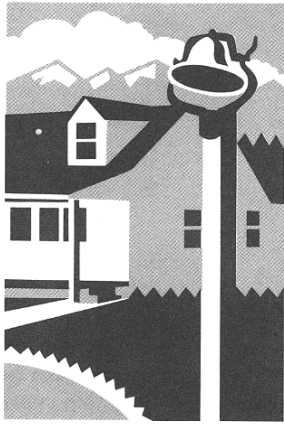




# HISTORY

## NINEMILE REMOUNT DEPOT & RANGER STATION



**Lolo  
National Forest**



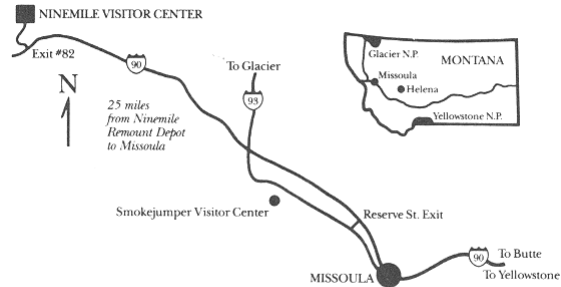
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## **WELCOME TO THE NINEMILE REMOUNT DEPOT AND RANGER STATION.**

*JOIN US ON A HISTORICAL JOURNEY*

*TO THE DAYS OF THE EARLY*

*FIRE FIGHTING IN RUGGED*

*WILDERNESS OF THE MOUNTAIN WEST.*

*FROM 1930 UNTIL 1953, THE NINEMILE  
REMOUNT DEPOT PROVIDED EXPERIENCED  
PACKERS AND PACK ANIMALS FOR FIGHTING*

*FIRES AND FOR BACKCOUNTRY WORK*

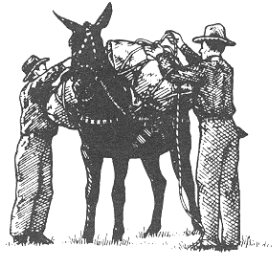
*PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE VAST ROAD-  
LESS AREAS OF THE NORTHERN ROCKIES.*

*MODELED AFTER U.S. ARMY CAVALRY*

*REMOUNT DEPOTS WHICH SUPPLIED  
FRESH HORSES TO TROOPS, THE NINEMILE*

*REMOUNT DEPOT IS LISTED ON THE  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
FOR ITS UNIQUE ROLE AS A FOREST SERVICE*

*REMOUNT DEPOT AND FOR ITS DISTINCT  
CAPE COD STYLE ARCHITECTURE.*



## CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

**1905** The Forest Service is created by an Act of Congress to manage the Federal Forest Reserves.

**1910** A severe fire burns 3 million acres in northern Idaho and Montana, claiming 82 lives.

**1910-1929** To help prevent disasters like the 1910 fire, the Ranger uses horses and mules to develop access trails, fire look-outs and to supply fire fighting efforts in the roadless northern Rockies.

**1929** A severe fire season rapidly exhausts the supply of experienced packers and packstock for the fire fighting efforts. Green, unbroke stock, poorly fitted tack and inexperienced packers result in long delays and injuries to stock and people.

**1930** Regional Forester Evan Kelley decides to establish a centralized

Remount Depot at Ninemile to supply horses and mules necessary for fire fighting.

**1930-1953** A run-down ranch evolves into a working arm of the Forest Service, providing well equipped pack stock, experienced packers and transportation for fire fighting efforts and backcountry work projects.



**1932** Breeding of saddle horses for Forest Rangers begins at the Remount Depot.

**1933** The Ninemile Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp is established 3 miles north of the Remount Depot. The 600 man camp, one of the largest in the country, constructs many of the Remount Depot roads, fences and buildings.

**1934-1935** Present Ranger Station buildings are constructed. The Frenchtown Ranger Station is relocated to Ninemile. The Ranger Station and the Remount Depot operate separately.

