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1946 Forestry Summer Camp

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NINETY-SIX forestry students followed Dr. J. A. Larsen to his old Idaho stamping grounds last summer for the first departmental forestry camp since 1942.

Tucked away among the hills of the Kaniksu National Forest, at the Priest River Experiment Station where Dr. Larsen spent many years, the Iowa State foresters assembled to hold their 1946 camp. They took over a former CCC camp for their headquarters.

The two-month camp was the largest in Iowa State's history, nearly twice as large as any previous year. And a different type of students attended. Most were recently-discharged war veterans, and many were married. The average age of students, usually around 18, rose several years. Some were nearly 30; few were less than 20 years old.
Things started out with a bang at Camp F-127—the plumbing had to be put in. The resulting steamfitter’s circus produced most satisfactory facilities, including hot running water and showers. All buildings also were wired for electricity. Prof. A. W. Goodspeed used his mechanical talent to prod a gasoline engine into pumping water, and the camp had all the comforts of home—almost.

There was one reminder that camp was 15 miles from the nearest town and many more from civilization: Wood stoves were the only heating units. These proved to have an enormous appetite for fuelwood, and as a result the students spent many an hour improving their skill with saw and axe.

After a few days of work turning the camp into home, during which time the truck drivers experimented to find the least bumpy parts of the road to town, schoolwork began.

Three subjects were taught: mensuration, forest utilization and silviculture. Professors Goodspeed and C. M. Genaux teamed up to keep the mensuration section busy cruising timber and taking data for maps; Prof. G. B. Hartman escorted the utilization students through forest industries in the vicinity, and Dr. Larsen directed his section in various silvicultural operations.

The foresters also became familiar with the business of running a national forest. They heard lectures by district rangers and other Forest Service officials, who explained details of timber sales, log scaling, recreational activities and wildlife management.

It wasn’t long before the students found out that Idaho’s hills are steep. The mensuration section discovered this when the students began to get readings of 50 feet rise in 66 horizontal on their Abney levels. The silviculture section came to the same conclusions after a few days of trampling about to learn the difference between cedar-hemlock and larch types.

The students got a taste of forestry in general, but of fire fighting they got a whole mouthful. Toward the end of the eight-week period, they found themselves in the midst of the Idaho fire season, reputed to be one of the most dangerous in the country. Six times they received calls to fight fires. They had been taught the method of building fire lines, and used their training to successfully halt all blazes they were sent to control.

It gets mighty cold about midnight on the fire line, they found. But they also discovered that a fire nearly out at midnight may be out of control the next afternoon. They found
that falling snags are a real menace and that fire can smoulder for hours in duff before showing up and that in general forest fires are not pleasant.

The students really got in the swim, for the Priest River, which formed one edge of the camp area, attracted bathers nearly every day. Some more enterprising foresters anchored a log in the river and practiced log birling in their spare time. Though no one got really expert, this sport proved fun and—more often than not—uncertain.

Prist Lake, twenty miles north of camp, was an ideal swimming spot. On Sunday afternoons many of the campers climbed aboard one of the four department trucks and sped to Luby Bay, a resort area on the lake, for an afternoon of splashing and horseplay.

Fishing was another important pastime. Leonard Thomas and Howard Lovestead proved champs at pulling rainbow trout out of the nearby streams. Nearly every kind of trout was found in these mountain creeks, and crappies fought for the bait in Chase Lake, not far away.

Some of the fellows had the wanderlust. Weekends found Iowa State men disappearing in every direction, to Coeur d'Alene, Sandpoint, Spokane, the Grand Coulee Dam, Priest River, or Coolin and points north.

There were plenty of opportunities for those who wanted to "rough it." One group, Willard Munson, Jack McElroy, Maynard Leetun and Bill Poston, rented a motorboat and cruised the length of Priest Lake on a weekend. Two other outdoorsmen trekked 35 miles over mountain trail and road on another weekend excursion. Several groups spent weekends away from camp, fishing and camping out.

Some people who passed by the camp got the wrong impression of its inhabitants. They thought it was a duck farm. This fallacy usually was cleared up when they caught sight of John (Coot) Parson, whose vocal efforts often resembled those of waterfowl more than humans. It was his good fortune that the duck hunting season was not open.

The foresters also became known for their cautious driver. Some of the auto and truck chauffeurs showed nothing but contempt for the hazards of the road, but not Leonard Lotts. Always conservative, his top cruising speed on the highway was 7 miles per hour.

The students will always remember their enterprising rafters, Eugene Adams, Bob DeVilbiss and Don Christman, who tied four logs together with wire and set out on the Priest

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River for a cruise. After about five miles of easy going, they came to rough water. Their logs became most unruly. "When we had only two logs left," one commented later, "our raft broke up quickly." It was a long walk back to camp in wet clothes.

Everyone will also remember George Meierstein's Friday evening campfires and Prof. Goodspeed's solo "Old King Cole." And George's enthusiasm and proverbial "Smile, dammit!"

The softball games after supper were fun, too, until the balls succumbed. Volleyball was another good sport, where one fellow pulled the net down while another hit the ball. Those back court lines sure moved toward the net on the losing team's side!

But the food at camp was most remarkable of all. It took real imagination to dream up things like mashed potato sandwiches with pickle, or diced carrot sandwiches. It was a real experience just to open a lunch sack. But you could count on one thing: One of the sandwiches would contain peanut butter!

And the chickens in northern Idaho must have eaten lots of fresh grass; anyway, half of the eggs they laid were green! But the pies made up for everything that was not too good, and the health of the campers attested to the overall high standards maintained by the cooks.

To everyone's surprise, one unavoidable thing didn't happen. No one fell off the foot bridge. The one-foot-wide suspension bridge tenuously spanning the Priest River was a sure thing to spill someone, but the surefooted foresters never once slipped.

A queer custom was observed by a number of the campers. They reverently doffed their hats when passing a shack beside the road to Coolin. They called the hut "Schmidt's Halfway Haven" in memory of the night one unlucky fellow failed to get a ride home from Coolin and found the structure a welcome resting place until dawn.

One group of students made themselves most unpopular with their buddies, at least those who listened to radios. It seemed that every time a song began, or a mystery play was at its climax, the radio would begin to rasp with the buzz of an electric razor. Those super-modern shavers seemed to have it timed perfectly.

As usual at summer camp, nearly everything possible took place. Not a day passed without the telling of a humorous
event, and there were some times of near-tragedy, like the morning Charles Cesar overslept and missed breakfast.

Most of the fellows felt a bit of regret in leaving camp, because they had to leave behind them a shaggy-haired dog named Rocky, who had become camp mascot. Rocky hated to see the campers go, too.

All in all, the foresters from Iowa State learned a lot, grew more familiar with each other, and got a taste of what forestry really is like.