

THE SIUSLAW NATIONAL FOREST IN 1910-11 AS I REMEMBER IT

By C. P. Cronk

TRAVEL BY FOOT, BOAT, BURRO-BACK AND HORSE STAGE:

I reported July 1, 1910 to Supervisor Cahoon at Eugene, then the headquarters of the Siuslaw National Forest, and was told to go to Hebo. Early the next morning I went by train to Albany, changed to a train for Sheridan Junction, which consisted of the railroad station and the agent's house, arriving about 2:00 PM. Here I sat for 3 hours until the train from McMinnville came in, which I took to Sheridan and where I spent the night. The next morning I took the train for a two mile trip to Willamina. There I boarded the Willamina Tillamook horse stage, lunched near the toll-gate at Dolph and arrived at Hebo in mid-afternoon. I then walked the half mile up the mountain to the Ranger Station and reported for work.

Ribbons of mud, of various depths, best describes the roads in winter. Part of the way there was a narrow path on one side or the other made by walkers trying to avoid the muck. At some places there was no escape; one had to plow through the middle.

As I recollect, the Willamina-Tillamook stage tried to run all winter but it was a tough ride then. The Salmon River road was impassable by wagon in winter so the mail was carried by packhorse to Otis and thence to Taft. Usually it was carried along the beach part way. At high tides, especially in the winter, this involved running the horse or horses from high point to high point as the waves receded. As I recall, the mailman walked when the load was light enough. From Taft, the mailman had a boat to cross Schooner Creek. At Drift Creek lived an Indian woman who ferried anyone across who was enroute to Kernville, where the salmon cannery was located.

I have reason to remember the trail from Kernville to Taft. I had borrowed a boat to go up the Siletz River to examine a couple of homestead claims. I made my way up the river to my objectives, but on the way back I found the incoming tide so strong it took me about twice the normal time to get back to Kernville. The next morning the tide was so high I couldn't get away from Kernville until afternoon. I worked my way to Drift Creek but there the Indian woman would not ferry me across until the tide started in again, which I did not blame her for. After crossing late in the afternoon I hit the Schooner Creek trail, which was worn down 4 inches or more through the turf, and was then under a foot of water from the storm tides. Suddenly I, pack and all, plunged into a tide drainage ditch. I scrambled up the other side, very wet, but that didn't bother me too much as I had left a boat at Schooner Creek when I came over the day before, and I knew I could get dried off at nearby Taft where I would spend the night. But when I reached Schooner Creek

(NOTE: C. P. Cronk was a Forest Guard on the Siuslaw National Forest from July 1, 1910 to April 17, 1911 and an Assistant Forest Ranger from April 18 to September 30, 1911. He has recently written from memory and scattered notes, various sketches of people and activities on the Hebo District in 1910 and 1911. His manuscript has of necessity been somewhat condensed and revised for the purposes of "Timberlines." Mr. Cronk now resides on "Cronk's Halfacre," Wellesley, Massachusetts.)

I discovered someone had taken the boat and rowed it across the creek. As darkness was fast approaching, I started exploring the area for shelter and came upon a group of summer cottages. I didn't want to break into one, but I did need to get my clothes dried. Looking into one, and seeing blankets, I broke the lock and started a fire, but the chimney was closed for the winter. So I entered another that had blankets hanging on a wire, a hammock, and a pile of rutabagas. I ate the raw rutabagas for supper and breakfast. Before leaving, I left a note asking the owner to let me know the cost of a new lock and I'd pay him. It was summer before I was there again. He had fixed the lock and would take no pay.

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FIRE FIGHTING:

In mid-August of 1910 Ranger Russell and I counted 16 fires burning at one time. During the worst 6 weeks, I have a recollection of not sleeping in my bed more than once or twice. Most of the time we had less than a dozen men and could only peck away where the danger seemed greatest. At the last blow-up we were working on a fire on top of Mt. Hebo in the old burn. We got that corralled, - or thought so. When we saw smoke near Dolph, heading toward Cloverdale, we started for that. When we had gone only a few miles we saw the Hebo fire breaking out again. Russell sent me back with my blanket, tarp, shovel, mattock and ax to get some men from Hebo for a new attack. Failing to Corral any volunteers, I started back with 60 pounds of grub thinking that I alone at night might be able to hold the fire. I did manage to hold quite a length of fire line, but in the morning the wind rose and I found myself with a nice fire line but with fire going by me on both sides. I should probably have headed for a small pond, but I was thinking more of making the ridge trail. Fortunately I did know the country. With increased wind velocity the fire was advancing more intensely through the tops of the snags than on the ground. I figured I had a chance to make the trail before the fire crossed it. My one thought was to beat the fire down the mountain.

