

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Billy Kruse Cabin

Other names/site number: McMillan Cabin; Leigh Cabin

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 15920 North Fork Road

City or town: Polebridge State: MT County: Flathead

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

MT State Historic Preservation Officer	
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
_____ Title :	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/single dwelling

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: vernacular rustic log

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD: Log (foundation logs, some sitting on concrete piers)
WOOD: Log (walls)
METAL: Steel (roof)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Billy Kruse cabin is a privately-owned homestead-era cabin located off of the North Fork Road, approximately 2.5 miles south of the U.S. border with Canada. The North Fork Road parallels the west bank of the North Fork of the Flathead River, across from Glacier National Park in northwest Montana. The property sits back, west, from the road and is accessed through a Forest Service easement. The cabin was constructed in 1925 and stands as the sole remaining original building on the site. The current owners constructed a modern home and outbuildings on the ridge west of the cabin, outside of the defined National Register boundary. The cabin currently serves as a guest cabin and occasionally as a short-term rental cabin.

Narrative Description

The Billy Kruse cabin is situated on a west terrace above the North Fork Road, approximately one mile north of Trail Creek Road and 1.5 miles west of the North Fork River. The site originally hosted the cabin, an ice house, and an outhouse, but only the cabin and a more recent outhouse remain today. The cabin is reached via a private gravel driveway that traverses the Forest Service easement granted to the current and previous owners.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Cabin (constructed in 1925, addition 1929, remodeled 1980-1981 and 2002-2004, one contributing building)

Exterior

The Billy Kruse Cabin orients in an approximately northwest-southeast angle. To facilitate the building's description, the northeast elevation is referred to as the *north elevation*, the southeast elevation is discussed as the *east elevation*, the southwest elevation is discussed as the *south elevation*, and the northwest elevation is referred to as the *west elevation*.

The cabin is a one and one-half story gable log building with a small single-story shed addition off the west elevation, added by the original owner, Billy Kruse, in 1929, and a screened northern front porch topped by a shed roof. The original cabin measures 16 feet wide (north-south) and 18 feet long. The shed-style addition on the west end of the cabin measures 10 feet (east-west) by 17 feet (north-south) and displays an open eave with exposed rafters. The partially enclosed porch displays an open eave with enclosed rafters. The cabin is constructed of square notched, hand-peeled larch logs with varying crown end lengths. The main cabin stands 13 logs high on the gable ends, each log tending progressively smaller, except for one, with very nice square notching.

The single row of large 16-inch sill and spandrel logs on the east and south sides of the cabin, constituting half of the cabin's foundation, were replaced in 1980, and supported by concrete piers. Some portions of older wood piers are still visible. There is no basement or crawl space under the original cabin, but there was once a small root cellar under the original cabin added by a later owner; the trap door leading to the cellar located in the current living room remains functional. Exposed second-story floor joists feature through mortise and tenon and extend slightly beyond the exterior wall on both the south and north walls of the cabin (not visible from outside the cabin on the north wall due to the porch).

The steep gables feature dimensional rafters with square notched corners. They are faced with 1-inch by 8-inch pine boards and display short open eaves. A narrow, single one-over-one double-hung window occupies each gable end, although the lower pane on the west gable is partially covered by the roof of the addition. There is a wooden Star of David-shaped plaque at the peak of the east gable that historic photos show a deer skull and antlers mounted on it. Moderate woodpecker damage to the vertical siding on the east gable is visible.

The original wood shingle roof that topped the cabin, addition, and front porch was replaced with a green, steel standing-seam roof (Delta Rib) in 2004. The cabin roof has a 12-12 pitch.

The south and east sides of the cabin feature paired double-hung windows with single light sash (one-over-one), with a 1-inch by 7-inch wooden frame. The original windows were replaced in 1980, but great care was taken to match the style of the originals. The exterior of the cabin logs was recently stained and sealed, and the original daubing between logs was covered with Permachink.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

The shed-style addition, like the original cabin, is constructed of hand-peeled, square-notched logs. The roof features solid 1-inch by 6-inch sheathing under the metal roofing. The log walls sit on a concrete foundation with gravel laid up to the sill logs. Original windows remain in the addition and include a single double-hung unit in the south wall, and a ribbon of three single-pane windows in the north wall bordered by a single frame.

The west wall of the addition originally featured an oversized entry and door and is now infilled with 1-inch by 8-inch horizontal boards. The addition originally served as a kitchen, but later was used as a garage to house a vehicle. In the 1980s, the interior door between the cabin and the addition was closed off, the foundation and floor under the addition replaced, and the addition converted for use as storage space. The south corner of the original cabin was modified to accommodate a rudimentary kitchen and propane appliances supported by a small external propane tank. Although a well was dug in 1980, the occupants at the time opted to use an outdoor hand pump in lieu of laying a water line into the cabin.

The front entrance to the cabin is accessed through a half-screened 8-foot by 18-foot shed-style porch. The original cabin porch was not enclosed. In 1980, the porch was widened approximately 30 percent and the roof extended; solid 1-inch by 8-inch sheathing underlays the metal roofing. The porch was then enclosed and finished to its present configuration. The porch displays rough framing with horizontal 1-inch x 10-inch planks enclosing the lower half. The openings of the screened upper portion are outlined with rough hemp rope trim. The porch is not supported by sill logs and sags slightly. The floor consists of painted plywood. Two steppingstones and a mortared 3-inch-thick flagstone stoop lead to the one-light/three-panel screen door on the east end of the porch. The north wall of the cabin is protected by the porch and displays wood pole chinking to improve insulation.

Interior

The interior of the cabin has seen extensive renovation over the years. Fortunately, Helen McMillan, one of the owners of the cabin from 1968 to 2000, kept a detailed diary of all repair and renovation work done on the cabin during that period.

The north, east, and south interior walls are exposed logs. Some of the logs on the north and east sides are hand-hewn flat. Most have been caulked and then covered with various sizes of quarter round chinking. Helen McMillan described tearing old paper sheathing from the walls and sweeping out dead leaves and rat dung before she could scrub and refinish the walls.¹ The west wall, common to the kitchen, is covered with 1-inch by 8-inch reclaimed lumber planks.

The main room of the cabin features paired, one-over-one, unpainted, wooden double-hung windows, with a central mullion and half-log trim surround on both the east and south walls. According to the McMillan diary, the windows and half-log trim are replacements. The bottom rail on both window sets shows extensive deterioration. Interestingly, Billy Kruse is rumored to have stored his guns in a space behind the window framing, designed for that purpose, when he left to work away from the cabin.

¹ Helen McMillan, Billy Kruse cabin diary, 1977-2000, entry for June 3, 1978.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

The front door is an inset, left inward-opening, one-light/four panel (one panel above the light and three below) wood door that may be original to the cabin, but has been modified. The window was added later, replacing two raised panels. The handle has been replaced. A 1-inch by 9-inch board closes the gap between the door bottom and floor and serves as the threshold.

The cabin has an 8-foot ceiling that extends to the second-story flooring. The original hand-peeled log ceiling joists are exposed, and the through tenons are visible on the outside of the cabin. The sturdy staircase leading to the upstairs runs along the west wall and features mortised 3-inch by 12-inch treads and 3-inch by 12-inch stringers. The bottom of the staircase displays three steps that lead to a small landing that serves to pivot the remaining eight 39½-inch wide steps (probably a meter, since Billy grew up in Denmark) to the upper floor. The cabin has a modern free-standing wood-burning stove and wall-mounted battery-powered lantern lights. Earlier propane light fixtures were removed, but the propane lines remain in place.

Downstairs, the flooring in the original part of the cabin is bamboo, whereas the addition features hardwood. A vertical 11-inch post at the doorway between the original cabin and the addition appears to support the roof, likely needed as Billy didn't make a ledger to tie the addition to the cabin. The ceiling of the addition displays 1-inch by 10-inch and 1-inch by 12-inch solid wood planks, rough circular sawn, with the original hand-peeled log ceiling joists exposed.

During their ownership of the cabin, the McMillans completely remodeled the upstairs. By removing the planed boards that Billy Kruse had used to cover the logs (with no insulation), the McMillans were able to access and remove several squirrel nests, install new tongue-in-groove wall paneling and insulation, and add quarter round between the sections of logs that remained, to improve tightness. The flooring is currently painted plywood, laid over earlier with 1-inch by 5-inch tongue-in-groove flooring. A former tenant of the cabin installed decorative rough hemp rope trim at the base of the walls, in lieu of baseboards.

The interior of the addition, like the cabin, has been largely renovated. On the east wall, the bottom seven logs were hand-hewn by Billy Kruse to allow for the installation of cabinetry. The McMillans completely replaced the floor and rotten floor joists when they converted the addition to storage space. From 2002 to 2004, the current owners, the Leighs, reopened the entrance between the cabin and the addition and performed a complete renovation of the addition. They used lumber to frame a partition along the south wall, creating a small bathroom with toilet, sink, and laundry hookup, and a vertical closet to house the hot water heater. The Leighs ran water to the cabin (gravity-fed from a cistern) and installed a septic system. There is no electric service to the cabin. The finishes they chose for the addition compliment the original cabin interior.

