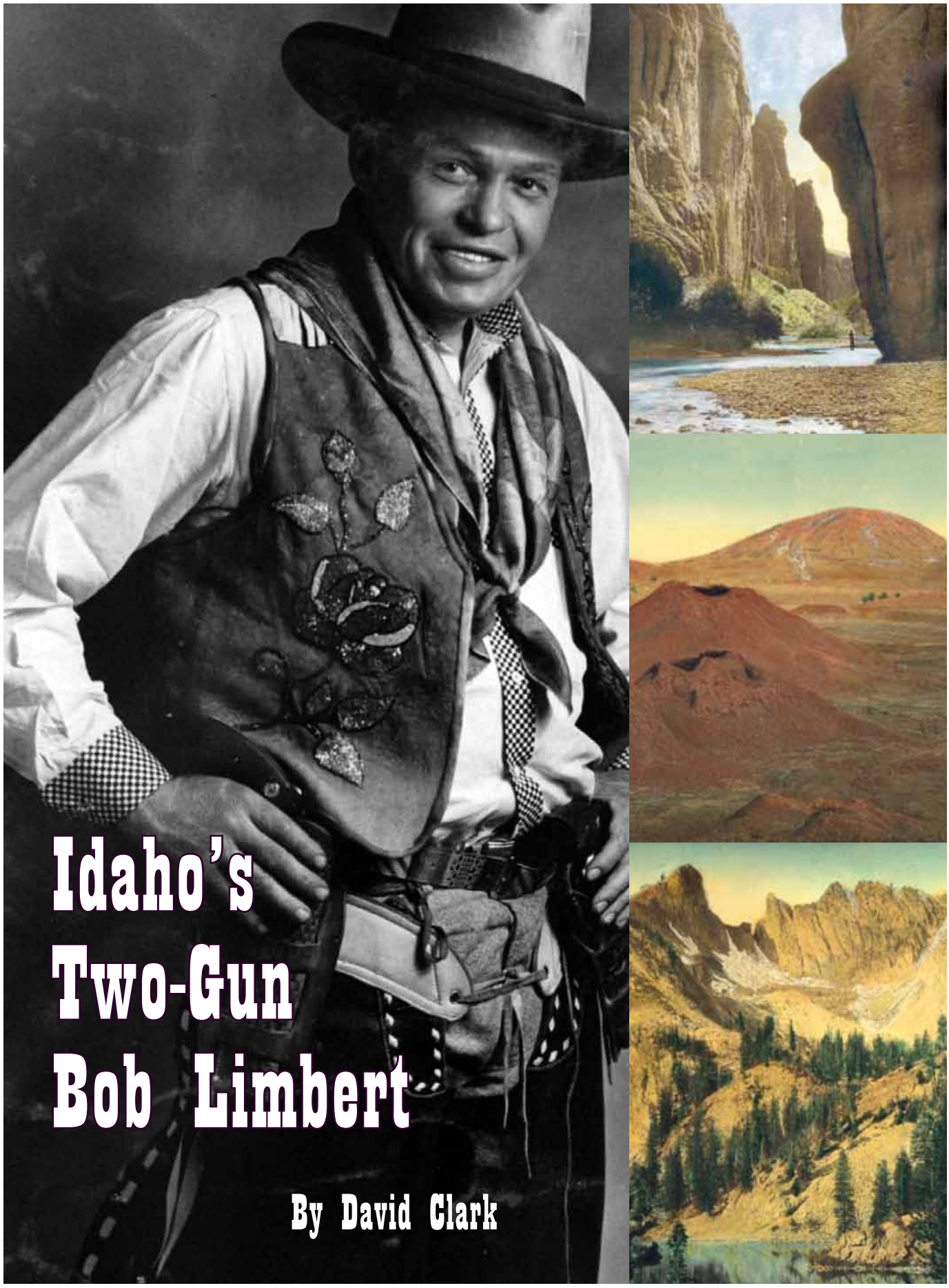

Idaho's Two-Gun Bob Limbert

By David Clark

Did You Ever Get To Thinking?

By Robert W. Limbert

Did you ever get to thinking about the close of day,
How you'd like to leave the city and go traveling far away;
How you'd like to take a pack string and range out through the hills,
How you'd like to climb the mountains and get the high rock thrills,
How you'd like to leave the hurry, the worry and the strife,
The dull and tiring cares that you find in business life,
How you'd like to wade the rivers and to paddle in the streams,
How you'd like to make reality, the things that come in dreams?

Did you ever get to thinking as you close up for the day,
How you'd like to find an "Eldorado" and forever go and stay,
How you'd like to find some placer ground that would the panning pay,
How you'd like to live among the mountains, the pine trees and the trout,
Where the pearly peaks would glisten when you stood in your lookout,
How you'd hear the ruffed grouse drumming and might see a doe and fawn,
How you'd hear the coyotes wailing as you waited for the dawn?

Did you ever get to thinking of how you'd like to go,
And mush up through the Arctic, the Land of Eternal Snow,
How you'd like to take a hunting trip down in Equator Land,
How you'd like to ride a camel across the burning sand;
How you'd like to know the heathen and the cruel things they do,
How you'd like to meet the savage, though he try to run you thru;
How you'd like to see the cannibal when you know your hair would stand,
How you'd like to say that you knew them all first hand?

Did you ever get to thinking of how you'd like to float,
How you would cruise up and down the Yukon if you only had a boat,
How you would hunt the bear and beaver, the caribou and moose,
How you would slip along the sand bar and stalk the wily goose;
Did you ever get to thinking and let your thoughts run loose,
How and where you'd find the money,
And then—Oh hell! What is the use?

Idaho's Two-Gun Bob Limbert

There are certain people who crave adventure in their lives. Some of the well-known ones would be Christopher Columbus, Charles Lindbergh, Sir Edmund Hillary, Amelia Earhart, Lewis and Clark, and Neil Armstrong. Others might be a friend or neighbor who sky dives, rafts down a roaring river, or backpacks into the wilderness. Whoever these people are, they all have the same thing in common—a driving force that keeps them searching for new and exciting experiences. To achieve this, they ignore pain, take risks, and dismiss fear. They are often willing to leave their families, make huge monetary sacrifices, and completely restructure their lives to allow for the constant pursuit of their passion.

What causes this fixation is difficult to pin down because this type of person is so unusual, so special, and so rare.

For most explorers, their lives never led to wealth and it is doubtful they would ever want the burden of dealing with such mundane things as money. Their riches came from being able to see something no one else has seen before, to climb up one more hill, and to feel the thrill of experiencing the unknown. Robert Limbert was one of these people. Although he received little recognition or credit for what he accomplished (even in his home state of Idaho), his explorations and feats were by any criteria, absolutely incredible.

