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My Experience In Redwood Country

Perry Dargitz

I spent the summer of '75 as a timber cruiser for Simpson Timber Company in northwestern California, along with Doug Sturhan. I was fortunate that my job was located within the heart of the Redwood country. During the first week of my job it was rather difficult to get used to measuring the boles of 70-100" diameter trees. The taller specimens of these "monsters" ranged from 144 to 176 feet in height.

As all foresters may know, during the summer months redwoods achieve most of their moisture from fogs coming off the Pacific Ocean. Sure enough, every morning we were met with this fog which hung around until about noon and kept the temperatures between the high 40's to low 50's and the undergrowth cold and wet. Because of the high amount of moisture, the undergrowth consisted of ferns and other moisture loving plants. In other areas, such as the cutover areas, the brush was so thick that I had to fall into it in order to get the vegetation crushed down enough so I could crawl over it.

Along with measuring the height and diameters of the trees and taking reproduction counts, I also graded the down redwood logs left behind by Weyerhaeuser in the 50's when they owned the land. I was surprised to see that after laying around for 20 to 30 years in this climate, the heartwood of the logs showed no signs of decay. Even the split logs had heartwood that was still in sound condition.

Five of us lived in a cabin not too far from the Klamath River and the Pacific Coast. The cabin had a fireplace which was in use practically every night and was considered the most important furnishing in the house. Along with the cabin we were provided with a "six pack" pickup to get us back and forth to work. Because of this old "clunker" we gained the reputation around Klamath as the Simpson Swat Team.

In the evenings I often went down to the Klamath River fishing for steelhead trout and salmon. I also had the opportunity to visit Crescent City, to watch the commercial fishermen bring in their days haul. On Sundays we visited the beaches or other attraction sites along with going to the surrounding logging exhibitions and fairs. Toward the end of the summer our crew entered a raft race only to get beaten by a local team of women bartenders, a group of kids floating on a piece of styrofoam, and the Air Force.

Some of the more interesting experiences that happened to me while working in California included: getting stranded in the middle of the forest with a flat tire on the truck and no jack, getting a sudden attack of the flu while timber cruising and having to hike for three hours over steep mountains back to the truck, having our camp raided by a bear while we were out cruising, which left my partner and I without food for a day, and waking up one night to find a salamander crawling into my sleeping bag with me. Another embarrassing situation occurred one night when I was fishing. Just about the time it was beginning to get dark, I hooked a trout which took me almost a half-hour to land. Because of this, I got back to the cabin later than usual only to find the Klamath sheriff starting to get a search party together to go out looking for me. Apparently, a couple of my friends back at the cabin were rather "soused" and thought I had drowned or was taken by the river god (a god which many of the Indians in that area still believe in).

Working for Simpson Timber Company was a real experience. They are becoming a progressive and innovative company concerned for the future of the redwoods. In some areas they are planting tubling stock which is providing them with 90% survival rate. For a person who has never been west of Ames, this was an experience I will never forget thanks to Simpson Timber Company, Dave Kaney, and Dr. Thomson.

The Black Hills

Roger Showman

My summer began last June 2nd when I managed to find Nemo, South Dakota, population 30, where my forest service duty station was located. I had left Ames thinking that it might be a dull summer. I had to take a job which was listed as a forestry aid working with recreation, but to my surprise when I got there I discovered that I had been assigned to the Nemo district fire crew.

We began work in June piling brush and thinning. June is a wet month in the Black Hills. The three of us on the fire crew were planning a camping and fishing trip to Wyoming over the 5th and 6th of July but bright and early on the 5th we had our first fire which totally canceled the trip. We mopped-up the fire and returned to the work center at one o'clock in the morning, which really made for a long day.

The living quarters in this small town were quite pleasant and reasonably priced. I only paid 20 dollars a month for a seven room house where I could look out toward the east to see the Pedmont Ridge and all its beauty as the early morning sun rose over it. Many times throughout the summer deer were standing just outside the backdoor in the early morning, which made a beautiful sight.

As summer drew to an end it became a sad time, a time of packing up and returning to school. All in all though, it was a fun summer and I gained a lot of good experience in the forestry profession.