

Around the Henry Mountains with Charlie Hanks,
some recollections, by

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It was my good fortune in 1935 to be assigned chief of a U.S. Geological Survey field party studying and mapping the geology of the Henry Mountains, Utah. Geologically the area is of great interest because of the classic work done there in 1876 by G.K. Gilbert for the Powell Survey. In the 1930's the area still was frontier -- a long distance from railroads, paved roads, telephones, stores, or medical services. It was heart of an area the size of New York State without a railroad, and a third of that area was without any kind of a road. This was not Marlboro country; it was Pull Durham country. The geological work had to be done by packtrain; it was about the last of the big packtrain surveys in the west -- the end of an era.

It was my good fortune also to obtain the services ^{of a veteran} horseman who knew that country, Charles R. Hanks of Green River, Utah. Charlie served as packer during each of our 5 field seasons there. He had played a leading role in the history of the area; the town of Hanksville was named (1885) for his father when a post office was established there. Charlie, an old time cow puncher, had spent more hours in saddles than he had in chairs, and he had slept more nights on the ground under the stars than he had in bed under a roof. Most of his meals had been before an open fire on the range. He knew that country, both its good features and its hazards. He knew and understood horses and mules and knew how to travel and live comfortably in the desert and its mountains. And he learned about geologists.

Charlie had worked for the Geological Survey in the summers of 1930 and 31 as packer for Art Baker's field party mapping the Green River Desert. Art helped me get started in 1935 and arranged for Charlie Hanks to join us as packer. We also employed Lou Christensen, one of Charlie's sons-in-law, as cook. The geologists on the party in 1935 were Paul Averitt, Jack Hirsch, and Ralph Miller.

When that field project was started, I was 29; Charlie was a quarter century farther along life's road. Always though he was cooperative and helpful to "the kid" in charge. The other geologists were young too, and all of us were city lads. But despite the inadequacies of our western ways, the group won Charlie's respect by being conscientious, hard working, and good natured. The group enjoyed Charlie Hanks and he enjoyed us.

Our first camp was at Buckskin Spring, about 4 miles northeast of Wild Horse Butte. While most of the party established camp and set triangulation flags, Charlie Hanks and Art Baker took me on a conducted tour of the area around camp. We took a car and drove cross country; if there had been a road along the route we took, it had not been used for many years. We drove down Well Wash, battling loose sand all the way, and then back up some tracks over the red hills northeast of what now is the airport. As we started up the grade, Charlie commented to Art, "Now we'll ^{show} Charlie Hunt what we mean by a sandy sunnovabich". We'll just say it was sandy, very sandy, but we did get to the top by two of us pushing the car for 5 miles.

Most of the work was by horseback, but not all. There are places horses cannot go. Mapping the Reef of the San Rafael Swell, for example, involved a rocky climb to the top of the reef and stadia traverse along the crest. Wherever a canyon crosses the Reef, we had to climb down into it and back up the other side. Charlie would bring our spike camp outfit along the outside of the Reef and meet us for supper and overnight camp. The rendezvous could not be planned in advance because we did not know how many canyons there were or how they were spaced. Charlie had to guess how many miles of crest we could traverse and how many canyons we could cross in the day and make camp accordingly. We took nearly a week traversing the 20 miles to the Muddy River, but every evening Charlie had camp made at the canyon we descended. He came to know the capacity of his geologists as well as that of his horses.

After a few weeks at Buckskin Spring we moved to Wild Horse Creek, and after a while there base camp was moved to the Muddy River where it issues from the San Rafael Swell. On that move Charlie came with the trucks because he knew how to get them to the place we wanted to camp. Lou and Ralph brought the horses. They spent the night camping in the Swell, and that night one of the horses strayed and was lost.

Next morning Charlie took camping gear and a pack animal to go find the stray. It might take a few days, but no, he was back with the missing horse by middle of the afternoon. It turns out that he jogged 12 miles to where Wild Horse Creek issues from the Swell and there found the horse's tracks head down valley towards our former camp. Instead of following those tracks he took a short cut to the trail from Wild Horse Spring to Buckskin Spring, and as he approached that trail there was the missing horse ambling back towards Buckskin Spring where we had first camped. Asked about his maneuvers, Charlie said, "Oh I just figured what I would do if I was the horse".

