

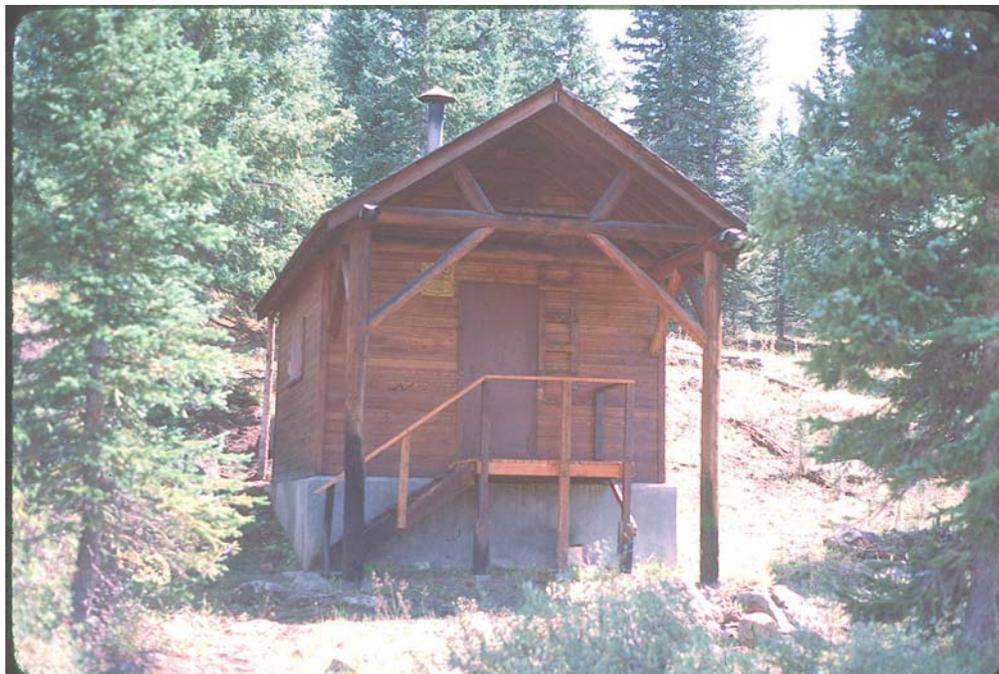


Snow Survey Centennial Celebration
1906-2006

"A Good Nights Sleep"

This story takes place back in 1984. My Electronics Technician, Earl Helseth had been to the NRCS Park Reservoir SNOTEL station a month earlier to fix some problems we were having with it. Earl went into the station with the field office staff from the Grand Junction office. Park Reservoir is located east of Grand Junction, Colorado, up on the Grand Mesa area. The station quit working again sometime in January and I talked to Earl about going back and fixing it. Being in the NRCS Snow Survey Program, it was always a requirement that two people went. This was for safety reasons and the program has maintained an excellent safety record as a result of this requirement. I asked Earl if he could find the Park Reservoir station. He said that he thought he could, but wasn't to sure. After thinking about it for awhile, he told me that he could find it. I told him that the Park Reservoir SNOTEL station was one of the first stations that I went into when I moved to Colorado back in March of 1981 and I wasn't sure if I could find it, but he felt certain that he could.

The drive from Denver to the drop off point to unload the snowmobiles takes about 6 hours to drive, so we had planned to stay in the NRCS cabin near the station overnight and repair the station the next morning and return back to Denver. The Park Reservoir cabin is spectacular. It is an old rustic cabin and the snow gets deep in that area.