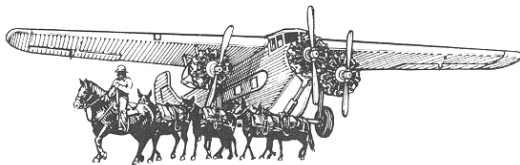




**1935** 44,000 acres of winter range is leased near Perma, 20 miles northwest of the Depot on the Flathead River, to winter up to 1500 horses and mules, creating the largest mule ranch in the Northwest!

**1936** The stallions and brood mares move permanently to the winter range where the breeding program continues.

**1941-1943** Aerial firefighting is pioneered; one of the first smokejumper training bases is established at nearby Grand Menard picnic area.



**Post World War II** Increasing demand for Federal timber for new houses results in an expanding road network, meaning less work for mules.

**1953** Regional Forester decides to close the Remount Depot due to increasing effectiveness of smokejumpers and improved road access.

**1954** Remount Depot facilities incorporated into the Ninemile Ranger District.

**1962** Winter range at Perma closes, marking the final chapter of "Thirty-two Years in the Mule Business" (1930-1962). (A publication by this name which provides a detailed account of the Remount Depot history is available at the Visitor Center.)

**1979** To teach traditional skills with stock to Forest Service employees, a Horsemanship and Packing school is initiated.

**1980** The Ninemile Remount Depot and Ranger Station is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**1989** The Ninemile Remount Depot Visitor Center opens.



Today, horses and mules continue to ply the mountain trails transporting the people and equipment necessary for managing our wilderness and backcountry resource. Ninemile helps support this effort by keeping these Remount era traditions alive:

**Winter Range** – From Moose Creek in Idaho to the Gallatin country near Yellowstone, over 200 Forest Service horses and mules come to winter at Ninemile each year.

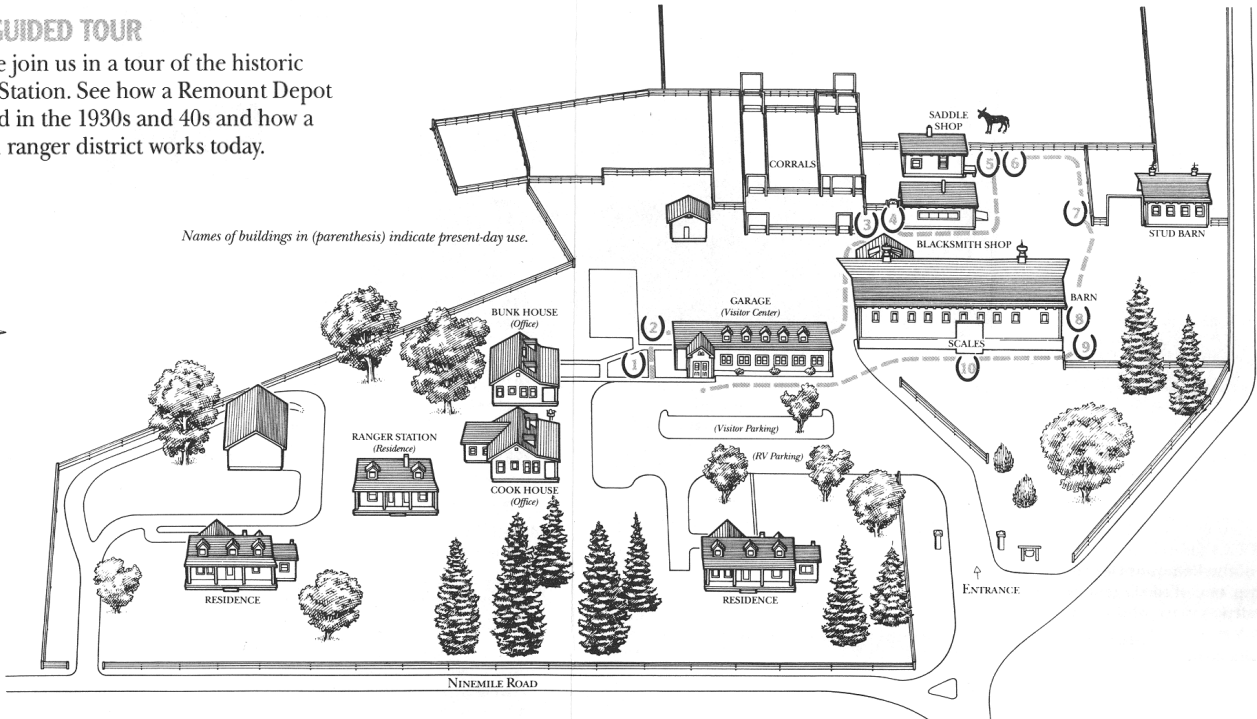
**Training** – Just as activities associated with the Remount Depot served to train packers, today Ninemile sponsors annual horsemanship and packing clinics as well as other Wildlands training courses involving trails, primitive tools and backcountry skills.

