

FOSM GUARD STATION...a symbolic, historic name

By Lou Romero, Friends of the Sandia Mountains, FOSM, August 2018

Background:

During the 1930's, Civilian Conservation Corps era, the Forest Service had Guard Stations built and strategically located to serve as deployment hubs, resupply and resting stations for trail, firefighting and other work crews. Many were log cabins, next to a fresh water source, with an adjoining firewood shed and fenced in pasture for horses and mules. They were commonly located at or near the end of a forest road serving several canyons. In the Wilderness, they were usually located at or near the mouth of several canyons to be served.

Over the years, as road and trail systems improved and helicopters became more widely used to transport crews and equipment, horses and mules became almost obsolete for Forest Service work. The role of Guard Stations started changing and becoming known as Work Centers. Some of the Guard Stations were abandoned and eventually demolished. The nomenclature, "Guard Station" also slowly faded away. Today the remaining "Guard Stations" are usually referred to as either "Work Centers" or "Rental Cabins". (Some remaining Fire Lookout Cabins" are now used as "honeymoon rental cabins").

I propose to perpetuate the title, "Guard Station" as a symbolic memory of an infrastructure that played an important role in "Caring for the Land and Serving People" from the early days of the Forest Service through about the 1980's . The word, "Guard" also has significant symbolic historic meaning. In the early days local volunteers were routinely signed up to serve as "Guards", were given a badge (some were even issued FS keys to enter locked structures if needed) and were relied on to report fires, vandalism and other duties. Often they self-dispatched as first attack fire fighters to local fires after a lightning storm.

The "FOSM Guard Station" serves a similar role as the old Guard Stations. It is a gathering hub for volunteers to deploy for various work projects around the

district and a place to store equipment and supplies. Our FOSM Volunteers, in a real sense serve a “Guardianship” role in caring for the Sandia Mountains.

Finally, I believe that current and future FS employees will continue to refer to the “FOSM GUARD STATION” in their daily routines and thereby perpetuate the title and its symbolism.

My personal nostalgia about 5 Forest Service Guard Stations:

Agua Piedra Guard Station – Located at the mouth of Agua Piedra Canyon at the North edge of the Pecos Wilderness, Carson NF. The cabin has been restored and still serves as a picnic shelter.

From the time I was 5 years old learning to ski at the old Tres Ritos rope tow ski site, we used the Guard Station as warming hut/yurt. The first 12K mountain I climbed was Jicarita Peak when I was about 12. My father, brother and I deployed on horseback from this Station for that first adventure.

La Junta Guard Station – Located at the mouth of La Junta Canyon in the Tres Ritos (3 streams) area, Carson NF. The cabin was demolished many years ago.

My first Forest Service job as an 18 year old was on the Penasco Ranger District (now Camino Real RD). One of my weekend duties was Fire Prevention Guard. I used the Guard Station as a hub to patrol all the canyons in the Tres Ritos area and talk to campers, picnickers, hikers and fishermen about Smokey’s Bears message, “Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires!”

Middle Fork of Santa Barbara Guard Station – Located in the Pecos Wilderness near the confluence of the West, Middle and East Forks of the Santa Barbara Canyon, Carson NF. The cabin and fences were removed many years ago.

My father served as Fire Lookout on Picuris Mountain 8 summers. Pre and post fires season lookout duties, he worked as a trail crewman in the Pecos Wilderness. The 2-3 man crew would use the Station as their home away from home during a 10 day shift. I remember many of his stories about that work that probably influenced my early motivation to work for the Forest Service.

One particular story was about the night I was born, September 14, 1941. He had just finished a 10 day hitch and was riding horseback, cross-country to return home in the village of Vadito. The village was dark as he rode into the valley because of the “military mandatory blackouts” ordered in the early days of World War II. My mother was in labor when he arrived and I was born later that night in my Grandmother’s house.

This same Guard Station served as our stopping point on the first 5- day pack trip (with horses) into the Pecos Wilderness that I experienced with my father when I was 14 years old.

Trapper Cr. Guard Station – Located on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River, Darby Ranger District, Bitterroot NF. The log cabin was demolished in 1965 to establish the current Job Corps Center. The Hotshot camp structures were built on skids and were moved to the far East Fork of the Bitterroot river.

This Guard Station served as a classroom the summers of 1963 and 1964 when I served as crewman first, then squad leader, on the Bitterroot Hotshot fire Crew. The Hotshot camp consisted of 6, 4- person bunkhouses, a bathhouse, a cookhouse and a small office located around the Guard Station.

East Fk. Guard Station – Located in the far upper end of the East Fork of the Bitterroot River, Sula Ranger District, Bitterroot NF. In 1965, the Bitterroot Hotshot camp was moved from Trapper Cr. next to this Guard Station. I served as crew leader that summer. 1966- 71, I served as District Dispatcher and Snow Ranger. I have many fond memories about how I relied on the use of the Guard Station as hub for many first fire attack deployments, a collection point for Smokejumper gear, a hub for Wilderness Search and Rescue operations, and other district projects.

MY FRIEND JIM LUNN, RETIRED ARMY RANGER AND FOSM MEMBER, MADE A BEAUTIFUL SIGN FROM A RED JUNIPER SLAB. TODAY, 1/28/19, HE AND I INSTALLED THE SIGN, “FOSM GUARD STATION” ON THE SOUTH WALL. (see photos next)



