

History of the Rager Ranger Station

The Rager Ranger Station, US Forest Service administrative site for the Paulina Ranger District, Ochoco National Forest, was recently closed after one hundred and five continuous years of operation. This article will provide a brief overview of those years, and some of the people whose names will always be connected with this remote station.

Land where the Rager Ranger Station is located is within the Beaver Creek watershed, which feeds into the upper reaches of the Crooked River, a main tributary of the Deschutes River. Use of the land within this watershed during historic times (post 1804) is more generally known due to the many sources of historic information written and saved through the years. Trapper journals, General Land Office survey notes, homesteader memoirs and diaries, Forest Service correspondence - these all contribute to the knowledge we have today of the Ochoco Mountains.

The earliest writings that mention the Beaver Creek watershed are the 1825-1827 journals kept by Peter Skene Ogden. It is believed he and his band of Hudson's Bay trappers stopped and camped on Beaver Creek in the Suplee area while exploring within the upper reaches of the Crooked River. In the 1840s, government-supported exploration of Central Oregon began with the expedition of Lt. John C. Fremont of the Topographical Engineers Corp. This expedition and subsequent map added to the overland emigration of the Oregon Country beginning in the late 1840s. After the Warm Springs Treaty of 1855, when Columbia River bands were relocated to the Reservation, Northern Paiute took advantage of this situation and began raiding the Reservation for horses and cattle. The military was called in, which began their exploration of the Crooked River and all of its tributaries.

The many explorations by the military of the Crooked River drainage were a large factor in the settlement of this area. Federal land policies also played a part through the 1862 Homestead Act and also the land grants for wagon roads in the 1860s. General Land Office (GLO) surveys were conducted for lands within the Upper Beaver Creek Watershed beginning in the early 1870s.

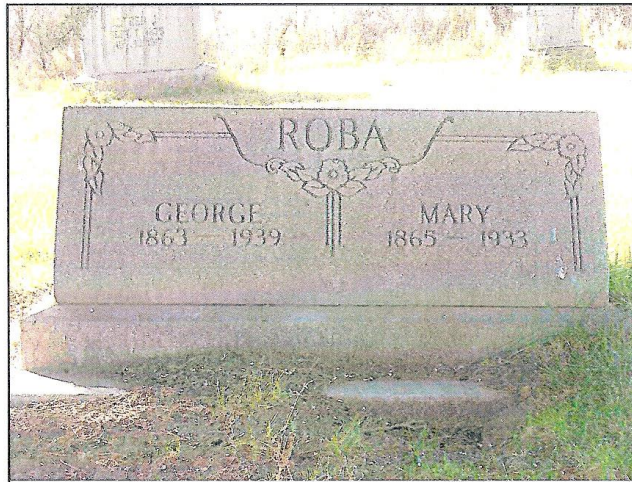
Homesteading within the Upper Beaver Creek Watershed

The 1862 Homestead Act contributed to the settling of the Paulina Valley. In May of 1862, James A. Rager, who was born in Tennessee in 1832, filed for a homestead patent on land in the southwest corner of section 33 of Township 15 South, Range 25 East, along what is now Rager Creek. Rager later sold the land in 1885 to George Noble, grandson of William Noble, for \$400. 1870 Oregon census records show a James A. Rager living in Canyon City and working as a freight wagon teamster. He was noted in the records as a citizen of the United States and could not write.

In 1871, the William Sherman Noble family settled on what is now Sugar Creek near its junction with Beaver Creek. In 1872, Thomas J. Powell settled on what is now Powell Creek. His father, John Powell, settled the Powell Buttes area west of Prineville. Near the turn of the century, Napoleon "Old Yank" Longley lived on a flat between Sugar Creek and the present day Rager Ranger Station. Longley cut shakes and shingles near his homestead, and this flat is known as Shake Flat. In 1908, John Henry "Dutch" Schwarzer came with his brother, Jake, from Nebraska to the Paulina area to work on the Tom Brennan Ranch. They helped to construct the old stone Brennan house that stood along the Paulina-Izee highway until it was destroyed in 1994. Dutchman Flat, just west of the Rager Ranger Station, and Dutch Reservoir, also within the Beaver Creek watershed, are both named for Dutch Schwarzer.



