

Foresters:

PACE I'm in the business of catching stories. Hunting them, corralling them, looking them over--trying to pick out the best of the herd, and break it into print. It's a strange occupation, I suppose--pre-occupation, anyone might say who has caught a glimpse of me sitting around in my own head all the time, watching things flit through the twilight of the mind as I try to figure out--was that the whispering ghost of Plato that just flew past? Or merely a bat? As a writer, you have to be able to stand your own company--and not need company from much of anybody else--long enough to figure out those shadowy patterns in the mental cave. Which can take two or three years per book.

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About all I can say in defense of an occupation that is best described as self-unemployed<sup>2</sup> is that at least it deals in one of humankind's better urges instead of the wide market of humanity's worst ~~urges~~. <sup>TENDENCIES</sup> The urge to know all the shapes and sizes and colors life comes in; that, I think, is why stories are told, and get listened to.

We know that stories become vital to us, very early. The novelist Eudora Welty recalls as a small child in Mississippi she would plant herself between the grownups in the living room and urge them, "Now, talk."

I'm here tonight because I've had some luck in getting foresters to talk, down through what is now some thirty years of writing. Oh, I know,

the overwhelming modesty of the breed has every one of you thinking,  
“Who, us?”

But you may be a more interesting species than you thought. What other profession has, among its founding ancestors, a figure as grandly sad and haunted as Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service-- who after his fiancée died, tragically, continued to mourn “My Lady,” as he called her, in his diary every day for the next twenty years. The Pinchot diaries are a very dark Dostoevskian apparatus ticking away-- after social events, the entry was often the ink of self-disgust: “Made an ass of myself”--there inside the psyche of the formidable historic father of the Forest Service. And was it simply coincidence that this diary-held man established the policy that every forest ranger had to keep a diary?

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So, you folks are tastier to a writer than you might think. In talking here about foresters as literary ingredients, for the sake of time I'm going to divvy them into just two kinds.

The first will be those that my characters call the "muckymucks": the higher-ups, the bosses, the big-blot Rorshach tests of personality such as Pinchot.

And the other category is the working-stiffs, out in the hard corners of the country, as most of my characters <sup>THEMSELVES</sup> tend to be. Forest rangers and their families, fire-line crews, camp cooks, packers, have all shown up in my pages. My own people back in Montana were ranch hands, what I call the "lariat proletariat," and their stump-jumping counterparts in my novels are what I've called in one of those books "the forest arrangers."

(I should do a parenthesis of explanation here that the only neighborhood of forestry I've hung around in is the public one, the U.S. Forest Service. It's the one where I rode horseback with my parents when I was five years old, and they were herding sheep in the Bridger Mountains of Montana. *(ON THE GALLATIN NATIONAL FOREST)* And the one I revisited quite a bit as a freelance writer around here a quarter of a century ago. In putting together these remarks, I came across my <sup>OLD</sup> correspondence with Rufus Robinson, who was one of the first smokejumpers when the idea of parachuting to a forest fire was being tried out, over in Winthrop, in 1940. I was writing a magazine piece about that, and I asked Rufus if there were any particular problems in his first jumps:

“The only problem I had was on my second jump. I went out head first and the parachute was tangled up in my feet. I fell about 500 feet before the chute came loose and opened up.” Just the kind of thing a story-seeking writer wants to hear, *you bet.*

And some of you may have, tucked away somewhere, a quite thin paperback that begins its story:  
*THIS WAY*

“The storms track in from the Pacific on collision course first with the Olympic Mountains and the Coast Ranges, and then with the longer and loftier jut of the Cascade Range north to south through the states of Oregon and Washington. We can't say for sure what at least one writer has alleged: ‘The first thing reported about the Northwest Coast was rain.’ But we do know how impressed the early explorers were with the

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vast growth fed by this damp North Pacific weather--the dark green forests which bristled from horizon to horizon, mighty trees often a height of 200 feet or more."

That's by me--the history of the Pacific Northwest Forest & Range Experiment Station, done in 1975 as a contract job for the Forest Service. If you happen to have one of these, you want to hang onto it--it's now one of my earliest and rarest "first editions."

