

George N. Engler--retired ranger I met at Readers World; "worked with
Vern Edwards at Townsend 1948-51, USFS"

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May 29, '81

Dear Mr. Engler--

You may recall that when we met at Readers World, I threatened to pester you sometime for background material about the life of a ranger. I'll be in Montana this summer for a month or so, starting toward a novel about a ranger's family in the summer of 1939. Will you be in Gt. Falls, and game to talk to me for an hour or two, on June 29, 30 or July 1? What I'm after is details of the job of ranger-- nothing personally incriminating!

Hope to see you. Best,

George Engler interview, 1 July '81

began as trail crew member, 1939; spring of '46, took jr ranger exam.

21--reporting to trail crew in '39, bought pr J.C. Penney boots for \$8.95: "They felt fine in the dadburn store" but walking made feet swell and they were tight: "but I spent the summer in them."

--29--worked 6 days/wk; 325--his pay \$3~~2~~40/day

52--trail job chores: removing logs, brush, telephone line mtnce ("grounded" phone line); bucked logs off with 2-man crosscuts

80--worked~~x~~ as 1-man trail crew on Cascade Crest

115--trip to Mt. Aix, leading horses around pumice cone.


175--spent most of day looking for horses; flushed 6 bull elk in velvet, going across alpine basin.

236--on way out in Sept that yr., in snow, met bull elk: rutting season, "they get to bugling"; E tied up pack horses, "decided to have some fun with him," run him out of meadow. "He wouldn't run;" wd go a little ways, return and take up his territory; got to thinking "maybe I wasn't so smart."

268--"We always used to figure" in Cascades, if 3 days of east wind, then there'd be lightning storms; ponderosa pine in ~~new~~ lower mtns ignited easily.

280, '41 Skykomish fire: speeder tracks--old logging rr--"turned into pretzels" by heat of fire sweeping across tracks; "had zigzags in "em..."

290--E was camp boss on Sky'sh fire; firefighters mostly off Skid Rd in Seattle; they "weren't the best physically...but on the other hand you got some excellent cooks..."; 3-4 Negroes who also worked in kitchen...

302--cook got into lemon extract; "come about mealtime and he was passed out...So I learned that you kept the vanilla extract and the lemon extract gathered up..." 

323--firefighting pay abt 35¢ hr

408--story of Greek logger, a faller, who knew the speeder was the only way supplies arrived to camp, but abt 2 hrs wd come in to see if snoose had arrived yet, "he was so desperate"

422--shook out ne'er do wells and agitators right away

429--was on Sky'sh fire 2-3 wks

446--fire camp workday: men on fireline by 8 a.m., 12 hr shift--men wanted a lot of hrs for more money, \$5/day was big wages; orchard pay was about 20¢, for ex, agnst 35¢ on fireline

468--worst fire E was on was late stages of Mann Gulch

475--Mrs E didn't know E's whereabouts for 3 wks or so on Red Rock fire in Wn in summer of '46; E had chg of suppression crew of 3 men--went to fire, above Goose Prairie, saw it crowning, knew it wasn't a 3-man fire "but you went and did what you could"; next day, "it crowned out again and spotted fire all over the mtinside there"; E hiked out to reclamation stn, phoned for help; next day, "it made a big run that day"; 40-man crew came in; "we hit it then late that afternoon" and started to get line around it; E was on fire ~~xxxx~~ because 1st man onto fire stayed in chge till relieved; stayed thru mop-up, finally 350 acres or so. (early Aug to after Labor Day)

--Townsend split into Elkhorns and Big Belts districts

--inspected ranges; saw that sheep didn't bed too long in 1 place.
Tepee system: (24) herder put tepee ahead of sheep, they homed in on it.

33--herder wd start sheep in right direction at daybreak; they'd shade up mid-morn, he'd go to wagon and have b'fast; ranger wd try coincide with him then; herder'd be at wagon until maybe 2, then sheep wd start grazing, he'd move tepee ahead, and stay with sheep until bedding.

