

FY 2008 Pulaski Tunnel Trail (10SE664) Accomplishments



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Pulaski Tunnel Trail Accomplishments for FY 2008

In the summer of 2008, archaeologists studied the remains of the Nicholson adit and cabin site that is thought to be Pulaski's refuge from the 1910 Fire. On August 20 and 21, 1910, Edward C. Pulaski and 40-some men sought shelter from forest fires in a mine adit along the West Fork of Placer Creek, near Wallace, Idaho. Big Ed Pulaski was proclaimed a hero for leading the men to the tunnel along the fire and smoke filled creek. Today, his story is told along an interpretive trail (Figure 1) that ends at the Nicholson adit, where it is thought they escaped the flames. The archaeological excavations were designed to help answer questions about the relationship of the remains at the adit and cabin to the 1910 Fire and Silver Valley mining history, help prevent vandalism to the archaeological site, and allow for additional development of interpretive facilities. Archaeologists from the Seattle firm, Northwest Archaeological Associates, worked with members of the Pulaski Project, Mullen High School students, Coeur d'Alene Field Office of the BLM and Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) to locate and excavate remains of this important piece of Silver Valley history. While positive proof of Pulaski's refuge was not found, the artifacts and features that were recovered suggest the cabin and adit were burned in the 1910 fire and would have been available to Pulaski and his men.

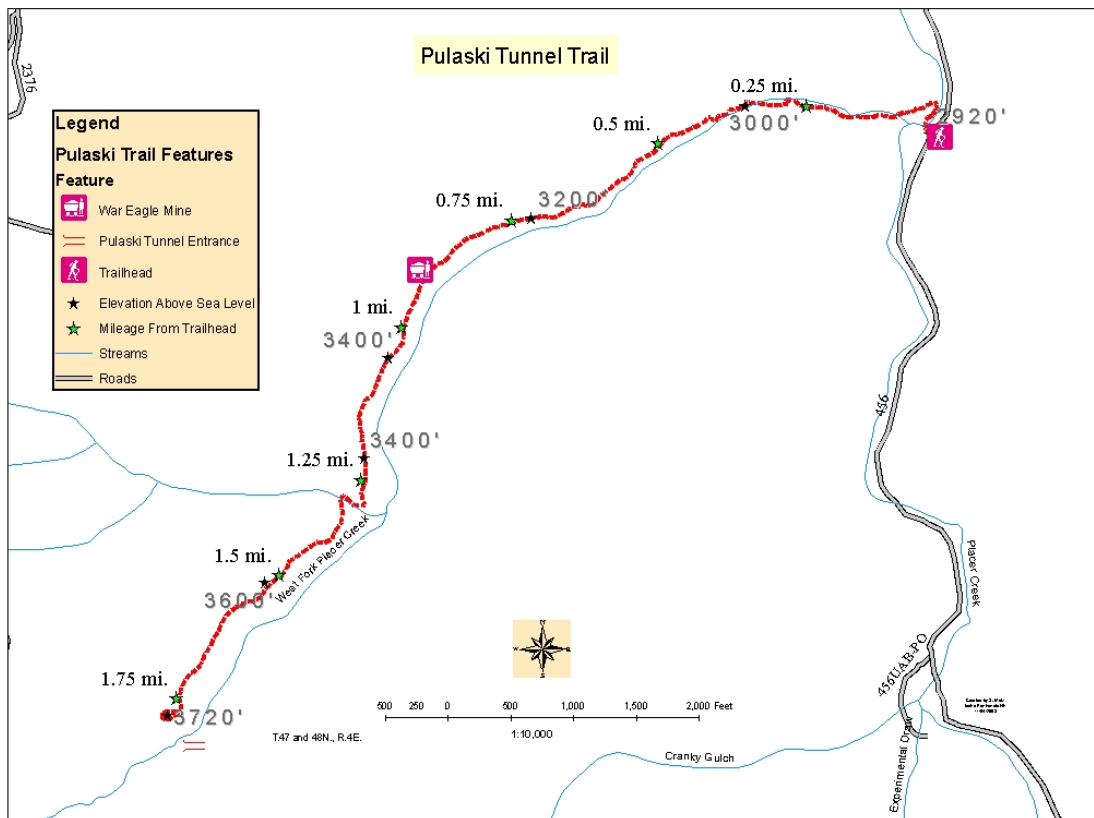


Figure 1. Pulaski Trail and Nicholson adit location.

