"TWO-GUN LIMBERT" THE MAN FROM THE SAWTOOTHS

BY Nicholas Casner

Interesting places seem to produce interesting promoters. Idaho qualifies—and so does Robert Limbert, taxidermist, naturalist, writer, photographer, resort operator, lecturer, exhibit designer, and devotee of the Gem State. The author of this essay on Limbert and his activities is a graduate student in the history department at Boise State University. He is also responsible for an exhibit on Limbert, funded in part by the Idaho Humanities Council, that has toured southern Idaho in the past year. Limbert is shown with gun and camera on the facing page.

IDAHO
When there's something in your nature
that makes you sit and dream
Of the wind among the pine trees
and the murmuring of the stream;
When that "something" keeps a calling
till you feel you want to go,
Start your journey, travel westward,
to a land called . . . . "Idaho"[1]
Robert Limbert

IN IDAHO'S MAGNIFICENT landscape Robert W. Limbert (1885-1933) envisioned a vacation refuge for America's urban masses. During the first third of the century, this naturalist, explorer, photographer, writer, artist, and entertainer—billed as "The Man from the Sawtooths"—promoted the glories of the Idaho wilderness. His talents brought considerable recognition to the state at the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco; his exploration and promotion of the Craters of the Moon helped establish that region as a national monument, and his photo essays publicized the state's diverse geography as an ideal tourist attraction.

IDAHO WAS CHARACTERIZED in late-nineteenth-century almanacs and histories as "the most grand, wonderful, romantic, and mysterious part of the domain enclosed within the federal union." Yet it remained a region that "no one seemed curious to explore." At the turn of the century, the state sustained a population of 162,000, but because of its isolation "somewhere beyond the Rockies" the area remained something of an enigma to the rest of the country. One editor, Moses King, commented: "It was hard to tell how this state, discovered by Americans, became part of the union." Even its name posed an etymological mystery. Idaho needed self-identity.[2]

Men such as naturalist John Muir, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, and editor-explorer Charles F. Lummis had already publicized the people and landscape of the West in their publications. In Idaho, Hiram French and former governor James Hawley recorded the state's pioneer history in the 1910's and 1920's. Like Lummis in particular, who worked primarily in the Southwest, Bob Limbert explored and depicted the grandeur of Idaho as the last of the frontier: the end of the New World.[3]

Two qualities remained constant with Robert Limbert: he loved the outdoors, and he packed his Graflex camera everywhere. Although he was a man of many talents, his chief contribution to Idaho history may well lie in his photographic record of the era between 1911 and 1933. His prints of the Sawtooth Mountains, Bruneau Canyon, Craters of the Moon, and Malheur Lake in Oregon expose a pristine country, teeming with wildlife. An experienced hunter, Limbert would often stalk his photographic prey in the same manner as he would with a weapon—using blinds, bait, and decoys to capture wildlife images on film. Landscapes required at least as much patience

[1]Robert W. Limbert, *Unknown Places in Idaho* (Chicago: Poole Brothers, Inc., 1927).

[2]See Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the Pacific States: Washington, Idaho, and Montana* (San Francisco: The History Publishing Co., 1890), 393, 394; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, 2 volumes (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), 1:27; Moses King, editor, *King's Handbook of the United States* (Buffalo, New York: Matthew-Northrup Co., 1896), 193.

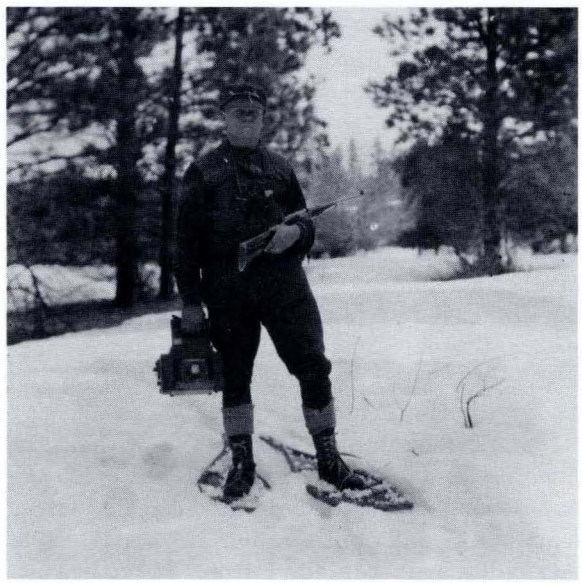
[3]See Hiram T. French, *History of Idaho . . .*, 3 volumes (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1914); James H. Hawley, *The History of Idaho: The Gem of the Mountains*, 4 volumes (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Co., 1920).

as animal portraits. Waiting for a lake to settle to a mirror finish or sunlight to accent a mountainside might take hours or days of anticipation. By 1928, he claimed to have snapped over 3,000 animal photos and 5,000 scenic views and over 15,000 feet of motion pictures.[4]

Though he was concerned with conservation, his motivations were primarily economic. By displaying Idaho through a variety of media, he acted as a self-appointed department of commerce promoting tourism as well as his own business interests. Nevertheless, comparison studies of his wilderness photos reveal dramatic changes that have occurred in the last half-century. Unwittingly, Limbert has provided indisputable evidence of the environmental changes resulting from the destructive forces of man.