Billy Kruse built the cabin in 1925. A hand-penciled notation on the top board of the framing around the single window on the south side of the addition reads, "Christmas Eve 1929, B. Kruse" attesting to the 1929 construction date of the addition. Billy, Danish by birth, explains the use of a "W" rather than a "V" in the word "Eve." A ribbon of three single-paned windows surrounded by a single frame occupies the north wall of the addition.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

The Billy Kruse cabin sits in a clearing that is maintained for purposes of fire protection. Landscaping is native grasses. The McMillans extensively logged and thinned the property in the 1980s, in response to the mountain pine beetle infestation that plagued this part of the North Fork in the 1970s. They continued to thin the 20-acre property over the years and extensively replanted trees. They mentioned starting a tree farm, with almost 300 Douglas fir and blue spruce seedlings, thanks to the Forest Service.² Mrs. McMillan also tended large vegetable and flower gardens when they were in residence during the summer.

Outhouse (one noncontributing building)

A two-hole outhouse stands 100 feet from the house. It measures 10 feet long (east-west) and 6 feet wide (north-south), and features a 6-foot section constructed of unpeeled notched logs, standing 11 logs high, and a 4-foot section consisting of a log frame sheathed with vertical cedar shakes. The portion displaying the cedar shakes serves as storage and as an entryway, since the outhouse has no exterior door. A cedar shingle roof composed of 24-inch shingles with 10½-inch exposure tops the building. A dimensional 2-inch by 4-inch board extends from the west end of the roofline. The east and west side gables display 1-inch by 12-inch horizontal scrap lumber. Despite its rustic and historic appearance,³ the existing outhouse is a noncontributing resource. The original outhouse was destroyed when the McMillans built the current outhouse in 1983

A propane tanks sits immediately west of the cabin.

Integrity

The Billy Kruse Cabin retains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. The cabin stands in its original location. The rural setting remains mostly the same as when constructed, imparting the historic feeling and association of the construction period. Owners have kept trees and vegetation trimmed away from the cabin for purposes of fire protection.

The cabin retains integrity of design, workmanship, and materials, and thus much of its historic ambiance. Although integrity of design was altered when the original porch was extended and enclosed in the 1980s, the change does not detract significantly from the historic presentation of the building. The change to a metal standing-seam roof from the original shingles and addition of new stovepipe and plumbing vents were fire protective measures. Reinking and re-daubing of the log exterior with Permachink provides greater insulation. The greatest changes to design and materials occurred in the interior to make it more hospitable, but modifications were made with sensitivity to the character and materials of the cabin, as described above. The cabin's interior retains the original floorplan, except for changes necessitated by the addition of indoor plumbing.

² Ibid., entry for June 22, 1981.

³ Ibid., entries for May-July 1983.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1925-1932

Significant Dates

1925, 1929

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Billy Kruse, Andy Olson, Fred Johnson

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Billy Kruse cabin is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its associative and representative value as an example of settlement in the North Fork of the Flathead River in the early to mid-1900s. The cabin stands as a testament to those who envisioned a place of their own in the rugged mountains of northwest Montana. Many hoped that the land would sustain their way of life in this remote area but found it necessary to seek additional outside income. In the case of Billy Kruse and many of the single men who lived in the North Fork, their cabins became a base to return to after their seasonal employment ended. Mr. Kruse became a noted person in the local history of the North Fork due to the circumstances surrounding his death in 1932 at the hands of a neighboring homesteader.

The Billy Kruse Cabin gains additional significance under Criterion C as a good example of a rural vernacular rustic log building that displays the construction characteristic of this late nineteenth/early twentieth century building type found in the remote timbered areas of the state. The single-pen cabin was constructed from locally available timber and boasts a small log addition that displays, as does the original cabin, well-crafted square notching on its corners. The cabin's entry occurs on an eave wall, an uncommon location for many of the cabins in the North Fork area. The tight construction is evidence of the builders' skills.

The period of significance for the Billy Kruse Cabin begins when Kruse built the cabin in 1925 and ends when he ceased using the cabin due to his death at the hands of his neighbor over the affections of a woman in 1932. Significant dates include the year of the cabin's construction in 1925 and the year the addition was built in 1929.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Much of the early settlement of the North Fork area occurred through various acts, including the Forest Homestead Act of 1906, and the opening of Blackfoot National Forest lands. Although some areas witnessed middling interest due to marginal agricultural potential, those hardy enough to test the waters and eke out a living based on trapping, hunting, seasonal wage labor, and limited agricultural productivity settled many of the valleys of northwestern Montana from 1908 to 1925.⁴

The earliest settlers in the North Fork tended to file their homesteads on east side of the river in what is now Glacier National Park. Others opted to settle west of the river, in the area where the

⁴ Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document*, (NR# 64000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 pp. unnumbered, 1.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

Billy Kruse Cabin stands. The disinterest in settling west of the river was not related to any issue beyond the fact that a wagon road, blazed in 1901, existed east of the river from the town of Belton to exploratory oil wells in the vicinity of Kintla Lake. Such a travel corridor did not exist west of the river at this time, hence serious west-side settlement was delayed a few years.⁵

The earliest homesteaders who wished to file west of the river traveled to the area by following the east side wagon road into the north country, crossing the river near where Trail Creek emptied into the river from the west, and established their homesteads along the old well-known east-west Kootenai Indian Trail.⁶ The Kootenai people traversed this trail for hundreds of years from their settlements near the Tobacco Plains area, in the vicinity of modern-day Eureka, to the prairies on the east side of the Rocky Mountains for their annual buffalo hunts in Blackfoot territory. Construction of a north-south road on the west side of the river began in 1913 and was completed to the border in 1920.⁷ With access to the northern homesteads made somewhat easier, settlement expansion from that point forward focused on the west side of the river, since homestead filings could no longer be made in Glacier National Park.

As articulated by Dave Walter, "A very real sense of community developed among the North Forkers...their numbers were few, and daily they faced a potentially dangerous and often unforgiving environment... For it was a rough country, removed from the 'modern world'"⁸ This sense of community extended to neighbor helping neighbor for projects large and small, including helping a friend raise a cabin, such as occurred with Billy Kruse.

In contrast to the homesteaders and settlers in eastern Montana whose identity aligned more closely to the national economy due to their dependence on the railroads, those individuals and families who settled in the North Fork were generally forced to supplement their livelihoods through outside work.⁹ Although many hoped the land would yield sufficient productivity to support them, the reality was that raising livestock and forage crops best suited the land's use.¹⁰ The short growing season of around 70 days resulted in raising longer lasting vegetables, such as root crops, hence dedicating much of their time to outside work was a fact of life.¹¹ Many didn't

⁵ Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document*, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 pp. 4 and 6.

⁶ Darris Flanagan, *Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies* (Stevensville, MT: Stoneydale Press Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 1-93.

⁷ Lois Walker, "100th Anniversary of the Completion of the North Fork Road," Script of presentation to the North Fork Landowners Association, July 2020.

⁸ Dave Walter, "Answers from the Bon Ami Box," *Montana Magazine*, July-August 1985, pp. 13, 14.

⁹ Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document*, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 p. 1.

¹⁰ H.G. Lewis, "Report of Intensive Land Classification Blackfoot National Forest (North Fork Project)," United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Soils, 1917, pp. 14-15.

¹¹ H.G. Lewis, "Report of Intensive Land Classification Blackfoot National Forest (North Fork Project)," United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Soils, 1917, pp. 14-15; Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork*

Billy Kruse Cabin

Flathead County, MT

Name of Property

County and State

pursue serious agricultural development, but instead raised small gardens, grazed livestock, and in many cases, found employment in the nearby mountains.¹² Although this appeared as a disadvantage compared to settlers in the eastern part of the state, when national and international conditions severely impacted eastern Montana, the routine of the North Fork remained essentially unchanged.¹³

The largest employers of these homesteaders and settlers were the Forest Service and National Park Service. Seasonal work often entailed guiding and hauling supplies within the Park, and work in the hotels.¹⁴ Some sought outside work with the Great Northern Railroad or in the coal fields in nearby Canada. Many worked seasonally for years on projects that included construction, trail work, packing, serving on fire crews, and manning lookouts. In the 1920s, construction of Glacier's Going-to-the Sun Road involved significant manpower.¹⁵ The seasonal employment was acknowledged by the heavy use of credit extended by Bill Adair for his mercantile in Polebridge, reflecting the seasonal nature of income.¹⁶ Despite such a strategy, success wasn't guaranteed; of the 198 homesteads listed and entered by 1930 in the Blackfoot National Forest, 121 were abandoned or not used by that same year.¹⁷

In 1910, 30 residents lived on the upper west side of the North Fork. Numbers continued to increase as 1922 tallied approximately 150 homesteads.¹⁸ Services sprang up in Adair, later known as Polebridge, south of the Billy Kruse Cabin. Phone service eventually arrived via a single-strand line installed by the Forest Service on the west side of the river or Glacier National Park on the east side of the river. Stages ran weekly, and the area soon boasted schools for area children and three post offices, including one at Kintla, about eight miles south of the Billy

of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 p. 1.

