

# Summer Jobs

## A Summer in the Backcountry

by Connie Reints

**M**T. Rainier, the towering God of Washington, gave me a lasting impression of power and beauty when at age thirteen I first saw it. . . . THE MOUNTAIN. I had seen other mountains, but nothing like this, and the lush-green forest of Douglas-fir, Western Hemlock, and Western Red-cedar within Mt. Rainier National Park complimented the mountain's beauty. After meeting THE MOUNTAIN and the park, I decided I would major in forestry in college and someday return here to work. We all have similar stories about love of the mountains and first interest in forestry, but in my case my dream came true.

To my excitement, in the summer of 1978, I was hired by the Packwood Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (just seven miles south of the entrance to Mt. Rainier National Park!). That summer I worked for the silviculture and timber departments, but "eyed" the backcountry guard position at Packwood Lake. Through contact with the right people and a little pushing, I was hired for the backcountry guard position during the summer of 1979.

Packwood Lake, elevation 2857; is accessible to the public via a six mile drive and then a four mile hike (or motorbike ride). Upon reaching the lake, backpackers may camp at undeveloped campsites, or may continue their hiking trip into the adjacent Goat Rocks Wilderness Area.

The cabin I stayed in at the lake was quite rustic, complete with electricity, flush toilet, stove, refrigerator, and trash compacter (of all things). My drinking water was pumped into the cabin directly from the lake, but I boiled it to be safe. The view from my cabin's picture window was spectacular, overlooking the 1 ½ mile by ½ mile lake, the ¼ acre island, and towering Johnson Peak beyond. The four room cabin was quite a cozy home!

As backcountry guard at the lake, I was responsible for the area in terms of general maintenance of bridges, buildings, and bulletin boards, cleaning outhouses (argh!), and litter

collection, but my major area of duty was public relations. Uniformed in green, I greeted the campers and hikers, visited with them, answered their questions, and passed on useful regulatory information. Every other week I hiked to the adjacent wilderness area for three days making visitor contacts and collecting litter. Truthfully, my job was so enjoyable I felt as if I was on a vacation.

The sun shone cheerfully most of the summer, which is quite unusual for this part of the country, but when the rain did fall it lasted for days. During the wet periods not many campers were at the lake, but those who where there usually appreciated my donations of plastic for tarps and Woodsie Owl garbage bags for raincoats.

Besides viewing Mt. Rainier everyday, I successfully completed its ascent in early July on my days off. The climb took two days and we left for the final climb to the summit at 2 a.m. the second day. The stars that morning were brilliant and so numerous that I know my eyes failed to take them all in. The sun rose when we were at 11,000 feet and it was glorious! Pinks, oranges, and reds

painted the sky above the mountains on the horizon. At 8:30 we reached the summit greeted by a slight wind and a spectacular panorama view of the distant world below. The ascent of Mt. Rainier was definitely a highlight of my summer.

The days at Packwood Lake passed quickly and so did summer; reluctantly I entered the last entry in my summer journal:

September 3

Such stillness here at the lake, the clouds hang over us, envelope us in our own little world. An occasional breeze makes the Forest sing. . . . the leaves move to and fro dancing in the breeze. . . . abruptly as they started, they stop dancing and once again life is still, the lake is still.

Why have I been so lucky, as to be able to spend my summer at this beautiful place . . . this heaven . . . this haven from the busy cities?

Yet, I am tiring of the solitude, I feel prepared, ready to complete my last year at college. Give me blaring stereos, lots of homework, short nights, old friends, cross country meets . . . and stimulus. . . lots of it! (Am I sick?!)

Iowa flatlands . . . college craziness and home . . . here I come! ■



*Connie successfully completed an ascent of Mt. Rainier.*