



Snow Survey Centennial Celebration 1906-2006

Excerpts from the diary of Paul Willmore

Introduction by Mike Bricco:

When I first started with the Snow Survey Program 16 months ago, I had no idea of what to expect. In my short time with the program, my experiences have made me realize that every day can be another adventure. Most of the snow sites that we maintain are very tricky to get to even with fairly new, 21st century vintage four wheel drive pick-ups with sixteen inch tires, four wheel ATVs, winches, chain saws, GPS's, satellite phones, and detailed maps. If we're lucky, the dirt road is wider than the truck and the washouts are passable. The adversities of nature create interesting obstacles to overcome and each visit is always different from the last.

Imagine if you will, driving a 1930's vintage Ford on roads much worse than today, without all the helpful gadgets we carry or the abundant places to stay. The price of gas was twenty three cents a gallon and quarts of oil were always needed. Two early day snow surveyors, Paul Willmore and Dee Fraughton mapped, measured, and leveled over 80 snow courses in the summer and fall of 1936. They cleared trees and brush from these snow courses with hand saws, shovels and axes.

Paul Willmore was, in 1936, establishing and maintaining the Utah snow courses. He typed a diary of his experiences. The first excerpt is just a brief look at how methodical he was. He maintained this meticulous nature throughout his diary, annotating everything from replacing tires, renting a cabin for 50 cents, buying a 40 cent meal, to a 10 cent phone call. I would like to share with you some of his passages. Some of the entries were shortened to give you, as the reader, more of feeling of the era and of what Mr. Willmore and Mr. Fraughton experienced going to and while at the snow courses. The excerpts contain the original spelling, but I omitted the logistical and mapping entries for the most part.



Mill D South Fork. Paul Willmore

Diary:

6/13/36

Dee Fraughton and I left for Franklin Basin Ranger Station at 3:50 P.M. in the U.S.D.A., (Ford), No. 23-356. The mileage at Logan, when we bought 9 gallons of gas, 2 quart cans of oil and one 50 cent repair kit, was 49418.

Our first stop was at Tony Grove Ranger Station. We marked the 132" one-piece aluminum snow tube (which was at the station) No. 5003. Other snow sampling equipment consists only of two slings. One sling belonged to B.A.E., and the other to the Utah Experiment Station. The B.A.E. sling was marked No. 405 to correspond to the unmarked B.A.E. tube and scales; while the Experiment Station sling was marked 5003 to correspond with the snow tube we left at the Tony Grove Ranger Station.

We encountered much difficulty in traveling from Tony Grove to Franklin Basin. Four Major stream crossings in high water and one mud hole constituted our major troubles. We spent 1.5 hours engineering ourselves and especially the car out of a mud hole just on the north side of the second stream crossing. The road, ground, and stream discharge indicates that the snow has just melted off of the Franklin Basin Valley.

Our next major difficulty was the removing of fallen trees from the road. With absolutely no exaggeration hundreds of thousands of aspen trees have been overturned in this section. Probably heavy snow, some thawing, a damp ground, and then strong wind caused this.

We found the cabin in fairly good shape when we arrived at 9:30. It is adequate for the snow surveying parties that come here once a year near April the first.

I close the book for tonight. Right now it is five minutes to eleven; its very dark outside, and rather cool—but not cold—more inclined to be damp and warm.

6/15/36-continued

...The dreaded carnivorous animal, namely the mosquito, has caused great discomfort in our camp. The hills are the homes of these beasts. I believe these mosquitoes have been under intensive training for the Olympics; a thought well verified by the large drills each carries around and which handles excellently. (I wouldn't care if they all did go to Germany). However, the Bear Lake Country has developed a double-barreled mosquito of tremendous proportions. This will be amplified by some swimming and camping fans this summer.

6/16/36

Today was a day in which we got our test of physical preparedness to travel vertical and horizontal distances. At 6:30 A.M. Dee and I put our packs, containing wrenches, axes, bolts, lunches, paint, brushes, stencils, and snow course signs, ect., on our backs and steadily climbed to Tony Grove Lake. On the way up, we put up a mile sign on a 10" aspen just above the crotch of the forks which is 3.5 miles from Tony Grove Lake. I should have been a monkey while I was trying to screw this mile sign on the aspen. With my only support consisting of my legs wrapped and clamped around this limbless tree, and with my arms trying to handle a hammer, wrench, axe, and a snow course sign all at the same interval of time you would have thought I was a monkey. But to my chagrin that familiar evolutionary family instinct left me and I dropped to the ground and gasped for more sparks of grip.



Tony Grove Lake. Paul Willmore

However, our trip to the lake was pleasant. It is only a 4.5 or 5 mile hike one way. Some very large units are left near the eastern exposure at the summit. The soil is moist all around the lake and in fact on all the ground surface on the mountains.

6/24/36-continued

...We were welcome in old fashion style to stay at Trial Lodge, which according to me is a wholesome display of western hospitality.

In our discussion with Mr. Clegg (Provo Reservoir Company, who measures this snow course) he recommended that next winter's supply list for the snow survey include one quart of Old Boston Whiskey. He says he has asked for this in the past years; but now you must not mistake the supposed use he wants this for. This Old Boston is wanted to help in curing snake bites and to limber up sore muscles, ect., which you may deem as rightfully so according to Mr. Clegg!

