

# SNOW NOTES



## RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD TIMER 1/

By

W. A. Lang

It is a real pleasure and a distinct privilege for Ethel and me to be with you in Reno to celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Western Snow Conference. Joining with us on this auspicious occasion are members of the Eastern Snow Conference and many friends of both organizations. While the Conference was formed primarily to disseminate technical data on snow surveying and run off forecasting, it has also served to develop many lasting friendships over the years.

I have been associated with this group almost from its inception, having only missed the first meeting in 1933 - for would you believe it, a snowstorm - plus five meetings since I retired in 1970. So as an "old timer", I have been asked to reminisce a bit on the prenatal and early history of what is now known as the Western Snow Conference.

It was my good fortune to have known about the work of Dr. Church and Professor Boardman prior to the 1933 organizational meetings. The extremely dry years of 1924 and 1931 plus the advent of Hoover Dam gave impetus to creating a forum for the exchange of ideas and the development of equipment and methods for evaluating the snowpack and forecasting runoff in the Western United States. In spite of the depression, and largely through the vision and persuasions of Dr. Church, the leaders of the snow-survey programs in California, Utah and Nevada were invited to meet in Reno on February 18, 1933 and the Western Interstate Snow Survey Conference was born. Unfortunately I was not able to reach Reno for that meeting as I was driving and became snowbound in Bishop. Among the forty persons attending that first meeting were Dr. Church, a Professor of Romance Languages at the University of Nevada, who developed and used the Mount Rose snow sampler and scale as early as 1909; "Jeff" Boardman, Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Nevada, who had long been associated with Dr. Church in the development of equipment and run-off forecast procedures; George Clyde, Professor of Civil Engineering at Logan, Utah and later Governor of Utah, who developed the Utah snow sampler tubes and scales now in use; Harlowe Stafford, Hydraulic Engineer, California State Division of Water Resources; W. C. Lowdermilk, Senior Silviculturist, U. S. Forest Service Experiment Station in Berkeley, California; V. H. Greisser, Chief Engineer, Washington Water Power Co. and James E. Jones, Senior Water Works Engineer, L. A. Department of Water and Power.

Following the organizational meetings in Reno in 1933, Dr. Church arranged for us to hold our meetings with the American Geophysical Union - Section of Hydrology. This arrangement permitted some of our papers to be published in the AGU Proceedings and also helped to publicize the Conference and to attract new members.

On July 1, 1935, by Act of Congress, the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Engineering was designated to coordinate and expand the snow survey program in the Western United States and W. W. McLaughlin became the first coordinator of that program. In 1939, the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering was abolished and the Soil Conservation Service took over this activity under the leadership of R. A. Work.

At this point it would be fitting to recall the names of some of the other "Old Timers" who contributed to the success of the Western Snow Conference during its formative years. These would have to include Cecil Alter, Monty Atwater, Merrill Bernard, Ernie Bulpitt, Ash Codd, Phil Cowgill, Wayne Criddle, Carl Elges, Dick Farrow, Standish Hall, Walter Johnson, Norbert Leupold, George "Pappy" Lewis, Ray Linsley, James Marr, O. W. Monson, Spencer Munson, Fred Paget, Ralph Parshall, Walter Parsons, Harry Potts, Fred Scobey, Jack Stevens, Jake West, H. G. Wilms, Walter Wilson and a host of others.

Among some outstanding events of the early years I should like to recall are the 1941 repayment of Dr. Church for his years of personal expense for AGU reprints of our

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1/ Banquet speech April 22, 1982 by W. A. Lang (retired), former Chief Hydrographer, Southern California Edison Company. General Chairman 1953 and 1954 and Honorary Life Member



papers which he distributed to expand our membership, also the 1943 decision to change our name from Western Interstate Snow Survey Conference to Western Snow Conference. In 1946, Fred Paget had the papers of the Sacramento meeting reproduced by mimeograph to determine the feasibility of publishing our own Proceedings in future years. Beginning with the 1948 Reno meeting we published our own Proceedings. This was made possible by increasing our membership and by expanding our public and private agency support. Also in 1946 the Conference began publication of the Snow Surveyors Forum which was a non-technical publication oriented to the field man. Many excellent literary gems of fact and fiction as well as cartoons adorned the thirty or so pages of each eagerly sought after annual edition. Its demise came about in the seventies when the increasing use of helicopters and telemetering for obtaining snow water content eliminated the need for many on-foot snow surveyors.

