

This document is a draft of an article that appeared in the December 1991 *Montana Magazine*, written by Jack Gilluly of Anaconda. Some of the information has been updated to reflect the present.

HAGGIN'S CROSS-COUNTRY SNOWBIRDS SERVE UP LOCAL HISTORICAL FARE

ANACONDA -- On a snappy winter morning -- with hoarfrost glued to trees -- the 10,000-foot-high Pintlar Mountains loom majestic across the horizon. The panoramic view from this elevated vantage point near the Continental Divide's spine overlooking the Big Hole Valley is picture-postcard-like.

Two cross-country skiers, acclimated to the altitude, pause awe-struck, indeed believing they may have died and gone to heaven. Their energized voices drift crisply, reverberating across idyllic meadows. "My God," one exclaims, "I never believed in a lifetime to see anything this awesome."

The foregoing scenario isn't beer-commercial hype, the fantasies of advertising writers. The Big-Sky-state descriptions are based on real, not contrived, experiences. Indeed, these neck-snapping vistas do exist; just ask those who have savored.

A GROWING CADRE

Participation in cross country skiing has increased dramatically in Montana and the nation during the past decade. Devotees of the sport plan to include in their itinerary several weekends of fun at the groomed Mount Haggin Nordic Ski Area located on state land south of here and northwest of Wise River. These skiers are a growing cadre -- some say a cult -- of aficionados who claim southwest Montana offers unmatched winter sports recreational opportunities.

The men and women members of the Mile High Nordic Ski Club in cooperation with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MDFWP) now groom the ski trails at the Big Hole Valley ski area in the California Creek drainage near the Continental Divide, 1-1/2 miles south of Mill Creek Pass, right off state highway 569, in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County. This is the club's 29th (as of 2013-2014) season at the site.¹

The skiing is free for those who participate.

The ski area is part of the MDFWP's 55,000-acre Mt. Haggin Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, which was established in 1976 to provide essential, year-around range and calving and fawning habitat to, in particular, elk herds and other game populations such as mule deer and moose.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, backed up by federal funding sources, acquired the 55,000-acre tract of land (valued at \$2.9 million) astride the Continental Divide for \$1.9 million when it was held "in trust" by Nature Conservancy, a private conservation organization. Nature Conservancy, in turn, had purchased the land from Mount Haggin Livestock, Inc., a private firm. Historically, the land for decades has been owned by the Anaconda Company, before it was sold in 1965 to the Mount Haggin Land and Livestock Co.

OFF-HIGHWAY PARKING

The Mt. Haggin Nordic Ski Area includes off-highway parking for vehicles and a warming hut for skiers. Trails are well-marked. Skiers can select several routes to test either beginners or the most ardent true believers of the winter sport. Adjacent to the highway are the 4.2-kilometer Sugarloaf Loop and the 4.7-kilometer Crooked John Loop, which range from about 6,500 to 6,600 feet. The Sugarloaf Loop is named after the nearby 7,766-foot-high Sugarloaf Mountain, which straddles the Continental Divide.

Away from the highway and advancing to higher elevations, the 8.5-kilometer Little California Loop and 3.7-kilometer Spire Loop climb from 6,700 to 7,000 and 7,400 feet. These elevated loops at the Mt. Haggin Nordic Ski Area offer the eye-popping scenes of the Pintlar Mountains that cross-country skiers rave about.

The total of nearly 28 kilometers of loops and connectors are so interconnected that cross-country skiers can include any combination of the four, starting with Sugarloaf. Many skiers choose the shorter-kilometer loops, that are located on relatively flat, gently-rolling terrain. To include all four loops in one's schedule means a day of steady cross-country skiing, which may be too physically demanding for novices.

"We groom all loops except for Spire Loop," said John Lundborg, Butte, a ski club director and spokesman. "What makes our ski area unique, of course, is the grooming. There's lots of cross-country skiing in southwestern Montana, but it's nice to be able to ski on groomed trails."

"Because the area offers ideal snow conditions and terrain, we have in mind plans for a system of trails that will be unequalled in Montana and which will complement the High Altitude Nordic Speed Skating facility in Butte," Lundborg explained.

CLOSE-KNIT NUCLEUS

The nordic ski club's members are a close-knit working nucleus from the Butte, Anaconda, Opportunity, Deer Lodge, Whitehall, Dillon, Wisdom and Wise River area. The organization survives on \$25-a-year club dues (per family), a major fundraising event, and donations matching (along with sweat equity) against federal recreation trails grants. Working with the group is Dr. Paul Sawyer, Butte, member of the Technical Support Group of the U.S. Olympic Ski Team.

A major corporation headquartered in Butte loans a snow machine to the group for trail grooming, and the nordic ski club recently purchased an additional snow machine, as well as a grooming sled and a building to store equipment.

Helping plow highway 569 over 7,000-foot-high Mill Creek Pass and push aside snow from the parking lot at the cross country skiing site each winter are members of the Anaconda-Deer Lodge County road department. The county took over the highway's road maintenance from the state in the 1970s and continues to under an agreement with MDOT until reconstruction can be completed, hopefully in the next few years.

"We entered this project, not knowing what to expect," Lundborg continued. "Happily, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks officials have endorsed our developments so far. We are using the land in a non-destructive way. On a volunteer basis, we are helping state employees achieve their goals."

LONG-RANGE PLANS

As far as long-term plans go in further developing the cross-country ski trails, Lundborg says the Mile High Nordic Ski Club has no futuristic perception of what may occur past the current skiing season. "Our minds, of course, always are receptive to ideas," he explains. "Immediate goals are to improve the bridges and trails; that's about as much as our limited resources and manpower will allow at the present time. The future does include working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks officials to post artistic historical "interpretative" signs in the cross country ski area, Lundborg explains. Another suggestion is developing a leisurely, summer hiking program for senior citizens on the Mount Haggin cross-country ski trails.