Though thoroughly mad at the apathy of the natives, nevertheless I warned the people at Hebo of the proximity of the fire. I again approached the road crew, that had practically laughed at me before, told them to pick up their tools and get up the mountain. Strange to behold, they did it, though I doubt if, at that time, we forest officers had the authority to commandeer fire-fighters. At night people would wet down the roofs of their houses until the blessed rains came, when our troubles were over. The following spring, however, there was a wisp of smoke coming from one of the snags along the road to Cloverdale.

As I look back from the vantage point of the present, with its many refinements in the detection and fighting of fires, and the change in public attitude, I wonder at the naive inexperienced attack in 1910 on the Hebo complexity of fires. Not knowing where to turn next, with woefully inadequate and untrained crews, in the face of an unsympathetic, even antagonistic public, it was frustrating and futile.

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FOREST RANGER EXAMINATION:

In the late summer of 1910 there was posted in the lobby of the Eugene post-office an announcement that on October 24 there would be a Civil Service examination for Assistant Forest Ranger, U. S. Forest Service. On the appointed day I, with 8 or 10 others, appeared. The exam was divided into two parts. On the first day field tests were given; on the second, written ones.

In the morning we were tested on our knowledge of surveying with compass and chain. In the afternoon we were directed to a livery stable where we found a saddle horse belonging to Supervisor Clyde Seltz of the Cascade National Forest who was conducting the exam. We were herded into the stable office where we could not see what the current examinee was doing. No applicant could get any ideas from those who preceded him as each one, after he had taken the test, was allowed to stand by to watch the next "victims."

Off to one side lay a western saddle and saddle pad. Seltz's horse was tied with a halter. Having been brought up with horses I had no trouble putting on the saddle. Then, as I looked for a bridle, I was handed a bit with two reins. I was puzzled for a moment, then noted the snaps on the halter so the connection was obvious. Holding the reins, as someone untied the halter, I got my left foot into the stirrup and swung into the saddle as the horse shot out of the stable like a scared rabbit. After going around the block I tied up the horse, took off the saddle and unsnapped the bit from the halter ready for the next man in turn. He was either nervous or hadn't had much to do with horses as he got the saddle so far back on the rump that Supervisor Seltz stepped up and said "You may get on some horses with the saddle like that but you will never get on this one."

The high point of the afternoon was the horse packing test, - loading properly and tying a hitch all within 15 minutes. The items strewn over the stable floor consisted of an ax, shovel, mattock, cross-cut saw, blankets, cooking utensils, eating utensils, an empty suitcase, a sheet iron heating stove and a 50-lb. bag of salt. In the midst were two canvas panniers and an X-frame pack saddle. No one of the devil's disciples could have contrived a more cunning assembly of objects to be effectively distributed on a horse's back or have arranged them more confusedly on the stable floor. I had never seen a pannier before. In school we used filled burlap bags to simulate a load.

As I struggled with the load Supervisor Seltz came over to me and in an undertone said, "You don't have to do much packing on your district, do you? You don't need to do any more; I see how much you know." By a strange coincidence a few weeks later I was introduced to four burros and for the rest of my time on the Siuslaw, did plenty of packing.

The second day, on the written tests, those of us with some schooling had our innings. I have never seen anyone more woefully distressed than the packer for whom we felt sincerely sorry. Later, we were glad to learn that his field tests pulled him through.

On the written tests about map reading, homestead law, fire-fighting, etc., two questions have remained in my mind. On most National Forests, grazing was an important use, but on the Siuslaw there was no grazing on public land. I was sure though, that we would have questions on the handling of sheep and

cattle. The Deputy Supervisor on the Cascade National Forest was an expert on grazing and he had painstakingly tutored me. As surmised, there were questions on the care of sheep and cattle. Thanks to my instructor, I got by. Then we were asked to give a number of brands, but I could not think of, or contrive, one.

In the early days of the Forest Service, when there was a lack of trained foresters, there was naturally a division between the Forest Assistants assigned to technical forestry, and the Rangers who performed the administration duties. I wonder if my experience on the Siuslaw wasn't the first instance combining technical and administrative duties, which later became universal, with an adequate supply of trained foresters and greater technical responsibilities required of the District Rangers.

