

12 State Lookouts Are 'Manned' by Women



HALF-STORY—Soda mountain lookout is a half-story structure located on the Greensprings mountain east of Ashland. Shutters on the building help reduce the glare of the sun and assist the lookout in spotting small fires.

2 Lookouts Have 30 Years Service With SW District

By JIM FISHER
Sunday drivers out for a week end trip in the mountains occasionally find themselves at forest lookout stations maintained by both federal and state forest agencies. Quite often these visitors are surprised to find these lookouts "manned" by women.

The use of women on forest lookout stations was a result of the manpower shortage during World War II. At that time, manpower was being devoted to the war effort. Women were tried as lookouts and because of their success they are still being used, but only by the state forestry department.

Used Married Couples
The U. S. forest service until recently used married couples as forest lookouts with the husband working five days and the wife two days. Some married couples still live in the towers during the summers, but only the husband is on the payroll.

With the Oregon state forestry department, the situation is quite different. Women are still being hired each summer to watch from mountaintop towers for the first sign of smoke. The southwest Oregon district of the state forestry department, for example, has hired women as 12 of its 16 lookouts for the 1960 fire season.

The ages of the women range from 18 to more than 60. For some, this is their first summer on a lookout, while others are old hands with many seasons of experience behind them.

Meeting During Winter
Oddly enough, the two women with the longest lengths of service with the district as forest lookouts get together during the winter months to keep their summer friendship alive.

For Mrs. Thelma Sims and Mrs. Howard Ash nothing is more fun than to relate their individual experiences to each other in the fall when fire season is over. Strange, too, is the fact that both women are on the same lookout that they started with many summers ago.

For Mrs. Thelma Sims, working as a forest lookout was a welcome relief from her winter-time employment as a private nurse caring for ailing persons in their own homes. The solitude, the scenery, and the change-of-pace have kept her coming back to Soda mountain in the Greensprings mountains east of Ashland for 15 summers.

Thelma recalls her first trip to Soda mountain as quite an experience. She went on the station just before July 4, 1946, as a late-comer to the district. She had missed the annual fire school and received her training on-the-spot before she was left alone. She says now that "if someone had told me that I would still be here now, I would have said that they didn't know what they were talking about."

Sees Into California
From her 6,091-foot peak, Thelma can see into California as well as on the southwest Oregon district and the neighboring Klamath Forest Protection district. She has radio contact with both Oregon districts and also the Yreka headquarters of the California division of forestry. Last year, she made the first report on the fire that later burned a large acreage in the Hornbrook area.

In 1957, Thelma had a ring-side seat to the 14,000-acre Bogus mountain fire that burned into Oregon from California.



LOCATE SMOKE—Using binoculars helps Katie locate a smoke or check a suspected fire. Other aids include glare-proof paint for the buildings, panoramic photographs with landmarks indicated, and contour maps.

of the safety precautions of disconnecting her radio and telephone and in staying inside on her glass-leg stool, but she still got a good shaking-up and a poor sense of hearing for a while from the blast.

Relay Station
Recently, Thelma's station got company on the mountaintop with the construction of a television relay station complete with electric service. Thelma lives now for the day when she can have a refrigerator, electric lights, and possibly television.

Most visitors to Soda mountain have the opportunity to look at Thelma's scrapbook filled with photographs, newspaper articles, and her poetry collected over her years on the mountain. The subjects for her poetry range from a thunderstorm building up or a beautiful sunset to a fire burning or just thoughts on life.

What force has brought Thelma back to Soda mountain each summer from her work in California or her present home on Sterling creek will probably bring her back for many more years. Almost 50 miles northwest

of Soda mountain is Burnt peak, a mountain that should almost be called Ash peak in honor of a family that has been closely identified with it for a long time.

Working her 18th summer as forest lookout on Burnt peak this year is Mrs. Howard (Katie) Ash. Katie and her husband have lived on Elk creek at the foot of the mountain for many years while he worked at Elk creek guard station for the U. S. forest service. Ill health forced Ash's retirement from that work in 1940.

