Guard School on the Kootenai National Forest

By N. C. Schulze

Last summer I had the opportunity of attending the Guard Training Camp on the Kootenai National Forest held each year just before the beginning of the fire season.

The purpose of the training camp is to give the farmers and lookouts sufficient training to enable them to meet the minimum requirements of the job. It also offers an opportunity to weed out the unfit, to overcome weak points and to establish a personal contact with the permanent force.

All new men and the old men who need to overcome some deficiency are required to attend the training camp. As soon as possible, it is planned to have all the guard personnel take the course each year in order to keep them on their toes.

The work of carrying on the instruction is handled largely by the rangers, with assistance from the supervisor's office. The teaching method used is to have every one actually do the things that his job requires and to encourage free discussion of all points. It might be stated here, that the less educated men are harder to teach, but when they once get the point, they retain it longer than the others.

In order to give the most intensive training in the shortest time, the men are divided into groups of 4 to 6 each. The groups are then scheduled to the rangers who have charge of the different subjects.

In this school the following subjects are covered:

Packing

Each man is shown how to saddle a horse, to balance the pack and make the proper hitches. He is also told how to take care of the horse under woods conditions. Likewise, he is instructed in making up man packs, both in pack sacks and on pack frames.

Timber and Reproduction

Here is taught the things necessary to make the proper report on damages caused by a fire. This consists of estimating the diameter and height of trees of different species, the number and age of reproduction, the percent killed or damaged and identification of species.

Telephone Line Construction

The principal points of line construction are shown and a short line constructed. This covers standard No. 9 wire, emergency and outpost wire.

Telephone Trouble

How to install a telephone set, soldering, where and why; ground, good and bad; lightning protectors; how to locate trouble on the line and in the instrument; how to use receiver for both receiving and transmitting.

Compass

The men are instructed on the following: How to read a compass; principal sources of error; how to set off variation; how to follow a line; how to back sight so as to get on a given line from lookout; how to use watch as compass; how to line through country without compass; with a given course run a line with a compass and find a card at the end of the line. Why the "E" and "W" are reversed on the compass.

Lookout Board and Map

How to set up and orient a board; how to take and report readings; why the "E" and "W" are not reversed on lookout map; legal sub-divisions and scale of maps; how to estimate distances; how to watch country by check looks.

Pacing and Computing Areas

The men were instructed in the methods used to pace over level and broken ground; converting pacing into feet, rods, miles, chains; to pace and compute area of irregularly shaped areas.

Fire Fighting

Confined to small fires only; how to fight a fire; construct a safe trench; danger from burning snags, roots, rolling logs, etc. To know when a fire is out and when it is safe to leave.

Lookout and Fireman Reports

How to properly fill out forms.

The Training Camp lasted 3 days and on the afternoon of the third day each man was given an oral quiz, during which the following questions were covered:

1. What constitutes the best kind of ground for a phone?
2. What is the function of the batteries in a phone?
3. If, after testing for trouble outside of the phone you

find that the trouble is in the instrument, what would you do next?

4. Two fires are reported to you. They are three miles apart, one on a ridge and the other on a creek, both in your district. The ranger directs you to handle the one on the ridge, and says he will send some one else to the one on the creek. You reach your fire and get it under control, but find that it will take two days to extinguish it. After getting your fire under control, you notice that the fire on the creek is burning hard. What would you do?

5. Why is night travel to a fire necessary whenever it is humanly possible?

6. You are directed to go to a fire in a region with which you are familiar and where you know a small fire will gain headway rapidly. You start out with your full pack. Part way to the fire you see that you can speed up greatly by lightening your pack. What would you discard?

7. If you had only two boxes to pack on a horse and one weighs more than the other, how would you balance your load?

8. If you were in the hills with a horse you knew would leave you and you had no hobbles but did have a long rope and a halter, how would you picket the horse?

9. Name eight of the local species of trees.

10. How can you estimate roughly the age of reproduction?

11. Supposing you had no experience in cruising timber, how would you arrive at the estimate of the damage done to merchantable timber on a small area?

12. In building a grounded tree telephone line, why should all of the spans be of equal length?

13. In a grounded tree line, what is the standard wire for line and for ties?

14. What is the proper amount of slack or sag in a span of a grounded tree line?

15. Which end of the needle of a compass should be read when taking a bearing with a compass?

16. What are the two principal sources of error in the use of a compass?

17. Is it necessary just before taking a reading on a fire to recheck the orientation of a lookout board that has been correctly oriented a few minutes before? If so, why?

18. How many chains in one mile? Feet?

19. How many square chains in one acre? Feet?

20. How would you go about to ascertain the area of an irregularly shaped fire?