

## Photos and Stories by Umatilla National Forest Retirees

### Submitted by Calvin E. von Weissenfluh

#### Desolation Butte Fire Tower

Once while I was at Dale somebody from the RO was visiting. Can't remember now who it was. No matter, he told a story about the ladder on Desolation Butte lookout. Somebody decided the ladder was unsafe so they designed a stairway that wound its way up inside the tower legs.

Shortly after the stairway job was done this RO person was on the district and visited the lookout. A young couple were on the mountain that summer. The old fat men from the RO started huffing their way up the stairway and the lookout's wife, an athletic and nimble young woman, scampered up the ladder like a squirrel. Orders went out to dismantle the ladder.

When I went to the district in 1959 the ladder was lying in pieces behind the equipment shed.

In 1961 a new lookout was built under contract. If memory serves, just the assembly was contracted as the FS provided the materials.



The new tower is about ten feet higher than the old one. Notice the roof just to the right of the radio antenna base, some stenciled writing. Reads "Forest Supervisor – Whitman National Forest – Sumpter, Oregon"



The original tower was built in 1915. The Dale District was then known as the Desolation District and was a part of the Whitman, and in 1915 the Whitman SO was in Sumpter. It went to the Umatilla the same time the Wallowa and the Whitman were merged. 1954, I think.

That merger created a game of musical chairs for some Forest Supervisors: Chet Bennett, of the Whitman, went to the Okanogan. Mel Loring left the Okanogan for the Malheur. Cleon Clark left the Malheur for the Ochoco (where I was at the time). Vondis Miller left the Ochoco for the Umpqua. Bob Aufterheide left the Umpqua for the Willamette. And the supervisor of the Willamette (whose name escapes me now) retired.



The orange numbers " U 19" on the side of the cab were there as an aid to help lost aircraft pilots to find themselves. So far as I know, all lookouts had their individualized markings.

But the shocker for me was that india ink stenciled onto galvanized sheet metal could survive 46 winters at 7000 feet on Desolation Butte.

### A Dangerous Game

One time Lloyd Waid (died last year) was telling me about how a bunch of young people played a fun but dangerous game on Desolation Butte.



They would climb the tower, taking a gunny sack with them, then wrap the gunny sack around a guy wire and ride the thing down. He also told me of one instance when they did this following a rain and a cold night. There was some ice on the guy wires. He said the fast route almost drove his hips through his shoulders.

I knew Lloyd well and wouldn't ever disbelieve anything he ever told me.



Many years later I was given a photo that proved he knew what he was talking about. This would have happened in the 1930's.

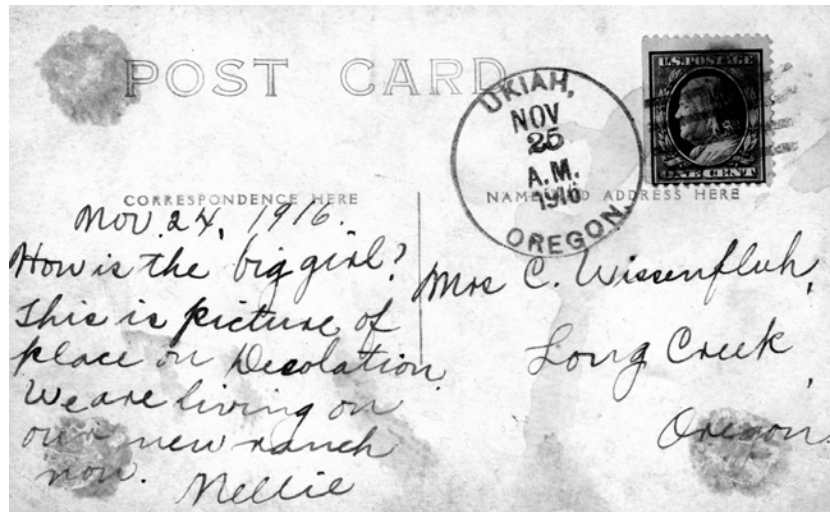
## The Jacobs Place

As you probably know, the Dale District wasn't a part of the Umatilla until the Wallowa and the Whitman were consolidated ca 1954. Thus none of the early pictures you have are of that part of the Forest. Dale was split away from the Whitman and given to the Umatilla to manage.

Here is one taken on private land about a half mile upstream from Desolation Crossing (view photo). We referred to it as "the Jacobs Place" when I worked there. Miles Langdon (son of Dale District Ranger George Langdon who retired, I think, in 1942) told me they called it "the Jacobs Exemption". The picture is on a penny postcard.



On the obverse the addressee is C(asper) Weissenfluh and I presume that "Nellie" was a member of the Jacobs family (view postcard). The "big girl" referred to in the message was Caspar's first child, Elris, born in October, 1916, who became Lloyd Waid's first wife and the mother of Karla. The house, or part of it, was still standing when I worked at Dale (1959-62).



### Calvin E. von Weissenfluh



Attended Oregon State College, School of Forestry, bachelor's degree in 1950. Started in 1950 with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Klamath Indian Reservation for one year. Quit and went to work for the Ochoco in 1951. Was TMA on the Prineville District for four years. Went to Heppner District, Umatilla in 1956 as TMA, stayed two years there. Then to SO for a temporary assignment of about six months in Engineering where he esigned a few roads. From there to Dale District as Assistant Ranger for three years. In 1962, to Snow Mountain District, Ochoco, as DR for eight years. Then to the Fremont in 1970 as District Ranger of Lakeview District. Retired in 1977.

Photo in 1998 on 75th birthday.