



CERAMIC INSULATORS

MOST OF LINE  
REMAINS IN  
PLACE ON ITS  
HISTORICAL  
ALIGNMENT.

FIRES OF  
1916-1940'S  
SPURRED  
OF LOGGERS.

USE OF  
PONDREOSA  
PINE.

considered for listing is the line itself, its phone terminals, and the method/materials by which it was hung from either poles or trees. Over the span of the line's working life, the nature of the forest through which the line ran has changed dramatically--in size, maturity, and density. Along other line corridors, poles as well as trees have been used to keep the line off the ground. Fire is one of the very phenomenon experienced in Glacier (along with other natural conditions--wind, beetles, etc.) that was anticipated in Park development; the very management of fire was among the reasons for construction of the line. Hence, the change in the kind of natural setting through which the line runs and changes in the size and frequency of trees from which to hang the line do not--in our minds---undermine the integrity of the line itself. The fact that the line is now "down" also does not in our minds constitute a loss of integrity too great to permit a reading of eligibility. Portions of the line have been down each spring, requiring the rechanging of the line within a given corridor. The amount of downed line that repairmen found each spring was a function of amount of wind, recent beetle kill, etc.

MAINTAINED  
SPICED BY  
RANGERS  
USING METHODS  
SAME TO 60  
YEARS AGO.

-- The trickier quality of integrity, in our judgment, to assess is that of the line itself--repaired seasonally. The line was mended and spliced throughout its life and is not the whole line as placed in that location in the teens. However, we believe that--repaired gradually--it is comparable to any other resource (log cabin, ship) that is repaired periodically over its life.

-- We have encouraged consideration of the National Register eligibility for resources such as crank phone lines--even though not traditional types of properties placed in the Register--because they appear to be structures or objects possible to list in the Register and because they appear to be very distinctive to an understanding of public management of resources in the West. We do not believe that this is the last remaining phone line system in Montana, but we do know it to be very rare. The survival of similar communication systems in the Forest Service--based on general checking--appears to be extremely limited.

Hence, based on the best information we have at this time, we believe that the Polebridge to Bowman crank phone line system does qualify for Register listing under Criteria A and C. In our Montana planning framework, it falls into two large historical contexts, "Using the Resources of the Environment" and "Developing a Communication Network within the Landscape." The derivative context on a smaller scale which combines those two large contexts would seem to be "public management of the environment." In that framework, the crank phone system appears to be very important in illustrating the importance of communication in protecting natural resources in public ownership and in protecting visitors to those resources. Second, it appears to be an extremely rare survivor--hence a distinctive representative of--the technology of crank phone systems with the line and terminals still intact. Finally, we would also note that crank phone systems once provided the only form of communication among rural residents throughout the state. While the specific historic context for evaluation of the Park's system is different from the one we would use to evaluate historic private systems, the technology is the same. In a Criterion C

CORRECT.

CONTINUED TO  
OPERATE IN  
92'S FASHION.  
ORIGINAL  
CRANK STATIONS  
REMAINED IN USE.

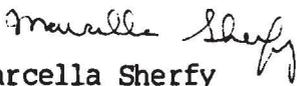
Mintzmeyer  
March 20, 1989  
page 3

framework, we again assume that public land managing crank phone systems are among the very last remaining representatives of entire systems. Crank phones survive in the private sector and are much loved "antiques." The systems do not seem to.

Wholly apart from the finding of eligibility, we appreciate very much Glacier's decision to retain portions of the resource for interpretation. Whether as management/mitigation should the line be formally determined eligible by the Keeper or for interpretation, we do believe that retention of portions of the line, oral history about and/or filming of how the line was maintained, cataloging equipment used to maintain it, etc., will all be important sources of information for researchers and the public.

Please feel free to call if you have questions.

Sincerely,

  
Marcella Sherfy  
State Historic Preservation Officer

cc Bruce Fladmark

File: COMP, NPS, Glacier

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Glacier National Park Historic Telephone System  
other names/site number North Fork Telephone System

### 2. Location

street & number North Fork Subdistrict, Glacier National Park (GLAC)  not for publication  
city, town Polebridge  vicinity  
state Montana code MT county Flathead code 029 zip code 59928

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>3</u>	<u>        </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u>        </u> sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>        </u>	<u>        </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>4</u>	<u>        </u> objects
			<u>        </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Multiple Resource Submission for Historically and Architecturally Significant Resources in Glacier National Park  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION:  
communications facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION:  
communications facility