LIMBERT WAS RAISED in Omaha, Nebraska. Growing up on the midwestern plain instilled an enduring appreciation of the great outdoors. Hunting, fishing, photography, and reading western adventure stories occupied his youth. A formal elementary education augmented by independent study of archaeology, geology, Indian civilizations, and zoology encouraged his many careers.[5]

By trade, Limbert was a taxidermist. After two years as a field naturalist for the Smithsonian Institution, he moved from Omaha to Boise in 1911 to work for the city's leading taxidermist and furrier, Mrs. A. A. Austin. His craft meant more to him than stuffing animal skins. Every specimen had to exhibit the qualities of a living creature and if possible be displayed in a recreation of its natural habitat. Owls on tree stumps and big-horn sheep on



granite cliffs exemplify Limbert's desire for naturalism in his work. His standards required detailed analysis of bone and muscle structure and a considerable understanding of animal behavior.

Limbert's camera captured poses of living creatures; freezing action like the dive of a hawk or the flexing muscles of an elk helped him generate a more realistic effect in his "recreations of natural history." To further animate his creations, he often moved stuffed animals to natural settings. Moving specimens of ducks or deer from his shop to the marsh or woods gave the animal a lifelike quality. Such representations served the taxidermist in his demand for naturalism in his work: it allowed him to see his subject with a natural background that would be recreated later. The photographer was served by models that were guaranteed to remain motionless.

Limbert's interest in naturalism was a considerable departure from Austin's methods of supplying simple animal mountings, and the attention to anatomical detail and expressions found in living animals accentuated the lifelike quality that became his distinctive mark. In 1915, Limbert bought out Austin and built up one of the largest taxidermy businesses west of Denver. He remained in this enterprise until 1923, when the "call of the wild," as he put it, presented other more adventurous opportunities.[6]

[4]Over 2,800 of these photographs, in addition to many manuscripts and newspaper clippings pertaining to Limbert's career, are in the Robert W. Limbert Papers at Boise State University (hereafter RWLP).

[5]Margaret Limbert Lawrence, interview with the author, Boise, Idaho, April 23, October 8, 9, 1986, March 21, 1987; Reginald C. Barker, "Bob in Wonderland," *Sunset Magazine* (September, 1924), 42; Creston B. Mullins, "Explorer of the Idaho Wilds Crack Shot with Gun and Camera," *Omaha World Herald,* April 15, 1928.

[6]"Bob Limbert, Famous Naturalist is Ex-Omahan," *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal,* November 17, 1928; "Interesting Character is Bob Limbert," *Pocatello Tribune* (April 20, 1924): Mullins, "Explorer"; Robert W. Limbert, "From Guesswork to Science" [pamphlet on taxidermy], RWLP; Hawley, *History,* 3:653-654; "Elk's Head will be Shipped from Boise to [President] Harding," *Idaho Daily Statesman* (Boise), June 5, 1921; Arthur A. Hart, "Taxidermists Stuff Part of Idaho History," *Idaho Statesman,* January 18, 1982.

IDAHO OBSERVED ITS twenty-fifth year of statehood in 1915 at the Panama Pacific International Exposition—the San Francisco World's Fair—with a celebrated display. Hired as designer and curator for the state's agricultural and horticulture displays by Frank Reed, executive commissioner for Idaho's exhibits at the fair, Limbert produced exhibits promoting Idaho's "resources, progress, and possibilities." To formulate concepts for them, he spent six months traveling the state; the next eighteen months were devoted to building and managing the exhibits.

Idaho's contribution proved one of the most popular and imaginative spectacles of the exposition. Strategically located directly across from the Great Conservatory in the Palace of Agriculture, it benefited from heavy traffic. Limbert had constructed several models illustrating the diversity of the state's geographic resources. His reproductions of Shoshone Falls and the Boise irrigation project (focusing on newly completed Arrowrock Dam) covered more than 2,300 square feet and were twenty-six feet high. These papier-mache displays featured, among other things, pumped water, to create a more realistic impression. The irrigation model followed the course of water from storage and discharge through diversion into a canal system and ended flowing onto a miniature farm. A model of the Sawtooth Mountains entitled "The Switzerland of America" used lighting techniques to simulate changes in mountain scenery at different times of day. Representatives of Idaho's animal population—grizzlies, cougar, and elk in the woodlands, quail and pheasant in corn and wheat fields, and beaver and fish in the rivers—were interspersed among these scenic models. The agricultural displays featured fruits and vegetables in apothecary jars, sheaves of grain, and a variety of wood products. A replica of a Russian kiosk presented the quality of the state's latest corn harvest. An eleven-foot Russet Burbank baker crowned a prominent display of Idaho's famous potatoes.

The popularity and attractiveness of Limbert's displays enabled Idaho to win the medal of honor of arrangement and decoration. In total, the Idaho exhibits earned 207 medals, making it one of the most decorated at the exposition. *The Exhibitors Weekly Bulletin* stated that the Idaho "exhibits were artistic as well as educational . . . . it was the attention to small detail that made it without peer on the grounds."[7]

Limbert's success at the World's Fair changed his life. It gave him the opportunity to display his artistic talents, gaining him a ration of fame. Newspapers and magazines applauded his accomplishments, which even earned him a spot in Hawley's *History of Idaho.*[8] As exhibit curator, Limbert lectured fairgoers on a variety of subjects concerning Idaho. Learning to entertain audiences was an important development in his life. It must have occurred to him that the inhabitants of an increasingly industrialized nation craved diversions from the complexities of urban life. Events such as the exposition satisfied those desires, and visitors' questions about hunting, fishing, and outdoor adventure alerted him to the economic potential of tourism.

