

## Jack the Giant Killer

### *From an email from Glen Bedell, August 2009*

*During the late 1960's, writes Glen Bedell, Federal agencies were beginning to discover the environment. He sent in this story about something that happened prior to the 1969 enactment of NEPA, and about how one of his “best early mentors” saved the agency—and the environment—from the construction of a giant tunnel.*

A major effort during the 1960's was the construction of the North Cross State Highway, now known as the North Cascades Highway. The project was shared by the Bureau of Public Roads and the Washington State Highway Department, and Glen Bedell recalled “we Feds were building from west to east, while the State was pushing their heading from east to west.

“Our section was very difficult; much more so than the State’s end, in my unbiased opinion,” Glen related, “involving nearly continuous rock or rocky excavation. One portion was a high steep solid rock cliff segment, I'm guessing now, 800 or so feet long, where it had been determined to build a tunnel. This was very close to Ruby Creek, somewhat pristine and an important spawning stream for Ross Lake.

“There were usually several projects in progress on either side at any given time,” so there were also several engineers in camp. Most of them were “juniors to the sort of Resident Engineer in overall charge.” **Jack Rickard** was that Resident Engineer, and he was “supported by me, dubiously,” Glen said, “and by a good bridge man named **Tom Neunaber**.”

Before the tunnel could be built, a preliminary contract was “awarded to 'punch' a pioneer road through the area, remove a bunch of good logs, and get better survey information.” Glen recalled that the “contract ran past Canyon Creek to a point near where we anticipated meeting up with the State's work from the other side.” BPR reached that point first, he said, “but that is another story.



*The initial clearing for a road through timberland: This section shows the final burning during a contract on Santiam Pass, Oregon, June 28, 1932. From the final construction report, Santiam Pass, Suttle Lake, No. 23-E1, 23-G and 23-D2, F. WFLHD Archives.*

They blasted their way “across and above the proposed tunnel location. (Then) it came to Jack's perceptive mind that if we could do that, why not take the cut the rest of the way down to the final grade and avoid the expensive tunnel?”

Jack proposed his idea to management at both the Western Direct Federal Division in Vancouver and the Regional Office in Portland. Late in the summer a delegation from those offices “and State Highway Department notables descended on our camp in Newhalem, Washington,” (not Nehalem, Oregon, Glen was quick to point out).

The day that “all the big shots arrived at the camp,” it happened that Glen and Jack “had been down toward civilization, that is Mount Vernon or Burlington,” most likely to take care of some vehicle maintenance matters.

“We needed to rush back for an evening meeting” with those decision-makers, “so we only had time for a short pause at our favorite watering hole in Marblemount: Ernie's. After quickly finishing a couple of bracers” they drove the last “15 miles or so to the camp and immediately joined the meeting, then in progress.”

Glen couldn't remember everyone who attended the meeting, but Division Engineer **John Mors** was there, and most likely “**John Miller** who did most of the design for our portion.” In addition, there were the decision-makers from the BPR Division and Region Offices as well as those from “higher levels of the State Highway Division....

“Jack was soon given center stage and eloquently explained his ideas to avoid the tunnel. His dissertation covered our usual contractor's—and our—successes with difficult rock cuts, (and) his scheme to use selected large standing timber along Ruby Creek as posts to brace stacked logs made of their cousins in a rough wall to retain the shot rock from the Creek.” This wall, he explained, was “to be installed under the direction of the usual logging subcontractor's expert rigger and logging superintendent, aptly named **Ole Torset**, a name well known to some at the meeting, and in itself assuring deft log handling.

“Jack was convincing.” The next day, the visitors took a look at the site, and “the decision was essentially made, though I suppose some ratification had to occur later,” to build a road instead of the tunnel. “I'm sure at the time someone calculated the savings (in) avoiding that long, expensive tunnel,” Glen said, which even after construction would have required on-going costs including lighting and ventilation, and would have posed other difficulties in its maintenance.

Looking back at the North Cross, Glen observed that Jack Rickard was one of the few project engineers who would seek out the challenge of such a project. That highway “was considered as something akin to Siberia by most of the Direct Federal lower level hands working at the time,” he said. “For one thing there were usually several contracts going at once to manage, and for another you had to manage the camp.”

Glen eventually ended up with those responsibilities himself, and based on that experience said it “was much more trouble than any decent highway project. I even found myself negotiating with school administrators” about practices that some of his employees' kids “had been involved in at the school...Not the sort of thing a young highway engineer feels comfortable with.”

There were some Federal Lands engineers who liked the assignment, though, and Glen noted that “with proper selection you could staff a good and mostly contented, though occasionally fractious crew, which we usually had.” He mentioned two of his other early mentors who enjoyed the North Cross assignment: “**Jim Bailey** and **Walt Franz**. They were chief inspectors and survey crew chiefs when I was there, but later became top drawer project engineers.

“**Ozzie Osborn** was another good hand who liked the North Cross,” Glen added. He had met him earlier on a job in Oregon, and said that Ozzie “and his wife **Julie** knew the camp from before that, and often mentioned liking to be there.”

**John Coffee**, an Area Engineer in Washington Division in Olympia was “another person fond of the North Cross State....In those days,” Glen added, “the Division Offices tried to supervise those of us assigned to active construction projects. John did his best to keep us more or less straight and out of trouble, not easy duty by any means.”

Reflecting back on the thwarting of the big tunnel, Glen reflected that Jack, the 'Giant Killer,' “certainly earned his pay for years for that action. Mine, too, come to think of it,” he added, “though it was “nothing out of the ordinary for him.”

*After retiring from WFLHD, Glen Bedell went to work for Clark County. Retirees who have memories they wish to share about the early days of Western Federal Lands Highway Division can email them to [marili.reilly@dot.gov](mailto:marili.reilly@dot.gov).*