

Summer Hire Perspectives, Part II – BPR, 1963-1965

From an Email from Scott Rustay, August 2009

Spending five summers as a temporary with the Bureau of Public Roads, Idaho Division, Scott Rustay had some choice experiences. He writes that “the facts may have been stretched somewhat, but I think the narrative doesn’t stray too far from what actually happened!”

For Scott Rustay, after two years with the Bureau of Public Roads, there was no question about where he would work the rest of his summers while going to school at Boise State. For the third year in a row, he hired on as a summer temporary for June through August 1963. Continuing as a GS-4 civil engineering technician, he was assigned to the Cascade-Warm Lake Highway project near Cascade, Idaho.

That summer, Scott had an apartment to himself which he rented from a Judge in Cascade. “My only company was a tap-shoe wearing mouse who used to scamper across the linoleum floor every night after I turned the light out.”

The Project Engineer was **Gordon Mead**, and he headed up an interesting crew, Scott said. “There was no love-loss between Gordon and Contractor, McGregor Triangle.” He recalled one weekend when “Gordon drove out to the job...and spotted the contractor burying brush under a big fill. He didn’t say anything until later when the fill was completed, and then he gave the Contractor an offer he couldn’t refuse: Take the fill back out.”

The cost would be McGregor’s, the P.E. told them, if any brush was found. If the fill was clean, the Government would foot the bill. “I don’t think the Contractor ever figured out how Gordon knew about the brush,” Scott said.

He also remembered a particular Party Chief on the project “who loved hunting cougars and spent all his spare time training his tracking dogs. Rumor had it that he would catch stray cats and throw them to his dogs to make them meaner! Given his



*Work on the Wayan-Freedom Highway, 1961.
WFLHD Archives.*

personality, this seemed quite possible to me.”

The next year, 1964, Scott was hired as a GS-5 and assigned to a project on the southeast Idaho state line, the Wayan-Freedom Highway. **Emory Waller** was the Project Engineer, and “much to Emory’s dismay, we began the summer with an all temp crew.” The first part of the summer was spent on survey and construction staking, and Scott noted that some permanent employees “were moved in once construction started.”

For most of June “we had heavy rain...making field survey work difficult. The stream along the route was at flood stage. By July we had finished the final construction staking which included a major channel change for the stream adjacent to the road. The mosquitoes were so thick that we had to wear bandannas across our faces even after applying cans of insect repellent.”

For that project, Scott was quartered in a motel room in Thayne, Wyoming, “where the office trailer was parked,” and he’d take his clothes into a Laundromat in Jackson on the weekends. For meals, the crew split their loyalties between the town’s two small cafés. One, he said, was “run by a Catholic and one by a Mormon,” and they “seemed to have a competition going that went beyond food...As the summer went on, both cafés kind of adopted us and made sure we would be taken care of when they were closed.” Occasionally, he said, he’d go “to the Cowboy Bar at Alpine for good dinners on Saturday night.”

During their spare time, the crew was well occupied. Most of them “played softball on the Thayne team. We also helped a local dairy farmer bring in hay bales

over several evenings.” He remembered that the bales were heavy, but the farmer was well-conditioned to deal with them. “The bales I could just barely buck-up off the ground, the farmer pulled up to stack with one arm and a hay hook.” That, Scott said, “really impressed me.”

All in all, he reflected, “Thayne was very welcoming to our crew—even though there was some grumbling about the time it took for merchants to be paid through (the government’s) purchase order process.”

That year, Scott’s duties revolved

mostly around materials testing, and “we worked into the middle of November.” Then, as the stream flows dropped, the contractor cut back to “placing the large multi-plate culverts...

“When snow came, I learned a lot about getting two-wheel drive pickups stuck in very stupid places. I was a slow learner, but the best (tire-chain) installer on the crew. Overnight temperatures reached -20 degrees, and the clear night skies were filled with fluffy snow crystals slowly drifting down. Starting the trucks in the morning became an interesting proposition. If one would turn over, we could use it to jump the others.”

Keeping warm in such temperatures was not easy. Scott said he “invested in a pair of heavy Woolrich pants which I wore over long johns and Levis. This kept me reasonably warm.” But, he added, his “proudest cold weather acquisition was a pair of army-surplus mukluks—white canvass, mid-calf boots with a moccasin sole and felt inserts. A cord drawstring at the top kept the snow out.

“I thought these were just the ticket for keeping my feet warm while I worked on notes in the office,” he said. “Emory, however, felt that they were totally inappropriate attire for working in a Government office. In the 39 years I was associated with the agency, I (was) chewed out by some pretty proficient linguists, but I don’t think any of them matched his passion! As I recall, though, that was a Saturday in which I was volunteering my time, and I was not about to back down....I suspect we were both a little burned-out and the battle



An incident on a 1961 project along the Wayan-Freedom Highway. WFLHD Archives.

probably allowed us to vent some pent-up steam. I can't remember what the final resolution was, but I did get to continue wearing those cool mukluks."

The project finally shut down just before Thanksgiving, which pleased the motel owners to no end. They "wanted to close for the winter and didn't see my \$5 a day as a big loss."

During his last summer as a temporary, June through August 1965, Scott was assigned to a construction project on Idaho Highway 21 from Lowman north. **Jim Jensen** was the Project Engineer, and Scott said he "definitely ran the job." He had his own unique method of dealing with "equipment operators who were doing something he didn't like: "I don't know what you're doing, but Quit!" he would tell them.

"I remember that phone service to the office was spotty at best," Scott said, and "that seemed to suit Jim just fine. He could usually get in touch with Boise if he needed something, but never seemed to be able to receive their calls of advice."

During that summer, "we had a major slide that just kept moving and closing the highway. We soon ran out of places to put all the extra material. My suggestion was to put a ½ yard of it in the trunk of each tourist that complained about the delays. I figured that would only take a week to solve the problem. Jim was not impressed.

"In general, the job progressed smoothly under Jim's direction, and I learned a lot watching him." Scott said that as the project engineer, Jim Jensen worked through "major issues with the contractor with firmness, but also a willingness to compromise to get a good job and stay on schedule."

Reflecting back on his five years as a summer temporary with the BPR, Scott reflected that many of the other young men he worked with came from small towns, and "times do change, but it was and still is a great way to make a contribution, visit some of the greatest places in the world, and earn a good living."

Scott Rustay was Chief of the Project Development Branch when he retired. More of Scott's experiences with paving, safety, and materials testing will be covered in future stories in this series. Retirees with memories to share are welcome to submit them to Marili Reilly at marili.reilly@dot.gov.