

Wild Honey



Going in search of wild honey is an experience that seems to delight youngsters and adults alike, and when John Winterhalder, Medford, decides to go honey-hunting, he has no trouble finding volunteers to go along. Mr. Winterhalder is the father of Colleen Hope and the youngsters setting forth up the hill in the picture above are mostly students of the Colleen Hope dance studio. Paraphernalia includes pans and buckets to carry honey, axe, saw and smoke pots.



Pointing out a tree where the honey will be found, Mr. Winterhalder explains to the youngsters how he tracked the bees to it by watching them circle into the air and head straight for "home." It takes sharp eyes to locate a bee tree and sometimes one must "sight in" 15 or 20 bees before being able to pin-point it. Mr. Winterhalder was raised in the Yankee creek area, where this tree was found, and has no trouble finding his way around the rolling, wooded hills.



The hike up the hill to the tree and the work involved in cutting it down is apt to make everyone thirsty, and a large canteen of water is a necessary part of the gear. Taking a big drink, above, is Patricia Hilton, while Kimmie Williams waits her turn. The warm summer day and the buzzing of the bees in the nearby tree creates a "lazy" atmosphere, but there is work to be done . . .



An important chore is the cutting of burlap strips which will be burned in the smokers. Above, Bob Neal cuts the strips while Linda Thames gently pumps the bellows on one of the smokers that has already been lighted. The amount of honey in a tree varies from a teaspoonful in a new hive to well over 200 pounds, depending on the number of years the bees have stored honey there.



Above, Patricia Hilton and Rosemary Tokar take their turn at manning the small cross-cut saw after Mr. Winterhalder chopped away a small undercut. At this point, smoke is forced inside the hollow tree through the entrance used by the bees. The smoke has a soothing effect on the insects and helps keep them from stinging. There is always a danger of being stung, especially if a bee gets inside one's clothing, but by remaining calm and not swatting at them, stings can usually be avoided.



Above, Colleen Hope, dressed in standard gear for protection against bee stings, takes honeycomb out of the tree by cutting it away with a hunting knife. In some trees it comes out in huge slabs, but most of the time it must be cut out a small piece at a time. Some of the combs are dark with age and often contain no honey at all, while others are lighter in color and are full of this year's product. Bee bread, found here and there in the comb, is not considered edible by most people as it has a slightly bitter taste. A smoker can be seen in the upper left.



The reward for their efforts comes when the group returns to Miss Hope's studio and sits down to a feast of hot biscuits and honey. Youngsters use paper napkins as bibs because wild honey, more so than the "tame" variety, has a way of sneaking off one's biscuit. The honey in the Yankee creek area is made from a combination of clover and wild blooms, which gives it a delicate yet tangy flavor. Partaking of the delightful fare, above, are Linda Thames, Mrs. F. C. Tracy Sr., Mike Thames and Mr. Winterhalder.