

BOOTS and SADDLES

By **Barney "Scout" Mann**

The four of us were riveted watching the 1937 Errol Flynn movie "Robin Hood." Were the boys there? We scrutinized every crowd scene. What did this have to do with the Pacific Crest Trail?

It starts with the historic 1930s YMCA PCT Relay. During four summers, 1935 to 1938, 40 teams of YMCA boys carried a logbook along the entire trail, passing it from one team to the next every 50 miles.

In Northern Oregon, during the relay's second summer in 1936, two teenage boys manned a fire line. **Bill Oberteuffer**, 16, and **Bob Moller**, 15, were volunteer firefighters keeping an all-night vigil putting out wind-blown embers. Caught in one adventure, the two schemed about their next. Did you read about those YMCA lads on the Pacific Crest Trail? Oberteuffer had just taken a 224-mile trail ride with his father that year. We could do it on horseback. Come morning, the embers were stamped out, the forest fire was dead, but the dream was alive.

The boys were Eagle Scouts. Bill's father, **G. H. Oberteuffer**, known as "**Chief Obie**," was Portland's Boy Scout Chief Executive. Soon the dream attracted a third lad, Eagle Scout **Bud Stewart**.

In 1937, the three boys started their ride. Chief Obie rode with them until they reached Northern California. The boys didn't return home for almost four months. Bud Stewart's sister, Irene, made a scrapbook. The title on the cover was written in 2-inch tall script - "Boots and Saddles."

It was Bud Stewart's fault that on a recent Friday night, my wife and I, together with **Jan** and **Jim Hawkins**, had our eyes glued to a widescreen TV ignoring Errol Flynn but closely watching all his merry men. It was because of Bud Stewart that this surfaced at all.

Ten months ago, I wrote an article about the PCT Relay for *The Sunday Oregonian*, a Portland newspaper. (A similar story ran in *The PCT Communicator* - ed.) **Pete Clark**, Bud Stewart's nephew, saw the story and sent me an email.

"Your article on the Pacific Crest Trail reminded me of a trip my uncle took in 1937 with two other teenage boys by horseback from Mt. Hood to Mexico - 1,726 miles on the Pacific Crest Trail," Clark said.

Clark was in the digital imaging business. In 2006, he found the "Boots and Saddles" scrapbook among a deceased aunt's papers. Clark passed the scrapbook on to another relative, and that original scrapbook may be lost. But before it passed from his hands, Clark made a near perfect, high-quality scan and stored it online. He sent me the link.

All images this article are excerpts from the original 1937 "Boots & Saddles" scrapbook and are courtesy of Pete Clark.



The Sunday Oregonian



September 12, 1937

SANTA ANA DAILY REGISTER, SATURDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 27, 1937



Three Eagle Scouts who made the trip from Portland, Ore., to Newport Wash. on horse back and by buggy. Heading from left to right they are: Bill Oberteuffer, 16; Bud Stewart, 17 and Bob Moller, 15. Oberteuffer and Stewart are from Portland and Moller is from Hood River, Ore. The boys traveled to Fresno, Calif., by horseback, using a string of eight horses. In the California city they purchased the buggy in which they are pictured.—Photo by Register.

OREGON SCOUTS NEAR END OF LONG TREK; VISIT AT NEWPORT

BY PAUL VISSMAN
Nearing the end of a glorious adventure, three Eagle Scouts from Oregon are the center of attention at the Sea Scout Rendezvous at Newport Beach.

The trio are: Bill Oberteuffer, 16; Bud Stewart, 17 and Bob Moller, 15. The trio made the entire trip on horseback from Oregon using teams of eight horses. The adventure...

OREGON SCOUTS VISIT NEWPORT

(Continued from Page 7)
The boys are: Bill Oberteuffer, 16; Bud Stewart, 17 and Bob Moller, 15. The trio made the entire trip on horseback from Oregon using teams of eight horses. The adventure...

