

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

James Cant Ranch Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

Sheep Rock Unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Oregon Rte. 19

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Dayville

X

VICINITY OF

2nd

STATE

Oregon

CODE

COUNTY

Grant

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

X DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

X PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

X OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

X YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

X MUSEUM

COMMERCIAL

X PARK

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

National Park Service - Pacific Northwest Region

STREET & NUMBER

2001 - 6th Avenue - Westin Building, Room 1920

CITY, TOWN

Seattle,

VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Grant County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Rte. 395

CITY, TOWN

Canyon City

STATE

OR

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Classified Structures Field Inventory - NPS

DATE

1976/Updated 1983

X FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

NPS - Pacific Northwest Region

CITY, TOWN

Seattle,

STATE

WA

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7. Cant Ranch: Physical Description

The Cant Ranch is situated along the bottomlands of the natural basin formed by the John Day River that has traditionally been called Turtle Cove. The ranch's irrigated fields extend approximately 2-1/4 miles north from the exit of Picture Gorge, varying in width from a few feet to a couple hundred yards. Rising steeply to the east and the west from the edge of these fields are the basalt escarpments that define the basin. Beyond these escarpments are elements of the Blue Mountain range that rings the basin. The most dramatic local prominence is Sheep Rock, which rises to 3360' directly southeast of the ranch buildings. The greenbelt formed by the ranch's irrigated fields distinctly contrasts with the dusky colors and sparse vegetation of the surrounding hills.

The ranch complex is situated on the west bank of the John Day River. It now includes 11 structures: ranch house, barn and sheepshearing stalls, cabin, bunkhouse, privy, chicken coop, feed storage shed, workshop, shed, sheep pens, and watchman's hut. The cabin, a small, one-room, one-story log structure originally built over a dirt-wall cellar, is the oldest building in the group.¹ Dating from the Officer homestead period (c. 1881-1910), it was used by the Cant family primarily for storage of supplies and foodstuffs. Pack horses were tied up outside of it to be loaded with supplies for the shepherders.

The most prominent building is the main ranch house. Built circa 1915-18,² it is an imposing 2-1/2-story, hip-roofed structure, with drop siding and porches that extend the full-length of the east and west elevations and approximately halfway along the north and south. The central plan incorporates a central stairhall running west to east, living room, dining room, kitchen, parlor, bedroom, baths and storage on the first floor; six bedrooms and a bath on the second; and a large open room in the attic story. Family sources maintain that the plan is based on a design from The Radford American Homes, a book of 100 house plans published in 1903 by the Radford Architectural Company of Chicago, Illinois. A review of the copy of the book still in family hands suggests that Cant's carpenters--Andrew Cress and Clarence Bisbee--may have taken ideas from several plans (for example, Nos. 126, 142, and 560) and combined them to arrive at the final plan for the Cant House. At present the house is used as a visitors' facility, with exhibits on the first floor, offices on the second, and storage on the third.

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North of the main house is the barn, built circa 1920. One and one-half stories high and 120 feet long, it is timber-framed with vertical board siding and a wood-shingled gable roof. The twelve-bay interior encloses a series of holding pens and stalls. Attached to the north elevation is a one-story rectangular structure, approximately 60' long and 20' wide, which is divided into stalls for sheep shearing. Sections of the shearing equipment are still in place. Additional wood frame sheep pens northwest of the barn are on the verge of collapse. East of the barn is a small, one-room, wood frame hut that housed shepherders during lambing season. To the west of the barn is the workshop and a small storage shed. Both are one-story, wood frame, shingle-roofed structures. The workshop has been rehabilitated for use as a park maintenance facility.

Other outbuildings in the complex--the chicken coop, feed storage shed, bunkhouse, and privy--are in proximity to the house. All are of similar wood frame, shingled-roof construction. All but the privy have received new roofs in the last 5 years and are in active use. The bunkhouse has been rehabilitated to house exhibits; chickens occupy the chicken coop; and the feed shed is used to store maintenance equipment.