That piece of work, and quite a lot of my other proximity to the Forest Service, came from the stroke of luck I had in grad school here, of being in the same history seminars with Pete Steen, a forestry student and former Forest Service employee, who was undertaking what the rest of us in the seminar thought was the insanely brave task of getting a

combined Ph.D.--history and forestry. A double set of academic hoops to jump through! Pete, as it of course turned out, very much did know what he was doing with that combination, and became the longtime head of the Forest History Society, first at Santa Cruz and then at Duke. Along the way, I ended up, at Pete's behest, editing his manuscript of his now-standard history of the Forest Service—and more times than I can count, Pete and/or the Forest History Society library came to my rescue with bits of forest lore. Here in Mountain Time, blueprints and photographs of fire towers, for instance, for me to create my fictional one on Phantom Woman Mountain in some of the book's pivotal scenes.)

So, the Forest Service long and often has been at the edge of my mind, and let me now take you through just a few of the ways I've translated that into specifics of fiction--stories, and their trappings.

As promised, we lead off with a muckymuck, here in **Mountain Time**--Bob Marshall.

Marshall is one of the holy ghosts of **Mountain Time**, along with Aldo Leopold and Wallace Stegner and THOREAU AND a chorus of other old environmental holinesses who every so often murmur in the laptop of my protagonist, who is the last of the environmental reporters here in Seattle. As probably all of you know but the world at large doesn't seem to, Bob Marshall was the Forest Service figure who was one of the founders of our federal wilderness system, and he was a personality who has long

intrigued me. Not so incidentally, the Forest Service Wilderness Area along the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana where I grew up is named for him.

Born in New York city in 1901 to considerable wealth and privilege, Marshall first developed his passion for the outdoors as a grade-schooler when he and his brother played Lewis and Clark in their backyard, which was Central Park.

Bob Marshall arrived out here as a young forester--I once came upon an oral history with Leo Isaac, the formidable old forest researcher at the Wind River Forest Experiment Station, south of Mt. St. Helens, who recalled that Marshall didn't know even how to use an axe properly when he got here.

But the attribute he did bring with him might be called a magnificent mania for the mountains--when he hiked in the Cascades, and the Rockies, and the Sierra Nevada, and the Brooks Range in Alaska, he would average about 35 miles a day. When he was assigned to Missoula, to the Northern Rocky Mountain Experiment Station from 1925 to 1928, the Montanans found him such a demon hiker that they called him "the Rocky Mountain greyhound."

I became interested in Marshall <sup>MY WIFE</sup> when Carol and I backpacked into the Bob Marshall Wilderness in 1977--an unforgettable set of days, utterly alone with ourselves and the Bob, as the Wilderness Area is called locally, which was the basis for the climactic journey my characters take in **Mountain Time**, and which you'll hear just a bit of, in

this excerpt. I ultimately tracked down his notebooks in the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley, and was determined to use him in a book sometime, somehow--Marshall was a weird and wonderful combination of geek and poet and overgrown boy and obsessive observer and overachiever on the trail and bureaucratic string-puller--I just find him a character nobody would believe if I made him up.

So, here's a swatch of fiction he and his ~~library held~~ notebooks make a bit of an appearance in. The main characters here, though, are:

Mitch Rozier, who is the environmental reporter for a Seattle newspaper called "Cascopia"--one of those urban weeklies for people concerned to know the difference between tofu and futon--and he writes

a column called "Coastwatch," a kind of ecological watchdog column.

Mitch at age fifty--when the ~~book~~<sup>NOVEL</sup> takes place in 1996--is jelly-sandwiched between the grown children he lost in an early divorce and an aging parent back in his hometown. He is, in other words, that not unknown specimen in our land, a Baby Boomer beginning to feel the pressure of the years.

Mitch at this point in the book has been joined in that hometown of his, back along the Montana Rockies, by the McCaskill sisters, who've been helping him in trying to fend with his father's illness. Lexa McCaskill is Mitch's "spousal equivalent," with whom he has been living, over here in Ballard; and Mariah McCaskill, her older sister, is still a highly intense photographer for a Montana newspaper. The three

of them here are in the midst of a weeklong hike into the Bob, for a reason I can't tell you without giving away the plot wholesale. They're at their campsite, after supper and after a tiff between Lexa and Mitch when she discovered he has brought along his laptop, with his Marshall disk, in his backpack.

