

Is That So?

By EUGENE BURNS
Ranger-Naturalist

Although the excessive heat of summer days may be over, the month of October can and often is the most dangerous month of the year for forest fires. Even after rains or premature snow.

Formerly we forest rangers thought that rains or snows were the chief natural safeguards against forest fires, while a protracted drought, through its drying effects, was supposed to be the worst of all days to increase the menace of fire.

Not so!
Today we know that even though rain or snow may have fallen just the previous week, other factors can conspire to increase the fire hazard. From the other point of view, we know too that even though rain has not fallen on forests for weeks, or even months, other factors can keep the hazard of fire comparatively low.

What then is this determining factor? It is the amount of invisible vapor in the air together

with the moisture of the forest floor—the loose duff made up of leaves, little twigs and cones. In short, the relative humidity of the atmosphere—the ratio between the water vapor present in the air and the maximum amount of moisture the air can contain at the temperature prevailing.

Thus, if after a rain the air turns dry—as often happens when the rain is over and the wind shifts and blows from a dry region of low humidity, then the forest fuels can dry out quickly and be in a state ready for ignition within 48 hours.

Temperatures Remain High
Such a drying condition frequently occurs when an Indian summer is prolonged in October—temperatures remain high; at this time of year there is a slower rate of evaporation from the ground which is already parched from a summer's drought; and this dryness is further nourished by sunshine and

drying breezes. Add to this the dry leaves in the trees. Under such circumstances, truly, the fire hazard is explosively real; quite likely the year's most dangerous peak is present.

No better proof of the importance of low humidity could exist than that northwest insurance companies recognize this and in our great western woods offer a substantially reduced premium rate to those logging companies which suspend active logging operations whenever the relative humidity falls below 30 per cent.

Some foresters would say that even 30 per cent is putting it too low; after all, it has been ascertained that 90 per cent of damage done to forests in the west have begun on days when the relative humidity fell below 40 per cent.

Will Check Fires
On the other hand, the delaying effect of higher moisture on fire can be seen in this: even when fires are blazing, a rising percentage of humidity to 60 per cent will sometimes check the fire and if it should rise to 75,



even extinguish the fire without so much as a drop of rain falling.

This close relationship between relative humidity and inflammability of forest fuels almost always much more briskly in the daytime—say from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.—when the air is driest, and dies down generally at night when the falling temperatures the relative humidity rises.

Notwithstanding, some factors can make a fire blaze even

in a rain. Should a fire be climbing a steep slope, then the hot air rising from below may keep the forest ahead dry as tinder—and I have seen fires literally explode as they raced up hill-sides despite showers.

As well, large fires make their own drift—a wind of tornado intensity to fan the flames. In the Tillamook, Oregon, burn of 1933, the power of the in-blowing wind was so great that it pulled giant Douglas firs up from the ground by their roots.

Great Strides Made
With our new-found knowledge of humidity and with fire-fighting improvements, great strides have been made in protecting our forests and the wildlife in them. Statistics from the state of Washington proclaim the story dramatically: During the 10 years from 1926-35 when I was a forest ranger there, we had 8,143 forest fires which involved 730,047 acres averaging 89.7 to the fire; more recently, during the succeeding 10 years from 1936 to 1945, there were even more fires—10,361 but they involved only 76,177 acres

Sunday, October 16, 1955

MEDFORD (OREGON) MAIL TRIBUNE—NINE

Two Plead Guilty; Two Men Sentenced

Two men pleaded guilty to charges in circuit court, Friday, and two others received sentences for burglary and obtaining money under false pretenses. Anthony Henry Silas, 48, Vallejo, Calif., was sentenced to three years in Oregon state penitentiary on a charge of burglary in a dwelling. Silas stole a radio

and a hotplate from the home of Ralph Connor, Talent, according to police records. Glenn Hedges Upchurch, 51, Los Angeles, was sentenced to four years in Oregon state penitentiary, on a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses. His sentence was suspended on condition that he enter the Veteran's hospital in Portland.

Warren Elridge Keller, 29, Pendleton, pleaded guilty to a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses. Sentencing was postponed pending receipt of federal bureau of investigation records.

Don Albert Jonsrud, 24, Ashland, pleaded guilty to a charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Jonsrud's sentence was also deferred pending receipt of FBI records.

Use Tribune Want Ads For Action,

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Best Girls' entry . . . Annie Oakley blouse, kerchief and skirt.

Best Boys' entry . . . Gene Autry blouse, jeans holster and gun.

First 10 best . . . picture taken with Gene Autry (5 boys and 5 girls).