Headstone for John H. "Dutch" Schwarzer's grave, Beaver Creek Cemetery, 2005.



The Beaver Creek cemetery headstone (2005) for George Noble, who in 1885 purchased land from James A. Rager, current site of the Rager Ranger Station. George is the grandson of William Noble, who in 1871 moved from the Willamette Valley with his family to settle on Sugar Creek. It is thought they named their new home after their valley homestead in Sweet Home.

General Land Office Surveys – H. D. Langille

Along with the 1862 Homestead Act, 1880s General Land Office (GLO) surveys and the resulting maps contributed to the settling of the Paulina Valley, including holdings within what would become the Ochoco National Forest. In December of 1902, H.D. Langille, a Forest Inspector with the Department of the Interior, was instructed to proceed to the Blue Mountains of Oregon and examine the land within the proposed boundaries of a forest reserve. Below are quotes taken from his 1906 final report on the proposed Blue Mountain Forest Reserve.

“The timber and water supply of the Blue Mountains is invaluable not only to the industrial interests of the immediate, contiguous sections but to the entire surrounding country. The value and importance of the Blue Mountains timber belt cannot be over-estimated. It is the only timber body between the Cascade and Rocky Mountains and the demand will be very heavy as the timber is excellent. Between 12,000 to 35,000 board feet per acre of yellow pine and tamarack is a conservative estimate. The density and abundance of reproduction of yellow pine is one of the most striking features of the Blue Mountain forests. The timber business of the reserve will someday be extensive.

“As a grass country it is excellent. Bunch grass abounds luxuriously on both the steep slopes and on the bare rocky ridges. The soils are, in the yellow pine zone, a good sandy loam. There are also patches in the open country free from rocks, but as a general rule the land is too rocky, the country too rough, and it would be altogether too expensive to bring water onto any of the uplands. Frost is liable to occur at any time during the summer. Timothy and red-top hay are the only crops raised. Alfalfa has been tried but so far without success. The Blue Mountain mining district is rapidly developing and promises to become a rich and permanent mining section. The number of developed mines is not large at present, but the work done in them has demonstrated that the ore bodies are deep and improve as greater depth is reached.”

Taken from: “Report on the Proposed Blue Mountain Forest Reserve”, by H.D. Langille. April, 1906.
Department of the Interior, General Land Office

Forest Service History of the Ochoco National Forest

In July of 1902, the Blue Mountains were withdrawn from public domain for proposed Forest Reserve purposes. In March of 1906, A.S. Ireland became the first Forest Supervisor of the Western Division of the Blue Mountains Forest Reserve and the Maury Mountain Forest Reserve. In March of 1907, Supervisor Ireland proposed to the Washington office to divide the Blue Mountain Reserve in half using the South Fork John Day River as the boundary. In June of 1911, the boundaries of the National Forests were rearranged. The region formerly included in the old Cascade National Forest and other areas on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains was named the Deschutes National Forest. The main division of the old Deschutes National Forest, including the Maury Mountains and the Snow Mountain region, was renamed the Ochoco National Forest.

Forest Service History of the Upper Beaver Creek Watershed

In June of 1908, the land surrounding Rager Spring in section 33 was withdrawn for a US Forest Service administration site. The land where the Rager Ranger Station now occupies was later withdrawn in November of that year and Charles S. Congleton was hired as the first deputy ranger for the Beaver Creek Ranger District with his headquarters at the Rager Creek Ranger Station. Congleton was appointed forest guard on the Blue Mountain (West) Reserve in 1907. He quickly advanced to Assistant Forest Ranger and then to Deputy Forest Ranger. He spent his entire career on the Paulina Ranger District, and served in this position until 1927 when he retired to his ranch in the Paulina Valley.