"There's just no other cross-country ski area in Montana like this one that is smack in the middle of such important state history," Lundborg enthuses. "This history sticks

out -- looking us right in the face everyday -- just waiting to be melded into pliable form."

WHEN CONGLOMERATES RULED

To place Mount Haggin area in historical perspective, one must look back to the 1890s and the turn of the century, when U.S. conglomerates ruled the West and the public was indifferent about environmental and forest destruction.

The Mount Haggin area was the setting for significant contributions in evolution of Montana's most important industries -- including trapping and fur trade, mineral extraction, lumbering, cattle and sheep production and livestock grazing. The area is awash in stories about corporate machinations, individual greed and personal tragedies, fortunes gained and lost, environmental degradation, and governmental agencies prosecuting forestry and environmental violators. Nearby French Gulch was one of the first gold mining strikes in the state. The area played a minor role in the classic struggle between copper kings Marcus Daly and William Clark. Moreover, the Haggin area was embroiled years ago in an epic pollution lawsuit filed by Deer Lodge Valley ranchers against the Anaconda Co.²

WOOD-CUTTER CABINS

Skiers in the Little California drainage can explore scores of wood-cutter cabins from the days when loggers harvested mine timbers commercially for the Butte mines and cut hog fuel for the Anaconda smelter, under William R. Allen and the Allen Company. While the cabins have deteriorated far beyond the point of being habitable, they do offer crumbling glimpses of the state's fanciful past.

Still visible are remnants of a giant wooden flume (called "Allen's Flume") in the cross country skiing area that was employed to slide logs from higher elevations to lower and more accessible locations. The flume, 18 miles long, started in the French Gulch area, zigzagged across several creek drainages, crossed the Continental Divide on the west side of Sugarloaf Mountain, dropped down into the Mill Creek drainage, connected up with the McCune flume coming out of Mill Creek and ended up at Mill Creek Junction east of Anaconda³. The flume, when in operation, actually took water from the east side of the Continental Divide and deposited it on the west side, a feat that doesn't seem possible until a person traces the route on a map or hikes the route. Allen's Flume functioned intermittently from 1906 when it was built by W.R. Allen until about 1917 when it was discontinued. (More on Allen's business ventures are provided later in this historical account.) The California and Little California Creek drainages, the main watersheds in the vicinity of the cross-country ski area, contain

evidence of tramways and power units in which the logs were moved by rail from the lower to higher elevations to be placed onto the flume.

William R. Allen's flume was the second in the area to harvest timber⁴. The first, of shorter mileage, had been started in 1883 by A. W. McCune in Mill Creek Canyon, south of Anaconda. McCune had received a contract to supply Marcus Daly's Anaconda smelter with 300,000 cords of wood. The contract called for 75,000 cords a year at \$3.75 a cord. Large amounts of timber were needed to convert to charcoal for fueling local Anaconda smelters and to produce mine stulls (timbers) to be used to support tunnels and shafts. The McCune flume, built by Daly's Anaconda Co., diverted water from Mill Creek. Through the use of this transport system, in combination with wagons and mules, he was able to satisfy contract agreements with Anaconda Co. in the 1880s and 1890s.

HISTORICAL SITES

Cross-country skiers are asked not to spoil the historical sites -- including the cabins, flume remnants, and tramways -- but to help preserve them. Wildlife also should be left undisturbed. Skiers who are fortunate will view moose, elk, deer and coyotes. A variety of furbearers and nongame animals also inhabit the area, and the streams contain a variety of game fish, primarily trout.

Mount Haggin's elk population, one of the more important herds in Montana, probably provides more days of hunting recreation annually (on a per-acre basis) than any other single elk herd in the state, say Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks officials. Departmental information indicates the herd has remained highly productive and the population has increased dramatically in the past few years. The same is reported for the deer herd.

"Cross-country skiers should appreciate the history of the Mount Haggin area," counsels Lundborg, a computer programmer and analyst. "If the skier relates with history, geography, birds, animals and fish, foliage and trees, and with ambiances and spirits of the place, then he is -- maybe not a better skier -- but certainly a more knowledgeable and more caretaker skier. Such an educated skier does not leave his garbage strewn on the trail, and he leaves knowing his life has been enriched. He returns again with renewed vigor."

MILL CREEK PASS

The trail (later road) across Mill Creek Pass, south of Anaconda, climbing the Continental Divide, was an early transportation route through western Montana. First to employ the pass were Native American Indians, members whose tribes largely were

friendly to each other, who traveled back and forth between the Deer Lodge Valley and the Big Hole Valley while on hunting forays. Frontiersmen, trappers and prospectors, and merchants and speculators used the trail through Mill Creek Pass, as did commercial loggers and livestock producers. The first actual road over Mill Creek pass from Warm Springs Creek reportedly was a toll road built by Allen and John Bradford sometime after gold was discovered in French Gulch. Previous to the toll road, many travelers used the German Gulch road.

Anaconda oldtimer Al Clark, who was born in the Mill Creek area in 1912, most remembered the Big Hole-Mill Creek area for its large cattle herds that were driven to market. The cattle, he recalled, would be trailed over the pass into Mill Creek and to the stockyards, which were about where the slump ponds are now located. _ From the stockyards, the cattle were taken to the Montgomery Slaughter House, which was in the Mill Creek drainage, south of the ponds. "The buyers came and bought the cattle," Clark said, "and the carcasses were shipped on the railroad to Stuart near Opportunity."

Near the foot of the Mill Creek Divide in the 1920s lived a character named Dan McIntyre, a woodcutter, Clark reminisced. McIntyre would haul a load of wood into town by horse and wagon and exchange the load for a day of drinking with an Anaconda bar owner. "He'd spend all his money in the bar, and become dead drunk," Clark explained. "Somebody always hauled McIntyre out of the bar, set him on his wagon, and the horses took him home. He couldn't even hold up a set of reins. How he kept from getting hit on the way home, I'll never know; half the time, the team was on the wrong side of the road, going out of Anaconda and up the Mill Creek Road." (NOTE TO EDITORS: Clark died shortly after he was interviewed.)