Attracted by all of the unexplored areas of Idaho and with no idea what he would encounter, Limbert floated down the hidden rivers of the remote Owyhee Plateau, hiked across the treacherous lava rock of the Snake River Plain, and climbed the challenging alpine mountains of the Sawtooth Range. Limbert filled in more of the unmapped areas of Idaho than any other person and wanted nothing more than to wander into the next unknown place.

Heading West

Little is known about Limbert's early life. It is known that he was born in 1885 in Minnesota, but records of his birth are sketchy. By 1887, his mother, Ida, had married Jesse Limber (Robert later change his name to Limbert). During his early life, Limbert's family lived near Omaha, in Dundee, Nebraska. His parents exposed him early on to the out-of-doors where he learned to hunt, ride horses, and shoot.

When he finished high school, Limbert took his first job with the Union Pacific Railroad. He worked on a survey team that located the best routes for building tracks in Utah and Wyoming. After two years, he returned to Nebraska where he began working for a local taxidermist. A year later, the experience he received there provided him with the skills he needed to get a job with the Smithsonian Institution collecting field specimens of the local fauna of the south-central region of Colorado. In 1911, he moved even farther west.

Taxidermist/Exhibit Designer

Upon arriving in Boise, Idaho, Limbert found that his background again provided him the experience he needed to get work in yet another taxidermy shop. By 1915, he opened his own business, R.W. Limbert and Company, and described himself as a "Scientific Taxidermist and Tanner."

At a time when many animals were mounted in a haphazard manner, Limbert strove to use the very latest techniques and technology. He announced in a promotional brochure, that he was a "Specialist in the artistic and lifelike re-creation of natural history specimens for the decoration of your home." He referred to his work as "taxidermy sculpture."

In order to refine his skills, Limbert spent many hours sketching animals in order to make his specimens appear more lifelike. His drawings portrayed the different patterns of hair, fur, and feathers characteristic of various animals.

Limbert would also study the anatomy of individual animals to ensure he could make them look as natural as possible. When he combined his attention to the unique physical characteristics of each animal with the talents he was developing as an artist, photographer, hunter, and naturalist, it was not surprising that he established himself as the leading taxidermist in Boise. His expertise soon gave him the reputation of being one of the best and most artistic taxidermists in the Rocky Mountain region.

Limbert's reputation as a taxidermist dedicated to creating the most realistic animal mounts and displaying them in recreated, but natural, habitats led to his selection to serve as designer and curator of Idaho's exhibit at the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco, California. Also called the Panama Pacific International Exposition, the event encouraged each state to create

an exhibit to showcase its most outstanding attributes and products.

Limbert devoted himself to touring Idaho in order to acquire the background necessary to create one of the most applauded exhibits in the entire fair. At the conclusion of the fair his work was called "artistic as well as educational" and deemed one of the most popular exhibits of the entire event. Idaho was given award after award—more than any other state or country—as a reward for developing a superb attraction.

For the time, the exhibit was incredibly detailed and contained working, automated features that fascinated visitors. Limbert created the 26-foot high Arrowrock Dam complete with a detailed irrigation system that traced the flow of water from the storage lake to the farmlands. Actual water was pumped into the exhibit to provide a sense of realism. He used this same technique to create the waterfalls that were a part of his huge replica of Shoshone Falls. His recreation of the Sawtooth Mountain Range included a relief of the mountains that were bathed by lighting that changed as the viewer was shown how the panorama's appearance varied from daylight to sunset.

Idaho agricultural products were displayed with a flair few other exhibits could match. There were seven-foot sheaves of wheat, oats, and barley. All of the fruits and vegetables grown in the state were shown off in large, sealed jars so that their color and characteristics would be preserved. He topped everything off by creating an 11-foot, papier-mâché baked potato complete with a pat of butter oozing out.

While his work was on display, Limbert was in attendance nearly every day. He spent his time lecturing his audiences on the wonders of Idaho. He soon found that people from

urban settings were fascinated by his life and exploits and loved his presentations. Their reaction to his personality and unusual lifestyle must have convinced him that his ability to entertain people might be something he could further develop. His love of the natural world would soon be the basis for developing into an insightful writer and charismatic speaker.

Naturalist

At the turn of the century, any person who studied nature was known as a "naturalist." The term is still used today, but has basically been replaced by identifying scientists by their specialties; biologist, entomologist, paleontologist, or taxonomist. The term "naturalist" now applies mostly to laymen who demonstrate an appreciation or even love of nature, but even these people are more commonly known as birdwatchers, wildlife photographers, or whale watchers. Limbert was often called a naturalist by the press of his time, but he seldom referred to himself as such. He probably thought of himself as more of a "sportsman" or "outdoorsman" than he did a naturalist. This may have been because Limbert spent little time educating himself about the natural world by the traditional means of study and academic pursuits, but rather concentrated on his own observations while in the wild.

In "The Carpenters of the Creek," an article that appeared in the October, 1921 issue of *Outdoor Life*, Limbert wrote: "The statement is often made that beaver cut their timber in such a manner that it falls towards the river. It is my belief that they think very little about it. All timber growing near

to running water generally inclines in that direction. The beaver naturally does the most work on the side he gets to first, or the side towards the water, of course, has a tendency of falling the tree in that direction should it happen to be perpendicular."

Limbert's uncanny sense of deduction was further illustrated in a letter to the editor of the *Idaho Fish and Game Magazine* involving a photo used in an earlier issue that showed a swimming deer about to be "bludgeoned" by a man in a small boat. In

the photo, a large buck deer was seen in the water in front of the boat and a man was standing while holding an oar in preparation to hit the deer. The small boat contained four other people sitting in rather cramped quarters in the rear of the boat. From this one photo Limbert determined that the photo was a phony because:

- There was no wake of water in front of the deer's neck while in the water.

- Only the man standing in preparation to hit the deer is looking at the deer. The rest look at the camera instead of the "poor victim." Hardly the reaction of people about to witness a deer clubbing.

- The nose of the deer is white (as opposed to black or dark) common to deer during the winter time when the lake would have been frozen.

- The ears of the deer protrude from its head rather than lying snug against the antlers which meant the head was a mount done by an "unobserving" taxidermist.

Later, the magazine responded that indeed the photo had indeed been identified as a fake and also reported the swimming deer was actually a mounted deer head that had been attached to a sunken log.

For Limbert to be able to see the many inconsistencies demonstrates a very well developed sense of observation. When coupled with his knowledge of the natural world, his reasoning proved very astute.

Limbert's love of everything wild naturally led him to want to share his feelings with others. He was soon writing articles and stories for the local newspaper and other publications. The need for photographs to accompany his work led him to what would become another passion—photography.