¹² Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 7 p. 2.*

¹³ Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 p. 1.*

¹⁴ Dave Walter, "Answers from the Bon Ami Box," *Montana Magazine*, July-August 1985, p. 12.

¹⁵ Kathryn L. McKay, *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, prepared for the Flathead National Forest, 1994, online version (no page numbers) found at <https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TRAILS-OF-THE-PAST.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2021; Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 p. 5.*

¹⁶ Dave Walter, "Answers from the Bon Ami Box," *Montana Magazine*, July-August 1985, p. 14.

¹⁷ Kathryn L. McKay, *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, prepared for the Flathead National Forest, 1994, online version (no page numbers) found at <https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TRAILS-OF-THE-PAST.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2021.

¹⁸ Kathryn L. McKay, *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, prepared for the Flathead National Forest, 1994, online version (no page numbers) found at <https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TRAILS-OF-THE-PAST.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2021.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Flathead County, MT

Name of Property

County and State

Kruse Cabin, one at Polebridge, beginning in 1920, and another north of Trail Creek, near the U.S.-Canadian border, which operated from 1921 to 1954.¹⁹ As Kathryn McKay noted, Prohibition didn't completely halt the consumption of alcohol, based on the regular orders of 100-pound bags of sugar by some settlers;²⁰ in fact, one could argue that the remoteness and inaccessibility of the area greatly abetted those inclined toward its continued consumption.

Much of the North Fork settlement occurred with the establishment of one family followed by visiting relatives or friends who apparently liked the area and filed claims nearby.²¹ This scenario appears to have been the case with Billy Kruse's arrival. With the establishment of Glacier National Park, the commercial and social focus of the North Fork migrated from the east side of the river to the west in the 1920s fueled by yet-to-be claimed homesteads.²²

History of the Billy Kruse Cabin

The history of the Billy Kruse Cabin begins with the filing of homestead entry 05244 (patent no. 801606) by DeForest "Dick" Woodmansee in March 1915, encompassing the land in the Trail Creek area where the cabin sits.²³ The working lives of both Woodmansee and Billy Kruse in the North Fork follow the pattern of many of the area's early occupants—locating a place to build, yet needing to find outside income.

Woodmansee, a more apropos name could not be conceived for his life in the North Fork, appears to have been born around 1859 in New York.²⁴ Prior to his arrival in Montana, he was widowed and lived with his daughter and brother-in-law in Aniwa, Wisconsin by 1905.²⁵ It

¹⁹ Kathryn L. McKay, *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, prepared for the Flathead National Forest, 1994, online version (no page numbers) found at <https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TRAILS-OF-THE-PAST.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2021; Roberta Carkeek Cheney, "Names on the Face of Montana," (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, revised 1984), pp. 155 and 269.

²⁰ Kathryn L. McKay, *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, prepared for the Flathead National Forest, 1994, online version (no page numbers) found at <https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TRAILS-OF-THE-PAST.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2021; Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document*, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 p. 5; Dave Walter, "Answers from the Bon Ami Box," *Montana Magazine*, July-August 1985, p. 15.

²¹ Kathryn L. McKay, *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, prepared for the Flathead National Forest, 1994, online version (no page numbers) found at <https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TRAILS-OF-THE-PAST.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2021.

²² Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document*, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 8 p. 7.

²³ Notice For Publication, DeForest Woodmansee of Kintla, Montana, *The Columbian*, 13 November 1919, p. 3.

²⁴ 1870 United States Census, found at <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/29544382:7163?tid=&pid=&queryId=c4a11d2f35d60ebb03ac71274a0bc33a&phsrc=EAF737&phstart=successSource>, accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁵ 1905 Wisconsin state census, found at https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1055/images/csusawi1905_28-

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

remains unknown when exactly Woodmansee arrived in Montana, however, he was apparently in the state and the North Fork area since at least 1913, as a trip by boat with Paul Norris and Wallace Houston was reported in October of that year.²⁶ Travel by boat seems to have been preferred by Woodmansee as he again is noted as using the river for passage from the town of Belton to Columbia Falls, a trip which also included passing by three bears at an oars-length.²⁷ By 1917, Woodmansee was established on his homestead claim in Section 28 of T37N R22W in the "North Fork country."²⁸ Two years later, his love of the river allowed him to operate a string of boats on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River between Columbia Falls and Belton during the months Glacier National Park was open.²⁹ By the end of 1919, Woodmansee filed notice of intention to make three-year proof to establish his claim for the property where the Billy Kruse Cabin sits.³⁰ The start of December witnessed Woodmansee in Kalispell making final proof on his homestead, which occurred April 1, 1921.³¹ Woodmansee appears to have stayed in the area referred to as Trail Creek until his passing in 1930.³²

Woodmansee's diligence in obtaining his patent in Section 28 benefited Billy Kruse. In 1925, Woodmansee granted permission for Billy Kruse to build a cabin at the north end of his property.³³ No documentation has been uncovered regarding this arrangement, though it is known that Billy never applied for any patent under his own name.

Born Wilhelm Axel Christian Kruse in Denmark on April 27, 1886, Billy's entry to the United States is unclear.³⁴ Similar to many people who came to the North Fork after visiting a relative, Billy's move to the area was likely spurred by a visit to his brother, John T. Kruse ("Jack) in

[0232?usePUB=true&_phsrc=EAF741&_phstart=successSource&usePUBjs=true&pId=2535478](#), accessed 8 April 2021.

²⁶ "Columbia Falls News," *The Columbian*, 2 October 1913, p. 4.

²⁷ "What's Doing In Town?" *The Columbian*, 5 July 1917, p. 4.

²⁸ "What's Doing In Town?" *The Columbian*, 8 November 1917, p. 4.

²⁹ "North Fork," *The Columbian*, 26 June 1919, p. 1.

³⁰ "Notice For Publication," *The Columbian*, 13, 20, 27 November 1919, p. 3.

³¹ "What's Doing In Town?" *The Columbian*, 4 December 1919, pg. 4; Homestead Patent, Record of Patent Number 801606, 1 April 1921.

³² Lois E. Walker, "Compilation, References to DeForest 'Dick' Woodmansee in *The Columbian*, 1916-1925; Polk's City Directory for Flathead County, 1928-1929, p. 272; Bonds and Oaths Probate No. 4, in the District Court of the Eleventh Judicial District of the State of Montana: In and for the County of Flathead, for the administration of the estate of DeForest Woodmansee, 4 April 1930, found at https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/9072/images/004310171_00309?pId=842222, accessed 14 April 2021.

³³ This was evidently a verbal arrangement, since no written agreement or other evidence has been found.

³⁴ State of Montana, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Standard Certificate of Death for William Alex Christian Kruse, 28 March 1932.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Flathead County, MT

Name of Property

County and State

1915³⁵ who served as District Ranger for the Blackfeet National Forest at Coram from 1916 to 1919.³⁶

By the time the United States entered World War I, Billy lived in South Dakota and was described as possessing a medium height, stout build, brown hair and blue eyes.³⁷ Billy appears to have stayed in South Dakota as a single man at least into 1920.³⁸ That Woodmansee and Billy had a personal relationship when Woodmansee granted Billy permission to build on his land is evidenced by their efforts to haul hay, “to their places above Trailcreek (sic).”³⁹ By 1930, Billy was fully ensconced on the North Fork, and while he may not have owned the land where he built his cabin, he did own the building itself.⁴⁰ He remained single at this time and listed himself in the census as a “farmer” and “working on own account.”

Billy’s venture toward constructing his cabin was assisted by two Trail Creek homesteaders, Frederick Johnson and Andy Olson.⁴¹ Such cooperation was a necessary element of living in such a remote area. The nature of the arrangements, or whether money exchanged hands for use of the Woodmansee property remains unknown. According to a local newspaper account, Mr. Woodmansee and Billy Kruse worked together for the U.S. Forest Service out of the Big Creek Ranger Station during the summer of 1925 on what was then the Blackfeet National Forest.⁴²

Billy Kruse also enjoyed a close relationship with a man named Tom Reynolds. Tom, a citizen of England, entered the United States illegally in 1925 and was deported back to Canada. Billy acted as Tom’s sponsor when he re-entered the country legally in 1926. In 1930, Tom purchased 80 acres of land a few miles north of the Billy Kruse cabin from the estate of homesteader William McAfee. He built his own home there, so the two men remained neighbors and close

³⁵ “Coram,” *The Columbian*, 14 October 1915, p. 4.

