

Forest Ranger Bill Blake Is Ten Men Under One Hat

His Job Calls For Long Hours
And Rare Skill In Woodcraft



If a Fire Breaks Loose It Means a Hard Fight and No Sleep for the Ranger.

Modern Park Ranger Must Be A Botanist, Mechanic, Diplomat, And Psychologist

By C. E. RANDALL

LET'S call him Bill Blake. His job is to cram 16 hours of work into what is laughingly called an eight-hour day. He must know of office details, woodcraft, technical forestry, broncobusting, throwing a diamond hitch, must be a sort of semi-scientist, mechanic, botanist, livestock expert, timber specialist, diplomat, tactician, strategist and a practical psychologist, not to mention several other things.

In other words, Bill Blake is a ten-men-under-one-hat sort of fellow. He is a Forest Ranger, a representative of the U. S. Forest Service.

The traditional conception of the dauntless Ranger in his forest-green uniform, with the famous pine-tree badge over his heart, sitting astride his horse and gazing from under the broad brim of his Stetson is slightly askew these days. That kind of a Ranger lives mostly on the colored calendars, for the borders of the average ranger district on a National Forest encircle anywhere from 100,000 to 400,000 acres, and Bill has been forced to turn to speedier means than "Old Betsy" to cover his "beat." The steel steed has in many cases replaced one subject to spavins.

Yes, Bill does much of his racing in a motor car or light "pick-up" truck. But faithful Betsy is not forgotten. She's still in service on the back-country jobs. Sometimes she rides in a snug trailer hauled behind the master's conveyance. Horsepower from gasoline has replaced the hay-burner where the going is good—but when there are no roads and the way is rough, Bill parks the bus, releases his equine pal from the portable stall, tightens the saddle, and is off on the second lap of his relay. This is just one of the shortcuts Blake uses to accomplish two days' work in one.

I spent a day with Ranger Blake—and lived through it. I happened into the Ranger Station that chilly morning, and saw him getting out the "pick-up" for a day in the field. Why couldn't I ride along with him on his rounds?

"But," said the Ranger, "it's going to be hard going and long hours today. However, I got to stand it—so I reckon you can, too."

WE RODE along. Bill was wound up, talked about his experiences. There was the time he rescued a fair damsel . . . but let that wait.

We climbed steep, winding, tree-screened roads; dipped into deep canyons. We took time out while Bill inspected a sale of railroad ties. The next stop was on the forest range, where in the spring Bill would supervise the entry of a thousand sheep into these federal grazing grounds.

"Take a squint at that range," he said. It looked to me like virgin land. "No overgrazing there," Blake said. "Our job is to allow as much grazing as the range will carry—and no more. It's one of the multiple uses of a National Forest. Did I ever tell you about that?"

We rode on again, and Bill talked. "The Forest Service," he said, "doesn't conceive of its National Forests—there are 154 of them in 38 States and Territories—as timberland reserves locked up against use. There are several prime uses to which they are devoted. These include protection of watersheds, the growing of timber



When the way is precipitous, "Old Betsy" is still the best transportation for Forest Rangers.

as a continuing business, the management and protection of wildlife, and the use of the forests as A-1 areas for real, outdoor recreation."

Along the way, Blake was checking on the cloth "flags" which mark the borders of the sheep allotment in that section of the forest.

"Have to be on the lookout for trespass due to broken, lost or stolen markers on the sheep ranges," he explained.

"This grazing business, now," continued Bill, "keeps us pretty busy. Did you know that the National Forests furnish summer range for about 13 million head of livestock? And lots of wildlife, too. Been talk lately about our vanishing wildlife. It's true—but we're bringing it back on the National Forests. Out West, here, the National Forests include about 75 per cent of the remaining big game range. In fact, the number of game animals on the National Forests has increased over 100 per cent in the past dozen years—in spite of the fact that we've had more hunters and more visitors than ever before. However, we've still got a lot of kinks to iron out—more data to gather about how the winter ranges support the wildlife, how many are killed, and such."

WE STOPPED for midday chow, which Bill prepared. Taking a few minutes off to stretch the knots out of my anatomy, I asked Blake about this recreation business. He told me that about 54 million folks visited the National Forests last year. A lot of them were transient visitors, but millions came for hunting, fishing, wildlife and nature study, hiking, mountain climbing, winter sports, motoring, archery, bathing, camping, and just plain fun. He recommended some choice trout pools, and desirable



A view of the blackened stretch of "burn," all that is left after a raging forest fire.

cabin sites if I wanted to put up a summer lodge; you can lease summer cabin sites for a small rental.

Then on our way again, while the Ranger



Bill Blake Posts a Fire Warning Sign, One of His Hundred Daily Duties.