Managing a large packstring poses logistics problems. A riding horse in the desert must have alternate days to rest, so each of us had two animals. A working horse consumes about 100 pounds of oats monthly, and a pack animal can carry about 300 pounds. The third animal nets very little additional feed for a month. At our Muddy River camp we were left with several extra animals that were not needed when Jack Hirsch was taken ill with appendicitis and had to leave our party.

We had rented horses from Sam Adams, who lived in Green River, and Charlie Hanks went there to find out from Sam where we could leave his horses. Charlie returned to camp reporting he had missed Sam who had left that morning by wagon for Rabbit Valley, a 300 mile round trip that would take about a month. What to do? Charlie began reasoning. "Sam will spend tonight at San Rafael and tomorrow he'll get to Garvans. Wednesday evening he'll pull into Hanksville and he'll stop at Andrew's place. He won't get away very early Thursday, and in town he'll stop to see Les and Nelus. You know, I think if I go down to the road here about the middle of the afternoon next Thursday, I'll find Sam." And Charlie did just that. In fact he had to wait only 30 minutes for Sam's wagon to pass en route to Rabbit Valley, 100 miles on its way from Green River.

When Art Baker returned to Washington after spending a couple of weeks helping the party get started, Charlie Hanks and I took him to Green River where he caught a train. In those days all trains stopped at Green River where the locomotives took on coal and water. We spent the evening visiting on the porch of Charlie's home, and in the course of the evening Art asked Charlie how many grandchildren. He had. Charlie replied, "I reckon about a couple of dozen". Mrs Hanks

expostulated, "Charlie Hanks, you know how many grandchildren you have". So they started counting, and the number proved to be 25. Charlie resumed his rocking and smilingly said, "I figured I was close".

In those days our supplies -- for horses and for men -- were obtained at a general store owned by Mr. Asimus. The dry cereal boxes then were carrying stories for children, and each morning Paul Averitt would solemnly read us the story. We consumed a good many boxes of cereal and a good many stories that summer, but one we could not get, a story about "Two knights of Red Castle". Paul insisted that Charlie shop for the box having that story; it must have been quite a scene at the store and the subject of many pointed remarks as Asimus and Charlie opened cartoons of corn flakes searching for "Two knights of Red Castle". Again though, success, and Charlie delivered the box with appropriate ceremony to Paul.

The geologists, all city bred learned to ride their horses in a fashion that was less than best western. One reason though was the handicap of the surveying equipment that had to be carried -- a plane table board strapped to one's back, an alidade over the right shoulder and held under the left arm, and a tripod carrier on the right shoulder. Getting aboard and staying aboard the horse had to be learned by practice, ~~which~~ ^{with} Charlie's help.

At times Charlie would tease about our horsemanship. Paul Averitt was able to even scores with Charlie during a trip to town. It began to rain. This was the period when automobiles were changing from manually operated windshield wipers to mechanically operated ones. Charlie didn't know how to start the blasted thing, and Paul ceremoniously showed him how, and never let him forget it.

In 1935 the road between Hanksville and Green River was little more than a pair of tracks, and the position of the tracks shifted with every storm. The 15 miles from Green River to the San Rafael River was across shale -- good in dry weather but slippery as grease and hub deep in mud in wet weather. The 40 miles from the San Rafael to Hanksville was in sand -- good in wet weather and tractionless loose sand in dry weather. This served to separate the optimists from the pessimists; to the optimists, part of the road always was good and to the pessimists part always was bad. When possible we took two cars and carried 50 gallons of water. The 55 mile trip was considered easy if made in less than a full day, and many is the time we had to borrow part of the second day to get through. During our second season, Charlie and Lou went to town as a storm broke and were unable to return for more than a week.

Three of us started the 1936 field season -- Marcus Goldman, Charlie Hanks, and I. We spent April and May mapping Mounts Holmes and Ellsworth from a camp at Four Mile Spring. To get there we could drive our trucks to Trachyte Ranch and pack in from there. The pack trip took two days; the night on the trail was spent at Woodruff Spring. To obtain supplies was a 6 day trip for Charlie Hanks. With the horses not loaded he could get back to Trachyte Ranch in a day, and the next day he might get to Green River. A day was spent there, and a fourth day returning to Trachyte Ranch. The 5th and 6th days were on the trail to Four Mile Spring. During that period I learned one of the vagaries of the West. It was never the horse packing the oats or canned goods who rolled over or fell off the trails -- oh no, it was always the horse with the eggs or the jug of wine.