³⁶ Lois E. Walker, Compilation, Newspaper references to John T. Kruse in *The Columbian*, 1916-1919; Notes from conversation between former cabin owners Don and Helen McMillan and Dick and Janet Leigh, at the time the Leighs bought the property from the McMillans; The date of approval for the creation of the Blackfeet National Forest was June 25, 1908. Since its creation, the forest gained and lost acreage through the years, including with the approval on May 11, 1910 to the transfer of acreage to Glacier National Park. Twenty-five years later, after multiple additions and subtractions of land, the remaining acreage of the Blackfeet National Forest was divided between the Kootenai National Forest and the Flathead National Forest and use of the Blackfeet name discontinued (approved on June 22, 1935), Lands Staff, *Establishment and Modification of National Forest Boundaries and National Grasslands, A Chronological Record 1891-1996* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, 1997), pp. 13, 25, 32, 56.

³⁷U.S. World War I Draft Registration Card for Wilhelm Axel Christian Kruse, found at <https://search.ancestry.com/collections/6482/records/14592908/printer-friendly?tid=&pid=&queryId=e18a75475af3294e9c3d98d717f26af2&usePUB=true&phsrc=EAF750&phstart=successSource>, accessed 9 April 2021.

³⁸ 1920 United States Census.

³⁹ “Polebridge,” *The Columbian*, 5 February 1925, p. 4.

⁴⁰ 1930 United States Census.

⁴¹ Conversation with Dick and Janet Leigh, 13 December 2018, including notes from Helen McMillan.

⁴² “Polebridge,” *The Whitefish Independent*, 19 June 1925.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

friends. Prior to Reynolds building his cabin, he and Billy lived together for two winters in Billy's cabin (1928 and 1929).⁴³

It appears that many of the men who moved and settled in this area were single and many stayed that way. By 1922, roughly 33 percent of the homesteads were issued to single men.⁴⁴ Similar to many single men in this rural area, Billy appears to have used his cabin as a base of operations, working outside the immediate area much of the time and returning between jobs. An example of this is Billy and Tom Reynolds working together several summers herding sheep on a ranch on the east side of the Continental Divide, in the Sweet Grass Hills south of Chinook.⁴⁵ Billy was also noted to have worked for the Forest Service.⁴⁶

In 1931, Dick Woodmansee passed away. His sole heir, Celia A. Dame of Milwaukee (perhaps his sister), did not care to retain the land. Since Billy had been living in his cabin for six years, she bequeathed the 40 acres surrounding the cabin to him for the sum of one dollar, with the provision that he pay any and all taxes due on the property.⁴⁷

The Untimely Death of Billy Kruse

Many of the settlers in this section of the North Fork lived as bachelors, and due to the rugged and isolated nature of the place these men forged strong relationships. However, even while accepting life as a bachelor, loneliness was a constant companion. It was thus, that in 1931, according to Tom Reynolds, Billy became acquainted with a middle-aged woman from New York City through what Tom called, "a Hearts and Hands piece in some newspaper." Though separated, Mary Powell was married with three children. Perhaps for financial reasons, or possibly because she was enamored with the idea of relocating to the remote Rocky Mountain West, she agreed to come live with Billy as a housekeeper/companion, bringing one of her daughters with her. The end result of this relationship turned out to be very unfortunate.⁴⁸

*The following is quoted with permission from John Fraley's book, *Rangers, Trappers, and Trailblazers*, Chapter 9, "Killing Billy Kruse: Shootout in the Upper North Fork."⁴⁹*

Mary [Powell] and her daughter spent a fall and early winter, 1931-1932, with Billy at his homestead and things seemed to be going along okay at first. Mary and the

⁴³ Letter, Tom Reynolds to Karen Feather, ca. 15 April 1987; Donald Sullivan, *Discovering Eden*, Chapter 4 (self-published book, n.d.), pp. 180-185.

⁴⁴ Dave Walter, "Answers from the Bon Ami Box," *Montana Magazine*, July-August 1985, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Letter, Tom Reynolds to Karen Feather, ca. 15 April 1987; Donald Sullivan, *Discovering Eden*, Chapter 4 (self-published book, n.d.), pp. 180-185.

⁴⁶ "Evidence at Inquest Discloses William Kruse Was Bad Actor," *The Daily Inter Lake* (Kalispell), 28 March 1932, p. 1.

⁴⁷ This transaction was finalized and recorded by the Flathead County Recorder on May 27, 1931. Book 209, p. 114, Flathead County Plat Room.

⁴⁸ Letter, Tom Reynolds to Karen Feather, ca. 15 April 1987.

⁴⁹ John Fraley, *Rangers, Trappers, and Trailblazers: Early Adventures in Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness and Glacier National Park* (Helena: Farcountry Press, 2018), Chapter 9, pp. 139-154.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

young girl served as “housekeepers.” Billy had few real friends in the North Fork community. He was a shepherd on the east side and also worked for the Forest Service, so he was gone a lot. On leaving for one long sojourn, he asked his “buddy” and neighbor, [Gustav] “Ed” Peterson, to “keep an eye” on Mary, keep her supplied with wood, and generally help her if problems arose.

Ed had a relatively new homestead cabin on his place near Mud Lake approximately a mile north of Billy’s homestead. While Billy was gone, Ed turned this new two-story cabin, complete with a front porch facing the lake, over to Mary and her daughter. Ed remained in his original one-room cabin on the lake. . . .

[In early March] Billy sent Mary a letter announcing that he would be returning from his work. Frightened of Billy’s reaction to her hop over to Ed’s, Mary hid out with the Waters [Charlie and Belle], who had a neighboring homestead.

When Billy finally got back to his cabin, he was stunned. The cabin was cold and empty, and his mail order bride had apparently not lived there for a while. . . .

Billy went up to Ed’s and found out that she was living in the newer cabin and that she was transferring her life away from Billy. At that point, Billy became scary mad. He threatened to go “settle with Mary” and then come back and settle with Ed. Billy was known to be a hard drinker and it was evident to Ed that he had been imbibing. Billy “nursed his grievance” and continued to threaten the ladies, Ed, and “various others” in the area, especially when he’d been drinking. Billy carried a reputation as a “mean drunk.”

Finally, on Monday, March 21, 1932, the feud boiled over.

Billy came over to Mary’s house and threatened to “get” Ed, Art Price, Jim Brigham, and the two women. Billy bragged that he was a killer and that Ed was afraid of him. Finally, the group went to Ed’s house and Billy followed along, continuing to slug down alcohol. When they reached Ed’s house, Billy grew more and more “quarrelsome” and became more drunk.

Billy pulled out a firearm and “kept all of them at the point of a gun” all evening. During this terrifying, hostage-like situation, Billy at one point startled the group when he shot at the feet of Jim Brigham, but didn’t hit him. Brigham was Mary’s nephew who came out to Montana to trap with Ed.

Later that night, Billy finally left Ed’s house, to the relief of everyone. Billy was headed for the lake cabin, and he’d vowed to burn it down. The group followed along behind Billy. Soon they turned back after Billy reportedly fired “six or eight” shots at them. Ed and Jim battened down the locks and hatches when they got back to Ed’s house, and Mary and her daughter hid out with other neighbors.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

The next morning, Ed, packing his .30-06 hunting rifle, returned to Mary's cabin to see if it still stood. A neighbor accompanied him. The cabin hadn't been burned down. Billy stepped out of the cabin from a door that faced away, and then walked around the edge of the porch. He pointed a rifle, reportedly a .22 caliber, at Ed, and got off a quick shot.⁵⁰ Feeling that his life was in danger, Ed quickly swung and fired his .30-06 from the hip at Billy. The .30-06 bullet entered Billy's left bicep and hit him in the left part of the chest. Mortally wounded, Billy staggered back toward the cabin. Ed fired another shot at Billy as he entered the cabin, but missed.

Ed and Jim Brigham assumed that Billy was dead. They left the scene right away and went to Charles Waters' cabin, where Mary was hiding, and asked Charles to call the sheriff through the old forest service or private lines. He attempted to call, but the phone lines down the North Fork were always sketchy. Bill Adair, early owner of the Polebridge Mercantile, finally made the call to the sheriff. The message broke up, but Bill hoped he was understood.

Charles Waters then went to the Powell place about 8 A.M. to check on the reported shooting. The unexpected, gruesome scene at the cabin frightened him. He looked inside the cabin and "saw Kruse lying in a pool of blood" and thought he was dead. Charles returned later and saw Billy "standing inside near a window and raving and cursing." Charles left the scene because, as he related later, "I thought he might shoot me."