Another noteworthy event was the awarding of the first four Honorary Life Memberships to Dr. Church, Professor Boardman, Honorable George Clyde and W. W. McLaughlin at the 1959 Reno meeting for their service to the Conference. Since then Honorary Life Memberships have been awarded to Arch Work and Harlowe Stafford in 1965; Bill Lang (your speaker) in 1969; Ash Codd in 1975; Jackie Davis in 1976; Jack Washichek in 1978 and Wilbur Simons in 1982. Four of the five living Honorary Life Members are with us tonight. Another milestone was the summarization of about 700 individual papers and the publication of a Bibliography of all Western Snow Conference papers from the first meeting in 1933 to date. This monumental task was accomplished by Ash Codd and Wilbur Simons. Finally, I would like to call attention to the Dr. James E. Church Memorial Award which has been presented by the Western Snow Conference to a graduating student at Reno High School each year for "outstanding progress in the field of scientific studies". One of these recipients is with us tonight.

With this background of our beginnings, I would now like to address the lighter side of some of our past meetings. As many of you have learned after several days of listening to technical papers while sitting on a hard chair, the mind can begin to wander. In order to offset any such malaise, and also to promote a spirit of friendship among the members, our first planned evening dinner and program was held at the 1939 meeting in Los Angeles. Shortly thereafter, a dinner for members was held in connection with each annual meeting. Several ideas to liven up our annual dinner meetings were suggested by the South Pacific Area Committee and put to the test at Boise during my first year as General Chairman in 1953. First, the local arrangements committee decided, that since many wives accompanied their husbands to these annual meetings, they would have a special afternoon program for the ladies as well as the regular evening banquet for members and guests. Secondly, that meeting saw the introduction of the orange knitted tie to identify each South Pacific Area Member. A tie cutting crew was available to cut off the neckties of all non-complying South Pacific Area members and we had a few. The orange tie I am wearing was first worn at that Boise meeting thirty years ago and is being given to Wilbur Simons for placement in the archives following this meeting. In succeeding years ties were made available to all members; orange for South Pacific, green for North Pacific, red for South Continental and blue for North Continental areas. When knitted ties could no longer be obtained the snow flake string ties were substituted retaining the same color code as before. These ties as you can see, are still being used today. The third and by no means least of the 1953 innovations was the birth of El Farsante an award concocted by one of our original members, George "Pappy" Lewis. Incidentally, the English translation of "El Farsante" is "The Fakir". It was to be presented to the person who made the largest error or goof in his previous years forecast but somehow the plans backfired and "Pappy" Lewis wound up with the little Chili Snapper from Furnace Creek for originating the idea. In the words of Bob Miller, quoted from the Snow Surveyors Forum for 1964, El Farsante was referred to as "that bit of painted pottery presented to some poor cluck who goofed. Actually it is this - but it is more--much more. The El Farsante and its presentation is all things to all men; or at least all snow men. In a ridiculous, dignified, terrifying ceremony which usually involves a Hitchcock-type ending, this grotesque glob of painted plaster is presented to the best, or the worst, or the worst of the best of our organization. There is no defense, no recourse, no appeal. The stunned recipient leaves the scene an anguished embarrassed, humbled mass of humanity -- to treasure always the highest award the conference bestows." Will all of those present who have received this meritorious award please stand and be recognized.