PREHISTORIC INDIANS

Providing a reliable source of information about prehistoric Native American Indians who inhabited the area is Marc B. Smith, who wrote *Archaeological Investigations in the Deep Creek-French Creek Locality, Deer Lodge County, Montana*, for Archeology in Montana.

Through analysis of stone projectile points and tools found on glacier outwash terraces above the major drainages, archaeologists have determined that Native Americans may well have frequented the Mount Haggin area for more than 10,000 years.

Ancient ways of life probably changed little during the centuries before white man's appearance on the continent. Mount Haggin lands were visited during the temperate months as bands of hunters, on foot, pursued game and collected edible plants.

European influence was first felt in the intermountain regions with appearance of the horse in the 1720s. Native American Indians were quick to embrace this new opportunity for increased mobility while hunting.

Mount Haggin's prehistoric period ended in 1805 as Lewis and Clark traversed Montana. Adventurous fur traders probably moved through the Mount Haggin area during the mid-19th century in search of beaver, but their brief passage left no lasting mark on the land. Recorded history began in 1865 with discovery of gold in French Gulch.

Historian Florence Johnson of Anaconda, writing in the book, *Under the Shadow of Mt. Haggin*, provided further glimpses of the area's Indian life.⁵ She noted varied Indian tribes who frequented the Deer Lodge and Big Hole valleys:

In the early days before the 1800s and to around 1840, Deer Lodge Valley was neutral ground as far as Indian fighting was concerned. The Flatheads, Bannocks, Nez Perce and Shoshones gathered in the Big Hole and Deer Lodge Valleys in the fall to go in a group to the buffalo country. Each tribe was fearful of the Blackfeet Indians, who came down into the Three Forks area on foraging trips. With the several small tribes banding together to get their winter meat, they made up a party that the Blackfeet were not too eager to challenge.

EARLIEST INDIANS

The earliest Indians relied on spears. Later, "atlatls" or spear throwers came into common use. Then about 1,500 years ago, local groups began to use the bow and arrow almost exclusively as a weapon. The people camped in the valleys and along smaller drainages while gathering plants and hunting a variety of animals, which were probably present in fair numbers. One of the animals relied upon were the bison and the presence of jumps or pounds attest to their use in southwestern Montana, primarily in the past 1,500 years.

Prehistoric use of the Mill Creek Pass area was centered on the quarrying or mining of chert or "flint" used to make stone tools. Prehistoric groups came to the area, camped along the creeks while they spent most of their time collecting and mining the chert or jasper, which was just below the surface of this high ridge. Pits and trenches were excavated to locate the high quality cryptocrystalline materials, from which chipped stone tools could be made. On the Mill Creek Pass are at least 200 pits and a dense scatter of debitage or waste rock from this mining activity. The process was similar to modern mining where, using digging sticks, bones and other materials, pits and trenches were excavated to bedrock (about 5 to 6 feet below the surface) where a high-quality "vein" of chert was located and systematically removed in chunks. These

rough chunks were then reduced to a core or blank that readily could be transported and later made into an arrow or spear point, hide scraper, drill, or knife. Hammerstones of diorite or similar materials, which did not chip, were used to reduce these large chunks to a manageable core.

Quarry sites such as the one on the Mill Creek divide are not uncommon in southwestern Montana and provide an example of another source of mineral wealth exploited in the area. Although the main artifacts found on such sites include hammerstones, and waste rock, projectile tips found in the general area suggest that the rock was used in a limited way up to 10,000 years ago, but the main period of mining was probably around 3,000 to 1,500 years ago. Because of the heavy snows on the pass and the difficulty of digging in frozen ground, it is probable most chert mining was a summer activity.

Historian Johnson continued the area's description, as it related to the Indians:

Indians were still living around in this area when the white men came. But they were peaceful, friendly and did not disturb anyone. At one time, there was quite a tribe settled around the Montgomery slaughterhouse on Mill Creek, where they gathered the leftover meat and hides.

THE MCCUNE CUTTING

In that oft-quoted piece of sagacity, a wise man said that those who cannot remember the past are bound to repeat it. For those who travel Highway 569 south of Anaconda, they surely will remember what happened 100 years ago when, nearing the top of Mill Creek Pass, they pull the car over to view a man-made environmental disaster of monumental proportions. No trees exist for miles; they've been cut down and never regrown. The bare-bleak landscape angers first-time visitors.

The view from atop the pass -- looking west down the Continental Divide -- evokes almost desert-like images. The barren mountains are eroded. The unimpeded wind blows dust devils. Little animal or bird life inhabits the desolation. One speculates whether the military might have used the area as a bombing range during World War II. The area is titled, disparagingly but accurately, "The McCune Cutting," a remembrance to A.W. McCune, the initial timber harvester for Daly's Anaconda Company smelter.

McCune's crews systematically denuded hundreds of acres, a clearcut swath of destruction stretching as far as the eye can see, only a few miles from the cross-country skiing area. Fortunately, most damage was confined to the Anaconda side of

the divide; the devastation did not seep as much into the ski area, on the Big Hole side.

Sulfur dioxide and arsenic from the Anaconda smelter that subsequently drifted south and southwest allowed little timber or grass growth to be re-established in The McCune Cutting. It is not a pretty sight; it is ugliness from the past. It is a graphic view of what ecologists term "environmental genocide." Let The McCune Cutting forever serve as a jolting reminder to members of future generations. No, we tell ourselves resolutely, it won't happen again. It won't occur another time until it does.

McCune and the Anaconda Company were cited by the Department of Interior for trespassing on federal land in the Mill Creek area. The outcome was that the Anaconda Company exchanged land with the government, and Anaconda ended up owning this scarred acreage.