At 11 A.M. Jay Price heard about the shooting, so he gathered four neighbors, including Matt Brill, and headed to Mary's cabin. When they reached the cabin, they heard Billy groaning pitifully. He was lying on a cot. After talking it over, their compassion for the suffering man kicked in and they decided to enter the house, even though they thought it might be dangerous.

The men dressed Billy's wounds and tended to him. Demonstrating amazing toughness, Billy didn't die until 4 A.M. the next morning, almost twenty-four hours after he'd been hit by the 180-grain, .30-06 slug. The men found a gun and Billy's packsack, which held a bottle of gin, on the back porch.

⁵⁰ Although the events leading to the demise of Billy occurred over several hours within a span of two days, whether Billy actually fired his gun first during the final confrontation was never confirmed. A *Daily Inter Lake* article dated 28 March 1932 ("Evidence at Inquest Discloses William Kruse Was a Bad Actor") stated, "Next morning they went to the Powell house to see what had happened, and Kruse came out, pointing a gun at Peterson. Witnesses said he (Peterson) believed his life in danger and he fired." The only mention that Billy may have shot first appeared in *The Daily Inter Lake* article dated 26 March 1932 ("Ed Peterson Exonerated by Coroner's Jury"), which stated, "It is said that Kruse went to the home of Peterson and began shooting into the house, and that Peterson returned the fire, killing him, although this information did not come from official sources." As this article provided a much different account than that reported on from the inquest, including incorrectly stating the location of the final confrontation, the account of Billy firing first must be viewed with some incertitude.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

The entire incident shook the tight-knit North Fork community. Residents of the peaceful backcountry hamlet probably felt that their world had been turned upside down.

Meanwhile, back in Kalispell, the phone message sent by Bill Adair had reached Flathead County Sheriff [Ralph] Ripke. Ripke could hear portions of the message: Ed Peterson had shot and killed a man named Bill Kruse. Adair also noted that neighbors felt that it was justifiable homicide. The sheriff couldn't hear the details of the shooting because of the broken transmission.

Sheriff Ripke now faced a quandary. A spate of high water had washed out the "pole bridge" across the North Fork of the Flathead River north of Polebridge, so a truck could not reach the upper North Fork along the normal route. Glacier Route 7, the inside North Fork Road on the east side of the river, runs from Belton along the edge of Glacier National Park for thirty miles to the washed-out pole bridge crossing. The Trail Creek area is about fifteen miles north of Polebridge toward Canada on the west side of the North Fork. But Sheriff Ripke couldn't use that route. Even if the bridge hadn't washed out, the snow levels were so deep that a vehicle probably couldn't have made the trip.

Sheriff Ripke arrived upon an innovative solution: he lined up a team of horses and a sleigh. The party would travel from Columbia Falls up the west side of the river all the way to Trail Creek. The investigative party included: Deputy Sheriff Nelson [heading the team], Assistant County Attorney Gordon Rognlien, and the busy acting deputy county coroner, J.E. Waggener. Considering the depth of snow, they planned on four days for the round trip.

The party left Columbia Falls on Wednesday, March 23, and by Friday, March 25, they had arrived at Trail Creek. Based on the deep snow and difficult travel, Deputy Sheriff Nelson and the team decided to appoint the coroner's jury and hold the inquest right there at Trail Creek. Matt Brill and his horse team and sled retrieved the body of Billy Kruse; some of the investigative party likely accompanied him to the Powell cabin on Mud Lake. In payment for transporting the body, Matt received a gramophone record player and cylinder records found at Billy Kruse's home.

The coroner's jury was seated in this bizarre process that was unfolding in the middle of millions of acres of isolated country blanketed in snow. The jury consisted of neighbors and even a few relatives of people directly involved in the tragedy. They included: Austin D. Weikert, Tom J. Peterson, William B. Barkley, Andy Olson, Bart J. Monahan, and Ralph Price.⁵¹

Acting Coroner Waggener testified first, describing the wound. He said that the bullet hit Kruse in the breast, "injuring the heart but not passing through it." The

⁵¹ Andy Olson was one of the two men who assisted Billy in the construction of his cabin.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

bullet also had passed through an arm “causing a severe hemorrhage.” He said either wound would have resulted in Billy’s death.

Mary Powell testified that Billy was at her cabin on Monday, and she agreed to go home with him to do some work. She said that Billy was drunk and said that if he was going to die he “would take a bunch with him.” Billy didn’t name who he would kill. After that, he threatened her, Ed Peterson, and Art Price. Mary and her daughter left Kruse’s place and went to the Waters home because they were afraid to go to their own cabin. She testified that she had been a “housekeeper” for Billy when she first came to Trail Creek. Afterward she left and stayed at Ed Peterson’s house.

Next, Charles Waters testified to the jury. He noted that Ed Peterson had been a law-abiding citizen. Kruse, on the other hand, was quarrelsome when drinking and “a little off.” Waters testified that Peterson had asked him to call the sheriff and that he left the scene because he saw that Billy was still alive. “I thought he might shoot me,” Waters told the jury.

Jay Price described how he and others cared for Billy at the Powell house, and stayed with him until he died at 4 A.M. on Wednesday morning.

Homesteader Matt Brill told the jury that he’d known Ed Peterson for eighteen years. He considered him a peaceable man. He said that he’d known Kruse for ten or twelve years. He said Billy held jealous feelings toward Peterson, and he thought those feelings would eventually cause trouble. Brill told the jury that Kruse carried a reputation as a “gunman” and that he’d spent time in prison for murder.⁵²

Mary Powell’s nephew, James Brigham, testified next. He had come to Trail Creek not long ago and met Billy Kruse just a few weeks before the incident. He thought that Billy was “queer” and mentioned that Billy shot at a button on his hat. He repeated his aunt’s contention that Billy said, “If I go, I will take a bunch with me.”

All of the witnesses described details of the events leading up to the gunfight. Of course, Billy was unable to testify or give his side of the story.

At the end of the proceedings, the jury found that there was “ample evidence that Ed Peterson acted in self-defense.” The jury returned a verdict of “justifiable homicide.” Deputy Sheriff Nelson did not arrest Ed Peterson; the proceedings had fully exonerated him.⁵³

⁵² No evidence of Billy Kruse spending time in prison ever surfaced during research for this nomination.

⁵³ “Evidence at Inquest Discloses William Kruse Was Bad Actor,” *The Daily Inter Lake* (Kalispell), 28 March 1932, pp. 1 and 4.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

On Saturday, March 26, the three investigators headed back early in the horse-drawn sleigh on the packed trail. They reached the Big Creek U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station about twenty miles north of Columbia Falls. At the station, Deputy Sheriff Nelson got a call through to Sheriff Ripke. He explained that they decided to hold the inquest at Trail Creek “in order to avoid bringing witnesses to the county seat, as there is still much snow in the North Fork country, and impossible to travel by automobile.”

Nelson also said that there was plenty of evidence that the shooting was a justifiable homicide, that Peterson acted in self-defense, and that he was not arrested or charged. He noted that they had loaded the corpse of Billy Kruse on a sled and that it was being brought out for burial. Nelson said that they expected to be back to Columbia Falls that evening.

On Monday, March 28, a very small burial party led by Captain Osborne of the Salvation Army laid William Alex Christian Kruse to rest in the twelve-acre “county area” of the old Demersville Cemetery south of Kalispell. That section holds people who offered no funds for a burial preparation or headstone. Billy’s death certificate lists “Papers at Trail Creek” as the informant for details inscribed on the certificate. This indicates that no one represented or stood up for Billy, who did have some friends. Tom Reynolds, Billy’s best friend, may have been absent during this incident and inquest.⁵⁴

Billy had lost everything in the upper North Fork: all the gorgeous country, the elk, the fish, and the American Dream. Instead, he lies among many other souls in unmarked graves in this poor-house section of the forgotten cemetery. The location of his grave is lost forever. Billy’s memory fades a little more each year.

⁵⁴ State of Montana, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Standard Certificate of Death for William Alex Christian Kruse, Registered no. 51, 28 March 1932. The certificate stated the cause of death as, “Homicide - -bled from left arm shot in arm by rifle (sic) in hands of Gust Peterson.” Coroner: Harry H. Campbell listed Billy’s occupation as “rancher,” and provided a date of birth of 27 April 1886, and an actual age of 45 years, 10 months, 24 days. The certificate states the location and date of burial as the Demersville Cemetery on 28 March 1932. Much of the information compiled on the death certificate apparently was derived from “Papers at Cabin, Trail Creek.”

