

## Dr. Peter Black's 1962 Adventures in the Alsea Watershed Study

During the summer of 1962, I worked on the original Alsea Watershed Study, installing stream gaging sites under the direction of Professor Jim Kreiger of Oregon State University (OSU). I was just starting out my teaching career at Humboldt State College (as it was then known) and this opportunity provided me some field experience. A copy of notes from that summer are attached.



Photo of Dr. Peter Black in 1964 taken by Paul Zahl with *National Geographic*

Among the many things that I did that summer, with the aid of hardworking student employees from OSU, was install two of the stream gages in Deer Creek tributaries. These gages were hand-made in the OSU machine shop. To get these instruments to their monitoring locations I enlisting the assistance of a mule from the local county sheriff's search-and-rescue team.

We needed to install gages in remote locations in the watersheds and a pack mule seemed a logical solution. We learned that the Lincoln County sheriff's department had a mule. I assured the generous search-and-rescue official that I had experience in handling horses, and fortunately wasn't queried about the details. With several carrots, sugar cubes in my pockets, and more moxie



Photo from <http://www.muleschool.com/>

than the mule, we managed to get the custom-made flume parts up the long trail to the Deer Creek gage site, and even took turns riding the mule back down the trail. Both the mule and I, incidentally, learned how much he could carry by loading him up – evenly, I am happy to note, by putting items on each side of the pack frame sequentially – until he went down to his knees. When this limit was reached, I took off a gage section from each side. I had originally got his attention by noting him inflating himself as I cinched the packsaddle belt and kneed him in the ribs, at which point he predictably exhaled while I got the last pull. I gave him a carrot, and had no more trouble with him!

I also recall detecting the date of road construction at one of the other gages because of a change in flow records. I can't recall which gage it was, but one of the retaining walls for this gage (which was almost invisible under a stream crossing) had been cracked and the leakage was affecting the runoff measurements. I was able to narrow the damage to within three months because of a relatively simple double mass analysis of rainfall and runoff, the relationship of which changed dramatically (and fortunately!) between the end of the water year and the beginning of the calendar year.

Attached are some old-fashioned Kodachrome slide images from that summer.

Sincerely, Peter ☺



Dr. Peter Black is Professor of Water and Related Land Resources, Emeritus from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, New York. Dr. Black retired in 2000 but continues to be active. Most recently he developed a series of essays on water science, hydrology, history, culture, organizations, law, and policy that are broadcast twice weekly by WRVO.FM 90.3 in Oswego, New York, and are available free on line at Public Radio Exchange. Dr. Black has published more than 80 articles, books, chapters, consulting reports, research notes, instructional films, and even an autotutorial short course. He has received numerous awards, from Distinguished Teaching Professor at SUNY to Fellow with the American Water Resources Association. He can be reached at [peblack@esf.edu](mailto:peblack@esf.edu).