

# Mt. Whitney Pack Trains 1946 to 1971

by Charles Morgan

## Ike Livermore

Norman (Ike) Livermore, Jr., aware of the need of the Sierra Club for a large pack outfit with plenty of mules to handle the packing chores for the Sierra High Trips, began putting together an outfit capable of doing the job. In 1946 he and Dina pooled their savings and purchased the Sage Flat outfit of Barney Sears, and the pack outfits of Chrysler and Cook in Lone Pine. The merged pack outfits became Mt. Whitney Pack Trains.

Born in San Francisco on March 27, 1911, Ike spent his childhood playing and working on the family ranch in Napa Country. He spent his high school years at Thacher School in Ojai, California. He attended Harvard Business School and earned a Masters of Business Administration at Stanford Business School in 1936.

His exposure to the packing business began with work at a Mineral King pack station in 1929 where he shod pack stock, worked as a cook and did chores around the pack station - never once getting into the back country. He made his first high country trip in 1930, and worked the whole season in the mountains.

After the packing season of 1934-about mid September-he made a tour of all pack stations on both sides of the Sierra from Walker Pass in the south to Tuolumne Pass in the north. He learned much about the packing business, as well as compiling information for his paper. The Tourist Packing Business in the High Sierra Region which was the basis for his "masters" thesis at Stanford.

In 1935 he organized the High Sierra Packers Association (see minutes page 48) serving as its Secretary for many years. About this time he began an ongoing campaign against excessive road building in the high country which continues to this date. He may be credited with stopping the proposed bans Sierra Minarets Highway between Fresno and Bishop

In 1937 he bought an interest in the Mineral King Pack Station as a partner of Ray and Phil Buchman. During that year he also packed on the Sierra Club trip for Allie Robinson. Additionally he brokered stock from other pack stations to conduct pack trips for his own clientele.

Prior to the start of the 1938 high trip Sierra Club High Trip Manger, Dick Leonard asked Ike to handle the stock contracts for the High Trips, which he did until the start of World War II. He also continued to broker private trips including the "Pennoyer Trip". It was on this trip that he met his lifelong companion and partner Virginia Dina Pennoyer. Dina was born in 1917 in New York. They were wed in 1943 and have five children (Norman,

Penny, Sam and David) two of which (Norman and Sam) packed many years for Mt. Whitney Pack Trains.

In the early spring of 1946 Ike met with Bruce Morgan of Lone Pine and discussed the formation of a partnership. Ted Cook had recommended Bruce because of his experience managing a recreational business at Tunnel and Monache Meadows. A partnership was created, but more about this later.

Ike was chief packer on the High Trip from 1946 to 1949. He went on to manage his own lumber business, became the Treasurer of Pacific Lumber Company, served as California Director of Natural Resources, and Commissioner for California Fish and Game.

The reins of the packing business were turned over to Bruce in 1950. The partnership in various forms and with various members of the Morgan and Jefferson Family lasted until 1971.

## Bruce Morgan

Robert Bruce Morgan became a minor partner of Ike Livermore in 1946 and effectively managed the pack train under Ike's direction for four years. In 1950 Bruce became general manager of the outfit with increased equity. Bruce managed the pack and saddle stock on the 1949 to 1954 Sierra Club High Trips.

Born in Madera County on June 9 in 1906, Bruce soon moved to and grew up in the Los Angeles Area and worked at various jobs in the area including at one point repairing slot machines. In the late twenties he took all the money he had, bought lumber loaded it on a truck and headed for the "last gold rush boom town in the west". He built two story structure that consisted of a Saloon on the first floor and a "house of ill repute" on the second floor. He no sooner had it fully stocked when the town "busted" and he lost his investment. Shortly after he went to work for the "Salt Works" at Tramway. It wasn't very long after that he met, courted and wed Grace Jackson.

Born November 16, 1909 in South Dakota, Grace Althea Morgan moved as young girl to a wheat farm on the plains of Montana near Lewistown. She attended the University of Montana at Missoula where she captained the Women's Basketball Team. She served mother, wife, secretary, treasurer and telephone operator for the outfit. She and Bruce had five children, Charles, Barbara, Enid, Roberta and Richard in addition she was the surrogate mother for many more. Light on her feet, she taught the entire family to dance and to enjoy it.

Bruce was foreman at the "Salt-Works" at Tramway 1929 to 1933. The company brought pure salt from the lake in Saline Valley via ore cars suspended on a tram to the narrow gauge railway in the Owens Valley. Charles was born there in 1931 and

and Barbara two years later. The depression hit, and the business was forced to shut down and never reopened.

