

The Early History of the Taylor Burn Guard Station

Willamette National Forest

Middle Fork Ranger District

Story and research done by Gary Guttormsen

Taylor Burn Ranger from 1991 to 2002

Before I go into specifics of the early history of the Taylor Burn area as well as Waldo Lake, it would be helpful to look at the timeline influencing this amazing landscape:

Timeline

- **1876 The Office of Special Agent for forest research is created in the Department of Agriculture to assess the state of the forests in the United States.**
- **1881 The Office of the Special Agent is expanded into the newly formed Division of Forestry.**
- **1891 Joseph Taylor and others begin regularly grazing their sheep in the meadows of the area north of Waldo Lake.**
- **1891 The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 authorizes withdrawing land from the public domain as "forest reserves," managed by the Department of the Interior.**
- **1901 The Division of Forestry is renamed the Bureau of Forestry.**
- **1905 The Transfer Act of 1905 transfers the management of forest reserves from the General Land Office (within the Department of the Interior) to the Bureau of Forestry (within the Department of Agriculture). The name of the agency changes to Forest Service with Gifford Pinchot as its first Chief. He was appointed by his good friend, Teddy Rosevelt, President of the United States.**
- **1907 Simon Klov Dahl, the engineer for the Waldo irrigation tunnel project, has crews begin building the wagon road up from Wikiup Planes past Little Cultus Lake and Taylor and Irish Lakes to the shores of Waldo Lake. Mining equipment and construction supplies were shipped by wagon from Shaniko, through Bend, and up the new wagon road to the north shore of Waldo Lake where it was loaded onto barges for the journey to what is now known as Klov Dahl Bay.**
- **1909 A year around construction camp was built and in 1909 the tunnel project was begun.**
- **1909-14 Crews worked year around building the tunnel and diversion dam at the outlet of Waldo in order to regulate the flow of the North Fork of the Willamette River. This spot is now known as Dam Camp and the dam continues to redirect and regulate the flow of the river.**

- 1905–1945 National forest management focuses on protecting lands against [overgrazing](#), controlling and combating fire, protecting fish and game, and providing public recreation.
- 1910 The [Great Fire of 1910](#)
- 1911 The [Weeks Act](#) authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to purchase cutover, denuded, and other forested lands for flood and fire control. This new authority led to the expansion of National Forests in the Eastern United States and the protection and restoration of millions of acres of land.
- 1919 This is the first mention of “Taylor Burn” by the Forest Service. It appears in their promotional booklet Vacationland. This is also around the time that the Forest Service begins the construction of Taylor Burn Forest Camp and the Waldo Lake Forest Camp.
- 1929 (approx.) Construction begins on Taylor Burn Guard Station. The cabin and fire truck garage was first located near a meadow above Mud Lake.
- 1922 The [General Land Exchange Act of 1922](#) authorized the Secretary of Interior to obtain title to privately owned land located within national forest boundaries.
- 1941 The Taylor Burn guard station was moved by crews to the location where it stands today.
- 1944 The Forest Service begins a campaign stating "Only YOU can prevent forest fires" using a fire-injured bear as a symbol to be careful. Today, [Smokey Bear](#) is one of the most widely recognized icons in America.
- 1946–1960 National forests experience increased demand on forest resources, especially timber and recreation.
- 1960–1980 in response to shifting public values, the Forest Service shifts focus to managing land as integrated systems, instead of individual resources.
- 1996 on October 30, arsonist burned down what was then called the Oakridge Ranger District office. The fire completely destroyed the 25,000 square foot office along with decades worth of historical forest service records.
(Fortunately the author was given the historic photos and other documents included in this story by then FS archeologist, Carol Winkler.)

Origin of the Name “Taylor Burn” in Willamette National Forest

The name **Taylor Burn** comes from early 19th-century sheepherding activity in the area. In the 1890s, **Joseph Taylor** began regularly grazing his sheep in the region that would later become part of the Waldo Lake Wilderness and the Willamette National Forest [Highway 58 Herald](#).