6/29/36

...After the Aspen Grove Course was finished, we drove down to the YLMIA Site Snow Course. Here we thought we would be through in about two hours, because no clearing was needed, and because we could put the four B.A.E. Snow Course Markers on trees. However, Dee thought he might as well drive the Gov't Ford across the Lower South Fork of the Provo River so that we would be closer to the course and proceed faster with our work. But, when the car was half way thru, the wheels spun and left the car in the middle. The water in the river was moving fast, probably about 7 or 8 feet per second, and as soon as the car was stopped it dammed up against the drivers side of the car and came splashing in thru the windows and up thru the floor boards. Well, Dee would have sold his estate for nothing at that instant—with the water dashing around the car, some going through the windows, the motor inundated, and the thoughts that the car belonged to the government all going through his mind—while I was on the other side looking about as worried. However, I got a shovel and decided I might as well go up the river and see if I could divert the water down another channel. I found two possible sites that would have taken us about 4 or 5 days to dig out, but that seems too wasteful of time, so I went back to the car. I had another idea, why couldn't we widen the stream and run the major part of the water down by the bank near the front of the car? Well, thank goodness, this worked. But it took us two hours and then some to make it work. After much prying with the cro-bar and spinning of the wheels (we got the water off the motor) the car was finally backed-up to dry land.

The sun had gone down an hour ago when we got the car out, but we hurried, so we could level and map YLMIA Site Snow Course before it was too dark. We succeeded in doing this, but we had to use the flashlight to place the markers on the trees. We were so thankful because we still had our Ford that climbing the trees and putting markers on delighted us.

...After we had finished the work on the YLMIA Site Snow Course, we drove back to Aspen Grove, to the Divide, and then down to Cave Camp. When we got to Cave Camp it was mid-night, and Thos. A. Walker was in bed. (I promised to come back to see him because he wanted to get what information we had). Therefore all we could do was to keep going, which we did.

We were Logan bound. While in Salt Lake City 10 gallons of gas were purchased. From then on, it was straight-ahead to Logan. We got in Logan about 3:30 A.M. and was still glad that the Gov't Ford No. 23-356 was not in the Lower South Fork of the Provo River.

7/12/36.

Today I tried to find out why the Gov't Ford never functioned properly—that is, why only 2 cylinders worked. Well, the spark plugs were cleaned and checked o.k. and the new distributor never done any good, so I still have to find out what is wrong before any long trips are taken. We bought 11.3 gallons of gas and one quart of oil at the Pikes Peak Garage in Heber after the above tests were made.

Three mile signs were put up: 1st 1.8 miles west of Lower Redden Mine, 2nd 1.0 miles west of Lower Redden Mine, and the 3rd 0.5 miles west of Upper Redden Mine.

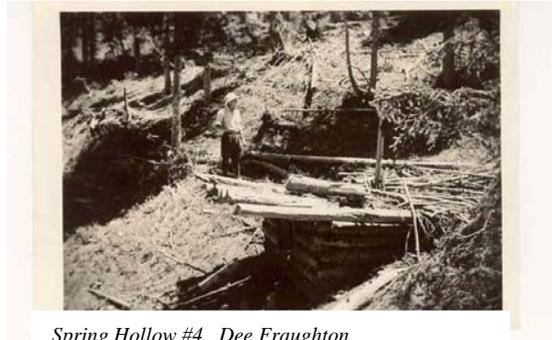
Tonight we are sleeping in Joseph Andrus' barn. We cooked supper, etc., in the barn, also. Joseph Andrus invited us to stay in the house, but we thought it would be just as well that we sleep here in the barn as in the house—because there would be no cramping of ourselves or of them.

Well, a few weeks ago I had the pleasure of sleeping with rats; tonight I will be a quest to a great family of mice.

We are sleeping in the barn because all the mountains (parks and campgrounds) are wet. We could sleep in a hotel, but that costs money, and I would just as leave sleep in a barn. The loft in this barn has lots of hay, so everything will turn out just "hunk-a-dory".

7/16/36-continued

...After all had been done, we plodded towards the edge of the cliffs in the black of night. We didn't know which canyon was which canyon, so with some agreement we finally decided it would be best if we sat up until day-break. And so we did. But sure enough we got cold, so a fire was built. A large dead pine furnished the fuel for the fire. We would build up a rather hot fire and then move back so we wouldn't get burned, and then the fire would die down and we would get closer too it. Thus, like a bellows of the old blacksmith, we would come close to the fire when it was cool and go far away when it was hot. Like many laws our distance from the fire varied directly as the hotness of it.



Spring Hollow #4. Dee Fraughton

After we bucked around on the rocks and in the dirt from 10:00 P.M. 9/7/16/36) to 4:00 A.M. (7/17/36), the morning rays of the sun gave us enough light to see which way we were suppose to go.

8/23/36

...When we had traveled approximately 35 mile from Monticello we stopped and ate supper. One can of tomatoes and a loaf of bread was the menu we ordered. This was soon stored away and again we were on the way to Moab.

...A swarm of small mosquitoes along with low atmospheric temperatures made our nights sleep a period of unrest. This is the first time in my life that I have been at this low of an elevation—4000 feet above sea level. If the density of mosquitoes and the increase of temperature were directly proportional to the altitude (as it seems in south-eastern Utah) than I am sure California or any sea coast town would be a dreadful place to stay. But this couldn't be the case—for we all know that our sun-kissed California is the Garden of Eden as compared to the rest of the world—(At least they advertise it to be so).

Closing remarks:

Paul Willmore and Dee Fraughton had many interesting experiences during the summer and fall of 1936. Some other stories include, flipping a coin to see who gets the bed or hay bale, taking in a 10 cent movie after a long day, and going down to a local pub to have a beer because the water lines in the town are filled with mud from a recent storm.

I will leave you with this last quote from Paul Willmore, written September 15, 1936. "Just a desire for knowledge and fact should be the only force or motive behind any research work, such as snow surveying, which may eventually or presently develop into one of the most valuable basic data collected today".

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