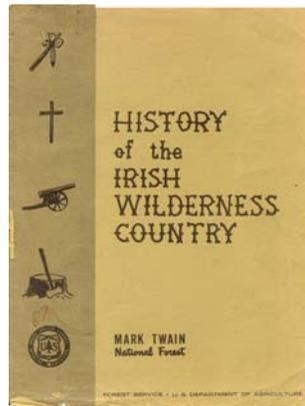


HISTORY of the IRISH WILDERNESS COUNTRY



This document was produced for the Mark Twain National Forest in 1970 by Ronald Wihebrink, Forest Historian.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a history of the proposed Whites Creek and Irish Wilderness special management units which are still being studied this date of November 9, 1970.

Whites Creek Unit consists of 3,600 acres, and Irish Wilderness of 13,360 acres; a total of 16,960 acres. This history will combine both units. The attached map will distinguish between the two areas.

The area boundary is generally described as being bordered on the west by the Eleven Point River, on the north by the village of Wilderness, on the south by Forest Road 3148, and the east by the Oregon and Ripley County lines. The area is contained in all or part of the following sections: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36, TWN23N, R2W, and the political township of King, Oregon County. From the very beginning eons ago, the area has eroded away to the present broad ridge tops that fall away to steep side slopes and narrow valleys with several caves, springs, sinkholes, and rocky outcrops. Elevations vary from a low of 440' to a high of 890'. Sheer bluffs dot this wild dolomite domain, which abounds in Flora and Fauna. Annual precipitation is forty-nine inches. The average winter high temperature is 46° and the average winter low is 26°. The average summer high temperature is 92° and the average low is 68°. ¹

THE BEGINNING

As the igneous rocks cooled, ancient streams eroded and carried them to create a vast plain interrupted by occasional knobs, mountains, and valleys.

Later, the entire area was covered by seas into which streams emptied their loads of mud, clay, sand, and gravel. Waves and shore currents wore away similar material from the beaches and shorelines, and the debris was swept seaward to fall to the bottom.

As sea organisms died, their remains settled to the bottom to form a litter composed mainly of the shells or bony parts. This thick accumulation eventually hardened and was naturally cemented to form many of the common rocks in Missouri. Mud and clay became shale, sand became sandstone, gravel became conglomerate, and the remains of the sea organisms became an important constituent of limestone (calcium carbonate) and dolomite (calcium magnesium carbonate).

The marine sediments are stratified or bedded like a huge layer cake. The area that is now Missouri was alternately sea bottom and dry land at many times during its geologic history.

Much of the landscape of today is the result of three major geologic influences; uplifting of the bedrock and the erosion and weathering of the various types of rocks.

The topography is one of hills, plateaus, and deep valleys. Streams are still following courses which they established thousands of years ago.

Many of the Ozark stream valleys are unusually crooked for their size and depth. Such valleys are called “entrenched meanders,” and are believed to have originated in the following manner: During the time interval when dinosaurs became extinct and the small ancestors of the modern horse appeared, the Ozarks were worn down to a plain on which sluggish streams developed crooked meandering channels similar to the present day Mississippi River.

When the Ozarks were later uplifted, the streams stayed in their old channels and cut deep valleys, which resulted in the entrenched meanders of today.

Springs, caves, and sinkholes are common in the Ozarks and bordering areas where ground water has been especially active in dissolving openings in the soluble dolomites or limestones.

Springs tend to form where solution has opened channels along bedding planes of layered rocks or along cracks in the rocks, and these openings come to the surface in streambeds or valley walls. Springs may also flow from beds of permeable material such as sandstone.

If underground channels are large, caves result, and where roofs of caves collapse, sinkholes are produced. Sinkholes may also be created where the solution of percolating waters has enlarged vertical cracks

or joints in the bedrock. These vertical channels reach the surface or near enough to the surface to allow the soil to settle.”²

The soils in the area are generally loess derived and cherty residual soils on ridges and sideslopes. Loam and sandy loam alluvial soils in the bottoms. (from Forest Service soil survey by Forest Service soil scientists, 1968).

Thus we have the results up to this date of the never ending shaping of our terrain, which gave us our scenic Ozark landscapes of today. As the rocks eroded to soil, the wind and ancient streams deposited their clays and silts, nature set the stage for the flora.

FLORA AND FAUNA

About the Tertiary period of the Cenozoic Era, twenty-nine million years ago, angiosperms (modern hardwoods such as the maple and oak) took root in the Wilderness area.³ These trees grew to lush virgin forests to be exploited by the timber beasts in 1880.

Today the forest consists of 69.7% hardwood, 9% shortleaf pine, and 21.3% mixed oak and pine (from Timber Management Plan Forest Service, 1968).

Also, the Cenozoic epoch gave us our wildlife. Some species as we know them today, such as the eagles, bitterns, grouse, owls, and mammals now long extinct such as the mesohippus (the three-toed horse). During this time the early cat, dog, bear, beaver, mouse, and rat evolved. The shorel-tusked mastodon appeared during the Miocene period. As the Quaternary period took its place in the never-ending geologic time table. Southern Missouri saw the appearance of the mammoth, saber toothed tiger, sloth, bison, and man.³

EARLY MAN IN THE OZARKS

From an archeological excavation at Greer Springs Recreation Area, man, (Polo-Indian to Archaic) left evidence of his occupation. By carbon tests, these people date back to 9,700 ± 500 years ago. ⁴

Although no archeological investigations have been made of the Wilderness Area, Indian evidence has been found. Whites Creek Cave would have presented a fine shelter for these early people. Investigations should be undertaken to see if early man and his successors occupied this area. “It is a rugged, picturesque country that appeals to the imagination of men today, and apparently has for thousands of years in the past. The big springs, boiling up from unknown depths and immediately forming rivers of crystal-clear drinking water teeming with fish, surrounded by virgin forests interspersed at intervals with prairies bounding in game, were irresistible attractions to hunters, fishers, gatherers, and beauty lovers as far in the past as the first men to explore the region thousands of years ago. The springs, underground rivers, sinkholes, and caves were mysterious thing---things that stimulated thoughts of greater powers than those that man possessed.”

Perhaps the ready abundance of food and drink were the greatest attractions to the first men to enter this wilderness, part of which is known today as the Irish Wilderness. The later Pilgrims may have come in part to worship the blue pearls and boiling spring waters. A ceremonial center on Eleven Point far removed from the usual range of

such “Temple Mound” Mississippi valley cultures, indicates that the area attracted the town-dwelling Indians of the Mississippi period just prior to the Invasion of the hills by the Spanish explorers and French traders and miners followed by our own settlers.

The Middle Mississippi culture is represented in fullest extent in the Eleven Point Valley at one point. At the mouth of Hurricane Creek is located a large temple mound approximately two hundred feet in diameter and more than 15 feet high. It is flat-topped, and is pyramidal in shape, similar to the temple mounds characteristic of the Middle Mississippi Culture. It has the possibilities of being a special ceremonial center on the order of the Spiro Mound of Oklahoma.”⁵

“About the time the last great ice sheet began its retreat from the Missouri River, early man made his appearance in the Ozarks. This was probably 9,000 to 12,000 years ago. If present-day interpretations of the period are correct, early man witnessed a land often flooded and covered with lush vegetation. Gigantic proboscidiens (huge elephants) inhabited the whole area and browsed in and near the swamplands. On the grassy uplands and prairies, herds of wild horses, little larger than Shetland ponies, shook their oversized heads as they grazed the vegetation. The great ground sloth, the huge dire wolf, and the big short-face bear stalked the terrain in search of food. The musk ox and the tapir, though probably limited in number, inhabited the region. The larger primitive buffalo of the Great Plains penetrated the borderlands of the Ozarks, leaving fossilized remnants

as evidence of their presence. Numerous herds of peccaries roamed the hills and valleys, consolidating their defense when attacked by enemies. The armadillos leisurely pursued their endeavors midst a harsh environment. Even the crocodilians from the south land pushed their way into the swampy borderlands of the Ozarks.

In addition to the now extinct creatures mentioned above, many of the more recent species also inhabited the region; the mountain lion, elk, deer, bear, raccoon, and beaver.