According to Oakridge District Ranger Corley B. “Big Mac” McFarland, Taylor claimed that the first time he saw the country, it was “a very old burn” — referring to a long-standing fire scar in the landscape. The area’s persistence of bunchgrasses, beargrass, and huckleberries indicated it was an old Indian prairie that had been used and periodically burned by local Tribes for centuries [Highway 58 Herald](#).

Sheepherders like Taylor followed these traditional burning practices to rejuvenate the shrubs and grasses for their stock and pack animals. As the **Cascade Range Forest Reserve** was established in 1893 (later becoming part of the Willamette National Forest), the area was formally designated “Taylor Burn” due to its association with Joseph Taylor’s grazing operations and the huckleberry fields that became a notable feature [Highway 58 Herald](#).

The earliest printed mention of “Taylor Burn” appears in the 1919 Forest Service promotional booklet *Vacationland: The National Forests in Oregon*, which listed it alongside Waldo Lake and Odell Lake as a favorite camping spot [Highway 58 Herald](#).

In short, the name honors Joseph Taylor’s role in the area’s early settlement and grazing history, and reflects the long tradition of fire-management practices that shaped the landscape. [US Forest Service](#)

1919 Huckleberry Patch Campground

The fire history of the Charlton Butte area begins in the 1890s, when Joseph Taylor began regularly grazing his sheep there. According to Corley B. “Big Mac” McFarland, the Oakridge District Ranger from 1924 to 1946, Taylor claimed “the first time he ever saw the country, it was a very old burn.”

The widespread persistence of bunchgrasses, beargrass, and huckleberries in the area to this time indicates that Taylor was grazing his sheep on an old Indian prairie that had likely been used and harvested — and regularly burned — by local Tribes for many centuries.

Shepherders followed the practices of those that had preceded them and continued to burn these lands in order to rejuvenate the shrubs and grasses to feed their stock and pack animals.

With the establishment of “Camp Edith” by John Waldo, the lake’s namesake, in 1889, Waldo Lake became an increasingly popular destination for campers traveling by pack trail from Oakridge or arriving by the Skyline Trail in later years.

Soon, competition for forage between shepherders and recreational pack trains began to create conflicts, and in eastern Oregon vigilante “sheep shooters” were killing sheep by the thousands and occasionally even murdering shepherders because of conflicts with cattle grazing.

The creation of federal “Forest Reserves” in the 1890s was done in large part to help resolve the differences between sheepmen and cattlemen — and recreationists — with the 1896 Cascade Range Forest Reserve being a significant result. This latter creation included “Taylor Burn” and its increasingly popular huckleberry fields.

The 1897 Organic Act was adopted the following year to guide the management of the new Reserves. This Act famously stated that: “No public forest reservation shall be established, except to improve and protect the forest within the reservation,” and “for the purpose of preserving the living and growing timber and promoting the younger growth on forest reservations.”

In 1905, management of the Reserves was transferred to the Department of Agriculture with the creation of the US Forest Service, whose mission was “to provide the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run.”

The earliest known printed mention of Taylor Burn is in the 1919 Forest Service promotional booklet, “Vacationland: The National Forests in Oregon” which states:

“All points of interest in this region are less than two days by trail from Oakridge. Waldo Lake, Odell Lake, and the Huckleberry Patch are all favorite camping places. Horse feed is abundant at Odell Lake, but campers at Waldo Lake should either carry horse feed or arrange to take their stock to the Huckleberry Patch in Taylor Burn, 4 miles north of Waldo Lake. At this place the Forest Service has set aside an area for the use of campers. Many parties from both sides of the Cascades pick huckleberries here during September of each year.”

According to Rakestraw and Rakestraw’s 1991 “History of the Willamette National Forest,” in 1922 nearly 41,000 acres of the Forest were available for grazing; by 1932 this number

had been reduced to 38,000 acres. Research studies in 1933 and 1934 indicated that tree seedlings were encroaching on rangeland at the rate of 2.5 percent per year.

