

**Environmental History Narrative:
Carberry Creek Watershed Analysis Area**

(C.R. Job RR-1084)

Report for: Rogue River National Forest

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CARBERRY CREEK W.A.A. HISTORY NARRATIVE

(J.LaLande, 3/18/96)

1. Prehistory (Ca. 10,000 years before present to A.D. 1775)

The generally rugged topographic character of the Carberry Creek Watershed Analysis Area, and its relative remoteness from major valleys or other areas of extensive "level" terrain, has strongly influenced the location and kind of human activities that have occurred within the W.A.A. Composed also exclusively of extremely mountainous terrain, which contains high-gradient streams that flow within steep-walled canyons, the Carberry Creek drainage apparently served as a seasonally used hunting/gathering hinterland for native groups that inhabited the main Applegate and Illinois River valleys.

Most of the very limited acreage of level land within the W.A.A. (alluvial terraces for the most part) is privately owned, and archaeological survey has not been done on these lands. (In addition, hydraulic mining and decades of plowing on these lands have probably virtually destroyed the integrity of any prehistoric archaeological sites that may have been located there.) Based on past surveys of federal land in and near the W.A.A., the only known significant prehistoric sites in the general vicinity are situated outside of the W.A.A., along the main stem of the Applegate (about 2-4 miles downstream from the mouth of Carberry Creek). Within Carberry Creek drainage itself, most prehistoric sites are very small, sparse "lithic scatters" that consist of waste flakes from the making or sharpening of hunting tools. Most of these few sites are situated along or near major ridge crests (e.g., the Siskiyou Crest between Big Sugarloaf and Pyramid Peak; Humpy Mountain), particularly at saddles and meadows. At a few of the ridge-crest sites, ground-stone tools (handstones for grinding roots or nuts) have been found. One small lithic scatter is situated at the mouth of Carberry Creek, adjacent to the main river; this location would seem to be favorable for a larger, denser site but--like the other recorded sites in the W.A.A.--it apparently represents a very lightly-used seasonal camp or overnight bivouac.

Throughout prehistory, human populations within the Carberry Creek watershed were probably mobile and seasonal: small family groups exploiting resources during the warmer seasons of the year. Hunting of deer, elk, and possibly bighorn sheep, as well as occasional gathering of acorns, hazelnuts, serviceberries, and roots, would have drawn small groups into the area. Although anadromous fish may have been taken from the streams of the W.A.A., better fishery sites were located on the main river, well downstream. Except possibly during the brief Indian War period of 1853-55 (when remote locales such as the Carberry Creek drainage may have served as "refugias" for native people who sought to avoid contact with the influx of miners), the W.A.A. likely never contained a major winter village.

It seems likely that the Siskiyou Crest, forming the westernmost highest-elevation edge of the W.A.A., would have been accessed most commonly via the main Applegate and Illinois Valleys (i.e., to the north and west of the W.A.A.), and that relatively little travel actually occurred via the steep

'canyon of lower Carberry Creek; most years, once a group had arrived along the high-country Siskiyou Crest ridge system by mid-summer, there may have been little to entice them down into the steep-walled drainages of the W.A.A.

Three major native groups that inhabited the general area during the Late Archaic period (the last 1,000 years before the arrival of Euro-Americans) were the Takelma, Dakubetede, and Gusladada (like the Dakubetede, an Athapascan-speaking group, but about whom virtually nothing else is known). The aboriginal inhabitants probably burned portions of the W.A.A. regularly, for hunting and gathering purposes. However, the actual acreage of anthropogenically burned areas within the W.A.A. may have been comparatively less than that found in other, nearby drainages (e.g., main Upper Applegate River, Squaw Creek, Beaver Creek, Little Applegate River) that appear to have been more intensively used.