The irrigated fields on the east side of the river, across from the main complex, were reached by two small, hand-operated cable cars erected by the Cant family. The closest is approximately 1/4 mile south of the main house; the other is another mile to the south. Only the cable car closest to the house is still operable. Northeast of the ranch on the east bank is a small, one-story, wood frame structure with vertical board siding known as Christina's Cabin. The history of the cabin is somewhat obscure, but it may have been originally built to establish a homestead claim for Cant's oldest daughter. It is now in deteriorated condition.

The Cant Ranch is one of the best-preserved examples of the early 20th century ranching operations in the John Day River Valley. The National Park Service has included the structures on its List of Classified Structures and has actively taken steps to stabilize and preserve the key buildings. The main house, bunkhouse, cabin, feed storage shed and workshop are all in good-to-excellent condition; the barn and sheep shearing stalls, chicken coop, shed, and watchman's hut are in fair-to-good condition; and the privy and sheep pens are in poor condition. Further study of the barn is planned to determine what steps will be necessary to insure its future structural stability.

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In addition to these structures, the National Park Service also purchased a collection of historic farm implements and machinery from James Cant, Jr., in January 1978. These items have been cataloged and key pieces of equipment are undergoing stabilization for future use in the interpretation of ranch life.

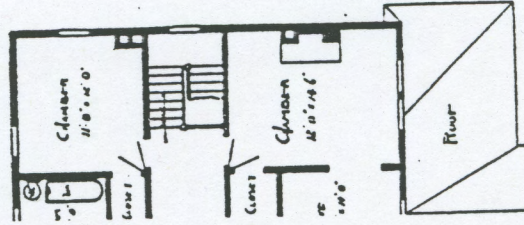
The area defined by the boundaries established in this nomination is that in which the activities of the ranching operation were historically focused. It includes all of the remaining structures of the ranch complex and the system of ditches and irrigated fields along the John Day River that supported the home operation. It should be noted that included within the boundary is the Sheep Rock Overlook, a 3-acre area directly off of Route 19, approximately 1/2 mile south of the ranch buildings. The overlook is a popular stop for visitors to observe the area's spectacular scenery. It is also the proposed site for the Monument's Thomas Condon Visitor Center, the construction of which is as yet unscheduled. Preliminary planning, however, has emphasized the need for a sensitive design that will present a minimal intrusion on the natural and cultural resources of the Sheep Rock Unit of the park. In addition, its completion will result in the removal of NPS offices and paleontological exhibits from the main house and permit the development of an enhanced program for interpreting local ranching history.

Also included within the proposed boundaries are ¹⁰ acres owned by James Cant, Jr. NPS holds a scenic easement on the property, thus protecting the physical and visual integrity of the parcel within the district. Mr. Cant will be contacted as part of the legal review of the nomination to provide him with an opportunity to comment on the inclusion of his property as part of the listed district.

1. During the 1983 stabilization and rehabilitation of the cabin, it was necessary to construct some partial concrete footings where the eroding dirt walls threatened the cabin's stability. These footings are visible only from inside the cellar.

2. Different informants have provided several different dates within this time frame for construction of the house. Research conducted in 1983 in Grant County tax and assessment records failed to pinpoint the date of construction any more precisely than 1915-20 (when the assessed value of improvements on the parcel where the main ranch complex is located was increased from \$250 to \$1,000), because of the county's 5-year assessment schedule.