I had a favorite type of raw leather field shoe to wear in the desert, and that season had brought some new ones obtained at an army surplus store. They had been quite a bargain, and I proudly showed them to Charlie. He shook his head, "They ain't gonna last you", he said, "them's belly leather". And again he right.

Our spike camps, like the one at Four Mile, consisted of a single tent with a rectangular pit 15 inches deep at one end. A sheep stove rested at one side of the pit. Sacks of oats around the pit served as back rests and we could sit on the edge of the pit around the stove, a sort of Indian pithouse. In cold or wet weather this was comfortably cozy; in warm weather we might move outside.

G.K. Gilbert's report on the Henry Mountains warns that the "Little Rockies", as Mounts Holmes and Ellsworth are known, are exceedingly rough and can be scaled only on foot. Working there was strenuous. One evening at supper Marcus, Charlie, and I were seated around the pit. Suddenly Marcus rose, stepped across the pit, picked up the salt, and returned to his seat. "Why didn't you ask, Marcus?" Charlie said, "We would have passed the salt.". Wearily Marcus replied, "I was just too tired to ask".

In June Marcus returned to Washington, and Charlie and I were joined by 3 geologists -- Ralph Miller who was returning for his second summer, Edgar Bowles, and W.W. Simmons. Lou returned as cook. Our first base camp was at Bert Avery seep. Later we moved to Granite Ranch, which had been abandoned, and finally to Dugout Creek at the west foot of Mount Ellen. From these base camps we had spike trips to the more remote parts of the area -- into the mountains and along the canyon rims.

That summer Alice visited our camp. While Jerry Bowles and I were mapping Bull Mountain, she would ride out with us and then, when we started our instrument set ups, she would return to camp at Granite Ranch. She expressed apprehension about finding her way back. Charlie reassured her, "You just give Dollie the rein and she'll bring you back to Granite the shortest route. That horse knows where to find her oats." Alice didn't get lost, but admits there were anxious moments when she was sure Dollie was making a wrong turn.

Alice was with us at our spike camp at Log Flat in Sawmill Basin. The day we were to move camp to Bull Creek Pass, Jerry and I had gone on ahead to continue the mapping; Charlie Hanks and Alice were to break camp and move it. While Charlie was loading the pack animals, one of the horses, Moose, started straying away. Alice, trying to be helpful, went to fetch Moose, but Moose would eye her suspiciously, wait until Alice was near, and then jog a bit farther up the mountain side. Alice spoke softly and sweetly, but Moose kept moving towards the summit. Chagrined, she returned and told Charlie that Moose now was far up the mountainside. When the pack string finally was loaded, Charlie took off on his horse, and addressing himself in no uncertain terms to the errant Moose, soon had her back in camp. Moose carried extra load that day.

Charlie Hanks and I set the triangulation flag on Mt. Ellen Peak. We cut a tall tree a thousand feet below the peak, and Charlie with his horse dragged it up to the saddle back of the peak. From there he and I had to drag it to the peak, the ground is too bouldery for horses. Setting that flag on the peak was the original flag raising ceremony. Alice was with us, and we have pictures of the two of us dragging the log to the top, and later, catching our breath, sitting under the flag after it was mounted and in place. The flag pole stood for a year, which is no mean feat considering the gale winds at the 11,000 foot altitude.

We were well acquainted with folks in Hanksville. We were made to feel welcome there and they regularly visited our camp when riding the range. Informality prevailed. One day Charlie Hanks was fetching our mail at the post office; there was mail for everyone except Ralph Miller. Charlie commented there was no mail for Ralph, and Mrs. MacDougal, the Postmistress, looked again. Presently she returned with a bundle of mail for Ralph exclaiming, "Somebody had put it under the M's."

