

## A Short History of the Area

### The Land

The ranch sits on the edge of two major formations. The Columbia Basalt Layer was the large, flat area that you drove across to get to Shaniko. The entire Columbia Basin is covered with a thick layer of basalt. It was scrubbed clean by the Missoula floods that created the Columbia River Gorge eons ago. That formation stops at Antelope and the John Day Formation basically starts here at the ranch. **Arrastra Butte**, directly North of the HH is a great example of a classic volcanic cinder cone. Volcanic dikes and standing stone pillars abound in the area. **Control #53** is at the base of on such pillar.

### Indians

The area was originally inhabited by several tribes of Native Americans. This area was fought over and also used as a travel corridor between the tribes in the Central Oregon Basin and the huge trading community along the Columbia at The Dalles. The Indian town at The Dalles housed several thousand inhabitants and stretched for miles along the banks of the Columbia River. The four major Indian groups that traveled and raided through the ranch were the Snakes from the south, the Warm Springs from the west, and the Cayuse and Walla Walla from the north.

### Trappers

The first white man to explore the ranch was the trapper Peter S. Ogden who led two trapping expeditions up the John Day River and presumably all the tributaries in 1825 and 1826. He worked for the Hudson Bay Company who controlled and trapped this territory for Britain out of Fort Vancouver. The Brits were trying to create a "fur desert" in the area so no Americans would deem it profitable to inhabit the Northwest but the Americans were already trapping the western basin.

### Settlers

The big American push came in 1842 with the first wagon train that crossed the continent on the Oregon Trail that ended in The Dalles. The John Day area naturally attracted some of the first settlers that didn't want to continue or were out of funds and couldn't make it to the Willamette Valley.

The road on the south edge of the map was the main pack trail and later stage road between the Dalles and the John Day gold fields. Gold? Yes, fifty miles upstream at Canyon City, a major strike was being dug out of the ground during the Civil War years. The gold was a much-needed boost to the Union coffers. A five mile stretch of this road running from Current Creek to the north along the road through the map and on through Hell's Half Acre about 2 miles south of the mine tailings on the southern edge of the western map was the scene of about 80% of the stage robberies by both the Indian Dog soldiers and the highwaymen of the era. When you are moving between **64 W** and **63** and on to **32** you are tracing the footsteps of some bloodiest bad men in the history of the Northwestern part of the United States.

## Big Muddy Ranch

In the late 1860's, the Snake Indians were on a killing rampage in the area. They burned the Clarno Ranch five miles to the north and attacked the fortified stage station in the Antelope Valley eight miles to the northwest. This was the last great Indian war in the Northwest as the federal government poured troops into the area to finally pacify it for the settlers and ranchers.

The Standard Government Land Claim was 160 acres. There are many examples of small homesteads in the area. The Rock Fort site at **Control 31** was an attempt to build a fortified position that could not be burnt out by the Indians. Alas little remains of the fort itself.

As the individual homesteads failed, the land was bought up and consolidated into the Big Muddy Ranch. Sheep, not cattle, were the major stock being grazed here. For a few years at the turn of the last century, more wool left the Shaniko train station than any station in the world. With large companies controlling vast areas, there were naturally run-ins with the homesteaders (or squatters as the sheep men called them).

In 1901, a man named Thomas Riley filed claim and built a crude cabin on **Current Creek** (drainage in extreme NW corner of the western map) that blocked the natural roadway the Big Muddy boys used to drive their sheep between the Muddy Creek and the **Black Rock Range** several miles to the south. The Black Rock Range is basically the Northern two thirds of the western Map. Riley and his partners would not budge and the Muddy needed through. The Muddy Ranch brought in a hired gun named Dave Bruner. One day, push came to shove and Riley threatened Bruner with a rifle. The hired gun drew and loosed two shots at Riley who immediately dropped his carbine and ran for his cabin. Bruner calmly picked up Riley's weapon and proceeded to place a bullet in the back of Riley's head from 125 yards. He pleaded self-defense, was convicted of second-degree murder and so took the fall for following orders from his employer! So much Old West history under our feet!

## Bhagwan

But wait, that's not all. The Big Muddy made headlines again when it was bought by an Indian guru and his followers. The Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh brought 5,000 followers to live and commune on this beautiful chunk of Central Oregon. The amount of infrastructure they built here is incredible. All of the buildings and the airstrip in the Muddy Creek Valley you passed through on your way here were Rajneshee vintage.

The rise and fall of the Rajneeshi are well documented so I will go no further than to say that their leaders were indicted in America's first domestic terrorism case involving the planned take-over of the entire county government. Since then, the ranch went through several owners, with the state of Oregon involved at some point. A possible state park was discussed.

## Current Use

The ranch is now owned by the **Young Life Fellowship**. They run 33 summer youth camps all over North America. Here they have a staff of forty full-time employees and their families who manage and care for the ranch year round. The Camp Outdoor Director, Craig Englesby, has been most helpful providing us with access to whatever we need. Please treat the ranch and facilities with care as honored guests. We would love to show Craig the low-impact nature of Rogaining and Orienteering in general. Remember, you will be traversing only a small portion of the entire ranch.

They had this ranch in mind when they wrote “Home on the range, where the deer and the antelope (and Elk and Boars) play”!

**Have fun**