

PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH PETE KARST
CONCERNING PETE AND THE GALLATIN CANYON

By Bill Slaughter
April 14, 1956

I was born back in Wisconsin. I left home when I was 20 years old. I went to the Coast and then went back to Minneapolis. I went back to get some money I had coming at home. I worked a couple years in Seattle before I came to Bozeman. I was going to go to Alaska but didn't make it. I had wild ideas about making money when I was young. I guess a lot of young fellas do. I ran around a lot before I came to Bozeman--that was in 1898, June I think it was. I worked for John Copp for awhile. Ya see I was a butcher by trade. Then I baled hay for F. L. Benepe for the Yellowstone Park Company. The next season I went into the gardening business up Sour Dough for two Summers. I next carried mail for a man by the name of Romine. He had the contract to carry mail from Bozeman to Salesville. I could see a future in it cuz a guy could carry people and freight too. Yes, we just went to Salesville and back at first--this was in the Spring of 1900. The route came up for bid in 1901 and I got it and started to carry the mail myself. Went as far as Salesville. I liked the country and finally got a place up at the dam about 20 miles from here. Had first summer home there. See Bill, those days we only had weekends and would go up then for a little rest. The clerks of the Golden Rule store would come up too.

Walter Cooper started his tie camp in 1902. That's how I got started up there. In the fall of 1901, I went up to look at the road and then started to haul to the tie camp in the Spring of 1902. No mail at that time--only freight. You had to carry 6 months in order to get a mail route established. I got \$2.00 a day until bids were let to carry mail to Eldridge.

Eldridge was started in 1903. There was a Post Office there. This was so long ago--I can't remember.

The road--it was just a poor wagon road cut through passes just enough to get through. There weren't no passing places. Out on the flats you could go anywhere. There wasn't no fences in those days. It took three days one way to get to Eldridge. The passengers I hauled were mainly tie hacks for the Cooper Company. He floated his logs down the Gallatin river. He had about 2 - 250 men working for him. Cooper Company was the one that paid me. The passenger charge was \$7.50 per head and 5¢ a pound for luggage over 40 pounds. The tie hacks had broad axes and a lot of tools, usually about 100 pounds apiece.

I'll tell you who Cooper resembled--he looked sorta like Harold Near--he was built like him only heavier and taller or maybe like Dean Chaffin. Cooper was elderly and very active in business. It was Cooper and Holter and Johnson that had the tie camp. W. A. Clark put up the money. They had an incorporated company. Cooper was high enough to get logs to Central Park. They didn't get their drive through for several years and went broke broke about 1907. I moved all their stuff down.

Industry--just logging was all. Later--I would say about 1907-8 we got some dude business.

I picked the spot for the Kamp because it was half way. It was a good days drive for a team of horses. For a freight outfit we took a day to go to Salesville and the second day we'd go to the ranch. The third day we'd make it to Eldridge. Fifteen-twenty miles a day was a big trip for a freight outfit. I had the route a long time except for about 8 years in the 20's. Freeland got it for 4 years. I carried mail about 40 years.

Gold--yeah they had a little at West Fork. There was nothing big. Bliss and the Agent of the Northern Pacific at Livingston--I can't remember his name--sluiced at West Fork for one summer. Never done any good--lost money on it. Tom Michner started the Gold diggins there.

Levensky was a lone prospector who had a quartz claim. Michner decided to get Levensky's claims and sell stock in the lead claim which was different from placer diggins. Their mines were unpredictable. Michner's claims were on the West side of West Fork and Levensky's claims were on the East side of West Fork. Nobody knows what they were trying to do. You'd have to find out through the Court house. Levensky killed two boys that tried to jump his claim--Miller and Stevens was their names. You see New Year's day was the day to jump claims and Levensky killed both men. I can't remember any dates. I guess somebody got Levensky. We know who got 'em but no proof. His beddin and guns were taken and found out at Gordon--that's out where the Bridger Club is now--there used to be a little town out there by that name. Bill Graylish worked for me one time--he was up there when Michner was coming down this way and claims he saw the beddin in Michners wagon. It points to Michner. No old-timers left to give any information on this now. I can't state anything cuz it's pretty touchy. I got in trouble before for saying who it was. I told Dr. McGill and she put it down in black and white and I got jumped about it. We can't come out and say who, cuz we can't prove it. Hell he was killed up there alright. Story and Anceny was backing Levensky on his prospect.

I started the asbestos mine in 1906. I just put money in it to operate and open it up. Years later I incorporated it. Twenty years later I opened it up. I done pretty well off of it in the 20's. After 1925 or 30 I sold

- 4 -

out 900 ton of asbestos for insulation. I operated it sometimes by leasing it to different firms like Law's--they had it 3 or 4 years. I used pack horses to get out the asbestos. Had 20 horses and could put 200 pounds on each horse. I called it a shift--made 2 trips a day. I had my own mill at the Ranch. I ground it up and made insulation and sold it for \$25-35 a ton. It's in a lot of houses in town here.

I had 80 head of horses up at the Ranch for the Dudes. They came from the East mostly. Oklahoma, Missouri, Chicago, Washington D. C., Kansas City, Ohio. Just summer business. We had hunters in the fall. I had camps up near the Park line.

End of the road was at Taylor's Fork. In 1911 the road was built through to West Yellowstone in the Fall. Jimmy Moore--not the one here now--built the road through. It was just a pack trail before he took it on through.

Sappington came in pretty early--don't know what year--about 1910 I guess. He drove cattle up there. Only had a few hundred head.

Devore was the sheriff here when the Security bank was robbed. The robbers got up as far as Henke's cabin. Henke was there at the time. The robbers wanted grub so Henke went to the 320 Ranch to get it. There was two of 'em--a young fella and an older fella that had a club foot. They had a regular gun battle up there. Seth Bohart did the shooting. He shot the young fella first. The sheriff got shot in the arm. Funny I can't remember the year--about 1923-4- or 5---damned if I know.

They didn't know much about skiing around here except at my place. Scorp and Les Anderson put on ski tournaments at the Ranch--they drew quite a few people. I think the first tournament was in 1936 or 7. That was before the Bridger or Bear Canyon were developed.

I retired in 1953--sold out in the Fall. It's been almost 3 years now. A fella forgets a lot of things as time goes by. There's a real future up there though--at least for a young fella that's got guts and wants to do some work and develop things. But it can be done.