

OUT OF THE WOODS

By Jim Stevens

TREE FARM TALE
Martha Hardy, mathematics teacher at the University of Washington, worked and adventured in wartime as a forest fire lookout on Mt. Tatoosh, up from the high prongs of the Cowlitz River. She wrote a book about it and won acclaim and made money. Now comes another book on

the same order, "Skyo," with its scene in the upper Cowlitz and the story another one of real life. This time the lady puts her money into a tree farm high Packwood town, 130 acres with an old house and other agreeably aging buildings, and cutover land that is fairly erupt-

ing with baby Douglas firs. There are some old trees, too, enough to pay off the largest share of the debt when sold as logs to the local lumber company.

On this and other business deals "Skyo" strikes one dramatic note after another, all sharp with the comedy that ever tracks along in the struggle of people on the land, all colored with the hues of forest and soil. Read these freest economics with the bark on, and you are bound to come to the conclusion that the businesses of selling stumps, harvesting timber and buying logs are mighty tough indeed. Anything can go haywire at any time. All hands are at the mercy of weather and of fire fools who come riding merrily along, tossing live butts, leaving campfires burning at every stop on the side of the road.

"S" Is for Skunk.
Miss Hardy had one, excuse me, hell of a time. How she enjoyed it as much as she says she did I can't imagine. For she was conscious all the while of the seamier side of life in the brush and is ever ready to give the dirt on it—and I do mean the dirt.

The first chapter is hooked on a book of Indian legends that was found on a garbage dump in the mountain woods of eastern Lewis County. One of the legends told of the amorous adventures of Mephitis-Mephitis, or common skunk. The book revealed that "tiskayai" is the Klickitat word for old double M. A version is "tiskyo." A mountain that stood up a piece from Miss Hardy's tree farm looked like a browsing skunk, it had sulphur springs that smelled like a skunk, the trespassing and firebug tourists who used the road past the farm were 90 per cent skunks—so Skyo (for skunk) tree farm came by its name honestly.

It should be noted the Oregon and Washington now stand even in one respect in the tree farm movement. E. H. Daniels, a forester and a scholar, owns a certified tree farm out of Molalla that bears the name of Skunk Hollow. Miss Hardy's tree farm is not yet certified, but true tree farm it is, and her property is more delicately called Skyo, but in both cases honors are to the bashful skunk.

Cougar Country.
I hasten to assure you that there are pages upon pages in "Skyo" to delight the soul of the most poetic nature lover in the woods. Listen here—

"Then, in a corner of my unfocused vision, came a small, stealthy movement. Turning my eyes slowly, still not loosed from the clinging magic, I saw the motion become a shape, and the shape became a long, lithe, catlike creature. Brown and soft as the earth itself. Like a part of the soil fused into fluid motion, it crept from the brush on the far side of the creek, paced a log across the stream, and melted into the willows not a hundred feet from where I stood. It was a cougar."

Such passages, and "Skyo" has many, match the best in nature writing.

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