

OSCAR EVANS

By Robert E. Burton

It was in 1911 that I first became interested in timber cruising. The very first beginning of a Forestry school was sprouting at the University of California in Berkeley. Men like Pratt, Woody Metcalf, Professor Mulford and, of course, Oscar Evans had arrived or were arriving.

That first year we cruised on the Klamath under Shirley Alen, mesmerized by his ukelele songs.

This is not to be a history of cruising but of the man Oscar Evans, and I shall try to supplement what Mr. Carl Wilson wrote.

Oscar Evans was intensely proud of being Scotch-Irish in ancestry. His views as to what type of man a Scotch Irishman was, got him into trouble with both the Scotch and the Irish. His pride in being a U.S. Forest Service man demanded that the best be produced. It was shown in respect of government property. If you lost a piece of equipment, next Sunday you spent going over your tracks.

He had a wide knowledge of the people in the hills of Region 5, at least in Shasta City where he tackled a burly butcher, whom he accused of having sold us "bull meat" instead of beef. After it was all over, on the sidewalk, Evans proudly displayed a U.S. Forest Service badge and had given the gathered crowd more than they had ever known before about the U.S. Forest Service and its services.

His wife was not a lover of the out-of-doors and when she did arrive required some niceties. One time he went back to Susanville to get her a sofa. The lumber train passed near the camp. That evening we were amazed to hear the train, and Evans pulling and tugging at the sofa.

His devotion to his dogs was proverbial. Asked what kind of dog food "Gus" ate, "Well, sir, Gus is forbidden to eat dog food", he said. It gave him worms, he claimed.

In spite of his love and admiration for accuracy and neatness, he was not especially gifted along those lines.

As to religion, he was a staunch Episcopalian, and he assumed that all the Evanses were Episcopalian. This trust was rudely shaken on one of his driving trips in Ireland, when overtaking an old man he gave a ride. During the course of conversation, he discovered that the man's name was Evans also and he was not an Episcopalian.

He had an intensive pride in his genealogy. He asked me if I could introduce him to a professor at U.C. on the subject, which I did, who frightened Evans when he proposed to examine his cranial plates and carry him to a simian ancestry. That was too much!

Like most of us, he had his own pet aversions. His was Calumet baking powder. Why? Some figured that Calumet was made in Michigan and that, in the past, some members of the Evans family had been neighbors of the Calumets. If found in camp, it was rudely destroyed by him.

What he considered a perfect physical specimen of a forester was a member of one of our crews. Kenneth Kuff, who came from Peanuts, raised among the wilds, over six feet, swung an axe like the best, a true gentleman, etc. Evans claimed that the shape of his head showed a relation to some noble, Greek ancestor.

Blessed with a wonderful memory for names, he knew and could talk with some of these old-timers who had not yet learned that there was a U.S. Forest Service not far from them, and that this back "40" on which they speculated, was really within the boundaries of the U.S. Forest Service.

He ended his days at Berkeley amidst his good classic English books and many of his friends, content that life had been good to him and that he had found the last section corner.

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By R. Edward Burton

World War II had started so I was able to get on as a compassman with Evans' timber cruisers at the ripe old age of 17. It seemed like a dream come true when I received a genuine U.S. Government Drivers license in the mail before reporting for work near Feather Falls on Rock Creek. I was a bit short on funds so I hitch-hiked and arrived in camp about 1:00 p.m. and reported to Oscar who was doing some book work. He hated to have anyone idle so he said, "Take my pickup, go up the creek to where the road crosses. You will see some wood cut across the creek, you had better carry it since I don't think you can drive." I got in the genuine U.S. Forest Service pickup with my genuine U.S. Government license, found the spot and started to carry the wood across the creek. After a trip or two I decided that a skillful, experienced driver such as I could easily drive across the creek, which I did. Unfortunately, the loaded pickup got hung up going back. Those that knew Oscar can guess what my reception was when I hiked back to camp and told him his pickup was in the creek. As a result, I spent the next three months in the back of trucks and pickups eating dust with my genuine U.S. Government drivers license in my pocket.

For some reason I did a lot of advance layout work for him pacing and working alone finding corners, running rough traverses, etc. One time he had me run three miles of rough line across a canyon between two roads. I was supposed to look for section corners along the way. At three o'clock I still had not come to the other road so I had to flag the spot and return. Needless to say, I got into camp late, all pooped out and discouraged. Oscar accused me of sleeping all day under a tree. The next day we drove around to the other side where he kept asking, "where were you?" Luckily, the country became familiar and I located my flags and with a little searching found a quarter corner. Oscar never said a kind word but I did end up doing more hiking and less map work, which suited me fine.

There are many more stories, like the time Bill Finster's sister-in-law visited and Oscar thought it would be great to take her picture on a pine stump. He had a great big camera and a tripod. To get the right angle he backed his pickup into place for a platform. This time he got hung up.

Oscar's training was an important part of growing up for me. Somehow you learned to stand up under his attacks and come out the better for it. Miles Sullivan, later president of Little Lake Industries and of Scotch-Irish descent was Oscar's ideal man.

I am sure that Oscar's methods would not be found in any personnel manuals but they did work and the government got their money's worth.