THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE REMOUNT DEPOT AND WINTER RANGE: ORAL AND WRITTEN HISTORY PREPARED FOR A GOVERNMENT AGENCY

Jane Reed Benson

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THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE REMOUNT DEPOT AND WINTER RANGE: ORAL AND WRITTEN HISTORY PREPARED FOR A GOVERNMENT AGENCY

by

Jane Reed Benson

B.A., University of Montana, 1964

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1978

Approved by:

Warren J. Brier
Chairman, Graduate Committee

B. C. Murray
Dean, Graduate School

6-2-78
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express gratitude to the many persons in the Lolo National Forest Supervisor's Office who gladly gave me their assistance, encouragement, and enthusiasm in this project. Their services are detailed in Part I of this paper. So too did many persons in the Regional Office of the Northern Region, U.S. Forest Service, contribute to this effort. Particular acknowledgment is owed those in Information and in Historical Records.

Special thanks go to Warren Brier, Dean of the School of Journalism and chairman of my graduate committee, for his suggestions and help beyond what is expected of committee members, including much editing of the final manuscript.
PART I

RESEARCH FOR THE FOREST SERVICE PROJECT
Introduction

This project began in March 1977 when Warren Brier, Dean of the School of Journalism and my committee chairman, showed me a letter addressed to journalism students. Information Officer Joseph Nadolski of the Lolo National Forest in Missoula had written to both the Journalism School and the Department of History explaining that the Lolo Forest had projects that could be of benefit to students. Since I was apparently the only person responding to this offer, a meeting was arranged with me, Nadolski, and two other persons from the Lolo Forest: Charles Fudge, Ninemile District Ranger, and Thomas Reese, Forestry Technician, Missoula District.

At this late March meeting I learned that the Lolo Forest wanted to have compiled a history of the U.S. Forest Service Remount Depot which was a unique aspect of fighting forest fires from 1930 until the early 1950s. The Remount Depot had served all of the Northern Region from its location in the Ninemile Valley west of Missoula in the Lolo National Forest. The Forest Service feared that the written history was being ignored and, more important, that key people who had participated in the operation of the Remount Depot might die before telling their stories. At that meeting we
discussed what resources were available to research the operation’s history, which people were still in the Missoula area, how the Forest Service could provide services to a researcher, and what qualifications I could bring to the project.

After a tour of the old Remount facilities (now the Ninemile Ranger Station), discussions with Information Office people in the Northern Region, and further talks with the three people from the Lolo Forest, it became clear that the Lolo Forest had two main goals in mind:

1. to compile tape-recorded interviews with the remaining persons associated with the old Remount Depot, and
2. to compile information from documents, from the interviews, and from any other materials to be found, including photographs, for eventual publication.

Since at that time, Spring Quarter 1977, I was enrolled in a magazine article writing class in the Journalism School, my chairman and I agreed that the Remount history project could serve at least two purposes for me:

1. provide material for a magazine article, a requirement for the class, and
2. possibly lead to a professional paper to satisfy the master’s degree requirements in my program of Interdisciplinary Studies.

At that time, neither the Forest Service nor I knew how much information would become available regarding the Remount
Depot operations nor how large the project might become. Therefore, the project was begun on a tentative basis of "let's see where it goes." I agreed to give the information officer at the Lolo the article that I would write for the magazine class, and he agreed to arrange all support and materials needed to accomplish that purpose. Since the Forest Service wasn't sure what would result, it did not commit itself at once to a publication. I therefore planned to seek publication of any resulting article on my own to meet the requirements of a professional paper.

I began work on the Remount project as a Forest Service Volunteer. That meant I received no money but could earn college credit for my services. In return, the Lolo Forest supplied me with a government driver's license, use of Forest Service vehicles, use of a cassette tape recorder and cassettes, access to Regional Office historical files and photographs, Lolo Forest files, use of photocopying machine, and access to and encouragement from many people within the Forest Service to conduct research and interviews. The Lolo Forest also began a publicity campaign by asking for information and describing the project in area newspapers, Forest Service newsletters, and on one Missoula radio station.

The 4,500-word article that I submitted in May to the magazine class and to the Lolo Forest revealed that there was much more to the story of the Remount Depot than either the Lolo Forest or I had first envisioned. It became clear that:
1. The Remount Depot itself was only half the operation; its twin facility, the Winter Range on the Flathead River near Perma, was also an important part of the story and essential to the complete history of the mule operation.

2. The Forest Service could realize an enormous amount of good public relations in Western Montana through the publication of the Remount and Winter Range contribution to the area's history and economic growth.

3. Because of the unique character of these facilities, the Lolo Forest might have an opportunity to nominate its Remount Depot as a National Historic Monument. The research I conducted would provide the Lolo with evidence to support its claim.

4. To continue and expand the project, the Lolo Forest would now have to find additional funds, negotiate with me for a contract to complete the project, and decide exactly what it wanted in the form of a publication.

In early June 1977, Lolo Forest personnel and I began discussing a contract for completion of the project. Since no funds had ever been allocated, the only money available was a small amount from the Ninemile Ranger District. That amount was nowhere near the worth of the project, but I had begun with no prospect of pay.

On June 16 I signed contract No. 263-0047 with the Lolo Forest in which I agreed to prepare a minimum 12,500-word manuscript describing the entire operation of the
U.S. Forest Service Remount Depot and Winter Range.

At that time I discussed with Dean John Stewart of the Graduate School my hope that this project could form the basis of my professional paper for the master's degree. He informed me that a U.S. Government agency publication had never before been submitted as a professional paper, but that if the project met with the approval of my graduate committee, he would concur.

Oral History

To make a list of names of possible persons to interview for tape or for information, I gathered names that came up in conversations with Forest Service people who were interested in the history project. That gave an initial list of about 20 persons known to be still living in the area who had either worked at the Remount Depot or Winter Range, worked at the time in the Regional Office or on the Ninemile Ranger District, or who had been married to or in some way associated with employees. As I began interviews, I learned that each person could supply a few more names, the publicity by the Lolo Forest brought in names, and simple word of mouth also added to the list. By the time
the project neared completion, I had a list of more than 80 persons who could serve as possible sources of information.

Long before the list reached that size, however, a decision had to be made about who and what kinds of persons would be most valuable to interview on tape. Since we had limited time and funds, the Lolo information officer and I agreed that we could tape only about a dozen persons. When I reached the point where I understood the operations of both the Remount Depot and the Winter Range, I made the final decision to attempt to interview these persons: representatives of different time periods during the operation of both facilities, representatives of all levels of employment from the highest administrators in the Northern Region to farmhands and secretaries, and especially people who could describe some important aspect that contributed to the entire effort.

By the time I finished the interviews—conducted from early May through late August—we had a total of 13 taped sessions. Several sessions involved both husband and wife, so the number of persons recorded is 20. The group comprises:

1 of the originators of the Remount concept
1 Winter Range superintendent
1 Remount Depot superintendent
1 assistant ranger
3 packers or horsemen
3 truck drivers
1 farmhand
1 secretary
1 improvements engineer
1 widow of a ranch foreman
1 part time cook and wife
several wives not employed

All of these persons performed many jobs besides those indicated by their titles, so by the time we had these on tape I felt that all aspects of the operation of both facilities had been described. The list of 12 persons interviewed is contained in the August 15 Progress Report to Joe Nadolski (see Appendix to Part I). The 13th interview was conducted in Polson on August 30 with Mrs. Alma Thompson, widow of the first ranch foreman at the Remount Depot.

Only after I had conducted the first interview and after I began reading historical records did I realize that the Lolo Forest and I were involved in the complicated technique called Oral History. I checked the UM Library card catalog for sources of information on oral history which led me into articles, books, and newsletters.

This reading, especially in mid-1970s journal articles written by lawyers, convinced me that the Forest Service had better prepare itself to deal with the legal ramifications of tape-recorded interviews. Oral history involves several Constitutional rights contained in the First Amendment: libel, privacy, and copyright.

Lolo Forest people consulted a government lawyer and I talked with a Forest Service sociologist regarding the Privacy Act. Based on these discussions, plus a model form
I found in Oral History Review, the Lolo Forest prepared a release form to be signed by interviewees for the tapes. (See copy of release form in Appendix to Part I.)

I had no formal training in conducting tape-recorded interviews. However, I combined what I had learned in a basic reporting class, what I had read regarding oral history interviews, what I had seen work in group interaction sessions, and my own common sense. By the time I had conducted the first two interviews, I had worked out a technique that served for the remainder of the sessions.

I called on the telephone to make appointments with interviewees, usually four to seven days ahead. I explained briefly the project (if they hadn't already heard about it), told them how I believed their contribution would be valuable, and explained that I would interview them on tape. Because each interview meant some preparation time for me, and particularly follow-up time to take notes from the tapes, one or two sessions a week were all I could manage between trips for written sources.

Each interview needed to serve several purposes. We wanted historical information—names, dates, descriptions of jobs or decisions or particular events. But as much as possible, we also wanted interviewees to feel free to reveal feelings, tell "I remember the time when" type of anecdotes, and explain anything they felt important to the record.

The day before an interview I scanned my own notes on
the likely discussion topics, reviewed who that person was, and prepared on paper a few pertinent questions to ask. When I arrived for an interview, I again explained the project, told the person(s) a little about myself, and showed them how I would use the recorder. People were usually interested in the project and friendly toward me, so we usually sat in a comfortable place with the tape recorder between us, near an electrical outlet. (I learned the hard way to plug in the recorder rather than depend on its batteries.)

After the person had signed the release form I turned on the recorder, introduced the person, date, and subject for the tape. I usually began the discussion by asking the person about something easy such as his or her daily work at the Remount or Winter Range. Any specific questions prepared for that person I interspersed with more general ones aimed at giving the person free reign to talk about whatever he or she wanted to describe and remember. I followed no real format past the introductions, but rather let the interview take the form of a conversation between the interviewee and me. Totally new subjects often came up this way because nearly every person would bring up an event, or a fact, or a person, that was largely unknown to others and not mentioned in literature.

Some questions were specific: X says that you designed the corrals—will you describe that for us? Or, Since you
were in charge of X at that time, how did you feel about the closure decision from the Regional Office? And so on. Those kinds of questions were to clear up historical points or to get information from possibly the only person who might know a particular subject.

Sometimes controversial subjects arose, especially when interviewing former administrators who had to make decisions or carry out policies. I assured them that all points of view were needed, that no judgments would appear in the final writing, and that the more information recorded, the clearer would be the Remount Depot's place in Forest Service history. Even with those assurances, there were times when people clearly did not want to offend or rehash old arguments. Occasionally people gave me information "off the record" if not for the tape.

Because opinions and even "facts" varied from person to person, I began to think that we should attempt to determine the most likely "truths." However, Nadolski at the Lolo Forest convinced me that we should not, especially since he did have one interviewee call him and attempt to "edit" the final manuscript. We stuck with our resolve to simply tell as much as possible from all sources and let readers draw their own conclusions.

Since I tried to direct the conversations toward description and anecdotes, most interviewees appeared comfortable with the procedure. Within a few minutes most forgot the
tape recorder and were surprised when I had to stop and turn over a 30-minute per side cassette. The taped interviews range in length from one-half hour to two hours total. They average about one hour.

Toward the end of interviews I gave people a chance to recall anything else or say anything they felt important to future generations. Occasionally that resulted in a fresh start and another half hour on the tape, but mostly it signaled the close of our session and created a natural stopping place. With the recorder off, I asked permission to call later on the phone if I needed clarification, to which all agreed. At that time many turned over personal photographs which they were willing to lend to the Lolo Forest for copying.

The Forest Service furnished me with a small portable cassette tape recorder and an unending supply of cassettes. I could have used a separate and excellent quality microphone, but felt that using the multi-directional, built-in microphone would be more effective in conversing with older people. I wanted to make them feel comfortable with me and with the recording process.

For that same reason, I rarely in their presence took notes, consulted books, or otherwise looked "official." The only time I used paper and pen was an occasional glance at my list of questions or when I jotted down a question that had just occurred to me. Most times I held a cup of coffee.
Since most interviews were conducted during the summer, many potential interviewees were not available at my first call. Therefore, the subject matter I pursued at any particular time depended on who was in town. For example, I intended to talk with a man who had coordinated getting Forest Service warehouse supplies to firefighters. I tried for two weeks to reach him, gave up, and talked instead with a former employee of the Ninemile Ranger Station who had watched the Remount operations. I learned probably more from that man that I would have otherwise. His ranger district jobs were so varied that he could describe not only the warehouse operations, but also the base camps, fire crews, and particularly changes brought about by new technology and new attitudes. His interview led me, and the resulting writing, into areas I had hardly considered. This kind of fortunate shifting of directions occurred often.

Following each interview, I listened to the recording and took notes from it for my use. I then marked the cassette's box with interviewee's name, place and date of interview, and my name; I also indicated sides, number of cassettes for that person, etc. In my note taking from the tapes, I looked for factual information to become part of the history, and I looked for vivid quotations that could appear in the eventual manuscript.