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

Billy Kruse, Post Script

Mary Powell went on to be a legendary figure in the North Fork. Ed Peterson sold his lake cabin and five acres of land to her. Local lore purports she had relationships with several men, although the separation of truth from rumor proves difficult, since North Forkers are sometimes prone to repeat and embellish a good story. Tom Reynolds claimed that she moved from Ed Peterson's cabin to the cabin of Pat House. She purportedly moved into Glacier National Park with a man named Jesse Bemis and his uncle, Henry Covey.⁵⁵ When her former husband died, she and Jesse married. She reputedly was a bootlegger, attested to by her daughter in a 1987 letter to the owner of the Polebridge Mercantile. Her daughter wrote, ". . . my Mom was raided and all her home brew dumped. She was arrested for selling this to folks around there. . . . Someone paid her fine of \$500, and she was released."⁵⁶

Eventually, Mary moved on and left the North Fork under unknown circumstances. Her daughter reported that Mary's granddaughter was an artist in New Mexico and a member of the "Taos Seven." She said that there is an oil painting of Mary Powell in a real estate office in Taos, New Mexico, decked out in Western garb and holding a gun.⁵⁷

Tom Reynolds, a supporter of Billy Kruse to the end, explained that Mary was dubbed with the nickname "Madame Queen," in reference to either a character who appeared on the popular Amos 'n Andy radio show, or the notorious organized crime figure and gang boss in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s. Regardless, the nickname was not meant to be flattering.⁵⁸ Tom, a lifelong bachelor, died in the North Fork in 1992 at the age of 96. Reynolds never held Mary Powell in high regard and defended the reputation of his friend Billy Kruse to the end. Because Tom lived so long and was himself a well-known and loved North Fork character, the Billy Kruse story remains alive. The Billy Kruse cabin is a popular stop on history tours of the North Fork, and the cabin where Billy was killed is most commonly known as the Madame Queen Cabin, regardless of who owns it today.

Subsequent History of the Billy Kruse Property

Billy, who never married and had no children, died intestate. Thus, on July 5, 1932, the acting administrator of his estate executed an order from the Judge of the District Court of the Eleventh Judicial District of Montana and offered Billy's property for sale to the best and highest bidder.

⁵⁵ When Jessie Bemis died in 1951, no mention of Mary Powell was made in the news release, "North Fork Resident Dies at Age 68," *The Inter Lake* (Kalispell), 26 November 1951; Bemis and Covey were charged in 1944 for the illegal killing of a doe and fawn within the boundary of Glacier National Park, "Polebridge Men Are Fined For Illegal Shooting Of Deer," *The Daily Inter Lake* (Kalispell), 14 February 1944, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Letter, Mrs. L.D. Gentry to Karen Feather, June 1987, in North Fork Archives.

⁵⁷ Letter, Mrs. L.D. Gentry to Karen Feather, June 1987, in North Fork Archives; Letter, Berta Gentry to Karen Feather, ca. 30 June 1987.

⁵⁸ Letter, Tom Reynolds to Karen Feather, ca. 15 April 1987; Don McMillan, "An Evening with Tom Reynolds," 22 December 2018.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Ironically, that turned out to be Ed Peterson's brother, Emil Peterson, likewise a North Fork homesteader. The purchase price for 40 acres and the cabin was \$180.⁵⁹

Emil Peterson owned the property for ten years, from July 1932 until his death in June 1942. It remains unknown what use he made of the cabin (probably rented it out), or the nature of any improvements he made to the property. It is rumored among present-day local residents that the cabin stood vacant for many years.

Emil Peterson died intestate, and the property subsequently was divided 10 ways among various Peterson relatives (including Ed and another North Fork brother, Axel). Various family members made occasional use of the cabin during summer months, but it appears none made any attempt to make improvements to the building. In December 1948, all the family members except one executed a Quit Claim Deed, selling their shares in the property for the sum of one dollar to Myrtle M. Anderson of Richland, Washington. Twenty years later, in December 1968, the last relative relinquished his share to the same Myrtle Anderson, thus consolidating ownership of the property under one owner.⁶⁰

Myrtle and her husband Leif sold the property in December 1968 to Donald J. McMillan and John H. Merrett, who listed their address as Columbia Falls, Montana. No purchase price is mentioned. McMillan and Merrett owned the property for 32 years, until 2000. They nicknamed the cabin, the "Mer-Mac cabin." Don McMillan and his wife Helen spent most summers there and made significant repairs and improvements over the years. The Merretts visited occasionally, especially for family events like birthdays, anniversaries, and holiday celebrations.⁶¹

In July 2000, the McMillans sold the property to Daniel Major Allen, who two months later, in September 2000, divided the property in half into Parcel 3A (south) and Parcel 3AA (north). By family transaction, he executed a Quit Claim Deed ceding ownership of the north half of the property, on which the Billy Kruse cabin sits, to his wife, Cynthia Allen.⁶²

On December 15, 2000, Cynthia Allen sold Parcel 3AA (20.09 acres) and the Billy Kruse cabin to Richard Leigh, and a Warranty Deed was issued. Richard Leigh and his wife Janet retain ownership of the property today. The land was transferred into the Leigh Family Trust effective January 5, 2010.⁶³

Architectural Significance

⁵⁹ Order Confirming Sale of Real Estate, July 22, 1932, Book 207, pp. 509-10; Administrator's Deed, 21 July 1932, Book 211, pp. 117-118.

⁶⁰ Quit Claim Deed, December 22, 1948, Book 300, p. 171; Order Confirming Sale of Real Estate, December 9, 1948, Book 302, p. 25; Quit Claim Deed, December 6, 1968, Book 501, p. 783.

⁶¹ Warranty Deed, December 6, 1968, Book 501, p. 784. Helen McMillan cabin diary, 17 June 1977 to 27 July 2000, in North Fork Archives.

⁶² Warranty Deed from McMillan & Merrett to Daniel Major Allen, July 13, 2000, transaction 20020215210.

⁶³ Warranty Deed from Cynthia Allen to Richard Leigh, December 15, 2000, transaction 200100408050; Quit Claim Deed, Richard E. Leigh to Leigh Family Trust, January 5, 2010, transaction 201000000252.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

The Billy Kruse cabin gains additional significance under Criterion C, standing as a fine example of early-mid century rural vernacular architecture that embodies distinctive construction methods found in the North Fork.

As defined by Kingston Heath, vernacular architecture is “composed of everyday forms, often made with readily available materials for functional application, by local, usually anonymous builders, who respond to traditionally mandated or locally adapted formulas.”⁶⁴ Heath continues:

. . . the very familiarity of a log cabin, false front, school house, a laborer’s four square house encourages us to take it for granted as nothing special. But what is common to a local, may be unfamiliar to an outsider; and whether desirable or not, that characteristically familiar form (as well as other manifestations of a culture) may in many instances be the most reliable record of who and what we are simply because of its nonself-conscious, all too familiar presence. What form the structures take, why those forms are there, and how they got there often hold the story of settlement, land use, the level of technology available, the regional preference of materials, the projected values of its people, and the patterns of economic growth and stagnation.⁶⁵

The ruggedness and inaccessibility of the North Fork generally necessitated the use of locally obtained materials, simple in presentation, and sporting steep gables and well-chinked walls. Although focusing on cabins built east of the North Fork of the Flathead River within the present boundary of Glacier National Park, Pat Bick’s discussion is just as applicable to the cabin resources found west of the river. The cabins and outbuildings almost invariably were constructed from logs from the readily available supply of the forest. One- and two-room cabins comprised most of the early examples—all with steep pitched gable roofs and cedar shakes. Notching included saddle or lap notch corner timbering. Entrances were usually set in the gable ends. The construction of one-room additions to the original building was not uncommon and sawn lumber was employed sparingly. If financial stability occurred, the homesteaders often graduated to larger houses and cabins, often with an increased use of milled lumber.⁶⁶

The Billy Kruse Cabin mirrors much of Bick’s description. Initially constructed featuring a single-pen from the locally-available surrounding larch of the then Blackfoot National Forest, the cabin displays a steep roof originally topped with shakes or shingles made or procured locally. The cabin displays a general progression of smaller size logs bottom to top. Though spare in ornamentation, it boasts extremely tight square notching, especially on the slightly later-

⁶⁴ Kingston Heath, “Striving for Permanence on the Western Frontier: Vernacular Architecture as Cultural Informant in Southwestern Montana” (PhD diss., Brown University, American Civilization Department, 1985), pp. xvii, xix.

⁶⁵ Kingston Heath, “Striving for Permanence on the Western Frontier: Vernacular Architecture as Cultural Informant in Southwestern Montana” (PhD diss., Brown University, American Civilization Department, 1985), pp. xvii, xix, xx.

⁶⁶ Patricia Bick, *Settlement on the North Fork of the Flathead River, Glacier National Park Multiple Property Document*, (NR# 640000439), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT, Section 7 p. 2.

