

OSCAR EVANS

By John M. Mahoney

A recently acquired photograph in an old family album circa 1914 shows a young USFS employee on the left of a group of Weaverville, CA. people (was it Jim Mace's uncle who was D.R. there for years?)--Oscar Evans. This was about five years before another young Cornell man and also USFS employee married my father's youngest sister in Weaverville-- John D. Coffman. The title on your business card reminds me of this as John Coffman was hired in 1929 (?) by the NPS as a fire control specialist and ultimately became forester for the NPS.

So, Oscar Evans was an old family acquaintance and remained so as my father married and settled in Berkeley as did the Evans. My father commuted to San Francisco via the Key System and ferry, and met Oscar from time-to-time on the ferry. On one such occasion my father was entertained if not somewhat bored, by Oscar explaining in meticulous detail his photograph album of a recent trip to Europe; whether before or after World War II, I don't recall.

My dad's younger brother had worked for Oscar in Trinity County about the end of World War I, so that when I applied for a job in the spring of 1935, my uncle's fine reputation cinched it with a remark to the effect that "I was a good boy and knew the country."

In early June 1935 I was met in Jackson, Ca. by Roy Wagner, later for many years with Masonite in Ukiah, as I recall, and we went out to the timber cruising camp east of West Point. It was my first time in the woods and I was to become a "compassman" which involved training from scratch by Wagner. I wasn't a very apt student having never even heard of a staff compass and chain after only a year in UC Berkeley, but somehow with the famous Oscar Evans manual on timber cruising in hand we were put out on the job. It was about this time that I was

introduced to an Oscar Evans idiosyncrasy. We arrived back in camp one evening where things hadn't gone well and saw Oscar vent his displeasure on a stack of tin washbasins, which after he kicked them rolled at least 200 feet down the side of the hill below camp. It was also in this camp that I became intimately acquainted with the Dodge screenside truck--at least ten ton springs on a 1-½ ton truck. And so the camp started to fall into a routine as it pretty damned well better as everything was set forth either in the cruising manual or by Oscar or his second in charge, in exact detail. It had been done that way since Oscar Evans had been in charge of the timber cruising for the Region and would remain so until he retired from it.

At about this time I was called in and told by Oscar that he had selected me to be a compassman for a survey party working under C.W. "Doc" Corson on the Lassen and Shasta National Forests. This job landed me in the brushfields where we ran compass and chain surveys on the perimeter of the major brushfields (and believe me they were major). We also took vegetation and soil samples to determine whether or not there was enough native reproduction to top the brush eventually or whether stripping of the brush and planting was necessary to regenerate the forest. I'm sure that John Gray will agree that it was a pleasure to return to school that fall.

The summer of 1936 I spent at UC summer camp at Meadow Valley but made the "mistake" of applying for work again with Oscar for the following summer. It was pretty much a part of the facts of working for Oscar that a "fair haired" boy would emerge and somehow most if not all of the rest of the crew would be on the-----list in some degree. Things were going fine as I was selected to drive one of the crew trucks from Government Island in the Oakland Estuary to camp in June 1937. Things went well and I was "put in charge of the truck" at camp to drive part of the trailhead or nearest point to the cruise strip, learning of course that you always turn the truck around so that it heads back toward camp before you leave it to go to work. Things were going well on the

El Dorado (I thought) until I was called in to Oscar's tent one evening to be informed that the truck I was driving had a new transmission (news to me) and that the fellow last year who hadn't inspected the transmission grease and let the transmission burn out wasn't working this year for Oscar. Well, the transmission grease hadn't been checked of course, even though I might have known how but didn't, and the truck would have to go into the shop again. So, Mahoney landed on that list fast and I got demoted to the job of mapping private holdings within the area where we were cruising. This was done by running compass and pacing lines at intervals across the section, placing the contour lines by aneroid barometer. It was at about this time when the story got about of Oscar accompanying part of the crew out to work, but not onto the cruise strip away from the road, and getting to the rest of his routine at this time which consisted of letting his dog out of the truck (by the way, Carl, my recollection is that the dog's name was Gussie) and when the boys were out-of-sight, he would take down his pants to squat and relieve himself. But one fateful morning while one of the crew watched, he got to the point of sighing in relief only to get an amazed expression on his face, reach around behind and discover that he'd forgotten to unbutton his long underwear. It's possible that someone else could verify this story. It seems to me that Kermit Cuff (again Oscar blinking and joking at the dinner table--you know Kermit Cuff from Cuffville, California) should also be able to recount some impressions of this camp too.

Later, that same summer, we moved the camp north across the American River to a site near "Uncle Tom's" above the Rubicon River. And it was here that I really got on the list by running two mapping strips too close together. At that point I was made chief camp roustabout, chopping wood and doing the chores where "I couldn't get into trouble."

At any event, I survived the summer knowing that a future in the USFS was doomed and that I'd let my family down. So, upon graduation

from UC Berkeley in Forestry in June 1938, and with jobs still scarce, I took the big chance and applied to the USFS for a job as Blister Rust Control Checker. As I recall Ben Howard and Roy Bloomstrom were doing the interviewing and very quickly I was asked if I'd worked for Oscar Evans and I, of course, answered that I had. Then the question was asked, "How did you get along with him?" Oh, fateful day and hour! A forestry career at the crossroads to fame or fortune or oblivion. What to say but the truth at any cost, and I replied, "Not too well, sir". The immediate reply from the interviewer was, "Neither did I, you're hired."

And so it was that I was assigned to work on the Lassen National Forest in a CCC Camp at Soda Springs. The following year I was hired by the NPS as a foreman in a CCC Camp in Yosemite with the work project of Blister Rust Control. This was interrupted by a five-year stint in the Army during World War II, but I returned to Yosemite in 1946, worked on the forestry crew and as Superintendent of a Blister Rust Control camp and was hired as a Park Ranger in 1949.

It was at about this time that one Oscar Evans stopped by Park Headquarters and when he was told that I was a permanent employee as a ranger and doing OK, remarked, "Must have learned his lesson, must have learned his lesson."

That, in brief, is Oscar Evans as I remember him. And I agree that the experience of working for him was worth a year of "school forestry." He had the pick of forestry students and did well with them.