ONE PERSON WHO made a profound impact on Limbert's life as publicist and promoter was Charles Lummis. Lummis was editor of *Outwest,* a magazine that publicized the culture and landscape of the Southwest, and is credited with coining the phrase "See America First." Urging tourists to "Begin with Idaho," Limbert used the slogan in the Idaho exhibit in San Francisco. As a writer, Lummis produced romantic fiction about the West and promoted the region as a major tourist attraction. Limbert adopted Lummis' rhapsodic style to promote Idaho.[9]

Limbert's Idaho travels supplied visual and literary inspiration for a variety of publications. He began his literary career in 1917 with a photo essay in the Boise *Idaho Sunday Statesman* on the bird habitat of Malheur Lake in Oregon. The following month the *Statesman* published his article on the beaver population in Garden Valley. A revised version of this essay, entitled "The Carpenters in the Creek,"

[7]"Panama Pacific International Exposition," folders in Box 29, John M. Haines Files, Governors' Papers, Idaho State Archives, Boise; "Idaho Has Four Exhibits at the Exposition," *Exhibitors Weekly Bulletin,* September 25, 1915.

[8]"Idaho Has Four Exhibits"; Hawley, *History,* 1:305, 3:653; Barker, "Bob in Wonderland"; *Idaho Daily Statesman,* October 1, 1915.

[9]Dudley Gordon, *Charles F. Lummis: Crusader in Corduroy* (Los Angeles: Cultural Assets Press, 1972); "Idaho Has Four Exhibits."

Limbert, W. L. Cole, and Limbert's Airedale Teddy examine the "doughnut" lava spout during a 1921 expedition to Craters of the Moon. This photograph appeared in Limbert's 1924 National Geographic *article.*

appeared in the October, 1921, issue of *Outdoor Life*. His explorations led him to the site of ancient Indian artifacts, large basalt boulders with petroglyphs carved on the surface. These rocks, located along the Snake River in Canyon County, prompted a series of newspaper and magazine articles beginning in 1922. Limbert discussed their archaeological significance and attempted to "translate" the Indian symbols. Such translation was impossible, but his narrative offers a fascinating account of the region, of Indian history, and—perhaps more important—the state of archaeological science in Idaho during the 1920's.[10]

Limbert contributed photo essays to many wildlife magazines and newspapers throughout the United States. These essays usually involved wildlife, photography, or the Idaho landscape, although *Outdoor America* published a number of his articles on the proper use of handguns. In addition, Limbert wrote short fiction and poetry on the western experience, which met with little success. Tales such as "The Man with the Mormon Draw" and a Lummis-style mystery adventure, "The Shadows of Shing-Foo," failed to reach print. His poem "Idaho" was included in a tourist pamphlet he produced for the Union Pacific Railroad.[11]

In his unpublished manuscript "Traveling through the Land of Tomorrow," Limbert detailed a 156-day camping trip. This account of life in the Sawtooth Mountains contains interesting insights as to his views on nature and his desire to preserve the area while capitalizing on it as a tourist attraction. While he appreciated the need for the mining and logging industries, Limbert believed that tourism would ultimately replace them as Idaho's greatest source of revenue.[12]

[10]"Bird Life as Seen in the West," *Idaho Sunday Statesman,* August 19, 1917; "The Carpenters of the Creek," *Outdoor Life* (October, 1921), 48:237-240; Claude P. Fordyce, "Bob Limbert's Feet have Carried him to Strange Places," *American Magazine* (January, 1929), 107:66; "Indian History Chiseled in Idaho Rock Probably Centuries Ago," *Idaho Daily Statesman,* January 17, 1917; "Examples of Primitive Man's Intellectual Achievement Found in Idaho," *Idaho Sunday Statesman,* June 18, 1922; "Explorer Finds Strange Relics of Lost Race," *Popular Science Monthly* (November, 1922), 102:53.

[11]"Articles" file, RWLP; Limbert, "Unknown Places in Idaho." The Lummis parallel is *The Gold Fish of Gran Chimu* (Boston: Lamson Wolfe Publishers, 1895).

[12]Robert W. Limbert, "Traveling through the Land of Tomorrow," manuscript in RWLP; "Idaho Neglecting its Most Valuable Assets," *Capital News* (Boise), April 5, 1927; "Naturalist Tells of Idaho's Wonders," *Idaho Daily Statesman,* April 5, 1926.

