Then and Now: Memories of Places in Washington County and Surrounding Communities

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What location does this material highlight or represent? *

Pine Valley Ranger District, Dixie National Forest,

What location would you like to share a memory about? (Please focus on one location per entry) *

Pine Valley, Utah/Pine Valley Ranger District

This location is associated with which of the following regions:

- [x] Washington County, UT
- [ ] Kane County, UT
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Share with us a memory of the location: *

Pine Valley Trail Crew memories
By Loren Webb
My experiences working as a seasonal employee on the Pine Valley Mountain trail crew of the Pine Valley Ranger District, Dixie National Forest, U.S. Forest Service during the summer of 1976 and 1977 were memorable because of the opportunity to work closely with one supervisor and a few other co-workers in the rugged backcountry beauty of Pine Valley Mountain's Summit Trail network.
I kept no journal of my work during the summer of 1976. What I remember of that summer is that I worked directly under Trail Crew Supervisor Norm Blake and with co-worker DelRoy Ruesch.
We worked out of the Pine Valley Ranger District office, located in the Federal Building, 196 East Tabernacle in St. George. My overall supervisor was District Ranger Rance Rollins and the office manager was Marilyn Squires.
If I remember right, I was hired as a GSA 3 employee with a starting salary of $3.03 an hour, which I thought was a pretty good summer wage back then.
I reported to the Pine Valley Work Center, 132 East Center Street in Pine Valley on Monday morning. And most weeks, the three of us would saddle up Forest Service horses kept at the Work Center and head up various trails that accessed Pine Valley Mountain. I was assigned to ride "Blackie," a dark-colored quarter horse.
We carried pruners for pruning overhanging tree limbs on Forest Service trails. We also carried pulaskis that looked like an axe on one end and a hoe on the other end. We used these to chop larger bushes or branches and to move rocks that impeded Forest Service trails.
Norm Blake, who also owned a ranch on the Arizona Strip, also used pack horses that carried metal panniers for transporting all of our food for the week we would be on Pine Valley Mountain, along with dutch ovens, gas-powered chain saws, two-stroke fuel and chaps when operating the chain saw. The panniers also carried grain for the horses, along with metal hobbles for hobbling the horses at camp so they would not run off. The panniers also carried our tents and sleeping bags for sleeping overnight on the mountain. DelRoy and I wore long or short-sleeved shirts, denim pants and hiking shoes with Vibram soles.
Usually, on Monday morning, Norm would go shopping at the Snow IGA store at 37 East 100 North (St. George Boulevard), buying bacon, eggs, and hash browns for breakfast, lunch meat and bread for lunch, and steak, hamburger, potatoes, carrots, onions and other vegetables for dinner. The supplies needed to last the three to four nights we would be working on the mountain.
We would then set out for some section of the vast Summit Trail system on Pine Valley Mountain.
Many times we would stay at either Further Water, Whipple Valley or Anderson Valley where we would set up camp, let the hobbled horses graze and Norm would cook up a steak or hamburger dinner.
Many times, DelRoy and I would clear trails on foot. Other times, when we needed to get to a camp site by evening, we pruned overhead tree branches while riding on horses. We wore hard hat helmets for protection from falling rocks or tree branches or whenever we removed dead and down brush or when Norm used explosives to loosen up rock formations that impeded trail access.
During the first part of the summer, Norm, DelRoy and I worked to improve the Forsythe Trail. I also worked with Norm Blake, Dan Talbot and Craig Hafen the following summer of 1977 along various sections of the same trail.
Because it was so rocky and slick, especially for horses, Norm received permission for us to drill large holes in rocks scattered above and to the west side of a stream bed. Once we had drilled the holes using a gas-powered drill, Norm, who was a licensed explosives expert with the U.S. Forest Service, walked to each of the drilled holes and put in plastic explosives. He then told DelRoy and myself to take the horses several hundred yards up the canyon so we would be clear and protected when he set off the explosives.