Writer/Photographer

Limbert wrote so many articles for the *Boise Statesman* newspaper, he became what would today be considered a columnist, writing on the out-of-doors. He wrote about bird watching, his explorations, and natural history. Eventually, he began to write for national publications. Stories he did about beavers for *Outdoor Life* and revolver shooting for *Outdoor America* were typical examples of his work. His writing also included fiction—in the style of Louis L′Amour's western genre—and poetry.

In order to illustrate his articles, Limbert became a photographer and his choice of subjects included anything that fascinated him. This was nearly always something connected to the natural world. He described the day's equipment: "The photographic outfit needs not be elaborate, a post card size or 4 by 5 camera being the best. It should be fitted with a ground glass that you may focus exactly what you want."

The large format cameras he used to take photographs weighed several pounds and, when coupled with large, wooden tripods, were best carried into the field on horseback.

Limbert's reason for taking pictures may have been less about creating great photos than in just having a good reason for being outside. He states: " . . . . do not get the idea that because you know the technique

of the camera you can step out and make pictures every one perfect. On the contrary, there will be some undesired feature of the pose, some miscalculation of the exposure or lighting that will spoil many a negative. The main thing is it will draw you into the places where there is room to turn around, where you can relax and live as a man was originally intended to . . . ."

Many of Limbert's photos were little more than snapshots and others were strictly utilitarian, meant only to illustrate some feature, place, or activity. But within his collections are some photos that demonstrate his true skill as a photographer. These photos did not simply capture an image—they documented a special moment or "sense of place." Scattered throughout the many photos that Limbert took are those that make the viewer stop and see the subject not with their eyes, but with their heart.

Limbert's love of the wild and desire to photograph Idaho continued to grow. In the early 1900s Idaho still had a lot of blank areas on its maps and Limbert was drawn by these unknown places.

Explorer: Craters of the Moon

In 1919, Limbert first visited an area in south-central Idaho he called "Cinder Buttes." To get there he traveled by train and drove over 50 miles of "dirt" (unimproved) road by automobile. He explored the northern section of the lava fields where ranchers, emigrants, and geologists had preceded him. But what caught Limbert's attention was the unmapped and virtually unexplored region to the south described on maps as just a rolling lava plateau. Hearing that a species of dwarf grizzly bear inhabited the area further peaked his interest and brought him to the "lavas" to collect one.

In May, 1920, Limbert, his Airedale dog (Teddy), and a friend from Boise, W.C. Cole, took the train to Minidoka, Idaho and from there headed for the mountains they could see on the horizon over 50 miles away.

Limbert's backpack carried enough provisions for a two-week trek and weighed 55 pounds. He also took along a large camera to document the trip and a rifle with which to hunt bears.

At first the going was easy—sagebrush country where you took one step to the right, one step forward, one step to the left, and then another step forward. But this changed abruptly when they came to their first a′a lava flow. A′a is the Hawaiian name used for the very thick basaltic lava that is a pile of sharp, irregular clinkers of rock found on these volcanic islands. The lava is so thick that it doesn't flow, but moves forward like a slow moving conveyer-belt. Travel over this material is unbelievably difficult. Limbert may have described it best when he said the a′a flows were: "Like a pile of millions of cups and saucers where every time you took a step you slipped and, every time you slipped, you cut yourself." Traveling a mile over these flows could take an hour or more.

The rough rock soon took a toll on the dog's unprotected feet. According to Limbert: "We also took with us an Airedale terrier for a camp dog. This was a mistake, for after three days travel his feet were worn raw and bleeding. In some places it was necessary to carry him or sit and wait while he picked his way across." Eventually Limbert cut patches from his leather jacket to cover and protect the dog's feet.

The a′a lava was soon replaced by pahoehoe lava. Pahoehoe moves like a molten river and pools up when it flows into low-lying areas. If the lava simply hardens in place, then walking over it is like walking down a highway of rock. If, however, the lava flow pulls apart as it pushes up against or rolls over an obstacle, it becomes a jumbled mass of loose slabs resembling a sea of ice jams. Travel over this terrain can be even more difficult than on the a′a lava because there may never be a flat place to plant your boot and the slabs of rock move or roll when stepped on.

Regardless of the difficulties encountered, Limbert, Cole, and the miserable Teddy continued on their journey. Along the way, they explored caves, descended into volcanic vents, and discovered a vast array of amazing features. They located waterholes that were icy cold because lenses of ice had formed just below the surface and prevented water on the surface from being absorbed into the porous lava. They examined the vents of miniature volcanoes

that seemed to be "bottomless" and wondered at pillars of lava that had formed when frothy, molten rock flowed around trees. Over time the dead wood of these trees weathered away and left hollowed out formations that marked where the limbs and trunks had been.

And with each new discovery, they named the feature or place. The lava trees thought to look like gun emplacements were located on Trench Mortar Flats. The cinder cones were Big Crater, Sugar Loaf, Horseshoe, and Fissure Butte. The caves were the theater-like Amphitheater and the collapsed lava tube named Bridge of Tears where Limbert rose up too quickly while standing under it. The flows, because their surface was bluish in coloration and looked like scales on a reptile's back, were Blue Dragon, while the waterholes were Bear's Den, Big Devil Sink, and Yellowjacket.

When the group arrived at what they named Echo Crater for its acoustic qualities, they found a perfect campsite inside the vent that contained limber pines for shade and protected them from the wind. Here Cole and Teddy rested their cut and aching feet while Limbert continued to explore the area.

Limbert talks of one interesting find that could have resulted in disaster. While crossing a lava flow alone he came upon a place where the roof of a lava tube had collapsed leaving an opening about 10 feet deep and 15 feet across. He saw the skeleton of a big horn sheep laying on the floor of the cave and in order to take a closer look jumped into the hole. In his own words: "After looking the horns over, I started to climb out, and found that the farthest I could reach lacked about four feet of the top. To be frank, I had some very queer thoughts, chief of which was, will anybody ever find me or shall I, like the sheep, lie here for years?" Limbert finally ascertained that he could stack up the debris from the collapsed ceiling to build a rock pile high enough to allow him to climb out onto the surface.

After a total of 17 days, the small expedition arrived at the base of the Pioneer Mountains. They had traveled more than 80 miles, discovered dozens of unique geologic formations, and taken more than 200 photographs. This trip into the lava, however, was merely the start of Limbert's association with the area later to be called Craters of the Moon. Soon after, he brought others to explore this unearthly landscape and spearheaded a quest to see the place protected as a national park.

As for Limbert's search for the dwarf grizzly, not a one was seen or has ever been recorded since. There were full-sized grizzly bears in the area, however, and on a return trip Limbert encountered one: "I had traveled an hour when I saw something move on the top of a huge pile

of ash. Thinking it was a woodchuck and that I might succeed in getting a picture by squeaking him up. I crept up and began calling for him. At about the second squeak I heard a rock rattle and glancing up I saw not a woodchuck, but a full-grown grizzly bear slowly raising himself up to look down at me from a distance of about 20 feet.