Sunset Magazine's September, 1924, issue featured an article entitled "Bob in Wonderland" that profiled Limbert as an interesting westerner, "extraordinary for his pursuit of out of the way places." In it, Limbert discussed his discovery of a petrified forest near Challis, Idaho; probing the depths of the Bruneau Canyon; and his exploits in Idaho's central mountains.[13] Reports of his exploits also continued to appear in *Statesman* feature articles. Just as Limbert tried to mirror the literary style of Charles Lummis, he emulated the curiosity about landforms of geologist and explorer John Wesley Powel. Like his hero, who had explored the West a half-century before, Limbert searched the remote regions of Idaho looking for places "where the other fellows haven't been."[14]

ONE SUCH PLACE was the Craters of the Moon. After he moved to Boise in 1911, Limbert claimed, he had heard strange tales of a mysterious region in central Idaho. He discounted the legends of a "land-a-fire" as the exaggerations of old mountain men. But reports of an exotic species of dwarf grizzly bear stimulated his curiosity, and perhaps his desire for a unique addition to his taxidermy collection. Whatever his motives, his initial investigation of the "lava beds of Idaho" began around 1918.[15]

Craters of the Moon National Monument traverses Blaine and Butte counties in south-central Idaho, north of the Snake River. Approximately 15,000 years ago a fissure known as the "Great Rift" opened a wound in the earth extending some fifty miles to the southeast. From this chasm issued lava flows that are spread over nearly 575 square miles. The present-day monument covers 83 square miles of this area. The Craters region is unique because its strange configuration of landscape is well preserved geologically.[16]

Although Washington Irving's *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (1833) contains the first known account of the region, numerous frontiersmen must have at least skirted the lava fields in their explorations north of the Snake River. Not until the early 1860's did overland emigrants routinely pass in sight of the lava beds. Pioneers attempting to avoid hostile Indians detoured north, circumventing the area on what became known as Goodale's Cutoff. Israel C. Russell, of the United States Geological Survey, conducted the first official survey of the area in 1901. Though he referred to the area as "Cinder Buttes," local people called it the Valley of the Moon.[17]

Limbert's preliminary encounters with the region followed Russell's routes. In May of 1920, accompanied by W. L. Cole of Boise, Limbert set out on a seventeen-day exploration of the lava bed's vast uncharted mid-section. Starting north of Minidoka, they journeyed eighty miles north to the Ira Martin ranch. Using Indian trails as a guide enabled them, Limbert claimed, to be the first white men to make the rugged north-south trek. Along the way, Limbert snapped photos and named prominent geological points such as Echo Canyon, Yellow Jacket Water Hole, Amphitheater Cave, and a natural lava bridge—the Bridge of Tears.[18]

The April 10, 1921, edition of the *Idaho Sunday Statesman* featured a six-page account of the expedition. Limbert expressed his appreciation for the unique beauty of the district, stating that "no more fitting tribute to the volcanic forces which built the great Snake River Valley could be paid than to make this region into a National Park." He contended that the construction of adequate highways would persuade tourists traveling west from Yellowstone to take advantage of the

[13]Barker, "Bob in Wonderland"; Robert W. Limbert, "Canyon of Brown, One of Nature's Beauty Spots, Tucked Away in Southwestern Idaho," *Idaho Sunday Statesman*, September 24, 1922; "Advertise Idaho Through Pictures Geologist Urges," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, April 5, 1926.

[14]Barker, "Bob in Wonderland."

[15]Bob Limbert, "Bear Hunting in the Craters of Hell," *Outdoor Life* (June, 1922), 49:373-377; Fordyce, "Bob Limbert's Feet"; "A Trip to the Moon Right Here in Idaho," *Idaho Sunday Statesman*, April 10, 1921; Mullins, "Explorer."

[16]Richard H. Lefebvre, "The Geologic Story of Craters of the Moon National Monument of Idaho," U.S., Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, topographic map (1983); Paul Fritz (superintendent, Craters of the Moon National Monument, 1966-1974), interview with the author, Boise, Idaho, November 1, 1986.

[17]Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, Works of Washington Irving, Volume 11 (New York and London: Cooperative Publication Society, n.d.), 206; Michael Ostrogorsky, "Historical Overview of Craters of the Moon National Monument of Idaho" (M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 1983); Israel C. Russell, *Geology and Water Resources of the Snake River Plains of Idaho*, U.S., Department of the Interior, United States Geological Survey Bulletin 199 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), esp. 72-112; "The Complete Story of the Lost Valley," *The Idaho Republican* (Blackfoot), January 24, 1927.

[18]Robert W. Limbert, "Among the Craters of the Moon," *The National Geographic Magazine* (March, 1924), 45:303-328; "A Trip to the Moon." The bridge was so named because a companion's bumping his head on its underside brought tears to the man's eyes.

"unparalleled experience" of visiting the craters area.[19]

Limbert continued his explorations of the craters and guided several parties of scientists and reporters through the region. In June of 1921 he led a party of ten men, among them two biologists from the federal government; Prof. Orma J. Smith, of the College of Idaho; and Harry Nims, a reporter for the Jerome *North Side News.* The expedition lasted two weeks, in which Limbert took over 200 still photographs and shot more than 4,000 feet of motion-picture film. Their investigation of the region revealed bottomless pits, ice caves, and large uncharted craters. The findings were recorded in a series of striking photo essays that appeared in a variety of newspapers and magazines. The *National Geographic* published his "Among the Craters of the Moon" in March of 1924. The twenty-six-page essay contained twenty-three photographs and a map that detailed the route of the expedition. Limbert's essay, which was actually an amalgam of experiences on several expeditions to the area, was submitted in the fall of 1921; the National Geographic Society withheld publication for thirty months in order to verify his observations. *Literary Digest, Outdoor Life,* and *Sunset Magazine* also printed Limbert's observations of the Craters of the Moon.[20]