FINDING HUMOR

Not far from The McCune Cutting, at the cross-country ski area, just south of the Continental Divide, was located a historical site that, upon reflection, has elicited considerable mirth among contemporary skiers. The Mile High Nordic Ski Club members searched diligently for historical humor. They found it in the following tale:

When the U.S. Forest Service was becoming established in the West, it located a number of administrative sites, or ranger stations, throughout the forest. One such early site in the Deerlodge National Forest was the Waterloo Ranger Station, which was situated near Oregon Creek at about the present location of the cross country ski area's parking lot. A log cabin was erected on the site a few years prior to the federal government taking over jurisdiction of the land in November 1906. Before that date, the cabin served as a saloon and restaurant run by an early French-Canadian resident of the French Creek Valley, Napoleon Tessier.

The location of this country inn was ideal, being adjacent to the county road leading from Anaconda to Wisdom, Montana. The feisty Napoleon Tessier did not look favorably on having his establishment condemned by an unwelcome federal agency. Although he contested the substitution of the ranger station for his saloon, he was not able to deny that his business operated on federal reserve land, in violation of trespass laws.

Tessier's defeat at the hands of the Forest Service was locally known as Napoleon's "Waterloo" and thence the official naming of this administrative site as the Waterloo Ranger Station.

"As far as we can determine, Napoleon's saloon was located about where our parking lot is," theorizes Lundborg about the cross country ski area. "During dull moments at the ski site some well-meaning, nostalgic soul occasionally passes a bottle around and proposes a toast to Napoleon Tessier. That's the least we can do in his memory, don't you think?" asks Lundborg dryly.

MULE RANCH

Continuing south down state highway 569 -- and only a few miles south of the cross country ski area -- is an area adjacent to the highway known as the "Mule Ranch." Popular beliefs by persons in the Butte-Anaconda area is the Mule Ranch was used by the Anaconda Company to rest mules that worked in the Butte mines. On the contrary, evidence collected by Alan Newell of Historical Research Associates in the *Historic Resources Study, Mount Haggin Area, Deer Lodge County, Montana*, indicates the ranch never was used by the Anaconda Company for that express purpose. Rather the name, Mule Ranch, came from the fact that A.W. McCune, the logging contractor who worked in supplying the Anaconda Company with cordwood, used mules in his operation. McCune reportedly used the valleys near Mount Haggin to graze his horses and mules. The animals were employed to haul wagons of cordwood from the cutting areas to the smelter site in Anaconda. Newell, who published his study for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, wrote:

One knowledgeable source believes McCune grazed many of his mules on a pasture on Oregon Creek. For this reason, the site became known as the Mule Ranch. Either at this time in the mid-1880s or sometime during the next two decades, a mule and horse barn was constructed at the ranch. It stood near the present sheep-shearing building.

The Mule Ranch gained its greatest notoriety in later years, for the sheep-raising efforts of Dr. Henry Gardiner, who had been originally hired by the Anaconda Company to oversee the activities of experimental farms in the Deer Lodge Valley. Anaconda Company officials were convinced that the agricultural operations would show the smelter fumes were not hurting farming and livestock. With this purpose in mind, the giant copper firm started purchasing land (including the Mule Ranch), mainly to prevent lawsuits from irate ranchers and federal administrators and also as pasturage for Dr. Gardiner's pure-breed sheep.

The high mountain valleys of Western Montana, like those of Mount Haggin, were ideally suited to the summer pasturage of sheep flocks. Through Gardiner's efforts the French Creek Valley relinquished its fame for cattle and horse grazing for that of sheep.

FRENCH GULCH AREA

Continuing south in the Big Hole Valley along the California and French Creek drainages is an area known as French Gulch, which first served as an early gold-mining camp and later as a lumber camp. The area also is called the French Gulch Mining District, and the actual lumbering site sometimes is referred to as French Town.

French Gulch was named because two Frenchmen supposedly discovered it on July 5, 1865 (some accounts say 1864), making it not the first but one of the earliest gold camps in Montana territory. It thrived as a mining venture well into the early part of the 1900s, many of the gold seekers periodically replenishing supplies either at Warm Springs or Deer Lodge. The very first French Gulch miners, however, received supplies from Fort Benton and Salt Lake City.

French Gulch was active with miners from 1865 to 1877, historian Johnson writes, and it supported 200 families. There were a store, schoolhouse and a sawmill at French Gulch, she says.

Alan Newell of Historical Research Associates, Missoula, and Dick Ellis of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Bozeman, together wrote an article "Mount Haggin: Living History" for *Montana Outdoors* magazine that described the French Gulch area:

The French Gulch Mining District included some of the more important mining properties in southwestern Montana. The district encompassed French, California, American and Oregon creeks and their minor tributaries. During the four years after its discovery, the district yielded between \$1 million and \$5 million in gold nuggets and dust. The gulch was a roaring mining camp, similar to hundreds of others throughout the West. The "town" of French Gulch, at the junction of French and First Chance Creeks, was the focal point for miners who worked the many creeks and draws in the district.

The French Gulch District soon became an important Montana Territory gold camp and a principal stopping-off spot on the trails between the mining regions near Bannack, and those at Last Chance Gulch and later, Butte.

In the beginning years of French Gulch, it had a post office, which was established in 1869, with Michael Larkin in charge. The office was closed in 1881 and then opened again from 1904-1913, according to U.S. Postal Service records. Moreover, an original drawing by Montana pioneer Granville Stuart shows French Gulch as a mining camp consisting of a cluster of log houses around the base of a hill. Mortimer Lott began mining gold there soon after the Stuarts began operations at Gold Creek (north of Deer Lodge) in 1862.