As a series of single fires came together in one great conflagration known as the 1910 Fire (Figure 2), Big Ed Pulaski gathered about 45 men together and made a dash down the West Fork of Placer Creek to the expected safety of the War Eagle Mine. On the way down the creek they came to the J.I.C. cabin where he took a cross-cut saw to clear the trail for the two pack horses they had brought. Trapped between fire above and below they sought shelter in the J.I.C. tunnel first, but since it was too short they headed into the nearby Nicholson tunnel. The men sought shelter on the damp floor of the 230 foot long adit, while their two horses were kept near the mouth. Sometime during the three to five hours they stayed within the tunnel they lost consciousness and several men drowned in the water pooled on the floor of the tunnel. Finally, one man woke up and made his way into Wallace to find help. A rescue party was then sent up the mountain and the remaining men finally made it to Wallace on the 21st of August. For additional information see Carl Ritchie’s *Cultural Resource Inventory: Pulaski, Two Days in August, 1910* (see http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/rec/heritage/publications/pulaski_two_days_in_august_1910.pdf) and *When the Mountains Roared* (see http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/rec/heritage/publications/when_the_mountains_roared.pdf).



Figure 2. The Big Blow-up of 1910 interpretive sign from the Pulaski Tunnel Trail.

The trail and tunnel are listed on the National Register of Historic Places for their association with the 1910 Fire, an event of national significance. The nomination form for the *North Idaho 1910 Fire Sites* describes "Edward Pulaski's Tunnel and Placer Creek Escape Route" as "a strip 1 drain wide, west side of West fork..." The trail portion of the

site is described as crossing a high ridge into the West Fork of Placer Creek to a prospect tunnel that provided shelter from a backfire set near Wallace. The trail continues to Placer Creek. The tunnel is noted as being partially collapsed with split cedar floor planking for about 30 feet after the collapse and three charred squeeze caps spaced over 25 feet of this distance. The tunnel continues for 120 feet from the entrance where there is a 10 foot offset. At another 110 feet beyond the offset there is a widened area for tool storage where the present tunnel ends. Besides its association with the 1910 Fire, the tunnel is also significant “as an example of an early hand-drilled prospect, providing important information on how such work was done”. To protect the public a gate has been installed at the mouth of the portal that blocks access to the rest of the tunnel.

While there are five known adits and two cabin sites along the West Fork of Placer Creek that could have provided shelter for the fire fighters, Ritchie provides evidence that “adit # 4” was the most likely candidate for the site chosen by Pulaski that day in August. Ritchie identified Adit # 4 as being on the J.J. Nicholson property and so it is often referred to as the Nicholson adit. Ritchie was unsure which cabin was Pulaski’s J.I.C. cabin, the one at adit # 4 or a cabin shown on an early map further up the creek.

The lands along the trail that Pulaski followed from the Nicholson adit to main Placer Creek are owned by the East Shoshone County Water District, Stimson Lumber Company, Hecla Mining Company and BLM. The Forest Service has a right-of-way for use along the trail and at the adit. The Nicholson adit and cabin are located on BLM lands, while features associated with the War Eagle Mine, including the power transmission poles, and trash dump are on Stimson Lumber Company lands.

While plans for the archaeological work were being developed to address concerns about trail development impacts, recent vandalism at the War Eagle Mine (Figure 3) spurred the need to collect artifacts and features before they are further damaged. The archaeological project was originally proposed by the Pulaski Project, a group of Silver Valley residents dedicated to telling the story of Edward Pulaski and the 1910 Fire. The project would allow the portal to be reconstructed to look as it did just after the 1910 Fire and to provide an interpretive overlook of the tunnel entrance. With construction of the interpretive trail



visitor use has increased tremendously. Recently, artifacts have been dug up at the cabin site and at the War Eagle mine leading IPNF archaeologist, Steve Matz, to collect the materials before they disappear. Besides being illegal to disturb or collect artifacts from public or private lands without appropriate permission, the loss of these materials makes the job of understanding the history of the 1910 Fire and Silver Valley mining much more difficult, if not impossible.