Then we heard him yell some kind of warning, such as “Fire in the hole,” and then a huge explosion sent rocks flying in all directions.
Our next task was to move all of the broken rock and smooth out a trail that horses and hikers could use afterwards.
When we encountered downed aspen or ponderosa pine trees on the trail, Norm would take out the chain saw and within a half hour to 45 minutes, he had the tree cut up so that DelRoy and I could remove the cut off logs from off the trail, and we could proceed to the next downed tree obstruction. We were allowed to use the chain saws on the mountain because this was prior to Pine Valley being designated a Wilderness Area by Congress in 1984.
Because we were on the mountain for most of the week, and were isolated from the rest of the world, I decided to pack a large transistor radio in one of the saddlebags on my horse. I usually listened to the radio station KSUB in Cedar City, since that station seemed to be heard all over Pine Valley Mountain.
Some of the top hits in 1976 were “If You Leave Me Now,” by Chicago, “Silly Love Songs” by Wings, “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart” by Elton John and Kiki Dee, “December 1963” by the Four Seasons, “New Kid in Town,” by the Eagles and “Afternoon Delight” by the Starland Vocal Band .
In 1977, some of the hits were “Torn Between Two Lovers,” by Mary MacGregor, and “Southern Nights” by Glen Campbell. Country hits in 1976 were “I'm a Stand by My Woman Man” by Ronnie Milsap, and “Let Your Love Flow” by the Bellemy Brothers. Other Country hits in 1977 were “It Was Almost Like a Song” by Ronnie Milsap and “Luckenbach, Texas” by Waylon Jennings, that I remember listening to.
Usually, we were on the mountain until Thursday evening when we came off the mountain so that I could participate in an LDS softball game in St. George that usually started either at 8 or 9:15 p.m., on a ball field west of Dixie High School or at the Elks Field at 250 East and 100 South (where Legacy Elementary School is now located).
Then I would drive back to Pine Valley and arrive at the Work Center by 8 a.m. and usually help with cleaning restrooms and making other improvements in the Pine Valley Recreation Area throughout the day. DelRoy and I usually worked under the supervision of Clifford Dean, a Dixie College professor, who worked summers for the Forest Service.
We also might do trail maintenance work that was close to Pine Valley and then quit at 4:30 p.m. after taking a half hour lunch.
On nights I didn’t have a softball game, I would stay overnight in the Forest Service cabin located directly north of the Pine Valley Reservoir. A paved road from the main road into the Pine Valley Recreation Area led to the one-room ranger cabin, (located just north of the Pine Valley Reservoir), which had no electrical power. I loved this cabin. During the early evening, I would take a sleeping bag and spread it out on the front outside covered porch. I would then sit on top of it while reading a book (such as the Life of Heber C. Kimball by Orson F. Whitney). I would read until it got dark, then I would go inside, turn on the propane lantern and read for another hour before going to bed around 10 p.m. I got a number of books read using this format.
Sometimes, in the evening, there would be these tremendous lightning and thunderstorms in Pine Valley that would last for several hours. The lightning would light up the entire valley and the thunder storms would ricochet and reverberate down through the valley so loudly that it was deafening, at times.
I loved it.
I remember also helping to erect barbed wire fencing under Norm’s expert guidance somewhere near Gray’s Ranch and Grass Valley.
Trails we maintained on the Pine Valley Ranger District during the summer of 1976 and 1977 included Gardner Peak Trail, Whipple Valley Trail, Brown’s Point Trail to Summit Trail, Water Canyon Trail, Mill Flat Trail, White Rocks Trail, Forsythe Trail, Blake-Gubler Trail, Anderson Valley Trail, New Harmony Trail, Browse Trail, Wet Sandy Trail, Oak Grove Trail, and Dan Spring Trail, among others.
My first year with the Forest Service, I was also called out on Sunday morning, July 25, 1976 by Forest Service supervisor Benton Smith with the Pine Valley Ranger District office to go to a forest fire on Pine

