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Black Hills Bivouac

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We were finally going to find out for ourselves what summer camp was like. We had heard stories about it from the older boys but we didn't know just how much to believe.

Everyone had to find his own way to the Black Hills camp. Some hitch-hiked, some came by car or train, but we all got there. Four good foresters were bringing the camp equipment in the G.M.C. and the old Dodge, and as they pulled into camp and skidded to a stop, we all jumped aboard and helped unload the boxes and trunks. The younger boys did most of the work because they wanted to get familiar with the tools we were going to use. Some were so eager to learn that they missed the first camp meal and when one of them was discovered later in the tool shed, he was standing along the south way and repeating the names of tools in order to memorize them. He had them all in a row and he knew most of them except the axe and the shovel. He always got those two mixed up.

Oscar got Gurk's number the first day of camp. Gurk was sent into the mess hall to do K.P. so he started flirting with Mrs. Oscar. He really thought he was doing right though, because he figured that K.P. meant "kiss people." He was punished by being fed peanut butter sandwiches every noon for the duration of camp.

Our camp work was usually finished by the middle of the afternoon and then everyone could do as he pleased. Most of the boys went to sleep. Sims paid one of the fellows five cents every half hour to ring the bell (an old circular saw blade). When the bell rang, Sims buried himself further in the covers and just ignored it. He said it made him feel good to lay in bed while the bell rang.
One fine day to remember is the one in which we visited Wind Cave, the buffalo herd and Evans’ Plunge in Hot Springs. All the boys went swimming and everyone had a swell time.

Some of the nicer boys (those that wouldn’t go into the bad town of Custer) were getting pretty long hair because they failed to visit the barber. So Chopper John and A. B. Thorpe decided to give each other a hair cut. The only barber tool was an old scissor found in the machine shed. It had been used previously to cut patching for inner tubes and also for bobbing horses’ tails. They sharpened it by rubbing it on the staves of our cots. Thus it was that terms such as “egg head,” “naked noggin,” and “crooked cranium” came into use. Chopper finally got professional and charged a dime a clip. Sometimes you could bribe him with a report, or an extra sandwich.

Weekends were always welcome. Some fellows went to Custer, some to other towns, some to a lake to fish and some just stayed home. Many a good forester went to his doom as he followed the crowd through the swinging doors of “Blacky’s,” or “Bucket of Blood,” for short. They were never the same after being there once. They were the culprits who introduced the game of poker into camp.

One beautiful night in July was what everyone termed as “a swell night for snipe.” Forty-one fellows in camp distinctly heard the snipe calling each other and after a few minutes the forty-second member said he thought he caught the sound too. Most of the fellows thought it would be a good idea to have a snipe breakfast the next morning. Everyone liked snipe drumsticks excepting the one fellow who’d never tasted them, but he was certainly willing to go help hunt them. After the art of snipe hunting was thoroughly described to him, he couldn’t contain his joy and he uttered high emotional squeals of happiness at the thought of such a pleasant adventure. Let’s call this guy Pud. It happened that Pud was the only man in camp that was lucky enough to own a gunny sack. He also got out a beautiful club he had carved from a pine branch and was saving to throw at marmots. Of course everyone had a flashlight and being armed in this manner, we started our hunting trip.

Pud was having a wonderful time picking up pointers on his job as chief snipe killer. Of course he had the honor of holding the sack first and no one could relieve him of his job. He promised to pass the sack to someone else after he had gotten ten snipes. After a very long hike, an ideal snipe hangout was located. Then Pud began his job of blinking the light eight times every five minutes. The rest of the fellows left to round

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up the snipe. Last we saw was eight winks of a flashlight through the trees.

Next morning when Pud ambled back to camp and saw all the fellows already there, he simply said, "Shucks, you guys ain't got enough patience. I almost caught a bunch myself 'cause I heard them just a little ways from where I was." He stuffed his laundry bag back in his gunny sack, wiped the dirt off his club and hoped for a more favorable night to hunt again.

Some of our sightseeing trips took us to the Rushmore Memorial, the Federal Fish Hatchery at Spearfish, and the Home-stake Gold Mine at Lead. The Fourth of July was spent at Devil's Tower in Wyoming. We visited several large sawmills and they probably were the first that most of us had ever seen.

Everyone in camp enjoyed forest fires and we all had fun going to the two minor fires in our vicinity. Due to the shortage of manpower, however, the entire camp was subject to fire call at any time and a full set of fire tools was kept at camp.

The Forest Service cooperated wonderfully with our professors in showing us around the Hills. With them we visited camp and picnic areas, marked timber, visited burns, went to fires, and practiced fire line construction. They talked to us about forest management and silviculture. They showed us how to thin out trees. They went with us to the top of the Harney Peak Lookout Tower and to the bottom of the valleys to study grazing conditions. They were swell fellows and two or three of them were Iowa State College graduates.

Everyone enjoyed camp. There were minor gripes but everyone has forgotten them by now and thinks only of the happy times we had together. When the words "next Tuesday" meant the end of camp, the boys said it jovially but they really hated to leave the old barracks and Camp Custer. It had been a place where we had grown to really know each other. We didn't know before camp what good sports our profs really were.

Besides the many souvenirs such as snapshots, deer antlers, porcupine quills, etc., taken home from camp, there were the pleasant thoughts of friends and fellowship in the minds of every forester. Those are the things we'll remember when we're a long way from home. They'll make us want to get together again, and sing songs and tell jokes, and, what's more, we're going to do it, too.

We're going to sing that song, "O, I'm a Hayseed," the one that originated in our camp. We're going to tell jokes about Prof. Mac and Prof. Goodspeed. The fellows that were from

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California and New York, as well as the Louisiana boys, are going to be there. We'll have another camp fire in the woods, just like we did in camp, but we won't be eating peanut butter sandwiches.

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