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Letters from a Forester in Summer Camp

Ames Forestry Club

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Letters from a Forester in Summer Camp

Dear Doc:

Well, I guess maybe you didn’t expect to hear from me so soon after I left Ames but there is a reason—we are here waiting for transportation out to camp. We reached this place at eleven this morning and thought that a truck would be here to take us right out, but here it is two p. m. and no truck!

I’m glad I brought my Corona along as I know you would never be able to read my writing if I had to use my pen. I’m sitting in the box-car that is used as a station and holding the Corona on my lap.

There is a river right alongside the track that is as red as rust. It is called Iron River and is well named. There are a dozen iron mines within five miles of this town and they all pump their surplus water into this stream. We climbed the hill back of the station just after lunch to visit one of these mines but they wouldn’t let us go down the shaft. The miners’ clothes and faces were plastered with red rust from the ore until they all looked like Indians. We went through all the engine shops and inspected the machines used to hoist the men and the ore. Very interesting.

We were told that our camp is to be on Lake Hagerman about twelve miles out of town on road No. 73, and that the fishing is good!

It has started to rain so I will close for this time. There is another town just a mile from here but I guess this will be our permanent address so you can write me here. More next time.

Your pal,

“Slim.”

Ames Foresters’ Camp,
Stambaugh, Mich.
June 15, 1924.

Dear Doc:

You can be glad you are taking such a simple course as M. E. where you will always be living in a house, and besides that always living in a town. How would you like to walk a half mile thru the mud to get a drink of water? It
rains awfully easily up here but who wants to drink rain- 
water? And who wants to sleep in wet blankets? 
We had rain in less than an hour after we reached camp 
the other day and you should have seen us trying to get up 
tents to cover our supplies. We did get up two tents to 
sleep in and I guess we were all so tired that night that 
we didn't notice how hard the ground felt. Believe me it 
don't make a very good mattress, especially if there are a 
few little bumps and hollows that don't fit the bumps and 
hollows of the human anatomy. 
The last of the stragglers came to camp yesterday and 
there are twenty of us in five big army squad-tents. These 
tents are big enough for eight men each so you see we have 
plenty of room to stretch out at night. We have cut about 
five tons of balsam and hemlock boughs for our beds so it 
begins to look like pleasant dreams even if we do have rain 
every day.
We killed a porcupine last night just a few rods from 
camp. The men at the lumber camp near here tell us that 
the porcupines will chew our shoes if they can get at them. 
Sounds like bunk to me. I dont think even a porcupine 
could relish some of the shoes in this camp!
We were on a nice little hike yesterday and if our coming 
hikes are thru the same kind of trails you can expect to wit- 
tness the remarkable phenomena of a web-footed human 
when I get back to school in the fall!! We traversed ten 
miles of swamp in the short space of a three-mile hike! At 
least it seemed like we covered ten miles and it certainly was 
90% swamp. I can easily understand where all those mos- 
quitos came from that were in my tent the first night. 
These swamps should be able to produce easily four tons of 
mosquitoes to the acre!
Going to town this afternoon to see what the attraction 
is at the Candy Land soda fountain. More later.
Yours,

"Slim."

Ames Foresters' Camp, 
Stambaugh, Mich. 
June — , 1924.

Dear Doc:
You asked what our program was for a day and now that 
I have been on flunkey duty a couple times and on the wood 
detail a couple times I can give you a fair idea of what 
happens.
Ed, our chef, gets going about 5 a. m. and after he gets
the fire started he calls his helpers or the flunkeys for that
day and things get under way for breakfast. Lunches for
noon are also prepared and all sacked up ready for the day's
hike. About 6 a. m. the Polar Bears take their morning
plunge to which they are welcome so far as I am concerned.
From the noise they make they either enjoy it or else they
are trying to make the rest of us believe they like it. Prof.
Jeff is a charter member of the organization and is learning
to dive. At least I think he is learning to dive because every
few minutes you can hear a splash like the Woolworth Build-
ing falling into Hudson River.

At 6:30 the first general alarm sounds and if you get up
then you have plenty time to go down to the lake, wash up,
clean your teeth and comb your hair before “first call”
which comes at 6:55 but most of the gang waits for that
“first call” before they get out of bed and then they can
easily qualify for the track team the way they rush to get
to the table.

Breakfast is served at 7 or as soon as Ed yells “Come and
get it” and he has never yet had to make good his threat to
“give it to the dogs”. You remember I never did care to
get up for breakfast there at school but up here I will soon
be able to challenge the world when it comes to shredded
wheat, toast, bacon and coffee and be ready for seconds by
the time Ed brings in the second platter of toast. The
flunkeys have to rustle to get things cleaned up in time to
start for the woods at 8 but the rest of us only have to get
our note-books or perhaps the instruments we will use in
cruising.