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PEOPLE AND HOMESTEAD CLAIMS:

In my time on the Siuslaw there was probably no other National Forest so much concerned with people, - people who were living in the area, and people who visited it from the Willamette Valley. There were settlers who owned their land, those in the process of fulfilling the requirements of homesteading, and the absentee owners who had taken up land under the Timber and Stone Act. There were also the "timber homesteads," often fraudulent, some of which had cabins not much larger than a dog-house.

Just prior to my time on the forest, there was a surge of people homesteading on claims containing considerable timber, who lived on their claims, or made pretense to do so, for 14 months. Some of the claimants were school teachers who apparently spent their summer vacations on their claims. How could they honestly swear to having "lived upon and cultivated the land" for the required amount of time?

These "homesteads" created a land ownership pattern that could not have come about after the establishment of the National Forest. These early claimants made good trails through visiting back and forth and many of their cabins were well built. ✓

Where Grande Ronde appears on the road maps of today, the townsite of Bentley was laid out in 1911 in anticipation of the railroad being extended there. The high point as the opening of the townsite was a tremendous barbecue. This gave me a three day opportunity to promote the collection of Douglas-fir cones. In return for the generous hospitality of the Bentley family, the only thing I could do was to help wash the pile of dishes which kept arriving in the kitchen.

Hebo, being at the junction of the Cloverdale and Willamina roads, was an important point. It consisted of a few scattered houses, a store, a hall where dances were held, and a cheese factory. About a half mile up Mt. Hebo was the Ranger Station. Fred Russell was the Ranger in charge; "Happy" Lane, a young neighbor, and I, completed the staff. In 1911 Ed Fenby joined me and we had our own tent below the ranger station. One of my favorite stopping places, near Rose Lodge, was at the Hardings. Mr. Harding was a leader in the community; he wrote letters and filled out forms for the homesteaders. He was at first one

of the severest critics of the "forest preserves." I found, however, he had merely some misconceptions of the Forest Service and its policies. From him I learned much. During the winter I was invited to the wedding of his elder daughter. I never saw such a variety of food anywhere as was offered at this wedding party. In contrast was the departure of the bride and groom, the next morning, on horseback through the winter muck to Willamina for the train to Portland. The horses were brought back the next day by the mailman.

The Pierces had the only bathroom in the district. For the rest of the families, except the Finns, the streams served in summer, the wash-tub in winter. The Finns all had steam bath houses.

Near the ridge, on the trail from Rose Lodge to Schooner Creek, lived the Wesley Horners. Their home was the finest settler's house in this section. Many houses were built of split cedar shakes, but Mr. Horner's had longer split boards, all planed by hand. On the door was a sign "Please take off your caulked boots."

Except during the height of the fire season, much of my time was spent examining and reporting on homestead and "June 11" claims. The Siuslaw National Forest had more "June 11," or Forest Homestead, claims than any other National Forest and examining them was a major assignment for me all the time I was on the Forest.

The variety of experiences incident to obtaining affidavits, etc. was great. Most of the information had to be obtained evenings. Homestead claims, taken up before the establishment of the National Forest, varied from a real home on burned over fern patches to claims with over 100,000 bd. ft. of old growth timber per acre, where there was no pretense to meet the homestead requirements. On the other hand, there were in heavily timbered areas, claims where the homesteader hoped to get something for the timber, yet took the claim because he loved the surroundings and endeavored to conform to the legal obligations. I recall particularly the Wonderly brothers in the Siletz basin. One of them had the unique experience of having three houses destroyed by the time I knew him. The first, built in the creek bottom, was washed away. His second, higher up, was demolished by a tremendous boulder which fate directed, fortunately, in the owner's absence. The third house was burned. His fourth house was home when I knew him. I first met the Hughes family, who resided in the same vicinity, on the trail coming from the Willamette Valley. On a borrowed burro were the family's supplies, with one child on the front of the pack saddle, another behind with its head just showing over the load. Mrs. Hughes had a phonograph horn she had carried about 15 miles from Black Rock.

At one point there were four claims that had been "proved up" with cabins around the common section post. This was known as "Four Corners." I had occasion to spend a night here on my first trip in this vicinity. The cabins were open, as customary, and there were plenty of blankets hanging on wires away from woodrats. But contrary to custom the grub box was locked. It was understood that in the absence of the owner any traveler made himself at home, putting everything in place on leaving. We rangers always left something to pay for the food used. The next morning I came upon an occupied homestead where I had a delicious breakfast to make up for my lack of supper the night before.