Okay, from **Mountain Time:**

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And now it's a different time, a different book: the summer of 1939, <sup>AND</sup> a novel called **English Creek**. It's a story set in Montana, along the face <sup>THOSE SAME</sup> of ~~the~~ Rocky Mountains--about a Forest Service family there in 1930's, trying to pull their way out of the years of the Depression into better times--a tale of a rural valley, of its small town, of its summer of ranch and forest work. All of it told by my teen-age narrator, Jick McCaskill. Jick is only fourteen years old--going on fifteen, he always points out--but his eyes and ears are as old as sin. Among the stories within the story, Jick's older brother has defiantly told his parents--particularly his father, the forest ranger of the English Creek District, Mac McCaskill--that he's not going to college as planned, he's going to marry the blonde flame he's been going with and take a job as a ranch hand. Of course

there's a family blowup over that, and here's a little section of Jick and Mac right after that. (Jick's voice)

--pp. 15-16 (2 1/2 min.)

Before Jick goes on with the story in a few more excerpts, this is where I have to exult in the obvious: this story gave me the chance to create my own national forest. The Two Medicine does not exist, except in these pages, and in the actual country along the Rocky Mountain Front which is a portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, headquartered in Great Falls, ~~Montana~~. I put the ranger stations where I wanted, made up the rangers and their careers, ultimately put the whole shebang at risk with a late August forest fire.

Throughout the writing of this, besides all the research work in the forestry library here and in the archives at the University of Montana, and Montana State U., and the Montana Historical Society, I was constantly tracking down old forest rangers, sometimes with my tape recorder, sometimes in letters from them like this:

--excerpt from George Engler letter (1½ min.)

That was from George Engler, still a tall handsome outdoors guy in Great Falls. More about George's particular flavor of contribution to my fiction in a minute, but let me give you a general idea of how other ex-rangers pitched in, depending on what kind of lore I was after.

I well remember going to the Mountain Villa Mobile Home Park in Enumclaw, to call on a pair of retired rangers--Nēvan McCullough and

Dal Kirkpatrick-- and "paw over old times," as they called it. Nēvan and Dal between them had most of a century of memories of assorted ranger districts.

In Helena, friends steered me to a quite old ranger named Eric White. Eric looked like a whitehaired hawk, and with ~~Eric~~ a great <sup>TRUTH</sup> dawned on me. Not only were these geezer rangers valuable to talk to for the sake of their memories: <sup>DAMN</sup> pretty often, they had packed <sup>SOME OF</sup> their paperwork home with them <sup>WHEN THEY RETIRED.</sup> Eric, in the trove in his basement, had a copy of a transcript of all the radio conversation between a fire dispatcher and the crew bosses he was talking to, on one of the big Montana burns of the late 1940s. You can guess what a writer does <sup>QUICK</sup> when handed material like that--you say "I'll look this over and get it

(THANKS, ERIC)

right back to you,” then you step around the corner and run to the nearest photocopy machine.

In Missoula, next, I found the keeper of the mother lode of photocopy-able good stuff. Mike Hardy, a not-long-retired ranger who lived up to his last name: craggy, barrel-chested, dark-haired. AMONG OTHER TREASURES Mike provided me this item: “Fire-Camp Cook Book, for 30 men--Region 1, 1940.” In a turn of the plot, my character Jick ends up helping out the cook during the climactic forest fire in the book, and right in here is how the T-shaped table was laid out, how many potatoes he had to peel, all the wonderful daunting chores of a fire camp kitchen.

Also, Mike Hardy, in his retirement, had turned into a scholar--he was working on a monograph about a longtime Missoula and Region

One figure, the Forest Service's only fire researcher for much of his career, Harry Gisborne. I had glossed across the Gisborne papers in my own research in the University of Montana archives, but Mike called my attention to them more closely, and this is the kind of bonus to the imagination that sources such as these old rangers can provide. Harry Gisborne, when you really get into his papers, and particularly their margins, is one of those Forest Service secret wildmen I love, like Pinchot and Marshall. Gisborne entertained himself with marginal comments he would pencil in beside what he thought were the stupidest ideas of his Region One bosses; he'd write "damnphool" -- ONE WORD, D-A-M-N-P-H-O-O-L -- or another real favorite of his, "this idea is whores de combat" -- the first word of that phrase spelled with a "w" and an "e."

