Lookout stations

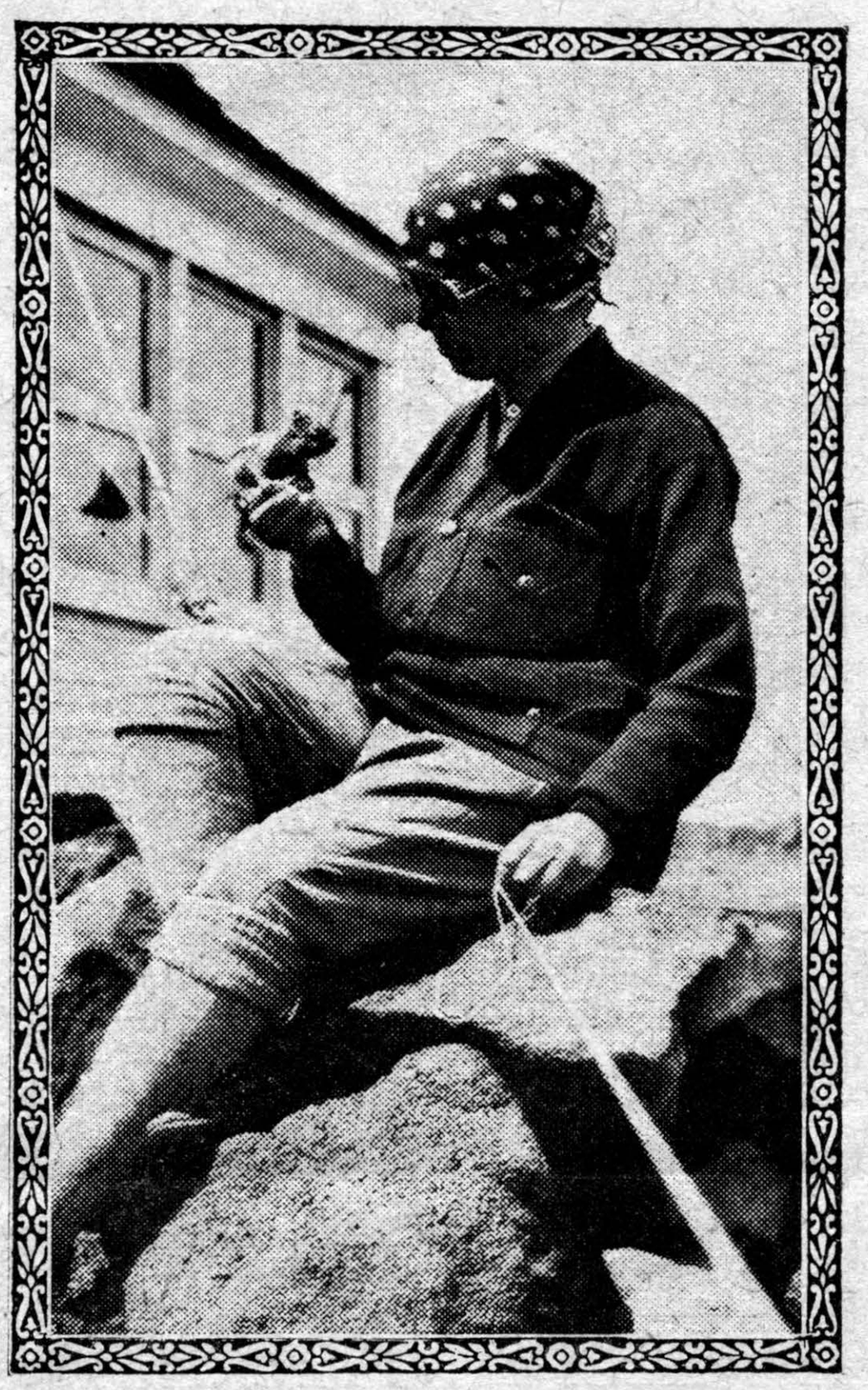
Fire-Lookout Is Her Job

PUFF! On a mountain-side fifteen miles across the high pitched spurs of the Cascades a thin column of smoke spirals skyward. The young woman in the square glass box on the mountain peak lays down the glasses with which she has been sweeping the wilderness of jagged peaks, and leans over the "fire-finder." She quickly sights on the faint column of smoke and makes some hasty figures on a sheet of paper with one hand. Before she has finished she is already reaching for the telephone to send the exact location of the incipient blaze to the nearest forest ranger's station. The entire operation has taken about two minutes.

Miss Shasta Leila Hoover is one of the last of that valiant feminine crew who released the men fire-lookouts for service during the World War—positions, because of the accompanying formidable hardships, not generally coveted by women today. Indeed, it requires a peculiar make-up of either sex to withstand not only the physical labors involved but also the mental strain of excitement and responsibility during a busy season. For the lookout must be on the job often for several consecutive days and nights at a time. Then there are the weeks of living absolutely alone in the awful solitudes of these mountain peaks.

