

OSCAR EVANS AS WE KNEW HIM^{1/}

by

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Oscar M. Evans probably had contacts with more forestry students, from more forestry schools, than any other employee of the U.S. Forest Service. He was a graduate of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor-- about 1910.

I first worked in California on the Shasta National Forest in 1936. I was a lookout on Billy's Peak lookout. I was told then about the excellent training to be obtained working with an R-5 timber survey crew, headed by a Mr. Evans.

So, I applied for a position in the Region 5 Timber Survey Crew. Instead of \$105 a month as lookout, I would be getting about \$95 a month--a cut of \$10 per month. I was accepted and reported for duty at the Headquarters of the Eldorado National Forest in Placerville (Hangtown), California during the first week of June in 1937. I met Mr. Evans who wore rimless glasses and was probably about 5' 10" in height, and weighed 180-190 lbs - somewhat overweight. With him was his dog "Ring." We went to his pickup. Ring sat between us, and we rode to the camp at Grizzly Flats--now a thriving private subdivision adjacent to Eldorado National Forest. I was shown the tent where I would bunk and met the cook, Mrs. Zink, who did a marvelous job of feeding us growing boys.

I was told by Mr. Evans what my job was about and spent the rest of the day, until the crews came in, getting oriented. Each survey crew was composed of a timber cruiser and a compassman. My assignment, since I was a neophyte was that of compassman. I met other members of the crew as they came in from the field. They came from places like Penn State, Syracuse, Oregon State, University of Washington, University of California (Berkeley), North Carolina State, and other far-away places such as Idaho (my home).

^{1/}A brief personal recollection of Oscar M. Evans, former chief of Timber Surveys, Region 5, Forest Service, U.S.D.A.

^{2/}Member 1937 Timber Survey Crew.

The first night's meal was a shocking experience. I was sitting on a bench at the table waiting for the food to be served. I felt cold water running into my lap. To my dismay I learned about the initiation rite! Several boys rolled up the oilcloth tablecloth into a sort of a trough. A person at the far end of the table poured a glass of water down the trough, and the unsuspecting individual, me, was thoroughly drenched. I learned later that this happened to every new member of the crew.

This happened one Sunday when one of our guests was Bob Burton's wife. Several of us decided that she ought to be initiated into our crew. She was sitting there in her Sunday dress, enjoying the food and conversation. All of a sudden Mrs. Burton screamed and jumped up. Mr. Evans said, "Mrs. Burton what are you doing?" Bob Burton knew what was happening so he said "Mr. Evans this is a common occurrence. At least once during every meal my wife screams loudly, jumps to her feet, and sits back down, and we just have to accept it."

Every member of the crew, excluding Oscar Evans, of course, roared with laughter. I'm sure that this kind of initiation rite continued for many years. I suspect that Oscar Evans never learned what was going on.

Mr. Evans, like most of us, had a number of idiosyncrasies. He said his crew should work hard. In fact, we often worked at night on our maps to make sure that we could fit together with the crew cruising the adjacent sections. Also, we worked on Saturday morning, taking care of the trucks and other equipment. Yet, Oscar also felt that we were entitled to entertainment.

For example, while we were at Grizzly Flats he permitted us to use the van body truck and other equipment to drive up to Lake Tahoe for the 4th of July weekend. We set up our tents at the El Dorado Public Camp and had a great time. I almost ended my career as a timber cruiser at that location.

We were throwing sticks for Oscar's dog, ^{"Gus"} Ring, to retrieve. Unfortunately, I threw a stick too far out in the lake, and Ring looked like he was going to swim the full length of Lake Tahoe. Fortunately, we rushed out after him and brought him back. Otherwise, he would still be swimming.

Mrs. Zink was a fine cook. We had excellent food, logger-type meals, for breakfast and dinner. For lunch the "fixings" were placed on the table in the morning. After breakfast, each of us would fix at least two sandwiches, a piece of cake or pie, an apple or an orange (all kinds of good things to take care of growing boys). Sometimes, while we were putting our lunch together, one of our smart aleck friends would put rocks in our pack sack, and we would carry them at least until lunch time! This was another phase of the initiation rite.

Our job was primarily to evaluate the timber that was growing in the National Forest. We would make a one chain-wide strip cruise through a "40," and we would map the cover types, streams, and topography as we went. The "timber cruiser," measured heights and diameters of the trees, which would serve an estimate of the timber volume on the forty. We were checked on accuracy both as to the volume obtained by our cruiser, and the line being run by the compassman. Oscar Evans would come out if it wasn't too far from the road. He would go check the cruise data and check the map. One day as he was checking us, he found I had missed the section corner by about five feet and he was terribly upset. He must have had a bad weekend as this was on a Monday. All of a sudden he said "stop" and he just sat there. I didn't know whether he was writing crank letters about me or what. He would write things in his USFS notebook, tear it out and crumple it up and throw it on the ground. This was ironic because he was a stickler for our being careful in the forest and not being litter bugs. For example, we were supposed to carry our lunch sacks to a place where we could dig a hole and bury them so that the animals wouldn't get them. He told us he didn't want anybody to see that we had been in the area.