About half the material in the final manuscript comes from the tape-recorded conversations. The tapes contain
much more information than what appears in the manuscript, however, because limits had to be placed on the final size of the product. The tape cassettes now belong to the Lolo National Forest and will be made available to historians and to the public. I could have made copies of the tapes to keep, but chose instead to take notes from the tapes (as described above). I have permanent possession of those notes.

Other Sources of Information

Interviews Other Than Taped

In addition to the tape-recorded interviews, I had many other personal contacts with former employees or knowledgeable persons. Because of time or distance restraints, I conducted several interviews over the telephone. One of them, for example, was 40 to 50 minutes long and resulted from a letter. I had written to the last Remount Depot superintendent, now retired and living in Idaho. I received no reply from him for several weeks and intended to write without his contribution. Then late in September as I worked on a draft of the manuscript, he called me on the phone while visiting friends in Missoula.
Some telephone calls were very brief, merely my attempts to get minor information or to clarify some point with a person I had already interviewed. Sometimes I visited Forest Service offices or people's homes to pick up a photograph or document and talk briefly. One hand-recorded interview was three hours long, however, because I was still unfamiliar with operating the tape recorder that day and couldn't make it record. I later returned to the same man because his role in the history of the Remount Depot is essential. We then taped another two-hour session with new topics.

Regional Office of Forest Service

The Northern Region offices in downtown Missoula gave me access to all pertinent files. Historical Files provided a small amount of biographical data, old personnel directories of administrators, one particularly valuable fire report, photographs, and one file on the Remount Depot. The latter contained the only remaining photographs from 1930 Packer Days, manuals and specifications on packing and saddles, a few written materials prepared for the agency, and several newspaper and magazine clippings. The records had not been consistently kept, however, and much material is lost--equipment purchase and sale records, a well-known horse and mule breeding ledger book, and others.

I talked with key people in the Regional Information Office. They suggested sources in the Forest Service as
well as names of potential interviewees. They also intro-
duced me to Floyd Sharrock of the UM anthropology depart-
ment, on leave for the year to work in management of
historical sources for the Forest Service. He found useful
materials in his files and also gave suggestions for publi-
cation of articles.

**Other Forest Service Sources**

A cardboard box of old Remount Depot files, maps,
minutes of meetings, plans, and correspondence was found in
the basement of the Ninemile Ranger Station. There were no
ranger's daily logs, which used to be kept religiously, but
the box yielded much valuable and forgotten material.

Many people at the Ranger Station also proved helpful.
Nadolski and I spent a day there early in the project when
we toured the grounds, visited the old CCC camp area, and
inspected former Remount buildings. We talked with the
ranger who had helped instigate this project, one of his
veteran assistants who knew some of the Remount's history,
and with a truck driver/maintenance man who proved so
valuable that I later arranged a tape-recorded interview
with him.

I visited the Ranger Station several other times later
in the project to examine the box of documents (which I then
took home), to record the truck driver's interview, to look
over the pastures, old landing field, corrals and gates, and
to estimate distances by using my car's odometer.
The Lolo Forest Supervisor's Office at Fort Missoula yielded only two valuable documents; they pertain to the purchase and lease agreements of land in the Ninemile Valley.

Though I found little historical material there, the Lolo Forest offices were invaluable in other ways. People there got what information was available from the Federal Records Center in Seattle (not much—only notes made by the landscape architect for the Remount grounds), provided Forest Service publications for my background reading, occasionally gave me office space and use of government telephone. They especially provided services: copying, typing, locating records, providing their photo lab, some editing of the manuscript, and returning photos and written materials to sources along with letters of thanks.

Tom Reese of the Missoula Ranger District (and now in charge of completing the publication for the Lolo Forest) is one of the first three people I worked with on the project. He provided his own stuffed briefcase of photos and historical documents relating to the Remount Depot as well as his sources and suggestions. Reese put me in touch with a former CCC employee who has been trying for years to get national historic recognition for the CCC's contribution to forest conservation.

As a result of the two radio interviews Nadolski and I prepared in May, several people called the Lolo Forest to
offer information or to give names of persons who could. And because of a description of the project in a Forest Service retirees' newsletter, we got other responses. One particularly valuable one was a four-inch deep collection of documents relating to the use of horses and mules in the agency which came from a Utah retiree.

Late in the summer I toured the Smokejumper Center west of Missoula and turned the guide's 45-minute tour into one of one and one-fourth hours by asking about the relationships between planes, mules, smokejumper gear, distances, and trails.

Miscellaneous Research

I wrote several letters seeking information. They are listed on Page 3 of the August 15 Progress Report in the Appendix of Part I. I received replies from all except two in Miles City. The others sent documents or photographs as requested plus their letters of information. One called, as described in my Interviews subsection.

The UM Library was used extensively. Irene Evers, who previously served as Forestry School librarian (when it was separate) and who now works in the main library, expressed interest in the project. She directed me to forestry journals and looked for information herself.

As a result of Mrs. Evers' help, I examined all volumes of the journal American Forests from the 1920s through 1954 for articles describing either the Remount or general use of
mules in the national forests. They yielded several articles of value, one written during the peak of Remount operations. The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature offered little, probably because most such articles were published in forestry journals and American Forests wasn't indexed until the 1950s.

The archives of the State Historical Society in Helena seemed at first a likely source, but I was told later that it was not probable that those files would yield what we wanted. I did not go.

When I attempted to use the files of the Missoulian, I found almost nothing. The newspaper had no clip file until the mid-1960s, which means it had nothing regarding the active operation of the Remount or its Winter Range. It had two Sunday feature articles written in the late 60s about shoeing mules at the Ninemile Ranger Station which were interesting but not of historical value.

The Missoula City-County Library had books that were helpful on animal breeding. The Library keeps a good newspaper clipping file, but it contained little on the specific subjects I needed. Old newspapers up to about 1945 are in bound volumes; later issues are on microfilm. But subjects are not indexed until 1970, so without specific dates of issues, I would not find articles of value. I decided to rely on sources other than the local newspaper.

Since much of the early stock purchased and lent for the
Remount Depot came from the old Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) station at Fort Keogh near Miles City (now USDA Range and Livestock Experiment Station), I called a staff person there asking for records from the 1930s. At first he was sure they had nothing. However, a few days later, he sent extensive and detailed records concerning purchase and loan of horses between the U.S. Forest Service and the BAI. This lent me good background knowledge of the breeding stock and may prove helpful to some researcher in the future, though little of this information appears in the final manuscript.

My last major research effort was a drive north along the Flathead River to see the old Winter Range shoeing area, the former location of the river ferry, and then to Plains. There I talked with a district ranger, looked at his Winter Range documents and maps, and interviewed by phone a woman who had lived at the Winter Range.

I then continued north to visit the former headquarters of the Winter Range, drove past its entire west boundary, went through the Big Draw (site of the Northern Region's original winter range), and then to Polson for the final taped interview.
Writing the Manuscript

Decisions

Before describing the organizing and writing process used, I should explain certain problems that arose and decisions that had to be made regarding the type of written report that should come from this project.

As indicated previously, the Forest Service wanted both oral history and written history from this project. It also wanted the manuscript to provide future Forest Service information writers with the data to prepare signs and brochures for visitors at the Ninemile Ranger Station. Collection of cassette tapes for the oral history was a time-consuming but simple procedure. And the sign-making and brochure-writing will fall to some future writer in the agency. However, working out an agreement on the manuscript proved troublesome.

At my first meeting with Forest Service personnel there were frequent references to a possible master's thesis or professional paper for a student in this project, so I assumed that the final document would be scholarly in nature. I planned for exhaustive research, a serious tone in writing and the use of footnotes and bibliography.

Within a few weeks the Lolo Forest's information officer began talking of possible placement of the resulting document in a popular magazine. By early summer, many in the Lolo Forest and the Regional Office mentioned the
manuscript's interest to Forest Service employees, especially retirees. And by the middle of the summer, it was clear that I would find far more material than the agency wanted in the final publication. At each of these junctures, I expressed concern over the length of the manuscript and what audience I should write for because, for me, the project had to provide a manuscript suitable for publication in a "scholarly journal."

Clearly the ultimate goal was not clear at the beginning of the project but had to evolve through much discussion and compromise. We finally agreed that I should assume a Smithsonian magazine type of audience: educated, but not knowledgeable about the Forest Service, forest fires, or mules and horses. That audience would expect evidence of research, but also a lively and anecdotal writing style.

Since the Forest Service had planned to publish the results of the research, it became clear that if the final manuscript could reveal the extensive research within the text, if not in footnotes, the Forest Service publication would qualify as a "professional paper" for my degree requirements.

In addition, we agreed that the manuscript would be kept as near the originally-agreed-upon length of 12,500 words as possible, but could run over if need be. It now contains nearly 15,000 words and will become a small booklet rather than a magazine-type article. The resulting manuscript
attempts to meet both the Forest Service's wish for an interesting and readable booklet and my demand for a well-researched and documented paper which contains most of the information found in research.

A second problem, which arose more recently, involves my rights as an author. Since the contract between the Lolo Forest and me contains some rather vague wording as to both ownership and the eventual use of the manuscript, I was unsure what I could publish on my own. At first I had understood the contract to mean that neither the Lolo Forest nor I could copyright, but that each of us could use information from the manuscript for other publications.

After discussions in late February with Lolo Forest personnel, it is now understood that we both own the manuscript but neither of us can copyright, and that both of us can use the entire manuscript for future publication if we credit the other party's contribution. That is an unusual agreement and it is not stated in writing, but is understood by both of us.

Procedure in Writing

Throughout the research and early writing phases of this project I kept a daily log. I recorded progress in research, decisions made by the Forest Service and me, persons interviewed, how I solved such mechanical problems as using the tape recorder, and my thoughts as I worked. The diary had been suggested by one of my graduate committee members,
Richard Adler, and it has proved invaluable in recalling conversations with Lolo Forest personnel about the project and, especially, in writing this Part I of the professional paper.

I also compiled two lists for myself which could be used in writing the eventual manuscript. As I read and listened I began to keep a chronological list of all events relating to the Remount Depot and Winter Range. This resulted in entries such as these, for example, for the year 1931:

Late winter: Jesse Williams became superintendent
Spring: 87 head of horses bought at Fort Keogh
        plow units begun
Summer: Yellowstone Park fire
Fall: second Packers Field Day (October)
      Morgan horse breeding project begun
      Boyd Thompson made ranch foreman

I also began to make lists of persons employed according to their jobs. Each time I learned a new name I added it to the lists: packers, cooks, district rangers, Winter Range foremen or superintendents, and so on. These lists never will be perfectly accurate or complete, but to my knowledge they are the only ones ever made and may prove useful to some future historian.

I had agreed to submit a progress report to the Lolo Forest by August 15 so that I would receive partial payment for my service. In mid-July, as I saw that report date approaching, I conducted one of several major efforts to
organize my research. That sorting and planning process resulted in the Progress Report contained in the Appendix to Part I. At that time I also began making photocopies of all hand-recorded notes from written sources. That way there would be a set of research notes for the Forest Service, one for me to keep, and one set that I could cut into sections according to subjects as I later began the writing process.

With research completed, I prepared to write by sorting those cut sections of notes into stacks according to subject, about 60 separate stacks. These 60 subjects represented all the various facets of the story, and the 60 gradually began to fall into the four major divisions I saw: (1) the era beginning with the earliest days of the Forest Service to the new construction at the Remount Depot (late 1800s to 1936), (2) the daily operation and services of the Remount Depot during its most active years, (3) the operation and services of the Winter Range, and (4) the final years of both these facilities as firefighting technology changed. At that point I could not closely estimate how many words of text would result from this research. Therefore I typed from notes to set down in text all the available information. This created a preliminary draft of between 17,000 and 18,000 words.

To cut the length of the manuscript, I eliminated small subjects that were part of the history but not essential to the desired story: details about specific persons, certain
aspects of operations such as pasture planning or the naming of livestock, or related fire-fighting operations such as the development of mechanical trenchers to replace horses and plows. After cutting superfluous information, I then added quoted material from written sources and from the tape-recorded interviews to add interest to the reading.

Lolo Forest officials and I had originally agreed on a manuscript due date of September 15. Because I still had much work to do early in September and because the information officer planned to transfer to another forest before he could do much editing, we agreed that the rough draft could come in to the Lolo Forest early in October. In a letter dated October 17, 1977 (see copy in Appendix to Part I*), the Lolo Forest accepted the manuscript and declared the contract completed. Since the manuscript needed further editing and final typing by the Lolo Forest and since I wanted to help choose photographs to accompany the text, it was informally agreed that I could remain part of the Remount Depot project until publication.

At the time of this writing in April 1978, I am working with Lolo Forest personnel on certain details of the booklet. The agency intends to publish in the summer of 1978 the manuscript, with photographs, that appears in Part II.

*The letter contains a minor error. The "first 2,600-word piece" contains 4,500 words.
APPENDIX
I hereby give and grant to the U.S. Forest Service History Project my tape recorded memoir as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Project shall determine. It is expressly understood that the full literary rights of this memoir pass to the U.S. Forest Service History Project and that no rights whatsoever are to vest in my heirs now or at my death.