FIRST TO ASSIST INJURED

French Gulch miners at their diggings (and other citizens across the Continental Divide in the Deer Lodge Valley, along with doctors from Butte) were the first to assist injured soldiers wounded in the Battle of the Big Hole in August 1877. From the scene of the battle 35 miles to the southwest, the injured first had to be transported to the French Gulch mining camp. They were then taken further to a hospital at Deer Lodge. In connection with that same incident, French Gulch also served as an overnight lodging spot for a hastily-recruited, adrenalin-rush contingent of 200 Butte civilian soldiers (led by the capitalist William A. Clark), who supposedly was chasing Chief Joseph's band of fleeing Nez Perce Indians through Montana. Clark and entourage never got close to the Indians, and, as some historians have pointed out, the group was more fluff and puff than substance. To their credit, the Butte soldiers never knew the location of Joseph's Indians, because there were no telegraph communications in the Big Hole area. They also were besieged by an hysteria-charged citizenry, who only a year earlier had learned about Custer's fate. Perceptions at the time were that the Nez Perce were intent on murdering everyone in their vicinity, when, in truth, they simply were trying to escape and be left alone. The Indians fled southeast out of the Big Hole Valley toward Yellowstone Park on a trek that took them on a route through Montana, Idaho, and back to Montana. Clark and his citizen soldiers rested at French Gulch, and the military delegation returned to Butte through German Gulch.

THE ALLEN FAMILY

Early mining and logging operations in the French Gulch area were conducted by William R. Allen of Warm Springs, an entrepreneur, businessman and legislator, who served as lieutenant governor of Montana from 1909 to 1913. He was born in a one-room cabin in French Gulch in 1871 in what was then Montana Territory.⁶

Allen writes authoritatively in his book, *The Chequemegon*, (pronounced Shay-Wah-Me-Gon), mainly a collection of personal stories in locales of French Gulch, Warm Springs, Deer Lodge, Anaconda, Butte and Helena. The Allen family for decades mined and logged the French Gulch area. In his book, Allen describes the less-than-lavish and harsh winters at French Gulch:

The altitude was 6,500 feet and snow would fall three to six feet, isolating us from the outside world from about November 15 to May 1. The camp cabins were generally a few hundred feet apart. As pathways were shoveled to each cabin, it piled the snow on either side eight to ten feet high, thus obscuring a view of the cabins and anyone passing through these snow lanes. About all that that could be seen of the settlement, from a distance, would be the stovepipes rising from the snow-covered roofs. Mail

was carried on snowshoes once a week from a station at Warm Springs, 22 miles away, where the Pony Express passed. These winter days were dreary and the nights were long, with only tallow candles for light.

ALLEN MADE IT PAY

Newell and Ellis, continuing to write their analysis of Mount Haggin area history, tell of William R. Allen's mining ventures in French Gulch:

Prosperity at French Gulch was short-lived. Profits gained by using the pan, rocker and sluice box were soon replaced by those recovered from the hydraulic nozzle. Many undercapitalized miners left the region. But one who returned was William Allen. In 1898, Allen, who had been working for the Anaconda Company, left the firm and took over the family mining interests at French Gulch. Allen acquired timber properties in the area and consolidated most of the placer and lode claims in the district, encompassing more than 800 acres of land. The Spain and McKinley mines were cornerstones of what became the Allen Gold Mining Company. Allen continued his mining and timber operations at French Gulch during the first decades of the 20th Century.

Earlier in this historical account a description had been given of the giant timber flume from French Gulch in the Big Hole to a location east of Anaconda. In 1906, William R. Allen (under the business name of "Allen Company") constructed the immense flume, as described by Newell and Ellis:

Under a contract awarded to him by the U.S. Forest Service, this enterprising Montanan constructed an elaborate wooden flume -- an engineering marvel -- to carry water and logs to Mill Creek Canyon. The 18-mile flume contained trestles, most over 25 feet high. The highest trestle was 72 feet, and the longest was 775 feet. On its way from French Gulch to Anaconda, the flume passed through numerous rock cuts and one 685-foot tunnel. It required more than 100,000 board feet of lumber and cost approximately \$4,000 per mile to build. Remnants of the flume, including standing sections of trestle, can still be seen today.

FLUME'S END POINT

Timber cut above the flume was sent down the mountainsides by sleds or chutes. Timber cut below the flume was hauled up the mountainside by cables and a tramway. The end point for the cut timber was a huge gathering area (where the timber was separated by sizes) and loading yard in Mill Creek Valley, about five miles southeast of I Anaconda. From here, timber was hauled by rail to Anaconda and Butte. Historians describe the flume's exit point as being the site of a small town of perhaps

la dozen scattered buildings. It was either named Mill Creek Junction or Mill Creek Settlement, because it was located on Mill Creek. The little town also was known as "The Loop," because the railroad had at this location a giant loop where railroad cars could be backed up.

Buildings are now gone from this Mill Creek Junction site, but during the zenith of its existence, it claimed a schoolhouse, blacksmith shop, store, and eight or ten residential structures. writing in *Under the Shadow of Mt. Haggin*, Anaconda historian A.C. Howard told of the Anaconda Company's flume operation:

It was a big company venture entailing two large camps, one at French Gulch and one at the Mill Creek Junction where the flume spilled logs, stulls and cordwood onto ramps, and the storage area for loading on the BA&P rail cars for the smelter and/or Butte. A hotel and boarding house, store and a few cabins took care of travelers at the ten-mile site on the road near the top of Mill Creek Pass.⁷ The French Gulch and Mill Creek camps were populated with loggers, saw mill operators, teamsters, clerks, a veterinarian, and other personnel necessary to the general operation. A wooden flume by which the timber was floated down to the rail site was on the Big Hole side of the pass and via meanderings through low spots, took advantage of the continual down grade flow. At designated stations, men and sometimes their wives, lived at watchmen's cabins to clear up any log jams occurring on their down stream rush. Johnny Pearson says that the women were especially adept at knowing just which log to pry loose from the log jam to start the logs going again. On occasion, daring loggers rode the entire length of the flume when in a hurry to spend a pay check in Anaconda. The flume was V-shaped, a few feet deep, and about 5 feet wide at the open top.

