Keep Oregon Green

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A lesson that is often taught is that if a person wants something badly enough, and tries for it, that person will usually obtain what is wanted. This concept became true for me last year as I obtained a summer job with the forest service in Oregon. Working and living in the mountain-west had been a life-long dream of mine, and it was finally happening. I secured my job in late April, and spent much of spring quarter just waiting for summer to come.

When the time came I fired up my old '64 Dodge, loaded up, and set out on the 2100 mile journey to Sweet Home, Oregon, and a job on a project crew for fire control in the Willamette National Forest. Three long days of driving took me the distance, and helped this midwesterner realize the beauty of the mountain country. I was rather excited at seeing mountains for the first time, and also marvelled at how the land changed; from plains to forest and mountains, to high desert country, to hills and forest, then more mountains. The last mountain range crossed was the Cascade, and I then coasted down the west side to my home for the summer.

Sweet Home is as nice as its name. This small logging community is located on the west edge of the Cascades, near the Three Sisters and Mt. Jefferson wilderness areas; just east of the fertile Willamette Valley, and only 80 miles from the beautiful Oregon coast. Forest cover in the area is dominated by large stands of Douglas Fir, with some cedar and spruce. Snow in the mountains provides the area with numerous streams, rivers and lakes, so watershed management is a primary concern. The west side of

Mark's favorite job, mopping up.

the Cascades is a high precipitation area. It rains almost every day from September through May, but the summers are nice, and often get dry.

The district office there had no lodging for employees, so I situated myself in a small cabin-style apartment, and was soon put to work. The crew I was on was responsible for presuppression and fire-suppression activities. My first week of work we were broadcast burning slash, often until eleven or twelve o'clock at night. This was followed by extensive mop-up, or a thorough inspection of the units to be sure all remaining fire was out. By mid June, it was too hot and dry to burn, so we then worked clearing recreation trails.

That job was like being paid for taking a vacation. After a few weeks of that the crew began brush disposal and fire patrol work. Piling brush was not the most exciting job, but it was in the mountains, and those mountain mornings were some of the finest I have ever seen. Patrol work meant driving through the mountains all day, checking on campers, and watching for fire.

Whenever fire did start, it was our job to put it out. Policy of the forest was to suppress any kind of fire. The crew was on constant call for fire duty, and I was aroused three different times in the middle of the night to go fight fire. I went on three project fires outside of the Sweet Home district, none of them very large. There were also three small fires in the district. It was enough exposure to let me get sick once from smoke inhalation, learn about and un-
derstand fire control and suppression organization, and witness how terrible fire can be. One thing that did surprise me was the number of women on some of the fire crews. Three of our fifteen members were women, but other larger crews had as many as one-half women members. Fighting fires sounds exciting, but it’s also a very hot, dirty, exhausting, and sometimes sickening job. One thing I liked about it was the travel and the many people I met. With fire suppression work I saw most of Oregon, and parts of Washington.

The Pacific Northwest is a very beautiful area. My summer there taught me a lot about forest service operations, the logging based economy, the lifestyle in mountain country, the beauty and wonder of the ocean, and the rich feeling of living on the Cascade country. If you can make it out there, I’d recommend it.

Forestry Arizona Style
Ray Dirksen

The summer of 1975 found me in the heart of Geronimo County, Coronada National Forest, Douglas Ranger District, in southeast Arizona. I was quartered, along with a native population of desert rodents, at the remains of one of the forts built by the U.S. military in an effort to capture Geronimo and his band of renegades. Fortunately I did not run into any vengeful Apaches. I did chase some local history and learned that “the lifeline of the woods” (to quote Dr. Thomson) in Arizona can do more to make a person lost than saved. I spent one afternoon with the district ranger searching for three separate section markers, which on one occasion was a 2 by 3 foot sandstone rock marked by an X in the northeast corner amidst a field strewn with comparable rock.

On the more serious side, I was a member of a fire crew, with recreational cleanup and fire prevention work occupying non-fire time. During the two months I was there, I was on three small fires (largest was 1 acre) all resulting from lighting striking trees. As a result, I saw more action behind a shovel cleaning fire pits than digging fire lines and more time scanning the roadside for litter from the garbage truck than scanning for fires from the helicopter.

One final point for all those unbelievers, yes Virginia, there are trees in Arizona. In fact the trees at 5,000 feet can make Holst Tract look quite poor, and at 8,000 feet huge Mexican white pine, lodgepole pine and some gambel oak predominated in majestic stands—not to be outdone by any Iowa forest. The problem is that most of this is not merchantable since the trees grow on slopes of 100 percent or more.