



FINDING AID

FIRE LOOKOUT REPHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT PAPERS 1935-1936, 2007

Prepared by
Cathy Miller
06/05/2013

Updated by
Sara Kaparos and Anne Foster
01/30/2024

Collection Number: MSC 049

Yellowstone National Park
PO BOX 168
National Park Service
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

COPYRIGHT AND RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. The various state privacy acts govern the use of materials that document private individuals, groups, and corporations.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a reproduction if the document does not infringe the privacy rights of an individual, group, or corporation. These specified conditions of authorized use include:

- non-commercial and non-profit study, scholarship, or research, or teaching
- criticism, commentary, or news reporting
- as a NPS preservation or security copy
- as a research copy for deposit in another institution

If a user later uses a copy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," the user may be personally liable for copyright, privacy, or publicity infringement. This institution's permission to obtain a photographic, xerographic, digital, or other copy of a document doesn't indicate permission to publish, exhibit, perform, reproduce, sell, distribute, or prepare derivative works from this document without first obtaining permission from the copyright holder and from any private individual, group, or corporation shown or otherwise recorded.

Permission to publish, exhibit, perform, reproduce, prepare derivative works from, sell, or otherwise distribute the item must be obtained by the user separately in writing from the holder of the original copyright (or if the creator is dead from his/her heirs) as well as from any individual(s), groups, or corporations whose name, image, recorded words, or private information (e.g., employment information) may be reproduced in the source material. The holder of the original copyright isn't necessarily the National Park Service. The National Park Service is not legally liable for copyright, privacy, or publicity infringement when materials are wrongfully used after being provided to researchers for "fair use."

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if fulfillment of the order is judged in violation of copyright or federal or state privacy or publicity law.

HISTORY

The 2007 fire lookout rephotography project by Ian Grob of the U. S. Forest Service was designed to replicate photographs taken by forestry student Lester M. Moe in 1935 and 1936. Copies of Moe's panoramic photos were placed in the lookouts and used as common reference points to coordinate reports of fires for many years. The rephotography project to document the changing landscape over time was first proposed in the 1990s, but most of the rephotography was completed in 2007.

Lester Maynard Moe was born January 21, 1910, in Portland, Oregon. In 1933, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and began work on the panoramic photograph project under the auspices of the US Forest Service. In 1934, he left the CCC to return to college. The same year (probably for the summer season), he joined the National Park Service as a junior forester, continuing in this role through 1938. During his four-year tenure, Moe took panoramic photographs from 200 existing and proposed fire lookouts within the NPS system. The June 1938 NPS *Bulletin* noted, "The photographic work, done by Junior Forester Moe, entailed many hardships not only in packing the necessary equipment weighing upwards of 100 pounds to lookout points, but also in climbing trees, poles, temporary towers, or roofs of lookouts with the equipment and facing the extreme winds that occur so frequently at high elevations." Moe served as a ranger in Yosemite from 1940 to 1942, before joining the Navy Air Service. Following WWII, he returned to the NPS working in Yosemite first as a ranger and then moving to the park's engineering department in 1946. Following a single summer season at Mount Rainier in 1949, he returned to Yosemite's engineering department. Moe passed away in Merced, California, on August 27, 1990.

Ian Grob joined the Missoula Technology Development Center (MTDC) of the US Forest Service in 2003. The MTDC owned Moe's Osborne camera. Not long after starting his position, Grob met Yellowstone's assistant fire management officer Andy Mitchell, who had recently been given Moe's photos taken in the park. A few months later, with funding from the NPS Office of Wildland Fire Management, Grob began the project to retake images from the same lookouts and perspectives that Moe had taken panoramic photos in the 1930s. As of 2023, Grob remains with the USFS, working as a visual information specialist at the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory.

Custom designed by William B. Osborne in 1931, the camera is believed to be one of only ten that were made by the Leupold-Volpel Company. Known as the Osborne photo-recording transit, the camera was built to take panoramic photos to track forest conditions and provide locations for fires. Both panchromatic film and infrared film were used for their photos. The infrared film was used more often because it eliminates atmospheric haze and creates a higher contrast image. Osborne was also the inventor of the Osborne fire finder, a tool used in fire lookouts to find a directional bearing to smoke so as to alert crews to a fire.

For more information see:

- *Guardians of the Yosemite* (1961) by John W. Bingaman
- History of the Panoramic Lookout Project (2020), <https://www.nps.gov/articles/history-of-the-panoramic-lookout-project.htm>
- Walking in the Steps of History: Retaking Panoramic Lookout Photographs (2020) <https://home.nps.gov/articles/walking-in-the-steps-of-history.htm>

SCOPE AND CONTENT

FIRE LOOKOUT REPHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT PAPERS 1935-1936, 2007

COLLECTION NUMBER: MSC 049 (YELL 128286)

VOLUME: 1 LF

DESCRIPTION:

This collection contains original panoramic images taken in 1935 and 1936 by Lester Moe and digital copies of images taken from same location using the same camera in 2007 by Ian Grob. The photographs document the park from many of its high vantage points and help to document the changing landscape of Yellowstone.

The project allows the National Park Service and researchers to study numerous changes to the Yellowstone landscape, including the effects of fire management, timber encroachment and climate change. so some photos of Mount Washburn and Bunsen Peak were taken with color negative film (these photos appear not to be in this collection).

ORGANIZATION:

Moe's panoramic photos for Bunsen Peak, Mount Holmes, Observation Peak, Purple Mountain, Mount Sheridan, Snake River Overlook and Mount Washburn are filed in the same box as the CD's which contain Ian Grob's 2007 photo replications from these same locations. Also contained in this box are Grob's photographic negatives and a folder containing general information about the project. A second box contains Moe's eight other panoramic prints.

The panoramic prints are organized alphabetically in each box.

PROVENANCE: Transferred from the NPS Technical Information Center (Denver, CO), 2000.

RESTRICTIONS: No

ASSOCIATED MATERIALS:

- Fire Management Records (RG03), Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives
- Lester M. Moe panoramic photographs of parks may be found in the archives of numerous national parks including Yosemite and Glacier.

CONTAINER LIST

Series Nbr **Series Title**
01 **Photographs**

Box 1

File Unit Nbr	Title
01.01	General Information: Fire Lookout Photography Project, 1993-2007
01.02	Bunsen Peak Negatives, 2007
01.03	Mount Holmes Negatives, 2007
01.04	Mount Sheridan Negatives, 2007
01.05	Mount Washburn Negatives, 2007
01.06	Observation Peak Negatives, 2007
01.07	Purple Mountain Peak Negatives, 2007
01.08	Snake River Negatives, 2007
01.09	Bunsen Peak Panoramic Photos, 1935-1936
01.10	Mount Holmes Panoramic Photos, 1935
01.11	Mount Sheridan Panoramic Photos, 1935-1936
01.12	Mount Washburn Panoramic Photos, 1935
01.13	Observation Paek Panoramic Photos, 1935
01.14	Purple Mountain Panoramic Photos, 1935
01.15	Snake River Panoramic Photos, 1935

Box 2

File Unit Nbr	Title
02.01	Bechler River Panoramic Photos, 1935
02.02	Gallatin Panoramic Photos, 1935
02.03	Mount Norris Panoramic Photos, 1935
02.04	Pelican Cone Panoramic Photos, 1935-1936
02.05	Pitchstone Plateau Panoramic Photos
02.06	Saddle Mountain Panoramic Photos, 1936
02.07	West Yellowstone Panoramic Photos, 1936