Signature of narrator

Address of narrator

Signature of interviewer

Address of interviewer

Date of Agreement

Subject of Tape(s)
DATE: August 15, 1977

TO: Joe Nadolski, Lolo National Forest

FROM: Jane Benson

SUBJECT: Progress Report, Remount Depot Project
Contract No. 263-0047

I submit the following information so that you will know what work has been completed toward writing the history of the Forest Service Remount Depot at Nine Mile. This report represents only that work done between the formal signing of our contract (June 17) and the present date. If you have any questions or need further information in order to complete our half-way point agreement, please call me right away.

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEWS

Below you will find the name of person interviewed, date of interview, approximate dates of period of time this person had knowledge about, person's occupation, and a brief list of the main subjects this person discussed. Alphabetical order.

JOHNNY W. BREAZEAL. 7-13-77. 1940s - 60s, engineer and fire foreman. Fire base camps, fire calls, general use of mules in USFS, phasing out of mules/Remount, loss of jobs, use of planes and smokejumpers, transitions.

JOHN CHRISTENSEN. 8-3-77. 1950s - 60s, packer. Breaking of horses and mules, on trail to fires, cargoing, various packing jobs for forests, breeds of horses, stallion service at Winter Range, jobs at Winter Range.

MARION L. DUNCAN. 7-25-77. 1920s - 1950s, warehouseman and truck driver. Establishment of Remount, Kenworth trucks (design, uses, driving, loading), daily operation of Remount, driving mules, work at Winter Range, filming of movie, role of warehouse, parades/demonstrations, transitions.

W. C. "CAP" EVANS. 6-27-77. 1930s - 1960s, superintendent of Remount and purchasing officer. Operation of Winter Range, cargoing, Remount service to area, shops at Remount, warehouse, daily operations, pastures/land, fire calls, Ranger District, horse handling, horse breeding.

WM. G. LONGPRE. 7-26-77. 1920s - 40s, farmer and first employee of Remount. History of ranch/land, first improvements at Remount, plow units, CCC work, Winter Range, local ranchers, social life, burros, corrals/chutes/buildings, rodeos, Packer Days, planting and irrigating.
WALTER PEERY. 8-5-77. 1920s - 30s, horseman. Breaking of stock, acquisition of horses/mules/burros, 1910 fire, dudes, handling stock, horse breeding, medicine, original ranch.

EUGENE AND MARIAN POLETTE. 8-8-77. 1950s, truck driver and secretary. Foreign visitors, daily operation, filming of movie, Kenworth trucks, phasing out of operation, Ranger District, fire calls, smokejumpers, California fire.

W. B. RUSSELL. 7-29-77. 1930s, foreman of improvements. Planting of grounds, water/irrigation systems, building of road/phone line/electric line, job of fire foreman, pastures, new developments/inventions, 1910 fire.

HENRY J. "HANK" VICHE. 7-7-77. 1940s, interim superintendent of Winter Range. Wintering stock, daily operation, job of superintendent, saddles/leather work, horse breeding, service to area, fire crews, living at Winter Range.

So that you will know all that has been covered by interviews, listed below are the interviews conducted before June 17:

W. C. "CAP" EVANS. 5-12-77. NO TAPE; NOTES ONLY. Taking over job of superintendent, acquisition of stock, stallion service, year-around jobs, personalities and methods of packers, packsaddles, Kenworth trucks, acquisition of land for Winter Range, CCC camp, relations with forests, final dispersal of horses, Ranger District.

CLYDE P. FICKES. 5-3-77. 1920s - 40s. Engineer and one of originators of Remount. Early concepts, establishment of Remount, acquisition of stock, horse breeding, changes in operation, own history.

DONALD R. HARRINGTON. 5-5-77. 1940s - present, truck driver and maintenance. Daily operations of Remount, wintering stock, use of trucks, fire calls, base camps, trailing herds.

MACCOY RICE. 5-18-77. 1940s - 50s, packer. Blacksmithing, mules (breaking, loading, shoeing, care), horse breaking, horse breeding, on trails, other packing jobs, life for women/families, housing, filming of movie.
CORRESPONDENCE

I have written to the following, listed in approximate order of date letter sent:

Howard Neas, 7-5-77, in Kalispell. Said to have bought some of USFS horses and might have photos. No reply.

Ray Woodward, 7-5-77, in Miles City. He is superintendent of USDA experiment station at Fort Keogh. I had already talked on phone with someone else there, so letter was mostly a matter of courtesy, asking for information about stock purchased in 1930s. No reply, but not expected.

Mr. and Mrs. John R. Love, 7-5-77, in Miles City. Former employees at Fort Keogh. No reply.

Bill Sharp, 7-5-77, in Bozeman. Former CCC man who is compiling history of CCC; has previously sent information/photos to Tom Reese. Reply received 7-22-77 with information and names of sources.


Howard Foulger, 7-14-77, in Utah. Retiree who left file on mules/packing in USFS. Asked for further information and permission to quote from materials. Reply received 7-28-77, giving all asked for and more.

P. D. Hanson, 7-30-77, Santa Barbara, CA. Regional Forester at time of closing of Remount. No reply, but it's been only two weeks.

Don L. Chamberlin, 7-30-77, Lewiston, Idaho. Superintendent of Remount in 1950s. No reply, but, again, only two weeks.

BRIEF CONTACTS

Bob Bellows, researcher at Fort Keogh. On phone he gave me names of key people. He thought he had no written records, but later I received stock breeding records which are pertinent. I wrote and thanked him, and assured him of copy of our report. Late June.

Mr. and Mrs. Peyton Moncure. He is former information officer for Region and she is daughter of Remount blacksmith. They supplied a few anecdotes and sources of information. Late Jul.

Harry Coughlin, who lives across the street from me. Retired USFS architect who had some information regarding original planning (or rather lack of it) and buildings. Early August.
Brief Contacts (continued)

Cara Hauf, former secretary to purchasing officer. July.

Katherine King, former secretary to Evan Kelley. July.

Pearl Bell McKee, sister and widow of packers, who has photos. Early August.

WRITTEN SOURCES

In no particular order, these are the written sources and files I have used for general information, for note-taking, etc. since mid-June:

Checked all volumes of Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature which cover period from late 1920s through mid-1950s, looking for articles in popular magazines on mules/packing/Remount. Found nine sources in UM library. Also checked most recent volumes (back to 1970) for current articles; one excellent one on genetics of mule-breeding; nothing else of real value.

Checked all volumes of American Forests from 1920s through 1954. Some of value.

Have gone to books in City-County library for information on breeds of horses. Also used their newspaper files; nothing indexed prior to about 1970; good clipping file, but yielded only one news article of value.

The files of the Missoulian contain nothing regarding the Remount or Winter Range during the time they were in operation.

Used the box of materials found at the Nine Miles Ranger Dist.

Used the materials from Howard Foulger, retiree from Utah.

Used what little there is from Federal Records Center.

Have read parts of Early Days in the Forest Service, and have marked those references which may prove useful for final writing.

Have made several trips to Regional Office historical files to check directories, individual files on persons, fires, Remount, etc., and pick brain of Beverly Ayers.
PHOTOGRAPHS

I have collected photos from the private collections of the following persons:

Hank Viche
Cap Evans
Bill Longpre
MacCoy Rice
John Christensen
Walt Peery

Walt Peery has more, but they are mounted under glass. Mrs. McKee says she has some, but I haven't seen them. Besides the obvious sources such as the R.O. files and other USFS, I'm sure there are other individuals who must have photos.

OTHER WORK (WHICH DOESN'T FIT INTO ANY CATEGORY)

I'm keeping a detailed list of jobs/persons at Remount and Winter Range for possible use.

Placed an item in the Miles City Star regarding our search for information. No response, but then I have no proof that it actually appeared.

Discovered that diaries and records of Evan Kelley are in storage at Glacier Building and no one has ever gone through them. As I discussed with you on the phone, I may know someone who'd hire out for that job.

I've got signed releases from all persons interviewed except Clyde Fickes. I'll get it within the next month.

Lots of trips to Team Electronics for service, information, and purchase of rechargeable batteries. Haven't needed the latter yet, but is good insurance.

I've driven by the Nine Miles Ranger District with new eyes; and have looked over the pastures, landing field, entrance.

Since I've been wanting to see the Smokejumper Center anyway, took their tour and asked loads of questions which gave some information of use to this project.
In conclusion, Joe, I believe that all the work has been completed that we agreed to on June 17. I will add that I think I may conduct one or two more interviews, but I am purposely holding off on them until I get well into the final writing of the history. That way, if there are specific points that have to get cleared up, I can ask these people for that information when I interview them. The people I would most likely call on, if any more interviews seem desirable, are:

Clyde Fickes. He is the first person I interviewed, but now there are new points to cover. Besides, I have to see him anyway to return a manuscript he loaned me and to get his signature on the release form from the first interview.

Charley Harrington, packer who lives on the West Nine Mile Road.

Bob Estes, former CCC man, packer, and farrier, living in Missoula.

Mrs. Boyd Thompson, widow of first ranch foreman, who lives in Polson and who might have photos.

I would see Mrs. Thompson only if I make a trip north to do other things at the same time, such as drive by both Winter Range areas (did you know there were two?), and see the woman in Plains who is compiling history of that area.

For sure I will at least talk by telephone with Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Kujath, the Plains historian.

I don't think that any of the above activities are vital to the project. However, I want you to know that I will try to do as much of it as I can in the time remaining on our history project. Come to think of it, I'll probably contact Virgil Pears also. He's the retired packer who wrote to you from Thompson Falls. Problem is, T. Falls is 100 miles from Missoula and out of the way on that Winter Range/Polson trip I'm hoping for. Perhaps you would care to reply to Mr. Pears?

Again, any questions, call me.
Dean Warren Brier  
School of Journalism  
University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812

Warren:

I just reviewed Jane Bensen's manuscript on the history of the Ninemile Remount Depot and most happily accept it for the Forest Service. It reflects both the events and the tone of the operation which shaped much of the history of this area. Although Jane consulted with many Forest Service employees and retirees during her project, her own enthusiasm is the hallmark of the manuscript's success.

As you know, Jane started the project as a volunteer during her spring quarter and interviewed several retirees. Based on the interest in her first 2,600-word piece, we contracted her to elaborate on it this summer. The latest manuscript is based on interviews with 13 retirees and employees associated with the Remount operation, plus the historical records available in our files.

We are already planning to publish Jane's manuscript, along with appropriate historical photos. The realities of our budget will affect the type and date of publication, but there is already considerable support for a quality edition that will be available to the public.

Warren, I want to thank you for your help with this project and hope my successor will be able to work closely with you. There are still aspects of this story that would benefit both the University's journalism students and the Forest Service, such as editing the interviews for radio airing.

Best of luck in the new school year, and I look forward to working with you again.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH T. NADOLSKI  
Public Information Officer
BIBLIOGRAPHY


PART II

PROJECT MANUSCRIPT
THIRTY-TWO YEARS IN THE MULE BUSINESS:
THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE REMOUNT DEPOT AND WINTER RANGE

By Jane Reed Benson
I. ESTABLISHMENT OF REMOUNT DEPOT
THIRTY-TWO YEARS IN THE MULE BUSINESS:

THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE REMOUNT DEPOT AND WINTER RANGE

By Jane Reed Benson

The U.S. Forest Service, a government agency dedicated to the conservation and administration of America's forest lands, would ordinarily concern itself with trees and Forest Rangers. Yet beginning in 1930, the Forest Service in the Northern Rocky Mountains operated a horse and mule remount depot.

Its history reveals an unlikely combination of fighting forest fires, coping with the Great Depression, buying show horses, designing trucks, building hundreds of miles of fences—and especially—packing mules. The Remount Depot proved that a string of nine mules with more than a ton of supplies on their collective backs could form a solid basis for controlling forest fires.
To understand why mules were crucial for fighting forest fires 40 years ago, we must understand the kind of land the U.S. Forest Service had committed itself to protect.

Region One, or the Northern Region, of the Forest Service comprises a vast territory—all of Montana, northern Idaho, and small sections of the Dakotas. At the time of this story, the Region also included a part of eastern Washington. Administrative headquarters of the Region are still at Missoula, Montana, 100 miles west of the Continental Divide, in the heart of timber country.

The Northern Region was the first numbered for it has the longest history. Gifford Pinchot, pioneer American forester, traveled the West in the 1890s under direction from Congress to set up the first "forest reserves," now America's National Forests. At that time much of this nation's great unspoiled timberland lay in Yellowstone National Park and the area that is now the Forest Service's Northern Region. When the Forest Service actually began, with its transfer to the Department of Agriculture in 1905, its goal was conservation of timber.

The Forest Service divided each of its regions into National Forests, and each National Forest contained several Districts. There on the District level the Ranger performed his job of protecting the public resource, having been assigned his ranger station after demonstrating an ability to measure timber, survive
in the woods, and load a packhorse. With a saddle horse and pack animal, which he furnished himself, he went to work for about $1,000 a year.