Charles S. Congleton, first district ranger at the Rager Creek Ranger Station beginning in 1908 until he retired in 1927. Photograph on left was taken after his retirement, ca. 1930s-1940s. Center photo was taken of his family ca. late 1920s, and the date of the photo on the right is unknown.

Excerpt below are from Congleton's work diary, now housed at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland, Oregon, and transcribed into a publication available through the Bowman Museum in Prineville, Oregon:

April 8, 1908: "In a.m. with L.E. Throop drove cattle that were near National Forest boundary. Drove them farther south. In p.m. went up on Rager Creek and surveyed out ranger station on Rager Creek."
 -Charles Congleton, US Forest Service

From a published story written by Congleton after his retirement in 1927:

"In April 1907, three or four of the Paulina Valley ranchers signed a petition certifying as to my general reliability and qualifications for Forest Ranger and recommending me for this job in the Paulina area. Accordingly, armed with this petition, I made application to A. S. Ireland, Forest Supervisor of the Blue Mountain West Forest Reserve with headquarters in Prineville, Oregon. On April 15, 1907, I was hired as a forest guard. There were no specific headquarters, but Paulina was my mailing address.

"During 1907, the work consisted mostly in searching out section corners, running out and marking Forest boundary, counting sheep and working out allotment boundaries between sheep permittees. At a meeting held the previous winter, there had been allotments made to permittees and the boundaries shown on a map, but no one knew where these were on the ground. Frequently, when the map boundaries were located on the ground they were found impractical and adjustments had to be made. This was further complicated by misunderstanding by the permittees on where the lines were and the fact that there were more sheep permittees than the area could accommodate. Regarding numbers, C. H. Adams of the Washington Office, while inspecting the upper drainages of Mill Creek and Marks Creek in 1907 said, "This is the heaviest stocked piece of National Forest range in the United States." These areas had a band of 1200 sheep on about every four sections. There were no inside fences and cattle and horses permitted at this time often ranged over adjoining sheep range as well as on the area on which they were permitted."

From 1908 to 2013, the district rangers at the Paulina Ranger District (Beaver Creek RD in earlier years) were as follows:

Charles S. Congleton, April 1908 - June 1927
Random R. Butler, June 1927 - February 1930
Arthur Radigan , February 1930 - February 1932
James O.F. Anderson, February 1932 - December 1936
George P. McClanahan, January 1937 - January 1944
Henry D. Harryman, February 1944 - April 1951
Virgil J. Hughes, April 1951- December 1954
Archie U. Mills , January 1955 - January 1958
Glendon K. Jefferies, March 1958 - June 1961
Don R. Campbell, June 1961- August 1963
John W. Lundgren, August 1963 - June 1966
Richard G. Dearsley, June 1966 - September 1970
Charles V. Hill , October 1970 - October 1971
Kenneth W. Roberts, January 1972 - July 1974
Richard E. Grace, July 1974 - May 1977
Robert L. Kiser , June 1978 - April 1983
Joe M. Salinas Jr., August 1983 - March 1985
Kenneth B. Koon, June 1985 - October 1988
David R. Poucher, November 1988 - August 1991
Robert MacWhorter, December 1991 - December 1995
Fred S. Salinas , July 1996 - October 1997
Eugene R. Skrine, April 1998 – August 2002
Mike Lawrence , June 2003 – May 2008
Sandra J. Henning, September 2010 –

In May of 1925, Ochoco NF Supervisor, Vernon V. Harpham, started *The Ochoconian*, an informal, in-house newsletter by and for the district rangers and fire guards on the Ochoco National Forest. Each month, the men would send in newsy stories of what they were doing and observing in their corner of the Forest. This newsletter lasted until 1932 and today is a gold mine of information regarding the day to day lives of the early Forest Service employees on the Ochoco National Forest. Below are some short *Ochoconian* newsletter stories:

June 1925: “Rangers Congleton, Elder and Blevins just completed 7 ½ miles of telephone line in Summit-Prairie. This line is the last link to be constructed of the Forest Service line connecting Prineville with the Snow Mountain district. With the exception of rain storms, mud up to the axles, and bridge washouts, the work went along in fine shape.” Supervisor Harpham

June 1925: “The Central Dispatcher will soon be a part of the Ochoco fire plan. This system of handling fire protection, detection, and suppression work has been tried out on just about every Forest of District (Region) Six for a number of years, and is a system that has come to stay. It has proven itself to be so much of an advantage over the individual Ranger District method of handling fires. Every Forest Officer, therefore, should fall in line.” Ibid.

