

WRIGHTSON PHONE LINE

Sometime after the U. S. Forest Service assumed responsibility of the Forest Preserves from the General Land Office in 1905 a need was established to provide better communications between the various field offices and functions. One of the early priorities of the Forest Service was the suppression of forest fires and a telephone system was constructed to aid in that effort.

The 1912 map of the Santa Rita portion of the National Forest shows a telephone line connecting the Madera Administrative Site to Helvetia and another line connecting the site to the Mt Baldy (Mt. Wrightson) Fire Lookout. An article in the 21 March 1912 issue of the Arizona Daily Star stated that Forest Supervisor Selkirk had been in the Santa Rita Mountains for over a week working on the construction of a telephone line to the top of "Old. Baldy". The article also stated that construction was almost complete.

The 1917 map of the forest shows that the telephone system had been significantly expanded. In addition to the Madera AS/Helvetia line, it shows a line connecting Amado to the Madera AS, another line from the Madera AS past Josephine Saddle to Patagonia via Temporal Canyon and a line connecting Helvetia to the Ranger District Headquarters at Rosemont with a continuing line to Elgin.

The 1940 forest map shows that the telephone lines to Amado, Rosemont and Elgin had been removed and the main outside connection from the Madera AS was to Continental. It also showed that a spur line had been added from the Madera AS to the Santa Rita ER Headquarters at the Florida Work Station where the fire crews were located. Sometime after 1940 the phone lines were abandoned and began to deteriorate. The fire lookout was removed in the 1950s.

The Main purpose of this article though is to address the routing of the telephone line servicing the Mt. Baldy (Mt. Wrightson) Fire Lookout. The author made a search for phone line remnants during a series of hikes in 2002 and was able to identify the basic route of the Mt. Baldy Phone Line. Although most of the telephone wire had been removed sometime after use of the line was discontinued, numerous remnants in the form of insulators, insulator arms, wire and telephone poles still remained. Unfortunately the Florida Fire of July 2005 destroyed some of the remnants so the discussion is primarily oriented toward the remnants as they existed in 2002.

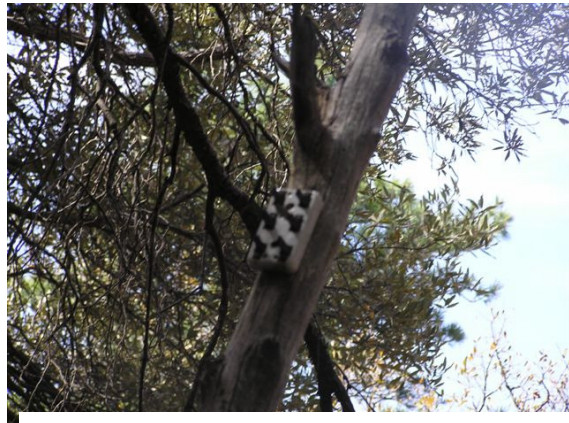
The route of the telephone line servicing the Old Baldy Lookout generally followed the Baldy Trail. It usually went in a straight line between major points and bypassed the numerous switchbacks in the trail. Starting from the lookout on the top of Mt. Wrightson, the line went in a northeasterly direction toward Baldy Spring. It crossed the Baldy Trail about 13 switchbacks below the summit as evidenced by insulators and wire in a tree adjacent to the trail and wire on the rock face leading to the summit. A Ranger support cabin was built at Baldy Springs in 1914 so it is assumed that it was connected to the phone line at that time. From the Baldy Spring area the line went to Baldy Saddle although no remnants were in evidence in that section

From Baldy Saddle, the phone line cut across the switchbacks between Baldy Saddle and Bellows Springs as evidenced by remnants in three locations.

- a. Insulators and telephone wire located on the rocks upslope from the trail just past the 11th switchback on the trail down from Baldy Saddle.
- b. Two insulators located in the vicinity of a large rock on the left side of the trail at the 17th switchback from Baldy Saddle.
- c. An insulator and an insulator arm on a dead tree on the upslope side of the trail at the 23rd switchback from Baldy Saddle.

There are another series of switchbacks in the trail below Bellows Springs and then the trail commences a long straight stretch before making a sharp turn to the right. There were no remnants that we could identify along the switchbacks but there were indications of the phone line in three locations along the straight section of the trail. The phone line had been mounted on the down slope side of the trail along this stretch of the Baldy Trail.

