



The following account is taken from the Snow Survey Notes of the Utah Data Collection Office, penned in 1936 by Wade Nielsen. The original spelling and grammar have been preserved in this reproduction.

Monte Cristo Snow Course, 1936.

Snow Surveys are made in the mountainous country once each year, usually about April 1st.

I was asked to make the survey on Monte Cristo Ranger Station, Blake Ranger Station, and Blacksmith Fork snow surveys this year. This country lies southeast of Logan, between Cache Valley and Evanston, Wyoming.

Mr. Rice, the forest ranger in this district, took Norman Peterson, Marion Norton and myself on March 23, to Woodruff Canyon to a ranch, there Mr. Rice left us and returned home.

The three of us stayed in a sheep camp, as the ranch house was what you might call a portable house, only part of it was standing. The sheep camp was o.k. except the bed was rather crowded, and when one decided to turn over all three had to turn. We awakened at daylight due to the comfortable night's rest, cooked breakfast, and was off up Woodruff Canyon southwest toward Monte Cristo Ranger Station with a pack apiece, and about 75 pounds of supplies on a hand sleigh.

The traveling was good for about twelve miles, then we encountered new snow, and our hardships commenced. The sleigh would sink making it almost impossible to pull, especially on a stiff grade like it was. The wind had started up about 90, and it started to hail. After about an hour of this we could hardly take a step because of exhaustion and therefore decided to hole up for the night. We had shovels with us to clean off the snow on the Ranger Station, so we dug a hole in the snow. I didn't think there was much snow there, but when the hole was dug it was about 8 feet deep. Because we did not have an axe we were forced to break what wood we used.

It was cold, and after starting a fire in the hole we decided to eat, as we had had nothing since breakfast. The meal was started by throwing a can of beans and a can of tomatoes on the fire. While these were warming up we sat down and discussed the amount of hours we would have to spend this way before daylight, in order to start traveling again, when all at once --boom! boom! -- I looked at Norton and saw red running down his face. I thought at first that we had built the fire on an

old shell, until I saw beans all over me. Then I knew we had forgotten to punch holes in the cans.

After this tragedy we opened a can of beans and had cold beans on bread, and then melted snow in the bean can to make coffee, each taking turns on the coffee. This procedure was followed until daylight, about 14 hours, all because of the fact that we had no cooking utensils, which we were to get at the ranger station. Sleep was out of the question as we had no guns for protection and were all scared and had to keep the fire going.

When daylight broke we decided we had to big a load to carry and so we buried the larger part in a snow bank, and taking a small pack apiece, left in search of the Monte Cristo Ranger Station.

About noon we found a hunting lodge, entered this, leaving a blinding blizzard, and had dinner. The blizzard did not let up so when we were warm once again we took off in the storm. We got on one range of mountains that was east of the Monte Cristo Ranger Station and we traveled up and down this range going north and south for a distance of about 8 miles. We didn't have any luck finding the ranger station. We started west towards the other range of mountains. Accidentally run across the trail that led to the ranger station. Just about dark Wednesday night we stumbled onto the road leading to the station and reached our goal about 9:00 that night. The station was almost covered with snow, but we finally tunneled in, dead tired.

We slept the clock around to the next morning and didn't feel so good after seeing how the building was pushed out of shape, due to the snow on the roof. We then left to recover what provisions we had buried in the snow bank, and to our astonishment had to travel about 16 miles to get them to the station. The weather was fairly clear when we left, but after about two miles from the ranger station we were overtaken by another storm. We were expecting to get back in about six hours, but we didn't get back until about 10:00 that night, due to the storm.

After practically fasting for three days we decided to catch up, and as soon as we would get through eating, would wash the dishes and cormence cooking again.

Friday Petersen and Norton went over to a C.C.C. Camp to clean the snow off the buildings, which was only 1 1/2 blocks north of the station. I was the only one having a compass, so I took it and went out to make the snow survey. I had some trouble finding it and didn't get back until 3:00 p.m. When I returned Petersen and Norton had not been back. I immediately set out to look for them.

As I went over a ridge I spotted Norton, but Petersen was not with him. Petersen had some wood and started for the station. Norton had tried to follow his trail, but the storm had covered all tracks and they were both lost, only a block from the station. Norton had cut a trail, but it turned out to be his own he was following. After finding ourselves, we stuck close to the compass.

Sunday we left the station in a blizzard although we had been waiting two days for better weather and headed southwest to the Blake Ranger Station to make another snow survey. Having better luck we walked right to it. I make the survey and we left about 12:00 with 15 miles to go to reach the Hardware Ranch at the

head of Blacksmith Fork Canyon. We struck out down the hollow toward Piss Ant Valley. We got there about 1:00 p.m. and stopped and had dinner. After dinner we started toward the ranch. When within about 4 miles of the Hardware Ranch, we encountered a pack of coyotes, thirteen in number. Norton was about one-half mile ahead breaking trail and Petersen and myself were behind bringing up the sleigh. The coyotes approached us within 20 ft. and yipped and yapped at our heels and frothed at the mouth as though they were going to attack us for about two miles. We were helpless as a small hunting knife was the size of our protection.

When within about a mile of the ranch we saw about 400 head of deer going up over a hill, which looked as though the whole mountain was moving. Petersen about this time cut a ski track. He said to me, "I wonder if a posse has been looking for us", because we were then overdue about two days. He also said, "If I should see someone looking for us I would drop in my tracks and let them haul me in", and the rest of us felt about the same, as we had traveled over 20 miles that day in loose wet snow.

As we approached the Hardware Ranch, Mr. Wilson, who takes care of it, came out and said laughingly "I thought the eskimos were moving in on me." Mr. Wilson cooked us supper, which we enjoyed, as it seemed good to not have to eat our own cooking. Early next morning Norton and Myself hit up over the hill east of the Ranch and made the Blacksmith Fork snow survey and returned to the ranch about 1:00 o'clock. When we got there the cook at the ranch had made ice cream and cake which we welcomed. We decided it was too late to go to Hyrum City Power Plant so stayed at the ranch again that night.

Tuesday morning we traveled to Hyrum City Power Plant in Blacksmith Fork Canyon, arriving about noon, had dinner, and called Mr. Rice who came and got us. This was one of the toughest trip I have ever witnessed. If you don't believe it is a test for hardship try it, the pioneers have nothing on us. Wade Nielsen

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