

Sagehen Area History

Tripod Lookout

It is unclear when the original Tripod Lookout was built. Forest Service records indicate it was in use as early as the nineteen-teens, and the earliest known photograph dates to 1921. In the 1970s, the old lookout was replaced with a modern building.

In 1931, Tom Cherry was assigned to Tripod Lookout. In addition to fire duty, he was also responsible for “enforcing the separation of sheep and cattle ranges” and clearing trails in the area.



Tripod Lookout, 1921
Forest Service Photograph

Tom’s son has fond memories of the five summers he spent there as a child:

“Tripod Lookout consisted of a small 10 or 12 foot square building sitting on stilts fastened by cables on outcrop of rocks at the pinnacle of Tripod Peak. Windows surround the building to provide an unrestricted 360 degree view. The furnishings consisted of a small wood stove, three benches, a small table, a low cabinet which doubled as a wash basin and water bucket stand, and a homemade double bed. I slept on the floor. Dominating the center of the room was a cabinet mounting an alidade. Oh yes, there was a hand cranked telephone. This limited amount of fixtures filled the room almost to overflowing.”

Each spring, the lookouts and trail crews gathered at Third Fork Guard Station before leaving for the field:

“The move was made on horseback with a pack string carrying the necessities we would require for the summer. The distance was about fifteen Forest Service miles, which are well known to be at least twice as long as any other miles on earth; however the trek was accomplished in one long day. The four of us, Dad, Mom, The Dog and I would arrive at Tripod Lookout badly in need of body repair. But what a wonderful feeling for me! This was the backcountry...isolated, unique, enchanting, and to me, my private domain whose reason for existence was for me and my dog, Pooch.”

Courtesy Bill Cherry, 1998



Tripod Lookout during the 1930s
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright



Pack string at Tripod Peak
Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society

Sagehen Dam



In 1881, Franklin Bowman was born in Star, Idaho. His family moved to the Long Valley area, and in 1915 he patented a 480-acre homestead in the Sagehen Basin. Fifteen years later, the parcel of land was sold to the Squaw Creek Irrigation District. They maintain ownership today.

In 1933 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was created and became pivotal to the development of the Boise National Forest. Several CCC Camps were established throughout the forest during this period, including the Black Canyon Camp in 1937.

Work on the Sagehen Dam
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright



CCC boys cutting a tree by hand
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright

The CCC enrollees spent 1937 to 1939 building a dam and reservoir in Sagehen Basin. The Sagehen CCC Camp was a spike camp of the Black Canyon CCC Camp. It was a tent camp without any permanent buildings, holding about 150 CCC boys.

Beginning work on Sagehen Dam
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright



Water inlet
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright



Sagehen camp, 1938
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright



Emmit Routon, dam foreman, at center
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright



"Leroy getting his cat fixed - we did the work ourselves."
~ LeRoy Cartwright
Courtesy LeRoy Cartwright