Evidence of early man lies in the scattered finds of specialized fluted spear points characteristic of the Clovis and Folsom variety. The Clovis fluted points, more often found in the Ozarks, date back to 10,000 B.C. Aside from the distribution of these very distinctive spear points, we know very little about early man in the Ozarks. It is quite evident he was knowledgeable in the use of fire as attested to by its presence on the oldest occupational levels of various excavations elsewhere. He no doubt wore clothing of skins and ate small animals, which were probably more easily apprehended than the giant species of his time. It is probably safe to assume he foraged on wild fruits and nuts for a portion of his livelihood. But the pursuit of the Ice Age giants surely offered the challenge of his time.”⁶

The Hopewell-Mississippian civilization started its decline about 1542 A.D. That is the time when Hernando ‘s men explored much of the region.

Many Mississippian townspeople living in southeast Missouri fell victim to the vices and evils accompanying DeSoto and his Spanish conquistadors.

The mighty Osages who could raise a thousand warriors were believed to be descendants of the Hopewell-Mississippian people. The Osages were considered one of the most warlike tribes in North America. Scarcely any Indian nation encountered more enemies. They raided not only early white settlements, but had numerous encounters with other tribes. They dealt in slavery and horse stealing to bolster their economy. A major Osage trail between Springfield and St. Louis passed north of the Wilderness area. Another principle Osage trail, known as the Virginia Warrior's Path, was just south of the area. All of south Missouri was considered their hunting territory. The Osages were still very active in 1818, according to Schoolcraft when he journeyed through southern Missouri.⁶ The last transient Indians to reside in the area were the Delawares and Shawnees, who remained as late as the 1820's. The last native Indians were perhaps the Quapaw.

The United States considered Missouri a dumping place for their Indian problem to rid the land east of the Mississippi of Indians for the western movement of the white settlers. As a result, tribes of Indians such as Kickapoos, Peorias, Weas, Piankashaws, and Miamis migrated through and around the Wilderness area. The Cherokees'

plight in the 1830' s created The Trail of Tears which runs north and south of the area. Twenty thousand Cherokees were forced to leave their homeland east of the Mississippi and forced west along these trails.

Early settlements and active fur markets, combined with the large influx of Indians, largely depleted the wildlife in the eastern portion of the Ozarks. There was a strong and continuous pressure on Congress to open up the Ozarks for settlement by whites. By the 1850's the Indians were gone from Missouri. ⁶

PIONEER SETTLEMENT

Some historians contend there is a possibility the Current-Eleven Point area was visited by some of DeSoto's men in 1541. (Ref. 5,11)

France took possession of this country in 1682. The Ozark region was ceded to Spain by France in 1762, then to the French, and in 1804 from France to the United States (known as the Louisiana Purchase for \$1,500,000.00).

Several hypotheses and theories have been advanced on the origin of the name "Ozarks." Some of these have been fabricated upon the French coinage of the word from some phrase of their language, which most ably described the graceful arcs, bends, and curves of the streams. While these disputations were being exploited, the Ozark humorists added their version to the origin of the name. According to them, the Ozark Mountains was the only body of land protruding above the surface of the waters in the great Biblical flood, and it was here that Noah landed his ark and released the animals. The region was named "Ozark" commemorating the exultations of the landing of Noah's Ark. There are several other theories, all coming from Indian tribes named by the French.

The discovery of the country of the "Six Bull" in about 1800 is credited to Edward Jennings from Jackson, Tennessee, who is said to have been the first English-speaking traveler in this region. This adventure set out to hunt through the Missouri wilderness, and for

fifteen years lived with the Indians. His friends had almost forgotten his existence when he appeared among them in Indian dress. The people of Jackson gathered to listen to his stories of travel. He called the Ozark region the country of the “Six Boils,” pronouncing the name as if written “Six Bulls,” because of the great springs, which feed our rivers (Greer Springs, etc.).⁸

Immediately after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 from the French; Randolph, a close relative of Thomas Jefferson, came into the Ozark region on Jefferson’s orders to mingle with the Indians. For three years he journeyed in these hills, living among the Indians. Randolph returned to Kentucky, but soon he and his relatives returned to the Ozarks. One of the old trails they and many other frontiersmen followed was the same as the one later known as the Bellview and Pocahontas road. This trail left Pike Creek in a southern direction at Poca Hollow to wind across the southern wilderness of Missouri. Randolph guided the settlers through the Ozarks by way of the Irish Wilderness (the Bellview and Pocahontas road now follows the approximate route of “J” Highway).⁷

Another explorer in the 1800’s was Schoolcraft. Though all indications are he traveled south of the Wilderness area in 1818.

Major Stephen Long traveled somewhere through the area in 1817. According to some historians, he named the Ozarks.

The great Ozark Wilderness remained virtually unsettled during the latter part of the 18th century. A few revolutionary war soldiers traveled through the area. The Wilderness was a no mans land while the Indian wars raged. The New Madrid earthquake had driven some settlers north and west into our region.

Early records show that a few people from the east had settled this section by 1810, but few stayed. One early settlement was Good Hope, located about 1½ miles east of Fremont at the junction of Big Pike Creek and Little Pike Creek. ⁷

In 1809, Charles Hatcher settled west of the present town of Thomasville, when the territory was a part of New Madrid County. He was followed by names like Howell, Huddleston, and Bellah. In 1822 Thomasville was becoming an important trading post and the only town in what is now Oregon and Howell County. ⁹

In 1821, the same year of Missouri's statehood, a government surveyor, John C. Sullivan, laid out the Wilderness area in sections. In his call notes, he describes the land as "unfit for cultivation." ¹⁰ Most of the people who settled this area lived uneventful lives and, therefore, made little local history. The region was isolated by its lack of communication from the rest of the state and consequently, developed little interest in outside affairs. Few men went from this area to take a strong hand in the affairs of the state. It was a minor factor in the shaping of policies of the State government. With few important

events, the want of pride in local affairs, and the character of the people, are all reflected in the scarcity of written accounts of the region.

The pioneers' cabins were generally made of logs, sometimes hewed on two sides and sometimes not hewed at all. When hewed, the logs were placed with the flat surfaces on the inside and outside of the buildings. The cracks were filled with chinking, and this was doubled over with mud. The form of the cabin was rectangular, with a huge fireplace in one end. The fireplace was set back in a crib composed of logs with the face even with the inner wall. This crib was heavily lined with stone and mortar, and built up on a hearth made of flat stones. On the top of the stones and mortar lining was made a stick and mud chimney, the latter always being entirely on the outside of the building and extending a little above the roof. The cabin was only one story in height and was covered with clapboards resting on poles and running the length of the building. They were weighted down with other poles. One or two small openings were cut out for windows in which greased paper, when it could be secured, was often substituted for glass. The floor was made of puncheons prepared wholly with an ax, and laid down on "sleepers." The door was made of light puncheons or heavy clapboards fastened together with pins and hung on wooden hinges. This is a fair description of the completed "pioneer's cabin." The only tools required in building it was an ax, broadax, froe, and angler.⁸

Some of these cabins still stand, as In the case of Jimmy Simpson. The oldest living person in Wilderness, (82 years old), Jimmy cleared his land and built a three-room log cabin. He later put wallboard inside and siding outside. He still lives in the house. Jimmy also is the proud owner of the only telephone service in Wilderness; the old crank type that runs from his house to his daughter's house across the back yard.

RECORDED DEVELOPMENT

The first territorial seat of Missouri was New Madrid, then Davisonville Ark, then it became Whane County, with the county seat at Greenville, Missouri, then Ripley County. The seat located at Van Buren was organized in 1833, including all of what is now Ripley, Oregon, and Howell Counties. In 1845, Oregon County was organized from Ripley County by an act of the Missouri Legislature. Authorized by the 13th General Assembly of the State of Missouri, the county was named for Oregon Territory. The first county seat was Thomasville.

In 1857, Oregon County was divided and a new county of Howell was formed. In 1859, the county seat was moved from Thomasville to Alton. The new county seat was named Alton so it would be easy to spell, and the first time William C. Boyd, the County Clerk, wrote the name he spelled it "Owlton."⁹

Father Hogan

According to records, Father Hogan and his Irish immigrants were the first recorded settlers in the Wilderness area in 1859. Father Hogan's church was built on the east half of Section 24, Township 24, Range 2 West.⁹

Father Hogan was extremely interested in establishing missions for Irish immigrants working on the railroads in St. Louis, and giving these immigrants and their families the security of family life.