Now that you have met some of the thirty recipients of El Farsante, I would like to relate some of the more bizarre happenings at a few of our past annual meetings:

- 1950 Boulder City - Gus worked for the railroad at Marshall Pass, Colorado and supplement-  
his income as the local postmaster and snow surveyor. Having a railroad pass, he  
came to our 1950 meeting via Las Vegas to see the bright lights. The last we saw of  
Gus was on a bench at Las Vegas waiting for the train home broke but happy.
- 1951 Victoria - Gus had such a good time in 1950 he came to Victoria via train to Port  
Angeles and ferry to Victoria. The Empress Hotel would not allow him in the dining  
room in his leather coat and no tie so we rescued him and fixed him up with a tie  
and jacket and got him in. He enjoyed this so much that he spent the next day in the  
lobby entertaining the tourists with tales of the Colorado Rockies. All went well  
until tea time when Gus wanted coffee. After some words with the help they finally  
poured him a cup of coffee from a teapot but then Gus had to spoil it by loudly  
asking for sugar and cream for his coffee. He sure raised some eyebrows.
- 1953 Boise - When Fred Strauss wnet to his car for the long ride home he found that his  
car door handles had been chained and padlocked. He was able to find a hacksaw  
somewhere but stripped the teeth when he used it on the chain. Undaunted he then  
borrowed some bolt cutters but only succeeded in chipping the jaws on those. Alas  
the lock and chain were case-hardened. How he finally got into his car, only Fred  
knows and he is not talking.
- 1955 Portland - Harry Oliver was a person who never met a stranger. At Portland he join-  
ed a group who went to the Oyster Bar for a seafood dinner. There he took a shine  
to the waitress and when she asked him about his orange tie, gracious Harry stood  
up, removed the tie and formally presented it to her as a momento of the occasion.  
When she told him how much her husband would appreciate it, we heard no more about  
Harry's conquest for the balance of our stay.
- 1956 Penticton - Otherwise known as benedictine. Much of the action here escapes my  
memory but I do recall a Canadian girl who wanted to buy her newly wed husband a  
North Pacific Area green tie. She was informed of the rules and was to see that he  
wore it to all meetings including the dinner. This he failed to do and came to  
dinner in a beautiful silk tie instead of the regulation green tie. As a conse-  
quence, his tie was cut off at the knot and his wife was very unhappy.
- 1957 Santa Barbara - One smart young fellow placed a sheet of metal in his tie but the  
monitors were prepared for such eventualities and produced a pair of tin snips and  
cut his tie off much to his amazement. It was here also that a large group got to-  
gether for a meal on the pier. We were assured of separate checks by the maitre'd  
only to have the waiter issue a single check for the lot. Since the check was well  
padded everyone refused to pay. Max Kohler wanted to meet the waiter outside but  
finally Fred Strauss made peace with the manager, paid the adjusted bill and  
settled up with the participants the next day. This was the first time that Fred  
Strauss had ever made money banking for a group of snow surveyors.
- 1958 Bozeman - Shortly after the arrival of the snow survey group, signs reading "Keep  
California Green" began to appear on car bumpers and bar mirrors around town. Seems  
like Carroll Horton had acquired these from some Forest Service men and brought  
them along for advertising purposes.
- 1959 Reno - We gathered here in Reno to celebrate fifty years of snow surveying. It was  
in 1909 that the Mt. Rose snow sampler tubes and scales were developed by Dr.  
Church and Jeff Boardman and they along with George Clyde and W. W. McLaughlin were  
to be honored at our banquet. Prior to dinner it seems that Arch Work was in the  
casino and misplaced the certificates and his notes. However, they were recovered  
in time for the awards ceremony to proceed on schedule. The following year Arch  
joined the ranks of the distinguished recipients of El Farsante.
- 1962 Cheyenne - It was here that we had some of our most exciting experiences. John  
Priest who came to the meeting from Pakistan, via London and Chicago and Pamela  
Barnett from West Pakistan via London were married in Cheyenne. Members of the  
Western Snow Conference assisted in the wedding party and gave them a rousing send-  
off. As if that was not enough, Arch Work encountered a holdup in progress on the  
street near our hotel and thinking it was a prank proceeded to disarm the bandit