"JUNGLE TELEGRAPH"

Further descriptive writing about the Allen Flume was provided by Florence Johnson in her book, *Ghost Trails Country*. Johnson hit on the flume attendants' novel "jungle-telegraph" communications system. Johnson also wrote that much of her information about the flume came from interviewing Fanny Osara, daughter of Matt Osara. The Osaras were among the "working families" living in the French Gulch area from 1906 to 1909:

The flume wound around the mountain sides, and in the places where gulleys had to be crossed, tall trestles were built. (As you go down Mill Creek Pass towards French Gulch, some of the trestle work still is standing and you can see it on the left of the road as you look toward Sugar Loaf Mountain.) Water was taken from the various creeks in the area to run in the flumes. The flume was built in the form of a 'V', the sides of which were perhaps three or four feet wide, the top being five or six feet

across. It was not used in the wintertime; but the men were not idle, as they were cutting trees. Each man was allotted a certain strip of timber. As stumps were not to be left, the lumbermen had to dig down through the snow to get to the bottom of the tree in order to cut it. The area was logged off completely. The smaller trees went for cord wood and the tall straight ones were cut for various purposes. Some of these larger ones were peeled. Six-year-old Fanny and her mother, brother and sister were given tools which they used to peel the bark off these special poles. Cleaning up the ground and burning the brush was another family job. There were two men, Andrew Laine and Elias Nasi, who did the skidding of the logs. The logs were counted in the spring and the lumberjacks were paid for their winter work. There were flume watchmen who patrolled their one mile. They had small way stations not much larger than a telephone booth. Usually, somewhere along this mile they built themselves a cabin where they lived. These men watched for log jams and kept the logs going. The Osara children used to watch from their home a place where the flume made a curve around a hill. Many times the logs jammed there and water ran all over the place and logs piled up. When the day was done, the first watchman would nail a pine branch on the last log and give a signal of two spaced raps, followed by three rapid ones. As the last log passed the next watchman, he also gave the signal with his pickaroon. It was surprising how clear these raps could be heard a mile away. The water was then cut down to a few inches for the night. Sometimes men with good balance and courage would ride on these floating logs. They could ride for miles. Children -- we wonder if any were killed? -- would slide along in the water between the spaced logs, and some, of course, would try riding them.

FLUME RIDING

Fred Mesenko of Anaconda, a former Deer Lodge County commissioner, tells about his youthful days of riding the logs in the Mill Creek Flume, southeast of the community. Youngsters in those days, Mesenko explained, walked into Mill Creek to fish for trout. On the return trip, they rode the flume logs several miles out to the end point, getting soaked to the skin. To avoid parental reprimands, the young people built fires alongside the flume to dry their clothes and bodies and then scooted home. It was all good, refreshing fun, a smiling Mesenko recalled, an activity that largely resembles today's youngsters speeding down those huge waterslides one sees scattered about the countryside. Mesenko said flume riding was not particularly dangerous for young people possessing normal agility; he doesn't recall any Anaconda-area kids killed or injured from their experiences.

ALLEN LOSES CONTROL

Numerous contracts with the Forest Service between 1906 and 1911 allowed William R. Allen to continue supplying cordwood and stulls to the ACM. Financial troubles

cost Allen his Forest Service timber contract in 1911 and resulted in Anaconda Company's Timber Co. taking control of the logging operation. Allen retired from politics in 1913, and ultimately he was forced to sell the French Gulch property to Anaconda Company. The Anaconda Company continued to work the area until 1917.

In his book, Allen said he operated the flume for eight years and hauled out 3,000 railroad cars of lumber per year. Anaconda historian Howard added a postscript to the Allen years in French Gulch; he claimed Allen lost control of the flume operation through "inept management," and that Anaconda Company President Con Kelley hired Nels Pearson, affectionately dubbed as Montana's Paul Bunyon, to "straighten out that logging operation." Pearson, a Swedish immigrant and beloved citizen, had previously been in charge of Anaconda Company's logging operations in Willow Creek and at Gregson Hot Springs.

WAS HE SACRIFICED?

An analysis of Allen's Flume operation by historian Newell showed Allen's troubles did not necessarily stem from ineptness, but rather from lack of available financing from bonding companies. The conjecture is advanced (although Newell doesn't claim that in his writing) that Anaconda Company officials disposed of Allen after he no longer was of use to the copper firm. If indeed Allen was sacrificed on the corporate altar, he never said that in his book. He wrote nothing of any significance of his business relationships with Anaconda Company officials; he did note his excellent business relationship with Marcus Daly. Historian Johnson, moreover, said Daly helped Allen finance his flume operation, but dates don't match up: Daly died in 1900 and Allen didn't start his flume operation until about 1906. Regardless of what transpired, Newell tells of Allen's financial troubles:

Although heavily in debt to the federal government for timber cut under the 1906 contract, Allen applied for and received a new contract to cut 100 million additional board feet of timber from French Gulch in August 1910. By April of the following year, the company's over-extension finally got the best of it and W.R. Allen was in deep trouble. Although Allen had a contract for government timber and a ready market for the product in Anaconda and Butte, he did not actually own the timberlands. Therefore, bonding companies would not secure his operation. Without the necessary loans and bonds to finance his operations, Allen's contract was worthless. In an effort to salvage some remuneration from his investment, Allen arranged for the incorporation of a new firm, the Mines Timber Company, which would assume a deed for "all timber interests, including the water rights, flumes, stock on hand, buildings, etc." This company was financed largely by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, which recognized the need to protect its source of supply for cordwood and mining stulls. Officials of the Anaconda Company, including John

Gillie, superintendent of mines in Butte, were listed as officers in the new logging corporation. In June 1911, the Forest Service relieved the Allen Company of its contract obligations after the Mines Timber Company had paid the former firm's outstanding debts. The Mines Timber Company was awarded a new contract with the federal government for French Gulch timber sale. Nels Pearson, who had been in charge of an Anaconda Company logging camp at Gregson, was placed in charge of the French Gulch and Mill Creek Canyon camps.

After 1917, the Anaconda Company switched its local logging operations to the Georgetown Lake area, again with Nels Pearson in charge. That year apparently marked the climax, too, of the Mill Creek-French Creek area being a productive economic unit. Although the figure seems embellished, historian Johnson estimated 1,600 persons lived in the area during the peak of fluming, logging and mining operations.

