

# *Stepping Out in the Swan Range*

## *Of Hash and Wolverines in the Swan Range*

By Keith Hammer

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A half-dozen years back I ran into Sally Hash-Savage and her husband Dan Savage atop Peters Ridge. It was a beautiful, sunny day and they were on their way with Sally's brother, Mark, and his family for their first-time visit to the mountain named after Sally's grandfather, Charles Jackson Hash. Our chat along the trail that day gives rise to this short story about two Hash families, wolverines, and the interconnectedness of life.

C. J. Hash in the 1920s moved from Billings to Kalispell with his wife Sara and their son Charles Leaphart Hash. He became the Assistant Supervisor of the Flathead National Forest and around 1930 initiated the building of fire lookout cabins. Fire lookouts at that time were little more than an exposed, round mountaintop map with sights that rotated around the lookout location fixed at the center of the map - known as an Osborne Fire Finder.

C. J. Hash moved to Missoula in 1932 to become Assistant Supervisor of the Lolo National Forest, but was killed by a lightning strike soon after. Hash Mountain, located at the head of the Lost Johnny watershed and just north of Lamoose Lake along the Swan Crest, was named in his honor.

Prior to my ridge-top chat with Sally and Dan I had wondered if Hash Mountain was named after some relative of Howard Hash, who together with Maurice Hornocker conducted a seminal study of wolverine in the South Fork Flathead area in the 1970s. It seemed plausible that a guy might chose to study wildlife in an area a relative of his once roamed around in.

According to Sally, there is no known relationship between her family and Howard Hash. But from there, as Alice would say of Wonderland, it just gets "curiouser and curiouser!"

Although the biggest wolverine I've ever seen was painted on the side of a bus in downtown Stockholm, Sweden, the only one I've seen for real was on top of a peak along the Swan Crest. I got little more than a glimpse of it from the time I heard it hiss at me until it disappeared off the barren ridge into the dense forest below. That peak, as fate would have it, was Hash Mountain.

Now, I've seen lots of wolverine tracks in my years spent in the Swan Mountains, but just that one animal. Hornocker and Hash confirmed both their existence and their reclusive nature by trapping, marking, and monitoring 24 wolverine for four years in the South Fork Flathead watershed, which includes a big chunk of the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the mountains lining both sides of Hungry Horse Reservoir, including Hash Mountain.

They also confirmed the expansive home range of some wolverine. They found a male whose annual home range included almost the entire Swan Range north from Swan Peak to Columbia Mountain. They also found a female with a home range

stretching from Gordon Creek, opposite Holland Lake in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, to Sullivan Creek more than a dozen miles north of the wilderness boundary.

Which brings me in a roundabout way to Dan Savage, Sally Hash-Savage's husband. As a veterinarian and avid outdoorsman, Dan is helping out with a wolverine study being conducted the past several years in Glacier National Park. But it's hard to stick to studying just the Park when those critters decide to move elsewhere, such as the Swan Range, which one recently did!

So it appears that indeed all things come full circle in both the human and natural world, as if they were somehow separate to begin with. Charles Leaphart Hash, Sally's father and son to C. J. Hash died this past September at the age of 86. I did not have the pleasure of meeting him but received this unsolicited response from the Forest Service historian who provided the photograph for this article: "He was always a gentleman in the old sense of the word."

While we are often at a loss to explain it, the interconnectedness of life and nature is undeniable. What is in a name? What is in a place? How is it that people come to be connected to place in this tangled web of life?

Well, perhaps it is all just a part of the great mystery that makes meeting people, especially while spending time in the great outdoors, so enjoyable. And it reminds me of something I once heard that has always stuck with me.

"The mystery is like a very small bird. If I speak too loudly of it I might frighten it away."

*Keith Hammer grew up hiking, skiing, camping, hunting, and fishing in the Swan Mountains. He has worked a number of jobs, from Forest Service trail worker to logger to backcountry guide, and currently works as an environmental consultant and head of the nonprofit Swan View Coalition. His column will appear regularly in this paper and will also be archived at [www.swanrange.org](http://www.swanrange.org). Keith can be reached at 406-755-1379 or [keith@swanview.org](mailto:keith@swanview.org).*

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Assistant Flathead Forest Supervisor C. J. Hash taking a reading on Salmon Lookout in 1926. Flathead National Forest photo.