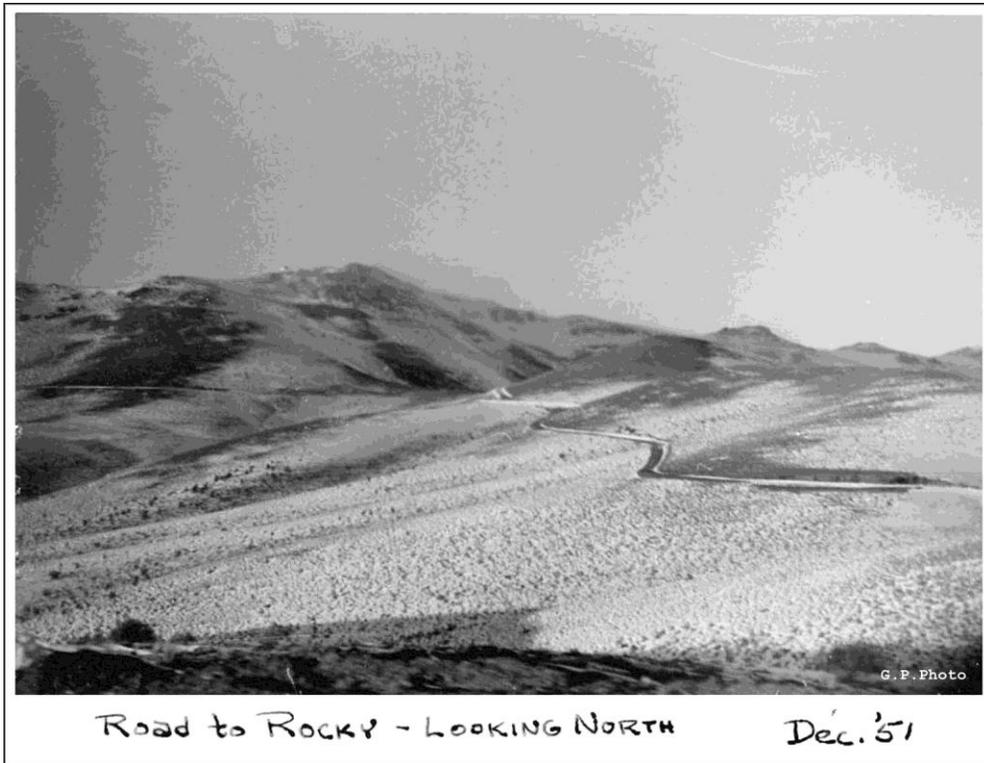


ROCKY POINT RESCUE

November 1950

The Story of a
Nevada Bell Telephone Company Construction Crew
Stranded by a blizzard at a new AT&T Microwave Radio Site,
And of Their Eleventh Hour Rescue.

A Copy of the document describing the event at the time,
Dated November 16, 1950



Memorandum - Rocky Point Radio Site

CONFIDENTIAL

Elko, November 16, 1950

COPY FOR: W. O. Harms, DIST. TOLL MTCE. SUPT., Reno:
MEMORANDUM FOR: H. H. POLEN, DIV, TOLL MTCE. SUPT., Sacramento:

The following, in log form, is our complete story of a recent incident at Rocky Point which may well have been a disaster.

I received a call from Mr. "Shorty" Whitworth, Construction supervisor, at approximately 9:15 p.m., November 14th asking if we had any knowledge of the whereabouts of Mr. Klone Draper, Construction Foreman and his crew of four men. He stated that these men had gone to Rocky Point around 1:30 p.m. in a two-wheel drive Ford station wagon, to do approximately two hours work on the antenna horns.

I checked with our "K" crew that had driven to Rocky Point earlier in the day and they had seen nothing of Draper and his crew but they had left Rocky Point around 12 noon, returning to Pequop "K" station and we were quite sure they would have missed Draper. After Mr. Whitworth and our testboard checked hotels at Elko; garages, restaurants and service stations at Wells, we decided that Mr. Whitworth and Mr. Paul Walther, Transmission Man, should take the four-wheel drive Willys station wagon and proceed to Pequop immediately.

They left Elko at 10:20 p.m., arriving at Pequop at 12:09 a.m. They reported that they had checked the entire city of Wells and no one had seen or heard of Draper and his crew. At this time we were quite certain that Draper and his crew must be somewhere on the Rocky Point access road. Mr. Walther and Mr. Whitworth left immediately for Rocky Point radio site.