142



Floor Plan

exclusive of porch

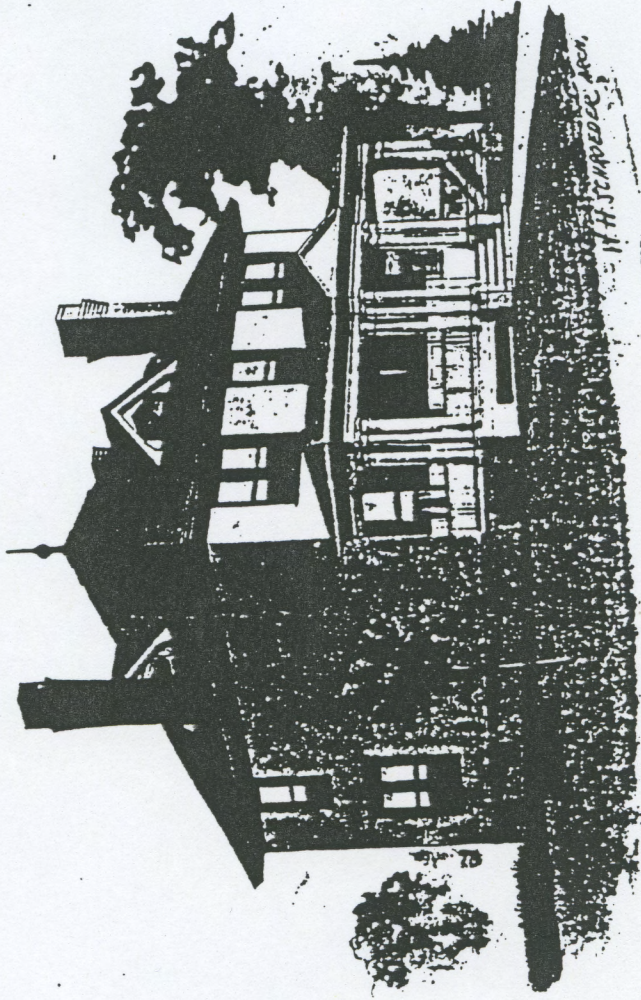
house

We illustrate, the prospective to find some plan at his requirements. If, it proves satisfactory, the price of these illustrations are of the book.

Fossil Beds NM, OR

and figure perfect and distinct

Price of Plans and Specifications \$5.00



House Design No. 142

See opposite page for floor plans of this house

Full and complete working plans and specifications of this house will be furnished for \$5.00. Cost of this house is from about \$2,100.00 to about \$2,350.00, according to the locality in which it is built.

Ask your Insurance Agent about our fire insurance adjustment. We know that he will heartily approve of it. Insurance companies do not hesitate to pay claims when proof is abundant. All they want is what is right.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
☐ 1500-1599	☒ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE
☐ 1600-1699	☒ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
☐ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☒ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
☒ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1910-1975

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Cress/Bisbee

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE ATTACHED SHEET.

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8. Cant Ranch: Statement of Significance

The Cant Ranch has been a local landmark in the John Day River Valley of eastern Oregon since the construction of its imposing main house was completed circa 1918. Nestled below Sheep Rock along the John Day River, just north of Picture Gorge, the ranch is one of the most intact remaining examples of early 20th century ranching operations in the valley.³ The Sheep Rock Unit of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, in which the ranch is located, incorporates the initial 357 acres in Grant County purchased by James Cant, Sr., in 1910. In addition to the main house, the ranch complex still includes the barn, sheepshearing stalls (among the best preserved of their type still known to exist in the region), watchman's hut, bunkhouse, and an assortment of outbuildings. James Cant, Sr., a Scottish immigrant, became one of the more prominent ranchers in the valley. The ranch remained in the Cant family until it was purchased by the National Park Service in 1975, 3 years after Cant's death at age 92.

The land on which the Cant Ranch was built was first homesteaded by Floyd Officer, a member of one of the first families to settle in the John Day River Valley. Officer moved to his claim from the Dayville area (about 5 miles to the east) circa 1881⁴. The small log cabin standing behind the main house is the only structure known to remain from the Officer homestead. Officer's daughter recalls that the cabin was used for storage and that the family lived in a larger log house that stood southwest of the cabin.⁵ The log house was taken down by the Cant family circa 1919 following the construction of the present main house.⁶

Floyd Officer sold his homestead to James Cant, Sr., and Johnny Mason in 1910 for \$4,000.⁷ Cant, who arrived in eastern Oregon in 1905, was part of a wave of Scottish migrants that settled in the John Day River valley at the turn-of-the-century. Many, like Cant, got their start by working for other already-established ranchers, usually fellow Scots. Cant was hired by Alexander Murray, who had one of the larger ranches in the area and was known in the community for his efforts in bringing his countrymen to the States.⁸ Cant worked for Murray from 1905-1910, taking as his wages 50 percent of the lamb crop to build his own band.⁹

