1-1-1996

Fall Camp

Christopher Janda
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester
Part of the Forest Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester/vol83/iss1/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ames Forester by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Three weeks in southern Alabama were exactly what the 1995 class of ISU Forestry students needed to gain excellent exposure to the world of forestry. The camp covered all areas of the field, from the management of land for wildlife to the manufacture of wood products for consumption.

This year’s fall camp was based in the beautiful and serene Conecuh National Forest at Auburn University’s Solon-Dixon Forestry Education Center. Solon-Dixon is a well-staffed and well-equipped retreat which promotes the education of students like ourselves in all aspects of forestry. At the Center we found a central square surrounded by the dormitories, the classrooms, the unforgettable cafeteria, and the recreation center. It was in that cafeteria where we were fed the most solid three meals each day which any student could hope for during the semester. Beginning with cheese grits for breakfast and ending with pork chops for dinner, each person was more than satisfied. Down the hill from the cafeteria, the cedar paneled recreation center housed ping pong tables, a television set, and brand new clothes washers and dryers. It takes little effort to say that Solon-Dixon definitely exceeded all of our expectations.

During the weekends, a couple of groups made the hour drive to the Florida coast where we were able to witness firsthand the damage done by hurricane Opal. It was eye-opening for us mid-westerners to see beach houses lifted off their pilings and set down again, though
not gently, fifty yards from their original construction site. A lot of the beach had been washed back out into the ocean, and much work was being done to restore the sand to the beach.

The most important part of the trip, however, was the education we received through plant tours and forest management trips. On the product side, we were able to visit such companies as Champion International, Neste Resins, T. R. Miller, Temple-Inland, and Georgia Pacific's plywood manufacturing facility. For exposure to management, presentations were given to us by Scott Paper, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, and Blackwater River State Forest, and we performed several surveys within the Solon-Dixon property.

At Champion International we watched the pulp and paper making process. It was educational for many of us to see the actual process from roundwood to final product, whether it was newsprint, white paper, or pulp. Many of us were surprised to observe the sheer volume of paper which was produced at that plant alone each day, keeping in mind that it was only one of the many plants around the country.

An employee of the Blackwater River State Forest presented its management plan to the group, showing us how it meets the wide range of demands for its use. The population surrounding the area is able to freely use the State Forest for recreation, picnicking, and camping. There is also pressure for the forest to produce saleable timber to financially support its operations. In addition to those obligations, the management of the area for endangered species is necessary. Pine Baron's tree frog, the Gopher tortoise, the Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake, and a pair of bald eagles make their homes on the property. Finding a balance between all of these objectives presents a challenge.

Since we were in southern Alabama, we all became well acquainted with the plight of the red-cockaded woodpecker as well as the decline of the longleaf pine and wiregrass ecosystem. Years ago, pre-colonially, much of the southeast was dominated by longleaf pine and wiregrass. Fires periodically burned the area, causing a dynamic equilibrium to exist. Longleaf, which is heat resistant in its grass stage, needs fire to release water and nutrients for its growth, while
wiregrass relies on the fire to open the understory for its light requirements. Through fire suppression and conversion to other species of trees, however, this ecosystem is now much reduced and isolated in protected stands.

The red-cockaded woodpecker, likewise, has lost much of its habitat since it roosts only in old growth pine. The strain placed upon the region to supply much of the country’s wood products has caused a considerable amount of this bird’s habitat to be lost.

In all, the trip was as educational as it was enjoyable. The Solon-Dixon Forestry Education Center provided a superb academic atmosphere and an excellent base to work from. The forest management and plant tours informed the class about the current issues in forest administration and industry. Without any doubt, the experience in itself is one which will outlast any education.

Now I see the secret of making the best persons, it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.

-Walt Whitman