About the same time he saw me, his hair came up in a ruffle on his shoulders much the same as a dog looking for a fight. Ears laid back, he slowly puckered his upper lip and stuck it out at me, at the same time making a clanking noise with his teeth. I didn't have a gun. I wanted to run but I couldn't, my legs wouldn't work." Limbert took a photo of the bear, but never reached for a gun.

Explorer: Bruneau River

For some reason, Limbert's writings about the exploration of the Bruneau River and Canyon of southwestern Idaho are sketchy and uncharacteristically devoid of factual information. Limbert wrote only a single newspaper article about his explorations. While full of rather artistic descriptions of the "various hues of brownish blue and black, with stripes of yellow and gray" of the rock walls of the canyon, the "the red, green and yellow" wisps of steam rising from the hot springs, and "the red glints in the sunset, (where) the oblique rays turn the tips and points of the canyon walls to pink," there is no description of the basic logistics of his journey through the canyon. It is unclear where he entered

the canyon and no mention whatsoever of where the journey ended. There is nothing about what boats were used, and even the duration of the trip is missing.

A caption for a photo of this steep-walled canyon in Limbert's scrapbook reads: "While hunting antelope in 1914 on the plain of southern Owyhee County, Idaho I first saw the upper end of the canyon and resolved to at some time see more of it. It was the summer of 1923 before this wish was gratified." This is a strange statement since he wrote the newspaper article about the trip through the canyon in 1922.

A single mention of this trip in a letter to a R.F. Warren, Governor of the Sierra Madre Club in Los Angeles, dated December 19, 1927, provides more information than the entire newspaper article. In the letter, which was sent to invite Warren and his club members to join him on a guided trip, Limbert wrote: "If a bunch of you people want to do something original I should like

to take you into...the Bruneau Canyon. So far as is known I am one of two people who ever went through the canyon. It took me 17 days and was a wonderful experience. It is perfectly safe and the trip can only be made with a canoe." It is not known if this trip ever took place.

His lack of promotion of his adventure may have meant that Limbert felt the first passage through Bruneau Canyon was not important or significant. The more likely reason was that his subsequent involvement with the building of his lodge and outfitting business at Redfish Lake as well as the start up of his speaking career allowed him little time to dwell on his discoveries. Regardless, there is little doubt Limbert was one of the first persons to float this river.

Explorer: Sawtooth Mountains

Limbert was soon exploring a terrain that could not have been more different than the black, barren lava fields of the Snake River Plain and the deep canyons of the Owyhee. His new love was the Sawtooth Mountains and the surrounding lands of the Sawtooth National Forest, created in 1905.

In his repertoire of outdoor skills, Limbert never specifically wrote about being a "mountain climber." But he did write about "climbing mountains." The difference being that Limbert never acknowledged the skill and courage most "mountain climbers" claim, but rather spoke of his accomplishments in a nonchalant way that indicated he simply felt that it was just a necessary part of exploring the backcountry.

In an article he wrote on climbing Snowyside Peak for *The Idaho Sunday Statesman* on May 15, 1927, Limbert described the ascent where he was accompanied by a "husky football player (a member of the Boise High School team) in the pink of condition."

"The climb was made over the northern route which at best is a difficult and rather dangerous climb. We were working our way slowly along the face of a rather bad piece of rock when my companion, as he leaned against the wall, happened to look down between his legs and saw the bottom of the cliff far below. I was in front picking out the way when I heard a sort of gasp below me. Turning, I saw a sight which almost paralyzed me with fear. White-faced and leaning in, almost clawing the wall of the cliff, was my comrade with his eyes dilated with fear. A moment more and his knees would have buckled under him and down he would have gone, hurtling through space to land an inert mass on the rocks below. Sympathy or words of advice are all right in their place, but at a time like this they are of no use whatsoever. What is needed is to

change the trend of thought of the one under the influence of this fear and there is nothing that will do this quicker than making them mad. He happened to be carrying my Kodak and I immediately found fault with him for scratching it. You may believe me when I say I laced him up one side and down the other in a way that will not bear repeating.

Slowly the color came back into his face and his eyes took on, to me, the glorious glint of anger. I swung on and up over the rim and was sitting there smiling at him when he followed. No apologies were necessary."

Never once in the article did Limbert pat himself on the back for reaching the summit at 10,651 feet elevation. To him it was all about being able to look out and see "25 thousand square miles of mountain magnificence, the grandest in America, spread laid out before you."

The excitement he found in scaling peaks was evident in his statement: "Of all the thrilling, stimulating and fascinating outdoor sports none can compare with mountain climbing and those who have never experienced it cannot understand the almost hypnotic influence it holds for persons who once indulge." His passion for climbing and wilderness travel was like every new, all consuming dream he pursued. He stated: "In 1926, I slept in the open for a period of 73 days when I wasn't in a house." Limbert soon knew the Sawtooth's mountains and valleys, lakes and streams, and snowfields, and every other nook and cranny better than anyone.

It is impossible to know if Limbert entered places no one had previously seen, but it is certainly likely. In Limbert's words in an unpublished article "Summering in the Sawtooths:" "In this region are literally

hundreds of gigantic mountain peaks, uncharted and which have never been climbed that tower like fingers up into the sky. Just to illustrate, the writer during the course of a saddle and pack horse trip made for the purpose of collecting data for this article found over twenty lakes and five living glaciers as yet not shown on any map. . . ." Limbert named many of these geographic features, but it is difficult to track down exactly which names can be attributed to him.

The mountain country fascinated him so much that he wrote poetically of his love:

For the mountains—
"Passing on and climbing upward to the crest of the ridge at the head of the canyons, one looks across greater distances and sees range upon range of jagged, snarly, mountain peaks spread out below like the immense billows and waves cast up by gigantic storms."

For the glaciers—
"Ages ago when the world was younger and an ice sheet covered a great part of this continent, the glaciers which originated on the back bone of this mighty mountain range carved the intricate system of canyons which today form the drainage slopes of this region."

For the wildlife—
"Along the trails one sees coyotes, porcupines, mountain marmots, pine squirrels, blue grouse, and strangest of all, that curious anomaly of nature, the Franklin grouse better known as the fool hen."

For the wildflowers—
"The mountain slopes and canyons are continually a mass of wild flowers and berries. Great patches of bright, vivid color framed between trees gleam on the hillsides."

For the trees—
"The trees, the big timbered giants of the hills that show by their size that they were old when we were young, clothe the slopes in every available spot that offers the life giving soil so necessary to their existence."