His Forest Service contract was the largest in the U.S. under government supervision, William R. Allen bragged. Newell similarly wrote that "At the turn of the century, the U.S. Forest Service initiated its first large timber sale in the Northern Region at French Gulch." Allen also claimed his lumber operations in the Mill Creek-French Gulch area were a national testing ground, so to speak, for the newly-formed. U.S. Forest Service:

As these timber operations were under the Department of Forestry supervisors, my operations were made a training school for forestry pupils and a testing ground for forestry methods of operation and conservation. At that time, most of the men under the Department were raw recruits but best of all I found them cooperative and willing to learn. Since then, most of these raw men have gained positions in the Department, and two became chiefs of the Washington office.

Such personages as Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, who later was crowned the "founder of the U.S. Forest Service;" Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson, and Attorney General George Wickersham visited his logging operation, Allen wrote.

MISSING CHAPTERS

When Allen wrote his regional history in his elderly years (it was published in 1949 when he was about 78 years old), he clearly wanted to focus on his notable successes (of which there were many) and not failures. Readers will justifiably question, however, why Allen wrote only one paragraph in his book about his gargantuan flume project. Here is a man who likely spent \$100,000 or more to build an engineering marvel of its day, and yet he only devoted a few terse sentences to the project. Something is amiss.

Allen was so weary of the flume experience, it is theorized, he ejected it from his mind. Perhaps he was so intimidated by the power of Anaconda Company officials, he dared not write the truth. Knowing how these corporate magnates controlled the flow of and access to information in Montana for half a century, it's understandable why Allen was reticent. Perhaps there was another element in the mix: many businessmen of this epoch sported an easy-come, easy-go *liaise-faire* attitude. Don't let financial worries temporarily rule your life, the philosophy went, because another bundle of money can be made on the next venture. Therefore, Allen may have waved away his flume's financial troubles simply as bad luck in the normal gamble of business.

In his book, Allen did lament about extra expenses of maintaining the Forest Service contract: "I had to build my own roads, bridges, telephone lines and even a schoolhouse, as the county and state had said that since these operations were on a forest reserve, they had no jurisdiction."

ELKHORN MINE

Another story concerning William R. Allen and Big Hole Valley history has not been explored fully; Allen did not write much about his role in either helping build a narrow-gauge railroad 40 miles through the Big Hole from the town of Divide into the mining town of Coolidge (south of Wise River) or his part in the development of the Elkhorn Mine at Coolidge. The mine, perhaps because of a drop in the price of silver and gold, never operated or only operated a short time. It was a financial disaster of considerable magnitude.

Mysteriously, Allen's book leaves more questions unsettled than settled; but, obviously, he preferred it that way. He avoided controversial subjects, providing little fodder on these topics for historians to cull out years later.

Big Hole Valley oldtimers say Allen is remembered for two other things: he treated his employees fairly. Secondly, he died a broke man.

A TRIBUTE

As a tribute to the Mill Creek Valley-French Gulch area, one is struck with historian Johnson's commemorative words:

Every one is gone now from French Gulch. There aren't even many summer homes, although the setting is beautiful for them. A few fishermen, some rock hounds, some ghost seekers, or gold panners scramble over the mountains and creeks seeking their kind of diversion. Few realize the history that this place holds, nor can they visualize the busy lumbering operations, the placering and mining, or the Chinese who placered

after everyone else was through. Nature is doing her best to erase all signs of the early days of struggles and teeming life that went on in the Gulch.

Little visible evidence remains of the French Gulch buildings, although Al Clark of Anaconda remembered that the town's dance hall building (which contained an old piano) was still standing in the community in the 1940s when he was cutting wood in the area.

It's all history. .

Clearly, miners and timber workers experienced hard lives sweating out a livelihood at French Gulch. The harsh weather and primitive conditions made their routine tough. But what was winter bleakness for French Gulch inhabitants is -- 100 years later -- a weekend sports delight for today's legions of cross country skiers. The snow and cold, on the contrary, don't have to be unpleasant five to six months out of the year, they claim.

A VISIONARY

Before ending this historical reckoning, one must mention the work of Matt Fischer of Anaconda, a cross country ski instructor and enthusiast, whose long-term vision 40+ years ago helped result today in the development of the Mount Haggin Nordic Ski Area. Fischer, a University of Montana college student at Missoula in the early 1970s, cross country skied much of the area south of Anaconda in the Big Hole when he came home to Butte on weekends. Fischer is one who dreamed of something better for his fellow citizens.

ADDING A DIMENSION

Cross-country skiers are a breed apart. They are members of a clan who up-close view winter landscapes, which they claim are more image-evoking than summertime fare. More importantly, these recreationists are most willing to share their sport with the inexperienced. Veteran club members, who are certified instructors, annually conduct free classes in cross country skiing techniques. The instructors include Paul Sawyer, Matt Fischer, Judy Geiger, and Mick Schutte.

"Cross-Country skiing adds a dimension to your life," says Mile High Nordic Ski Club member Phil Winninghoff of Butte. "One sees things and senses feelings that he doesn't experience in the summer," adds Winninghoff, a water color artist and art teacher. "Moreover, for those who hike trails in summer, cross country skiing is a companion recreation in winter."

TYPICALLY UNCROWDED

Another advantage is the sport requires a minimal outlay of dollars for equipment. As opposed to commercial downhill ski runs, the Mount Haggin Ski Area is typically uncrowded. The cross-country skier, moreover, advances through the course at his own speed, unharried and peaceful. Another incentive: glassy-eyed romantics can try Haggin's renowned moonlight skiing.

Besides that, these snowbirds crow, anybody can cross-country ski. If you can walk, you can do it. "So, couch potatoes, off your buns."

