

Messner, Frank -  
Working and Living on Mount Hebo in the 1920s and 1930s

*Two stories were sent by Frank Messner in April, 2002, to Nestucca Valley Middle School for their Heritage Project. I combined them and reformatted them to make this story in February, 2023. Dean Bones db*

My dad, Billy Messner, drove stage coach from Yamhill to Tillamook over the Trask mountain from 1900 - 1909.

In the early 1900s two Johnson families had homesteaded on Mt. Hebo and ran a lot of sheep. There was a long building, a shed, to house the sheep in the winter. There was no road then. The road was built sometime around 1930.

We had a homestead 2 1/2 miles east of Hebo near the old ranger station. In about 1922 our family moved to the old ranger station. We lived there awhile as we got the house ready on our place. My dad started working for Roy Garwood, forest ranger, in 1920 packing trees and supplies for planting camps on Mr. Hebo mostly near Cedar Lake.

While we lived there it was decided to build a new lookout on top of Mr. Hebo on the north point. At that time there was just a small shack that was maybe 6 feet by 6 feet on the east point, and the lookout man lived in a cabin down below, west, on the flat.

The lumber was precut and bundled. They hauled it up to the old ranger station by horses and wagon and then loaded it on packhorses to be taken 8 1/2 miles up to the top. Bill Land from near Willamina came over with his pack string to help Dad pack it up. Dad also packed trees for the planting camp.

As soon as school was out our family moved to the top of the mountain. My brother Henry, was 8, I was 6, and my sister, Lola, was 13. We had a tent house that the folks lived in, and Mother cooked for the rest. Jack Johnson and Roy Garwood, the ranger, had a separate pyramid tent and ate with us. We kids also had a separate tent for sleeping. Our beds were split cedar boards with ferns in a straw lick.

We took some cows and calves and also some chickens with us. We lived on top of Mt. Hebo that summer. My sister, Lola, went out to Hebo by horseback with packhorses to carry in the supplies and what was needed probably about every week.

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Water was 1/4 mile from camp, so we fixed a pit and a metal top to heat water at the spring which was at the present campground where Mother did the washing in a washtub using a scrub board. It was Henry's and my job to keep wood for the fire there and also at the cook tent. We gathered knots out of the old rotten logs. We covered a lot of the mountain top to get them and carried them in gunny sacks. They made really good wood and hot fires. By the way, the cook tent had a cookstove carried up on a packhorse.

Henry's and my biggest pastime was getting loose rocks or digging them loose to roll over the steep bluff and see them bounce and clatter all the way down.

Dad and Jack Johnson built the lookout. I still remember Dad, Jack Johnson, and Roy Garwood drilling holes in solid rock with hammers and chisel to cement the anchors in to hold the lookout from blowing away. There are still part of them there.

We also lived up there the next summer while Dad ran the lookout.

The next year after that we didn't move up there. When Dad had to go home to make hay and do some work Lola and I stayed up there.

After the third year, Dad did other work for the Forest Service. He did all the packing, worked on telephone lines putting in new lines and also maintaining old lines, putting in new trails and maintaining old trails. He helped build Cedar Cabin over east of South Lake which was an improvement over staying in tents. Vic Affolter also helped build it. Men working with Dad over the years were Ade Lane, Wirt Sappington, Vic Affolter, Jack Johnson, Kenneth Thorall (my cousin), Bert Adams, Jim Imlah, Ira McKinley, Shorty Hoag, Ernest Bohna and Ken Lorentz.

Some running the lookout were: Ken Thorall, Earl Greenlee, Ira McKinley and Wirt Sappington. I believe some of the Lightfoots and Kellows ran the old previous one. Shorty Hoag, Ira McKinley and Wirt Sappington were also on Bell Mountain. Henry Messner later was on Little Hebo Tower 100+ feet high.

I remember Martin S. Durbin running section lines and marking corners. Thornton Munger was around some. He was over Roy Garwood. They usually stayed at our place.

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Dad and Ade Lane tore down the old ranger station house and hauled it down to Hebo to build a new house for the Garwood family, Roy, Helen, Lee and Barbara.

There used to be old sheep sheds, really long buildings maybe 1000 feet long and open on the east side and 12 feet wide where Hebo Lake campground is now. We called them the lower sheep shed and the upper sheep shed which was where the Air Force housing project is now. The mountain was all pretty open then. We and other farmers ran young stock up there during the summer. We used it year round.

About 1930 a road was built on the mountain to the top. It missed our place by going on the south side of Blow Mountain. When the CCC came my dad had a crew of them. They built a lot of roads. They also built the present shelter at Hebo Lake Campground. The lake used to be just a swamp until they dammed it up. There once was a cabin at the upper end. The sheep sheds ran along the southwest side and way up the hill.

Kenneth Jensen, Homer Lewallen and I used to ride our horses all over the mountain. Each summer we would take our grub and blankets and go clear over to Bell Mt. and camp out for a week. We also stayed at Punkin See Smith's over towards Willamina.

Bliss Fletcher and sons, Roy, Ralph and Berle built a cabin at South Lake probably before 1930. It was known as the Fletcher Cabin. They liked to fish and hunt. Also they let anybody else use it. Later my dad's crew built another shelter near there and fixed a campground. Also a shelter was built at Cedar Lake. The CCC crew also fell a lot of old sags and graveled the roads. They did many good things that otherwise wouldn't have been done for a long time and at much greater cost.

Later a tower was built on the east point of Mt. Hebo and a temporary or part-time lookout tower on the south point. Ira McKinley helped built it. The old lookout was torn down.

Leonard Whitmore has marked the old Indian trail up over the mountain. We used to come down over the east point to North Lake. It was very steep but a lot shorter than going down the old switchbacks which wind down in the saddle just east of the radar station and came over to where the road is now near South

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Lake. This was a good place for deer hunting before it grew up so. There was an old pine tree planting camp off to the right going down.

My dad and Ade Lane planted some Port Orford cedar and some redwood for the Forest Service as an experiment over on the old Charley Jensen homestead above our place. There is one of each on our old place which are now big trees.

Many of the men working on the mountain were at our place either staying or stopping for a meal. We were on the Forest Service telephone line that ran from the Hebo ranger station clear over the mountain to all the lookouts. Everybody had a different ring. It was quite a job to build and maintain all the telephone lines and trails.

When they camped at the Cedar Cabin the horses were pastured in what we call Dry Lake which is still an open spot east of South Lake.

We moved off the hill in 1937 under the Resettlement Act when the Forest Service bought up all the hill places of those who wanted to sell and resettle.