

## The Moose Creek Project (Nez Perce National Forest)

By Bobs Whaley (MSO '56) and Cushing (MSO '59)

Flying into historic Moose Creek Ranger Station was a thrill for all of us. As every jumper knows, the station played a significant role in smokejumper history and was the sight of the first fire jump at Martin Creek, a two-manner by Rufus Robinson and Earl Cooley on July 12, 1940. Perhaps less well known, Moose Creek was also where John Rolf (MSO '57) and Gary Williams (MSO '59) died in a Tri-Motor Ford crash along with forest Supervisor Alva Blackerby on August 4, 1959. Rolf and Williams are two of the 30 smokejumpers who have died in the line of duty. Walking through the crash site was a somber moment for everyone and all the more so for Roland Pera (MSO '56) who was at Moose Creek at the time of the crash.

The main objective on this trip was to tear down a decrepit drift fence and replace it with about 1200 feet of jackleg fence to provide a pasture and to keep stock off the landing strip. About 300 feet of fencing had been constructed by district personnel the previous year.



The last nail was hammered home at 5:05 PM on the last day. The fence was still standing when we left Moose creek but had not been put to the Tank test.

Although he has the appearance of a Grangeville jumper wearing a ROOKIE R-1 shirt, Tank is a mule that has a habit of breaking through any fence known to man.

A secondary goal was to bundle debris from the dismantling of Seminole Ranch and haul it across Moose Creek via a Rube Goldberg flying fox contraption and load it on a wagon pulled by two mules (no one we know) that hauled it up to a dump site near the landing strip for USFS aircraft to fly out when deadheading back to base. The ranch is a former private in-holding of approximately 42 acres transferred by its recent owners, The Conservation Fund, in 2003-04. The ranch has several buildings including a beautiful barn full of old growth lumber. The long-term plan is to return the ranch to wilderness status and as managed as part of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area. We did meet the District's weight target for hauling sufficient debris in the time allotted, but no matter how we gussie it up, we were hauling garbage. With all those years of education amongst us, wouldn't our mothers be proud?

Larry Nelsen (MSO '56), Roland Pera (MSO '56), J B Stone (MSO '56), Bob Whaley (MSO '56), Bob Cushing (MSO '59), Dennis Pearson (MSO '62), and Jim Phillips (MSO '69) flew into Moose Creek on the Grangeville jumpers' Twin Otter.



The cook, Dick Hula (MSO '??), flew in his own aircraft, something that looked, appropriately, like a Dutch oven with a spatula as a control stick. He certainly was the workingest cook we have ever had on project. Bob Shumaker (MSO '59) flew in for a day in a Cessna 172 loaded with brownies and beer and put in a good day's work as well. The fencing was flown in on the MSO Sherpa, which took out a load of trash on the return trip. It all brought back a lot of memories, some of them good.



Special thanks go to Randy Nelson (Jumper Base Manager at Grangeville), Eddie Ward (Base Manager in Missoula), Nels Jensen (MSO '62 and current Grangeville pilot), Suzanne Cable (Moose Creek Wilderness Manager), Anna Bengston (Moose Creek Wilderness Ranger) and her staff and a number of summer volunteers including

Gordon Pfister and his wife Bunny (?) (Volunteer Hosts at Moose Creek). Without their support, the project would have been tougher than it was, particularly the 27 mile walkout to Fenn Ranger Station that we avoided by going airborne. Special thanks to Bob Shumaker for flying in the brownies and beer, the only criticisms being the brownies should be a bit older and taller next time 'round and the beer a bit colder.



The crew who survived the ordeal claimed to have had a great time. Although Nelsen did catch a three-inch fish, the most memorable and undeniably high point of the evenings was when we all gathered around the campfire to celebrate the passing of Jeremiah Weed.