Another time I needed certain information on a particular claim. It was late afternoon when I knocked on the door of a house that had a beautiful outlook over the valley. The elderly lady who came to the door gave me the first shock. She had on a one-piece affair of dirty brown, pulled together around the waist with a piece of rope. Her socks had fallen down over her slippers. I explained my business. As I waited for her son to come home I had a chance to observe without appearing curious. The house consisted of the living room with a kitchen added to one end. On the walls hung clothes, harness and various tools. On the floor was a square of something, which proved to be a fly-catching material on a newspaper. A ladder went up to the loft. A single bed occupied one corner. As it got dark a lamp with a broken, smokey chimney was lighted. After the son came in, supper was announced. The main course was pork and boiled potatoes with white gravy. The biscuits had the taste of old grease. On the table was a bowl of stewed dried apricots. I picked up a spoon; it was sticky. I picked up another; it was just as bad but I kept it. I could not get a spoonful of fruit without getting at least one fly. We pushed our chairs back and left our plates as they were, ready for breakfast. The cooking utensils were kept on the floor. After supper I got the affidavit I came for; then the mother said, "Guess I'll go to bed," kicked off her slippers and did. The son and I climbed the ladder and lay down on mattresses in the loft. In the morning I apologized for having to leave early, saying I never ate breakfast.

One evening in early winter I knocked on the door of a log cabin of a Finnish homesteader. As the mother did not speak English, I asked the school-age daughter if I might stay for the night. She said I'd have to wait till her father came home. The cabin had only one room. In one corner was a cupboard for food, in another the stove, in the third a table big enough for 8, and in the fourth a large bed. After an excellent supper I was able, through the interpreting of the daughter, to get the needed information. When time for bed came the table was pushed over to the wall, a mattress was put on the floor for the daughter and a smaller child. The parents, who occupied the bed, said to me, "You can sleep up in the loft with the three boys." Imagine my amazement when I found I was to sleep between sheets, hardly known on the district, and there was a monogram embroidered on the pillow case. This family had lived in Helsinki, Finland. What a change to this cabin which was not even on a road!

I received instructions from the Supervisor to get information at the Grande Ronde Indian Reservation about a certain Sioux halfbreed to whom a land allotment had been given. I arrived the day after Christmas just as the whole countryside was focused on a dance to be held in the reservation school building, which was also serving as the village hotel. To the accompaniment of a tiny piano the dancing started at 5 PM. About 9 o'clock I asked Mr. Peterson, the proprietor, where my room was. He said, "You can sleep in the big room upstairs." I took my pack and went up to discover the "big room" was as big as the school-room below. In each corner was a bed covered with sleeping infants. I went downstairs and told Mr. Peterson there was no place for me upstairs. To which he answered, "I'll fix it." We went upstairs, he looked at the beds and then selected the one that seemed to be least occupied. He then deposited the babies from this bed indiscriminately on the other beds. He was proud of his accomplishment and motioned me to my bed. All through the night the chords of the piano continued. About 5 AM, as the dancers thought of breakfast and the ride home, I awoke to a vigorous shaking of the bed clothes with an Indian mother looking into my face crying, "What did you do with my baby? What did you do with my baby?" I, of course, said I hadn't done anything. As other mothers appeared, pandemonium broke loose, with each woman

trying to find her particular offspring. For the next half-hour lying in bed with one eye cocked I had a ringside seat to as amusing a show as I had ever seen put on. I had read in "The Virginian" of mixing the babies at a dance, but never believed it would actually come about in my presence.

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TRAVELS WITH FOUR DONKEYS:

This installment deals with a unique feature of the Siuslaw National Forest in 1910-1911 - the use of donkeys for packing. Supervisor Cahoon promoted their use in those days of almost no roads, few trails and little pasturage.

On a rainy day about November 1, 1910, I made the acquaintance of two of my traveling companions, the mother, May, and the daughter, Fanny. We started out of Eugene in style and ease, I riding May, Fanny trailing with my belongings stowed in panniers. This was my first acquaintance with the species. I found it highly educational; their actions unpredictable. After a few uneventful miles we came to a point where, due to rain, a waterfall was coming over the cliff from which the road was carved and landing in the middle of the roadway. The burros balked. Finally I pulled Fanny through; May refused to budge. There was nothing to tie Fanny to. The moment I dropped her halter rope she trotted back to her mother, paying no attention to the waterfall she had to go under again. Next I tried to pull May through the waterfall. By putting a half-hitch around her nose and pulling steadily on it until she had to move to get a breath of air, I managed to move her about 10 feet at a time. As soon as she got through the waterfall, she became her docile self again and daughter Fanny dutifully followed her. Thus was completed the first of many lessons I was to learn regarding burros.