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State

constructed shed addition. This reason for the difference in corner presentation from the original structure to the addition remains unknown. The Billy Kruse Cabin also displays exposed second-story floor joists with through mortis and tenon construction. The use of mortise and tenon joints is found in the cornering of some log cabins; however, its application to stabilize the second story floor in the Billy Kruse Cabin is unusual. "...A clean and tight mortise and tenon is recognized as a sign of skill..." and use of this joint reflects on the experience of the cabin's builders as it is an "incredibly difficult joint" for the inexperienced.⁶⁷ Differing from many log cabins, including those documented by Bick east of the river, the entry's location appears on a side wall, not a gable end, a feature more commonly associated with Plains cabins.⁶⁸ An open porch, now partially enclosed, covers the entry to direct snow load away from the eave. End-hewing around the door and windows is even and consistent, indicating the builder's skill and competence.

Billy Kruse benefited from his cabin's construction on a friend's already patented property, saving him the effort of needing to fulfill the usual requirements associated with homesteading. Despite not needing to demonstrate any improvements to the property, it was only four years later that Billy expanded his home, adding a finely constructed log addition to provide extra space when he and Tom Reynolds shared in his cabin.

Following the precepts of the vernacular architecture of the area and the time, the Billy Kruse Cabin represents the construction of choice in remote and forested areas of western Montana during the state's territorial period and into the twentieth century. Well preserved historic log cabins, while still found, are becoming increasingly scarce with the passing years with many replaced by newer log structures.

The Billy Kruse Cabin reflects the life of a single man, often occupied by work away from home. The cabin stands as a testament to the intentions of its builders, to construct a functional and durable building that could withstand the harsh elements of the North Fork. While undoubtedly never an intent of Billy Kruse and the men who reportedly assisted him in the cabin's construction, it complements the forested and rural setting very well. It retains a high degree of integrity and stands as a fine example of simple, yet well-constructed log building that continues to serve succeeding generations.

⁶⁷ Mario Rodriguez, "All About Mortise and Tenon Joints," *Fine Woodworking*, found at <https://www.finewoodworking.com/2005/09/12/all-about-mortise-and-tenon-joints>, accessed 26 April, 2021; Cabinetry Guide, "Pros & Cons of Wood Joint Types," found at <https://cabinetryguide.wordpress.com/2017/11/28/pros-cons-of-wood-joint-types/>, accessed 26 April 2021.

⁶⁸ Mary Wilson, "Log Cabin Studies, Cultural Resource Report No. 9," (Ogden, UT: USDA Forest Service, 1984), p. 34.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

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Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

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Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property
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Flathead County, MT
County and State

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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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- 1) Latitude 48.944570 Longitude, -114.454000
- 2) Latitude 48.944550 Longitude, -114.451180
- 3) Latitude 48.943740 Longitude, -114.451150
- 4) Latitude 48.943780 Longitude, -114.453910

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The National Register boundary includes the NE1/4 of a larger 20-acre tract of land (Tract 3AA). The legal location of the National Register boundary is the N1/2 NE1/4 SE1/4 NE1/4 of Section 28, Township 37N, Range 22W, encompassing a total of 5 acres. See attached

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

topographical map below under "Additional Documentation," page 31 confirms this boundary.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary for the Billy Kruse Cabin includes the cabin and associated (not historic) outhouse. It includes sufficient setting to impart the rural feeling of the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Lois E. Walker
organization: North Fork Landowners Association
street & number: 11233 N. Fork Road
city or town: Polebridge state: MT zip code: 59928
e-mail lewalker@nvdi.com
telephone: 406-407-2791
date: April 2021

Additional Documentation

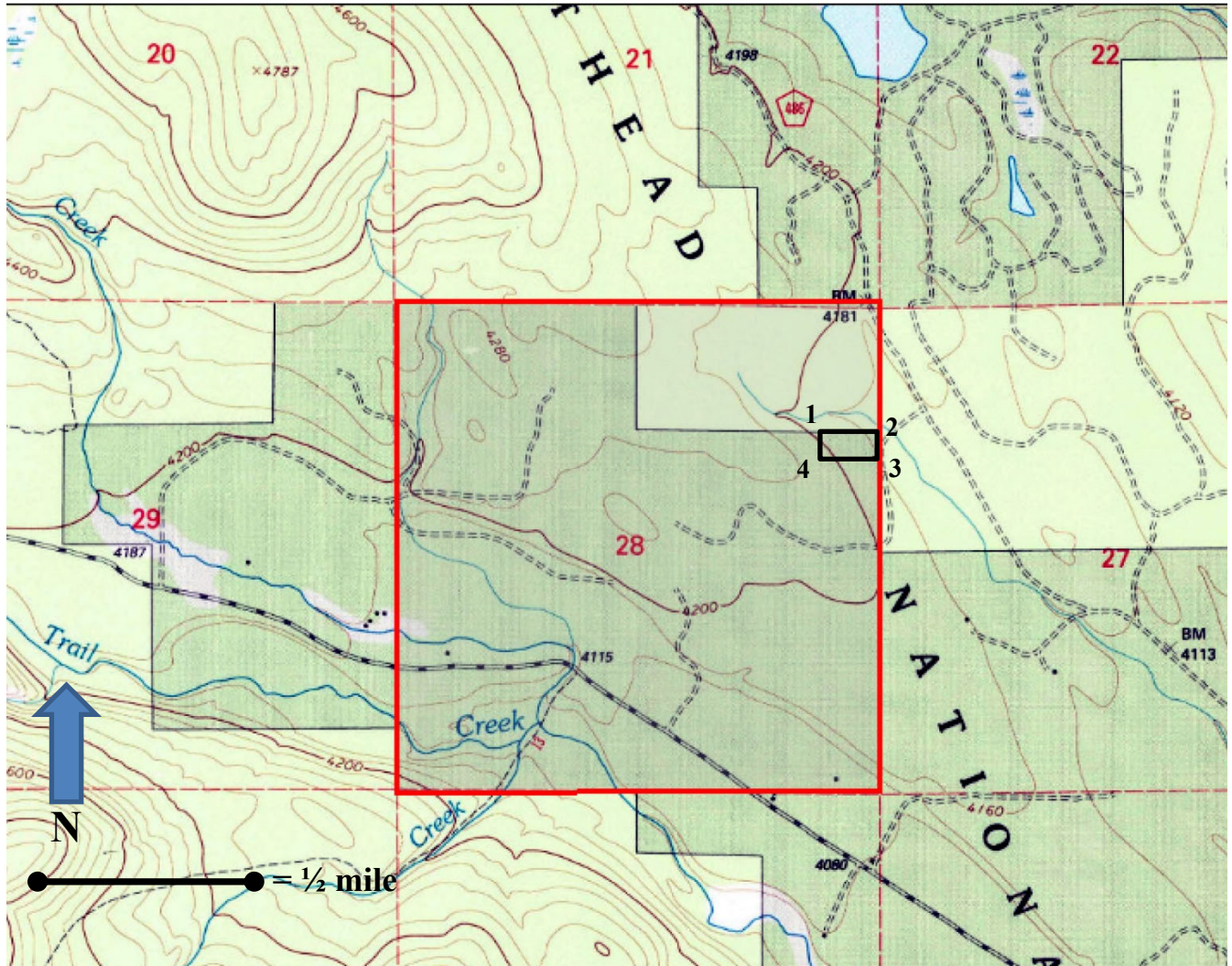
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Additional Documentation: Maps