The phone line departs from the Baldy Trail at the turn and continues in a fairly straight line to a point where it intersects the Super Trail about 30 yards from where the Super Trail branches off from the Old Baldy Trail. During the time that the phone line was operational, the Super Trail did not exist. The phone line continued down the ravine until it intersected the Temporal Trail. This section of the phone line from the Baldy Trail to the Temporal Trail contains the highest concentration of remnants. When the phone wire was removed, this section was evidently left since it was rather remote from the Baldy Trail. Remnants include long sections of wire and numerous insulators. At the intersection of the Temporal Trail, there is a double throw switch that evidently served as the interface with the Temporal Canyon Phone Line.



Double Throw Switch at Temporal Canyon Intersection

The phone line then followed the Temporal Trail to Josephine Saddle as evidenced by several insulators mounted on trees on the upslope side of the trail. A large “V” shaped pine tree (dead now and rapidly deteriorating) served as a telephone pole for the system at Josephine Saddle. From the “V” shaped tree, the phone line left the Josephine Saddle to the northwest following a faint trail of use and bypassing some switchbacks on the Baldy Trail. It intersected the Baldy Trail again about 0.28 miles down the trail from Josephine Saddle. From this point, the telephone line continued to follow the Baldy Trail in most areas except that it took the shortest route and cut across switchbacks.



“V” Shaped Tree at Josephine Saddle

There is a relatively flat area (saddle on a ridge line) on the Baldy Trail about 0.83 miles below Josephine Saddle. At this location there are remnants mounted on two different trees about 20 feet apart indicating that the route of the line had been changed at some time. The phone line rejoined the Baldy Trail again after bypassing the switchbacks. Insulators and/or their supports can be seen at several locations along the trail where the trail is relatively straight. At a point about 1.36 miles below Josephine Saddle there is a large pyramid shaped rock located on the down slope side of the trail at a sharp curve in the trail. About 100 yards up the trail from that rock, the telephone line continued across the knoll and then crossed the Baldy Trail about 100 yards down the trail below the pyramid shaped rock. About 20 feet upslope from the point where the line crossed the trail is a manmade telephone pole with a cross arm. The telephone pole is a 4" by 6" timber and is the first manmade pole found when following the phone line toward Madera Canyon. The pole provided the necessary height for the line crossing the trail since the area did not have trees of adequate height.



Telephone Pole

After crossing the Baldy Trail, the phone line follows the water pipeline that brings water from Issacson's Springs. From this point on, the phone line and the water pipeline follow the same route for quite a long ways. Both the water pipeline and the phone line are visible and about 40 feet down slope from the Baldy Trail that is relatively straight along this segment. When the Baldy Trail approaches a sharp curve to the left the water pipeline comes back upslope to within about 10 feet of the trail. As the water pipeline heads upslope, the phone line veers to the right and heads down slope in a relatively straight line toward the Roundup Parking Area. From this point, remnants in the form of manmade telephone poles, insulator arms, insulators and pieces of telephone wire were found for several hundred yards. The last remnant found was an insulator on a Ponderosa Pine Tree.

The remnants found along the route of the phone line indicate that the line underwent periodic maintenance and in some cases a slight variation in the routing of the phone wire during its operational life. It appeared that earlier installations generally used insulators mounted on insulator arms while later upgrades to the line used insulators suspended from their support trees using wire. An example of where the line was rerouted is at the saddle located 0.83 miles below Josephine Saddle. The original line was down slope from the Baldy Trail while the replacement line was routed about 15 yards upslope as it entered the saddle. Examples of phone line mounting schemes are shown in the photographs depicted in the enclosure.

Summary prepared by T. Johnson in October 2011 using field surveys and construction information provided by William Gillespie of the US Forest Service. Photos by T. Johnson

Additional Material: GVHC Library File 37

WRIGHTSON PHONE LINE REMNANTS

These pictures portray examples of some of the different remnants of the Telephone Line that serviced the Old Baldy Fire Lookout.



Insulator Arm
Mounting



Wire Suspended
Insulator Mounting



Wire Suspended
Insulator Mounting



Two Mounting
Types on Same Tree



Only One Insulator of This Type
Was Found

Enclosure 1

