

## **The History of the Crag Rat Banquet**

*(Wilson Applegren's speech delivered Jan. 2004. Transcribed by Don Pattison)*

It was on August 3, 1926 that Andy Anderson, the manager of Tum-a-Lum Lumber, invite around twenty young men that were residents of Hood River County to his home for the purpose of exploring the idea of establishing an organization to promote mountaineering and skiing. Sports that, at that time, were just getting going here in the valley. At that meeting, not much occurred. The only memorable thing was that Delia Anderson, Andy's wife, jokingly suggested that if they did form an organization they should call it the Crag Rats. She said that they were a bunch of rats for leaving their families, almost every weekend, to climb around on the various crags in the area.

It was about ten days after that (meeting), Mrs. Strong, a lady from Portland, brought her three boys up to Government Camp. She set up camp and planned to spend a few days in the outdoors. Her two older boys took off to go fishing. The youngest boy, Jackie, was only seven years old and decided to explore the forest around their camp. When dinnertime came, Jackie didn't show up and they couldn't find him. She contacted the authorities and a search was immediately started to try and find Jackie Strong.

Andy Anderson and about twenty men from Hood River showed up for the Jackie Strong search. Being mountaineers, they searched higher on the mountain than most of the others did. There were about 250 searchers, by the third day, looking for Jackie. The Hood River men, eventually, found Jackie sitting on a rock, enjoying himself so they picked him up. He had survived the three days by eating huckleberries and whatever else he could find. He spent nights sleeping in leaves, piled next to logs. When

they brought Jackie down to Government Camp, of course, the reporters from the various newspapers immediately descended on them and wanted to know who they were and where they were from. By the way, it was Mace Baldwin, Percy Bucklin and Jess Puddy that found the boy. So, out of the clear blue sky, they said that they were Crag Rats from Hood River. "Crag Rats", boy, that name really caught the press and before the day was over, most of the newspapers from across the nation were telling the story of a mountain rescue group, in Oregon, known as the Crag Rats. There was only one hitch...there wasn't any organization! They hadn't formed an organization, at that time. But, Andy Anderson and the group got together and within month, they had drawn-up the bylaws and besides being and mountaineering and skiing club, they put in that they were a mountain rescue organization. This made them the first mountain rescue group, in the nation.

It was the beginning of the following year, New Years Day 1927, that a group of teenage boys, from Portland, went up to Government Camp and climbed, with skis and snowshoes up Little Zig Zag canyon to tree line. It was snowing hard and they decided to retreat. Calvin White, a boy of sixteen, was a better skier than the others and soon out-distances them. When the group arrived in Govy, they were surprised to find that Calvin wasn't there. He was lightly clad and had no provisions, so immediately a search was organized to look for him. After three days of searching, Bill Cochran, found Calvin White huddled next to a big rock in the canyon. He wasn't in very good condition. Bill alerted the other rescuers, with yells and gunshots and they made a ski sled and brought Calvin to the Battle Axe Inn. Calvin White lived but lost a few toes to frost bite.

The following year, on January 3rd, 1928 Dr. White (Calvin's father) and Calvin came to Hood River and invited all the Crag Rats to be their guests at a banquet at the Mt. Hood Hotel. He continued to host this banquet for many years, while his health permitted. He eventually changed it to Portland and the Crag Rats drove down old highway 30 to the University Club, in downtown. They did that for several years (1934) until Dr. White was no longer able to do it. But the tradition had been established and the Crag Rats continued to have the banquet, the first week in January, each year.

The banquet was eventually held at the original Crag Rat hut, which was on the point above the gas station on the west end of Cascade St. It should be noted that one fierce winter all the roads, in Hood River, were blocked but they didn't cancel the banquet and members skied to the banquet, spent the night and skied home the next day. For many years the banquet was a potluck and the wives prepared the dishes. In about 1938, the December minutes show there was a heated discussion regarding inviting the wives to the banquet. It was decided that since the wives were preparing the meal, it would only be courteous to invite them to sit down and eat. At that time, the Crag Rats were strictly a stag affair. Shortly after that, they began hiring a cook to prepare the dinners. This went on until after World War II, when the organization took on a lot of new members and out-grew the old hut. At that time, the banquet was moved to the Rockford Grange Hall where it was held for several years and eventually out to the Pine Grove Grange before the first banquet was held in this building, in January of 1967. The minutes show that Mokie Taft put out a delicious prime rib dinner for the membership and guests. Then the membership began to get a little bit soft and would postpone the banquet when the roads were blocked. In fact,

one year it was postponed until the first week of April. But the older members, eventually, put their feet down and the banquet was moved back to January, where it has been ever since. Tonight we are celebrating our 83<sup>rd</sup> Crag Rat banquet and I hope that we will be celebrating them for many years to come. Thank you.