

J.D."Daws" McCall, Forest Ranger 1906-1913

Heritage Program - Payette National Forest
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James Dawson McCall was one of the four sons of Tom and Louisa McCall. Born in Missouri in 1883, he arrived with his family on the shores of Payette Lake in 1891 (McCall 1939:7). Known as "J.D." or "Daws", he had a lively time growing up in the mountains of central Idaho. When he was 16 years old, he became a contract mail carrier from Van Wyck (near the present-day Cascade) to his father's post office in McCall. Mrs. Jake Stover, who homesteaded near Roseberry, recalled the experience in 1939: "I used to watch for Daws with his heavy pack of mail on his back mushing through the snow and the cold, just a speck in that big lonely valley. When I saw him coming, I began to get dinner ready for him. He used to come in so tired and cold I had to help him off with his pack and his coat. I used to feel so sorry for the boy for he was so young for that hard trip" (McCall 1939:10). In addition, Daws would help his father and brothers at their sawmill and in the construction of many of the buildings in the rapidly growing town named after them.

The Forest Service was established by Gifford Pinchot and President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, and the Payette National Forest was created. The Forest Headquarters was located in Meadows, 7 miles west of McCall. In May of 1906, Daws McCall took the ranger examination and was appointed as a temporary Forest Ranger. (Long Valley Advocate, May 24, 1906). In March of the following year, J.D. McCall, D.H. Kerby, and C.E. Herrick were confirmed as Forest Rangers (Long Valley Advocate, March 8, 1907).

In July of 1906, while on patrol near Warren, he single-handedly extinguished a 200-acre forest fire. The following article from the August 26, 1906, issue of the Long Valley Advocate describes this event:

HEROIC STRUGGLE WITH FOREST FIRE

"Up near Warren, not far from the Loon Lake region, lives a forest ranger whose name will long live in the Payette country. He is one of the men whom Uncle Sam has singled out for strength of limb and devotion to duty. He is one of the forest rangers - wilderness bred, strong of body and will, afraid of nothing alive, nor even, as he has just proved, of the elements themselves.

At 9 o'clock on the 25th day of July commenced the crackle of the fire which has made Ranger J.D. McCall at once the envy and the admiration of his brother rangers in the great woods. McCall was alone, with help entirely out of the question, when the big fire commenced. In that region, fires are fought with axe and shovel and for three days the ranger worked and planned with shovel and woodcraft, until, having at last fringed 200 acres with the trench which no fire can pass, he saved the rest of

the pine on his patrol. For three days and three nights the dauntless ranger stuck to his task, never daring to close his eyes for sleep, nor to leave the spot. Help was out of the question, but the ranger's nerve was good, watching the crawl of the fire like a cat and heading it off with stratagem and sureness. His single-handed fight is quite unmatched in recent history, and hardly 25,000 feet of timber were destroyed. McCall is a native of Long Valley and is 23 years of age."

Since he was experienced in construction, he helped build a cabin with Meadows Ranger Jesse W. Adamson on the Lardo-Meadows road in December 1906, and in the spring of 1907 built a ranger cabin on Lake Creek near Burgdorf (Long Valley Advocate, December 13, 1906 and May 9, 1907).

When the Idaho National Forest was created from parts of the old Payette and Bitterroot National Forests in 1908 (Hockaday 1968:33), Daws McCall became the ranger for the newly created South Fork District, which included Warren, Burgdorf, and portions of the Secesh River and the South Fork of the Salmon River. He was stationed at Hays Station (Preston 199:9). While stationed there, McCall recommended an additional ranger station be built on Hitchelwood Creek, now known as Oompaul Creek, on the Secesh River. A cabin was constructed there (Ortman 1975:5).

In 1909, J.D.'s father, Tom McCall, offered to donate a building and land in the town of McCall if the Idaho National Forest would move the headquarters building (which is now the only remaining building from that period - the Lake Creek Station - in downtown McCall) and he even paid the moving costs (McCall 1939:14).



In 1910, McCall was reassigned as ranger of the Lake Fork Ranger District, and helped construct the ranger quarters and bridge at the new site, seven miles west of the town of McCall. The original buildings were replaced in 1929.



Lake Fork Ranger Station, pre-1929.

J.D. McCall resigned from the Forest Service on February 28, 1913 (USDA Alumni Bulletin 1921:60). He established a "tie hacking" camp north of Upper Lake in anticipation of the expansion of the railroad and began to sell ties to the Oregon Short Line Railroad, which arrived in McCall in 1914. He was one of the first to attempt to manufacture railroad ties with a portable mill, but the high cost of transportation to McCall and an outbreak of Mountain Pine Beetle finally forced him to close the operation in 1929 (Hockaday 1968:73).

It is fitting that both the South Fork and the Lake Fork Ranger Districts, once patrolled and managed by J.D. McCall, are now part of the McCall Ranger District of the Payette National Forest, whose headquarter are still located in the town named after his family.

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