When not exploring or writing about the lava fields, Limbert promoted the establishment of a national monument there. Second District congressman Addison T. Smith pursued the issue on the federal level; C.A. Bottolfsen, editor of the *Arco Advertiser* and future two-term governor of Idaho, used his newspaper to drum up local and regional support. The National Park Service engaged geologist Harold T. Stearns, who submitted a report through the United States Geological Survey "describing the area, delineating the boundaries, and stating the reasons for its preservation." The official name became "Craters of the Moon" in March of 1924, thus avoiding confusion with California's Valley of the Moon. The name was selected through a survey conducted by Bottolfsen's paper. Though there was some disagreement over the name, Stearns—in a letter to A. B. Cammerer, then director of the National Park Service—deemed it appropriate because the lava fields resembled the surface of the moon when it was viewed through a telescope. Limbert was on the selection committee for the new name.[21]

On May 2, 1924, President Calvin Coolidge signed a proclamation designating thirty-nine square miles of southern Idaho as Craters of the Moon National Monument. For his efforts, Limbert secured exclusive rights to operate a guide service through the area. He continued to explore and to write articles on the monument until the late 1920's. In 1926, he led fifteen men and women backpackers from the Seattle Mountaineers and Mount Stuart Alpine clubs through a part of the rift that Limbert believed to be the "Lost Valley," a legendary Indian sanctuary. Unfortunately, the "Lost Valley" remains an enigma. "He found something," park naturalist David Clark says, "but there is no way to verify his exact position because his directions are too ambiguous."[22]

[19]"A Trip to the Moon."

[20]Limbert, "Among the Craters"; "1500 Attend Opening of the Craters of the Moon," *Arco Advertiser,* June 20, 1924; "Sees Idaho as Home of Great National Park," *Nampa Leader-Herald,* May 3, 1921; "New Expedition Ready to Explore the Valley of the Moon," *Idaho Daily Statesman,* June 5, 1921; "The Valley of the Moon Will be Explored by Scientist," *Pocatello Tribune,* June 6, 1921; Harry Nims, "Exploring the Valley of the Moon," *The North Side News* (Jerome, Idaho), July 21, 1921; "A Trip to the Moon"; Robert W. Limbert, "Among the Craters of the Moon in Idaho," *Literary Digest* (April 12, 1924), 81:41-44.

[21]Special edition, *Arco Advertiser,* June 12, 1921; "Craters Area May be Made into National Park," *Arco Advertiser,* March 13, 1922; "Congressman Plans to Get National Park for Southern Idaho," *Sunday Capital News,* September 13, 1923; Harold Stearns, "Craters of the Moon National Monument," *American Geographic Review* (July, 1924), 14:362-372; Harold Stearns to A. B. Cammerer, Acting Director, National Park Service, February 2, 1924, Records of the National Park Service, General Records, 1921-1928, Box 574-576, Record Group 79, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; "Craters of the Moon," "Proclamation of President, Idaho Craters of the Moon," *Pocatello Tribune,* June 8, 1924; "Coolidge Sets Aside Craters," *Capital News,* May 6, 1924; "Valley of the Moon Declared a Wonderland," *Pocatello Tribune,* July 18, 1921; "Limbert Talks about Craters," *Arco Advertiser,* March 7, 1922; "Valley of the Moon was Known as the Great American Desert in Early Days but Name Changed by Senator Heyburn," *Sunday Capital News,* June 25, 1922; "Smith Active in Obtaining Park at Craters of the Moon," *Idaho Daily Statesman,* January 15, 1924; Harold T. Stearns, "Striking Volcanic Features in Craters of the Moon National Monument," *Arco Advertiser,* April 29, 1927; "Explored by Scientist"; "New Expedition"; Nims, "Exploring the Valley."

In an apparent effort to give the project a final nudge, Limbert compiled a scrapbook containing photographs with vignettes describing various park scenes. This book, delivered to President Calvin Coolidge, is believed to be the same one retained in RLWP.

[22]"New Marvels in Idaho's Volcanic Wonderland," *Idaho Sunday Statesman,* October 10, 1926; "Hidden Valley is Found by Limbert, Mountaineers," *Capital News,* May 30, 1926; "Lost Valley"; David Clark (park naturalist, Craters of the Moon National Monument), interview with the author, Arco, April 20, 1986. See also Abraham C. Anderson, *Trails of Early Idaho: The Pioneer Life of George W. Goodhart* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers Ltd., 1940). The area of the monument was enlarged to 83 square miles in 1928, and a 185-acre *kipuka*—or island of unique grassland surrounded by lava beds—was included in 1963. See "Craters of the Moon" files, Frank Church Papers, Boise State University Archives.

Redfish Lake Lodge, probably just before its remodeling in 1928. Limbert planned to build another lodge, accessible only by boat, across the lake.

Despite Limbert's failure to find the "Lost Valley," he achieved additional publicity for the park. Yet the natural beauty and mystery of the Craters area were never adequately rewarded with visitors. The region proved too harsh an environment for the average tourist.