Another experience with Mrs. MacDougal concerns the name of the Dirty Devil River. The name had been applied by Powell when he went down the Colorado River -- the tributary in question proved not to be a trout stream, it was a dirty devil. The name stuck, and became the antithesis of the better known "Bright Angel" in Grand Canyon. But "Dirty Devil" was unpopular with some early settlers, and when the Board of Geographic Names, about 1890, wrote to the post offices inquiring about local usage, the Hanksville Post Office replied, "The nicer people call it Fremont". Charlie Hanks referred to the river as Dirty Devil and so did everyone else in Hanksville. I was anxious to restore the original name because of its historical flavor. Knowing the Board of Geographic Names would consult the Hanksville Post Office, then managed by Mrs. MacDougal, I asked her the name of the river. She replied, "Oh you mean the Dirty Devil?". I then told her that her predecessor had said that the nicer people call it Fremont. She only smiled, and said, "Oh the nicer people moved away from Hanksville a long time ago."

At the end of the 1936 field season the project was visited by my boss from Washington, Hugh D. Miser. First I showed him the mapping north of Mount Ellen, and then we convened at Fairview Ranch for a pack trip onto the north flank of Mount Ellen. Charlie Hanks took the packstring to Log Flat while I showed Miser the pediments along Bull Creek, the well exposed contact between the Bull Mountain gneiss and the wall rock, the floor of the Horseshoe Ridge laccolith, and roof of the Bull Creek laccolith. It was a day showing off spectacular geology spectacularly exposed.

When we reached camp, Charlie was not there, so we unsaddled and relaxed with a cup of wine. Presently Charlie came in, with a deer. That evening, after a feast -- including some of Charlie Hanks's sourdough biscuits, Miser said to him, "Charlie, they ought to make this into a national park." It wasn't just the good camping weather, the feast, or the wine, or the geology; it was the delightful blend of all four. Clearly the boss was pleased.

In 1937 Paul Averitt, Jerry Bowles and I extended the mapping southward to Mount Hillers. George Wolgamot, owner of Trachyte Ranch, joined Charlie Hanks in helping to manage our camps and horses. That summer we worked mostly from temporary spike camps.

Mount Pennell had been so overgrazed Charlie had trouble finding a place where he could pasture our horses. The mountains at that time were in bad shape because of drought and overgrazing. We rode out together one morning, he looking for pasturage and I to set triangulation flags. En route we came on a sheep herd and stopped for a visit with the herder. Under the boulder where Charlie was sitting, I noticed a blade of grass, the first of the day. I commented on it; the herder almost apologetically said, "Yeh yu see we've only been over this part once."

That summer we had to map the bare ledges of the country between Trachyte Creek and North Wash and between North Wash and the Dirty Devil. There is no water there so we waited for rain to fill the waterpockets, or tanks. When the rains came Charlie and I took off. He made camp in North Wash and I was to join him there after spending the day mapping along the rim.

When it came time to quit, I took off following some fresh tracks that I discovered too late were not headed where Charlie should be. Some Ekkers had crossed by that day and I was following them. It was too late to find Charlie, so I returned to Trachyte Ranch, had late supper and went to bed. About midnight I was awakened by horse's hoofs; there came Charlie Hanks. Fearing an accident, he was wasting no time beginning a search. That was the only connection we failed to make in the 5 field seasons.

Next day he and I again headed for North Wash and from there onto the rocky ledges towards the rim of the Dirty Devil. Noon on the second day we had reached the rim and were having lunch together looking across that magnificent canyon. The Dirty Devil is not as deep as Grand Canyon, but 3,000 feet is deep enough, and the colors surpass those of Grand Canyon. We ate lunch in quiet; I was drinking in the scenery and thanking my lucky stars for the privilege of being there. Charlie Hanks finally broke the silence, "You know, there just has to be mineral in those rocks over there; no piece of country could be so gosh blamed worthless".

At one of our camps that summer, on the west side of Mount Pennell, Charlie Hanks and I were joined by George Wolgamot and Paul Averitt. We were to move camp to a trailless part of the southwest side of the mountain to a spring Paul and I had found. I told George he could follow our tracks. At supper next evening I asked George if he had any trouble finding the place; there had been no trouble, he had followed the tracks of a wild cow. I said, "George, do you mean you would rather follow the tracks of a wild cow than of a geologist?". "Yeh", George replied softly, "You see the wild cow knew where he was going." Charlie Hanks sure appreciated that one.