He had other unusual characteristics. He had such strange sayings as "can't you see that boy, can't you see that boy, can't you see that there Wilson?" "It's plain as a goat's, expletive deleted, going uphill, it's plain as a goat's, expletive deleted, going uphill. You ought to see that." And then he would say "as slick as a hen's... as slick as a hen's..." These are not quite the complete sayings because I left out 3 and 4 letter words.

Mr. Evans told us about his extraordinarily exciting weekends! He and his wife sat together, he said, and memorized words from the dictionary. They started at "A" and were going all the way through. (Maybe that's what he was writing in the notebook.)

He was also interested in our having fun. On one occasion one of our crew, "Berkie" Berkencamp, had a girl friend in Placerville, who later became the wife of Joe Flynn, Assistant Regional Forester For R-5. She had a birthday, and we had a birthday party at our camp in Grizzly Flats. After the party we went down to the river, about five miles away, and swam. Oscar Evans didn't have a swim suit, but Bill Beaty who was a Cal. graduate had borrowed one from the Cal. gym - a men's jockey strap-type swim suit. As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Evans was fairly heavy. So, when he put on the skimpy swim suit quite a bit of his bulge hung over. He stayed under water most of the evening because he knew how obvious he was.

On the way home from our swimming party the lights in our truck gave out. Fortunately we had a Coleman lantern that we had taken to the picnic, and we also had a flashlight. So, several of us took turns serving as headlights in front of the car for the four or five miles back to camp.

(I have pictures of both Mr. Evans under water and Bill Beaty, now General Manager of Shasta Forests Company. These will be available for any publication that we make. I also have pictures that were taken on the 4th of July at Lake Tahoe.)

Mr. Evans got a big kick out of the fact that I liked to read Sunday papers. When I would go to town, or somebody else would go in, I would ask them to pick up the Denver Post which was my favorite Sunday paper. He thought this was funny. Also, he thought it was kind of interesting that I used after-shave lotion. He called it "pooh pooh" water. He would say, "Wilson, the Denver Post kid, uses pooh pooh water."

I don't know what kind of rating I received that year. I didn't apply for work in 1938 because I had a job in Montana, but I have a hunch that I didn't get the highest mark. It was understood that one sure way to success in the Forest Service was to get a bad mark from Oscar Evans. But, I don't think that was true, because I know people who were rated highly by him, people like Bill Beaty, Hank Branagh, Lee Thomas, and others, who were successful in forestry. So, it may have been that the R.O. didn't give great credibility to the poor ratings because he did have biases.

The second part of the summer of 1937 was spent in the Sequoia National Forest. We camped at Quail Flat, now within the Sequoia Kings National Park. In any event, it was one of my most exciting experiences. I saw the Redwoods in 1936, but I had never seen the Big Trees. When we cruised Redwood Mountain, we had to get special

tapes to measure the diameters because the conventional 20-foot tape was not big enough. Even the 50 foot tapes seemed too short.

I had to return to school in late August, at the University of Idaho, and Mr. Evans took me back to the railroad station in Fresno, California, and put me on a train. We parted friends.

I next saw him in 1956, when I transferred to the Forest Experiment Station in Berkeley. Oscar had been retired after about 40 years of service. He would often come to our coffee room and reminisce about old times and about people he had known. He remembered many of his "boys," and he took much pride in their accomplishments.

I believe Oscar Evans left a greater imprint on more forestry students than any other practicing forester. Oscar influenced the careers of many foresters because for the first time they saw forestry at the practical level. Some decided on other careers, but most of Oscar's boys stayed in forestry. And, most, like me, are proud that they spent a summer with Oscar.

I hope these few comments will stimulate the rest of you who read this to recall incidents relating to your association with Oscar Evans. Then, perhaps, we can assemble something that will be a tribute to one of the outstanding Foresters in the Western United States.

So far, I have talked about the documentation of "Oscar, As We Knew Him," with Ed Burton, son of Bob Burton. Bob Burton, who started with Oscar in 1912, wants to contribute. Harry Camp, formerly Director of PSW Station, now retired; Norm Dole, R-5 Forest Service, retired; Bill Beaty, Shasta Forests Company; George Grogan, Deputy State Forester, R-1, CDF; and John Callahan, Executive Manager for the California Forest Protective Association have all expressed interest. There must be many others who have something to contribute.

If we are able to assemble a significant collection of anecdotes, perhaps the Forest History Society will be interested.