Not included among the Ranger's skills, however, was much knowledge of forest fire control. The early Forest Service had no knowledge of fire behavior or of firefighting techniques, beyond the use of ax and shovel. Theodore Shoemaker, who worked for many years in the West, describes in *Early Days in the Forest Service* the difficulties of his job in 1908:

"I was alone at the time as acting supervisor of two Colorado forests, and there was not another forest officer within a day's ride to call on for help. Before I knew there was a fire, it was throwing a column of smoke hundreds of feet up in the air. There were no lookouts or cooperators to report fires in those days. When a man casually called from my office door to ask whether I knew I had a fire and I went to look, dozens of the townfolk were out gazing at the spectacle but not one had thought to come and report it. Indeed, why should they, when no one had ever tried to put one out before?"

One of the Ranger's and Supervisor's biggest problems was lack of access to their own forests. Much of the Northern Region was wilderness with steep mountains and few roads. What trails existed had been mostly left by Indians, early miners, and deer.

The combination of ignorance about fires and difficulty in getting to them would eventually culminate in disaster.
The summer of 1910 began as drier and more troublesome than most fire seasons in the Rockies. By mid-August, the lightning-caused fires, especially in northern Idaho, came so close together that men were still battling one when two or three more would start. Finally, a multitude of small fires swept into a holocaust that burned a half million acres of western Montana and northern Idaho timberland, killed 82 persons, and destroyed a third of the mining town of Wallace, Idaho. These were the biggest fires in recorded history in the West, where the smoke and ash drifted 700 miles south to Denver. The drama of that summer has been captured in numerous books and articles.

Some of the people who would later go to work for the Forest Service have childhood memories of those 1910 fires. Walter Peery, a Bitterroot Valley horseman, recalls the cinders coming down off Saint Mary's Peak onto his family's farm. "It got so dark up there at three o'clock in the afternoon the chickens went to roost." W. B. Russell, who later became a construction foreman, lived on a farm 70 miles northwest of Missoula. He recalls that it became "dark as midnight" on August 23rd, the afternoon he helped his father thresh grain.

The fires ended, but only because of the early autumn rains and snows. Not only did the forests lay in ashes, but so did the spirit of the entire Forest Service. Since it had not been prepared for those fires in the West, a time of grim reassessment began.
Gradually, out of the destruction, rose new methods. There was much experimenting with new tools such as the ax-hoe called a Pulaski, which today is still the firefighter's basic tool. Men hired as lookouts watched from the tops of peaks and reported fires to Rangers by newly installed telephone lines. Most important, an elaborate trail system began to grow through the roadless, timbered mountains.

Ever since the Forest Service began, pack animals had transported equipment in the newly created Forests. Now, with the concerted effort to control fires in land so inhospitable that only animals could serve as transportation, the packer and his working horses or mules became all important. As an early writer put it, "As the Forest Service grew, so did the job of packing."

All equipment—nails, telephone line, lumber, cable, food, and tools—was hauled up the new trails, mainly on horses hired from local ranchers for 50¢ a day per animal. At first, the pack stock was herded loose, not led, by a $60-a-month packer on his own horse leading a "bell mare." Gradually, mules began to be used more than horses, and the Forest Service purchased more of its own pack stock. The crews of firefighters, some trained, some off the streets of Butte or Spokane, walked to fires up these trails, sometimes taking several days to get there. The Forest Service equipped itself to respond as quickly as possible to every fire reported in order to prevent another 1910.

The Northern Region saw other bad fire seasons through the next 20 years, as this area of the nation was caught in one of its
cyclical droughts. The Forest Service handled the fires well enough with its new methods and tools, and plenty of extra mules and horses could be hired when needed. But in 1929, another particularly serious fire season erupted and forced another change in concept.

Summer of 1929 saw the headquarters in Missoula sending out rented stake-bed trucks with hired pack strings of horses and mules to help the Region's Forests fight their fires. All went well at first. But as the weeks wore on and more fires broke out, the men could no longer find commercial pack stock. They had to use animals that had never been packed before. Marion Duncan tells how he was taken off his usual job of driving trucks for the Forest Service warehouse. "We were leasing a corral down here in the middle of town for pack stock....I would go down and help load these 'broncs' they were hiring for pack stock--pour 'em in, pull 'em in, any way we could get them in the trucks to haul them to fires."

The Forest Service's supply of packsaddles ran out, and purchasing officer Orrin Bradeen requested that saddles be made to order for immediate use. Men who had never packed a mule before got sent out, resulting in delays and in animals with backs so sore they couldn't be returned to their owners until Thanksgiving.

"Frankly, it was a mess," wrote Clyde P. Fickes, who dispatched the 1,500 horses and mules. "But we did the best we could. When Ed MacKay wanted fifty head of pack stock for the
'Big Rock Candy Mountain Fire' over at Powell [Idaho], he had to have them."

Until 1929, no one had realized the implications of a recent development in rural America: mechanization. The Forest Service had always relied on hiring horses and mules if more were needed than what a Ranger District could supply, for this was farming and ranching country in the valleys between the forested slopes. But the great farms of eastern Washington, Idaho, and eastern Montana had been selling their work animals for mechanical combines and threshers and hay balers. No one wanted even the horses anymore. One day in the early 1920s, W. C. "Cap" Evans--later an administrator--saw 5,000 horses sent from Butte, Montana, to canners. It seemed that only the Forest Service still had need for a horse or mule.

The word "remount" may seem strange when used by a government agency concerned with the care of our National Forests. It borrowed the term, of course, from the U.S. Army, which had been in the horse business since 1775. According to a publication of the Department of the Army, "The function of remount depots was to procure, train and issue horses to mounted men to replace those becoming non-effective for various reasons including combat."

During the winter of 1929-30, the Northern Region of the Forest Service began to think in terms of "procure, train and issue." Clyde Fickes, who described the "mess," proposed that they set up a central depot to supply strings of pack stock for all the
Forests in the Region, modeled after the U.S. Army cavalry remounts. The unique idea of the Forest Service getting into the mule business did not receive immediate acceptance, however.

Before 1929, the various Forests within the Region, in the words of one retiree, operated as "little islands." Each Forest wanted self-sufficiency, including keeping its own horses and mules, and this sometimes resulted in a serious lack of cooperation.

Probably the one man who did most to establish the Remount Depot was Evan W. Kelley, who arrived in Missoula during that fierce fire season as the new boss of the Northern Region. Kelley, who would serve as Regional Forester from 1929 to 1944, was small in size, but a very commanding person. Kelley saw that changes were needed in the Region, and he must have been attracted to the new idea of a Forest Service remount depot because it offered a chance to centralize one service of the agency. The fact that Kelley had earned his title of "Major" while distinguishing himself in a U.S. Army cavalry unit during World War I—-a horse outfit—-couldn't have hurt.

Therefore, with the support of assistant regional foresters Glenn Smith and Meyer Wolff, it was decided that the Region would establish an experimental remount depot. With final approval from the Washington Office, the Region began to search for a suitable site. In his Recollections, Fickes, who would administer the new facility as it started, stated the goals of the Forest Service Remount Depot:
--To provide a reservoir of experienced packers and pack animals for fire emergency and other uses.
--To supply saddle horses and pack mules of a satisfactory type to the Forests.
--To develop adequate types of equipment for transporting pack stock on highways and roads.
--To serve as a training base for packers.
--To develop improved methods of packing and standardize packing practices on the Forests.

GETTING STARTED

Out in the rolling valley of Ninemile Creek 30 miles west of Missoula, lay a one-square-mile unoccupied ranch which had gone through a succession of owners since the late 1880s. The place had productive hay meadows and, perhaps more important, close access to main roads and railroad line. On July 1, 1930, the Forest Service secured lease of this property for its new facility and set out to begin immediate service.

For the next year, between forest fire calls in summer and snow storms in winter, the 30-35 first employees of the Remount worked to turn a run-down ranch into a working arm of the Forest Service. The men mowed 200 acres of hay with work mules, and they irrigated and built corrals.

"I took the first load of mops, buckets, brooms, and paint to clean up the old house," remembers Marion Duncan about the one
building that looked usable. "It was decided already that all these old buildings would have to go. Our first bunkhouse was a Forest lookout building." But until that lookout was hauled in and many temporary buildings constructed, the men slept in tents.

Before the first season was over, the new Remount Depot had performed its first responsibility: getting well-equipped pack stock with experienced packers loaded into trucks and out to Forests to supply crews of firefighters. The first summer saw only hired stock go out—about 100 head—but more and more animals would be purchased. The horses and mules traveled in crates fitted into 1½- to 2-ton trucks, GMC's and Reo "Speedwagons," that carried five or six head of stock each.

During the next summer of 1931, the Remount Depot supplied men and stock to Yellowstone National Park. The Park actually lies outside the jurisdiction of the Northern Region, but there would be several times over the years when the Park Service would request additional help from the Remount Depot. On this particular occasion, the Northern Pacific Railroad sent three cars to the siding at Huson, just a few miles from the Remount Depot, to transport 65 head of pack stock southeast to Yellowstone.

One of the stated goals of the Remount Depot was to standardize packing equipment and methods for the entire Region. In the fall after the fires had passed, packers gathered in the meadows of the Remount to demonstrate their veterinary methods or their hitches; take photos; and, on the third day, participate in
contests. Bill Longpre, the Remount's first employee, describes a Field Day this way:

"That was more fun; it's just too bad they didn't have moving pictures....We put up hitching racks for six to ten pack strings contesting, and each guy drew....Some of them mules were 'goosey.' They'd get them all tied together and they had to run so far down that meadow and back. The first one that made that trip without losing a pack won the contest. I've seen them make that loop too far and it would kind of whiplash--every mule would roll over!"

Obviously, the Field Days provided some spectator sport, but they served a serious purpose too. After Major Kelley, the Regional Forester, presented prizes of chaps or spurs, the packers found that they had agreed on the most expedient methods of packing enough gear for a 25-man fire crew, plus a cook.

After experimenting with sawbuck and Spanish aparejo packsaddles, the Region chose to use the Decker, developed in Idaho. The advantage of the Decker packsaddle is that the loads are packed "sling" style in ropes on each side of the animal. That way, if a mule brushes too close to a tree or rock on the trail, the load will simply swing back and allow him to walk on naturally. Later the Forest Service issued written specifications and diagrams for the manufacture of the Decker saddle and its deer-hair stuffed saddle pad. There would be few sore backs among Northern Region mules.

During the tenure of the first superintendents of the Remount Depot, Charley Butler for less than a year and then horseman Jesse
"Jake" Williams, other new programs were tried. One didn't last long. An experiment with burros to pack supplies and water to trail crews failed because the truckload of little Southwest burros, which arrived with their ears cropped to brand them, wouldn't load into trucks and wouldn't step across a creek.

The Remount Depot also sent out "plow units"--a team of draft horses, worked one at a time, to cut a fireline with a plow. If the fire area could be reached by road, the truck carrying the horses also hauled supplies for the fire crew. However, if they had to travel a long distance by trail, the horses carried the plows on their backs. Bill Longpre described one such trip. "One time we walked into Moose Creek. We had a 28-mile hike there, but we couldn't take this equipment. All we took was our horses and the plow."

Of course, if the country was so steep and rocky that it was accessible only by trail, the Forest Service couldn't expect the plow unit to cut firelines effectively. Plow units served only five or six seasons, but the heavy horses stayed on at the Remount Depot to help with maintenance work such as fence building.

In those days of fewer regulations and less paper work, hiring was simple. Walt Peery, desperate for an income during those Depression times, describes how he left his Bitterroot Valley farm for a job at the Remount:

"Mr. Fickes bought two saddle horses from me, and then he said 'I hear you're pretty handy at breaking saddle horses.' 'Well,' I said, 'I don't know, I broke a few.' 'Well,' he said, 'I've heard
different than that.' So he wanted to know if I wanted a job and I said yes, and I said 'When would you want me to go to work?' and that was on a Friday or Saturday. He said 'Monday morning.'"

So Walt Peery went to work at $145 a month plus his board to "take the rough off" the newly purchased stock. He and others broke mules to halter and pack, but especially they were charged with the job of preparing Rangers' horses to ride.

The Northern Region had been acquiring its own horses to provide a mount for every Ranger on the Forest Districts. Many of these were unbroken horses from western Montana ranches, of good quality, from men like Ern Hoyt who also came to work for the Remount. Many more horses came from a government agricultural experiment station, then known as Bureau of Animal Industry, at Miles City in eastern Montana.

Besides wanting a gentle horse, a Ranger needed one that wouldn't mind saddlebag, bedroll, and noisy rain slicker bouncing on his back. And, Peery reports, the men got the horses used to being mounted from either left or right side so that a Ranger could always mount his horse on the uphill side of a mountain trail.

In addition to purchasing saddle horses, the early Remount also raised some of its own. When Peery came to work, he brought with him an American Saddlebred stallion which sired perhaps a dozen horses for the Forest Service.