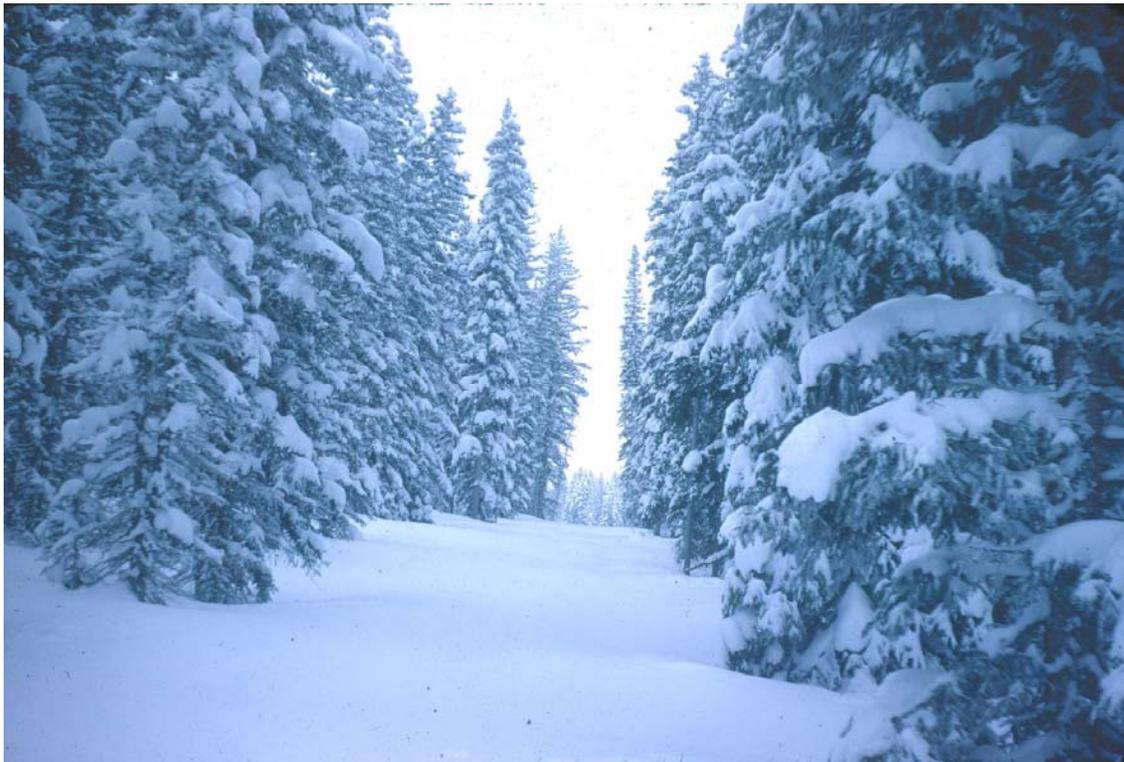


Park Reservoir Cabin

I agreed to go with Earl because the rest of my staff was already busy. We got the truck, loaded the snowmobiles on the trailer and headed out early Tuesday morning. It was a cold day with temperatures in the teens, but not snowing. I backed the trailer up so we could unload the snowmobiles around 2:30 in the afternoon at the drop off area. The cabin is about 18 miles from the road and it takes about an hour to get there. After loading the snow machines up with the equipment we needed to fix the station and to stay out overnight, we locked up the truck and headed out, with Earl leading the way. I knew that the cabin was east of our starting point and higher in elevation than when we started. We traveled east for a few miles and then turned a little south. I caught up with Earl and we stopped to talk about where we were. By now, the time was after 3:00 PM. A little snow shower hit us, but it wasn't too bad and Earl thought that we were still going in the right direction, so we continued.

After another 20 minutes, we kept turning more west and losing elevation and my snowmobile was not running very good and it kept dying. At 3:30, I knew we were lost and heading in the wrong direction. I finally caught up with Earl and said we were not going in the right direction. He agreed and said he didn't know where to go. I told him that my snowmobile was having problems and we had to do something soon or darkness was going to set in and we would have to stay outside if we didn't find the cabin or head back to the truck.

I told Earl to follow me and we were going to go back to where I knew where we were. We arrived at a road that was heading east and gaining in elevation. I thought that this was the correct road, so we made the decision to check it out. We gave ourselves until 4:00 to find the cabin or to turn around and try and make it back to the truck.



We continued to travel east along the snow packed road. I kept saying to myself, "This sure looks right," but I still couldn't find the cabin. The light was fading quickly as I looked at my watch. It was getting close to 4:00 PM and my snowmobile was stopping every minute now, so I knew we had to make a decision soon to stop and turn around or stay where we were because I wasn't sure my machine was going to get me out.

I continued about another 5 minutes and slowed my machine down. I noticed a small meadow to my right and thought that it looked familiar. As I turned around and looked off to my right, tucked back into the trees, there was the cabin! I pointed it out to Earl and we headed off to it.



We pulled up to the cabin and got the door opened. There were two sleeping cots, one on each side of the door. I asked Earl which one he wanted and he took the one on the right side, so I put my stuff on the bunk on the left. I told Earl that I had to work on my machine or we were not going to get out the next day. He stayed in the cabin and got the fire going in the old wood stove and said he would get dinner going.

I went outside and started working on my snowmobile. The head gasket was leaking so I took it off and had a tube of "gasket seal." I put the seal on and started the machine up. It seemed to run fine so I went back inside to warm up.

Earl and I had a good dinner of canned stew and visited. The wind had stopped blowing and the snow had stopped. The moon was out and the stars lit up the sky. About 7:00 PM we decided to try out my machine and take a little night ride. We loaded up and took off, making sure we stayed on the road so we wouldn't get lost. Eventually, we were sitting up on the Grand Mesa... the view was spectacular on top! We could see the lights from Delta and Montrose down in the valley.

Around 9:00 PM, we headed back to the cabin. When we got into the cabin, we started to get settled for a nice sleep. It was around 10:00 PM when we turned in. We were going to be up at 6:30 to fix breakfast and get out to the station to fix it. We turned the lights off and crawled into our sleeping bags.

It wasn't very long before I kept hearing Earl "tossing and turning." After about an hour of this I said "Earl, are you alright." He said yes, but he couldn't get comfortable.

Something kept pocking him in the back, but he said that he was alright now and it was better so I turned over and tried to go to sleep.

Throughout the night, Earl could not sleep. He keep stoking the stove and getting up to get more wood. Finally the night was over and we both got up. I told Earl that I didn't sleep very well either, because he kept moving around. He said he just couldn't get comfortable in that bed.

We fixed breakfast and loaded the machines to head out to the site. I went back into the cabin one last time to make sure we didn't leave anything behind and thought, "I'm going to check out Earl's bed." I went over and lifted the 4 inch thick mattress and saw why Earl couldn't sleep. Under the mattress were two "metal" folding chairs! I couldn't believe it. I yelled at Earl to come back into the cabin. I said "Earl, I know why you couldn't sleep or get comfortable in your bed," and pulled the mattress back and let him see what was under it. We laughed so hard that we couldn't leave for 5 minutes. We both had tears running down our checks from laughing so hard.

We took off and fixed the station. I retold the story to the rest of my staff and we all had a good laugh about all of the events of that day.

I've told this story many times to many different people. I always get the same response with tremendous laughter. I will always remember that February day and just wanting to get a "Good Nights Sleep."

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