Gisborne's paperwork attitude reminded me, if I ever needed much, of the frustrations <sup>CAN</sup> that come with working <sup>SUCH AS THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE</sup> within a large organization, and here I have to take you just briefly back into "muckymuck" territory. In the 1930s the Regional Forester of the northern Rockies--Region One, headquartered in Missoula--was Evan Kelley. Major Kelley, he was known as, from his World War I service. Major Kelley was one of those administrators who may be in error but never is in doubt. His rangers and packers in the northern Rockies cursed him devoutly because he arrived from the Southwest with the notion that burros, which he'd been used <sup>USING</sup> to in the chaparral country, should replace packhorses in Region One. It took a year or two of short-legged burros getting high-centered across the big downed trees and windfalls

(WITH NO TROUBLE)

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of the Rockies, which packhorses had always stepped right across, to budge the Major from that idea.

Well, of course, the Major's memorandums to his troops out in the ranger districts were right in line with the rest of his thinking--you can imagine what some of Gisborne's marginal comments were--and so I ended up working into the book two major contributions, to call them that, from Missoula headquarters: Gisborne's SENSATIONAL EYE-WITNESS description of a firestorm, and Major Kelley's effect on my invented ranger, Mac McCaskill, as in LITTLE this scene:

--pp. 228-229 (1 1/2 min)

/I vowed earlier to come back <sup>to</sup> George Engler, the ranger who wrote that winsome letter of advice about how to get a cup of coffee out of a

sheepherder, because George provided me a story that makes about a five-minute finale here. This is another of the bonuses to the imagination from using these rangers as sources--personal anecdotes of things that had happened to them. George told me his tale of a problem he'd once had with a packhorse, in maybe fifty words, and as you'll hear, I give the same basic problem to my narrator Jick and let my imagination take off with the story. Through no desire of his own, Jick has ended up tending a sheep camp--taking groceries in to the herder--in the mountains of the Two Medicine National Forest; he's riding a saddlehorse named Pony, and leading a packhorse from Hell--as so many of them were--named Bubbles.

--pp. 82-84 (5 min.)

The storyline of **English Creek** goes on from there, with Jick of  
course discovering that the lash cinch on Bubbles' packload has been  
broken by that waltz down the mountainside; and of Mac battling the big  
 fire on his beloved forest, and so on. That's the written version, and for  
 the writer there's also a kind of shadowplay version there in the mental  
cave between the ears--the memories of the interviews and  
 conversations that helped to spark 333 pages of fiction.

For me, there have been wonderful <sup>LITTLE</sup> subsequent chapters with these  
 "forest arrangers" in the years since **English Creek** was published:

--When I began writing **Mountain Time** and wanted to make sure  
 that one of my backpacking characters--one of the women--was a  
 superlative hiker and an expert in the outdoors, I again gathered trailwise

National Forest, down on the Oregon coast. Jim and I chatted about this new book, **Mountain Time**, for a few minutes, then he looked at me and said, "Hey, when you were researching this in Great Falls, were you ever in the supervisor's office when Dale Gorman"--the supervisor of the Lewis and Clark National Forest for a number of years--"was there?"

I told him no, I'd been in the public information office there plenty of times, but never the super's office--why?

DELIBERATE He grinned and said, "You'd have seen something there. Dale Gorman always kept a copy of **English Creek** on the corner of his desk. And anybody who came in new to work <sup>FOR</sup> ~~ON~~ his national forest was required to read it."

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR LISTENING TONIGHT,  
AND I'LL BE GLAD TO SIGN UP SOME BOOKS  
AND VISIT FURTHER.

material from George Engler: one of the men to match our mountains, lending me another bit of his life so I could create a woman to match our mountains.

--Then when **Mountain Time** arrived in the bookstores a few months ago, at the reading I did in Missoula I looked out into the audience and there was Mike Hardy, of all the fire camp help, sitting there now looking like a whiteheaded hawk.

--But the closing <sup>LITTLE</sup> story, completing for me the fifteen-year-circle since I started struggling to create that Two Medicine National Forest of mine, and have Jick tell you about it, happened this February. I was in Corvallis, to give a speech at OSU, and at the booksigning beforehand, up to me came Jim Furness, who is the supervisor of the Siuslaw

# UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON ALMA MATER

To her we sing who keeps the ward  
O'er all her sons from sea to sea;  
Our Alma Mater, Washington,  
A health! a health! we give to thee.  
Child of the mighty western land,  
You're the mother of a mighty race;  
Silent her gentle vigil holds  
In strength and purity and grace.