With the acquisition of Rosin, a Morgan stallion, the Remount in 1932 began breeding a line of half Morgan saddle horses. Since
"bell mares" were no longer needed to keep mules together (now packers led their mules in trains and tethered them at night), the remount called in these horses from Forest Districts to serve as brood mares for the new saddle horse project.

Within just two years, many decisions had been made. The initial decision, to establish a remount depot, came as a way of solving a problem--getting pack stock to fires in a hurry. After the basic problem was solved, others naturally followed. The Region standardized its packing methods, trained men to pack, experimented with plow units, bought mules, and began to raise its own saddle horses. The experiment had proved its worth.

Already in those early years, the feeling grew that the Remount Depot and all the programs that spun off offered solutions never thought of before. One of the originators of the Remount, Clyde Fickes, describes his feelings with justifiable pride. "We started with nothing; with some real experience in what it takes, in what you have to do to get [a job] done."

**A NEW LOOK WITH NEW HELP**

During America's Great Depression, hundreds of thousands of young men, about half of them from the large cities, found themselves out of work. At the same time, the nation's natural resources--forests, soils, and water--had been badly neglected. As part of the early New Deal efforts of the Roosevelt administration,
the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began with the twin goals of reducing unemployment and performing public works. The new Forest Service Remount Depot benefited immensely from the CCC program.

In 1933, the Ninemile CCC Camp was organized under the direction of Ranger Ed MacKay. This camp, situated just 3 miles north of the Remount Depot headquarters, was believed to be the largest in the country, for it actually held three companies of 200 men each. All 600 men worked during winters building fences at the Remount Depot. In spring, two companies left the valley for work on other Forests, while one remained to serve as firefighting crews directed by Forest Service foremen, in addition to their labor at the Remount.

One of the important jobs of CCC men was to cut lodgepole pines from the slopes near the Remount pastures, then to construct miles and miles of "jack" fences from those poles. CCC men also cleared rocks from pastures, driving mules who balked and ran and reversed in their hitches to the delight of the oldtimers. Stories abound concerning the "green" New York City boys trying to guide teams of mules. W. B. Russell, an improvements foreman, laughed, "You could look around that pasture any time of day. Somewhere in the pasture there'd be a span of mules running away!"

Now that it had a huge influx of government money for work projects, the Forest Service purchased, for a little over $14,000, its leased ranch and in 1934 began an ambitious permanent building project for the Remount Depot.
With the help of CCC labor, the Remount grew from a cleaned-up but slightly shabby old ranch into a white-painted showplace for the Forest Service. Under the direction of Louis Vierhus, CCC project superintendent, the permanent employees of the Remount Depot became foremen of the work projects. The crews constructed homes in the latest design for the Remount superintendent and for a District Ranger who would also work out of this facility. They put in a permanent bunkhouse and cookhouse and built a huge barn with concrete floor and hand-hewn ceiling beams. Of the temporary buildings constructed earlier during 1930-31, only the small white stud barn remained—the rest were moved or torn down.

Walt Peery tells how the new buildings were a little too fancy for some. "Everybody was more happy with their tents than they was with that new layout....Everybody had hobnail shoes where they were working; they had to pull their shoes off before they could go in there. It was all hardwood and polished."

After completion of the buildings in 1935, it was time for such improvements as bringing in an electric line and building a decent road from the Remount to old Highway 10 (now Interstate 90). The old road was, in the words of the foreman, "A road like you'd run out to the barn--two rows in the grass."

After building irrigation and sprinkling systems, the crews began planting. Forest Service architect William Fox helped work out a detailed planting guide for the grounds which would use trees and shrubs purchased from a Missoula nursery. "We'd come in
with two trucks every morning," describes Bill Longpre of his work with CCC men, "and we'd load up one truck. They were getting all the trees, all the shrubbery from there, and that's what's around the Remount now. We even went out in the woods and got thorn bushes, sarvisberry [or serviceberry] bushes, chokecherry bushes... staghorn sumac. I guess those fir trees that we planted are 30 feet high now."

By the time Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace arrived for a visit in the summer of 1936, the Remount Depot shown with its new paint, young grass, and perfectly notched fences. One retiree recalls that Wallace rode around with a pack string and helped plant a maple tree. But the visit could hardly be termed a dedication ceremony, for the Remount had been performing its job for several years.

By the time construction ended, the Remount Depot saw two administrative changes. W. C. Cap Evans became superintendent after Jake Williams died unexpectedly in the summer of 1935. When Clyde Fickes transferred to the Engineering Division of the Forest Service, the Remount Depot's supervision was assumed by the Regional Office's Service Division, then known as Procurement and Supply. In coming years, the Remount Depot would become more than ever a service organization.

The curious relationship between the Depression and the beautiful new Remount Depot remains intriguing. The Forest Service was immensely proud of its Remount and fully recognized the debt it owed to the 1930s CCC program.
"Prior to that time," muses Cap Evans, "the Forest Service had no money--very meager appropriations. Here came this landslide of the CCC operations and all the Emergency Relief money coming into the picture. Why then the Remount expanded and that became the showplace of the Northwest for the Forest Service. That was really the first spread of any kind that they had in this part of the country--when they built the Ninemile."

In addition to the monetary relationship, the CCC program affected people, too. Many of the CCC enrollees stayed on to live in western Montana. Some went to work for various arms of the Forest Service, and several used their newly learned skills as permanent employees of Ninemile Remount Depot.
II. DAILY OPERATION
ON THE WAY TO A FIRE

It takes more than attractive new buildings to get pack mules to a fire. It takes a well-thought-out transportation system.

At its inception, the Remount Depot had used several 2-ton stock trucks which each carried five head of stock. However, since a pack string comprises nine pack animals plus the packer’s saddle horse, it would be simpler, the men reasoned, if all 10 animals could travel in one vehicle rather than sending two or more trucks on every fire call. Roads in the Northwest had improved by the mid-30s to the point that the time seemed right for larger trucks and a unique development.

Marion Duncan, who drove a lot of trucks for the Forest Service, describes how a truck idea starts.

"Dee Stewart, he was an old logging driver....He had a real good idea what the gears and the motor should be for a truck that could really move out on the highway and had lots of power. I wanted a sleeper cab on these trucks because I could think of the many times that you’d drive 24 hours without ever quitting....We really beat this thing around....and then turned it over to the engineering department and they took it from that....Some of the things we wanted, like power steering on 'em, they didn't know what that was."

After more on-the-ground suggestions and some back-and-forth visits with the Kenworth Truck Company of Seattle, the Northern Region of the Forest Service got the only truck of its kind in the
country. Kenworth delivered a 1937 model bus chassis with a specially designed aluminum stockrack on the back.

The new truck had no power steering, but it had everything else; and the Forest Service equipment shops in Missoula built two more just like it over Kenworth bus chassis. They were cab-over-engine designs with 10 wheels, sleeping cabs, steel sides (no more aluminum, the mules kicked holes in it), and weighed 24,000 pounds unloaded. These $18,000 green trucks were big enough to haul an entire pack string, packer's horse, and all the saddles and equipment needed. The trucks burned gasoline in their 270-horsepower engines because of the literally backwoods places they had to deliver their loads. The drivers might not find a diesel pump for days.

For their time, these transporters were fast—gaining far over the speed limit of 45 m.p.h. on good highways and 35 m.p.h. fully loaded up steep Evaro Hill on the way to a fire in the Flathead Forest. The trucks were driven fast (up to 70 m.p.h. if we can rely on the stories) because with such a heavy load and no power equipment, speed was easier on the driver. Don Harrington drove them in the 1940s and says, "It was a full time job! The trucks were heavy and if you drove slow, they steered hard."

The agency's equipment shops also developed one 12-head trailer to pull behind a large truck. Trucks and trailer were well built and beautifully maintained. Gene Polette drove them much later, in the 1950s, when more sophisticated transporters
appeared on the highways. "The body work was meticulous," he says. "Somebody had put a lot of planning into them and a lot of good designing."

The well-managed Remount Depot proved its worth on a typical day in a fire season. When a fire was spotted on a District Forest and the local Rangers knew it was too big for them to handle alone, the call went to the Supervisor of that Forest, then to a fire control center in Missoula, and immediately to the Remount Depot.

One blast on the siren in the main yard of the Remount Depot summoned the ranch foreman and signaled one pack string. Three blasts meant a real emergency and everyone within hearing distance was needed to help load two, three, even four pack strings in a hurry. At that alarm, each person dropped whatever he was engaged in at the time—haying, repairing a saddle, changing the oil in a truck, or sleeping.

"If the call came of a night, you'd grab your clothes and put 'em on as you went out of the building," relates "Coy" Rice, a long-time packer. Everybody had a job to do to help get a fully loaded and equipped truck out the front gate on the way to a fire.

At least 100 mules and sometimes up to 200 stayed all fire season (roughly July through mid-September) in Remount Depot pastures. Four of these pack strings of 10 animals each stayed in corrals inside the Remount grounds in readiness. At the sound of the alarm, the first packer "under the gun" responded. (Packers
rotated calls throughout the season.) He gathered his own stock and haltered them in the loading chute leading from the corrals. If several pack strings had to go, men would ride or run to the far pastures to bring more stock down a lane connecting all the pastures to the main corrals.

Meanwhile a driver moved his Kenworth carefully out of the specially built truck shed with only inches to spare on each side and maneuvered the truck into position at the end of the loading chute.

First came the saddle horse, which the mules would always follow, and then two of the larger mules to ride three abreast at the front, facing forward. A steel gate closed behind them. The packer chose four smaller mules next, one of them a "wedger" or ill-tempered one who would rear up and spread the four into position. These four rode in the center tier where the packer carefully positioned them according to the mules' own preferences—some wouldn't ride on the outside next to the metal sides. Another gate closed. Three more mules made up the last row to total the entire string of 10. Experienced mules loaded easily, handled always by the same packer, and rarely objected to the trucks.

At the same time as the loading of animals, other men grabbed the packsaddles down from storage shelves in the barn and ran with them to the front of the truck. Into the equipment racks they loaded saddles, ropes, and blacksmithing tools—each set of
equipment marked in the barn for only that packer and his mules. The packer joined the driver in the cab and out the gate they went—to the Selway in Idaho, to central Montana, sometimes to Yellowstone Park or the Grand Teton.

One packer, Coy Rice, set a record in the 1940s—8 minutes out the gate during a Forest Service "Show Me Day" demonstration. (Eight minutes was not unbelievable for Rice for, as others have verified, his mules always "came at a dead run" into those loading chutes.) Even on a typical fire call, the truck could be loaded and moving out within 10 to 15 minutes.

During the trip down a highway in these open trucks, the mules were well protected. Tied down to the dividing gates, they wore canvas and leather goggles with isinglass lenses to protect their eyes from insects and wind.

The drivers came to expect problems in hauling mules. Sometimes the animals jostled each other until one or two would end up down in the truck. Then the driver and packer unloaded the mules and got them all back in again. Few accidents occurred, though Marion Duncan tells of a mule who one day insisted on trying to climb out of the back. This distraction resulted in a huge truck rolling into a ditch and cutting one mule so badly that the men performed an emergency sewing up job on his belly skin at the side of the road.

Other arms of the Forest Service cooperated to get supplies to firefighters. While the packer and his string drove to the
"base camp" of a fire, the supplies were loaded into trucks at a central warehouse in Missoula or Spokane, Washington. Each pack-string supplied a 25-man fire crew plus cook and packer, sometimes up to 30 men, with cooking tools, canned goods, sides of beef, and other kitchen supplies, as well as packages of firefighting tools. In the days before airplanes, the mules brought in everything a crew needed, even sleeping bags and lunches, which had been organized into the back of warehouse trucks. There were joking contests to see who would arrive at the fire's base camp first, mules or supplies.

The ideal base camp would be located at the end of a road in a draw with a creek. The camp boss situated cooking and sleeping areas upstream and the mules and cargo area below. If there was no access to water for the camp, then one string of mules did nothing but haul water to supply the fire camp. Usually, however, their job was to haul supplies from this camp up trails to where firefighters worked. (In the days before roads into forests, pack strings carried supplies by trail just to establish a base camp.)

The packer, sometimes assisted by a cargo man, unloaded the supplies from trucks and "cargoed" them, or prepared them for mule transportation by assembling goods in mantas (a Spanish term) or "manties," 6-foot-square canvas tarps. The men roped packs carefully on each side of a mule's saddle, each pack weighing 125-150 pounds.
The base camp was usually a well-organized system, though Johnny Breazeal worked often as a fire foreman and remembers some that proved otherwise. "The camp bosses would have their crews back....when the mules came in, without any disturbance. But once in awhile!....I helped pull two CCC crews into a fire on the Nezperce one time, and we'd fought fire until way in the morning, and so we bedded the kids down to get a few hours rest....We didn't pay much attention to where we were bedding.

"We'd been down about an hour or so when this packer brought these mules in. [Breazeal is sure it wasn't a Remount packer.] He pulled those mules in in the dark, bringing in equipment, and he brought 'em right in over that bunch of people alayin'--stepping right over.

