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The C.C.C. in North Carolina

EARL F. OLSON, '33

Forestry Foreman, Camp McClosky, Marion, N. C.

The ten Civilian Conservation Corps camps on the Pisgah National Forest are scattered through its four ranger districts. Their location in each case has been determined by the major project assigned to that particular camp. In some instances the blocks of territory needing timber stand improvement take the camps to isolated mountain spots of high elevation. In others where road construction is the principal job one finds the camps on main highways and such accessible locations.

The above-mentioned jobs are only two of the major works on the Pisgah. These and others are the basis for the organization laid out by the Forest Service for handling the projects. At the head is the camp superintendent, called the project superintendent. Under him are the cultural foremen, road foremen, and construction foremen. These men are individually responsible for the projects assigned to the camp. The usual projects in progress are timber stand improvement, road construction, road re-routing, road maintenance and trail construction and improvement, camp ground construction, planting, and roadside esthetics. These can best be explained individually.

Timber stand improvement is designated as the main project on the Forest. It is the primary purpose of the camps, and all possible preference is given it. The stands of timber treated are largely young growth, and some second growth. They are those stands which have taken root naturally following logging operations. On the district where the writer is located the young growth stands are mostly 15 to 20 years old. The principal species is yellow poplar, which occurs in the cove sites (draws or small valleys draining into creeks, which are well watered and protected and of good soil). Other species are oak, locust, white pine, and sweet birch. Except the last, they are more often found on exposed sites. Poplar is the most favored tree because of its relatively rapid growth, excellent form, and marketability.

Careful consideration is given the importance of the work. Only the better sites properly stocked are worked over. The cultural foremen scout out the areas beforehand, taking note of these conditions and determining the advisability of going ahead.

The usual crew per foreman on timber stand improvement is
15 men. Three straw bosses watch and help three squads of four men each. The 12 men on squads each run a strip through the woods back and forth much the same as planting crews: i. e., in staggered formation, the end man being a guide for the others to follow in order. The "crop tree" system is used. The ideal stocking for a mature stand being about 150 trees per acre, the crop trees are selected every 17½ feet and the strips run that distance apart. A man on a line selects a crop tree at the beginning point of his strip. His selection is first the one of best form, and second the best species and the thriftiest. By inspection he decides whether competition to the selected tree is present and proceeds to cut or girdle any menacing weed trees or lesser trees of good species. Only those giving direct competition to the crop tree are cut. This done, the man moves along his strip 17½ feet more and picks out another crop tree at that point. If a crop tree is not in need of help he merely moves on to the next. The usual so-called weed species are black gum, sour-wood, silverbell, dogwood, and mountain magnolia.

There are usually three cultural foremen in each camp with one designated as chief-of-party. The output per man in the crews runs from one to two and a half acres per day.

The enrolled men are for the most part fairly good workers. Since timber stand improvement is given preference the cultural foreman takes the pick of the men for the crews. Often, however, they must be handled "with gloves," for they do not
always respond like regular labor. Handling them is a unique experience and a chance to learn much about human nature.

Two more jobs administered by cultural foremen are the planting program and roadside improvement of truck trails. The former involves gathering of seed and wild stock, surveying of areas to be planted, caring for seedlings, and planting. Roadside work is clearing and cleanup work to increase scenic and esthetic values.

Special duties of cultural foremen include boundary surveys and painting, timber marking, and scaling.

The cultural foremen keep a complete record of the work. They make regular tallies of stands covered. They compute the trees and the cuts per acre and classify the stand by ages and types. They keep progress maps. A supervisor's deputy (accompanied by a regional inspector) makes regular inspections of the work. He notes the quality of the work, the crew organization, their output, and their progress.

The main types of road constructed are the standard Forest Service truck trails. When finished these roads are to be used by logging operations during sales. The jobs present some serious engineering problems, for the routes often go in precarious places and much rock work must be done. One road to which the boys have taken a dislike is nicknamed "Hell's Highway."

Public camp grounds are springing up on many desirable places in the forest. These spots will be a valuable and much needed recreational asset. Storage buildings, powder houses,
and fire towers are also under construction.

The camps themselves are much the same as elsewhere. They have evolved from tent cities to well constructed camps with barracks and all modern conveniences. The strength of most of them is 200 men. When the recruits first arrived there were many questions in the minds of those in charge. They wondered how successful this sort of labor would be. A period of three or four months had passed before both men and superiors had finally become adjusted to each other and to their jobs.

Now the work moves smoothly; but problems of a different sort arise. One of these is the period of work each day. At first only five hours' work was possible on distant projects under the strictly eight-hour day. A ruling was received that six effective hours must be spent on the job exclusive of travel time and the lunch hour. This meant early departures, short lunch hours, and late arrivals in camp in the afternoon. In places the recruits attempted to strike in protest. The matter has been smoothed out and the six-hour rule continues.

The welfare of the boys is in the hands of a designated Army officer in each camp. Forest Service personnel lend a hand in organization of athletic teams for competition among camps and in giving lectures and holding classes. An orchestra has been formed in one place. Speaking of welfare it is interesting to note that several of the men have seen fit to get married on their meager wages of 30 dollars a month! And another surprising (?) fact is that nearly a third of the cultural foremen hired on this Forest have married since the work began.

The work of the C. C. C., I believe, is of distinct benefit to the Pisgah National Forest. Many improvements needed for years are now on their way to completion. Items on which the Forest was behind, probably for financial reasons, are now caught up. The young growth stands of timber which would soon be under serious competition, and in some cases stagnating, are being released and given a real chance.

As for the boys doing the work—they are becoming forestry-minded more strongly than any advertising or teaching could make them.

This silvicultural work is a goal which foresters in charge had never, before the E. C. W. program came along, even hoped to realize. It was an ideal seen mostly on paper. Now the thinnings, liberations, and cleanings are almost completed, and disease-clean up along with them.

For the duration of the camps the Forest will enjoy a well-organized fire system. It may suffer, though, in having to brush up its old organization when all this man-power is gone.