Fall Camp 1997 - Mark Twain National Forest

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Bright and early Sunday, October 12, 1996, 33 students and two instructors set out in cars, a truck, and vans: destined for a land full of promise, education, and trees. Steven Jungst and Richard Hall were those instructors and the students were the newest group of Forestry Fall campers. The place we were headed was Mark Twain National Forest in southern Missouri. The camp, run by the University of Missouri, was located at Poplar Bluff in the heart of the Mark Twain National Forest.

We arrived to find six cabins, a classroom, volleyball and basketball courts, horseshoes, and most important, the mess hall. Camp was arranged around a fire pit, which was the focus of many a night’s activities. This was the beginning of three weeks of intensive learning in forestry.

The week started by learning dendrology and polishing our pacing skills. Then, our first road trip: East Perry Lumber Company. This was our initial look at a large sawmill operation, and we got to see it all, from the debarking to the final product, 50,000 board feet of which were produced each day. Next, we visited the Forest Service, one of many organizations we were to tour. The rest of the week included lessons in topography, advanced regeneration, and determining site index. The week ended Saturday with a canoe trip down the Current River, learning about hydrology and the special management required for rivers.

Week two opened with the National Park Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. The week continued with the Fisheries and Wildlife Service, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and for Products, a trip to Westvaco Paper Company’s timber management facilities based in Wickliffe, Kentucky. At Westvaco, we went on an excellent tour of a plantation. The system consisted of rows of cottonwood trees planted in a crop-like fashion. The trees were then harvested after as little as thirteen years. They also showed us their plan for helping the environmental causes: a 3400 acre waterfowl refuge, established in cooperation with the Kentucky Fisheries and Wildlife Service.

Next, we visited their fiber farm, one of the few fiber farms in the midwest. This was located on a very sandy plot, ideal for fast drainage and growth. The trees were constantly watered and fertilized using a drip-line system. This plantation method produced harvestable trees within eight years.
The final week started with a visit to Pioneer Forest, aptly named due to the management methods applied. The forest is one of the largest privately owned forests in the midwest, and is managed for timber production and uneven-aged forest, an idea once thought impossible. One of the secrets to their success was to employ very meticulous harvesting crews. The result is a forest that does not look harvested and is uneven-aged. Pioneer Forest has become an example for private and public forests alike and is one of the only forests to ever earn awards from both the Forest Service and the Sierra Club.

Our final week included another trip to Westvaco to see their paper mill. Their specialty is premium coated paper and their biggest customer is National Geographic Magazine. The security was very tight, and we were not allowed to take pictures inside the plant. We were not allowed to even visit certain facilities. We did, however, see the pulping, bleaching, and drying processes, and were able to watch the paper being rolled and cut. This was a huge operation, bringing logs and chips in both by truck and train. Mountains of chips lasted only a few days, and 1000 tons of paper were produced daily.

We learned a lot while at camp, some things expected, like the differences between agencies and how to break a log down into lumber. Consider, for instance: we were told that Iowa State University is the only college in the midwest with an excellent forestry program. Even colleges closer to the area lacked the quality of education we take for granted. We also learned about the importance of making good impressions and establishing connections everywhere we go.

Finally, we learned that there are always jobs in forestry. We are only limited by our imaginations and our pride. At last, we took the final test on a chilly, damp morning, ate lunch, and headed home. We arrived with expectations and excitement, and we left with new friends, new insight, twice the experience, and a clearer knowledge of what forestry is all about. We will now head into new forestry classes and our futures with our friends beside us and camp behind us...forever.