Notes

1. The club submitted its proposal to Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks in February 1985.[↵](#)

2. The generic "Anaconda Company" is used for purposes of expediency and simplicity, although that is not necessarily historically accurate. Most Anaconda-Butte residents, while engaged in conversation, simply say "Anaconda Company," "ACM," or "The Company." According to the authors Malone and Roeder, the copper company had various names. The Anaconda Company, incorporated for the first time in 1891, took the name Anaconda Mining Company. When the firm organized again in 1895, it became known as the Anaconda Copper Mining Co., and it retained this title until 1955, when it renamed itself simply as The Anaconda Company. In that mix is the Standard Oil Company taking over Anaconda in 1899, creating the Amalgamated Copper Company as a "holding company." Therefore, to denote certain time periods, some writers and speakers refer to Anaconda Company as "Amalgamated" or the "Trust."[↵](#)

3. The flume has been described by historians as being 15, 18, and 20 miles in length. William R. Allen, who built it, said it was 18 miles long; therefore, his mileage is accepted as being accurate for this historical account. Secondly, Mill Creek Junction or Mill Creek Settlement should not be confused with the town of Mill Creek, a now-defunct community a few miles southeast of Anaconda. The Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) in 1987-'88 declared the town of Mill Creek area contaminated with metals; residents were relocated by the EPA to other areas. Buildings were demolished and the land posted. The federal agency thus "eliminated" the community.[↵](#)

4. Allen's Flume actually was one of three located in the area, but not necessarily operated at the same time. To make counting more confusing, another flume was installed by Marcus Daly. It was in the Willow Creek drainage to the east of the Mill Creek Valley on the Anaconda side of the divide. This flume reportedly ran down Willow Creek, made a dogleg to the left down Cabbage Gulch and exited into the Mill Creek Junction site.[↵](#)

5. Again, for expediency purposes, Florence Johnson, the historian, is identified as being an Anaconda resident. That community served as a base of operations. However, she actually resided in the town of Mill Creek, a small village a few miles southeast of Anaconda and only a short distance from the copper smelter. The town was "eliminated" by EPA decree in 1987-'88.[↵](#)

6. William R. Allen, a Republican, posted a brief and successful political career, largely on local and state tiers. An attempt to advance onto a national level resulted in his defeat and an end to his political aspirations. Allen served in the 1903 and 1907 Montana legislatures, representing Deer Lodge County. In the 1908 election, Allen defeated Democrat T. M. Swindlehurst for lieutenant governor of Montana. He served in that state post from 1909 to 1913. In the 1912 election, Allen was defeated for "Representative at Large" in Montana for the U.S. House of Representatives. Two candidates were elected to this post, and Allen finished fourth in a field of eight. Readers will note Allen's political career and his business career of operating Allen's Flume parallel each other. Such a statement only infers politics played a significant role in the flume's operation; but whether that was true remains to be discovered. Perhaps it is coincidental the events and dates match.[↵](#)

7. Historian Howard, in writing about the hotel, boarding house, store and cabins, apparently was not referring to Mill Creek Junction, but to another cluster of commercial buildings further south in the Mill Creek Valley, at about a point where Highway 569 "S" curves are located at the bottom of Mill Creek Pass. It was called the "ten mile site" because it was about 10 highway miles from Anaconda. These buildings, too, have been gone for years, and little physical evidence remains of their existence, points out Harold Miller of Anaconda.[↵](#)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, William R. *The Chequamegon*. The William Frederick Press, New York, 1949.

Cheney, Roberta Carkeek. *Names on the Face of Montana*. Mountain Press Publishing Co., Missoula, 1983.

Glasscock, C. B. *The War of the Copper Kings*. Grosset & Dunlap Publishers New York, 1966.

Howard, A.C. "The Saga of Nels Pearson -- Montana's Paul Bunyon." *Under the Shadow of Mt. Haggin*. Deer Lodge County History Group, 1975.

Johnson, Florence. *Ghost Trails Country*. Published by the author, Mill Creek, Montana, 1964.

Johnson, Florence. "Indians." *Under the Shadow of Mt. Haggin*. Deer Lodge County History Group, 1975.

Malone, Michael P, and Roeder, Richard B. *A History of Two Centuries*. The University of Washington Press, 1976.

McWhorter, Lucullus Virgil. *Hear Me My Chiefs*. The Caxton Printers, Ltd, Caldwell, Idaho, 1952.

Newell, Alan S. *Historic Resources Study, Mount Haggin Area, Deer Lodge County, Montana*. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Bozeman, Montana, 1980.

Newell, Alan, and Ellis, Dick. "Living History." *Montana Outdoors*, June 1982.

Place, Marian T. *The Copper Kings of Montana*. Random House, New York, 1961.

Smith, Marc. B. "Archaeology Investigations in the Deep Creek-French Creek Locality, Deer Lodge County, Montana." *Archaeology in Montana*, Vol. 22.

Toole, John H. *Red Ribbons*. Lee Enterprises, Inc., 1989.

Waldron, Ellis. *An Atlas of Montana Politics Since 1864*. The Montana State University Press, Missoula, 1958.

THANK YOU

The following persons, many of whom reside in the Butte-Anaconda area, are thanked for providing research materials and photographs, giving writing and editing assistance, dispensing advice and counsel, and for pointing out geographic landmarks and historic sites: Mike Anderson, Bob Amick, Al Clark, Ellen Crain, Dick Ellis, Alice Finnegan, Matt and Susan Fischer, Lynn Fredlund, Cort Freeman, Jack and Carol Gilluly, Elaine Howard, John Hughes, John and Bonnie Lundborg, Linda McGillen, Sara McClernan, Fred Mesenko, Harold Miller, Elizabeth "Biz" Patterson, George O'Connor, Richard Periman, Bob and Karen Sampson, George Timson, and

Phil and Peggy Winninghoff. A special thanks is extended to John Lundborg, Butte, a man of immense historical perspective and personal energy, who consented to hours of interviews. A personal thanks goes to Harold Miller, Anaconda, a young man who had hiked the valleys and mountains of the Mill Creek-French Gulch area and who devoted several weekends telling facts he knows.