"And it was all right up until the kids got scared. And they started jumping up and scared the mules! I never will forget what the packer said. 'Hey you s.o.b.'s! Lay still! Don't get up and jump around. Lay down or you're gonna get killed.' Everybody just quieted down and lay down, and those little ol' mules went right on over them and he pulled them right through there and nobody was hurt."

On large fires, dozens of pack strings moved up and down trails to create a transportation network serving hundreds of men. For example, the Pete King and McLendon Butte fires of Idaho in 1934 blew up into one conflagration. Because of the remote location, this fire was served exclusively by mules. Forest Service
records show that these two fires had a combined perimeter of 410 miles. The agency established 74 fire base camps, some of which lasted only a day or two, but many were needed more than 20 days. Eighty percent of the equipment used was trucked to a place called Elk Summit, then packed 27 miles to a central service area. Forest Service pack stock from the Remount Depot and from Idaho forests, and private pack stock served—a total of 475 head.

Fire alarms might come at any time of day or night. Packers tell of loading up at 1 a.m. from the Remount Depot and driving the rest of the night and morning to get to a fire. Trucker Don Harrington once drove nearly 24 hours straight to deliver his load. Even if the men found that they’d arrived at a fire in the middle of the night, the procedure was the same. This sometimes meant a pack string traveled over mountain trails in the total blackness of a forested canyon. Often packers had to dismount and lead their horses and mules through the darkness on rough trails.

Even in daylight, the trail to a fire crew presented hazards. Coy Rice tells of an incident in 1945 where he took his string along the banks of a large creek to a crossing. By the time the tenth animal stepped onto a soft spot on a trail, the bank crumbled. The mules, tied to one another, slipped and piled into the fast creek, rolling among huge boulders and falling over each other with their loads pulling them deep into the water.

Rice went down too, though not pulled by his mules since he never tied the lead mule tight to his saddle, but simply held the
rope in his hand. After getting to the bottom he ducked kicking legs to cut lead ropes and pack ropes so that his mules could separate themselves and scramble to their feet. He knew that he had to act quickly for, in spite of all their admirable qualities, mules tend to give up easily in such a situation and might drown.

Rice's mules got out, but the carefully cargoed packs had to be pulled out of the water. That day the fire crew went hungry.

There were other hazards on the trail. Fishermen or campers might spook the mules. Or wild animals. One story is told about packer Howard Benscotter who had to cut a new trail through the lodgepole pines for his pack string because a bull moose wouldn't give up the trail. Sometimes a packer had to take his animals through an already burned-over area to get to the firefighters, watching for "hot spots" in the forest floor that could burn an animal's feet.

The packers all agree that hornets caused the worst problem. Those nasty stinging insects would nest in late summer in the forest floor or in hollow logs at the side of a trail. If the bears hadn't dug up a hornets' nest along the trail, then a previous pack string might stir them up. Marion Duncan tells how the latter situation once caused his friend, George Case, to have to get all his mules out of a creek because of a swarm of hornets. Case's comment on the day was, "Duncan, if there was anybody here to quit to, I'd quit!"
However, the successes numbered far greater than the failures on the fire trail. The Northern Region felt great pride in its ability to provide trained packers and well-chosen mules when needed. And the trucks loaded with their four-footed cargo became a familiar sight to the citizens of Missoula and nearby valleys all through the late 1930s and the 1940s fire seasons.

THE PEOPLE WHO SERVED

It should be obvious by now that the skill of the packer created the basis for the entire operation. A good packer had to handle himself in the woods alone, doctor a sick animal, and most importantly, talk mule language. Bill Bell, a long-time Forest Service Ranger and packer, was one of the best. Author Norman Maclean, in A River Runs Through It and Other Stories, describes him this way:

"He was a sort of 'Yeah' or 'No' guy to human beings--now and then he talked part of a sentence or a sentence or two--but to his horses and mules he talked all the time, and they understood him. He never talked loud to them, especially not to mules, which he knew are like elephants and never forget."

The best packers had that quality of gentleness with animals. They were concerned with the welfare of their pack strings on every fire call. Furthermore, they were resourceful and damned independent. Walt Peery, who met a lot of packers while he broke horses for the Remount, described one called Slim. It seems Slim let it be known that when his mules came down off a fire trail, he
wanted a supply of grain for them. Once when the truck didn't show up with the grain, he simply turned his pack string loose in the nearest rancher's oat field. The government paid the bill.

Packers understand mule psychology. The story of the packer who led his mules over men in sleeping bags, knowing the danger of flying hooves, illustrates that knowledge. And the packer knows the idiosyncrasies of the mules he works with, as noted by Walt Peery. "You can take the lead mule or the one right behind—if he's not in the right place, he'll try to get up in front and get in his right place....You can't keep him back there. Those packers know where those mules go."

Packers performed many other jobs besides supplying firefighters. Until 1947, when the Remount Depot bought a power mower, the packers worked teams of horses or mules in the hay meadows. They cared for all the stock at the Remount.

In springtime packers helped shoe horses and mules. Most of this work occurred at the Winter Range, a facility which kept stock during the "off season." The Winter Range, another important part of this story, will be described later.

Many packers worked in the saddle shop, which became the supplier of leather goods for the entire Region. The men made Decker packsaddles and repaired them, developed shoeing hobbles, made harness and halters. Of course, many packers also broke stock. Between fire calls a man might work with four young mules at a time for 2 or 3 days to get them ready for packing.
Truck drivers also performed essential services for the Remount and its Winter Range. On fire calls, they were just as concerned as the packers in getting their part of the job done—delivering pack strings at fire camps by a certain time. Drivers also rotated duty unless, as sometimes happened, a special relationship built up between a particular packer and a truck driver. Coy Rice, for example, wanted only Don Harrington to drive his mules.

Drivers took responsibility for minor repairs and maintenance on all trucks. They drove loads of hay from the Remount to the 400-ton hay shed at the Winter Range. A driver might haul a packstring to another Forest for a season's work or a fire, drive on to the Spokane warehouse to pick up supplies needed in Missoula, and return to find another fire call. Truck drivers usually got the mechanical repair jobs at the Remount, helped with field work, and even hauled garbage to the dump a mile down the road, where they had to chase bears away.

Remount men and mules and trucks performed many services over the years. In 1935, they helped Forest Service photographer K. D. Swan take one of the first trips into what is now the Bob Marshall Wilderness near Glacier National Park. A pack string was sometimes assigned to a Forest for an entire season, such as the work done at Priest Lake in Idaho in the 1950s to help control blister rust—a forest disease. A pack string might carry lumber and cable for building forest bridges, or the cement mixer (broken down into parts), or beds and stoves for lookouts.
Charles Edgar Randall describes in an article in *American Forests* another common project, with an uncommon ending. "A Montana lake was named for a Forest Service pack mule. The mule, one of a pack string carrying live trout...sank to its haunches at the edge of one of the unnamed lakes. In commemoration of the struggle the crew had getting the animal out, the lake has since been known as Mule Lake."

During World War II, the U.S. Army called on Remount Depot packers to come to Fort Carson, Colorado. There the men trained Army packers for their work with pack mules on the European Front.

The Remount's sign shop and blacksmith shop operated year-round. In the mid-30s, the Regional sign shop moved from downtown Missoula to the Remount Depot where the CCC's worked alongside salaried men. The blacksmith shop kept two men working through every winter to improve horse and mule shoes by adding heel and toe pieces to basic shoes--15,000 every year.

Under superintendent Evans, then Ed MacKay (from 1939-1949), who had worked as a Ranger and as organizer of the Ninemile CCC Camp, the Remount Depot became the horse and mule supply center for the Northern Region. In the case of horseshoes, it supplied the Forest Service nationwide.

While the superintendent coordinated the operations of the Winter Range and CCC Camp with the Remount, the ranch foreman took charge of daily operations. He assigned packers and drivers to their fire calls and took responsibility for all equipment used.
Alma Thompson, widow of the first foreman, recalls, "He had to be on duty all the time... didn't have any time to himself at all." Yet she smilingly adds that because of Boyd Thompson's insistence, the Forest Service constructed a home for them near the Remount headquarters. Most of the laborers and packers lived in the bunkhouse.

The wives of those men who lived full time on the grounds, mainly superintendents and foremen, remember those as good years. Their children rode the schoolbus with the other Ninemile Valley children. The wives developed a social life in nearby towns and with the ranch families in the valley. But only an occasional woman ever worked for the Remount Depot—as cook for 50-60 men at a time or as busy-season secretary.

Imogene Rice remembers that the worst times came when the men were gone on fire calls. Then the women "listened to the radio and chewed our teeth and tongues wondering what was going to happen next—if anybody was going to get hurt." Fortunately, there were no serious injuries.

The Remount Depot tried to be a good neighbor in the Ninemile Valley, though it had gotten off to an uncertain start during its first year when the local cattle ranchers had to insist that the Forest Service limit its spreading appropriation of government grazing land. Ranchers depended on that land for their own herds. Cooperating with the Ninemile stockgrowers association, the Remount later helped build a concrete dipping vat to control livestock diseases in the middle 30s.
The Remount Depot became a center for visitors. There the Forest Service entertained its administrators visiting from the Washington Office, assorted congressmen, and local civic groups who wanted to see the operation in action.

Cap Evans reports that sometimes 200-300 guests came at a time. They were always entertained at the Remount's cookhouse with reportedly excellent meals. Gifford Pinchot, the father of American forestry, toured the facility. After Donald Chamberlin became superintendent in 1949, there were United Nations-sponsored groups of foreign foresters wanting to learn the latest methods in forestry and fire control.

In earlier years, the Remount Depot often provided demonstrations off its own grounds in parades or at county fairs. One 1938 account details how packer Bill Bell and driver Monte Peyton drove their truck around a racetrack with its siren open, stopped in front of the grandstand, unloaded the mules, and then packed a complete 25-man firefighting outfit—all to much applause from the audience.

Newspapers in the Northwest often featured the Forest Service Remount Depot, describing the fire calls, repeating mule stories, and showing photographs of mule shoeing. The facility was simply not like anything else. Most people in the Region, while used to seeing livestock, had never before seen so many mules or such a well-organized program to use mules for a specific job.
The people hired to work the Remount helped make it unique. They were not trained foresters at all. Rather, the Remount Depot was more of a ranch operation which required persons skilled in the use of farm equipment and knowledgeable about horses and mules. The only foresters at the Remount administered its overall work for the Region, and even then, many of those men had ranching backgrounds before coming to the Forest Service.

A spirit of cooperation, more than people's backgrounds, helped create the Remount's widely known efficiency in answering fire calls. Packer Coy Rice put it this way: "Everything has to click just right....everybody has to be right there, even the fellow who brings the time slip out from the office."

Johnny Breazeal, who observed the Remount operation from his job as assistant ranger, recalls: "The people there were very dedicated....They might get out on Saturday night and even fight among one another, but when that old bell rang and a fire call came--they were as loyal a bunch as you ever saw." Breazeal, who recalls they got paid no overtime in those days, and other Ranger District employees often ran over to help. Marion Duncan remembers a sign painter who went out in the middle of the night to help shoe mules that had to go back out again. Everybody worked. Everybody cooperated to get a job done.
III. THE WINTER RANGE
THE NEW WINTER RANGE

When the Regional Office, in the 1930s, decided to centralize all the packstock for its Forests in one place, it had to find more pastureland than that available in the Ninemile Valley. Therefore, at the same time as the 1930 lease of the Remount Depot, the Forest Service had also set up its wintering range about 90 miles north of Missoula in an area known as the Big Draw. In 1935 when more breeding programs were planned, the Region moved its Winter Range farther south to the banks of the Flathead River between the towns of Perma and Dixon.

The Big Draw and the Perma area are opposite ends of a huge rectangle that seems out of place in mountainous western Montana. This rectangle situated southwest of Flathead Lake is nearly treeless hills and open prairie, cut with gullies and scattered with sagebrush. This country had opened to homesteading about 1910, but by the mid-30s the combination of drought and Depression had caused ruin to the sheep and cattle ranches.

Beginning in 1935, the Forest Service began securing 30¢ per-acre leases on abandoned ranches in the Perma area from owners who were happy to have any income at all. The new Winter Range grew to almost 44,000 acres of good grass and had the added advantage of an exceptionally mild climate. Since the Region had a large wintering area situated closer to the Remount Depot—only about 20 miles cross-country—the two facilities coordinated their efforts to serve the Forests.
By 1936, the Winter Range had many functions. It would expand its provision of all horses and mules to the Northern Region: wintering, doctoring, shoeing, and dispersal to Forests for the working season. It would provide the Remount Depot with pack stock for emergency fire control as a service to the service organization.

In addition, the Region then concentrated on scientifically breeding its own animals rather than buying them. The horse program begun in the Ninemile expanded and moved to the Winter Range. And the Forest Service started what would become the largest mule ranch in the Pacific Northwest with its decision to breed, to its own specifications, not only saddle horses, but also pack mules.