Bruce moved his young family into Lone Pine where he went to work for Ellis Motors, the area Ford Agency. Bruce was a born salesman! One of his proudest accomplishments was that he sold a car a day, every day, for thirty days. Remember this was during the depression. He later worked a couple of years as a carpenter for Bill Skinner.

In 1936 Bruce and Grace gathered up all their saving and borrowed whatever they could to purchase Tunnel Air Camp from Ted Cook. The camp was located at Tunnel Meadows at 9,000 feet elevation in Inyo National Forest with a landing strip only 1,600 ft. long. It took a really skilled pilot to safely land and take off. The guests were flown in bi-planes with huge radial engines. Grace prepared meals in the two large tents that served for a kitchen and dining room. Guests slept in sleeping bags on cots in individual tents located around the compound. Pack trips to the Kern and Rocky Basin Lakes were conducted from the camp on a regular basis. After four years of scrimping the fifth year was profitable and it looked like the camp was successful at last.

December 7, 1941 and the coming of World War II changed all that. The camp was closed for the duration and Bruce and Grace went to work as fire guard and telephone operator at the Tunnel Ranger Station. The whole family spent the next two summers at the ranger station with newly born Richard joining his sisters and brother in the mountains.

The following two years Bruce, Charles and Dick Troeger spent the summer managing cattle at Little Whitney for the Anchor Ranch and Russ Spainhower. Grace and the girls grew an enormous "Victory Gardens" at the ranch in Lone Pine.

It was at this ranch that a tall gentleman just out of the Army made a partnership offer to Bruce that was beyond belief and after a very short discussion with his family, he chose to accept. A one page agreement was drawn up and signed. Of course that man was the family's good friend, Ike Livermore.

Business was good in the early fifties. The outfit not only packed the Sierra Club High Trip but also provided stock and services to the Wampler Trip, The Trail Riders of the Wilderness two Sierra Club Base Camps and a Sierra Club Saddle Trip. Saddle trips were conducted to the Top of Mt. Whitney out of the Portal. The outfit packed mule loads of supplies to Golden Trout Camp located below Cottonwood Lakes, and also sent many parties into the camp. The outfit also packed large parties from corporations such as Pacific Coast Borax Co. on two week all expense trips.

From 1948 to 1954 the family managed the stable at Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley. Most of the stock were wintered in the Valley. Moonlight, breakfast and dinner rides were popular many accompanied by dancing on the dry lakes. With the help of their family Bruce and Grace taught folk dancing four nights a week at the Ranch and Inn. In addition Bruce had the "Grey Line" Tour concession for the valley, and

with the help of Barbara, Enid and Charles tours were conducted up and down the valley. Bruce eventually was appointed Recreation Director for the Ranch and the Inn.

Bruce's twenty mule team was first hitched up for the 1949 Death Valley Centennial Celebration, and the next year appeared in the 1950 California Centennial Pageant conducted at the Hollywood Bowl. The team was a popular attraction at Furnace Creek, and won the sweepstakes trophy three times in the Helderado Days Parade in Las Vegas. It appeared in many movies and was featured in the titles for the popular "Death Valley Days" television series. Bruce is credited by historians as being the last Pacific Coast Borax 20 Mule Team Borax mule skinner. The team was hitch up for the last time in Mojave, California in 1960.

In 1956 Grace succumbed to her long battle with Diabetes and a vacuum was created in the business that was never quite filled. She did so much that no one could ever really walk in her foot steps.

In 1958 Bruce accepted an offer from Joe Bonham to manage the Dow Villa Hotel in Lone Pine. He divided his interest in Mt. Whitney Pack Trains as follows: 30% went to Charles and Mary, 30% went to Barbara and Tommy, and Bruce retained 40% of the business with the idea that someday that would be divided between Enid, Roberta and Richard. Charles and Tommy jointly managed the business with much assistance from their wives.

The new partnership lasted until 1961 when Tommy and Barbara moved to Shafter in order for Tommy to begin a career training horses. Charles and Mary continued to manage the business for the next three years at which time Tommy and Barbara were welcomed back into the outfit. Charles' participation in the management of the outfit ended in 1964. Barbara and Tommy continued on with the outfit until Barbara's untimely death in June of 1970. Tommy and Ike negotiated the sale of the outfit to Tanner and London in 1972.