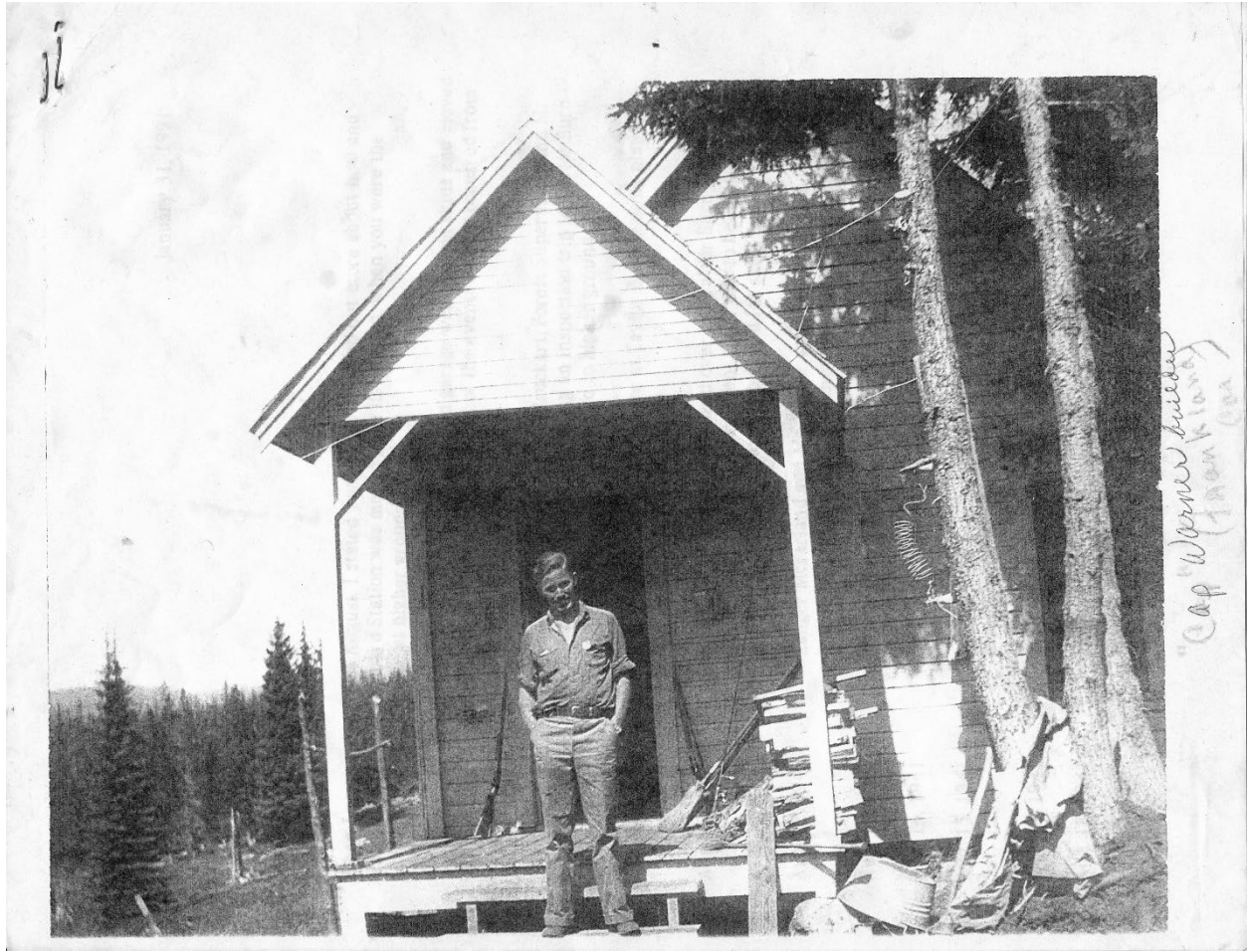
The authors quote a local packer who had occupied the same range for 30 years as saying: "You've got a natural tree country here and not a grass country." Camps which had formerly supplied 30 days grazing now could supply 16 days at most; meadows formerly covered with grass now had a stand of lodgepole pine six feet high.