MULES AND HORSES

The mule, that sturdy but sterile offspring of a donkey and a horse, had for many years been the preferred pack animal in the Forest Service. Charlie Shaw, an early Flathead Forest Ranger, lists these reasons for choosing mules: they are sure-footed, require less feed than horses, can carry heavier loads, and won't attempt to rub their packs off against the trees along the trail.

Also important is the mule's motion when traveling. A writer for Western Horseman magazine put it this way: "It is the peculiar fox trot gait that makes the mule supreme as a pack animal....The extended walk or jogging trot of the horse transmits motions to the load, greatly handicapping the animal. Never underestimate
the mule when it comes to brains. He quickly learns to acquire a
gait which enables him to move to best advantage without rocking
his load, and wearing himself to a frazzle—even at 5-6 miles per
hour."

Forest Service packers would agree, for one noted that you
can pack crates of eggs on a mule but not on a horse. And they
all vouch for the mule's intelligence.

In the early days of mountain packing, the men had preferred
small mules of about 1,000 pounds. It was easier to throw a load
on their backs, and some said their feet were better. When the
Forest Service began using mules for increasingly larger jobs such
as hauling lumber and machinery, larger mules became necessary.

In 1936, the Northern Region bought two large jacks (male
donkeys) with cross Spanish/Mammoth breeding. They were bred with
90 large mares with mixed Percheron blood purchased from eastern
Washington farms. The result: 1,200-1,400 pound straight-backed
mules with strong legs, "mealy" mouths, and good dispositions.

The size of the herd varied, but in the early 1940s the
Winter Range held more than 250 mares and 4-6 jacks (Paddy was
best known) to produce some 200 mule colts each year. One set of
mule twins appeared.

The men in charge of the breeding of horses and mules kept
exact records. It has been said that Les Wolfe, who later became
superintendent of the Winter Range, knew the stock so well he
could name which mares would foal that spring and whether they
would produce horse or mule offspring.
The continuing influence of that horseman-turned-forester, Major Kelley, was felt again. Kelley wanted his Rangers to have quality saddle horses, bred from a recognized breed, and noted for their riding qualities rather than for packing. Inspection trips were made in 1936 to Yakima, Washington, stables to inspect riding breeds, and Remount Superintendent Cap Evans and others made the final decision—they would raise American Saddlebred horses.

The "Saddler" is the familiar five-gaited show horse. The Forest Service purchased several stallions during those early years, the best known being Grand Menard. Winter Range Superintendent Herb Stone purchased the sorrel stallion at an auction in Nebraska for between $2,300 and $2,500--memories are at odds on the exact price. At any rate, it was a mighty sum of money in 1936 for a horse. The agency also purchased several Saddlebred mares.

The Forest Service tried another line of saddle horse, the Nonius, a Hungarian cavalry horse. These were small, similar to Morgans or Quarter Horses, and considered good mountain horses because of their shorter bodies and legs as compared with Saddlers.

The new brown horses didn't succeed however. The principal stallion, acquired from the Miles City experiment station, had to be destroyed after an injury. And when a Blackfoot Valley rancher attempted to continue the line, he found that most of his Nonius colts fell prey to mountain lions during a hard 1940s winter.

After much experimenting, the consensus seemed to be that a purebred horse of any kind, especially the Saddlebreds, did not
produce a good Forest Service saddle horse. "Hot blood horses were no good on a trail; they were too fast and too nervous," or "They're wonderful for roads, but not up in these hills." But when "cold blood" mares were crossed with those Saddlebred stallions, most Rangers were happy. Along with all those mules foaled every spring at the Winter Range would appear 30-50 horse foals destined to become Rangers' saddle horses.

Sometimes an idea comes along that proves to benefit everyone. The stallion service provided by at least two government agencies--the Army and the Forest Service--worked like this:

The government-owned stallions, in this case the Saddlers such as Grand Menard, Hermes, or Easter Fox, or the Nonius stallions, Shorty and Kipling, were offered to the public for breeding. A rancher could bring his mare to the Winter Range for service by the stallion of his choice, or the rancher might make arrangements to keep the stallion on his property for some specified time. Either way, the rancher paid nothing. He signed an agreement with the Forest Service stating that he could keep the offspring of these unions if he chose. Or if the rancher wanted to sell, the Forest Service had the first option to buy any gelded colts--for about $100 each in 1940. The Northern Region wanted quality saddle horses available for its Rangers.

Many mares came for visits at the Winter Range and the Forest Service stallions spent time over much of western Montana. Often-times permanent trades took place. The Forest Service might trade one of its purebred horses for two mules or two grade saddle
horses. Or, for example, Howard Neas of Kalispell writes: "In the spring of 1942 I traded two saddle horses and a mule for a stallion 'Montana Peavine.' He was an American Saddlebred....I had Peavine two years when I sold him to a man from Mercer Island, Washington."

In these ways, the influence of purebred horses spread. Many persons cite evidence today of the upgrading in horses brought about by the Forest Service's stallion service and stock-trading.

RANCH OPERATION

Hank Viche, in charge of the Winter Range during the early 1940s, describes its organization. "The main headquarters was at Ferry Basin where all of the activity was during the winter period. During the spring, summer, and fall periods, we had....the Gustine Ranch which was just a short ways from Camas Prairie; it was kind of a showplace and that's where Grand Menard, the famous stallion, was stationed....And over the hill from there was what was called the Clark Ranch, where Les Wolfe was with the breeding program for the mules. The spring ranch was at MacDonald, which was just down the river from Dixon, where we used to take the mules and horses down in the spring and shoe them."

The Winter Range, then, became a somewhat atypical western Montana working stock ranch. There was no place for cowboys at the Remount Depot in the Ninemile, but the Winter Range hired them
to work with an average of 1,500 head of pack stock and breeding stock.

Spring roundup time meant days of riding to bring in the animals that had roamed freely all winter. After the men corralled the horses and mules, they were sorted, branded, clipped, and shod.

In the early days, every time a mule transferred to a different Forest for a season, he got a new brand. This resulted in what Cap Evans called "every mule looking like a Chinese laundry ticket." By the time stock was run at the new Winter Range, the system became more organized. From 1936 on, every mule or horse carried one brand for life—"US" plus a number—and that number was recorded in a master record book.

In spring, the winter-long hair over the mule's brand was clipped off, and while the men were at it they clipped a large design on the rump—F for the Flathead National Forest, L for Lolo, and so on. This way the animals could be quickly sorted into groups.

Shoeing time started in late April and continued for as long as it took to get four new shoes each on anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 mules and horses. A ferry came across the high spring water of the Flathead River with a load of shoes—thousands of them fashioned the winter before in the blacksmith shop at the Remount. Then a horse-drawn wagon carried tools and shoes to the camp.
The men put in long days in the shoeing shed. Three or four crews of three men each roped and held mules, trimmed the hooves, and nailed on the shoes. Two and a half or three minutes for each shoe—maybe half an hour altogether for each animal. The blacksmiths and ranch hands worked fast, for the mule's benefit as well as their own.

Sometimes it took wrestling a mule to the floor and tying all four legs together. Mules in particular seem not to like to get shod. One writer watching the spring roundup during wartime observed, "Until I saw this show, I thought all brave men were on the battle fronts. But they aren't; the mule shoeing profession has a lot. They all deserve medals for each season's work. It took four men ....to get one shoe on a mule. They wear their own wound stripes."

Or, in the understated words of Rice: "Any animal went in that building, came out with shoes on."

One shoer might turn out 16 to 20 animals a day. Or if he was Dave Pronovost, a man who spent a lifetime shoeing stock for the Forest Service, he might set a record of 33 animals in one day. And the end of the spring shoeing at the Winter Range was only the beginning of the working season for blacksmiths. The animals would need shoes every 6 weeks throughout the summer; two or three men traveled all the Ranger Districts keeping horses and pack stock well shod.

By the end of May or early June, the mules and Rangers' horses, freshly shod and clipped and conditioned, went to their
respective Forests. For many years, the stock traveled on their own legs. Forest Service trail drives were a familiar sight to western Montana residents as 100 head of stock walked and trotted as far away as the Kaniksu Forest in Idaho or 150 headed south to Darby in Montana's Bitterroot. The 200 head of mules who would summer at the Remount Depot for fire assignments trailed down a main highway and over a forest trail to the Ninemile Valley, a 2-day trip.

To help improve the Winter Range, a CCC "spike camp" housed a detachment of 30 men. They constructed 300 miles of fences along with buildings and corrals, working all year around. One winter, 1936-37, as Dorrien Wolfe, then wife of an employee, remembers it, a severe cold spell held for so long that the Flathead River froze over and construction logs were hauled over the ice.

Usually a ferry crossed the river, an old ferry rebuilt by the Forest Service out of steel drums and powered by an outboard motor. Since there were no roads into MacDonald Basin, the shoeing area of the Winter Range, the ferry transported everything needed, including workmen and visitors. It served well except on one occasion as described by Peyton Moncure, a Forest Service writer:

"It was in the summer of 1938...that the ferry broke its cable and began drifting down the river with its load of a five-ton truck, a load of pipe, and several Civilian Conservation Corps boys and Forest Service personnel. The CCC boys were taken ashore
by the motorboat while an employee by the name of Bill Riddle rode the ferry downstream until it grounded on a sandbar near Perma."

Just as on any ranch, there was never a season with nothing to do. The CCC crews, sometimes joined by Remount packers during the "off season," developed springs on the rangeland, continued to build and repair fences, fed stock, and cared for weanling colts or injured animals. During at least one season during the meat rationing days of World War II, the Region fattened its own beef on this rangeland.

The Winter Range had no farming. Any hay and oats that were needed came by truck from the Remount Depot meadows. But the rangeland became another showplace for the Forest Service. "The result of that program wasn't just horses and mules," says Hank Viche. "It was the land itself, also."

They planted crested wheatgrass to improve the grazing land, rotated pastures by seasons, and controlled grasshoppers. At its peak in the late 40s, the Winter Range exemplified the best in range management.

Because the winters were mild in the Perma area, the stock seldom was bothered by the weather. "In all the years they had that place, I can only remember one time when they got in trouble with the stock being out...." begins Marion Duncan, who worked at both the Remount and Winter Range. There had been a chinook, a sudden warm breeze in the middle of winter, which caused ice to form over the snow. Duncan and three others succeeded in bringing
in 300 head of stock caught on icy hills away from feed, but it
must have been mostly a case of pointing the mules in the right
direction and letting them slide. The men's mounts had sharp
cleats on their horseshoes, but the range stock didn't. Says
Duncan, "They got on a hillside and they started. They never knew
where they would stop!"

Life for families at the Winter Range was not quite as pleas­
ant as at the Remount Depot. The headquarters area was hot in
summer, nearly treeless, and isolated from towns by impassable
roads in winter. Hank Viche's children weren't allowed out of the
yard for weeks in late summer for fear of rattlesnakes. Fortu­
nately, the old farmhouse supplied to the superintendent had many
additions, including a large porch for playing.

The Winter Range, as well as the Remount Depot, provided many
attractions. (The employees of both facilities sometimes felt
burdened!) Western Montana people wanted to watch the shoeing,
see the horses, or make arrangements for the stallion service.
For several years there were Field Days such as one in 1938 where
the visitors were treated to a barbecue lunch for 25¢ each and
demonstrations of packing, shoeing, and loading stock on trucks
for fire calls. Later there were tours for officials or small
groups.

Again, all that visiting came about because of the uniqueness
of the operation. When Lloyd Noel, the Region's administrative
services officer, retired in the 1960s, he said, "Except for the
Army, we were the only government agency with a remount depot and a breeding ranch for mules....It was the only one of its type in the West."

Through the influence of such men as Major Evan Kelley the Forest Service bred a superior line of pack animals and, incidentally, supplied them with one of the best winter grazing areas in the country. Many mules from the Northern Region even went outside the area. Several strings of pack mules were sold, for example, to Forests in California.

One has to remember that though other means of fighting forest fires were developing in the 1930s and 40s, mainly airplanes, first a depression and then a war was going on. It was difficult to get money to fight fires. Probably the main reason for an elaborate 2-day guided tour for newspaper people in 1945 was to make a public plea for funds. As quoted in Spokane's Spokesman-Review, then Regional Forester P. D. Hanson told the writers:

"At the rate of present appropriations for forest development roads, it would require 100 years to complete an adequate road system for the protection and utilization of the region's forests....The ambition of the foresters is to develop a road program that will allow men to be put on a fire within an hour after reported."

Meantime, the mules served.
IV. THE END OF THE MULE ERA
AIRPLANES AND MULES

The Forest Service's Northern Region had been experimenting with airplanes to fight forest fires during the same years as the establishment and peak of the Remount Depot operation. In 1929 the Region began free-fall cargo dropping of cans of drinking water, food, and firefighting equipment. During the 1930s it used parachutes to drop supplies to crews of men on the ground.

Mules still supplied most fire crews, however, because the slow-moving and small planes could not get into most of the hazardous areas where fire occurred. Only small signs pointed to the end of the mule era. In the mid-1930s, Forest Service mules packed warning beacons for airplanes to western Montana mountain peaks. Then came the perfection of a totally new concept, parachuting men into fire zones.