Miss Hoover's post is Mt. Bachelor, elevation nine thousand and forty-five feet above sea level, in the Deschutes National Forest Reservation, Oregon, one of the twenty-two Government reserves in the Northwest Forestry District. The small square station-house, perched anglewise on the loftiest point of the reserve to facilitate observation, is lashed securely to the rocky pinnacle by strong woven wire cables to keep it from flying into space during one of the sudden terrific storms frequenting such altitudes. It is built in accordance with government regulations, surmounted by a little box of an observation tower, which is glassed in on all sides.

Because each article in the cabin must be packed in on horseback—or in the case of major peaks, such as Mt. Hood, Mt. Ranier, or Mt. Shasta, on the shoulders of men—the cabin is furnished with the minimum necessities for actual living conditions. However, it is always equipped with a telephone, the lookout's only link with the outside world, and an Osborne Fire-finder, a simple yet ingenious instrument, invented by an Oregonian, W. S. Osborne. It consists of a series of circular metal disks superimposed one on the other, and mounted on a track by which it may be oriented due north,



On a nine thousand foot peak of the Cascades, Leila Hoover's lookout cabin was made less lonely by "Pinto," this friendly squirrel, and his tribe.

then clamped into position. The lower fixed rim of this fire-finder is graduated into three hundred and sixty degrees. The upper disk is covered with a map of the region surrounding the station, the center of which is the station itself. By means of a rotating front and rear sight—one of which is fitted with a hair-line—and by means of a vertical delining tape, which is connected with it, the fire up to forty miles away may be located on the map by an azimuth reading in exact degrees in both vertical and horizontal scale.

On one tour of duty Miss Hoover lived at Mt. Bachelor station from June 12 to September 20, 1924, and because of the great prevalence of forest fires that season was not once absent over night. For a period of three weeks she saw no human being and went without adequate sleep and food for days at a time in the performance of her duties. During ordinary conditions the lookout must survey his or her territory every

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gun was empty! Mrs. Bruce, he discovered later, had removed the cartridges for fear the children, playing around the cabin would get at the gun. Escape over the trail by which he had come was impossible, and the cats were between him and the river. He clubbed his rifle and waited, resolved to fight to the last. As the cats advanced stealthily, he heard a rustle behind him and then the muzzle of his hunting dog "Eli" touched his hand. Around the dog's neck was a handkerchief containing the missing cartridges. When Mrs. Bruce had returned to the cabin and discovered that the rifle was gone, she guessed the terrible danger in which Jay might find himself. She called his favorite dog, "Eli," tied the shells about his neck, and sent him out to find his master. Bruce got both lions just as they were about to spring. A quick-witted wife and a faithful dog had saved his life.—M. M. DONOVAN.

Fire-Lookout Is Her Job

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ten minutes during the day, and several times during the night, alert for the first sign of smoke. During a bad fire, or series of fires—after electrical storms several are often started simultaneously—there can be no relaxing of vigilance, day or night, until they are under control.

Immediately on discovery, a fire must be reported by telephone to the nearest platting agent's, or forest ranger's station. The report must include, according to Miss Hoover, "the azimuth reading, the distance of smoke from the station, the township, range and section, any landmarks near which it is burning, number of men needed to control it, the time sighted and cause of its origin—if known—and any other pertinent information." On all of this is presupposed an intimate personal knowledge of the topography of the country. After this report is made, the fire-chasers and posses must be directed to the fire with instructions as to what fire-fighting equipment is needed, and the fire must be watched for further developments, such as its progress, and the color and volume of smoke. At the end of a month Government report blanks are made out and turned into the Superintendent's office.

Official duties are often rendered difficult and sometimes impossible by the sudden wild storms which occur without warning in such an altitude. These may be electrical storms of a wild violence undreamed of by valley dwellers. Such electrical disturbances invariably set many fires. Or there may be ice storms such as Miss Hoover experienced in June, and which she describes as follows: "On June 16, 17 and 18 I saw the most sensational storm I have ever witnessed. After living through it, moving picture storms have lost all thrills for me. At their worst they are only play to what can happen on a mountain peak. The wind rose to sixty miles per hour; the mercury dropped to zero; the glass house became a mass of ice, groaning and straining at its cables, and rocking back and forth like a ship in an angry sea, threatening every moment to tear itself loose from its moorings and sail away."

Besides this imminent danger she had to contend with the bitter cold. Mt. Bachelor station being too far above timber-line for wood fuel, all she had to burn for heating purposes was kerosene, and for cooking, gasoline. Both of them were futile against such a temperature and wind. As very little cooking could be done under the circumstances, she had to go to bed under a pile of blankets in order to keep alive, there to wait, with what fortitude she could muster, the abatement of the storm. "Wo to the poor lookout who hasn't an adequate supply of blankets," she commented feelingly. This storm, one of four equally severe, blew itself out in seventy-two hours, leaving the cabin, and the mountain top encased in ice, which soon disappeared under the onslaught of the sun, as fierce in its heat as the cold had been intense. Of course, there are many other lesser storms, all of which serve to keep a lookout on the jump.