only to find out later it was for real and the gun was loaded. And finally, to top things off, we had another happening. The night of the banquet Fred Strauss was not able to find a baby sitter for his youngsters so asked if they could use my room to watch television. He than instructed them to go to their room at nine o'clock and to be sure to lock my door when leaving which they did. They also bolted their room door from the inside so Fred could not get in and no amount of door pounding could awaken them. Bob Beaumont to the rescue. He found an extension ladder in the hotel storeroom which he took to the street outside the hotel. At 2:00 a.m. he proceeded to climb up over a neon sign and into Fred's window to unbolt the door from the inside so Fred and Evelyn could get to bed. Yes, you guessed right. The youngsters never woke up nor did the hotel night clerk or the local police.

Now, I have given you a thumbnail sketch of our early history and some of the highlights of our meetings during the first thirty years of our existence. Most of you are familiar with the last twenty years which culminated in this Golden Anniversary of the Western Snow Conference. Who would have believed that those first meetings in the depth of the great depression would have grown into the wonderful organization we have today. May it continue to grow and prosper in the future as it has in the past.



## SNOW NOTES

By

Jack N. Washichek  
(Ex Snow Survey Supervisor - Colorado)

This feature is really not snow notes at all, but more of a written excuse for missing the 50th Western Snow Conference. After a perfect attendance for 26 years, I deeply regretted not being in Reno with all of our old friends. I wouldn't have written this but was goaded into it by Messrs Meiman and Shafer.

First it seemed a new frontier in the snow and forecasting business was a must. After all forecasts and snow measurements are automatic now and scarcely require human assistance. I thought what better place to look than in New Zealand and Australia where their summers are our winters or something like that. This would enable our mountain men to switch areas every six months and keep on freezing their butts off.

Well, enroute I thought we might as well take a brief vacation so stopped of in Tahiti. This is a beautiful chunk of rock in the middle of the Pacific.

Everything grows there -- bananas, coconuts, pineapples, citrus, papayas, and flowers of every variety. Growth was not restricted to plant life as cockroaches grow so big they can be ridden if one can catch them. The only thing bigger are the rats (I was told). Undaunted by these tales of horror, we enjoyed every minute of our three days. Snow was scarce, however, and in my log I made a note that this was not a fertile field for new exploration. I did see a number of high peaks and deep valleys on the nude beaches, however, it was difficult to actually do much research on this subject with my wife continuously whacking me on the head. It was with heavy heart we left the thatched huts, rum and coke, sparkling blue water and the ninety-four degree temperature and headed south to the winter snows.

We flew into Sydney and were greeted with what has to be one of the most, if not the most, beautiful harbor in the world. The opera house jutting out into the blue, blue waters of the Tasman Sea was like adding a diamond to an already stunning bracelet. Our hotel room overlooked the harbor and I spent all my free time just taking in the breathtaking view.

Almost immediately I started inquiring about snow and found it was again in very short supply, another discouraging entry in my log. Like all good snow men I was determined to make the most of a bad situation and spent the next three days looking at harbor structures, the Sydney bridge, buying opals, and steering my wife away from any shop she seemed too interested in. Sydney is a city of three million people and I swear they were all downtown or on the buses I needed to ride. To show you how backward these countries are, I never saw a crew haircut the whole time I was gone.

Since I was still determined to pursue my quest for snow, we boarded a plane to New Zealand. We landed at Christchurch which is centrally located on the south island. Enroute looking to the south I could see vast fields of snow in the Mt. Cook area and the steward said skiing was already good and getting better every day.

Now I am confronted with the biggest decision of the journey. Everyone said it is beautiful to the south, lots of snow, colder than penguins feet, and picturesque snow clad 12,000 foot peaks. Now I have seen snow before, have frozen my tail off many times and seen a good many 12,000 foot peaks. Obviously this research should go to someone less experienced than I. Anyone could find the snow fields and perform their measurement magic so why not leave this area to later explorers. We decided to go north.