The following year, a son, Gene, worked on Burnt peak as forest lookout. In 1942, Katie worked as a "checker" for a forest service closed area near her home. The following spring, she was working as an aircraft observer with the Air Watch Service when it was discontinued. Another son, Benny, had just left Burnt peak as lookout and the job was still open. With Howard persuading both her and the forest service, she was soon Burnt peak lookout.

Worked As Cook
Katie has held the job each summer since 1943 except for the summers of 1952 and 1953 when she worked as a cook for the Medford headquarters of the state forestry department. In 1946, the local area and the lookout were transferred from the U. S. forest service to the state forestry department. Both Katie and the state were happy for her to continue as lookout.

At the present, the Ashes are living in the third tower to have been built on Burnt peak. The foundation and main structure of the present tower was built, of course, with all of the Ash family helping at one time or another.

Two years later, the tower was lowered 13 feet from a 42-foot height to approximately 29 feet. This job was done by the lookouts along with friends from the department to make it easier to see out and down without walking the catwalk on the outside of the building or getting near the windows on the inside.

Katie and Howard live in a small cabin at the foot of the tower. They hope to make living quarters within the



SIGHTS FIRE—Lining up the firefinder, Thelma Sims carefully sights through the cross-hairs for the exact setting of the firefinder. This information, as well as the fire's location by both legal description and landmarks, is radioed to the fire dispatcher.

framework of the tower in the near future to help cut down on the stair climbing.

Make Lookout Home
Both a dog and a kitten make their home at the Burnt peak lookout with the Ashes. The kitten was first too small to climb the stairs up the tower, so she would walk the narrow boards up the side of the stairway.

Katie's lookout cabin is also more like a person's home than a lookout with comfortable furniture and small conveniences that experience teaches a forest lookout to have. If they aren't painting the cabin on the tower, they are cutting brush on the ground or working on the mountain road that leads to their station in addition to their other duties.

Supplies are brought to the lookout by Howard from their Elk creek home, including fresh vegetables from their garden. Other supplies are often brought by their son, Gene, now forest warden at McLeod guard station five miles south. Katie also hopes to keep coming back to Burnt peak as the forest lookout along with Howard to help her pick out the smokes and locate the landmarks.

Each spring, Katie Ash and Thelma Sims assist with the fire school cooks in the preparation of meals. Then, it's "so

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THREE FREQUENCIES—If things are quiet on one frequency, Thelma Sims has two more to keep busy with in reporting fires, relaying messages, and reporting on weather conditions. Radio communication to Medford, Klamath Falls, and Yreka are maintained at this lookout by three fire districts.



BURNT PEAK TOWER—The Burnt peak tower is 29 feet high with two flights of stairs leading to the top. Safety on lookouts is stressed both during training sessions and on the job to help prevent accidents resulting from falls.

Democratic Picnic Slated July 24

The annual Jackson county Democratic picnic will be held at TouVelle State park Sunday, July 24, starting at 10 a.m., according to County

Commissioner Ralph James, Sams Valley, picnic chairman. Entertainment will start at 10 a.m. and lunch will be served at noon, James said. Robert Duncan, house speaker, will be master of ceremonies. The annual event is open to the public. The picnic committee will meet this week to decide on speakers, James said. Reports will be given by Jackson county Democrats who attended the Democratic national convention in Los Angeles last week. These include Duncan, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Norton, Phoenix, Larry Sheehan, Rogue River, and Mrs. Edward C. Kelly, Medford.

Entries Accepted For Talent Show

Roseburg—Entries are now being accepted for the eighth annual Ricketts Revue and Talent contest at the Douglas County Fair and Exposition Aug. 25 to 28 here. Contest Manager Chuck Ricketts said that applicants should register at Ricketts Music store in downtown Roseburg. The contest is open to any resident of Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Lane, Coos, or Curry county. Any kind of amateur act that can be classed as entertainment will be welcomed, according to Ricketts. Contestants will be divided into six categories: singers 16 and under, singers 17 and over, instrumentalists, pianists, dancers, and miscellaneous. Acts are to be limited to a total of eight people in any one group, he added.

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