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: telephone system

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation \_\_\_\_\_  
walls \_\_\_\_\_  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
other metal \_\_\_\_\_  
wood \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The route of the surviving North Fork telephone line traverses a heavy, mixed forest interspersed with occasional small meadows. Timber is largely lodgepole, much of which has been damaged by insects. The Bowman Lake road, a single-lane dirt route, loosely parallels the line. The line itself is a single-strand system utilizing an earth ground. No poles are extant; wire is generally strung through ceramic insulators mounted on trees, as original where not burned by the recent Red Bench fire. Insulator placements were generally 15-20 feet high using larger Ponderosa pine trees, and the alignment was moved from tree to tree as individual trees failed. Somewhat over five miles of line (constructed 1923) remained between Polebridge and the foot of Bowman Lake prior to the Red Bench fire of September, 1988, much of the line in its physical alignment. The Red Bench fire burned 26,400 acres of forest in Glacier National Park, including 2.9 miles of the Polebridge-Bowman phone line. The line in the burned area is presently almost entirely lying on the ground. There are no living trees nearby from which to suspend it for most of the 2.9 miles. For the balance of it's length the line has suffered the normal damages to be expected from being suspended from trees in an insect-damaged forest. Some insulators remain affixed to trees as they were when the line was in use. Many are broken loose and in many places the line is close to or on the ground.

Three interior telephone stations (wood) remain in place at Polebridge; two are currently in the Subdistrict Ranger's residence, while the third is in the office/checking station building. An old plastic telephone with a wooden ringer unit are inside the Bowman Lake Ranger Station, with a metal exterior phone in place on the porch of the structure. All these units date from the early days of the system.

**3. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNICATIONS

CONSERVATION

Period of Significance

1923-1938

Significant Dates

1923

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Significant Person

n/a

Architect/Builder

National Park Service

**State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.**

The North Fork telephone system was significant as the last-used segment of a vast early twentieth-century NPS communication system in Glacier. At it's peak, the network included several hundred miles of line and provided access to virtually every staffed outpost in the park. Such telephone systems are common in major NPS locations, serving until the advent of improved radio technology. Through 1985, the surviving portion of Glacier's line was used daily throughout the summer season and was maintained by rangers using historic methods. The Red Bench fire of September, 1988, burned 2.9 miles of that line, leaving it on the ground with few living trees left to support it in that section. The integrity of the line in the burned area has been destroyed.

Historical Information: Development of communication services in the Glacier Park region lagged behind much of the rest of the country, due to the area's relative inaccessibility and limited population. In the park's earliest years, the Great Northern Railway's telegraph wires paralleling it's main line served as virtually the only communication link between Glacier's eastern and western halves. Park officials, presumably realizing the implausibility of convincing a private operator to construct telephone lines in the areas, began rectifying the problem by constructing a government telephone network in the park.

Work began with the first park construction season of 1911, when some \$1,400 was spent on 42½ miles of line from Belton to Apgar, Logging Creek and Sperry. The North Fork line, a primitive, earth-grounded affair, had been extended some 45 miles to Kishenehn by 1914. Other short routes in the Belton areas were also erected, including a direct line from headquarters to the Belton railroad station to facilitate the sending of confidential telegrams.

While some segments saw daily, year-round operation, more remote sections (such as the primitive Brown Pass line) often faced service interruptions of weeks or months due to storms, slides or deadfall. It was a major project each spring to reopen the entire network and prepare it for a summer of reliable operation.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Interview with Bob Paul, Bowman Lake Ranger Station, August 5, 1988.

Paul, Bob. "Glacier Park's Own Telephone System" (typescript), George C. Ruhle Library Glacier National Park.

"Services and Utilities: Radio and Telephone." Records File 77-7, George C. Ruhle Library, Glacier National Park.

"Superintendent's Annual Reports" files. Records Boxes 6, 7, and 8, George C. Ruhle Library, Glacier National Park.

\*\*Additional references are noted in the Multiple Resource submission.\*\*

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Glacier National Park Headquarters

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Approximately 14 acres.

UTM References

A	1, 1	6 9, 9   9, 1 0	5, 4   0, 6   6, 2, 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C	1, 1	6 9, 9   6, 8 0	5, 4   0, 7   2, 1, 0

B	1, 1	6 9, 9   8, 3, 0	5, 4   0, 7   0, 6, 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D	1, 1	7   0, 0   2, 1, 0	5, 4   0, 7   8, 1, 0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The bounded area includes the telephone line connecting UTM points "A" through "K", above, as well as a 10 foot strip of land on each side of the line. Various lines on and near the grounds of the Polebridge Ranger Station (point "A") are included, as are the Polebridge office and ranger residence structures. The Bowman Lake Ranger Station building (point "K") is included, as well. NOTE: indicated location of the extant telephone line is approximate.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The buildings included in this listing are those which contain historic telephone stations and wiring. The listing also includes the route of the extant historic telephone line. The 20' width of the district along the line's path approximates the width of the original right-of-way.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Fladmark, Cultural Resources Ranger

organization National Park Service

date November 22, 1988

street & number Glacier National Park

telephone 406-888-3441

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1 of 2

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In Glacier's early years, the NPS telephone system existed only in the North Fork and Lake McDonald areas. To reach east side points from Belton, it was necessary to send the message via Great Northern telegram to Glacier Park Station. From there, the telegrapher could access the Glacier Park Hotel Company's private phone system to the chalets and Many Glacier Hotel. Park Superintendents complained bitterly about this inconvenient state of affairs, but with few results.