Figure 3. Artifact hunters damaged this can dump at the War Eagle Mine.

Between July 30 and August 3, 2008, archaeologists and several Mullen High students used metal detectors, cadastral surveying equipment and archaeological excavation techniques to better understand the history of the site (Figure 4). The metal detector surveys allowed concentrations of metal artifacts associated with the adit and cabin to be located and mapped. Archaeologists then excavated a series of shovel probes (i.e., round holes a little over a foot in diameter and up to several feet deep) on a grid and screened the remains through 1/8” mesh cloth to recover any artifacts. This systematic testing of the site area helped to further refine the locations of artifact concentrations, structural remains, and the boundaries of the site. Once the shovel probes were excavated a series of 1x1 meter (39x39”) units were excavated in high value areas to remove the artifacts and structural remains for further laboratory analysis.



Figure 4. Metal detector inventory at adit and shovel probe excavation at cabin site.

While the BLM and FS do not normally excavate or remove artifacts from archaeological sites, recent vandalism has become so serious that as much material as possible was removed to preserve it for future analysis and interpretation. A comprehensive surface collection of cans, bottles and other remains was undertaken to preserve this material for archaeological analysis and public display and interpretation. Each artifact collected was bagged, tagged and mapped with cadastral survey equipment so its original location is known and the site can be studied in three dimensions (Figure 5). Artifacts from the excavation suitable for display will be loaned to the Pulaski Project and the Wallace Mining Museum as the need arises.



Figure 5. Garland stove door (left) and mapping the surface scatter (right).

Nearly 2300 artifacts were collected during the week long project. Most of the artifacts are small scraps of metal, nails, fragments of ceramics and pieces of broken glass that can tell archaeologists a part of the Nicholson cabin story, but are of little interest to the general public. A few hundred have trademarks or other distinctive characteristics that tell the age of the site, what type of activities took place, and interactions with the rest of the Silver Valley and United States around the turn of the 20th Century (Figure 6). At the mouth of the tunnel a wagon bench spring, sheet metal, an axe head (Figure 6) and a mine cart wheel were recovered that are probably associated with mining activities. Unfortunately, the remains of the saddles and other equipment left by Pulaski's men were not found (Figures 7 and 8). At the cabin site, several features were uncovered. The first was an area that contained a scatter of Garland wood stove parts, bottle glass dating between 1890 and 1917, nails, a bobby pin, corrugated metal roofing and other material (Figures 5 and 6). According to NWAA the Garland stove was made by the Michigan Stove Company as early as 1884 and can be traced back through several different distributors. The bobby pin suggests that a woman may have lived in the cabin, giving us the barest glimpse into family life. A depression that may have been a trash pit contained stove parts, tin cans dating to the late 1800s and early 1900s, nails, window glass, Western bullet cartridges dating from 1898, more parts of the Garland stove, and a watchcase from the "American Waltham Watch Co." dating from 1892 (Figures 6 and 8). At the final location what appeared to be the remains of sill or wall logs from a structure were excavated and nails, window glass, chimney glass from an oil lamp, bottles, Western bullet cartridges dating from 1898, and corrugated metal roofing were found (Figures 6, 9 and 10). Many of the artifacts show fire damage consistent with a pre-1910 fire date. In conclusion, the remains suggest that the cabin was occupied around 1900, however, there is no link to Pulaski's use of the site as a refuge.



Figure 6. Sample of artifacts from the excavations. These materials, if found where they were originally left can tell us the age of the site, type of activities that occurred and what kind of economic ties the cabin owners had with the outside world. The glass, shells, watch case and can date to the late 1800s or early 1900s. The bobby pin and axe head can tell us about the gender of the occupants and the types of activities that occurred. The corrugated metal roofing was damaged by fire and suggests the remains of a cabin or other structure.



Figure 7. Present adit with gate installed (left) and original 1910 portal with saddles and other material at entrance immediately after fire (right).



Figure 8. Excavation at the tunnel mouth (left) and in the pit feature at the cabin (right).