50 best . . . Front row center seats as personal guest of Gene Autry.

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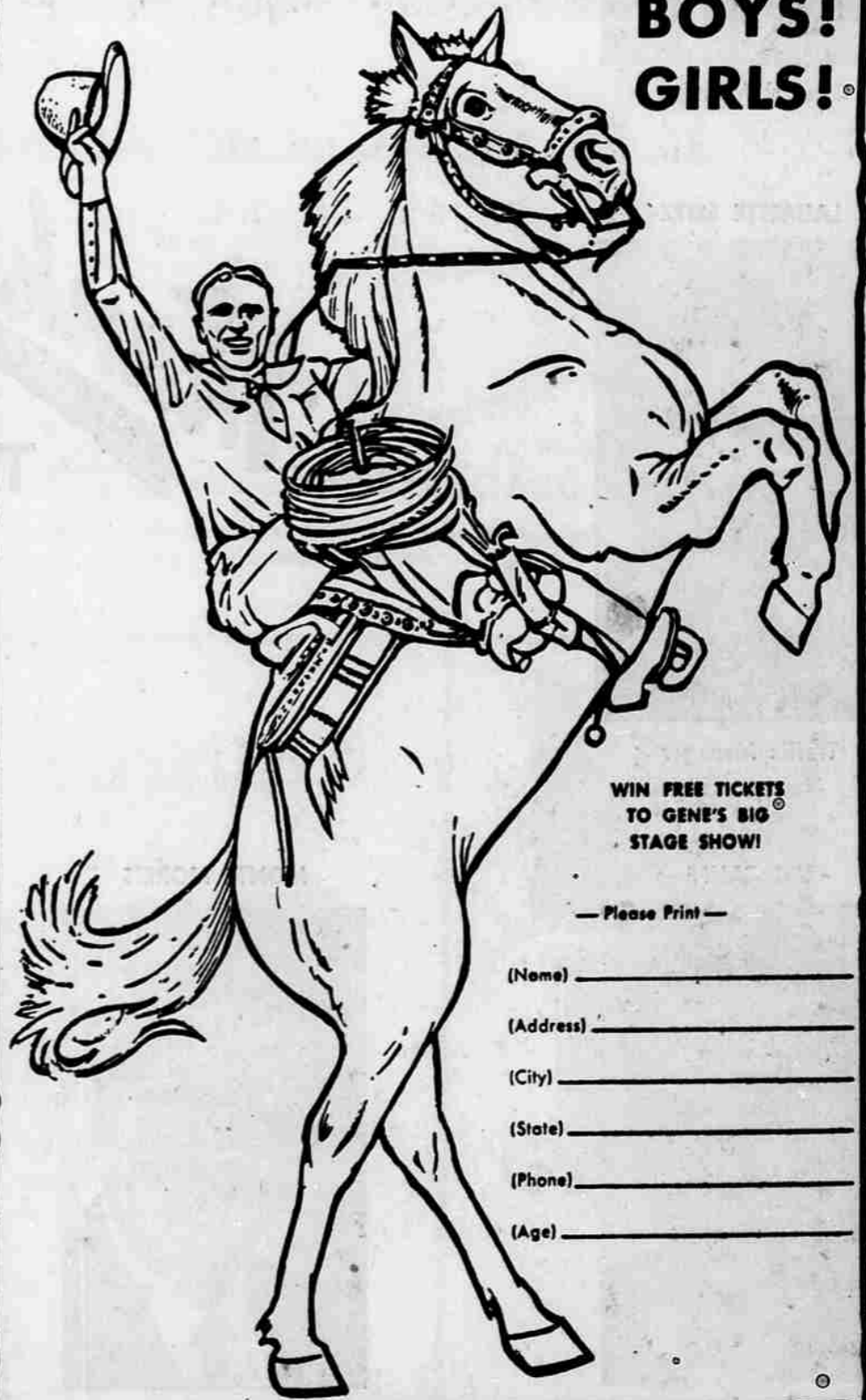
1. Using crayons or water colors, color your entry.
2. Inclose one Pepsi Cola Bottle Cap.
3. Mail or bring to Snider's Dairy, Medford, Oregon.
4. Open to boys and girls up to 15 years of age.
5. Winners will be notified at close of contest.

And there it is, boys and girls! Your grand opportunity to see the Big Gene Autry "Hit Show of 1955" when it comes to Medford on November 1. It's easy and it's fun!

Plan on being in the front row at E. H. Hedrick Junior High School as Gene Autry's personal guest.

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