**Service** – The Remount Depot provided packtrains for fire fighting and project work across the Northern Rockies. Today we are home to the Forest Service packtrain of mules which lends a helping hand to other National Forests, and represents the Forest Service at the State Centennial and other events throughout the Nation.

## SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Please join us in a tour of the historic Ranger Station. See how a Remount Depot operated in the 1930s and 40s and how a modern ranger district works today.

*Names of buildings in (parenthesis) indicate present-day use.*



Remember, this is a working ranger station – for your safety and comfort:  
*Follow the horseshoes U. Mules stay out of trouble by staying on the trail. We ask you to do the same.*

*Keep a safe distance from active operations, and especially the horses and mules.*

*Corral your kids and watch for vehicles when crossing driveways.*

*Please, no dogs, and no smoking on tour.*

Tour stops are identified with a numbered sign.

### **1) THIS BELL MEANT BUSINESS**

During the summer fire season, 35 packers and wranglers were stationed at Ninemile. The ringing of the bell signaled that either dinner was ready in the cookhouse on your left, or there was a fire in the mountains, perhaps awakening the men in the bunkhouse straight ahead.

Today, these buildings serve as administrative headquarters for the Ranger District and fire calls come over mobile radios.

The Cape Cod style of architecture was chosen to create an image of a well run horse farm along the lines of those found in New England or Kentucky. The buildings are maintained to preserve their original character and integrity.

### **2) A WORKING RANCH**

Today, as in the past, Ninemile remains a working ranch. The smell of fresh cut alfalfa from the field to your left fills the air in July as provisions for the wintering animals are put up. The thundering hooves of up to 200 horses and mules can still be heard as wranglers move the animals between the 10 pastures on the 5000-acre “ranch.”

The concrete slab to your left is all that remains of a garage and bunkhouse that burned down in 1982. (Remember,

no smoking on the tour.)

Today, as during the Remount era, lookouts are a vital link in detecting and reporting fires. Can you see the lookout on the distant peak across the valley to your left?

### **3) THE CORRALS, LOAD 'EM UP!**

The fire call stirred up a cloud of dust and plenty of hee-hawing from anxious mules in the corrals. The driver backed to the loading ramp, men collected equipment from the barn, and the packer gathered, haltered and loaded the animals into the waiting truck.

Throughout the fire season, which generally ran from July through mid-September, 4 packtrains of 10 animals each waited in the corrals for the next fire call. Each packtrain carried enough gear to supply a 25-man backcountry fire camp.

Stock still runs through these chutes to be wormed, inoculated, roached (the mule version of a shave and haircut) and sorted before returning to their summer homes – mountain Ranger Stations located in some of the finest backcountry and wilderness in North America! Twenty-five head remain at Ninemile year-round.