The Irish immigrants were subjects of extreme prejudice and poverty. They had fled their homes in politically torn, famine-ridden Ireland with many locating in St. Louis. Because of these prejudices, they could only find menial work. The men took jobs as construction workers on railroads, and the young women worked as domestic help. The men were forced to live in camps along the right-of-way of the railroads they were building, and women were compelled to live with the people who employed them.

In his search for a place for immigrants, Father Hogan traveled to northern Missouri where he found the land prices too high (\$10 to \$20 an acre). He then searched southern Missouri in 1857 with a surveyor, traveling by horseback across the rugged terrain, steep-sided timbered hills topped by glades where grass grew often as tall as man. He then returned to his parish in Chillicothe, in northern Missouri. Then, in November of 1857, Father Hogan and his close friend, Father James Fox, set out again in search of a home for the Irish. The country through which this expedition took them was almost wholly without roads. It was on Tenmile Creek that Father Hogan found land he deemed suitable for his Irish settlement. He selected 480 acres just north of the conflux of Tenmile and Crane Creeks. Anticipating problems in procuring the land, he searched further west. On his final trip he was accompanied by Father Walsh, rector of St. Peter's Church in Jefferson City; who, according to Father Hogan, took interest in every effort to lead the good Catholic

Irish people from the railroad shanties and the back streets and cellars of the cities, to locate them on new lands. After completing these journeys, there were few watersheds Father Hogan hadn't personally traveled.

Father Hogan's written record read as follows: "The information we had gathered was that Ripley, Oregon, and Howell Counties afforded good advantages for settlement to people of small means and of patient, frugal, industrious habits. The country, as we found it, was quite healthy. Land was cheap." (Ref. 11, 12) The land was by no means all good, but enough of it was good to support many inhabitants, if not a dense population. The price of government land was from 12½ cents to \$1.25 an acre.

All the time he remained in Chillicothe, his anxiety grew, for the railroads were advancing steadily southward from St. Louis with each driven spike. The Irish of the railroad shanties were moving further away from Father Hogan's dream of a community where they might realize "their higher social aspirations."

In November 1858, Father Hogan returned to Tenmile Creek site, and to his dismay found that "all the government land fit for cultivation had been bought by parties not Catholic."

Father Hogan writes, "Westward, though very much against my will, I had to move about 40 miles to a region where there was yet much government land." Affairs in Chillicothe kept Father Hogan pretty

much tied down. He, therefore, appealed to Father Fox to purchase a large tract of land upon which a one-story log house, 40 foot square, was erected and partitioned into two apartments-- one for a chapel, and the other for the priest's residence. (This church was located in Township 24, Section 24, 2 West, on the Clyde Anderson farm. The foundation has been plowed out in recent years.)

Father Hogan had not selected the land until 1858. Already in the spring of 1859 there were settlers established. In his account, Father Hogan wrote, "already in the spring of 1859 there were about 40 families on newly acquired government lands." The gathering of the colonists was turned over to a St. Louis land agent. The Irish settlers finally were able to have homes of their own on land they could cultivate with a sense of security. Their children faced a future free of the deprivations and persecutions that had driven their parents from their native country. Gone now were the miserable shanties of the railroad camps, gone were the separations of parents and children, and husband and wife.

Improvements were keeping pace with the growth of the area; cutting down trees, splitting rails, burning brushwood, making fences, grubbing roots and stumps, building houses, digging wells, breaking and plowing land, and sowing crops.

Vice was little known among them, although everyone smoked -- men and women, young and old, using corn cobs for bowls and cane that grew

along the streams as stems for their pipes. The manfolk did usually take a “morning dram” of moonshine liquor, but intemperance was nowhere observable.

Father Hogan gave a clear picture of life in the Irish Wilderness during this period of settlement and growth. “Maidens and wains married young, usually before 20 and often at 16, and their married life was remarkable, virtuous, and happy. The marriage dowry was usually a one-room log house. The young man was fortunated by his father with a yoke of oxen and a plow. The bride was dowered by her mother with a wealth of homespun dresses and household fabrics of like manufacture. Timber from a neighboring sawmill was framed into furniture and the young couple delighted with it, although it lacked veneer or varnish, for which their rural surroundings gave them no knowledge whatever.”

The government had sold them a homestead of 320 acres, at 12½ cents an acre. Wilderness and all of the proposed area was part of Father Hogan’s Irish settlement, as the county records show all the land being entered by half sections with Irish names. There seemed to be no limit to their dreams, but even as they worked their soil and reaped their crops. In the fall of 1860, ominous clouds began to form, which would bring devastation to the colony of Irish settlers. The split of the Democratic Party over the free soil question resulted in the election of Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln, a Republican and anti-slavery, was sometimes called an abolitionist. The South rose in resentment and threatened secession.

In 1861, civil war rolled across the nation. In the border state of Missouri, the war was brutal, bloody, and relentless. Father Hogan foresaw the Civil War, yet felt secure that neither the North nor the South cared enough for the Irish Wilderness to occupy it.

The Irish Wilderness was completely surrounded, the Union Armies to north and northwest, and the Confederate armies to the south and southeast. Wilderness held little to attract an army. However, because of its terrain it did offer refuge for raiding parties of both armies.

The Irish Wilderness did provide cover and protection for the murderous bands of bushwhackers who gave no allegiance to either the North or the South, and preyed on the helpless situation of the civilian population without regard or discrimination. Thus, the Irish Wilderness became a no mans land where civilized rules of warfare were discarded and bloodthirsty bands looted and murdered almost at will.

But what was the fate of the Irish settlement? Records show only that there was a settlement there prior to the civil war and after the civil war, there was nothing. Only the remnants of a few buildings which had been burned, and here and there badly deteriorated fences surrounding desolate overgrown fields remained. What became of the people, we can only surmise. One legend claims the Irish fled in the dark of night.

Another tells of murder by bushwhackers over a period of time. Actually, no one knows for certain what happened to the people, but it seems likely that they just drifted away family by family. Perhaps some families left because of recruitment, because these people had little interest or knowledge of why the war was being fought. (Ref. 12,15)

Father Hogan went on to be Bishop of Kansas City. He left no account of the fate of his Irish people.⁹ On May 17, 1879, the land where Father Hogan's church was located was sold for taxes.

In the mid 1800's, about the time of Father Hogan's entry into this country, Peter Rine Simpson and an eldest son, T.M. Simpson, settled the community of Wilderness. T.M. Simpson was government surveyor (uncle to Jimmy Simpson who resides at Wilderness), then later road commissioner. In 1880, T.M. Simpson opened up a road from Alton to Panther Spring and to Eleven Point River at the W.A. Whitten farm, and then to the county line, the eastern line of Section 13, Township 24, Range 2 West. Two years later it was built for \$5.00 and was probably located on an old trail. He then opened up a road from the present site of Wilderness to Alton. Both Peter Rine Simpson and his son, T.M. Simpson were to become leading citizens and instrumental in the development of the Wilderness community and surrounding area.

Wilderness and other communities such as Handy, (said to be the smallest post office in the world, a six-foot by nine-foot slab building, is no longer in service), Pine, Bardley, and Whitten, that surround the

proposed area did not become populated and functioning communities until after the Civil War, except the community of Whitten, which was located on the southern end of the proposed area. Since it was on the river, it is logical to assume it was started early in the 1800's. No records are available on Whitten. The school building church still stands and was used until the early 1950's as a grade school. The rest of the community seems to have disappeared from recorded history.

Thomas Simpson, who emigrated from Tennessee in 1852 (grandfather of T.M. Simpson) bought from the government what is now known as Greer Spring; then selling to T.C. Simpson for \$25.00, who arranged with millwright Samuel W. Greer to come from Tennessee to build a mill at the foot of the hill near the spring. Here the mill was operated after the war, when Mr. Greer bought out all interests and built the mill building that now stands at the top of the hill.

T.M. Simpson built a water-powered saw mill at his father's mill located on Little Hurricane and sawed the lumber for the Greer mill building at the top of the hill. At that time he was living at Wilderness.