2. Early Euro-American Exploration (ca. 1775-1850)

The Carberry Creek W.A.A. was far off the "beaten track" on early Euro-American exploration. The first well-documented sea-borne explorers arrived off the southern Oregon coast in the 1770s, but it was not until 1827 that the first whites, fur trapper of the Hudson's Bay Company, entered the interior of the region. During this initial visit, the newcomers may have ascended Thompson Creek and the upper Applegate River to enter the fringes of the W.A.A. but this is uncertain. Any subsequent visits by trappers during the 1830s-40s into this (likely beaver-poor) portion of the upper Applegate River watershed would have been sporadic and extremely brief; most beaver trapping was concentrated along the major streams to the east of the W.A.A. (It is possible that Euro-Americans actually never penetrated into the Carberry Creek drainage until the gold rush of the early 1850s.)

3. Mining and Initial Settlement (ca. 1850-1910)

Mining: The first recorded prospecting for gold in the uppermost Applegate River drainage occurred in 1852-53. Placer mining operations, composed of small groups of men--Americans, Europeans, Chinese, Hawaiians--proliferated in the area during the 1850s and into the early 1860s. These early placer miners worked the stream gravels of the W.A.A. "by hand," particularly sections of Steve Fork, Brush Creek, and Carberry Creek above China Gulch. (Very little mining occurred then [or later] in the Sturgis Fork and O'Brien Creek drainages, the rock formations of these two drainages apparently do not contain the kind of mineralization favorable for gold deposits that is found elsewhere in the W.A.A.)

Later, particularly after 1880, large-scale hydraulic mines operated in the "high terrace" placer deposits of the W.A.A. (for example, the Beck and Epperson Mine in 1881-3, near the south base of Steamboat Mountain, and the Oregon Hydraulic Mining Corporation's Steve Fork operation [at "Browntown"] just after 1900). Although considerable "dirt was moved," these hydraulic mines were evidently only marginally profitable and they were abandoned soon after the richest ground had been worked.

Hard-rock, or "lode," mining for gold began in the W.A.A. in the early 1860s at Steamboat Mountain, when the so-called "Fowler Lode" was discovered and developed by Jacksonville investors. Although the richest portion of the ore

"was "mined out" by 1869 (giving the mine the derisive name "Steamboat," as in a steamboat that soon ran out of fuel and steam), Steamboat Mountain has continued to be the focus of numerous small-scale hard-rock mining ventures from the 1870s well into the 20th century. The "Big Four Mine," for example, had a 5-stamp ore-crushing mill and employed a small crew of men during the early years of the Great Depression. Prospecting and intermittent mining continues on the slopes of Steamboat Mountain and nearby ridges to the present day.

Agricultural Settlement: Because the Carberry Creek watershed contains very few areas of level arable land, permanent settlement has been a minor factor in the area's history. A few small ranches were located along the main creek between lower Sturgis Fork and China Gulch. Families that either settled in or maintained "side ranches" within the W.A.A. during the late 19th and very early 20th centuries included the Agees, Kohlhagens, Offenbachers, Culy's, and Knutzens. They built ditches to irrigate small pastures, orchards, and gardens (or reused older mining ditches for that purpose). By the 1890s, the tiny community of Steamboat had a one-room school, a sawmill, a post office, and weekly stage service via the narrow wagon road that accessed upper Carberry Creek from the north, over Thompson Creek Divide.

The few agricultural settlers (many of whom also mined seasonally) raised livestock as their main "cash crop." Sheep (and even some goats) were grazed in the Steamboat Mountain and Cougar Gap vicinities, but cattle were the main stock grazed in the meadows of the Siskiyou Crest. In addition to the settlers living within the W.A.A., ranchers from the Thompson Creek, Williams Creek, and main Applegate River valleys ranged their herds into the higher portions of the watershed. By 1910 or so, portions of the Crest in the Grayback Mountain area were reported as badly overgrazed.

Ranchers of the neighboring Thompson Creek valley had first tapped the waters of the W.A.A. in the 1850s, diverting it into the headwaters of Thompson Creek. In 1907, the Thompson Creek Irrigation District began to lengthen and enlarge the ditch from Sturgis Fork, impounding and enlarging Miller Lake as a reservoir.