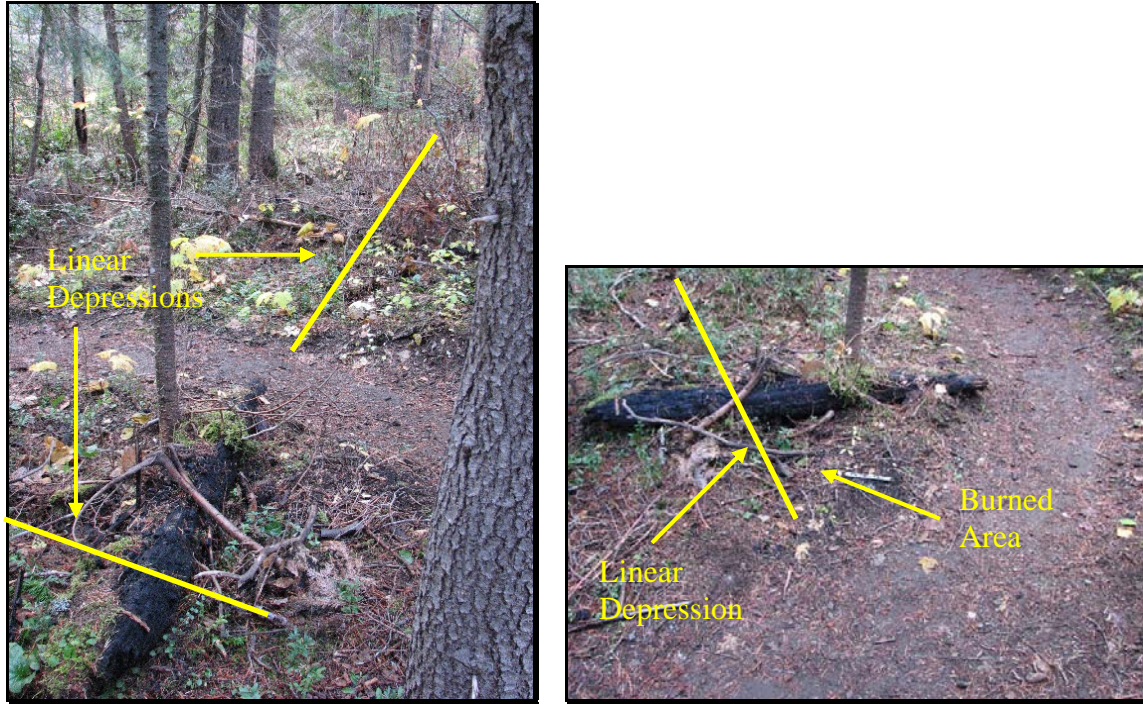


Figure 9. Potential cabin remains cut by trail construction. The left hand photo shows the relationship of the burned log and depressions (yellow lines) cut by trail. The right hand photo shows the log, depression perpendicular to the log, and burned area with glass and ceramics in between the log and the trail.



Figure 10. Corrugated tin roofing associated with the burned log shown in Figure 9.

The 2008 work was made possible through grants and numerous partners that should be recognized for their efforts and generosity. First and foremost, the members of the Pulaski Project, especially Ron Roizen and Jim See, sought the grants that paid for the majority of the work and provided the push to complete the archaeological evaluations. The Inland Northwest Community Foundation provided the majority of the grant money for the excavations. Additional funding was provided by the Recreation Advisory Committee. BLM archaeologists Stan McDonald and David Sisson provided comments on the plan of work and expedited the review so that the excavations could take place on BLM administered lands. Northwest Archaeological Associates (NWAA), under contract to the Pulaski Project, directed and accomplished the majority of the field work, initial artifact preparation and analysis, preparation of the letter report describing the investigations, and donated time and labor to the project to keep it within the Pulaski Project's budget. The NWAA project director was Alicia Valentino, while the field crew consisted of professional archaeologists Yonara Carrilho, Margaret Elm, and Dylan Henderson. NWAA Project Manager, Lorelea Hudson, donated her time to the project during the preparation, field and report phases of the work. Mullen High School students Chad Dawson, Damon Reid, Trevor Henderson, and Brittany Walsh, under the supervision of Jim See, provided help with the field data collection. Housing in Wallace for the field crews was supplied by ?? IPNF Forest Archaeologist, Steve Matz, completed the initial plan of work and facilitated the negotiations for the contract and a portion of the field work. IPNF Archaeologist Sarah Wilson took part in the initial planning and field work.