The Civil War

Those who gave allegiance to one side or the other mostly went to the Confederacy (very few going to the Union as Oregon County was predominately Democratic and still is). The majority were neutral;

they are the ones who suffered the most. Then there were some people who preyed upon others and profited from the war. These people showed loyalty to no one. They were referred to by both the Union and the Confederacy as “jayhawkers.”

These bands confiscated any livestock and provisions they could find. There were no recorded skirmishes in Wilderness, but according to Jimmy Simpson the area was used as a rest area for both sides.

They used Jimmy’s uncle’s house (George Simpson) for shelter. The Union troops butchered a calf and slept in the hallway of his uncle’s house. His aunt told the commander she did not care what they ate or where they slept, but that she did not want her family harmed. The commander said any man who got out of line would be shot.

Peter Rine Simpson (Jimmy Simpson’s grandfather) was in command of a company of rebels. He was captured by the Union troops and was ordered to be executed before a firing squad. His clothing was removed and he was thrown into the river to “wash the rebel dirt off.” In civilian life, he had served as a doctor and a preacher. One of the soldiers said to the commander, “This rebel is a preacher. Let’s have a sermon,” where upon Peter Rine spoke on the following text:

“Naked I came into this world and naked I goeth out.” At the close of the sermon, the Union commander ordered him to put on his clothes, and sent him to prison. Later paroled, he died a natural death in the late 1890’s. His marked grave can be found in the Wilderness Cemetery.⁹

The following reports from both armies will give you an insight of the war conditions in the area.

War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Series 1, Vol. XXII, Part 1, Pages 296, 297, & 298. (CONFEDERATE)

BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS
Camp at Burden's Mill, May 11, 1863

MAJOR: In obedience to General Orders, No. _____, division headquarters, I herewith submit the following report of the part my brigade bore in the late expedition into Missouri.

On April 14, orders were received to immediately prepare my command for active service. I obeyed this order by sending train, baggage, etc., to the rear, and providing each of my companies, in addition to the regimental train allowed, with one pack mule, for the purpose of conveying such cooking utensils as could be conveniently transported.

On Friday morning, the 17th, I moved, marching 25 miles in a northerly direction, and camping on a small creek in Oregon County, Missouri.

The next morning I resumed the march, expecting to form a junction with Colonel (Joseph O.) Shelby, to whom I had been ordered to report, at Williams Creek. Owing, however, to the scarcity of forage, Colonel Shelby had already started, leaving me to march in his rear through a country known as the Wilderness. After marching 28 miles, I was compelled to halt and encamp without obtaining a particle of forage for my horses.

The next day I crossed Current River at Van Buren, camping 22 miles south of Patterson, which place I reached the next evening, learning however, that the garrison occupying the place had retreated, burning their quartermaster's and commissary stores. Lieutenant-Colonel (William J.) Preston, with three companies of my regiment, was here ordered to report to Colonel (George W.) Carter, commanding Texas brigade of cavalry, he having been sent to attack Brigadier-General (John) McNeil's forces at Bloomfield, Missouri. This part of my command did not report to me again until our forces fell back from Cape Girardeau.

I again resumed the march from Patterson, moving in the direction of Fredericktown, and encamped within 12 miles of that place, and entered the town next day at 12 o'clock, but found no enemy.

On the evening of the 25th, I received orders to move on the Cape Girardeau road, which I obeyed, passing through Jackson about daylight. At 10 o'clock we reached the city and made preparations to attack it. By Colonel Shelby's order I formed my brigade in line of battle upon his right, occupying a position that completely protected my men from the artillery of the enemy, and at the same time placing me in supporting distance from his battery. An artillery duel of an hour and a half duration was here kept up on either side, the enemy showering their shot and shell upon us, but doing little execution on account of our protected position. My loss here was only 7 wounded, 2 dangerously. Lieutenant G. R. Gilmore, of Company D, and acting adjutant

of Lieutenant-Colonel Preston's regiment, was slightly wounded in the ankle.

About 12 o'clock I received an order from Colonel Shelby to withdraw my force, it being Brigadier-General Marmaduk's intention to make only a demonstration, and not to assault the place. I then moved my command upon the Jackson road, and encamped about dark, 4 miles beyond that place, upon the road leading to Dallas. Before I could post my pickets, and, in fact, before I had fairly encamped, a company belonging to Colonel (R.C.) Newton's regiment, which had unaccountably encamped some 300 yards from the regiment, was attacked by the enemy and scattered. This company lost 6 men killed, wounded, and missing, and almost the whole of their horses. I immediately formed the brigade on foot, and awaited the approach of the enemy, whom I rightly conjectured to be in force, sending the train to Jackson. Colonel Preston was here ordered to dislodge a small force of the enemy posted on the road between my camp and Jackson, which was done without loss. Not being sufficiently acquainted with the country to attempt an advance upon the enemy, whose strength and locality I was totally ignorant of, I ordered Colonel Newton to retire with his regiment toward Jackson and form his line 1 mile west of town, and Colonel Preston was ordered to form his line of battle near the junction of the Dallas and Fredericktown roads, and to resist any movement of the enemy from that quarter.

At 5 o'clock the next morning an order was received from Brigadier-General Marmaduke to withdraw my command to Jackson. I immediately

did so, leaving, however, a picket force to cover my rear, which an hour after I had left was attacked and driven into town.

The march southward from Jackson for several days, as far as my command is concerned, presents nothing worthy of consideration. The enemy, however, were pressing our rear, and frequent skirmishes were engaged in, which, owing to the position the brigade occupied, were more frequently heard than engaged in. Once, however, the rear guard gave way and was forced back upon the command without giving sufficient warning of the approach of the enemy. This for a time threw my brigade into disorder, but the men were promptly rallied by their officers, and formed in line ready to resist the approach of the enemy. The enemy was, however, gallantly repulsed by the Texans, under command of Colonel Carter.

After my brigade had passed Bloomfield, I received orders to march back to the town and form upon the right of Colonel Shelby, and to resist the farther advance of the enemy. A heavy skirmishing was soon begun in front, and kept up till dark. No firing was heard during the night, though my scouts reported to me continually that the enemy was making a flank movement upon my right, which would have given him possession of a hill that commanded our whole position.

I was ordered next morning to move in the direction of Chalk Bluff. When within 2 miles of that point, I received orders to dismount my men, and to send horses and train across the river, and to march

the infantry thus dismounted back a short distance to a position that had been selected for fighting. The position assigned me was on the left of Colonel Shelby's brigade, my left resting an open field. Not willing to expose the men any more than necessary, I ordered temporary breastworks to be made, which would have effectually protected them from the musketry of the enemy. The enemy soon commenced a vigorous shelling, remarkable for its accuracy, the shells passing directly over my lines, within 2 feet of the ground.

At 2 o'clock at night I received orders to withdraw my forces with the utmost secrecy and dispatch, and to leave my skirmishers in front to resist any night advance of the enemy. The brigade was safely crossed to the south side of the St. Francis River, and occupied a position above the bluff on the bank of the river, which completely commanded the road leading to the bridge. I here received orders to march the brigade upon the Gainesville road and encamp until further orders, leaving, however, my sharpshooters upon the river, subject to Brigadier-General Marmaduke's order.

Subsequent events would be but a detailed list of short rations, hard marches through swamps, etc., in no way worthy of mention, save, for the cheerfulness with which the men under me endured those hardships.

In conclusion, Major, I would return my sincere thanks to both officers and men of this command for the bravery which, with but few exceptions,

they have displayed upon the battle-field, and for the unflinching fortitude with which they endured every hardship.

I would take this occasion to acknowledge my obligations to Colonels Newton and Preston for the cooperation and assistance they gave me in carrying out all orders received.

I am, Major, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JNO. Q. BURBRIDGE,
Colonel, Commanding, &c.

Major Henry Ewing

Assistant Adjutant-General, Jacksonport, Arkansas.

War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies

Series 1, Vol. XKII, Part 1, Pages 682-683.

Report of Maj. James Wilson, Third Missouri State Militia Cavalry.

Commanding expedition to Oregon County.

(UNION) HDQ.RS. THIRD MISSOURI STATE MILITIA CAVALRY
Pilot Knob, Missouri, October 23, 1863

Colonel: In compliance with your instructions of the 28th of September, I placed my command in order, and moved out on the following morning with 200 men of the Third Missouri State Militia Cavalry; encamped at night near Centreville, Missouri.