From 8 till 5 we are in the woods or on the hike, except
for an hour at noon when we stop for lunch which consists
of a couple of sandwiches (one of which is bound to be pea-
ut-butter), an apple and some cookies or cake. We study
timber growth, logging operations, milling, or railroad con-
struction, or perhaps we will do some timber estimating
with some mapping or surveying. It all is diversified enough
so that no one thing becomes monotonous and at 5 we are
back in camp for a swim and a rest before supper or if the
supply of wood has become depleted we locate a dead tree,
fell it, buck it up into lengths that can be carried, bring it
to camp and cut it up into stove lengths and pile it near
the cook-tent.

Supper comes at 6 p. m. and boy you may have seen angry
mobs in the movies but you never did see such a concerted
attack upon a poor defenseless victim as is launched upon
Ed's cooking at six bells!. If you think it is impossible for
a man to eat sixteen slices of bread with gravy, the only way
I can prove it to you is for you to come on up and have supper with us some night when the hike has been long and the gravy is nice and thick!

After supper we build up a cheery blaze and all sit around the camp-fire and either try to outdo Paul Bunyon or listen to stories of his past performances. Some of the fellows walk down to Wells camp which is about a quarter mile down the road and where it is possible to buy smokes, gum and candy bars. Also there are a number of lumberjacks down there who are always willing to swap yarns or tell of the old days when there was plenty of pine left in this section. We have three boats at our disposal and each night some of the gang can be seen enjoying a little exercise at the oars. Occasionally we have some Foresters’ Anthems accompanied by Prof. Coville on the uke but most of the singing in camp emanates from Tent No. 1 where Lundy swings a mean pick on the mandolin and the sweet sad strains of “The Baptist Sunday School” or the plaintive lilt of “My Wife and Policeman Six Feet” melt into the harmony of the rallying call of the family of loons across the lake.

Nearly all lights are out before ten and mosquito netting is arranged and pleasant dreams are the finishing touch to another active day.

We started a crap game one evening but the total capital represented in the game was only seven cents so you see the session did not last long. Another night we tried to get a game of bridge going but had difficulty in finding four players and at that the fourth man thought it was all the same as 500! Needless to state the encounter was of short duration.

We get up early tomorrow to drive over into Wisconsin so me for the blankets. More later.

Your pal,

“Slim.”

Ames Foresters’ Camp,
Stambaugh, Mich.
July —, 1924.

Dear Doc:

I wish you could come up here for a visit while we are camped here. I’m sure you would like it. I like the country better each week and I’m beginning to wonder whether I shall care to go back to school when the camp closes. There are over 200 lakes within fifty miles of here and there is good fishing in nearly all of them. They have wonderful
highways in all directions from this town. We took a nice little drive in a Dodge touring car with Mr. Wells, the logging superintendent last week while he made his weekly tour of inspection of other operations in which his company is interested. All the men in our tent made the trip. We started at 5:30 and drove to Ontonagon on Lake Superior about 95 miles from camp. We stopped at the various camps along the way and also visited a copper mine near Bruce’s Crossing. We saw several deer near the highway as we were returning. At Ontonagon we visited the fish market on the docks and also a big paper-pulp plant.

We had a very entertaining visitor in camp one evening last week, a Mr. Selden who was one of the first white men who ventured into this part of the state when Indians were in possession of the country. Mr. Selden was prospecting for iron ore and located the first mine in the region and is still heavily interested in iron mining here. Incidentally we learned that the smartest man in the employ of the iron mines here is a mechanical engineer who graduated at Ames in 1906, so there is a chance for you here after you finish.

We have started our survey in the township south of us and before we leave here we will have cruised, estimated and mapped the entire area. About four days each week will be put in on this work until we finish and that will be one of the real accomplishments of this camp.

We are developing some real champions at pitching horseshoes these evenings. So far the laurels belong to Ed and Prof. Coville but some of the students are becoming proficient too. Punk put a ringer on the hound’s nose last night. He should have yelled “Timber” when he shot. The dog has recovered sufficiently to be able to inspect the garbage can today so his time goes on without any reduction.

We visited a look-out tower last Sunday but there had been a rain the night before so the guard did not have to stay on the job. Not bad, is it? When it rains you can lay off. They get $3.50 per day for all sunshine days so I imagine they pray for fair weather! There were a number of warning placards posted about the tower urging extreme caution with camp-fires, matches and cigarettes.

That same day we found more strawberries and blueberries than we could eat. I certainly am fond of wild strawberries. Never had found them anywhere in such quantities.