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Cant came to the States experienced in dealing with stock operations. His parents owned a butcher shop and stockyard in Scotland, and he had worked for several years, beginning in 1900, for a Scottish stock firm, traveling to Portugal and Argentina to purchase merino bucks. He had also briefly been in business for himself in Argentina, raising mules for military use during the Boer War.¹⁰

Cant's future wife, Elizabeth Grant, also immigrated to Oregon from Scotland, arriving in 1907.¹¹ Married in 1908, the Cants both continued to work on the Murray Ranch--she as a cook--for 2 more years. When they were ready to set up their own operation, they purchased the Officer homestead and moved into the log house on the property with their first-born, James Cant, Jr.

Over the next six decades, the Cant operation expanded ten-fold. A 1965 article in the Western Livestock Journal reported that the ranch consisted of 6500 acres of deeded land plus 4500 acres leased from BLM; another 600 acres within the Thomas Condon Fossil Beds had recently been purchased by the State of Oregon for a park.¹² During the peak of the sheep operation, Cant ran bands on leased mountain ranges in the Malheur National Forest. Many thousands more sheep from neighboring ranches annually came through the shearing pens. Along with many of their neighbors, the Cants switched to a cattle operation in the mid-forties. Low wool prices and the difficulty of locating good herders had made sheep ranching increasingly unprofitable.¹³ The Journal reported in 1965 that the Cant Ranch was producing 500-600 head of cattle annually.

The Cants were prominent members of the valley community.¹⁴ Cant, Sr., was a member, often a founder, of numerous community organizations and business associations, including the Oregon Wool Growers' Association; the Grant County Stockgrowers' Association; the Patrons of Husbandry, Grange No. 627; and the Cattle and Horse Raisers' Association of Oregon; and served as District Clerk for the local school district.¹⁵ He and his family were noted for their hospitality. Travelers through the valley were welcomed and given a meal and, when needed, a bed. When Oregon Route 19 was constructed, Mrs. Cant boarded the road crews. Family members recall that the need to accommodate the frequent travelers and houseguests was one of the reasons Cant built such a large house. With seven bedrooms, each large enough to accommodate two beds, he was confident that his family would not have to give up their beds when guests arrived.

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The upper basin area's first school was started at the Cant Ranch in 1919. Classes were first held in the old log house; shortly afterwards, when the Cants decided to tear that house down, the school was moved to the third floor of the new house. School was taught by a young woman from Kentucky whose aunt was the wife of one of the neighboring ranchers; she boarded with the Cants and, several years later, married Cant's cousin.¹⁶

The third floor of the main house, and the grounds of the ranch, were also the scene of many social gatherings for the Scottish community. Bagpipes and kilts were often brought out for these occasions and the thick Scottish accents that many of the original settlers never lost are recalled by surviving participants.

The ranch is now part of the Sheep Rock Unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. The monument was established by Congress in 1974 to preserve one of the nation's most important deposits of mammalian fossils--a unique uninterrupted seven-million-year fossil record. The State of Oregon began purchasing land in the vicinity in the 1930s to preserve these deposits through the establishment of State Parks; one of these purchases was the above-mentioned 600 acres acquired from the Cants. Sections of these State lands were incorporated within the National Monument. Today, the ranch headquarters serves as a visitor center, offering exhibits on geology and local ranching history.

3. The John Day River Valley has not been surveyed by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office for the purposes of identifying, evaluating and nominating eligible structures to the National Register of Historic Places. This evaluation of the significance of the Cant Ranch is based on several sources: a review of the properties in the area that have been recorded by the SHPO; interviews with park staff, local informants and an Oregon State researcher, all of whom are familiar with the area and its ranching history; review of written references to the ranch and the Cant family; and a partial windshield survey of the valley.

4. Interview with Eva Officer Murray (June 9, 1982) recorded by Royal G. Jackson, Oregon State University. Although the Officer family may have moved to their homestead claim in the early 1880s, Floyd Officer did not record his claim under the provisions of the 1862 Homestead Act until 1899 (Grant County Deed Record Book K, p. 263: Homestead Certificate #3131, 160 acres, January 30, 1899; on file at the Grant County Courthouse, Canyon City, Oregon).