On the 30th Ultimo, I detached Captain (G.L.) Herring, with 70 men, directing him to move via Eminence, and to rejoin me at Alton as soon as practicable. Commanding the main force myself, we followed the Van Buren road, encamping at night near what is known as Henpeck Creek.

October 1, I ordered another detachment of 60 men, under command of captain (H.B.) Milks, to take a lower route, cross Eleven Point at Boyce's Mill and to proceed to Alton. The main force on this date crossed Current River; encamped at the head of Pike Creek, and on the morning following in the direction of Alton. Upon arriving at Falling Springs, I detached Captain (J.W.) McFaden, with 30 men, with orders to go by way of Boyce's Ford and meet us at Alton, and with the remainder of the force I crossed the river, about 8 miles east, at a place known as Simpkins' Mill, and also arrived at Alton that p.m.

Captain McFaden's command encountered a party of guerrillas, under one Lieutenant Duckworth, whom they routed, as well as capturing several

horses, saddles, &c. My immediate command captured 4 guerrillas, with their horses, arms and equipments.

From Alton, on the 3rd of October, I sent out three scouts, respectively, to Boyce's Mill, Simpkins' Mills, and Boyce's Ford, with instructions to scout the country for guerrillas. Captain (C .W.) Rush, commanding one of these detachments, fell in with the command of Duckworth, whom he succeeded in routing again, besides capturing several horses, camp equipage, &c.

All of the several detachments having reported to me at Alton, on the 5th of October I started for Arkansas with 140 men (leaving Captain McFaden with 60 men), proceeding in a southeasterly direction of Jaynes' Creek, Arkansas; thence west to Spring River; thence southeast to Strawberry River, and to Evening Shade, on Piney Creek. At Evening Shade we captured 35 prisoners, including captain and 3 lieutenants, as well as all their horses, arms and equipments.

On the morning of October 7, we moved east, on the Smithville road, 15 miles, thence north, crossing Strawberry River, near its mouth, to Mill Creek; thence northeast to Jaynes' Creek, returning to Alton, on the 9th instant. Captain McFaden, with an escort, was then sent with what prisoners we had taken, to report to you at Pilot Knob. I remained at Alton, sending scouts into the surrounding country frequently, and wherever I could hear of any guerrillas, until the last instant, when, my provisions being nearly exhausted, we started to return to Pilot Knob, but met Captain McFaden on the 20th, with re-enforcements, provisions, &c., for us.

In pursuance of your further orders, we returned to Alton, and remained there until the 21st instant, when, with 120 men (sending the remainder of my force under command of Captain (G.L.) Herring, to Pilot Knob, in charge of prisoners and to escort a train of refugees from Oregon County), I moved west to Thomasville, scouting the country thoroughly en route.

Learning that Alton had been burned since our departure, we hoped to intercept the rascals by traversing the northeastern portion of Oregon County, but in this we were unsuccessful. We then returned, via Delaware Creek and Jack's Fork, arriving at Pilot Knob October 26, after an absence of twenty-eight days.

As the result of our expedition, we have killed 1 captain, 4 men, and wounded 2 others. Captured 1 captain, 3 lieutenants, and 76 men, as well as about 70 horses, a lot of arms of various kinds, horse equipments, &c. This list does not include men who had been previously in the rebel army, and who voluntarily surrendered to me. I ordered all such to report to the nearest provost-marshal and to comply with the law concerning their cases. We lost 1 man, captured and paroled (Joseph Shram, Company G, Third Missouri State Militia Cavalry), and had another wounded in the left arm (Martin D. Gray, Third Missouri State Militia Cavalry).

I have to speak in the highest terms of all the officers and men under my command, and to report that I have conformed to the requirements of Circular No. 1, District of Southeastern Missouri.

I have the honor to be, colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JAMES WILSON
Major, Commanding Expedition

Co. R. G. Woodson
Commanding Post of Pilot Knob, Missouri

War of the Rebellions: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies,
Series 1, Vol. XXII, Part 1, Page 744

OCTOBER 29 - NOVEMBER 5, 1863, Scout from Pilot Knob to Alton and
Doniphan, Missouri

Report of Capt. Robert McElroy, Third Missouri State Militia Cavalry.

(UNION) Camp of the Third Regt. Mo. ~State Militia Pilot Knob, Mo., November 9, 1863

Dear Sir: According to order, I left this post with the command assigned me on the 29th day of
October, at 9 a.m., and camped that night on Little Black River, on Burford's farm.

On the morning of the 30th, we moved at daylight, although the day was very disagreeable, the
command having to face the snow and rain. We camped that night on Henpeck Creek; from
thence we moved on to Eleven Point River, and camped near the farm of the notorious
Lieutenant Huttleson; thence to Simpson's, 4 miles from the town of Alton, in Oregon County;
and on the morning of the 3rd we moved into town, and remained until the election was over.
The election passed off quietly, although Lieutenant Bricker was much mortified at the result
thereof; but the thing was done and could not be helped. In the evening we moved in a
southeast direction, and camped on the farm of Mr. Saunders.

November 4, we moved at daybreak through the hills in toward Doniphan, in Ripley County, and
camped on the farm of Oliver (one of Reven'men). On the 5th, we came through Doniphan,
and camped on the Little Black River; thence to Otter Creek; thence to Bailey Station; thence to
Pilot Knob.

During our trip we killed 8 and captured 5 of the most notorious guerrillas and jayhawkers that have infested that part of the State. Among them was a man by the name of Farmer, who had taken the oath of Allegiance at Saint Louis, and had a copy of the same in his pocket, dated the 14th day of April, 1863; also was found in his pocket a certificate from Major Crandall, certifying that the said William W. Farmer had furnished a substitute in the person of Jessee Hollice, of Oregon County, Missouri; age fifteen years, 5 feet 7 inches in height, dark complexion; dark hair, hazel eyes, and by profession a farmer. The certificate was dated the 7th day of September, 1863, and signed Lee Crandall, Major Commanding. We also captured 10 horses and 1 mule, a number of which were branded C. S. There are no regularly organized bands in that part of the country; but any man that can creep on his belly into a camp of Federals and steal a horse is entitled to the name and rank of Captain.

That portion of the State once cleaned of these marauders, jayhawkers, and thieves, and we will have peace throughout South Missouri.

I am of the opinion that the women in that region are even more daring and treacherous, and, in fact, worse than the men, as we found in their possession a number of newly made rebel uniforms, &c.

I have the honor, sir, to subscribe myself, your obedient servant,

ROBERT McELROY
Captain, Commanding Expedition

Maj. James Wilson
Commanding Third Missouri State Militia Cavalry

NOVEMBER 4-9, 1863, Scout from Houston to Jack's Fork, Mo.

Reports of Lieut. John W. Boyd, Sixth Provisional Regiment Enrolled Missouri Militia

HOUSTON, MISSOURI - November --, 1863

SIR: In compliance with Special Orders, No. 42, issued from your headquarters November 3, 1863, on the morning of the 4th instant, I started on scout with 15 men of my company, 5 men of Company B, and 5 men of Company G, Fifth Missouri State Militia, in the direction of Spring Valley. Marched that day 25 miles, without discovering anything worthy of note. Visited the residences of Benjamin Carter and Wilson Farrow, that were engaged in burning Houston; they were gone. Burned Carter's house. November 5, divided the scout. Sent 10 men, under Orderly Sergeant Basket, Company I, to march by way of Bay Creek to Jack's Fork. I proceeded with the balance of the command by way of Leatherwood or Wollsey's trail; found fresh trail of horses; followed them on Jack's Fork to the residence of Miles Stephens and brother, Jack Stephens, whom I was satisfied were bushwhackers. Burned the house. Heard that Fed Taylor had been at Stephens' last week with 25 men. Proceeded down Jack's Fork 10 miles, having marched 30 miles that day. Camped at Widow McCormick's. Had positive evidence that the widow had kept a general rendezvous for Freeman's and Coleman's guerrillas. On the morning of the 6th, burned the buildings. Learned from the widow's son, a young lad, that on the previous evening James Mahon had got him to give news of our approach. Sent back and took Mahan prisoner. Went down Jack's