IN HIS REMAINING years, Limbert focused greater attention on the central mountains of Idaho as an attraction for vacationing Americans. He regarded the Sawtooth Mountains and Stanley Basin of Idaho as the most beautiful region of Idaho, if not the world. In effect he displayed them at the Panama Pacific Exposition and in a number of articles depicting their grandeur. He also claimed to have explored and charted vast sections of the district, naming over 200 lakes and several mountain peaks. By the mid-1920's, he took them as his home: his family moved its residence to Redfish Lake and Limbert established himself as a hunting and fishing guide. Addressing the Hailey City Council in 1926, Limbert proclaimed: "Your town can be made the St. Moritz of America and become just as famous [a] winter sports town, all it needs is a few strong souls to push it along." That same year, he and six other men formed a joint stock company named Sawtooth Tours Incorporated, to "develop the Hailey-Sawtooth district into a tourist mecca."[23]

At the same time Limbert began touring the country, lecturing to conservation and explorers' clubs. He presented lantern slides and motion pictures of Craters of the Moon and other Idaho sites. Although he generated some enthusiasm for the monument, many people revealed a great interest in his photos of the Sawtooths.[24] On the way home from his 1926 tour, he stopped in Wyoming to investigate Yellowstone National Park and several dude ranches, learning how the latter were operated. Convinced of the Sawtooths' potential, he set out to enlighten the people of central Idaho about the economic value of tourism. That summer he spent over two months camping, photographing, and gathering more material for lectures. The following winter he again toured the East, but this time he focused more attention on the Sawtooths. Averaging eleven performances a week over a six-week tour, Limbert attracted a strong following and signed up many fishing parties for the following summer.[25]

On his 1927 tour, he also met with Carl R. Gray, president of the Union Pacific Railroad. As a result of this meeting, Limbert signed an agreement to write a fifty-four-page pamphlet entitled "Unknown Places in Idaho" as a promotional piece for the railroad. Limbert supplied the text and seventy-four photographs, and the booklet included three railroad route

[23] "Unexplored Wonderland of Interior Idaho will Lure Tourist Millions", *Times-News-Miner* (Hailey), December 30, 1926.

[24] "Will Open Treasure House of Scenic Central Idaho to Great Armies of Tourists in East and South," *Times-News-Miner,* September 9, 1929; "In the Land of Tomorrow."

[25] "Unexplored Wonderland of Interior Idaho will Lure Tourist Millions"; "Naturalist Tells Idaho's Wonders," *Idaho Daily Statesman,* April 5, 1926; Robert W. Limbert, "The Scenic Sawtooths of Idaho," RWLP; "Idaho Neglecting."

maps of southern Idaho—particularly emphasizing Hailey. The Union Pacific published 100,000 copies of the pamphlet and an additional 50,000 pamphlets describing a then unbuilt lodge at Redfish Lake.[26]

In June of 1928, Limbert and B. D. Horstman signed a contract with the U.S. Forest Service for "exclusive rights" to operate a "dude ranch" at Redfish Lake. The compact was for fifteen years; Limbert and Horstman paid $50 a year for the use of the site. Construction of Redfish Lake Lodge began that summer; forty two-room cabins and a boat dock were built the next season. Modeled after lodges in the Yellowstone area, Limbert's "ranch" provided "dudes" with a unique western experience—wild west shows and personally guided tours of "wild Idaho."[27]

Limbert had counted on attracting droves of rich easterners for hunting and fishing excursions as a means of financing. He also attempted to solicit investors for the project, among them cheese magnate J. L. Kraft. This strategy worked until the advent of the Depression, when America's interests in vacations shifted to other matters. By the mid-1930's, the Limbert family's connection with the resort had terminated, though the lodge and several adjacent buildings he constructed remain at this popular mountain retreat.[28]

UNDAUNTED BY THE calamity of the Great Depression, Limbert decided that if the nation could not come to Idaho, he would take Idaho to the nation. After returning from San Francisco in 1915, he had begun lecturing to clubs and civic groups in the Boise Valley. These early programs addressed wildlife conservation. Animal and bird calls highlighted his performances, as he imitated over 100 different species. In time he introduced lantern slides, motion pictures, discussions of his exploratory experiences, and demonstrations of his skill as a marksman.[29]

By the time he toured the country in the mid-1920's, Limbert had retained the services of Dorothy Fox, a Chicago booking agent. Fox characterized Limbert as an "entertainer deluxe, an extraordinary naturalist, explorer, author, photographer, and cowboy humorist—second only to Will Rogers." In 1931, Limbert signed on with another agency, Albert and Wilkes, who booked the likes of Winston Churchill, Amelia Earhart, Will Durant, and Lowell Thomas on the lecture circuit. Albert and Wilkes's promotion claimed that "Two Gun Bob Limbert" was the "most versatile entertainer in America today."[30]

Dressed in western garb, Limbert entertained audiences with his repertoire of photos, movies, and animal calls. He thrilled them with stories about his mountain home and many adventures in Idaho's wilderness. Limbert sometimes exaggerated with tall tales: his favorite may have been the story of the twelve-year-old Idaho boy who caught so many trout at Redfish Lake that the fish on his stringer pulled his raft around the lake. He claimed world-class status as a small-arms marksman, although no official evidence exists to verify such eminence. His proficiency with a gun was demonstrated in many tricks he performed. Limbert could shatter two glass bulbs by splitting a bullet on an ax blade from twenty paces. He could toss a washer in the air, draw, fire, and shoot through the hole—which was covered by a postage stamp so there would be evidence that the bullet had really gone through it. To promote his engagement in Chicago, Limbert once challenged Al Capone to a duel. Evidently, "Scarface" declined the invitation.[31]

Herbert F. Jenkins, a vice-president of Little, Brown and Company, publishers, attended Limbert's show in Boston in March of 1933 and approached him with encouragement to relate his manifold adventures in a book. Before Limbert could return west and take on the project, tragedy struck. While in New York, he received word that his mother was dying in

[26]Lawrence interview, October 9, 1986; Robert W. Limbert, "The Crown of the Sawtooths," *Idaho Sunday Statesman*, May 15, 1927; "Bob Limbert Again in Print with Idaho Scenic Publication," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, December 23, 1928.