Valley Mountain. He told us we would only be out during the day and that we wouldn't need any sleeping bags or tents.
How wrong that prediction turned out to be!
We didn't get the fire out until late in the evening. Because we had no sleeping bags or tents or extra food, we had to keep a campfire going throughout the night to keep warm and we resorted to putting horse blankets over us for warmth. Luckily, Jerry (Gerald) Smith, who was over Special Uses in the Forest, had one granola bar he shared with the rest of us by breaking it into several pieces.
Overall, it was a miserable night, and my Trail Maintenance Supervisor Norm Blake had warned that we should have taken the extra supplies. But Benton Smith didn't listen.
I never wanted to go on another fire with Benton Smith.
I believe there was one more time we had to go on another fire on Pine Valley Mountain. It was about 10 p.m.,when we started down the mountain on our horses. It was pretty dark and you could barely see the trail. We let our horses find their way down off the mountain which took about two hours to get back down to the valley floor.
Then either the evening of Aug. 6, or the early morning hours of Aug. 7, 1976, I was notified by Pine Valley Ranger District office manager Marilyn Squires that I was needed on a large forest fire in northern Utah. She instructed me that I needed to travel to Enterprise to meet my Forest Service supervisor Morris Dannelly to travel in school buses or government buses to Mona, Utah to fight a forest fire. About 40 of us from the Dixie National Forest arrived in Mona at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 7, 1976. We were to be housed at a fire camp at Mona City Park where we were to be fed and bed down for the night.
The next morning, Sunday, Aug. 8, 1976 at 6 a.m., we were transported by bus to a base camp located on the east side of Interstate 15 where four helicopters were used to airlift myself and others from the mountain base to the fire burning out of control between 5,000 and 8,000 foot elevations.
I remember that helicopter ride well.
Those of us on that ride were flown to an outcropped landing area on the side of the mountain. Because the helicopter shook so much because of heavy wind currents, my legs were shaking pretty bad by the time I got dropped off. Then the next several hours were spent using a pulaski, cutting up burning debris and putting out hot spots. Later in the afternoon, after gaining control of the fire, we exhaustedly sat down and looked out over the valley and Interstate 15.
According to a Salt Lake Tribune Sunday, Aug. 8, 1976 news article, "Six bulldozers were also used to battle the fire's lower portion.
The fire, which started Friday, Aug. 6, 1976 at 4:30 p.m., in the Mona garbage dump, was aided by 35 mile per hour wind, which raced east of the Mona City limits to the mountains and canyons of the rough and steep terrain of Mt. Nebo.
By Saturday afternoon, it had consumed 745 acres of private and state land and 295 acres of the Uinta National Forest, forest officials said.
In the Mona fire's extremely rough terrain, which supports elk and deer herds and is a major nesting area for eagles and hawks, the fire's perimeter had to be worked by men with shovels and axes.
Marvin Newell of the Ashley National Forest, who was manning the Mona fire camp headquarters on Saturday, Aug. 7, 1976, said there were 155 smokejumpers in service, including the 40 of us who arrived that afternoon from the Dixie National Forest. Smokejumpers were pulled in from the Wasatch, Ashley, Manti-LaSal, Fishlake, Boise, Sawtooth and Payette national forests as well as 20 smokejumpers from Region 1 in Missoula, Mont.and McCall, Idaho, plus three air tankers, including a B-17, B-26 and C-119 carrying fire retardant from the Salt Lake Airport, assisted fighting the fire on Mt. Nebo's west slope.
On Friday, Aug. 6, the day the fire began, fire fighters came from the Juab County Sheriff's Jeep Patrol, the Utah Highway Patrol and volunteer fire departments of Nephi, Mona, Santaquin, Payson and Goshen.
At the peak of the fire fighting effort, some 220 firefighters battled the blaze on Mt. Nebo, and I was one of them.

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Pine Valley Rang... Pine Valley Rang... Pine Valley Rang... Pine Valley Rang... Forest Service pi...

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1976. I took all five of the photos.

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Photo 1: Pine Valley Ranger District crew boss Norm Blake and Trail Crew member Jim Bayer chat at campsite at Mill Flat on Pine Valley Mountain. Summer 1976. Photo by Loren Webb
Photo 2: Loren Webb, Pine Valley Ranger District trail crew member looks out from the barn at the Forest Service Work Center (now Heritage Center). Summer 1976. Photo by DelRoy Ruesch.
Photo 3: Forest Service picnic at Pine Valley group picnic area. Left to Right, Charlotte Berg, Norm Blake, Ron Garner, Clifford Dean and Perry Pickering. Summer 1976. Photo by Loren Webb
Photo 4: Pine Valley Ranger District Trail Crew member Loren Webb, with hard hat, works on Summit Trail. Notice his Forest Service horse in background. Summer 1976. Photo by DelRoy Ruesch.
Photo 5: Pine Valley Ranger District crew member DelRoy Ruesch, Supervisor Norm Blake and Forest Service employee Jim Bayer chat at end of work day on Pine Valley Mountain. Summer 1976. Photo by Loren Webb
Photo 3:

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