For the waterfalls—
"Waterfalls that were before, perhaps unnoticed, hang suspended as white silvery curtains, and at the same time the mist at the bottom floats up the canyon in the night breezes."

It is easy to believe that during his time, Limbert knew the wilderness lands surrounding the Sawtooth and White Cloud Mountains better than any other person. How deep his feeling for this special place may be inferred from a story he loved to tell: "Three years before I climbed to the crest of a peak just to the north, being accompanied by a companion who had been a top sergeant in the army and who had been in charge of a train of pack mules. He was, without a doubt, the most blasphemous man I had ever encountered during a lifetime spent in the west. It happened to be his first experience in the high hills and I was curious to see how it would affect him. After the customary period of silence which seems to affect one who has this experience for the first time, I sat waiting for him to speak. When he did so I was never more surprised in my life, for he said, 'There is a God, ain't they?'" Limbert's own sentiments must have been very similar.

Robert Limbert loved his family, Idaho's wild places, nature, and interacting with people who shared these same interests. Because of this, Limbert decided building a lodge at Redfish Lake in the Sawtooth Mountains of central Idaho would best allow him to enjoy his passions and still make a living.

In the mid-1920s, Limbert sold his Boise taxidermy shop in order to spend more time developing his new business at Redfish Lodge.

Redfish Lodge

It was in the late 1920s that Limbert decided dude ranching (according to his

daughter he called all his clients "dudes") was a business that would flourish in his favorite stomping grounds, the Sawtooth Mountains. But before he could realize his dream, he first had to have a suitable base of operations. At the time, a small hotel and boating operation existed on Redfish Lake and was available for purchase because its owner, B. D. Horstman, had recently become ill and unable to meet his obligations.

On June 28, 1928, Limbert entered into a contract with Horstman to purchase a premier site located on the shores of Redfish Lake along with the existing facility. With this purchase, Limbert also acquired the Forest Service permit that allowed him to provide accommodations, supplies, and boating services to area visitors. This location offered fantastic views of the lake and mountains, an unusual length of sandy beach, and was free of the marshy conditions common around most of the lake's shoreline. Limbert immediately set about expanding the lodge, building small cabins, and improving the overall operation of his new business venture.

In an early letter to a potential investor, Limbert wrote: "Frankly the place is not of much account. The building (hotel and store) is crude and the bedrooms small and cramped. It is not a place at the present time where I would even care to stop my

camping parties, but it is the location and at a reasonable expense can be put into proper shape. The enclosed photo will show you what it is today." Limbert continues: "My idea is to build on a fifty foot room for a lobby, change the roof to run lengthways and install ten to fourteen rooms upstairs. Outside I want to put up at least six or ten tent cabins floored and boarded up the sides, similar to those in use in the tent camps at Yellowstone Park and other places. And then using this as a nucleus, build it up to something worthwhile."

Eventually, utilizing logs he floated from the far side of the lake, he built a facility that consisted of a general store, gas station, boat docks, boat house, ice house, and six log cabins. Limbert chose to build his structures primarily from logs because: "The log cabin style of building is much cheaper to construct than one made of lumber as the timber grows at my very door, can be cut and fallen into the lake

and rafted to where we want to use it. It takes very little work to construct a building of this type fifty feet long than it does one fifteen feet as one set of notches in the logs at each end and the one falling suffices for both operations."

For the next few years, Limbert was constantly searching for investors to supply the $50,000 to $60,000 he estimated was needed "to put the place in modern running operation." Limbert looked to wealthy investors in Chicago such as J. L. Kraft (of Kraft Foods), but had a difficult time getting all of the funds he needed. In one letter to a potential investor in 1929 Limbert wrote: "I guess you think I am the limit—well I own up to it, I am. The fact of the matter is I have been nearly crazy for the past few weeks. The fellow I had in Chicago who was going in with me went broke on the stock market and when I say broke I mean broke. Anyway it left me away out on the end of a branch and the branch about half sawed in two. If you think I haven't been worried you are sure mistaken. Here is the way it left me. I have this place of mine about two thirds finished and simply haven't the money to finish it up." Most likely, the unknown investor referred to in the letter lost his money in the Wall Street crash of 1929. Limbert continued to struggle with finances as long as he operated the Redfish Lake Lodge. For a man who did "not want to be tied down on the business end of it except where absolutely necessary" and instead wanted to handle the field operations and publicity, it must have been an unwelcome task.

But Limbert was not about to let a few setbacks kill his dream. He made progress on building facilities and, on a limited basis, was able to take bookings for pack trips, sightseeing, boating and fishing in the summer and for hunting trips in the fall. The start of the Great Depression, however, made for difficult times for Redfish Lodge. In *Dude Ranching—A Complete History*, a passenger agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad noted: "1932 was a very bad year for both the railroads and the ranches; this was not the fault of poor publicity or service but came rather from the large number of business failures in the spring of that year just at the time when people make their vacation plans." But most dude ranches survived the bad times and so did Redfish Lake Lodge.

In 1931, Limbert produced a publication called *Redfish Lake Lodge—In the Land of Tomorrow* to advertise his business. The brochure stated: "Redfish Lake Lodge, isolated in the heart of the Sawtooth National Forest Reserve, was built for the sportsman, horseback rider, camera hunter, naturalist and student; for the person who wants to turn his back on the grinding roar

of the civilized world and seek the quiet and peace of this primitive untouched mountain country….almost the last outpost of a majestic, savage nature in the United States that remains untrammeled and unmarred."

As with many backcountry lodges, providing a variety of experiences for guests was important. Limbert provided the horses, equipment, and expertise needed to provide top notch hunting and fishing trips for his clients.

Hunter and Fisherman

A brochure Limbert published to promote his guided hunting trips discussed all of the different wildlife that could be pursued. Of the animals they sought—elk, bighorn sheep, goats, mountain lion, bear, and mule deer—the deer was identified as the most abundant animal and each hunter was guaranteed to be successful. In his words: "Deer are so plentiful there is little need to mention the hunting conditions of these animals. They are the large mule deer and afford the finest and largest horned heads to be found anywhere in the west." Limbert felt that: "shooting deer around these parts is just about as easy as shooting rabbits in Nebraska."

Hunting for big game in Idaho took place in the fall. An out-of-state hunter could purchase a hunting license for $50 that permitted them to take almost all big game animals. For the hunter who wanted to take deer, elk, mountain goats, bear, cougar, and—for another $25—bighorn sheep, a long hunt was the only way to do it. This is why Limbert encouraged clients to arrive before hunting season started and plan on hunting for the entire month. Limbert felt he could find clients for every hunt he offered.