[27]Mullins, "Explorer"; "Unknown Places," RWLP; "Contracts: Robert W. Limbert and Union Pacific Railroad," "Contracts: Redfish Lodge," RWLP.

[28]Lawrence interview, October 26, 1986; Robert W. Limbert to J. L. Kraft, no date, RWLP.

[29]"Interesting Character."

[30]Dorothy B. Fox, "Bob Limbert, The Man from the Sawtooths," publicity pamphlet, RWLP; Albert and Wilkes, *Blue Book of World Celebrities*, 1932-33, RWLP.

[31]"Westerner, Quick on Draw Gives Police Some Ideas," *Buffalo Courier Express*, April 15, 1929; "Two Gun Cowboy from West Shows," *Des Moines Register*, December 20, 1929; "Two Gun Cowboy Laughs at Chicago Gangster," *Chicago Evening American*, no date, RWLP; "Trout Like Flies, Deer as Rabbits," *Omaha World Herald*, November 21, 1928.

Senator William E. Borah posed for Limbert's camera during a visit to Idaho in the 1920's.

Boise. During the journey to reach her side, he suffered a fatal brain hemorrhage. Robert Limbert died June 15, 1933, in Cheyenne, Wyoming.[32]

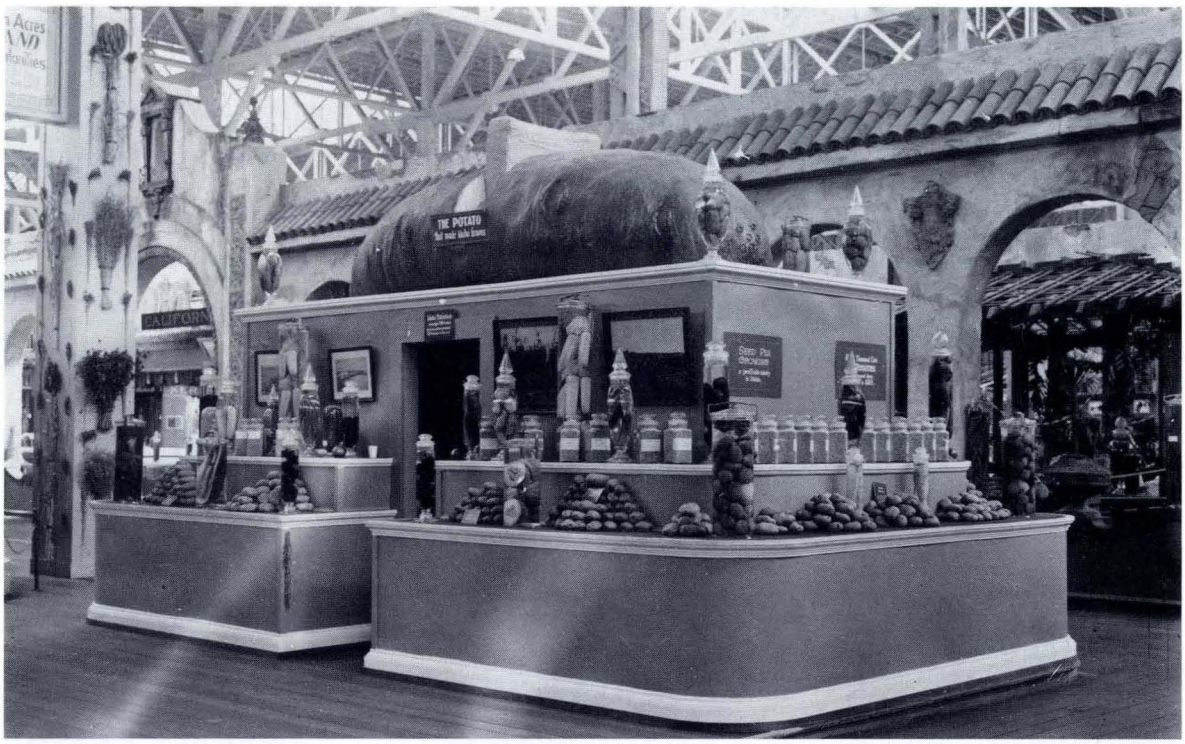
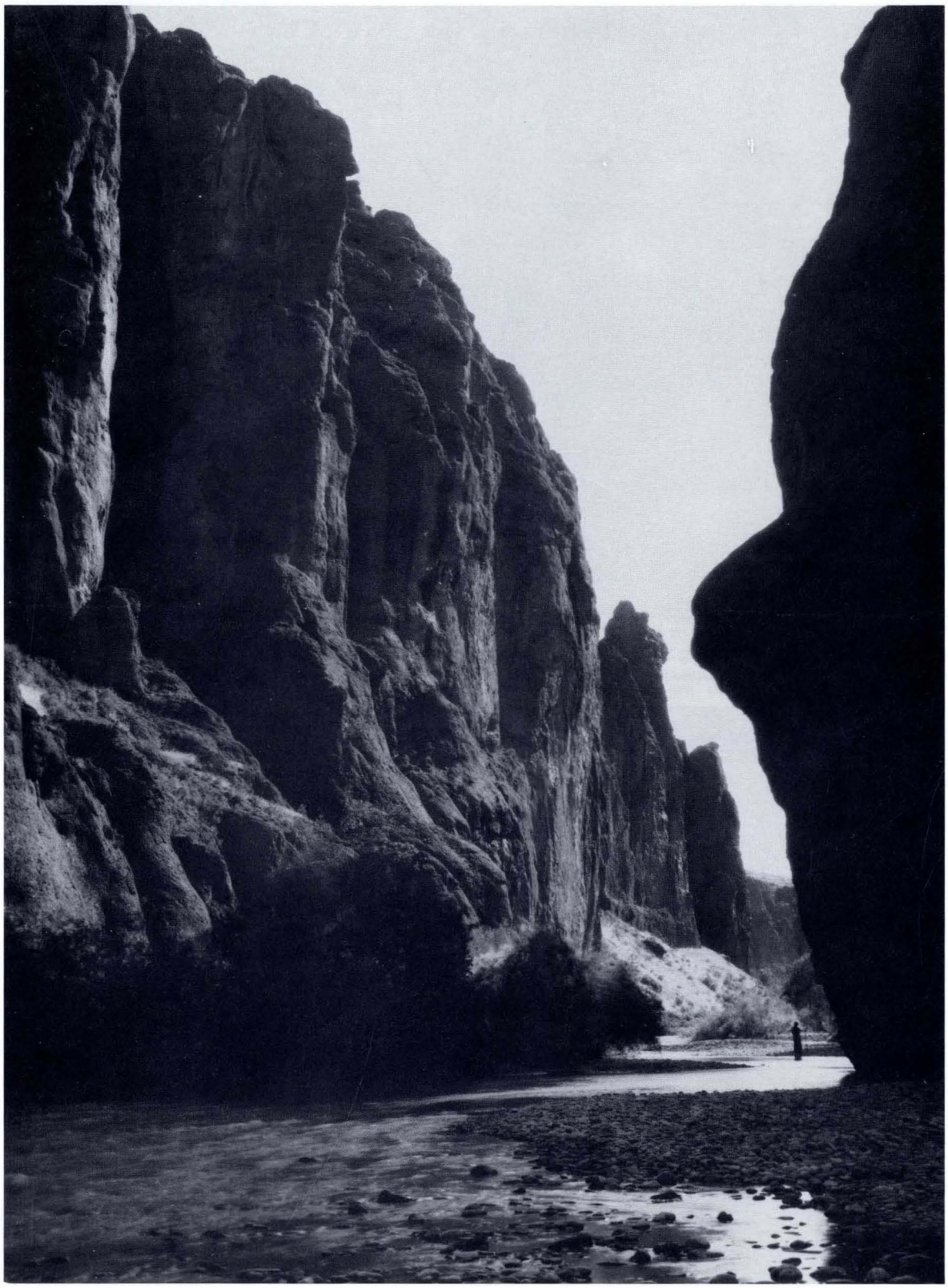
ROBERT LIMBERT'S LIFE reflected the diversity and energy of the Idaho landscape he loved. He promoted the natural treasures of an isolated region through his exploration, photography, nature studies, and entertainment talents. Limbert was among the first to recognize the state's magnificent landscape as a powerful tourist attraction to the nation's growing urban population. While he is a fascinating character out of Idaho's past, Limbert's most significant contribution may be made in the future though it is rooted in the prehistoric.