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5. Eva Officer Murray interview (June 9, 1982).
6. Interviews with Stella Pigg Munro (June 24, 1982) and James Cant, Jr., (July 10, 1982), recorded by Royal G. Jackson, Oregon State University.
7. Floyd L. Officer and Sylvia A. Officer to James Cant and John Mason, 357.41 acres, Grant County, Oregon, for \$4,000, recorded in Grant County Deed Record 27, p. 609, July 7, 1910. Officer sold an additional 320 acres in adjacent Wheeler County to Cant and Mason on the same date (Grant County Mortgages Book I, p. 162). Total transaction was for 677.41 acres plus water rights for the sum of \$6,900. Cant bought out John Mason's one-half individual interest in the land in 1915 for \$10.00 (Grant County Deed Record 30, p. 388: March 10, 1914).
8. Stella Pigg Munro interview (June 24, 1982).
9. Western Livestock Journal (January 20, 1965), p. 10. (Interview with James Cant, Sr., who was being honored by the Malheur National Forest as its oldest permittee).
10. James Cant, Jr., interview (July 10, 1982).
11. "Elizabeth F. Cant" (1973 newspaper obituary on file at Cant Ranch Visitor's Center).
12. Western Livestock Journal (January 20, 1965), p. 10.
13. Dick Lawton, "Long History of Cant Ranch to end soon," Code 11 (April 1976) 16-17.
14. Stella Pigg Munro interview (June 24, 1982).
15. Receipts, clippings, and other miscellaneous documents pertaining to the Cant Family on file at Cant Ranch Visitor's Center.
16. Stella Pigg Munro interview (June 24, 1982).

9

SEE ATTACHED SHEET

10

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY
UTM REFERENCES

SEE ATTACHED SHEET

A 

B ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE: ATTACHED SHEET

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
AL	01	ALBANY	01
AL	02	ALBUQUERQUE	02
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AL	98	ALBUQUERQUE	98
AL	99	ALBUQUERQUE	

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11

NAME / TITLE

Stephanie Toothman, Ph.D., Regional Historian

1983.

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service

DATE _____

FTS 8-399-0791

STREET & NUMBER

2001 - 6th Avenue, Westin Building, Room 1920

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Seattle.

STATE

WA

12

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES_____ NO_____ NONE_____

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is _____ National _____ State _____ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE _____

TITLE

DATE _____

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE _____

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE _____

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Grant County, Oregon. Deed Record Books K, p. 263; 27, p. 609; 3 p. 388; and Mortgage Record Book I, p. 162. On file at Grant County Courthouse, Canyon City, Oregon.

Jackson, Royal G. Interviews with James Cant, Jr., Lillian Masca Eva Officer Murray and Stella Pigg Munro, 1982-1983. Transcripts on file at Department of Resource Recreation Management, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon.

Lawton, Dick. "Long history of Cant ranch to end soon." Code 1 (April 1976) 16-17.

Miscellaneous Biographical Items related to the Cant Family on file at Cant Ranch Visitor's Center, John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

Radford Architectural Company. The Radford American Homes. Chicago: 1903.

Western Livestock Journal (January 20, 1965) 10+.

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Section 10: Geographical Data

Acreage: approximately 200 acres

UTM References: A. 11/291000/4936700
B. 11/291250/4936475
C. 11/291300/4935650
D. 11/291700/4933850
E. 11/291750/4933250
F. 11/290800/4934850
G. 11/290600/4936800

Quad: Picture Gorge, Oreg.
1:62,500

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary begins at the confluence of Rock Creek and the John Day River and proceeds in a northwesterly direction along the easternmost irrigation ditch to a juniper tree northeast of Christina's cabin and there turns west along an old fenceline to a point where the John Day River and the highway (Rt. 19) meet, just north of the Cant Ranch, then turns south and proceeds in a southeasterly direction along the highway until it meets the starting point at the confluence of Rock Creek and the John Day River.