Limbert's hunting brochure provides hints of the hunting experiences he offered his clientele:

Camp Outfit—
"There are cozy tents for every two persons. There are single or double beds as desired, camp cots, and appropriate camp furniture such as chairs, tables, etc." For beds I furnish Kapok camp mattresses in preference to air mattresses, blankets, and heavy double tarps. My experiences with air mattresses is that they are fine while they are new but they don't stay new long enough when they are jammed around on a pack horse."

Provisions—
"The cook outfit is the standard Dutch-ovens with aluminum table sets that nest for convenience in packing. I consider camp cooking somewhat of an art and the only way satisfaction can be obtained is to hire cooks that know their business and

pay them accordingly. For food nothing is furnished but #1 grade in both staple and canned goods."

Horses—
"If you are an inexperienced rider you need have no fear, for the horses you will be called upon to ride have been carefully tested and proven gentle. Mountain trails are no place for a fractious or skittish horse. Western stock or McClellan saddles are used exclusively and under no circumstances will ladies side saddles be furnished."

Special Note—
"These trips are perfectly practical for ladies also. There is no traveling until late hours. Camp is made early so it will not become tiresome. Primarily you are out for a rest and for pleasure and for the purpose of bagging your game and it is our desire to see that these are attained with the least hardship possible."

He ended the brochure by proudly announcing: "This year I am equipping each party with one of the new orthophonic portable phonographs." This is further testimony to his desire to provide a deluxe trip for guests and his own lifelong love of music.

A reaction to a guided trip with Limbert was written by J.R. Lund for the magazine *Outdoor America*. In an article titled "A Sawtooth Hunting Trip with Bob Limbert," Lund wrote: "Before hitting out we enlisted the services of a good packer who is also one of the best guides in the Rocky Mountain States, familiar with all the big game localities and fishing streams. He is a tall, taciturn, lean and sinewy man who can stand more fatigue apparently than an iron man, and his patience under all conditions was admirable."

Limbert's feelings toward hunting may have been best summed up in the opening statement of an unpublished article he wrote on hunting: "With the coming of the fall every man with good red blood in his veins feels a longing to hide away from the cares of the city and take a trip to the hills on a big game hunt."

This statement does an excellent job of describing Limbert's relationship to the animals he hunted. Even though the business of hunting and guiding hunters is about the killing of game, this was secondary to Limbert. To him, it was more about the adventure of the hunt and just having a reason to head far into the mountains.

Although the streams and lakes of Idaho's central mountains were teeming with trout and salmon during Limbert's visits, his writing (or lack of writing) seems to indicate he had little passion for fishing. He did, however, realize that many of his guests loved the sport and were eager to go on pack trips that offered fishing opportunities. "I went out with two visitors one day," he related in a letter to a prospective client, "and in an hour and a half we collected eight beauties. In that time we tossed back 110 trout that were too small for us to keep. They were under 18 inches." A newspaper article about his presentation to the local sportsman's group quotes Limbert as saying: "In the 14,000 lakes scattered over the region, trout are as plentiful as flies at a summer picnic."

In an unpublished article titled "Summering in the Sawtooths," Limbert wrote: "Another item of fishing sport seldom obtainable other places is the Pacific Salmon run, big husky fellows weighing from twenty-five to forty pounds which you spear with a

pitchfork in the riffles during the later part of July and August. The novice, much to the glee of his companions, who attempts this exciting event for the first time is generally quickly upset for his first few trials before

he learns to handle his fish. These are also the months when trout fishing is at its best, and during that time a fly, spinner, a grasshopper, or even a piece of bacon rind is sure of getting results."

In 1928, to promote his Redfish Lodge, hunting and fishing trips, and the great tourist attractions of Idaho, Limbert began a career as a performer and traveled to the big cities during the winter. Depending which persona—his firearm expertise or his exploits as an outdoorsman—he wished to project, he promoted himself as either "Two-Gun Bob" or "The Man from the Sawtooths."

Performer

The centerpieces of Limbert's programs were the things he enjoyed doing most. He imitated the calls of hundreds of different birds. With pistols he shot coins out of the air. And, while showing lantern slides or movies, he extolled his audiences with tales of his explorations of Idaho's mountains, lava plains, and rivers.

Limbert toured both the eastern and western United States speaking to schools, civic organizations, law enforcement groups, and sportsmen's clubs. His principle sponsor, however, was the Izaak Walton League of America. The league was a group of fishermen who originally came together in Chicago in 1922 to form an organization to "combat water pollution in lakes and streams" and still exists today.

When he first went on the road, he gave performances primarily in the eastern United States and felt the appropriate clothing was more formal attire—the same suit and tie worn by most of the other speakers on the city-to-city lecture circuit. But Limbert found this wasn't going to work for him. According to Limbert: "I learned a great deal about the west while in the east. All the leading citizens wear sombreros and chaps out here, I was told. As a matter of fact, until I adopted the garb I couldn't make any money. Nobody would believe that I came from the west, in spite of my sunburned complexion and close acquaintance with firearms."

Although Limbert never documented how he chose the western clothing he wore for

his presentations, it is apparent that he was greatly influenced by the western movies popular at this time.

In the 1920s, actors such as William Hart, Mack Brown, and Tom Mix were all defined by their exaggerated cowboy garb. All wore the large Stetson referred to as a 10-gallon hat. The oversized hat was a popular trademark worn by the heroes of most western films of that era.

Limbert's costume had all the earmarks of the well-dressed Hollywood cowboy actor. He wore boots, chaps, and a colorful, elaborate, beaded vest made for him by his friend Bill "Doc" Hisom (the nickname Doc was because of his training as a veterinarian), a well-known, south-Idaho hermit.

During his programs, Limbert switched from one subject to another. He started by doing renditions of bird and animal songs and calls that showcased not only his knowledge of wildlife, but also his ability to whistle two tunes at the same time.

Limbert claimed to be able to imitate some 63 different bird calls. His notes indicate the great range of diverse species he could mimic:

- "As darkness gathers the whip-poor-will gives their weird cry."

- "You may hear the sandhill crane high in the air with his bugle-like call."

- "As you walk along the marsh and thru the cattails and tooliess you may hear a mournful call like this. It is a young duck that has got lost from his mother. She answers this."

His ability to reproduce the calls of birds was much more than just repeating the most characteristic melody of each species. Limbert sensed that the calls birds were making were much more than just a casual song, and in an unpublished, untitled manuscript, he said: "For instance it will begin to dawn on them that the birds do not save what might be termed a speaking language as does the human race, but convey their thoughts by the inflection or modulation they put into their calls or

notes. It will readily be noticed that while these are of practically the same pitch and scale they vary a great deal in expression. The meaning of this can best be illustrated by listening to a mother call her son.

If she calls the single word "Jimmy," short and snappy it will readily be inferred that Jimmy had better come a running or he will wish he had. On the other hand, she may give identically the same call but slower and full of pathos which only a mother can impart and we sense she is worried over his whereabouts. Again, she might call in such a way that we feel she is merely curious as to his whereabouts and whether he is in mischief.