October, 1925: “The Ochoco has become a Mecca for hunters. The fame of our mule deer seems to be known in nearly all parts of the country. We have had as high as 250 hunters in the Forest in one day, in fact, the hunting grounds here have been overrun every day of the season. If this condition continues to exist it is very probable that the mule deer on the Ochoco will go the way of the passenger pigeon.” Ibid.

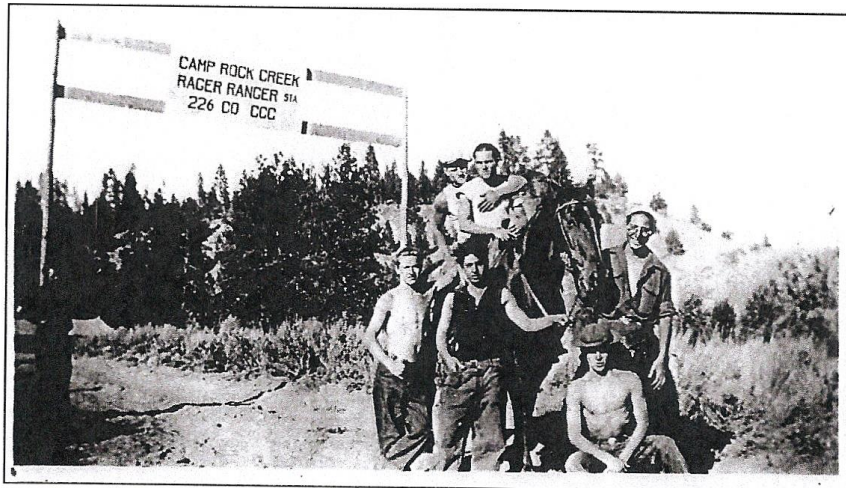
November 1925: "Mr. G.L. Conklin, employed by the Shevlin-Hixon Company, a large sawmill operation of Bend, is making his headquarters at the Ochoco Ranger Station while he looks over the timber land in the Horse Heaven, Ochoco and Marks Creek watersheds." Ibid.

January 1926: "Ye Supervisor is doomed for another journey to Pendleton for the annual meeting of the Oregon Woolgrowers which starts January 21 and lasts for three days. I intend to take along a tally register so as to get an accurate count on the "cussings" that the Forest Service will get from those sheepmen who do not agree in a 100% way with our range appraisal figures." Ibid.

April 1926: "There will be no sheep permitted on the Lookout-Pisgah District this season. This will be a happy lonesomeness – possibly I will find a little time to fight fire, etc., out of time formerly used in keeping sheep and cattlemen from cutting each other's throats." Ranger Lee Blevins

December 1931: "As you walk down the street do you think what a little thing like a smile or nod with a friendly greeting can mean? Such small things influence the attitude of your fellow citizen toward you and your work. Attendance at community affairs in a friendly mingling with the other people of the locality, lending your support to neighborhood enterprises and activities are other ways in which the goodwill and favorable attitude of the public toward the Forest Service can be gained. When your neighbor talks with you, a Forest Officer, you get his viewpoint which is always valuable, and what is of still more value to us, you have the opportunity of working our point of view into the picture and showing that we are really, in the end, working for his good to the best of our knowledge." G.H. Ball, Ochoco Supervisor's Office

Beginning sometime in the early 1930s, until World War II began in 1941, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Rock Creek Camp was operated from the Rager RS. These young enrollees built miles of fences, constructed hundreds of log water troughs (some that still remain today), and worked hard at other resource projects on the district.