In 1941, the nation's first training base for smokejumpers began, ironically, just 3 miles from the Remount Depot at the site of the Ninemile CCC Camp. By that time, World War II needed the young men who had previously filled the barracks of the CCC Camps. In 1943, the smokejumper center moved down the road, closer to the Remount Depot, to Camp Menard, and Forest Service crews constructed a small landing field just west of the Remount headquarters. Many of the Remount's visitors drove on another mile to watch the spring training of smokejumpers as they parachuted into Remount pastures where the irrigating had been shut off the night before to allow the men a dry landing.
As if in return for the favors, smokejumper back-up crews often came down between assignments to the Remount. "They'd help pitch hay, shock oats, build fences—whatever we had to do," according to Donald Chamberlin, the Remount's last superintendent.

Smokejumpers are simply men who fight forest fires, except that they can arrive much faster at the scene and often have the fire put out in a few hours. Their story is an exciting one in itself. But the coming of the smokejumpers would have a great effect on the use of mules in the National Forests. Gene Polette, a mule-truck driver in the 1950s, put it this way: "Due to the time involved in the airplane dropping smokejumpers on a fire [compared to] the time it would take a pack string to reach a fire, the handwriting was on the wall that the airplane was going to win out...."

For at least 10 years, mules continued to prove essential, but for different reasons. The Forest Service figured approximately one mule per smokejumper was needed to haul out the smokejumpers' suits and sacks of equipment which the firefighters stashed along trails for the mule strings to carry out. That procedure would continue for as long as the Forests had few roads, for even if everything—men and equipment both—dropped by plane to fires, there was still no way to get it all out without using mules on mountain trails.

As late as 1951, mules played a major role in control efforts on certain fires. In September of that year, the Gasquet District
in Northern California had a severe fire blowup. In addition to Northern Region men who flew to California to help, Remount Depot mules also responded. Three truckloads of pack mules, with their packers, extra drivers, and all equipment, drove for 2 days, before there were interstate highways, to assist the men and mules already there.

This trip was the farthest away from "home" that the Region's pack stock ever traveled. During the 3 weeks on that Northern California fire, the Remount trucks and their drivers also served in the fire control effort. Smokejumpers fought that fire, but equipment was brought in by truck and mules rather than planes.

Alfred E. Spaulding, Northern Region chief of fire control at the time, recalls the widespread reputation of the Remount mules and men. While the animals were being loaded up for their first trip out of a base camp, one of the local California packer's wives said, "I don't believe it's true that the Remount packer blows a whistle and his mules line up in proper order!" No one else believed it either, but the mules were so well trained that it was almost true.

During the summers of 1950 and 1951, the Remount Depot found itself center of unusual activity. Twentieth Century Fox sent in its crews to film "Red Skies of Montana" starring Richard Widmark, the motion picture that told the story of the smokejumpers. Much of the filming took place at the smokejumper center at Camp Menard and at the Remount grounds. The moviemakers shot film of Remount
activities such as employees trotting across a driveway to the corrals, loading mules into trucks on a fire call, and the fully loaded trucks heading up a mountain road.

When the film editors were finished, all that remained of the Remount Depot was a background shot behind the credits at the movie's beginning, one packer, George Feucht, and one shot of "feet, nothing but feet" heading out to the corrals. After all, the film's theme emphasized the new technology of fighting fires with planes and parachutes.

THE FINAL DECISION

"Missoula, Montana, July 1, 1953. Services formerly rendered by the Forest Service Remount Depot at Ninemile will be considerably reduced commencing in July, it was announced by Regional Forester P. D. Hanson. This reduction is in line with a program of economy aimed at reducing government expenditures...." Thus began the press release marking the year-long phasing out of the Remount Depot. Many factors contributed to make the final decision.

Both smokejumpers and pack mules served the roadless areas. As the new smokejumper program grew larger, its effectiveness increased so much that there were few large remote-area fires.

Growing gradually during the 40s and 50s, the network of access roads in the mountains reached the point where most areas had roads into them and could, therefore, be supplied by trucks and bulldozers.
"Roads probably did more of it than anything," explains Cap Evans. "You've got a road going up the creek here, and you've got a fire over there. Well you could take those big 'cats' and you just push a road over to the fire with it. That probably took the need for pack stock out more than the airplane did--the roads."

Even in remote areas, airplane cargo delivery had much improved. In addition, much of that gear dropped was disposable--fire camp equipment and paper sleeping bags. The Region needed fewer mules to haul out gear dropped by planes.

Since the mid-1920s, the Forest Service had been developing aerial fire detection. This new method reached such a peak of efficiency that the lookout towers on mountains were no longer replaced when they became unusable. Remount pack strings had once carried both the construction materials for these lookouts and the supplies for the men and women who lived in them during fire seasons.

In the early years of airplane use, large forest fires often created conditions of such smoke and haze that pilots could not fly into areas where planes were needed. Thus mules had still served, for they could get through trails on the ground where visibility was better. As the fires were kept smaller, the periods of zero visibility became rare.

By the late 1940s, privately owned herds of horses and mules had increased again, and the Northern Region could hire pack stock in emergencies or buy it to replenish the herd.
Fire calls had always been sporadic--one in 2 weeks, and then four or five in a matter of days for the next 2 weeks. By the early 1950s, there were one or two seasons where the pack mules served the Forests on work projects, but answered no fire calls at all. But even as fewer and fewer pack strings went out on fires, the cost of maintaining the animals remained high.

For all those reasons, many in the Forest Service saw the Remount Depot as having served its purpose. With various arms of the agency competing for funds, priorities had to be placed in those areas where the most fire control could be bought for the least amount of money.

The decision to close the operation had apparently been put off for some time. Referring to Evan W. Kelley, the Regional Forester who had led the establishment of the Remount, Alfred Spaulding explains: "When Major Kelley retired in 1944, he left a strong legacy to continue to maintain the Remount Depot. It was a difficult decision for a Regional Forester to eliminate such a colorful and efficient arm of Fire Control."

Cap Evans, for 5 years a superintendent of the Remount Depot, and Lloyd Noel of the services arm of the Region recommended closure, feeling that the Forest Service hadn't really needed mules for many years.

The last superintendent, Don Chamberlin, remembers otherwise. "Thirteen strings were out in August of 1953 at the time of the closure decision," he says, and insists to this day that most of
them were on fire calls. But it was not his decision to make. Arguments went back and forth at the time, and still continue if one strikes a sensitive nerve. Much of the feeling was sentimental.

One writer, referring to mechanical substitutes for animals such as scooters and equipment carriers, could just as well have included airplanes in his 1954 article "The Mechanical Mule." He wrote: "Oldtimers like Ed McKay of Darby, Montana, who were with the Forest Service for 40 years, would hate to see the mules go. And they're right. The mules are creatures of flesh and blood and feelings, and with remarkable personalities, some of them. And we're proposing to replace them with brute machinery. We're wrong, and we know it, and the only honest defense we can make is that we're keeping up with the rest of the world."

Regional Forester Hanson, who succeeded Kelley, issued orders for the closure. Superintendent Chamberlin transferred in September to a Forest assignment, and enough hands stayed on the Ninemile during the winter to get in the hay crop and care for stock. The Forest Service transferred the 10-head trucks to its engineering department and all three were eventually sold to the public on sealed bids. Mules and horses belonging to the various Forests could continue to spend off seasons at the Winter Range, but the Remount Depot ceased to exist by the next fire season.

In July 1954, the facilities of the Remount Depot became the headquarters of the Ninemile Ranger District, Lolo National Forest.
Since mules could again be purchased or rented from private owners, the Forest Service had ceased breeding them in 1948. And since Forest Rangers no longer patrolled their Districts mainly by horseback, the breeding program for horses had also ended.

The public auction of 50-60 purebred horses attracted much attention in the Northwest, as 300 people attended the sale at the Winter Range. Sentiment ran high also within the Forest Service for this stock. As Eugene Polette put it, "Some of the older packers, who were horsemen from the day they were born, were concerned as to whose hands those horses were going to fall into."

Some of the horses were purchased by Missoula area people; most went out of state. Rosin, a Morgan stallion, went to the Glacier Park saddle horse concession. Grand Menard, the American Saddlebred, was sold to a Spokane stable.

Curiously, at about the same time as these horse dispersal efforts, the Forest Service also acquired horses on a custodial basis from the U.S. Army—dispersing its own herds and closing its remount depots. In 1950, the Winter Range at Perma had become the home of several Thoroughbred horses from an Army remount depot in Nebraska. These animals had produced foals which were traded for mules or saddle horses for the Forest Service. In the fall of 1956, the stallion Off Chance, nine mares, and about a dozen young Thoroughbred colts and fillies were sold at another public auction. The Northern Region was finally out of the stock-breeding business.
Even before the Remount Depot officially closed, it needed fewer people to run its operation and that of its twin, the Winter Range. With fewer animals and fewer fire calls, there were fewer jobs for employees, especially the packers. Many of them found other positions within the Forest Service, working on road maintenance or in equipment shops, for example. A few packers went into business for themselves as outfitters and guides to hunters and tourists. Some retired.

A few packers stayed on, for even after 1954 mules served on service jobs and occasional fires, leaving from the Winter Range at Perma rather than the Remount.

Stock from Northern Region Forests still spent their winters at the Winter Range where, since 1935, the Forest Service had tried to purchase these grazing lands rather than lease them. By the time Congress appropriated funds for purchase in the 1950s, there was no longer any need for a 40,000-acre block of land. The leases were gradually let go until 1962. That year saw the closing of the last 18,000 acres of the Winter Range—and the end of an era.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The word "unique" has appeared many times in this account of the Forest Service Remount Depot and its Winter Range. The Northern Region itself is unique, for the forests are large and the mountains steep. For many years it had fewer roads in more rough country than any other Forest Service Region in the nation, making
pack stock essential for fighting fires. Other Regions may have used some central dispersal points for their pack stock, but nowhere else was such a large and well-organized operation carried on.

Over and over, in talking with people who either had been associated with the Remount or who had watched its operations from a distance, similar themes emerge: problem-solving, changing technology, new ways to meet new demands. Ray Karr, the information director for the modern Regional Office, who never saw the Remount Depot but who knows history, calls the Remount Depot an example of "the creativity of the discouraged."

Indeed it was. Just as were the changes in firefighting which emerged from the tragic 1910 fires. And later the airplane cargo dropping and the smokejumpers. New problems need new solutions. One Forest Service retiree in reminiscing about the mules and packers of the Remount said, "We've grown out from that into another period of history....it'll never happen again."

The modern Forest Service may no longer need a Remount Depot, but you will find mules in the woods. In areas designated as Wilderness, for example, no mechanized vehicles may enter their boundaries. Animals are the only form of transportation allowed besides human backs and feet. People working the lookouts in primitive areas during the fire season still need supplies, sometimes even drinking water. Mules remain essential there.

Even in lands not set aside as Wilderness, mules are most convenient for trail maintenance or pick-up jobs. Forest trails
which used to serve mainly as access for fire control now serve for recreation as well and get used heavily. Therefore, many Ranger Districts in the Northern Region still keep strings of mules and hire employees who, among their other skills, can ride horses and pack mules.

The Ninemile Ranger District, now housed at the old Remount facility, reported at the end of one recent summer month these uses for mules: carried telephone wire to McCabe Creek, gathered wire at Lake Creek, picked up jumper gear at Indian Creek, picked up barbed wire at Petty pasture, worked Rattlesnake Creek fire, supplied Fletcher Mountain trail crew, and supplied lookout near Plains.

The six mules and two horses at Ninemile perform other jobs too. Every fall, the Ranger inspects hunters' camps on his District, and this past summer, they packed supplies for a university study group. The men, and sometimes women in these changing times, who work with even two or three packmules carry on the ages-old tradition of moving goods with the help of animals.

Now the Ninemile District Ranger Station has a construction job under way—remodeling a classroom building into offices. The new Ranger never saw them, but that same building once housed a garage and shop for mule-truck maintenance, and later a Forest Service sign shop. The two white office buildings were once cookhouse and bunkhouse.

In front of the barn, the scales still stand where they used to weigh animals and trucks and meat, but the siren is gone, and
the handsome white cupolas of the Remount Depot's entrance gate have been set aside for a hoped-for restoration project. Pine and aspen trees planted by young CCC men in 1936 still beautify the grounds, but there are no more flower beds, only the Ranger's backyard vegetable garden.

The spacious barn now holds surplus Forest Service equipment, and its downstairs storage room, once for packsaddles and halters, serves carpenters. Leaning against a dusty wall in the saddle shop, the last sign for a mule truck reads "U.S. Forest Service Remount Depot Pack Train."

Climbing the logs of the aging corrals in winter, a visitor might see 70 horses and mules from four National Forests in the outlying pastures. A mile up the timbered hill behind the main yard beckons one of many Forest Service public picnic areas. This one graces the site of the old smokejumper base and bears the name "Grand Menard Campground" after that flashy stallion which sired so many saddle horses for Forest Rangers.
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