The 1920's saw spur lines extended to isolated west side ranger stations and lookout sites. The park also leased a circuit on the Great Northern's lines from Belton to Glacier Park Station, easing somewhat the problem of communicating with the east side. Lines began snaking up McDonald Creek, paralleling construction efforts on Glacier's new "Transmountain Road." A primitive, isolated route wound from Polebridge over Brown Pass to Waterton Ranger Station (Goat Haunt). By 1932, a total of 251 miles of line and 91 telephone units were in operation. All ranger stations and fire lookouts were provided with telephone service. A central park switchboard was maintained in the Headquarters area.

Aided by the availability of CCC labor, a major expansion of Glacier's telephone network took place during the late 1930's. The largest effort occurred during the 1939 fiscal year, when a \$20,000 appropriation for materials allowed construction of some 300 miles of line. The project's crowning achievement was the completion of the "Transmountain Cable," connecting Belton and St. Mary (Autumn, 1938). The cable followed a spectacular routing up the cliffs of Hidden Creek cirque and over Logan Pass. A new east side line was instituted as well, operated jointly with the Indian Service and allowing abandonment of most of the old Hotel Company system. A second switchboard (at St. Mary) was put into service. At last Glacier was served by a reliable, complete telephone network providing service to nearly every staffed facility in the park.

The system was operated and maintained by Park Service crews. Linemen were employed to handle major maintenance projects, while rangers and lookouts handled much day-to-day repair. Lines varied greatly in construction standards and frequency of use.

United States Department of the Interior  
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The telephone system had reached its zenith in the late 1930's, but its heyday was to be relatively short-lived. The decade of the 1930's also saw NPS use of radio beginning to assume some of the telephone system's duties. By the early 1950's an FM radio communication network served much of the park; many lines faced abandonment, and negotiations began to transfer other telephone operations to the local public utility. A system operated by the Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company finally supplanted the old NPS lines the night of May 6, 1956. After abandonment, many lines were physically removed, although occasional traces may still be observed in locations throughout the park. These actions at Glacier were concurrent to similar communication changes at Yellowstone and other major NPS sites.

Soon only isolated segments remained intact and in use. Lines from Chief Mountain to Belly River, from West Glacier to Kintla Lake, and from Polebridge to Bowman Lake and Numa Ridge remained operational well after the system's official abandonment, due to the largely volunteer efforts of local NPS staff. The Belly River and West Glacier-Polebridge lines were gone by the early 1970's. The Polebridge-Kintla route was maintained and used until 1983. Phones continued to operate in 1920's fashion; original crank telephone stations remained in use, and wires were still maintained and spliced by rangers as a matter of course through 1985 on the line from Polebridge to Bowman Lake. The summers of 1986 and 1987 saw this line in use for part of the summer seasons, largely through volunteer efforts of local NPS staff. National Park Service efforts to maintain this last functional line ceased in 1985, after it had been determined there was no more administrative need for such a system.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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E:	Zone	11	700.930	Easting	5408.200	Northing
F:	"	11	701.480	"	5408.430	"
G:	"	11	702.390	"	5409.110	"
H:	"	11	703.520	"	5410.420	"
I:	"	11	704.640	"	5411.670	"
J:	"	11	705.280	"	5412.240	"
K:	"	11	705.430	"	5412.230	"

H32

Photographic Log - Bowman Lake & Telephone Line

October 11, 1988

Numbers cited are odometer readings. A photograph was taken every .2 mile through the Red Bench fire burn area except where noted. Travel was from east to west on the road.

- 51125.7 - Mileage reading taken at the Camper Registration sign, Bowman Lake Campground for reference. No photograph taken.
- 51128.5 - Devastation begins - both sides of road. Photograph taken from road looking south.
- 51128.8 - Photograph taken from road looking north. Two photographs.
- 51129.0 - Photograph taken from road looking north - wire and insulator on ground.
- 51129.2 - Photograph taken 40 yards north of road looking west along wire.
- 51129.4 - Photograph taken looking north from road (on hill) part of road visible in shot - no wire visible.
- 51129.6 - Photograph taken looking north from road - the wire is elevated by one burned but standing tree - first view of the wire in the air in the burn area.
- 51129.7+- Photograph taken looking west along road from a switchback - truck in foreground - no wire visible.
- 51130.0 - Photograph taken 25 yards north of road looking west down the wire.
- 51130.2 - Wire six yards north of road elevated by one tree.
- 51130.4 - Still in burn area - road next to embankment - no wire visible - no photograph taken.
- 51130.6 - Two photographs taken looking to the north of the road - wire elevated by one tree - no unburned trees in sight.
- 51130.8 - Wire elevated for about 200 feet (two trees) - two photographs taken looking to the north of the road - no unburned trees in sight to the north of the road.
- 51131.0 - Photograph taken 20 yards to the north of the road looking west at a long span of wire on the ground - no unburned trees are in sight.