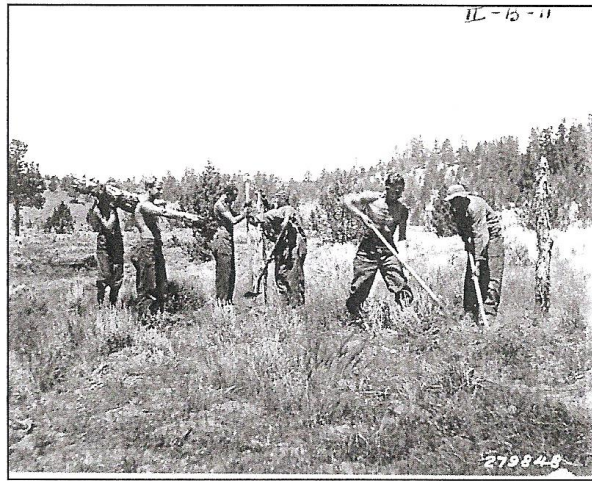
The CCC camp was along the west side of Rager Creek, just east of the Forest Service compound. This photograph was donated by the son of Charles Aparicio (seated in photograph) who was from Vera Beach, Florida.



Noon mess at Camp Rock Creek, Rager Ranger Station, ca. 1930s.

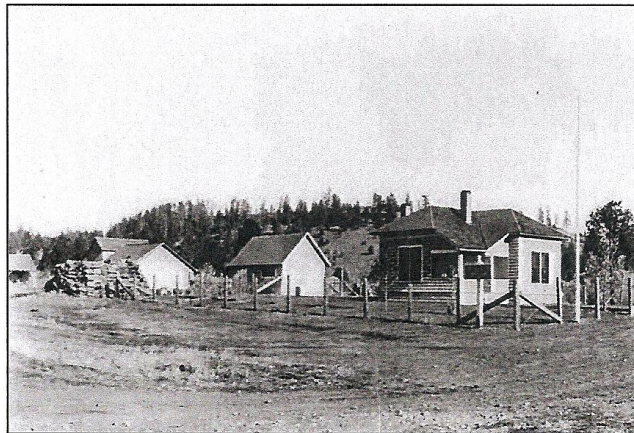


Constructing the log water troughs at Dipping Vat Spring, Paulina RD, ca. 1930s.



Building fence, Paulina RD, ca. 1930s.

For many years, the Rager Ranger Station was its own community where children were born and raised, families came and went, and many Forest Service employees began their careers. Millions of board feet of timber, mostly ponderosa pine, came off of the Paulina Ranger District. Neighboring ranchers grazed thousands of livestock on the forest, beginning before it was National Forest land, and continuing to this day. Employees at the ranger station were integrated into the Upper Valley through the grade school, book clubs, the church, and rodeo activities. In June of 2008, a Centennial Celebration was held at the Rager Ranger Station, where many current, former, and retired Rager employees gathered to talk about the “good old days at Rager” and to reminisce about their time at the most remote ranger station in Region 6.



1935 photograph of the Rager Ranger Station, with the handwritten inscription:
“The good old days at Rager.”

On April 5, 2012, Ochoco Forest Supervisor, Kate Klein, met with Paulina Ranger District employees who were still stationed at the Rager Ranger Station, and later in the day with Paulina RD employees who had already moved to Prineville, to share with them her decision to close the Rager Ranger Station and transfer the remaining employees at Rager to Prineville no later than December 31, 2012.

She made this decision after evaluating the ability to fund the Ochoco NF organization and facilities, in light of declining budgets that are projected to continue declining through at least FY 2015. The needs for facilities maintenance at the Rager RS far exceeded current funding. In December of 2012, the last remaining employees were moved to Prineville with the Paulina RD headquarters at the Ochoco National Forest office as their duty station. The buildings at the Rager Ranger Station have been boarded up and plans for their future, as of this writing (January 16, 2013), have yet to be decided.



A group photo of some of the employees and their families at the Rager Ranger Station, 2004