Centuries ago another civilization established itself in the Snake River region of North America. For unknown reasons some of its people left their marks on boulders along the river. Today many of these symbols of antiquity—the same ones Limbert studied—no longer exist because of the ravages of man. Vandals have shot them, chopped them, even burned them into oblivion. Symbolically, this destruction represents other, albeit less premeditated, marks on the environment by the encroachment of modern man.

Limbert's photographs captured the pristine Idaho: they may be used now to see how it has changed. Comparison of his work with modern conditions reveals changes in wildlife habitat and populations, reduction of stream levels, and alterations to the geology of different regions—including the Craters of the Moon. Paradoxically, Limbert is partly responsible because of his promotion of tourism.

Robert Limbert, like Idahoans of today, took pride in the "quality of life" the state offered. The investigation of his materials may help secure methods to halt these destructive forces in doing so may preserve the opportunity for future generations to experience Limbert's "call of the wild." ■

[32]Herbert F. Jenkins to Robert W. Limbert, March 9, 1933, RWLP; "Bob Limbert Dies While Homeward Bound," *Arco Advertiser,* June 23, 1933.



Above: *Limbert's display of agricultural products—topped by a Russet Burbank potato—at the San Francisco World's Fair.* Below: *Limbert in his motorcycle in front of the "Map Rock" petroglyphs near Marsing, Idaho.* On the next page: *Limbert's spectacular photograph of the Bruneau Canyon—the kind of harsh, unexplored terrain that he thrived on investigating but found difficult to promote as a tourist attraction.*