We continued on toward the Coast as far as Indian Creek. Here I picked up the rest of the party, "Vic" the biggest and most even-tempered of our burros and "Bubbles," the jackass, smartest and smallest. These two had been used during the past field season to pack supplies to the trail along the backbone of the Coast Range from near Mapleton on the Siuslaw River to near Waldport on the Alsea River.

All burros seem to have a sense of humor. Unless led by a horse or bell mule they delight in exploring all side trails to the discomfort of their driver. Bubbles had learned that he would be given candy if he walked up the steps of the store in Florence.

One of the trail crew told a story on Supervisor Cahoon. When approaching the camp riding Bubbles quite properly they reached a mud puddle when the burro lowered his head to the ground and the Supervisor slid off into the puddle, to the merriment of the crew assembled at the end of the day.

From the end of the ridge trail at the Corvallis-Waldport road we turned east, there being then no road along the Coast. From Corvallis we went north to Sheridan and along the road to Willamina to Dolph and Hebo, then up the mountain to the ranger station. This was approximately 225 miles and 22 days from Eugene. Because the night stops were more or less routine only one stands out. I discovered that in the Willamette Valley, east over the Coast Range from the Siuslaw National Forest, a ranger was still an oddity. A bit north of Corvallis I inquired at a house if I might put the burros in a fenced

pasture I had noticed. There was hesitancy, but finally it was decided that the burros could be taken care of and I could sleep in the barn and get supper and breakfast. After supper the boys of the family brought out copies of the "Youths' Companion" to show me a series of articles on the forest ranger and to ask questions about the life of a ranger. A couple of hours later as I asked the man of the house if he would give me a call as he went out to the barn in the morning he said, "If you don't mind sleeping with the boys we can put you up in the house." I had talked myself into a bed.

The burros were used to pack supplies to the planting crew on Mt. Hebo during the winter of 1910-1911, but I had little to do with them as I was busy elsewhere. It is my recollection that burros, because of their thin skin and consequent tendency to get saddle sores in wet weather and their small hoofs which sank in the mud, did not prove as satisfactory as horses or mules in this region of high rainfall. I did use the burros during the summer and my last job on the Siuslaw Forest was to deliver Fanny and May to Ranger Durbin near Waldport. On September 14 my record shows it was "rainy" as I took the two donkeys down to the Hebo store where, beside my duffel, I loaded on a mile of telephone wire, 25 brackets, 25 insulators and an extension bell. We stopped at Neskowin for the night, 18 miles. On the second day we left one coil of wire on the way up Neskowin, or Slab Creek and the rest in the Salmon River valley where adjoining ranchers were to erect the line. This time we stuck to the road, as on a previous trip, to our sorrow, we had taken the short-cut foot trail through second-growth hemlock over the ridge between the two streams. There, one of the burros went off the trail, up to her belly in mud from which she couldn't be extricated until I removed the entire load. Even then it took much persuading and pulling to get her to exert herself to get onto solid ground again where she could be reloaded.

From Rose Lodge, on Salmon River, we went up over the ridge and down the Schooner Creek trail to Taft. It was on this trail, up from Rose Lodge, that I first met the 12-year old and 10-year old Pylkanen sisters (generally known by the American name they chose - Adams). The older girl had a 50-pound sack of flour on her back to pack up the 7 miles to the family homestead. Another time when I passed that way the two young ladies were "manning" a cross-cut saw to replenish the fuel supply.

Having delivered all the telephone equipment, we had only my pack from I got someone to row us across Schooner Creek trailing two unwilling hind. At Drift Creek and the Siletz River the performance was recorded for this day shows "Sunday, September 17, 6 AM to 3 PM, weather CLEAR."

Putting up at Newport, in the morning we ferried across Yaquina Creek I phoned Ranger Durbin. He took the Wald-Newport and upon his arrival took a picture of me, arms around May. I turned the donkeys over to him, thus completing my Ranger on the Siuslaw. I took his place on the stage at Eugene.