## *Chorus*

All hail! O Washington!  
Thy sons and daughters sing glad acclaim  
Through years of youth and loyalty;  
And still in age we sing thy fame.  
In honor thy towers stand,  
Thy battlements shine in dawning light  
And glow again in sunset rays.  
All hail! O Washington!

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## Ivan Doig, '69

Author of nine books, Ivan Doig was described by the San Francisco Chronicle as "...not just another regional writer with an ear for the parochial rhythms and shallow roots of the Rocky Mountains. He stands upon the shoulders of Wallace Stegner and A.B. Guthrie, taller than Edward Abbey and Tom McGuane, and sees much further. He looks homeward, and he sees a place in all our minds, not just in those of us who live in and write about the West."

His career has been honored with the lifetime "Distinguished Achievement" award by the Western Literature Association, the "Spirit of the West" award from the Mountains and Plains Booksellers, and honorary degrees from Montana State University and Lewis and Clark College.

Doig divides his time between his home in Seattle and the places his writing takes him.

## Program

### Welcome and Introduction of Special Guests

CFRAA President, Gene L. Chase, '67

### Dinner

### College Report

Dean David B. Thorud

### Presentation of Honored Alumnus Award

Gene L. Chase, '67  
to  
William Corbin, '64

### Presentation of Honorary Alumnus Award

Dean David B. Thorud  
to  
Norman Beckert  
David Thomas, '41, '48  
to  
Frederick F. Wangaard

### Special Presentation by Author Ivan Doig, '69

### Arbor Day Fair

### Class Countdown

### Alma Mater

## College of Forest Resources Alumni Association

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*College of Forest  
Resources  
Alumni Association*

**1999  
Annual  
Banquet**

**Friday,  
November 19, 1999**

*Faculty Club*

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

COLLEGE OF  
FOREST  
RESOURCES



**Ms. Andy Gary**  
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October 25, 1999

Ivan Doig  
17277 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW  
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Mr. Doig,

Attached is copy that will be used at the College of Forest Resources Alumni Banquet on November 19. I am hoping you could take time to review the copy and return it to me by Nov. 8. Please edit as necessary.

My intent was to provide two brief pieces – one for the printed program and one for the MC to read aloud – and that they would complement rather than repeat one another. As this is the first time I have had the privilege to present an author as a speaker, I hope I have captured the appropriate information to share with our guests.

A few details on the evening:

Social Hour: 5 p.m. - 7 p.m. – Faculty Club

Dinner: 7 p.m. – Faculty Club, to be followed by presentation by Ivan Doig and awarding of honorary and honored alumni awards. (I have yet to see the exact program order, but will send it your way when I receive it).

I also need to know what you and your spouse prefer for the dinner. The options are salmon or beef tenderloin.

I am looking forward to meeting you in person. If you have any questions, please contact me at (206) 685-6606. Thanks once again for agreeing to attend our event.

Cordially,

*Andy Gary*

Andy Gary  
Development Coordinator  
College of Forest Resources

**Introduction at event:**

Ivan Doig was born in Montana in 1939 and grew up along the Rocky Mountain Front where his trilogy of novels, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, English Creek, and Ride with Me, Mariah Montana, takes place. As a youth he worked ranch jobs and herded sheep with his family before embarking on degrees at Northwestern University and the University of Washington, where he earned a Ph.D. in history.

His first book, This House of Sky, was a finalist for the National Book Award in contemporary thought, and each of his eight following novels have been lauded with numerous awards and recognitions. His ninth book, Mountain Time, which arrived in bookstores \_\_\_\_\_, is set in Seattle, San Francisco, Alaska and the Rocky Mountain Front.

As Doig's stories focus on both the struggles of the land and its people, he has relied on the experiences of numerous foresters and environmentalists to supplement his own first-hand knowledge of the Rocky Mountains. Interestingly, the land issues Doig created for the plot of Mountain Time, which he describes as "a generational tussle over the question of oil and gas leases," became, in fact, a hotly contested reality in the region.

We are honored to have such an esteemed guest with us this evening. I would like to introduce to you Mr. Ivan Doig.

**Following the presentation:**

Mr. Doig will be available to sign books following the remainder of tonight's presentations.

**In printed program:**

Ivan Doig, '69

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