Fork to mouth of Mahan's Creek; turned up said creek on Thomasville road. Prisoner Mahan attempted to escape, and was shot by the guard. Camped at William Mahan's that night, (having) marched 24 miles. On the morning of the 9th, marched up Mahan's Creek. About 9 o'clock discovered about 20 of the enemy on the bluff above us; fired a few shots at them, when they fell back. I took 20 men up the hill and reconnoitered, expecting to find them in force to give us battle, but they had all fled into the rocky ravines and hills, where it was impossible to pursue to advantage, mounted; returned to the road, and had gone about 1 mile, and met 3 men, who started to escape on seeing us; killed 2 of them, whom I ascertained from papers found on their persons to be William Chandler supposed to live in Dent County, and a man named Hackley, who had in his pocket a discharge as lieutenant from Company F, Mitchell's regiment, rebel army. He also had several packages of letters from persons in the rebel army and citizens in Arkansas, directed to persons in Dent and Phelps Counties, all of which are submitted for your disposal. Two miles farther on we captured William Story on a United States horse. He was recognized and well-known as a notorious horse thief and house robber. He attempted to escape, and was killed. Camped that night at Morgan Dean's on Birch Prairie. November 8, started in the direction of Houston; marched 5 miles, and captured William Hulsey, James Hulsey, William McCuan, and Samuel Jones at the house of James Harris, all well provided and packed, going to Freeman. One of them had a horse that was stolen some time since from one of our men; also goods of different kinds. The first three, viz, the Hulseys and McCuan, were killed. Jones, on account of his extreme youth and apparent innocence,

I had brought in, prisoner. Five miles farther, at the house of John Nicholson, a known rebel and bushwhacker, we captured the said John Nicholson, Robert B. Richards, alias Bruce Russell, and Jessee Story, all of whom were killed.

We then marched by way of McCobbin's Mill to Spring Valley, and camped at Wiley Purcel's. November 9, started direct for this post, ending a few men by way of Upper Jack's Fork, and all arrived here in the evening, all in good health, having been out six days, marched 145 miles, killed 10 men, returned 1 prisoner, burned 23 houses, recaptured 9 horses that had been previously stolen, and took 6 contraband horses and mules. All of which is respectfully submitted.

JOHN W. BOYD

First Lieut. Co. I, Sixth Prov. Reg., E.M.M., Codmg., Scout.

Captain MURPHY

Commanding Post, Houston

Slavery

There were two or three families that owned slaves in the surrounding area, but there were none in the Wilderness Area.

The people would hide their valuables, including slaves, in caves when the Union army was in the area. There are no Negroes in Oregon County. Negroes would not be accepted in the Alton and surrounding area.

When the war came to an end the people had been torn apart mentally, morally, and physically. After being paroled, the confederate soldiers were disfranchised. They could not vote or hold public office, and woman suffrage was non-existent; so the affairs of the county for five years after the war was controlled by the Union officials. ¹⁴

Post War

During the three-year period following the civil war, there were bands of outlaws who roamed the State. One such group, led by a man who had ridden with Quantrill, was Devil Dick Boze; who had hide-outs in the hills of the Eleven Point River. Devil Dick Boze is thought to have used the Wilderness Area as one of his hide-outs. His relatives owned and operated the Boze mill where later a government still was located.

By 1868 this band had increased in number and daring to the point where the Oregon County court ordered a county militia to be formed (the majority of the militia were ex-Confederate soldiers).

After the muster of the militia, most of the outlaw band fled to Texas and Oklahoma territories, but Devil Dick Boze chose to make a last stand and was killed in a gun battle with the militia.

The county awarded

Captain Greer \$1.50 to build Devil Dick's coffin. He is buried in the old Spring Creek Cemetery. ⁹

From 1865 to 1880 the Irish Wilderness lapsed in historical obscurity. Bears and mountain lions roamed the area and flocks of passenger pigeons "of such numerical size to stupify the imagination" roosted in the confines. Dear and wild turkey grazed in such number along with other wildlife that it seemed the stock could never be depleted. The rivers abounded in fish. The Irish Wilderness was, in fact, a veritable hunters' paradise. ¹²

Reconstruction

After the war, Wilderness slowly became a community being populated mostly by Simpson descendants. Living conditions were hard, and only the hardy survived.

Hunting was a mainstay of life. First, to provide food for the family; then later to sell in Alton. In the late 1800's and early 1900's a deer's saddle (hind quarters and back) brought \$.60 cash according to county records.

The houses were made of logs. Some of the more fancy houses were hewn logs (in the late 1800's, when a sawmill was installed in Wilderness, houses were built of slabs and boards) from pine timbers, while some were of small round timbers, notched at the corner so they would fit close together, and chinked or plastered with lime and sand mortar (and sometimes manure) between the logs; sometimes clay was used for plastering. Early houses had a fireplace which was used for cooking as well as for heat and light. Glass windows were unheard of at that time. Nearly

every home had a spinning wheel and loom with which to spin thread from wool and cotton for weaving into cloth for clothes. Wheat fields were harvested by hand with a grain cradle, and the sheaves were bound by hand using a wisp of wheat to tie the bundle. A first-rate cradler could cut five acres of wheat in a day, with a good hand tying the wheat as fast as it was cradled. The grain was threshed by beating it from the bundles with a flail, or tramped by horses and oxen and then screened and poured from one barrel to another with the wind removing the chaff. The grain was then taken to Turner's Mill where one grade of flour was ground, and the shorts and bran were separated. If two grades of flour were wanted, grain had to be ground at Greer.

Lead was molded into bullets for the rifles and gunpowder was made from charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter obtained from caves. Jimmy Simpson and Ona Shehorn tell of a cave that is located up Bliss Hollow. They describe the cave as being powder dry, and Jimmy saw a smelter and mining equipment. This cave has been shown to Arden Mikich, Ranger at Doniphan '61 to '67. (The Forest Service should investigate this cave).

Candles were made from tallow and it was a usual process to dip enough to last for a year at one dipping. Soap was made from lard. The main imports were salt and iron for the blacksmith who made shoes for the horses and oxen, and tires for wagons. These necessities were obtained by exporting hides and furs to Piedmont, Missouri, and exchanging them for salt and iron. The fields were fenced with rails as wire was nonexistent.

If a person became ill, he was treated with herbs and teas. Wild cherry bark tea was the most popular remedy for coughs and colds, and a household that did not have at least a gallon of corn whiskey on hand definitely was not prepared for snakebites.

According to local residents, there were several stills in the area. The remains of one is located up Bliss Hollow. Another still or sorghum mill was found about a quarter west from the mouth of Whites Creek. The local residents don't know of any sorghum mill in this area.

Whiskey or moonshine sold for \$8 a gallon and \$2 a quart. Most of the whiskey made in this area was for the local market and not exported, because of the lack of line communications.

Another account of living conditions in the area from Jimmy Simpson: He relates the families raised corn for meal, cane for sorghum, plus their gardens, and either raised their own meat or killed game. There was no other income in the area at this time. There wasn't \$10 passed through a family within a year (cash), and if a family had bad luck with a crop, they split rails for fences for a neighbor in exchange for corn or sorghum. In the late 1800's only two families owned a horse. The rest had oxen. The first sawmill that came into the area was brought in by some people named Armstrong and set up at Brauleys well located in Wilderness. The mill was hauled in by oxen. Later the Lawmores moved in a larger sawmill at the same location. These sawmills were steam operated.

The first school in Wilderness was a log cabin (no date available) located behind the present church. There were three schools. As the old school house became too small, a new one was built. In Jimmy Simpson's school days, there was a two-room schoolhouse, a basement and ground floor. The

school had two grades. You started on one lesson (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and stayed with it until you had mastered it, and then went on to the next lesson. Grades were not given and 14 was the maximum age. The teachers were very strict. The present school building (also a two-room building) now stands vacant. The children of Wilderness attend school in Alton, 27 miles away.

The churches in Wilderness started out as Baptist then went to Presbyterian then to the present Freewill Baptist. Early church was usually held once a month when the circuit preacher got around. Besides an occasional square dance or barbecue and brush arbor, the only social and recreational gathering was the church.

At one time, when the Presbyterians had the church, any denomination could hold service.