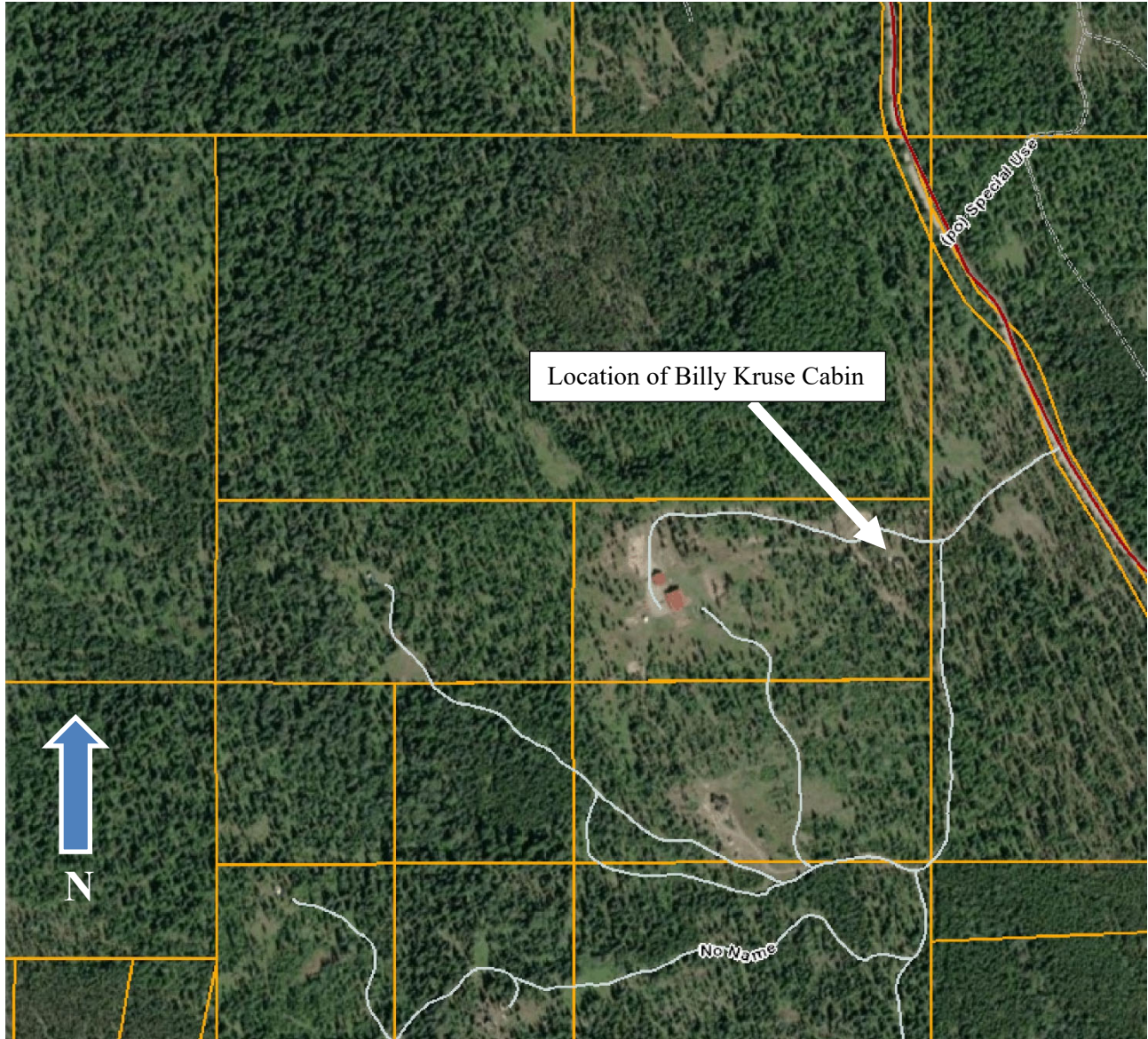


Location of the Billy Kruse Cabin, N1/2 NE1/4 SE1/4 NE1/4 of Section 28, Township 37N, Range 22W. Found on the Trailcreek 7.5' quadrangle map.

- 1) Latitude 48.944570 Longitude, -114.454000
- 2) Latitude 48.944550 Longitude, -114.451180
- 3) Latitude 48.943740 Longitude, -114.451150
- 4) Latitude 48.943780 Longitude, -114.453910

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

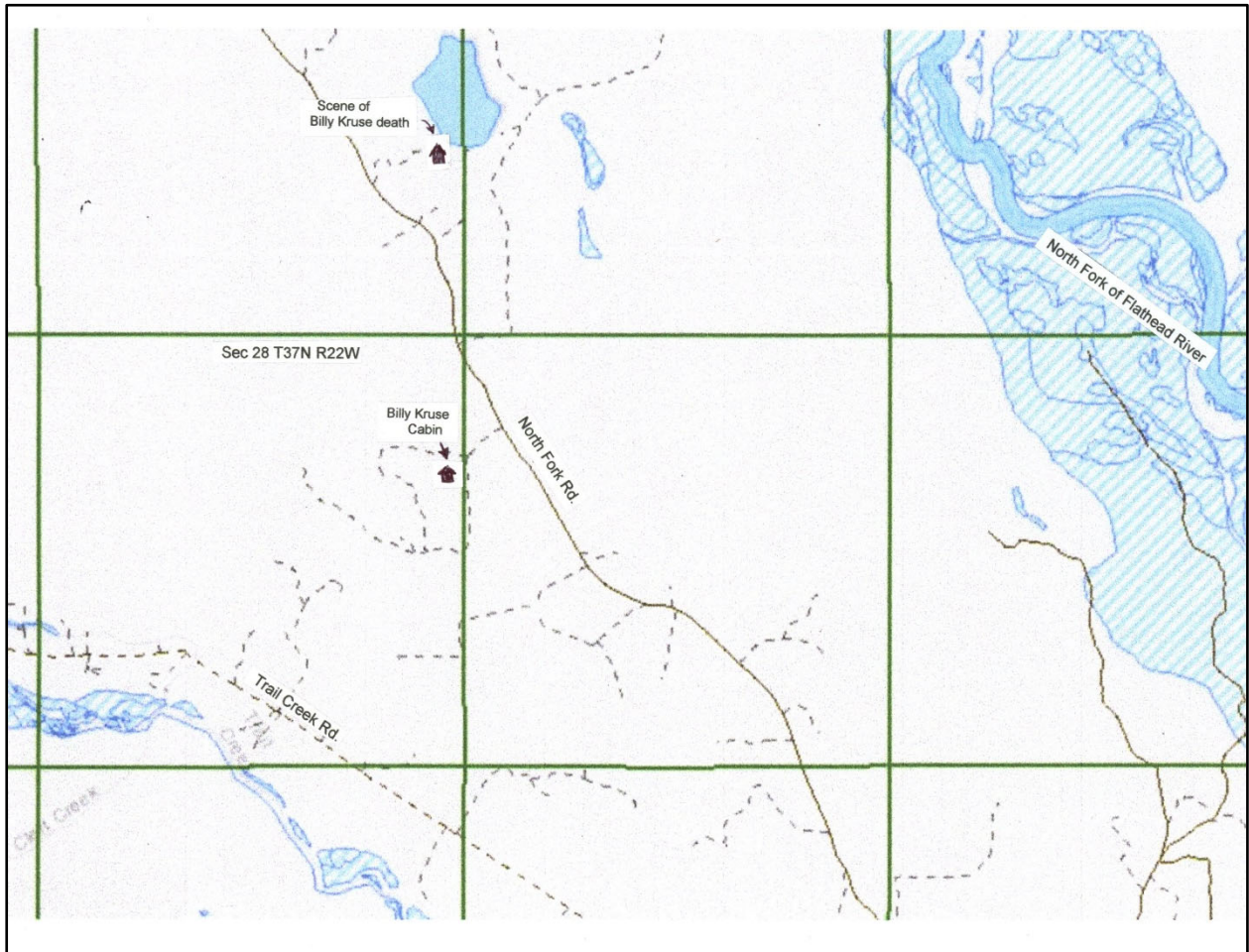
Flathead County, MT
County and State



Aerial view of location of the Billy Kruse Cabin, N1/2 NE1/4 SE1/4 NE1/4 in Section 28, Township 37N, Range 22W.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Map showing location of the Billy Kruse Cabin in N1/2 NE¼ of SE¼ of NE¼ of Section 28, Township 37N, Range 22W and the location of his demise in SE¼ of Section 21, Township 37N Range 22W.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Additional Documentation: Historic Images



Billy Kruse Cabin, 1929. Approach to cabin from east, view to west. Unknown photographer.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Billy Kruse Cabin, 1929. Cabin from west, view to east, showing addition. Unknown photographer.



Billy Kruse Cabin, 1929. Billy Kruse (left, in hat) with friend Tom Reynolds. Unknown photographer.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Billy Kruse Cabin, 1969. Cabin from northeast, view to southwest, showing open porch.
Photographer, Larry Wilson.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Billy Kruse Cabin, 1969. Cabin, showing 1929 addition, and porch from west. Photographer, Larry Wilson.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Billy Kruse Cabin, 1982. Cabin from northwest, view to southeast. Photographer, Larry Wilson.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State

Additional Documentation: National Register Photographs



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Dick Leigh
Date Photographed: September 23, 2018
Description: Approach to cabin from east, view to west
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0001.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Dick Leigh
Date Photographed: September 23, 2018
Description: View from southeast, view to northwest
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0002.

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Dick Leigh
Date Photographed: September 23, 2018
Description: View from west, view to east
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0003

Billy Kruse Cabin

Name of Property

Flathead County, MT

County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Lois Walker
Date Photographed: April 22, 2021
Description: View from south, view to north
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0004

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Lois Walker
Date Photographed: April 18, 2021
Description: View from east, view to west
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0005

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Lois Walker
Date Photographed: April 18, 2021
Description: Close up of south wall, view to the north.
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0006

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Lois Walker
Date Photographed: April 18, 2021
Description: Interior, close up of Billy Kruse signature.
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0007

Billy Kruse Cabin
Name of Property

Flathead County, MT
County and State



Name of Property: Billy Kruse Cabin
City or Vicinity: Polebridge
County: Flathead State: MT
Photographer: Lois Walker
Date Photographed: April 18, 2021
Description: Interior showing stairs.
MT_FlatheadCo_BillyKruseCabin_0008

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

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- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

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