In 1938 mapping was completed southward along the Colorado River to Halls Crossing and westward to the Waterpocket Fold. Paul Averitt, Ralph Miller, and Robert E. Dates assisted that summer, and again we had the good services of George Wolgamot and Charlie Hanks. We operated from two camps and periodically I would visit the other camp to see what progress was being made.

One day Charlie Hanks and I took off across the desert in the general direction where we thought the other camp would be located. On the desert, Charlie always could spot a cow or horse on a hillside too far away for me to make out the animal. Furthermore, he not only could see the animal before I could, he could tell whether it was a horse, cow, or man on horseback. I thought his eyesight remarkable, until that day. About noon, far off on a hilltop, I saw Ralph Miller at a plane table. I not only knew it was a geologist at a plane table I knew it was Ralph. Charlie couldn't see him, but presently spotted Ralph's horse. It was clear that each of us could see and identify a tiny speck if it was the kind we knew

The deserts south of Mount Hillers include the dry (usually) wash known locally as Shitimaring. This was another of the colorful local names I wished retained, but knew it had no hope in the Board of Geographic Names as it was constituted in the 1930's. (The viewpoint has changed as witness the 1952-53 Mt. Hillers and Mt. Ellsworth Quadrangles of the U.S. Geological Survey.) We decided to try the name "Shootaring". One of Charlie Hanks's heartiest laughs came one day when some of the Ekkers visited our camp and, looking at our maps, shouted, "Shootaring! Shootaring! Yu damn sissies".

At the end of that field season we were to be inspected by a considerable group of VIP's from Washington. Miser came again, and with him G.F. Loughlin, Chief Geologist, Herbert E. Gregory who had begun work on the Colorado Plateau about the time I was born, and Wilbur Furbank who had experience with similar geology in the San Juan Mountains. Bert Loper, veteran Colorado River boatman, helped Charlie and George with the camps during the field conference.

Our only bad accidents in 5 field season occurred during that conference. The first day out Gregory's horse fell and Gregory had to be returned to town with cracked ribs. The second day, Loughlin's horse fell, and Loughlin had to be taken to Price with a dislocated shoulder. The third day, Miser's horse fell and had to be led off the mountain. It was decided to terminate the field conference.

At the end of the 1939 field season we were host to a group from the Carnegie Geophysical Laboratory including N.L. (Ham) Rowen, J.W. Greig, Earl Ingerson, E.F. Osborn, and Frank Schairer. We convened at Notom where I had arranged to rent a string of horses from the ranch, owned by George Durfey, a contemporary and old friend of Charlie Hanks. Charlie and George selected the horses for the 5 new arrivals, and George would explain to each one the attributes of the particular horse he was being given, and why that horse was selected. In turn Joe Greig, Earl Ingerson, Ossie Osborn, and Frank Schairer were given their horses, and finally George brought out one for Ham, who obviously was a dignified elder statesman in the midst of a group of youngsters. Said George, "This is just the horse for you, gentle as they come, sure footed, neck reins easily, easy gaited, and keeps moving. All the kids around here love to ride him. Just one thing though. He is a sunnova-bitch to jump sideways". Needless to say that became the password for that trip.

Finally came the end of the Henry Mountains project. Four of the horses owned by the Survey still survived and I asked Charlie Hanks what he thought they might be worth. W "What do yourmean", he replied, "What are they worth? Do you want to buy 'em or do you want to sell 'em".

On our many revisits to the Henry Mountains, Alice and I would stop to visit with Charlie in Green River. He seemed to age as little as anyone possibly could. His humor and quick response continued with him. In 1967, in connection with some additional work in the Henry Mountains with some graduate students, we needed to be reminded about certain features that could be seen in a 1938 photograph. In the picture was a person I thought was Charlie. He looked at the picture, but quickly passed it back saying, "That ain't me; he's wearin' galluses and I never did".

It is ironical that this veteran horseman and veteran of the open range should meet his end in an automobile accident in a city. It was an unhappily violent end. But Charlie Hanks had had mostly a quiet life. His skills with the horses and in camp were those of an artist-expert, and those of us who were with him as he practiced his arts and expertise appreciated and respected his ability. We are richer for the experience of having been associated with him.