



# The **Cougar Bob Review**

Volume 19, No. 1, May 2010

## **New Friends Swap Lochsa River Job Stories**

Two Bureau of Public Roads employees didn't know each other on the original Lochsa River road construction. They do now, thanks to introductions by family and friends. This summer they compared Lochsa project experiences, like men comparing hats with a bullet hole.

"I worked as instrument man in 1952 for about six years," Bob Campbell recollects. "Mostly ran transit and level to verify the route of the new road."

Terry Semanko of Coeur d'Alene, replies. "In 1958, I shoveled with the Materials Sources crew, digging holes six feet deep. We sent soil samples to the Boise materials lab for analysis, to locate suitable rock crusher sites for the road project."

In the early 1950's, the US Forest Service called for location of a 100-mile road along the Lochsa River's north bank from Lolo, MT, to Kooskia, ID. The new river road would make sales of beetle-killed spruce accessible for logging. The FS borrowed engineers and crews from the BPR to work on this huge project.

Both men fulfilled their assignments in different years, but they hold several experiences in common. Terry came to the job in a four-man crew, and Bob in a six-man crew, each with a boss, a cook, and a packer who went twice a week to Powell Ranger Station to replenish supplies. They both headquartered at Post Office Creek, where it runs into the Lochsa. Crews lived there two weeks or so at a time, then moved closer to the next section of the job.

"We had three big wall tents. Two for our bunks," Terry recalls, "...and a mess tent."



Lochsa Highway 12 construction crews bunk in two tents at Post Office Creek, take meals in third tent.

Both men remember being on location with no road, only sand and gravel, no mechanized earth moving equipment, with everything done by hand.

"Like hitting a manual carbon steel drill bit with a heavy hammer to chip holes through rock for dynamite," Bob

reminisces. "With a plunger, we triggered an electrical charge in several holes at once. You can bet we kept our heads down."

When Terry arrived, thirteen miles of wild road remained. His crew hiked from construction ends and completed soils sampling.

"Terry, do you remember the Colgate Licks, that natural salty hot springs near the road?"

"You bet." Terry enjoys a flashback. "The pack trail went right by it. Kind of hard to get by it when moose were on the trail. Ornerly cusses."

Bob pictures other wildlife moments. "I counted at least 300 elk there at calving every year. At other times, my boss, Gordon Mead, and I stopped after work and soaked in the hot water. Slippery moss on rocks, I recall."

"I slipped only once, up on Weir Creek," says Terry, "but the slide was spectacular—down a weir of moss-covered logs and right into a herd of 30 startled elk."

The early 1960's saw completion of Hwy 12, and a storehouse of swappable tales. ☺



Ruth and Terry Semanko of Coeur d'Alene greet Cougar Bob at his Birthday Party. (See page 2.)



Pack train brings supplies from Powell Ranger Station twice each week. [Photos used by T. Semanko permission.]