Writer Spends A Day In National Park With Busy Bill Blake And Lives Through It

noted fire warning signs that needed replacing, collected specimens of range plants including some poisonous species, inspected a telephone line and mended a loose connection. Next he advised a permittee sheepman how to treat his lambs for stomach worms.

No, Blake doesn't lead the life of Riley. More often than not during fair weather, he beats the sun up and greets the moon on his way home. Bill may be busy preparing his district for an influx of motor tourists, campers, hunters or anglers. He doesn't have much time for what we consider fun.

Once he dangled at the end of a 100-foot rope with 600 feet of ozone between him and a bed of jagged rocks. On a ledge was a girl with a sprained ankle—an amateur mountain climber. That's Bill's version of the "man on the flying trapeze."

I considered, then, that a choice recipe for a Forest Ranger would be several parts each of football fullback, cow-puncher, business executive, and college professor, with a strong dash of the psychological background of a diplomat. As a matter of fact, Bill is a college graduate. Most of the Rangers are; they have studied at Forestry Schools and served in the field as tech-

nicians and assistant rangers before they became District Rangers. How many Rangers are there? Oh, about 750, he guessed. Of course, most of the Supervisors, and many of the "big shots" in the ten regional offices and the Washington headquarters of the U. S. Forest Service have been Rangers in their time. They're all on the merit system, appointed only after passing strict Civil Service examination. The only forest workers not on Civil Service are the temporary men hired during the summer season, and the many thousands of CCC men in the 600-odd CCC camps located in the National Forests. Incidentally, I found out from Bill that the Forest Service shouldered the bulk of the burden of the CCC program when it was started. No small job to put more than 200,000 young men into the forests, almost overnight, and have plans ready for their work projects! The Forest Service did just that. The men that bore much of the brunt of the increased work were Rangers, like Bill. Just another chore added to their working day.

WE FLOODED on, making frequent stops while Ranger Bill checked on this piece of equipment, straightened out that difficulty, always on the alert to keep his immense bailiwick in first class running order.

"When did you ever have a little time of your own, Bill?" I asked him.

He grinned. "Well, let's see now—there was a time, honest, during the blizzard season that I practically got caught up. I burned the candle at both ends and at the middle, too. I got within whispering distance of a cleared desk. And then, without warning, down came the avalanche. The Supervisor's office asked me to prepare pronto, brief but accurate information on all the browse, weed, grass and grasslike plants on the District. So, there I was—and still am!"

The day was pretty nearly gone when we headed for home. There was one more stop, though, for Bill to inspect the work being done by a crew in building a bridge to span a mountain stream. He gave a few orders, and we started the last lap.

The sun was setting as we rode along the mountain trail, which led down to the Ranger Station. Over to the east we could see the vast blackened stretch of a "burn." Recreating in my mind the belching smoke, the roaring vortex of flames that had caused it, I knew that that "burn" had cost Bill several nights' sweat and lack of sleep before the fire was stopped—just another chore in a Ranger's long job list.

A late supper, and I made a bee line for the bunk, much too tired to wait while Bill wrote in his notebook and work diary. My last thought, though, before I dropped off to sleep, was that a Forest Ranger like Bill Blake is the world's champion optimist. He stakes himself, with the aid of a couple of horses, a light auto truck and trailer, against a monthly Government pay check of from \$176 to \$267, works without sleep on many a stretch in fire season, and dares a lot of dangers you and I only read about in books. But even at that, he finds a deep satisfaction in real public service, a wholesome appeal in his work. I think a lot of us would like to be Rangers, if we had the chance.

BILL BLAKE'S job is no snap, of course. He undoubtedly works harder and longer than any average man on a tough assignment. But there are compensations, especially for a young man who likes to live in the open.

"There's a lot to be said for fresh air," my friend insisted next morning. "When I see the pale, drawn faces of the men who come in here all fagged out, I know I'm the lucky one. I wouldn't stick in a stuffy office if you paid me twice what I'm getting."

"One thing people forget—you can't beat nature. And that's what city men try to do. They forget that exercise and sunshine make people grow as well as plants and trees. When they go without it too long, what happens? They drop off like flies, from half a dozen causes that an outdoor life would fix up. Me, I may work like a dog, but believe me, I'm living."

There's nothing wrong with Bill's reasoning. Everything he said was so, and I couldn't argue with him. The man's right!

Reminiscences Of A Rover

"KITES FOR LAURIE"
By Peter Wolff

I CAN'T help thinkin', son, of that last trip home from Hong Kong. Bound home for Frisco, we were, the whole crowd of us, I seemed to be the only married man aboard, an' me a captain an' young for the job; 38 to the day, I was, when we steamed into San Francisco Bay back from our cruise in China waters—all set to join up with the navy an' go to France to chase subs, ah' convoy transports.