By 1945 the grazing activity, which had once been the dominant economic activity in the Willamette National Forest, was ending. By 1946 the Waldo Lake area was closed to sheep but not to cattle, as was use of the road to Odell Lake and Rigdon.

By 1968, the Waldo Lake recreation area was opened to the public. A 12 mile paved road connected the lake with Highway 58 and was built well back from the shoreline in order to preserve scenic values.

Historic Photos

The following photos are copies of original black and white photographs taken by Mac Mckenzie and other early FS guards who helped build the Taylor Burn cabin and patrol the forest in the Waldo Lake region. They also helped man and maintain the Waldo Mountain lookout. (I believe that all the original photos and documentation of the Taylor Burn and Waldo area were destroyed when arsonists burned down what was then known as the Oakridge Ranger District office on October 30, 1996.) Using modern technology I was able to colorize some of the photos.



Mac McKenzie took this photo of Cap Warner, one of the young men who built the guard station. Probably taken around 1933.



Cap Warden building
Hawkins (CA)

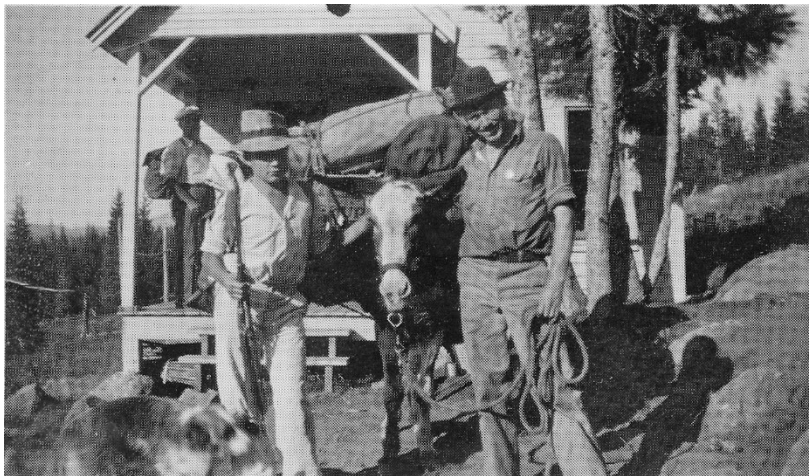
Here is the photo colorized. Today this area is a heavy forest with little grass, but the foundations of the station and garage are still there as are the three hemlock trees shown in the photo. Near these trees is the rock where Mack McKenzie inscribed his name and the years he was up there.



Here is the rock that Mac helped me find when he visited me at the guard station in the summer of 1994.



This is Mac and me back when he visited me at the guard station. He passed away only a few years later.



Here is the crew getting ready to head out onto the many trails up there. Approx.. 1933



The guard station was very close to Mud Lake where there was lots of grass for the animals as well as water. Approx. 1933



The station and garage at the original Mud Lake location. Approx. 1933



Same photo colorized.



Pack train heading out from the Mud Lake site. Approx. 1933



Same photo colorized.



Pack train at Waldo Lake near Dam Camp. Approx.. 1933



Waldo Mountain Lookout. Approx. 1933





TAYLOR BURN GUARD STATION 1925

704-2524

The date on this photo is incorrect. This photo was taken in 1941 after the cabin and garage were moved to its new location where it stands today. The Western White Pine that sits between the station and garage still occupies its spot as a large and stately pine.



The small Douglas Fir growing on the north side of the station also is still standing, but as a much larger tree. Right next to the photographer is the spring where a filter box was installed for the rangers to get their water.