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1937 Summer Camp

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The purpose of this article is to tell about the required Forestry summer camps of the early 1930's and 40's which must have been very different from the September camps of today.

The 1937 summer camp was split into two periods. We left Ames in late June and drove to Kirbyville, Texas, where we lived in a large former CC camp. There were 70 to 75 foresters in our camp that year.

The Forestry Department had two 1 1/2-ton trucks that carried our tents, cooking equipment, and other supplies we would need. I drove one of the trucks and another forester drove the other one. Some of the fellows who didn’t have transportation rode in the backs of the trucks. Others pooled their money and bought a secondhand car for their transportation.

Professor George Hartman was in charge of our camp. Professors McComb, Junlander, and Thompson were also part of the faculty. We also had a doctor from the ISU Hospital to take care of any sickness or injuries. A cook was hired in Kirbyville.

We spent about four weeks in Texas visiting sawmills and creosote plants and studying the fast growing southern pines.

We broke camp in Kirbyville in the latter part of July and drove across country to Mormon Lake, Arizona. We all lived in tents and slept on the ground, usually gathering some small pine branches for a softer bed. A large tent was set up for a mess hall. Each professor and his family had their own tents. It was like living in a small village. The food was very good, and everyone seemed to enjoy our tent city.

We didn’t do a great deal of traveling from our Mormon Lake Camp. Most of the time we were out in the Ponderosa forest, timber cruising or on some other studies. We broke camp in the latter part of August and stopped to see the large herd of Kaibab mule deer grazing in a meadow. There must have been at least 1000 deer. Professor Julander knew exactly where to find them as he had worked in the area before coming to Iowa State. That ended our 1937 summer camp, and everyone headed his separate way back to Iowa.

I want to close this with some of my experiences in camp, other than forestry. I was having a hard time financially staying in school. I had always sold candy bars between labs and classed, so I went in to the candy business in Kirbyville camp. I made arrangements with a wholesale candy man and invested all of my funds in candy bars. One evening a fellow came into camp with a truck half loaded with watermelons. Professor Hartman bought 40 melons and there was still more than 100 left. It was late Saturday and the trucker wanted to head for home. After about 15 to 20 minutes of dickering, he sold the rest of the melons to me for $25.00. Now I had more than 100 melons to sell. Professor Hartman let me put them in a section of the cold storage room and gave me a key to get in any time I made a sale. It didn’t take long to sell all of the melons since the days were hot and the nights were quite warm. The fellows always seemed to want a late evening snack. I ran out of melons in about ten days and made a nice profit.
When we arrived at our camp at Mormon Lake, I contacted a candy wholesalesman. He came to camp once a week and kept me supplied with candy bars. I was back in the candy business again.

About two weeks before we broke camp at Mormon Lake, I was rushed to the hospital in Flagstaff for an appendectomy. I had saved enough money to pay for part of the hospital bill. The last week in camp the fellows put on a cute play. Our doctor was shown riding a small burro that had wandered into our camp and had made it his home all during our stay. They surprised me when they called me up in front and presented me with a large match-box. They said I was always running out of matches so they thought I needed a large quantity. I opened the box and it was fill with almost a $100.00 in bills. They and the professors had chipped in to help me finish paying my hospital bill and pay for my ride back to Iowa, as I wasn’t physically able to drive one of the trucks.

I will always remember the fine group of fellows from our 1937 camp. Over the years I have kept in contact with many of them. In fact, one of them was the best man at our wedding a year late.

I would like to hear from any of my 1937 camp members or any forester who was in school during my years at Iowa State.

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