The dead were generally buried right away and services were held later or right away, as the mode of travel was slow (ox cart) and roads too rough to take the deceased to a mortuary and back for burial.

The people of Wilderness are very much religion oriented. As an example, one resident told me at one time there was talk about starting a tavern and if it went in, it would burn down that night. I believe this to be a general feeling.

The general store was (and is) the main source of communication, and the hub of the community. (The present store is not what you would call a general store as it only handles foodstuff, feed, and gasoline).

Here are some of the prices of staples in the late 1800's: coffee was 3 cents a pound, and beans were 3 cents a pound.

The only crime ever recorded was a murder (not considering the Civil War era) in the late 1800's, around the mouth of Whites Creek.

The Lumber Rush

Then came the timber cutters. The first slashing of shortleaf pine began in the 1890's. The destruction of the magnificent forest was fully underway. This was no haphazard, small-time operation. It was organized by big business with one objective; to strip the land as rapidly as possible at the lowest cost. Selective cutting was unknown. All that was left of this area was stumps.

The Ozark Land & Lumber Company was the company that cut out the Wilderness area. Logging, railroads, "tram lines," as they were known, were built almost down every hollow, as they would log from the top of a hill to the bottom. Near the river, the logs were cut and skidded to the river where they floated them down to a pick up point.

The camps were moved by trains. As soon as one area was logged out, they would move camp. The houses had skids, and they would simply skid the dwellings off the flat cars. The camps were built along the side of the tracks. The engines were run on pine knots. Those who worked gathering fuel received \$.50 a day.

The trees were taken to Winona where the Ozark Land & Lumber Company's mill was located.

The camps that are located in the Wilderness Area are: camp 9, where Ona Shehorn resides.

This is where they watered the engines in this area. A 2-acre lake was dug here. Camps 5, 6,

7, and 10 were also located in this area. Logs were cut into 16' lengths and 15 logs were

stacked on each flat car. Some of the trees were up to 42" in diameter. A cutter had to cut

10,000 board feet a day or he was out of a job. The trees were cut from the surrounding hill and

skidded to the tracks. Where the logs had to be hauled out, one person related that the ground

became too soft and so rutted that wagon wheels could not negotiate the terrain. They would

cut large pine, then cut a wide section out of the tree and round it off; the results would be a wide

wagon wheel that would not sink in the mud.

Wages ran from 50 cents a day to \$1.75 a day, the average being \$1.50 a day. Board and room

was 50 cents a day. A working day was a very hard 10 hours. (Farm labor at this time and up

to the first World War was 25 to 50 cents a day.)

By this time Wilderness had grown into a sizable community. King township population in

1890 was 412 (now it is 154). As the lumber boom raged on, it brought in a post office in 1890

(the post office was closed in the 1950's). The post office was located in the general store.

The building still stands, but is vacant. The last postmaster was Clyde Simpson. Wilderness

also sported a Masonic Lodge.

The peak cutting was from 1890 to 1900, although Ozark Land & Lumber Company was still in

operation in the area in 1906. Between 1906 and

1914, the plundering ended. The mills were dismantled, the railroad tracks torn up, and the workmen laid off. There was nothing left to cut. The pines were gone and the wildlife deprived of food and cover. The soil was stripped of its protective trees and even much of its grasses eroded and washed into the streams. Efforts to reclaim the land for cultivation were largely futile. Scrub Oak and buck-brush found root where the pines had stood, and this new growth thrived and mingled in such profusion that the whole of the region became a vast and almost impenetrable thicket; a wilderness more formidable than before, abandoned, mysterious and shunned. There were sporadic attempts at other industries. ¹⁵

About 1914 or 1915, the area we know-as the Whites Creek area, was bought from Ozark Land & Lumber Company by a rancher from Broadmore, Texas. The rancher's son, Will Harris, put several thousand head of sheep into the area that at this time had grass on it where the timber had been cut. The grass didn't hold out for the sheep in the winter and the sheep died off. Harris then tried cattle and let them starve. The local people skinned out the dead cattle and hauled the hides to Fremont to ship. Jimmy Simpson said he had hauled several four-mule hitch wagonloads of hides to Fremont himself.

Harris' mistake was that he didn't realize that unlike the blue stem grass in Texas, the grass here loses its food value after the first frost. The local farmers used to cut the blue stem grass for hay, which would grow about two feet high. The hay was cut in Hay Hollow and Greenbriar Hollow.

A telephone company was formed in the early 1900' s by a group of Alton businessmen. The line ran from Alton to Wilderness to Fremont. The company went defunct in 1920.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Wilderness area was denuded, its precipitous hillsides barren of their age old pine timber.

Some twenty years later, after the close of World War I, the appearance was quite different. The land was covered except on the grassy upland glades by oak and elm and scrub growth of all sorts.

There was this major difference; the pines had been spaced, early travelers described the forest as sufficiently open to permit passage of wagons between the trees, now the growth was thick and almost impassable, wrapping the hollows in a perpetual gloom. No roads existed other than the crudest of wagon trails. None dared penetrate it but the native folk who knew its terrain. Its dark recesses served only two purposes: as a hunting ground, and as a cover for moonshiners in the prohibition era.

FOREST SERVICE

Reclaiming began in the 1930's with passage by Congress of a bill facilitating the acquisition of lands for National Forests. The Irish Wilderness being part of the Fristoe Purchase Unit, so far as tax revenue was concerned, it was virtually worthless. First, the assessed valuation was negligible; secondly, the timber interest which owned title to the greater part of it, considered it so valueless they failed to pay up the comparatively trivial tax bills. Thus, the counties concerned faced no loss if

it became Federal land. There were, of course, dissenting views and there was some squabbling; but the landowners were, in general, only too glad of an opportunity to rid themselves of the tax burden.

During the 30's soil supported the people on a reasonable standard of living for a time, but unscientific methods of cropping and burning of the woods followed by torrential rains finally resulted in the complete loss of the shallow top soil, except for the small part of the region comprising the wider stream bottoms. This, in conjunction with the common and continued practice of frequent woods burning done with the misconception of improving pastures, has resulted in vast areas with a rather complete ground cover of loose rocks and a scattering of badly injured and defective trees, remnants of the original virgin stands. Game has largely disappeared and once fine fishing streams are now filled with silt for long stretches and subject to periodic floods.

During this period of soil and timber loss and deterioration, the people have gradually become more poverty stricken until large relief expenditures are necessary to prevent deaths by exposure and starvation. Illiteracy was on the increase and in some sections was disturbingly common.

Realizing this condition and aware of the work of the United States Forest Service in restoring, protecting, and using natural resources to furnish employment and serve the people, certain public spirited citizens were instrumental in securing the passage of the Enabling Act in 1933, which gave the consent of the State to the acquisition by the United States of lands to a maximum of 25,000 acres in any County. This Act was further amended at the Special Session of the State Legislature to provide for

the purchase of 10,000 acres in any County.

Upon petition by these same enterprising citizens, the United States Forest Service made a preliminary examination of the region and recommended the establishment of the four original Units, the Clark, Gasconade, Fristoe, and Pond Fork, with the gross area of 529,200 acres distributed in eighteen Counties.

These recommendations were approved by the National Forest Reservation Commission August 30, 1933, establishing the first Missouri National Forest. These units were called the Clark National Forest, and were under the administration of the Shawnee National Forest; then the administration changed from Shawnee to Clark, then July 1, 1962 the Fristoe Unit became part of the Mark Twain National Forest.

The Forest Service did not wait until the examination and purchase programs were completed, but started immediately to relieve the distressed people and restore the natural resources, which activities must go hand in hand since an enormous amount of labor is necessary to properly develop the lands. The first step in the development of a forest enterprise is a complete fire protection system, which in the Missouri Units includes the erection of twenty-eight one-hundred-foot lookout towers, four hundred sixty-eight mile telephone lines connecting the towers with ranger headquarters and 1,076 miles of roads. These projects have provided seasonal employment for 5,000 men. With this partial protection provided, 315 fires were detected and suppressed. The area burned amounted to 25,000 acres, or but approximately one percent of the gross area of the Units was burned, while previously these areas received no protection and were burned annually.

1935 census records show there were 193 squatters and 193 suitable forest workers suitably located.