We journeyed north to Picton on Marlborough Sound. The area looks like a million golf courses one after the other. They even have automatic lawn mowers in the form of four legged mulchers. I never saw so many sheep even in my wildest insomnia. The land and people are fantastic. Everyone is very friendly and anxious to help. In Picton we found a lazy little harbor that suited our fancy. We played golf and spent a day on the Sound delivering mail to outlying islands. The Royal mail boat delivers twice a week and even lets you indulge in a little fishing. Fishing was about the same as home. Everyone was catching things

of all description and I kept pulling up my bait. I eventually did catch three which is about par for me. They fish with hand lines and everyone else had more experience. We had to have tea about every hour so I spent a lot of time in the john. I think those New Zealanders have bigger bladders or something.

After five days in Picton we took the ferry across to the north island. My log now says not too much snow, if any, near Picton and no interest in measurement. Not a good area for future research. From Wellington we traveled by bus to Rotorua, a thermal area like Yellowstone. This is the home of many Maori, the first settlers in New Zealand. Most of the homes are heated by tapping the underground hot water. There are a number of thermal generating plants providing electricity to most of the area. We found the Maori culture interesting and the people fascinating. It seems most of the natives originally wore a funny little skirt and not much more, so I got the feeling that all the snow had been melted and was now being cooked by an unknown hand.

Farther north the same problem, no snow and no particular desire to have anyone make some.

By the way, for those few who indulge, beer was served in a warm, six ounce glass. Now, from what I have seen, this wouldn't even reach the stomach of a good mountain man. Drinks were served in a four ounce glass with no ice. How backward can you get? Country was still beautiful and people the same.

In Auckland we found no evidence there ever had been any snow except their beautiful harbor was full of water. I wrote this area completely off as a potential for future explorations. Auckland, like Sydney, has a magnificent harbor and a century old bridge as well. It is the largest city and displays grand old buildings and tie and coat bedecked bureaucrats at every turn. The city is quite modern with many malls, nice cosmopolitan restaurants of every nationality, and friendly people. Normally we stayed at hotels or motels but here we stayed at a B&B (bed and breakfast). Most of the other guests were students attending the university. We ate at sidewalk cafes and took short tours.

We flew back to Sydney for a final look at the harbor and then to Townsville for an inspection of the Great Barrier Reef. By now I have completely forgotten snow, the W.S.C. and any reference to the white stuff. For a close look at the reef we boarded a forty foot tour boat at 5:00 a.m. and headed out into the Coral Sea. Two and one half hours and fifty-five miles later, we came upon the reef.

I have never seen so much color in my life. The reef is all shapes and colors and the fish, not to be outdone, come in stripes, plaids and a variety of shapes and sizes. Unfortunately, the tide was high so snorkeling was the order of the day. I drank so much salt water that, to this day, I don't need salt on my margaritas. It is truly a wonderful world.

By now we are both so tired we totter instead of walk. Ena has worn out a pair of shoes, and the nude beaches in Townsville have dulled my vision (only kidding - I could go back).

We have given up research and now just search for some rest. We felt a week in Hawaii would be just the ticket. We got our strength back and knew we were back in the states by the crude, impolite people. We did spend a relaxed week in Honolulu, sunning and seeing.

So this is my excuse and I offer this in the form of my research report:

1. There is little prospect for snow studies any place north of Christchurch, N.Z.
2. If one wants to do snow research, there is good possibility around Mt. Cook in New Zealand.
3. Since I didn't cover it all I can't say for sure, but snow research doubtful in Australia.

4. Neither Tahiti nor Hawaii require snow measurements or forecasts.
5. We have eliminated a lot of travel for future generations interested in snow related subjects, but if you are interested in a beautiful trip, complete with the nicest people you will ever meet, we strongly suggest retracing our steps.