Boy Scouts Go Scouting—No Fooling



JOGGING along the Pacific Crest trail this week end are four Oregonians, three days out of Portland on a 1126-mile horseback jaunt to Colville, just across the Mexican boundary, an what they hope will set a distance record for horseback trips on the trail. Led by G. H. Oberteuffer, Portland scout executive, the group includes Bill Oberteuffer and Bud Stewart, Portland, and Bob Moller, Hood River. The latter three are Boy Scouts. Expecting to average approximately 25 miles per day, through snow and sunshine, the travelers have allotted three months to the journey. The senior Oberteuffer will accompany the boys as far as Mount Lassen, where the trio will continue. They will return to Portland by motor truck in December. Above, the riders are pictured as they left Portland (from left): Stewart, Moller, B. Oberteuffer, G. H. Oberteuffer.



(Continued on Page 2, Column 1)

(Continued on Page 2, Column 1)



The 37 pages included photos, newspaper clippings, an itinerary, equipment list and a detailed budget. For three months, the total cost for the three boys, Chief Obie and eight horses was \$444.

Included were two loose photos, one of which was particularly endearing. Bill Oberteuffer stood tall in a leather buckskin shirt he'd sewn, a big grin on a lean face, his light beard dwarfed by the mass of fur held on his shoulder. Like a child's cuddly plush toy, Bill held a porcupine draped on his shoulder, the head and front paws supported by one well-calloused hand. Bill wrote in his journal: "In the picture you could see a resemblance between me and the porky."

One of the newspaper clippings set me straight. From the Sunday, Oct. 31, 1937, *Oregonian*: "They took turns cooking, and vied with each other to serve the most tasty meals. Everything was served from French toast for breakfast to porcupine stew for dinner."

It was a very different time. It was the heart of the Great Depression. Guns were for food, not sport. Three teens were allowed to roam with eight horses by themselves.

They rose at 4 a.m. on Sept. 9, 1937, and saddled their mounts. Bill was on **Chapeau**, Bud rode **Spike**, Bob was on **King Cole** and Chief Obie swung a leg over **Silver**, just like Lone Ranger, who had been on radio for just four years. Photos show two of them in thick sheep's wool chaps. What the black-and-white photos don't show is that Bill's nascent beard is red and his wool chaps are dyed orange.

Riding out from Portland, they and their four pack horses – **Cleo**, **Jerry**, **Pete** and **Sam** – passed through Gresham on the first day's 35 miles. On the second day, they reached the PCT at the Summit Ranger Station near Mount Hood. That day, 17-year-old Bill got a beer from his mother when she passed by in her car, and he sent home his pipe with the "women folks."

The first days were ragged and glorious.

Ragged: King Cole and Chapeau got into a "hoss fight." It took all hands to break it up. Another day the "hosses ran off." Another still, the group got lost, adding an accidental 10 miles. Then only four days on the trail, they woke to find their water frozen.

Glorious: Bill writes: "We went to bed with the moon shining over rugged Jefferson's crest." Chief Obie waxed eloquent: "I don't know which I like best – these intimate close-up beauty spots that

you can hold in the palm of your hand and look at, or those breathtaking sweeping views from the ridge tops that fill you with awe and make you feel small and unimportant. I guess I like both."

On twisting switchbacks near North Sister, one of them remarked that the turns were so tight that the eight horses were going in five directions at the same time. It was between there and Crater Lake that Bill shot the porcupine.

Just south of Odell Lake, Bud's mount, Spike, got caught in quicksand. The four tried everything. They put boards under him. They tied ropes around him and heaved. The other horses pulled too. None of it helped. Spike sank deeper into the loose, boggy soil. Bud sat down next to the horse and cried. The others started talk about shooting Spike rather than leave him to suffer.

But there was one long shot left. Earlier in the day, they had passed a road crew with a tractor. In a last-ditch effort, they sent Bob Moller to try to bring the crew, and especially that tractor. Chief Obie told Bob, "Offer them money. Plenty if you need to."