Along with this strenuous work and the rigors of such storms, the daily routine of living must be accomplished. All water used must be packed up from timber-line—an arduous task apropos of which Miss Hoover relates: "There is no night at nine thousand feet when water does not freeze—at least I experienced none—and I broke the ice on the water every morning I carried it to my cabin."

Meals must be prepared from the store of canned goods. Once in an endeavor to supplement her scanty rations Miss Hoover nearly lost her life. Receiving permission for a few hours' leave from her eyrie to go down the mountain, to where fresh fruit and vegetables had been cached a short way below, she left under a cloudless sky, dressed for the heat of a mid-summer day. On her return trip she was overtaken by a blizzard, and it was only by superhuman efforts that she reached the haven of her cabin before exhaustion and exposure overcame her.

Still there are some aspects of living alone on a mountain which Miss Hoover says have compensated her for the hardships. She takes quantities of books with her to peruse between duties. "A glass house near the sky affords an excellent opportunity to study the stars," she explains. "And this country is wonderfully

rich from a geological standpoint. Then there are the mountain birds, so different from valley species, which are always a joy to watch. The small furry animals, especially the Douglas squirrels, become so tame that they will sit on one's knee or shoulder to get something good to eat. I talked by phone one day with the young man on Pine Mountain—the station I had two previous summers—and he told me that he thought he should have died of loneliness had it not been for my little friends. The two seasons I was there I had petted and fed them, until they came from miles around to the station, bringing their babies, carrying them by the fur on their bellies, much as a cat carries her kittens. I had a herd of them, and they came when I called, like a flock of chickens, swarming all over me for food."

On clear days there is a marvelous outlook from Bachelor which never loses its charm. From her vantage point Miss Hoover can sweep the magnificent panorama of the Cascade Mountains across the whole State of Oregon, from the superb snow-clad peak of Mt. Ranier in Washington, past Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Hood, Mt. Thielsen, Three-fingered Jack, Broken Top and Three Sisters in Oregon, along the jagged mountain chain as far south as Mt. Shasta, her own namesake in California. More than twenty mountain lakes are caught like turquoise brooches on the ice-clad bosoms of these ranges, reflecting the light dazzlingly.

At other times the station is isolated on an island surrounded by a sea of fog, all the landscape blotted out except perhaps the prominent peaks to the north.

"At the end of the season," Miss Hoover concluded, "I was so worn out by storms and unnerved by constant anxiety that I was a long time recovering my mental and physical poise, and yet in the remembrance of that eventful summer on a mountain top, how soon the difficulties were forgotten!"

All in all, holding the position of fire-lookout in the Northwest is a stupendous adventure for either man or woman.—ETHEL ROMIG FULLER.

The Way of a Maid

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I was thinkin' about Jerry! I was thinkin' that since Miss Winton give Ormsby the gate, Jerry wouldn't be around drivin' him no more an' maybe I never would see him again.

So I got Miss Winton dressed an' then stayed an' hung up all her things an' fixed up the room an' went out, an' there on the street by the alley was Jerry sittin' back o' the wheel in Ormsby's car.

HE DIDN'T let on that he seen me so I didn't let on I seen him either an' I was goin' right by when Ormsby opened the door o' the car an' got out.

"Wait a minute," he says, takin' me by the arm. "You played a pretty cute trick on me, but I don't hold it against you. But don't you think," he says, "that you owe me a little something? Suppose we go some place where we can have a little bite an' talk things over. How about it, sister?"

I didn't have no chance to say anything back 'cause just then Jerry jumped down an' butted in between us.

"Hey!" he says to Ormsby. "What's comin' off here?"

"Webster!" Ormsby says. "What's the matter with you!"

"Not a thing," Jerry says in a matter o' fact way. "This is my girl an' I want to know what's comin' off."

"Your girl," Ormsby says, his voice full of scorn. "Why you—" an' then he called Jerry a bad name.

You should o' seen Jerry take him! It didn't last more'n about a minute I guess, an' honest, you wouldn't believe a man could get beat up so bad in that little time with just a pair of fists.

When Ormsby fell down an' didn't get up again, but just laid there groanin' an' holdin' his hand over his nose, Jerry says: "You can't fire me 'cause I've already quit. Drive your own car!" he says to Ormsby. "An' here's wishin' you four flat tires an' a bad skid in the wrong place."

Then he called a taxi over an' shoved me in an' says to the driver: "Get me out o' this before the cops come. I just beat up my boss good and proper."

"Sure," the driver says. "That's fun, ain't it? I did once. Where do you want to go? I'll drive like the devil."

"Oh, up in the park," Jerry says.

So he drove us to the park an' me an' Jerry made up an' the next mornin' first thing we went an' got married, 'cause we was afraid if we waited any more we might get mad an' fight again. I told Miss Winton all about it at the matinée, an' you know what? She talked to Jerry an' loaned him two thousand dollars an' we got a place out on Long Island on a road in the country that used to be a barn once, an' we made a garage out o' part of it an' a hot dog stand out o' some more of it an' fixed up upstairs where the hay used to be to live in, an' we're doin' fine. We got Miss Winton paid back an' most o' the mortgage off an' a little boy three months old an' next year we're goin' to build a house.