### **4) THE BLACKSMITH SHOP— WHERE IRON MEETS THE TRAIL**

Horses and mules were shod here on the wooden floor by “farriers.” Not all horses and mules appreciate the need for shoes but according to one packer, any animal that went in the building came out with shoes on! One reluctant mule jumped through the small window in front of the hitch rack!

With smoke pouring from the forge and continual ringing of the hammer on the anvils, this shop provided shoes for all the Forest Service stock across the Nation. The Blacksmiths hammered out 9 shoes an hour and 72 a day, totaling 15,000 per year!

Today, over 100 horses and mules are fitted with shoes here each year to pre-

pare them for their backcountry missions. A working horse or mule wears out 4 sets of shoes in a busy summer season.

*Reminder—please stay clear of the animals. Avoid sudden movement and loud noises. Thanks.*

### 5) OUTFITTING THE STRING— THE SADDLE SHOP

The smell of horse sweat and leather still permeates this shop. Packers made and repaired all the gear necessary to outfit a string of mules in the mountains—saddles, halters and harnesses. Each packer marked the equipment to make sure it ended up on the right mule. This saddle shop supplied leather goods to the entire Northern Region of the Forest Service. Between fire calls, the packers “broke” young mules and horses in the adjacent corrals to ready them for “mountain” work.

Winter finds our packer still building, repairing and maintaining saddles and packing equipment for next summer in the mountains.

### 6) A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH— CINDY

Cindy was one of a truckload of wild mules from the Badlands of North Dakota delivered to Ninemile in 1962. Johnny Christensen, a retired Forest Service packer, remembers Cindy as a “salty” mule (uncooperative) for the first year or two.

For over 25 years, Cindy has carried the load over trails in the Selway Bitterroot, Bob Marshall and the Great Burn country. As the lead mule in the string, she has taught many a young mule how to be a follower. A quick kick reminds the youngsters not to tailgate and that the trail is a no passing zone!

Retired from active duty now, Cindy is our pet mule.

### 7) GRAND MENARD'S CASTLE— THE STUD BARN

What better way to overcome a shortage of horses and mules than a breeding program? The stallions, such as Grand Menard, were bred to Forest Service mares in pursuit of the perfect mountain horse. After much experimenting, the consensus was that purebred horses, like Grand Menard, did not produce a good mountain horse. When mixed-blood

mares were crossed with saddlebred stallions, most Rangers were happy with the resulting offspring.

Today the stud barn houses injured stock and the Forest Service buys their horses and mules!

This building was modeled after the barn you are about to visit.

### 8) THE BARN

The centerpiece of the compound, the barn housed animals as well as grain and equipment. Big draft mules lifted hay into the loft using a system of nets and pulleys. Hay was dropped from the loft into a manger as you see in the stall to your left. Stallions were kept in these two stalls; however, they created such a ruckus during official visits that Regional Forester Kelley ordered the men to make a new home for the stallions—the stud barn you just visited.

Originally, the barn floor was wood. As you can imagine, keeping the floor clean was quite a chore. With a continual string of visitors to the Remount Depot, Regional Forester Kelley demanded a spit and polish image—so the floor was replaced with concrete.

As you walk around the barn, note the distinctive weathervanes on the roof.

Today the barn is used to store equipment for all aspects of Ranger District operations.

### 9) FIRE FIGHTING TODAY

The fire engine, rather than a packtrain of mules, responds to today's fire calls. Engines, capable of carrying up to 750 gallons of water, can reach much of the 400,000-acre Ranger District via roads. Smokejumpers and mules are still used for backcountry fire-fighting efforts.

If the engines are gone, look for smoke on the horizon!

### 10) CAN WE MAKE IT?

Within 15 minutes after the fire bell rang, trucks loaded with nine mules, a horse, and supplies for 25 men stopped here briefly to weigh the loads and ensure that the bridges along the planned route would handle the load.

***We hope you enjoyed your tour of the Remount Depot. Come back again and until then, happy trails!***