The work crew put a cable around Spike. Bill wrote: "The tractor pulled him right out without a scratch. He got right up and started eating grass."

"The men with the tractor wouldn't take a cent for the job."

As they pushed south past Crater Lake, the weather closed in. Heavy rain, then snow. At Dead Indian Road, near Ashland, they beat a retreat, riding off the PCT to lower elevations. On Oct. 10, they crossed into California. The high country above them was in early winter's full grip.

Moving south, they rode on back roads and such trails as they could find. They set a pattern that would hold for the rest of their trip. One of them would hitch ahead to the next town, pick up mail and scout out a campsite. They passed Red Bluff and Redding, landing in Chico. They took shelter in abandoned barns, hayfields, city dumps and hobo camps. In Chico, there was a hard farewell. They said goodbye to Chief Obie at the train station. The boys were on their own.

In Chico, their reception was different. In other towns they had stood out, mistaken for pioneers. But in Chico the boys were mistaken for actors. That fall, Warner Brothers Studios was using Chico's

Bidwell Park as the stand-in for Sherwood Forest. It was the studio's most expensive movie to date, "Robin Hood," the budget bumping \$2 million. The day after Chief Obie left, the three lads were hired as extras. They shed their buckskins and chaps for wigs, makeup and the costumes of merry men.

Bill wrote: "We were told to sit at a big banquet table under the trees. The table was spread with every possible form of food – ducks, chickens, turkeys – just everything. The director instructed us not to eat the props."

That didn't last long. Soon they were eating with gusto, starting up again with each retake. "We saw Basil Rathbone and Olivia De Havilland ... We got \$5.50 [a day] for just sitting, eating and talking."

"Jan, push the pause button. Is that them there?" But the feast scenes just had too many people. Did Robin Hood have that many merry men? I had really thought there would be a good chance to spot Bill, Bud and Bob. We sat through tepid 1937 fight scenes and a milquetoast love story. No boys.

After the filming, the boys made their way down California's great central valley. Admittedly, the PCT was far off, buried under building Sierra Nevada snow. But Mexico was still squarely in their sights. In Fresno they picked up a red buggy for \$10 and took turns riding in it. Bakersfield. Los Angeles.

Los Angeles Evening Herald: "Three Lads Ride Nags 1,000 Miles"
Santa Ana Daily Register: "Oregon Scouts Near End of Long Trek"

On Nov. 30, they reached San Diego's Balboa Park. They didn't know it, but they had come full circle. They had landed on the spot where two years before the YMCA PCT Relay had begun. The three boys quietly camped at the park's nearby Boy Scout office. They ran an ad in the San Diego paper: "Horses for Sale."

One more thing remained. Mounting two saddled horses and with one horse pulling the buggy, they crossed into Mexico.

Upon return to Portland, Bob and Bud went back to high school, and Bill got ready for Reed College. Chief Obie served as Chief Scout Executive for the Portland Area Scout Council for 20 more years.

There was little information about the lives of two of the boys after that. Bud Stewart died first, in the 1950s. Before the PCT trek he'd apparently been a troublesome boy. His mother and relatives sent him off with high hopes the trip might change that. Pete Clark, his nephew, simply says, "It didn't."

Bob Moller died in 1986, at age 65. In a published interview, his wife, **Nancy Moller**, said Bob always said the PCT trip was the highlight of his life.

Bill Oberteuffer lived till 2006. A year later, a 144-page biography was published – *Gazing Down from the Mountain: The Story of William H. Oberteuffer*. Bill was an innovative science teacher, a Boy Scout leader and a vociferous advocate for the outdoors. His biographer, **Berkley Carnine**, wrote that on her first visit to Bill's house, only months before he died, the first story he told – for hours – was of his PCT trip. Bill ended his trail journal with: "It certainly was a trip of a lifetime! I'll never forget it."

Sixty-nine years later, at age 86, Bill clearly had not forgotten. 🐾