“Shorty”, the Clear Lake mariner, left his pipe and tobacco pouch somewhere in the woods again yesterday for the umpsteenth time. Guess he must have started another
excavation in his search for Indian relics and probably buried his pipe and tobacco during the operation.

Next week we are to drive to Iron Mountain to visit one of Ford’s saw-mills. More later.

Your pal, “Slim.”


Dear Doc:

We have just visited a logging operation over in Wisconsin, you see the state line is only a few miles from camp. This outfit was engaged in cutting all the merchantable logs for a furniture factory and as a by-product they were taking the small stuff for railroad ties. They have a small tie mill at camp and as there is a good market for hardwood ties at present they are realizing quite a neat profit from material that in many cases would be wasted.

Nothing so remarkable about the mill itself but they have one most peculiar laborer who is known locally as “Barefoot Charley” from his habit of going about his work without shoes or sox! He was engaged in rolling the logs down the rollway to the saw-carriage and was extremely dexterous with the cant-hook. It developed that during his spare time he is somewhat of a trapper and was real anxious that we all stop at his home and inspect his collection of wild-life. Of course that made a hit with all of us so we accepted his invitation. He had several foxes in a large wire cage and a sizeable family of tame skunks but the prize of the collection was a black bear which had been caught in a monstrous trap a couple of weeks previous and which was still unable to use the foot that had been held by the heavy steel springs. The poor creature seemed reconciled to the possibility of spending the remainder of his life chained up to a post in the front yard. He did not seem interested in having his likeness reproduced by our cameras but nevertheless we took a number of pictures of him. The skunks were not so particular and one of Charley’s daughters obligingly held a pair of the woods pussies while the camp photographers did their stuff. The foxes seemed intent on running up their mileage record and must have covered at least twenty miles in as many minutes round and round their cage.

There seems to be no very strict regulation as to disposal of brush in logging operations in Wisconsin and the land that was logged off last winter is a dreary looking wilder-
ness of stumps and dead tops. This of course constitutes a fire hazard besides leaving a whale of a job for anyone that might want to clear the land for farming. Of course the land is not very adaptable for farming because so much of it is rocky but where there is any depth to the soil it is very fertile and this whole section of the country is called "Cloverland" because red and white clover both grow along the roadside or in the clearings in some places coming up so thick that it looks like some of our best clover fields there around Ames. Timothy hay also comes up with the clover and it would appear to be a good country for dairying altho we haven’t seen a dairy in our trips around. That reminds me of the farmers from whom we obtain the milk supply for the camp: a couple of old bachelors who have a small farm a few miles from camp. They have a nice, big, comfortable house on the farm but there are no curtains for any of the windows! They thought curtains would look too much like there might be women around the place and they therefore do without. They have six or eight cows and in the morning the herd is turned out to go to the timber, each cow with a bell strapped to its neck. In the evening, when milking time approaches, one of the men strikes off into the woods in the direction of the jingling bells but occasionally the cows take a notion to rest just when they should be coming home and when the bells are quiet the herd is as difficult to locate as a loaned necktie in a fraternity house. Less than a mile from their house and near the bank of the Brule River is a small Indian burying ground. Each grave is covered with a small hut which looks like a dog kennel being three feet high and just the shape of the grave. We were told that when the Indians lived here they built these huts of cedar bark but now pine boards are used which obviates the necessity of frequent replacements.

Our camp relic-hunter promises to look into the matter of possible treasure in the locality of these burial grounds so we may have some material to add to the museum on the top floor of Central when we return.

It is too bad that Ames does not have a racing crew because we uncovered the makings of a wonderful rowing team the other evening. You remember I told you we had the use of some boats. Eight of the gang decided to take a trip to the end of the lake and of course there are only two oars to each boat so they requisitioned the spades and shovels from the equipment tent and with their improvised paddles made the two mile cruise to the outlet in six minutes passing two motor boats on the way!

One evening the transit was being used to watch a heron
in a tree on the other side of the lake, a distance of about a half mile. There is a little cabin on an island near the other shore used as an over-night camp by folks from town and one of the men took a shot at the island with the transit and immediately got a boat at the dock and rowed over. He did not return until ten-thirty so we assumed that the Kiwanis Club must have been in session over there that evening.

Must close for tonight.

Your pal,

“Slim.”

Ames Foresters’ Camp,
Stambaugh, Mich.
August 10, 1921.