How the boys teased me about the stuff I brought along for Laurie an' my wife Mary . . . dozens of Chinese kites, a suitcase full of the handsomest foreign dolls you ever laid eyes on, an' animal toys like elephants an' tigers with movable joints that Laurie could line up alongside his toy soldiers an' go to war with on the carpet in true Oriental fashion. The lad was a soldier at heart, I do believe.

Well, I was goin' to war myself, fast as I could sign up, so couldn't object on that score.

I know, son—I could have gone straight into the service, but there were three things I wanted to see in 'Frisco, before I took a look at the Atlantic an' perhaps the North Sea. There was Mary, an' Laurie who had just turned five years an' was growin' like a weed, an' then there was Tony, the dog.

We all loved that pup, perhaps because he loved Laurie like only a dog can love a child; he followed him down the block every day to kindergarten, an' no one could talk to our lad without Tony's approval. Some mongrels are human, an' Tony was one of 'em.

I was all pepped up like a kid comin' home from school, impatient as the deuce to see my own home again—Mary an' the boy, an' all. It's fine to have a girl to come home to, son—but when you add a man-child of your own, it's better still.

THERE'S nothin' can beat the feelin' a father has for his son; all the pride a man has is wrapped up in a lad all his own. You get to thinkin' about it way out at sea on foggy nights, what he said last time you were home, an' how doggone clever he was in makin' things with his hands, an' how he put up his soft little arms

an' kept 'em tight around your neck—not wantin' to let you go back to China or anywhere else.

Yeah, I was some impatient with the pilot that took us in, it seemed like he took a thousand years to get past the Golden Gate. . . .

Mary was to meet me at the flower stand in the Ferry Building, with Laurie. They'd written me they'd be there early, expectin' me. Laurie had scrawled his name with a lot of crosses at the bottom of the letter, meanin' he was in a hurry to see those China kites. Sometimes it's windy in 'Frisco, an' kites are fine things for kids to play with.

I pranced through that Ferry Building like a dancer, landin' in front of that flower stand with a runnin' jump—but they wasn't anywhere about. I'd left the pack of toys on my ship, clutterin' up my room, so as I could make more speed.

I WAITED ten minutes, thinkin' they'd got held up in a traffic jam. Ten minutes was all I could stand, so I caught a taxi an' told the driver how to get me home.

He was a fast driver, but 60 an hour would have been slow to me that day. We finally pulled up before one of the pleasantest little white houses you ever want to see—inexpensive, but mighty comfortable, an' set on the side of a hill facing south to get the sun.

I overpaid the man, somethin' I do twice a year regular when I use a cab, an' dashed up those porch stairs with a grin on my face an' a whoopin' yell in my throat which made the windows jump. I couldn't figure why no one had met me, unless it was they'd mistaken the day or the hour. And I felt so good myself to be there, I knew nothin' could be wrong.

The front door was open an' inch or so, and out comes Tony the pup with a leap that near knocked me over; he gave one big yip of joy, an' subsided like a pricked balloon; his little short tail went down between his legs, an' I followed him into the house.

Mary was in Laurie's room, bendin' over his bed, kinda hidin' her face with her hands; she heard me come in, an' for the first time in her

life, she didn't pay much attention to me; she didn't say a word that I can remember.

Laurie was lyin' there, all quiet like, as if he was dreamin' some pleasant dream; there was a tiny smile that had sort of settled on his face, an' around his lips. If he hadn't been so pale an' so terribly still, I would have sworn he was havin' a nap.

While I stood with my arm around Mary's shoulders, grabbin' hold of her like I would a mast at sea to steady myself, Tony crawls up on the foot of the bed, an' gets his head to where he can lick Laurie's hand. He didn't let out a whine, Tony didn't—not one. Almost as brave as Mary, he was; I can't say the same for myself. Sometimes a woman faces things a man just can't appear to bear, an' one of 'em is losin' his lad.

The kites an' dolls an' animals were stacked half across my cabin, waitin' for him, but I knew Laurie would never play with them. An' for the first time in my life, I sat down on the edge of the bed an' bawled like a kid. Mary couldn't stand it, an' went away for a minute; an' I remember that Tony the pup came over an' snuggled up to me awhile, but not for long. He went back to Laurie pretty soon, an' we let him stay with the lad all that night. . . .

AH, WELL—sad things end sometime, son. An' brighter days take their place. We have another lad, now, Mary an' me, a great two-year-old, almost a twin for Laurie, you might say; an' I know that Mary loves him just as much, maybe more—'cause there was an empty place to fill in her young heart. And Tony the pup is romping about the house again as if he was a two-year-old himself, instead of nearer ten, an' he takes care of our boy like he owned him.

You wonder why the boys used to call me "And Company," do you? Bless you, they still call me that—for the reason that I'm constantly wearin' them with accounts of Mary, an' the boy, an' Tony the pup. That's my company, an' a strong one it is; I may be president, but it's more like we was all partners together. Did I show you those pictures that came by mail today?