighted thunderheads that built up over the upper Thunder Creek country and the beautiful Boston Glacier. The lightning storm, about the only one that occurred that cold and extremely wet summer, apparently didn't start any fires. In fact, I doubt if there were any fires at all in the back country that year,

The other noteworthy feature of this storm was that it confronted Slim squarely with an absurd idea he had picked up somewhere. Slim was Irish and a bit likely to get temperamental. One learned early not to debate matters dear to his heart. This particular notion was that the lightning grounding system on the lookout buildings would 'dissipate the charge' - that is, so that a building never would be struck by lightning at all! He had just given us a rerun of this ridiculous statement when the storm began to grumble. Seeing it was headed our way, Slim thought it prudent to visit the priceless little outhouse building near by. Unusual for such an edifice, this one sported a lightning rod of its own - fortunately, indeed, as this was the time the lightning gods decided to give Slim a demonstration. That's right. It zapped the outhouse fair and square while Slim was doing the honors! We never heard any more about dissipating the charge, nor did we feel it necessary to mention the subject!

Crater Mountain, My Last Fire Lookout Station

One might expect Crater Mountain to be of volcanic origin, both from its name and the reddish color of the rock. Probably it was these which had confused someone, but the peak is composed of metamorphic and igneous rocks, and any imagined crater shape due to a cirque containing Jerry Glacier located on its northeast side. This was a bit disappointing. Somehow a real crater would have seemed more exciting and glamorous.



In all, I spent only about three weeks on Crater - my swan song to the lookouts as it turned out. A big four-day blizzard blew in soon after we got the Marine safely down the cliff and for the better part of the next week it was frost and snow with a husky, westerly gale behind that. I recall vividly that on the Fourth of July hoarfrost built up more than four inches deep on the windward side of the building and it was similarly frigid inside. Some way to celebrate the Fourth!

I well remember something else which at least in part relieved the chill. Someone had left a magazine there which contained illustrations of a very gorgeously-shaped lady in an abbreviated costume. She was demonstrating various 'keep fit' physical exercises and was so attractive I mounted her picture on cardboard and placed it conspicuously in the center of the table for company! Ah yes, even I was beginning to admit it was getting time to look beyond the solitude of the remote lookouts!

Redheaded Woman

The final event of note while on Crater Mountain was a message heard on the Forest Service radio. Crater was high enough that its two-watt signal could be heard anywhere and I could also pick up about any station on the frequency. (This included the police in a Louisiana city, and I was told by Slim that a previous lookout had carried on a weirdly confused, two-way conversation with their lady dispatcher.) The conversation I overheard wasn't so far distant. It originated from Green Mountain lookout in the nearby Darrington Ranger District.

The conversation began with a youthful voice shaking in terrible fear and fright: "Darrington Ranger! Darrington Ranger! There's a redheaded woman up here and she says she's going to stay all night! What'll I do? What'll I do?"

The Ranger, fortunately, was fully up to the occasion. "Darrington Ranger to Green Mountain: regarding the redheaded woman: Son, the first prerequisite of a Forest Service Guard is self-reliance! The Service looks to you to uphold our traditions with fortitude, perseverance and valor!"

Needless to say, everyone that heard this exchange was on pins and needles to hear the outcome, but there was no follow-up the next morning although I hopefully kept the radio turned on high for hours. I didn't find out what happened until the end of the season when talking with Slim.

"The redheaded woman on Green Mountain? Why, the kid locked her in the lookout and spent the night on the rocks!"

Of course, there was much excited speculation on the radio about the "Redheaded Woman" among the whole lookout fraternity, with most of us avidly hoping she would put in an appearance on OUR station! As it turned out, she did show up on several. But if she was headed my way, she failed to make it before the unusually short fire season ended. (And oh, yes, it was hinted that those visits did live up to expectations!)

The Final Job

After Crater Mountain's short stay, I spent the fall with a trail crew, which about winds up my Forest Service adventures. The season's work was done, the seasonals were let go and I took off with my Jeep for the deserts. Without actually realizing that this was to be the final chapter of the relationship, it was, "So long, Forest Service". For me, it had served its purpose admirably. Its major changes, like the demise of the Lookout System, came at a time in my life when they only encouraged adjustments which would have been made anyway, though certainly not as quickly. It was a wonderful experience and I will always cherish every moment of it.

So - except for fond memories - **goodbye, Pyramid Mountain!**