

## ALONG NATURE'S TRAIL

By KEN McLEOD

A small group of sportsmen and conservationists put in a diligent five hour shift gathering bitterbrush seed last Sunday in the great bitterbrush fields of the north slope of Mount Shasta. Over 60 gallons of seed was collected in this short working period. The seed will be used largely in the re-vegetation program that is being conducted in the so-called "Devils Garden" area of Modoc County, the wintering grounds of the migratory interstate deer herd which annually comes into California from Oregon.

The group that assembled on this cooperative seed gathering program came from various localities in California and from Oregon. As was expected the large group of self styled "sportsmen" who have been crying mightily that the state game commissions of Oregon and California had joined in a conspiracy with the U. S. Forest Service to decimate the interstate deer herd were prominent in their absence from this project which had as its objective the up-building of the winter range of the herd to the end that greater numbers of deer might successfully winter there.

Of course it is realized that these boys who have been spouting off so much about how the deer herds should be managed probably think that gathering bitterbrush seed is a lot of "holism" and besides they had more important engagements elsewhere along some babbling brooks. It's hot beating brush on the slopes of Mount Shasta in the sunshine on an August afternoon and far from the pleasant luxury of cooling shade of some idyllic forest glade. Oh well! The deer will make out and perhaps sometime we will go out and collect our own seed?

Unfortunately, neither bitterbrush nor research programs dealing with the browse have adapted themselves to the convenience of the sportsman. The re-vegetation program must have seed and the seed can only be collected at the convenience of the bitterbrush, a short period of three or four days. The seed is not easy to harvest nor is it very abundant at any locality where it is coming ripe. The Forest Service has paid as high as \$2 a pound to seed collectors for uncleaned seed which gives some indication as to the value of the product. Since appropriations for this class of range improvement have been small, plantings of bitterbrush up to the present time have been conducted only upon an experimental basis.

Strange as it may seem, bitterbrush, once thought to be one of the most difficult browse shrubs to grow, has proven to be one of the easiest to get established of all the browse species that are being investigated at the present time. The preparation of the seed, however, is not simple. The seed must first go through a period of what the experts call, "stratification." This is a period of moisture and low temperature similar to conditions that might be expected in the state of Nature where the seeds fall to the ground and are covered by the winter snows.

Some of the seed collected last Sunday may be planted this fall so as to experience the natural conditions of the coming winter. However, the larger portion will be held for spring planting and will undergo a period of artificial winterizing. About 60 days before the seed is required for planting it will be placed in a vat of water where it will remain for the two-month period. The water is continuously agitated by a stream of air and its temperature is held around 33 degrees. At the end of the 60-day period of treatment the seed is drained and while still soaked is placed on ice and held there until planting time. The seed can be held this way for a couple of weeks though it is usually planted immediately after going through the stratification process.

If the stratified seed is allowed to dry out and become warm it returns to the dormant state and will not germinate unless it goes through the stratification treatment again. It can be seen that the problems of planting bitterbrush seed is far from simple, yet the researchers tell me that they have had practically 100 per cent viability results from cleaned seed that has undergone this vigorous treatment. There are still many problems for the researchers to determine answers for. One problem is the desirable depth at which seed should be planted, so far, they have discovered that the plants will emerge from the soil if planted to a depth of two inches. Normally the seed is planted at much shallower depths. Planting depth, they are beginning to discover, must be gauged by soil conditions, the amount of moisture available and the rate at which the soil loses its moisture or dries out in the spring. The researchers have developed an electronic system for gauging these soil moisture conditions. The problems are still numerous but the researchers are confident that they have now overcome the most difficult of these and all they now need is an ample supply of seed—the most difficult problem of all as most of the boys who were out in the brush patch Sunday will agree.

## DAY'S WORK

PICHER, Okla. (AP)—Police Chief Gene Crockett, seeing a suspicious-looking car turn into an alley while watching for narcotics runners, jumped into another officer's car and gave chase yesterday.

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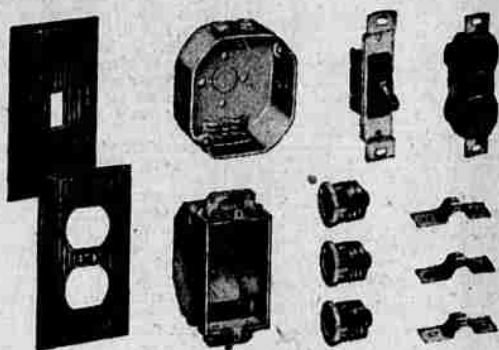
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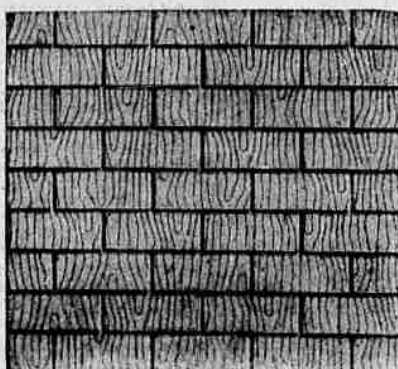
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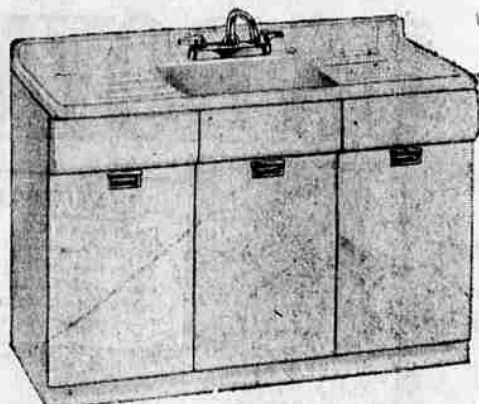
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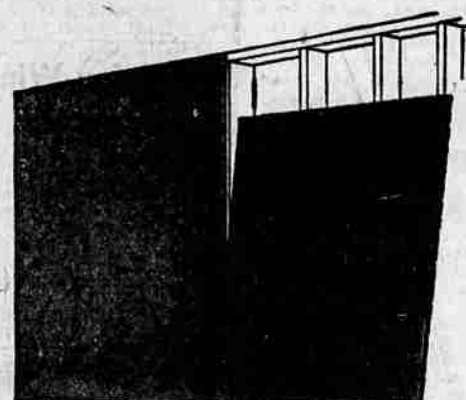
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