So it is with bird language. It is hard to describe and make it so it can be understood but there seems to be some kind of a thought wave, or is it a sense of feeling that is somewhat along the same line as mental telepathy that bridges the gulf between man and the animal."

Limbert also felt that what he called "bird whistling" was affected by his own mood. Where on a day he was feeling down, he found he could not get a response unless he used a scolding call. He found it was just the opposite when he felt good and full of life when he could get a good response to his mating and nesting calls.

After doing his program on birds, Limbert usually demonstrated his shooting ability. Newspaper articles reporting on Robert Limbert's unique performances of exhibition shooting were given titles like: "Limbert Gives Crowd Thrills With Shooting," "Lots O' Tricks In Evening By Revolver Ace," and "Limbert Tells Stories, Does Feats with Gun." Billed by himself and others as the "World's Champion Exhibition Revolver Shot," the highlight of most of Limbert's shows was a demonstration of his almost unbelievable talent for shooting.

Limbert's expertise was well documented in newspapers throughout the nation that described his feats:

- "The two guns jerked into place, two shots rang out, and two cans placed some 25 feet apart, jumped simultaneously into the air."

- "Aiming at the object by the use of a mirror with his back to the target."

- "With guns up-side-down, pulling the triggers with his little fingers, the targets continued to break."

- "He suspends a target by a string, cuts the string on the first shot and on the second shot, hits the target before it hits the floor."

- "Splits clay targets while standing on his head."

- "He placed a card some 25 feet away, turning it sideways until it presented just a line to the vision. His bullet cut it in two."

According to a reporter for the *Omaha Bee-News*, Limbert's "trick shooting" was: "The most astounding exhibition of fancy shooting and uncanny quickness ever witnessed."

Whether called exhibition, fancy, cowboy, or trick shooting, the ability to handle guns has been admired from the first time modern firearms made this type of target shooting possible. But at the same time, it is also hard to believe that anyone could actually shoot through the center of a washer or hit a pin as it sailed through the air. But time after time, newspapers reported that he would allow the audience on stage to verify that his shooting skills were for real.

An unpublished article by Limbert stated: "In this sort of shooting let it be plainly understood it is not a gift and men who do it are not born that way as many people seem to imagine. It is merely a question of practice coupled with a certain percent of natural dexterity and quickness of eye."

The intensity of Limbert's practicing becomes apparent in the remark of Limbert's daughter Margaret: "Dad would shoot most everyday, so much in fact that if you dug up the beaches at Red Fish Lake you would probably find several hundred pounds of lead."

After he finished shooting, Limbert showed lantern slide and movies on his exploration of Craters of the Moon and Sawtooth Mountains. At the conclusion of his program, he was usually bombarded with questions about a potpourri of subjects as

varied as petroglyphs, the exaggeration of threats posed by wild animals, archeological finds, discovery of some of the largest natural bridges found anywhere, and the promotion of conservation practices he felt were important.

The exact details of these presentations are unknown because no recordings or films exist and photographs of Limbert's programs are rare. What is known must be gleaned from articles in local newspapers that reviewed his program or publicity flyers, advertisements, and booklets produced by Limbert.

In 1933, while on one of his speaking tours Limbert was contacted by his family in Chicago, Illinois. He was told that his mother was seriously ill in Boise. He immediately began driving back to Idaho.

According to the June 23, 1933 issue of *The Arco Advertiser*, "Robert W. Limbert, well known Idahoan and promoter of Craters of the Moon National Monument died last Thursday morning at 9:20 at Cheyenne, Wyo., of a heart attack. He was hurrying home to the bedside of his mother who was critically ill, but his death intervened without warning. His mother died the following morning and a double funeral for mother and son were conducted at Boise on Sunday." Limbert died on June 15, 1933 at the age of 48.

Limbert's Legacy

If you are asked to name important figures in Idaho's history, few people come to mind. Some might choose Lewis and Clark, some John Fremont, and some Captain Bonneville. All were well known explorers of the American West, but all spent a very short, limited time in Idaho—Lewis and

Clark were only in the state a total of less than four months.

All of these explorers had one thing in common; they generally hated this place because travel was difficult and treacherous in the diverse, but harsh, landscapes of Idaho. Instead it was Robert Limbert who was the one who spent years heading into the places other explorers avoided, loved Idaho like few others, and did more than anyone else to showcase the state outsiders knew little about.

Limbert started the concept of tourism in Idaho by traveling the United States giving presentations on the beauty, fun, and adventures possible in this strange place of desert and mountains. He explored unknown and under-appreciated areas that eventually resulted in the preservation of world-class landscapes, protection of critical

ecosystems, and development of recreational areas. He encouraged out-of-staters to visit the state's wild areas by building a dude ranch on the shore of Redfish Lake and giving performances throughout the United States to excited audiences that loved this "westerner." He wrote articles for national magazines and took the first photographs of many of the "curiosities" found in Idaho. And he did all of this with a style anyone would want their "spokesman" to have.

Collectively, the places—Craters of the Moon, the Sawtooth Mountains, the Owyhee—which Limbert explored, had certain things in common. All were, and still are today, considered to be some of the most unforgiving terrain in Idaho. All are extremely remote and the last places on the map of Idaho to be filled in. And, even today, these places have few backcountry visitors who are willing to subject themselves to the difficulties that extended travel into these areas involves.

For Limbert, each area represented a very different challenge. At Craters of the Moon, it was the travel over the sharp, jagged lava flows. In the Sawtooth Mountains, it was the high altitudes and the exposure on vertical, rocky slopes. On the rivers of the Owyhee, it was the dangers of floating rivers where unknown and treacherous, rapids could be around any bend. But Limbert realized that these remote areas were all very special.

Eventually, Limbert had a role in seeing each of these areas being set aside and made a part of the protected lands Americans consider so sacred. These included:

The Craters of the Moon National Monument which was created in 1924 after Limbert publicized the area in

National Geographic Magazine and presented President Calvin Coolidge with a scrapbook of his expedition. This National Park Service area was expanded in 2000 by proclamation of President William Clinton to include all of the Great Rift that Limbert traversed so long ago and is now one of the largest units in the National Park System.

The Sawtooth National Recreational Area (SNRA) was created within the Sawtooth National Forest in 1972. The reason for this change in designation was to ensure recreational opportunities such as hiking, hunting, and camping received the same attention as timber harvesting, mining, and grazing. Today the forest is managed as a multiple-use area to meet the needs of many different groups and people.