The land was purchased in the Wilderness Area between 1935 and 1940, the bulk of it being purchased in 1937.

Whatever ill effects the depression of the 1930's had on the nation as a whole, it was a boon to the Wilderness Area. Civilian Conservation Corps camps were set up, roads were built, and ponds constructed. Work was begun on thinning out the hardwoods and restoring the pine forest.

In 1934 the CCC camp was formed at Bardley, and after the purchase of the Whites Creek area in 1937, the Whites Creek wildlife refuge was established in cooperation with the State of Missouri Conservation Commission. The CCC fenced the wildlife area and made other wildlife habitat improvements. Several bays have been lost in what we can realistically call Missouri's only wilderness. The 1935 Wildlife Plan stated:

“The restoration of the once abundant game is another important project. From four to seven game refuges averaging 2,500 acres each are now being surveyed on each of the six Units and plans are being made to fence them with hog tight fencing, since the Ozark hog is notably fond of young turkey and turkey omelet. Surrounding these areas will be a strip one mile wide, owned by the National Forest, where shooting by the general public will be permitted. In November 1934, through the cooperation of the State Game and Fish Department, five hundred wild turkeys were introduced into the Purchase Units. Plans are now being formulated to introduce one thousand deer surplus from National Forests in Michigan, and

fifty elk surplus from the Wichita National Forest in Oklahoma to the Missouri Units. Special forage crops will be planted where necessary for the development of wildlife within the refuges and shooting areas. ¹⁶

The Whites Creek wildlife area was abolished in the early 50's.

The CCC camps are gone, but there is ample evidence of the work done then and since by the Forest Service. The pines are caning back; there are many tall stands of the conifers to impart to the Wilderness the appearance of the magnificent forest it once contained.

The wildlife has made a remarkable return; deer herds are in abundance and the turkey is making a comeback.

Tales of panthers (or mountain lions), bears, and other long-gone species still roam the Wilderness (and some of these may be true). As in the case of bears, several have been killed in southern Missouri in the last five years, but the Wilderness Area was still to have trials and tribulations trying to retain its status as a wilderness area.¹⁷

In 1950 the towns around the area such as Thayer, Alton, Winona, and Eminence were besieging their congressmen upon learning that the DuPont Company had a contract with the Federal Government to build an atomic energy plant, and that they were looking for a home. The area towns wanted the atomic plant located in the Wilderness Area; the prime instigator being Lewis Lindley of Thayer. The only thing that the area could offer for maintaining the plant was that it would truly be secluded. The people of Wilderness did not care where the sight was located. The area was saved when DuPont Company picked South Carolina.

Again, in the 50 s, the area was to be threatened with proposed dams on the Current and Eleven Point. The State of Missouri, in an anti-damn stand supported by all the affected agencies, cited the destruction of scenic beauty, disruption of agriculture and of transportation facilities, unfavorable effects of high dams on wildlife, and the general lack of either economic or flood control justification of the project.

The dam on the Eleven Point would have split Oregon County in two, inundated thousands of acres and flooded out the great springs and other major scenic attractions. The people of Oregon County, aroused by the appraisal crews, organized and fought to prevent what they considered unjustifiable despoliation. This sharply antagonistic stand, combined with the pressure of public opinion, forced a stay of execution.

In October of 1968 President Johnson signed into law a bill creating the Eleven Point as a scenic river administered by the Forest Service; no longer would the river be threatened by dams. Part of the scenic river easement borders the Wilderness Area.

In 1956 there was a small threat of mining in the Wilderness Area. J. B. Bates was issued a prospecting permit, as he thought there was uranium in the area. Mr. Bates prospected in Sections 22 and 27, but no ore was found. There were traces of uranium and associated minerals found.

In the 50's Wilderness was dormant, not growing or dieing. In fact; after the timber era of the late 1800's and early 1900's, the Wilderness community is pretty much the same with the usual amount of deterioration of its buildings. The only outstanding event in this time period was electricity.

REA lines were built into the community in 1952. Everyone signed up for the service.

TODAY

The Forest Service brought back the timber industry in the last ten years. The stumpage value in 15 timber sales was \$140,836.06. The Forest Service is the main employer of the Wilderness Area; out of 25 families in the Wilderness community, 10 families depend on the Forest Service for a living. If the Forest Service were to shut down, most of the people would leave. Of the remaining 15 families, 4 families farm or cut timber, 1 runs the store at Wilderness and farms, and the remaining 10 are on old age benefits.

The population of Wilderness is 71. There are 29 dwellings and 6 buildings in Wilderness proper. In 1970 they had their gravel road paved to J Highway, which is also paved.

The Proposal

Recreationally and historically the Wilderness is almost wholly undeveloped. In the years of its history, it has remained almost wholly unknown and forbidden over the state, except as a legendary land that lies somewhere off the beaten path.

In 1935 the first attempt to set the area aside was made. The plan was to have trails and be called a natural area. On April 13, 1969 the Conservation Federation of Missouri passed a resolution requesting the Forest Service to make a study of a possible Wilderness Area within the

National Forest boundaries. Then, on March 21, 1970, Mark Twain personnel met with 35 interested persons in Jefferson City to discuss the Wilderness Area to be set aside. This was done under Forest Supervisor James S. Berlin.

On October 10, 1970 Mark Twain National Forest personnel conducted a tour of the Wilderness Area and discussed alternatives of management for the area. There were 57 interested people on the tour. This was done under Forest Supervisor James E. Brewer.

Gordon Joiner, District Ranger at Doniphan, and Ron Olsen, Forester, organized the hike at the request of the Missouri Conservation Federation. Ron Olsen, of the Supervisor's Office, has been responsible for writing the proposed management plan. Some of the prominent people who attended the hike were: Dr. Oscar Hawksley, author of the book "Missouri Ozark Waterways;" and Charles S. Watson, Jr., author of several nationally published articles; State Representative Don Hancock; Ed Stegner, Executive Vice-President of the Missouri Wildlife Federation; Judge Simpson of Alton; and several Sierra Club members. Presently, it is still being discussed for a Unit to provide an opportunity for a Wilderness-like environment.

Father Hogan wrote:

"Who will build up these waste places? Who now will lead back the scattered settlers to their humble but ruined homes? Who now will rekindle for them the light of faith or preach the word of God to them in their little chapel beneath the pines in the forest?"

Father Hogan wrote of the same place, but a different time. As time changes, so change the needs of man. What Father Hogan called the waste places are now lands of value and opportunity.

Who will give to the people nature's humble but undisturbed habitation?

As Father Hogan characterized the past, the Forest Service can characterize the future.

RONALD WIHEBRINK
Forest Historian

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One of the theories on the naming of Eleven Point River is that an eleven-point buck was killed by an early settler. Another one is that it has eleven tributaries.

Bliss Spring and Hollow was probably named after a family.

Orchard Hollow was probably a family name or an orchard.

Whites Creek and cave was probably a family name.

Stillhouse Hollow is probably synonymous with moonshine.

Fiddler Springs was named for and by the Fiddler family, who built a brick house above the spring.

Slash Boy Hollow; the reason behind the naming of this hollow is unknown.

Freeman Hollow is a family name.

Greenbriar Hollow is named after the thick growth of greenbriars.

Tater Hill is either a family name or has something to do with potatoes.

Hay Hollow is named after the cutting of the blue stem grass for hay.

Laimore Hollow is a family name.

Dry Prong is synonymous with its name.

Coffin Cave, which is located 1/4-mile down Whites Creek from Fiddler Springs, is named after a tale that a white man was killed by Indians and was buried in the cave.

MAP APPENDIX

1. Whites Creek Cave.
2. Approximate location of Bellview and Pocahantas Road.
3. Site of Father Hogan's church.
4. Road opened up in 1880, from County line to Alton.
5. Whitten farm.
6. Alton to Wilderness Road opened up in the late 1800s.
7. Approximate location of the Whitten community.
8. Approximate location of cave.
9. Approximate location of abandoned still.
10. Approximate location of abandoned still or sorghum mill.
11. Steam operated sawmill in 1800's and Brauley's Well.
12. Camp 6.
13. Camp 7.
14. Camp 10.
15. Railway trams.
16. Log yard.
17. Harris ranch headquarters.
18. Coffin Cave.