Mr. Walther was requested to write a detailed account of his entire trip. I feel that his account is very descriptive and, therefore, are [*sic*] quoting it directly as follows:

"We headed up the Rocky Point road, the snow had been drifting bad at the turn-off and looked about five to six inches deep. It was about like this for the first two miles, then kept getting deeper and higher drifts. We were unable to see any tracks at any time on the road. The road was glazed with ice spots and drifts up to three feet deep. We did not put on chains and did not have to back up to bust through any of the drifts. There was no wind blowing and the sky was clear all the way up the access road. We came across the crew's station wagon directly below the station, but about 150 yards from the station. It was in the middle of the road and all windows were covered with frost and ice. I got in and tried to start the motor but could not and it acted like it was not getting gas and I took it that ice had formed in the fuel system. Mr. Whitworth and I then tried to push it off the side but all the brakes seemed to be frozen. We could not move it. We drove around the stalled car and on up to the station. We saw no signs of life or any tracks. We parked the station wagon and with our flashlights went into the little entrance room and shouted as loud as we could several times but got no answer.

The door to this room was open and snow had drifted in, covering the floor. We could smell a faint odor of smoke and upon entering the inner door, a puff of smoke burst out. We shouted again several times and played our flash lights around the room and could see nothing. The smoke was too thick to stand and breathe without choking. Upon entering the next room, I stumbled over one of the crew who was lying on the floor apparently sound asleep. We shook them and woke them all up. We noticed that they had built a fire in a five gallon can from scrap lumber to keep warm. The fire was not burning but smoldering and giving off smoke and fumes. The men were all very cold and drowsy acting. We put out the fire and got them into the station wagon where it was warm, then shoveled the snow from the door, closed the door and headed back to town. We arrived at the Rocky Point radio station about 12:45 a.m. and were there about fifteen minutes. We drove back to the Pequop "K" station and checked in with the Elko testboard and on into Wells where we gassed up and warmed up by the furnace at the service station, then proceeded on to Elko, arriving about 3:30 a.m.

"All men seemed in good spirits, but complained of burning eyes and raw throats and some of them coughed quite a little on the way to Elko. It is my opinion that these men would not have frozen to death but may have frozen feet or faces and hands had they remained in the station all night. The greatest danger would have been from the smoke and lack of air which I believe would have smothered them in a very short time, sleeping like they were."

Mr. Walther's story checks very closely with Mr. Whitworth's description of the trip, received by telephone November 15th from Lovelock, Nevada.

"On November 15th, about 2:00 p.m., while plowing the road to Rocky Point, we met Mr. Draper and his crew coming up after their stalled station wagon. We discussed the trip [of] the night before and following is briefly a story that I formed from my conversation with Mr. Draper.

"We arrived at the station at approximately 2:00 p.m. and started working on the antenna horn braces. In about an hour, we were forced to quit on account of severe wind and spitting snow. We were unable to start our truck, although the battery turned it over it would not take off. We then attempted to push the truck downhill to start it and although there were five of us pushing it, we were unable to get enough speed out of it to do any good. As soon as we reached a slightly level spot, we were unable to move the truck at all. By this time, the wind had reached such a velocity that it was extremely hard to stand up and we were unable to see the station although only 150 yards away. In fact, we had to walk with our heads down and fight our way back to the station facing the snow and wind. Upon arriving at the station, we were practically frozen. We considered walking to the highway but with absolutely no visibility and such terrific cold, we felt sure we would never make it alive. Therefore, we decided to stick it out in the station for the night."

It is our opinion that Mr. Draper should be highly commended for his decision upon remaining in the station, for we feel quite certain that they never all would have made it to the highway under the prevailing circumstances. The foreman, Mr. Draper, and all four of his crew are well proportioned men and are considered an out-door type of workmen. The building of the fire and falling asleep in the station with all the doors

shut does not in our mind, point out poor judgment, but merely emphasizes the reactions of an individual under pressure of a stiff cold body, empty stomach and thirty miles between himself and civilization.

To prevent re-occurrences of a situation of this kind, we have suggested to Mr. Draper and Mr. Whitworth that their crews check "in and out" to the testboard whenever they go to a remote station or to any station under adverse weather conditions. The suggestion was met with approval. We also have a similar arrangement with Mr. James Reilly, the Bell Company building engineer from San Francisco. Mr. Reilly is our inspector on the radio buildings.

This incident readily points out our need for good motor vehicle equipment, well-trained and well-clothed personnel and definite, close supervision on each and every operation of this nature, which we may well expect to be often. Also, we feel that this incident points out the need for two-way radio equipment in all vehicles and should be considered immediately.

Furthermore, we sincerely hope that this trip will be charged to "experience only."

RAM:SWG

[Note: The above letter was dictated by Ralph A. Michelson, then Chief of the Bell Telephone Company of Nevada's maintenance force located at Eighth and Court Streets, Elko, Nevada. Verbatim copy by George A. Phelps.]