

FIRST OVER THE PASS

This interesting story is based on a Maupin Times Newspaper article dated April 26, 1918. I like this story as it demonstrates how tough people were 100 years ago. The young men involved were raised on farms and ranches in rural Oregon and they knew how to work and wanted to work. This story demonstrates the adversity they would endure to get to a job. The words, phrasing and locations used in the original article make it difficult to comprehend if the reader is not a historian. The original article is in italics followed by text added by the author for clarity and historical interest.

We Eastern Oregon boys being employed by Forest Ranger Dee Wright on some county work between Wapinitia and Camas Prairie after completion were assigned a timber planting job across the mountains. Preparations were made by Dee Wright and Joe Graham to move our camp as far as possible by muleback which proved to be only five or six miles.

These boys, one of whom wrote the newspaper account, but is not identified, were from Maupin and Tygh Valley area. Dee Wright was a Forest Service packer that also owned the Summit House in Government Camp where his wife operated a restaurant. Joe Graham was the first Ranger hired by the US Forest Service at Wapinitia. His District spanned the Forest from the east Forest Boundary above Pine Grove to the Clackamas River and from Government Camp south to Mount Jefferson. He worked from his home in Wapinitia in the winter months, and from the Clackamas Lake Ranger Station in the summer months. He served as Ranger from 1905 to 1935.

Wapinitia was a thriving community at the time of this event, located just south of the present Walters Corner store on OR 216. Camas Prairie was the site of an early Ranger Station located on the Oak Grove Wagon Road that ran from Wapinitia to Government Camp where it joined the Barlow Road that accessed Sandy and points west. It is not known what County work they were doing in that area, but most likely some road work.

We had no skies and did not wish to be bluffed so took two blankets each and a lunch and proceeded. We were the first to cross the Oak Grove pass this year as the snow was very deep and drifted between the top of the hill east of Frog Lake and the Summit House. We had some trouble finding the road. We had only one accident, which was not serious. One of the party, Mac, broke through the mush ice on Frog Lake while looking for a better foot path. We arrived at Government Camp April 13. Jack Whaite, Clyde Oliver, Wm. Smith, Mac Holloman and Elmer Munier all of Wamic, Tygh Valley, and Wapinitia, arrived a 5 o'clock PM, having made the entire trip across the mountains in the remarkable short period of twelve hours, a distance of nineteen miles all of which was covered with snow to a depth of from three inches to ten feet. On arrival we were very wet and tired, but we had good luck and made it fine considering the conditions. There was from three to six inches of new snow and the old snow was very mushy. We will proceed to hike west on when the weather permits.

Oak Grove Pass is today known as Blue Box Pass on US 26 above Frog Lake and is the divide between the White River watershed and the Sandy River watershed. A good day's hike on a well-maintained trail is 15 miles. To travel 19 miles in deep snow without skis or snowshoes is incredible.

April 16 – Twenty inches of snow has fallen since our arrival and it is still snowing. Owing to the hospitality shown by Mr. and Mrs. Pridemore, we are perfectly content to stay here indefinitely. Mr. Pridemore furnished us each with a dandy pair of skis and we went up the slope toward Mt. Hood where he gave us some lessons. We will continue on our trip to Camp Creek on skis when the weather clears.

The boys apparently are staying at the Government Camp Hotel operated by the Pridemores. They are likely the only hotel guests as the road to Government Camp was not plowed in winter until 1926. We wonder who was paying their hotel bill? To reach the tree planting site they will need to travel about 6 miles west. The first four miles will be steep and snow covered. They should make good time if they can manage to stay upright on their borrowed snow skis. We hope the tree planting job paid well as they went to great lengths to get to the job site.

Transcribed and interrupted by Lloyd Musser, Curator, Mt. Hood
Museum March 2018