**NORTH FORK TELEPHONE LINE**

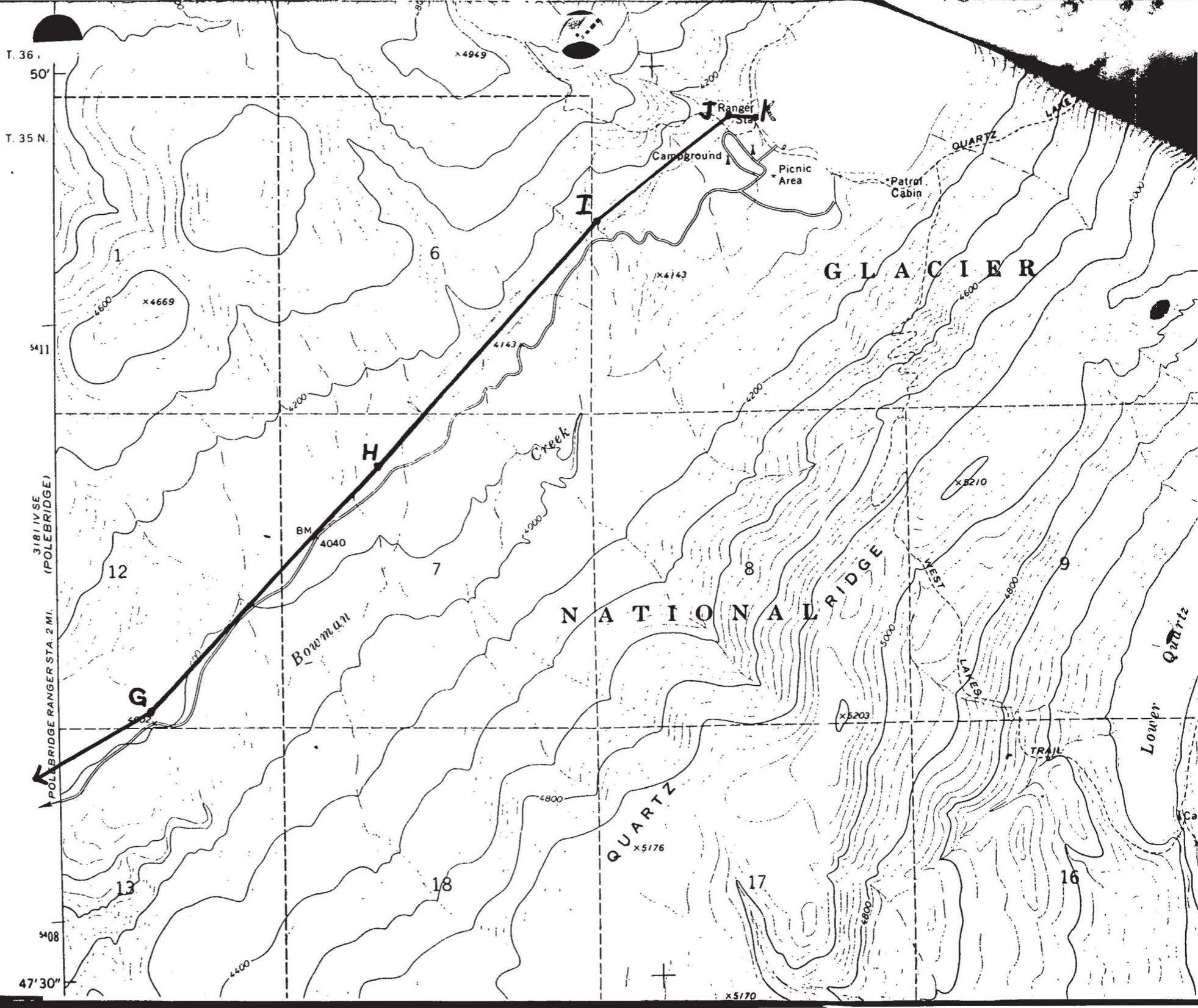
**G: 702.39E 5409.11 N**

**H: 703.52E 5410.42N**

**I: 704.64E 5411.67N**

**J: 705.28E 5412.24N**

**K: 705.43E 5412.23N**



**NORTH FORK TELEPHONE LINE**

**G: 702.39E 5409.11 N**

**H: 703.52E 5410.42 N**

**I: 704.64E 5411.67 N**

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