Dear Doc:

We have been globe-trotting this week. Prof. MacDonald is here with his big Buick and we have made three trips which took a day each. On Thursday we drove to Phelps, Wisconsin, on North Twin Lake to visit a saw-mill and acid plant. It was a charming location and a very complete outfit but the odor at the wood distillation or acid plant was none too sweet. The managers were very courteous to us, allowing us to go all thru the place and the workers in the mill let us try our hand at some of the work of handling logs and lumber. The mill was a single head-saw and single re-saw affair but they put out a heap of lumber in a day.

On Saturday our six-car cavalcade made the run to the Caspian mine which is just down the river from Stambaugh. Our party was split into two sections and each section made a complete tour of the underground workings of one of the largest iron mines here in company with a mine captain and a shift boss. There was a complete electric railway used to haul the ore from the various parts of the mine to the main shaft. A stream of water ran along each side of the track on its way to the lowest mine level where a pump station forces the water to the ground level some four or five hundred feet above. They told us the number of hundred gallons of water that was forced to the top each minute but it has left me all ready. We were impressed with the amount of timber used daily as mine props and timbers and the kinds of timber that was preferred. Tamarack (larch) is the favorite and two carloads are used daily. One man was busy all the time pushing a flat car of props and tim-
bers to some part of the mine. Some time when you think you need a vibrator treatment just take the job of driller in an iron mine and hang on to an air drill all day. I felt like I had been thru a Swedish massage when I tried to operate a drill for a couple minutes.

We had been advised to wear slickers while underground and the fellows who were not so clothed found their clothes plenteously smeared with red rust when we again reached the surface. Water seeps thru the ceilings or roofs of all the lower levels. We were each given a miner’s lamp to use while below and they were so handy that most of us purchased them for a souvenir of the visit.

Next week we go to Niagara, Wisconsin, to visit a paper mill. Tell you something about it next time.

Your pal,

“Slim.”

August 24, 1924.

Dear Doc:

This is probably the last you will hear from me unless we decide to stop over in Chicago on the way back to Ames as camp closes this week.

We had a very interesting trip to Niagara, Wisconsin, and to Iron Mountain, Mich., while Prof. MacDonald was here. The paper plant at Niagara is called the safest mill of its kind in the country. No one has been hurt in their mill in the last eighteen months! We followed the progress of the stock from the mill-pond where the logs start into the mill clear thru to the callender where the paper comes out all ironed smooth and glossy.

Briefly, the process consists in removing the bark, chipping the wood blocks, cooking the chips, stirring or beating this cooked mass, mixing and thinning with water and running the mixture over belts and presses extracting the water and thru more rollers, finally they produce a long wide ribbon of paper. Rolls of this paper are run thru more rollers, some heated and others cold until the finished product is the high grade glossy magazine paper. This particular plant sends their paper to the Red Book magazine and it produces or reproduces the photo section.

At Iron Mountain we were taken thru one of Ford’s sawmills and body plants. To give you an idea as to the size of this plant: five hundred men are busy all the time just
sweeping up the various workshops! They told us that we would be able to carry away in our hands all the material that is wasted there in a day and I guess we could because there was nothing wasted! The pieces of scrap wood are sent to the wood distillation plant to be converted into wood alcohol and the other products of that industry while the sawdust is mixed with oil and used as fuel for the boilers. You would enjoy going thru their power plant. The boilers are four stories high and we climbed to the top to see how the sawdust and oil were fed in and to watch the burning fuel drop down the length of those four stories. These boilers supply heat for a battery of forty-eight dry kilns in which the wood or lumber is seasoned in one-sixth the time required for air seasoning.

Every piece of wood that goes to make up the body of a Ford is cut and trimmed in this plant including the handles for tire-pumps.

The plant has its own fire department and a call was answered at the wood distillation plant while we were there. We passed by the fire station on our way out and the firemen were occupying their idle moments by painting the window sash for an addition to the plant which is now under construction.

We have taken several field trips the last week studying botany with Dr. Pammel who recently joined us in our work. We found thirty-one varieties of plants and flowers on one trip right near camp. Also we learned that there is a quantity of edible mushrooms in the shaded woods and we have enjoyed a couple side-dishes of mushrooms. On one trip thru a swamp we found some most peculiar shaped plants with stems and leaves forming cups or pitchers the plant being called pitcher-plant. Another very beautiful flower found in the swamp was the lady slipper. I sent some of each of the last two home and the pitcher plant survived the trip nicely.

We were challenged to a game of baseball by a boys' camp over on another lake but when we looked over the possibilities we found we had men for the pitching and managing but we were very short on some of the non-essentials such as a catcher and several infielders and outfielders. Neither did we have equipment so we were forced to call off the proposed match.

We should be back in Ames about Monday so I shall hope to see you in a couple days.

Your pal,

"Slim."