And Bruneau Canyon, where just prior to entering the chasm, Limbert came in

contact with a Basque sheepherder who upon hearing of his determination to follow the river shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well kees yerself goo-bye." Limbert ignored this warning and in a small way, his exploration of this remote, nearly inaccessible place was the first step in making people aware of the incredible, beautiful resource it is. Nearly 90 years later, in 2009, the area's preservation was ensured by the passage of the Owyhee Public Lands Management bill. This legislation defines how the cultural resources, economic interest of local ranchers, wilderness areas within the Owyhee Canyonlands, and 316 miles of waterways will be managed in future years.

Limbert could be called the "last of his kind," an "adventurous spirit," or a "real-life Indiana Jones." In truth he was all of these, but most of all he was a man who loved Idaho—loved its untamed nature and the incredible challenges it offered.

Limbert loved Idaho's wild places so much he felt the need to tell others about the marvelous wonders they could experience here. Today, his legacy leaves Idaho with a reputation as being the nation's best opportunity for outstanding outdoor adventure as well as a thriving tourism industry.

Maybe the most remarkable thing about the man, however, is that if you read what people wrote about Robert Limbert, you will never see a negative remark about his character. His most important contribution to Idaho may have been his showing others what it was to be a true Idahoan;

the kind of person born to live in a place that will be forever wild. In his obituary, a local newspaper said, "Mr. Limbert was a genuine westerner." This was, and is, the greatest compliment Idahoans can give a man.

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Published by:
Craters of the Moon Natural History Association

Designed and Printed by:
The Arco Advertiser, Arco, ID

Photos Courtesy:
Margaret Lawrence, Boise State University, and
Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve

That Poor Other Fellow

By Robert W. Limbert

Have you ever stood on top a mountain,
And gazed down on the grandeur below,
And thought of the vast army of people,
Who never get out as we go?

Have you ever traveled out to the desert,
Where the hills fade from gold into blue,
And then thought of some poor other fellow,
Who would like to stand along side of you?

Have you ever packed out into the mountains,
Where the clouds twist around the peaks and unfurl,
And then thought of someone you know of,
Who is penned up in the city's mad whirl?

Have you ever hooked into a bull trout,
And fought until your arms ache and pucker,
And then thought of the fellow back east,
Who fishes all day for a—sucker?

Have you ever slipped along on a deer trail,
Or tracked up to a lair of a bear,
And then thought of that poor other fellow ,
Who would give half his life to stand there?

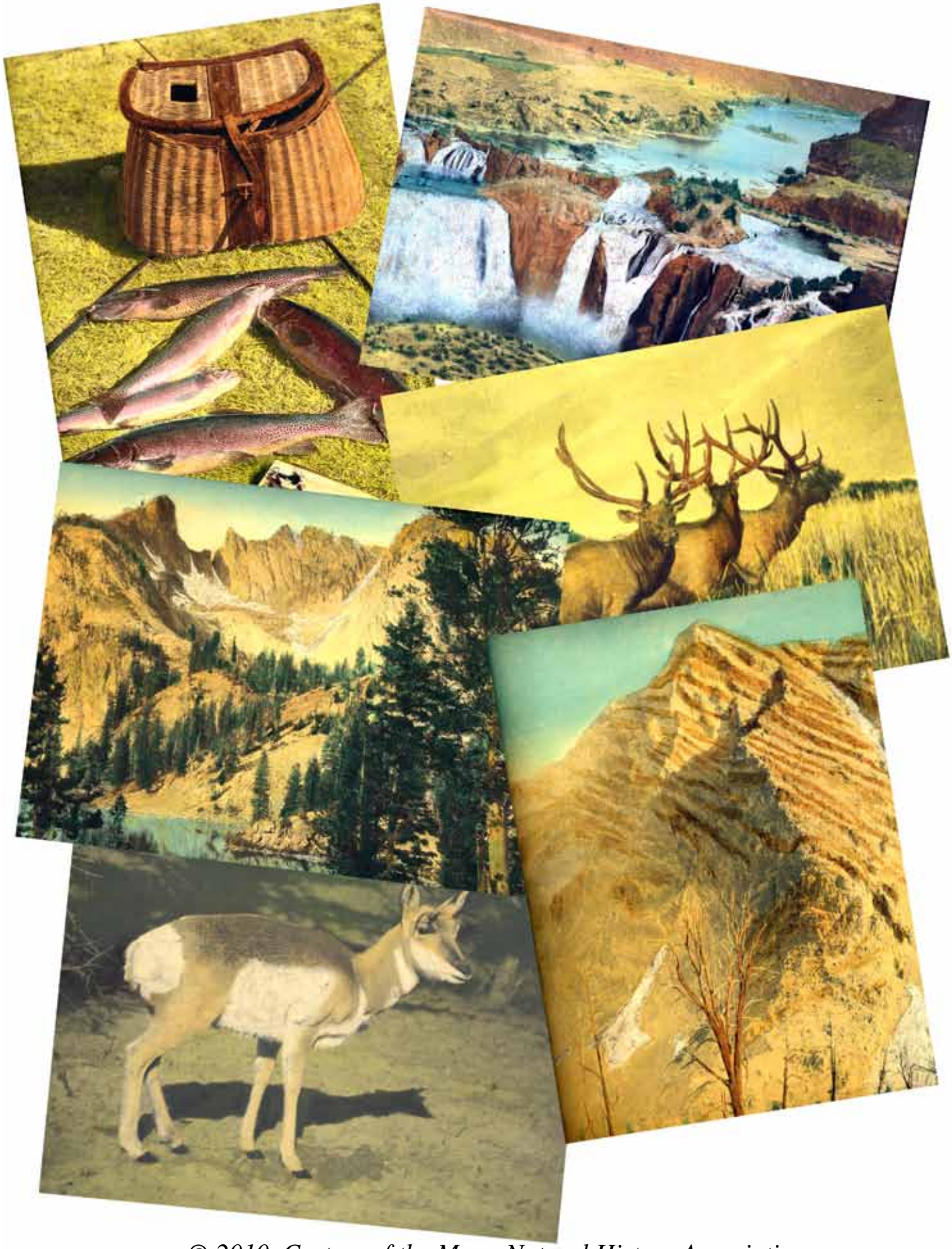
Have you ever followed the call of a hound dog,
As he coursed over canyon and glen,
Until he had worked out the puzzle,
And ran the game to its den?

Have you ever sat by the side of a campfire,
And talked at the close of the day,
And then thought of that poor other fellow,
Who would like to hear half what you say?

Have you ever thought of the thousands of people,
Who never get out like you and I,
But spend their whole life in the city,
To slowly wither, grow old, and then—die?

Have you ever thought of the pleasure of living,
Where all these things can be seen from your door,
And then thought of that poor other fellow,
For whom life must be somewhat a bore?

Have you ever thought such a life is not wasted,
And that to be bubbling over with health,
Is much, much better than money,
Yes! Much, much better than wealth?



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