Note: In addition to "Steamboat Mountain," several other place-names within the W.A.A. date to the early mining days. Carberry Creek was named for William Carberry, miner of the Upper Applegate area during the 1850s; likewise Steve Fork was named for early miner Steve Oster. Grayback Creek/Mountain commemorates the plentiful lice (or "graybacks") that sometimes made life miserable on the early mining frontier. Sturgis Fork, Miller Lake, and O'Brien Creek recall ranching/mining families of the main Applegate Valley (between Ruch and Provolt); members of these families undoubtedly grazed cattle and hunted in the headwaters of these two streams.

4. Early Forest Service Period (ca. 1910-1940)

During the early Forest Service period, federal land management activities within the W.A.A. consisted largely of fire detection, fire suppression, trail (and by the late 1930s, road) development, and limited control over grazing. Fire lookouts were erected on Steve Peak and Whisky Peak. A telephone line built down Carberry Creek connected these lookouts to the ranger station at Star Gulch; a seasonal guard station was situated near Steamboat (later, "Sturgis Guard Station"). Livestock ranchers expanded their herds during World War I, increasing the grazing impact on high meadows. Flood irrigation of pastures

*within the W.A.A. typically did not use fish screens at ditch intakes; probably contributing to a decline in the native and anadromous fish population.

Because of the importance of the Sturgis Fork/O'Brien Creek watershed to Thompson Creek irrigators, the Soil Conservation Service established one of its earliest "snow courses" in southern Oregon on Grayback Mountain in the 1930s (the S.C.S. replaced the old snow course with a "sno-tel" remote-telemetry snow-moisture measuring station in the late 1970s).

Probably the most notable federal activity in the vicinity during this period occurred just to the west of the W.A.A., when the Forest Service (later, the National Park Service)--in cooperation with private businesses--developed the tourist potential of Oregon Caves National Monument during the 1920s and 1930s. However, with access to the Caves available only from the Illinois Valley area, the Carberry Creek watershed witnessed virtually none of the tourist "boom" that brought visitors, via a winding narrow road up from the "Redwood Highway," virtually to the western edge of the W.A.A.

The Depression brought renewed placer and lode mining to the W.A.A., largely by local men who hoped to augment their meager income through small-scale mining. Much of the W.A.A.'s "Depression mining" activity concentrated in the Steamboat Mountain/Brush Creek area. Although gold was the main objective, some cinnabar and tungsten was also mined. During the mid-1930s, the Forest Service employed crews of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrollees to help build a road up the narrow, winding canyon of Carberry Creek to join the old road at Steamboat. (During the 1930s, a CCC "spike camp" was located along Carberry Creek; it probably housed 20-40 enrollees.) This new, more direct access route opened up the W.A.A.'s timber to loggers, but the low lumber prices of the Depression discouraged any significant logging until World War II.

5. World War II and After (1940-1980s)

Until the 1940s, all logging within the W.A.A. had been for local use (i.e., within the Carberry Creek drainage): pine and Douglas-fir for a few residences, barns, and a large quantity of flume boards, as well as cedar for underground mine timbers and fence posts/rails. By 1940, the new CCC-built road system up Carberry Creek had been extended about a half-mile up Brush Creek, Steve Fork, and Sturgis Fork, setting the stage for post-War penetration of the mature timber stands in the W.A.A.'s higher elevations. During the War, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built several stout log-stringer bridges in the W.A.A. as training exercises; these did not become well-travelled, however, until the mid-1950s, after more accessible timber stands to the east of the W.A.A. had been tapped and harvested. The 1950s-1960s witnessed accelerated road building into the higher elevations of the Carberry Creek watershed, with selective cutting ("high-grading" in many cases) and some clearcutting on the steep slopes. During the 1970s and early 1980s, skyline-cable yarding of timber occurred, as did the construction of some very dense, parallel road systems in upper Steve Fork.

In 1984, a small portion of the W.A.A. in the Steve Fork drainage was designated as wilderness by Congress (part of Red Buttes Wilderness); wilderness advocates had lobbied for inclusion of nearly the entire Siskiyou Crest between Steve Fork and Grayback Mountain.