50--growing up in Yakima, was around Basque ("Basko") herders

60--wd meet sheep at boundary, count them onto range; wnd use "counting wing" or corral, run them thru gate; E used tallywhacker, punch it every ten sheep : like pocket watch, clicker on top: 120=1200
--become "somewhat mesmerized" watching sheep go thru; 73, story of ranger who cnd't get count to agree with herder's on 3 tries, (1 band) finally said, "Hell, the manual just says I got to count them, it doesn't say I got to be right."

88-3¢/ewe/month; sheep come onto range abt 1 July, to early Sept.

95--sheep fed on "forbs", lush weeds (broadleaf), which dried up by Sept--bluebells, etc.

103--grazing went up in elevation thru summer, then worked dn toward end of season

121--sheep sheared before coming onto range

123~~1~~ lambs shipped in Sept.

134+--various ^{field} stations he worked out of, in making rounds of range; 4 altogether; usually worked a week out of each; might have corral pole sales, post sales, on flat rate basis--every tree had to be marked with light axe with US on butt: blaze on tree, then stamp the US.

188--ass'n: ex of one of abt 15 permittees, family ranches; 100 head then an ave. operation. Ass'n rider might have 1500 head; moved stock around to various pastures; perhaps 6-8000 acres of allotments. Rider might hq at old ranger station, with wagon on far end of range; wnd't have to ride back every day that way. "Rarely caught a cow herder at cabin" except at night; he went out at daybreak, rode in cool of morning, during heat of day holed up at other-end wagon; so ranger would try catch him at daybrk or dark.

250--roundup of cattle in fall; cattle might work themselves down, as stormy weather began in high country; cattbe off range by mid-Oct., just before hunting season.

269--ranger s'times would help with roundup, to get acqnted with ranchers; also might help put cattle on in the spring.

280--counting cattle on was actually sampling. rate in late '40s, 50~~0~~⁰/ head/m~~on~~th

312--sheep: counting wings scattered thruout forest--a kind of brush corral, the sheep run up against it and funneled out end; counted* 3-4 times during summer ✓

330--small bunch of sheep split off from band doesn't make noise "get kegged up" in narrow canyon, for ex, and don't make noise (possible reaction against predator threat)

358--herder tends to bunch up sheep when moving them thru timber; uneasy if he can't see them; good timber herder prob'l isg~~o~~ good open herder, but not nec'ly vice-versa. An uneasy herder will dog the sheep a lot to keep them bunched.

Engler

detail--fire/2

334--sorting out fire crew: "you go thru to see what they know how to do...": able-bodied ones, if they have good footgear, are put on fire line: fallers, buckers, men with shovels and pulaskis, to do "grunt work"; fallers were better paid, as were men who did the snagging--maybe 50¢/hr; most worthless guys, "you could always put 'em to washing dishes" or policing up camp, feed pack stock, build pole corrals and hitching rails.

360--200-300 men under E as camp boss

365--meals: steak or ham, vegetables, salad: took pride in meals, men ate abt twice as much as normal hand: lunches often double, maybe 3-4 sandwiches, oranges; bologna sandwiches, which could be "slapped together quick".

382--1st day or 2, problem of sobering men up, "didn't get a whole lot out of them; after that they settled in"; some were out of work loggers, or hay hands; once sober, many were good hands.

392--"overhead personnel" were FS, knew how to organize crews: saws in front, pulaskis next, the shovels on the end;

400--camp boss and ass't camp boss were only FS personnel, cook was main person: if you had good cook, crew was happy. Also, had to keep snoose in camp. ↙

Engler

detail

578--at ~~Townsend~~, asst ranger, 1948-51, under Vern Edwards, old-style ranger who grew up in upper Centennial Valley, knew livestock. Except Supvsr and maybe someone on staff, all Helena Forest rangers were old-timers.

Engler

detail

160--on Mt. Aix in '39, had SPF long-range radio; "took half a horse to pack the batteries"; radio abt 1' square, 100' antenna; was on the air next morning by time dispatcher got to work.

106--meals: mostly canned stuff: loaves of bread, would leave them out to dry--harden like toast--so they wouldn't mold.

155"There was a big packrat had my last crust of bread...rattling it around in the middle of the floor there..." shot rat with .22, "salvaged my bread."

Eric White FS '82 interview, for possible turns of phrase; in "Forest Service"
category in Eng Crk big filebox