

# A Forest Ranger's Rounds

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THE GRAY-GREEN Forest Service jeep parked in front of the ranger station looked different this spring morning. From inside the jeep peered three young boys, obviously impatient to get started, with big piles of camping gear heaped all around them.

The boys, Dean, Charlie, and Jesse, had been the winners of a Kentucky State Conservation Essay Contest. The prize awarded was a day spent with a forest ranger on his rounds. As district ranger, I was to be their escort.

For an added bonus, we would camp out overnight on the Morehead District of the Daniel Boone National Forest. This forest lies in the eastern portion of Kentucky, and my district is the northernmost of seven.

By now it was 9 a.m., the work crews had been dispatched for the day, office routine had been disposed of, and I stood in the doorway just for a moment, waiting to plunge in.

"Ranger Al! Can't we go now?" That got me started, and the boys and I settled back in the jeep to see what a national forest can say for itself.

Our first stop was to be at the Clear Creek Furnace Recreation Area. The site needed checking after a weekend of intensive use by picnickers.

We swung off the main road, drove through the picnic area, and stopped at the base of the furnace.

The towering stone furnace now standing silent could tell a story of changing times and changing industry. During the late 1800's, the furnace was the center of iron ore production. Great quantities of

timber had been cut to provide charcoal for iron ore smelting. But, by the change of the century, this method of iron production had been replaced, and the furnace abandoned.

Growing populations in the area were putting greater demands on the forest's timber, water, and wildlife resources; and by the early 1900's, the forest was in poor condition from overuse.

It was at this stage that the U.S. Forest Service was asked to purchase this land as a national forest. The proper protection and management of the once scarred and barren slopes have restored the land to its fullest potential. Dense hardwood forests, clear streams, and abundant game populations now make this forest a paradise for the outdoor enthusiast.

The boys were attracted by the creek, and so was I, but for a different reason. There, spoiling the clear sparkle of the water, lay refuse from a picnic meal, cans and paper caught along the rocky edges. The four of us gathered up the mess and left it in a trash can, and then kept our eyes open for other litter and signs of vandalism. It is a discouraging thing to see Smokey Bear signs riddled with shotgun pellets, and picnic areas dotted with paper and soft drink containers. The cost of sign repair and cleanup can run into hundreds of dollars for one recreation area alone, enough to open the eyes of any responsible individual.



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We piled back in the jeep, our next destination well in mind. The Primitive Weapons Area, about 8,000 acres, had been established by the Forest Service and the State of Kentucky to provide an area for hunters using such primitive weapons as longbows, crossbows, and muzzle loaders, and also to demonstrate wildlife management under the multiple use concept. This is a region crisscrossed with ridges and sandstone cliffs, and in its remote beauty lies much of its appeal.

In these surroundings, Daniel Boone lived with and also fought against the Shawnee Indians. His adventures centered around the Licking River Valley and the Blue Licks salt region to the north. These areas were appropriately named, as it was here that wild buffalo and deer once satisfied their natural craving for salt at the mineral springs "licks." "What good is all that salt?" came from Charlie, and I went on to tell of its importance to the early settlers for food preservation, and how salt was produced in large iron kettles which were set over wood fires.

### Boone's Capture Recalled

Daniel Boone's capture by the Indians came next in my story, and the fact that hunting in this area is limited to the weapons those early pioneers used had the boys drawing imaginary crossbows and sighting muzzle loaders.

There were no real targets in sight except the ever-present squirrels, but hunters bring home deer, grouse, and wild turkey in season. The rugged landscape, with its ridgetops and cliffs, gives the hunters an exciting time, and their response has been most enthusiastic.

Now came the first real business stop of the day—inspection of a timber sale. A big part of my job calls for administration of the sale of mature trees or the thinning of younger trees. The sales are mostly to lumber producers who operate one or more small sawmills.

These sales are a boost for the local economy, through the employment of the men working in the woods, and through the manufacture of wood products like building materials and furniture veneers,

Even the younger generation shares in the profits. But the three boys looked only vaguely enthusiastic when I mentioned that 25 percent of the receipts of the sold timber is turned over to the national forest counties for local school budgets and for county road systems.

The activity of the logging operation seemed a lot more fun. The boys watched wide eyed as bulldozers skidded logs to a central area where they were being loaded onto big logging trucks.

### Turkey Family Sighted

Newly constructed logging roads were checked by me for erosion control measures required of the logger. He had done a mighty good job.

Water bars or diversion ditches had been bulldozed across the road at regular intervals to prevent the rain runoff from eroding the steeper portions of the road and washing the soil away. The roads no longer in use had been seeded to cover the turned up earth.

Here Dean was the excited one—not 30 yards from us was a mother turkey with her brood, carefully picking their way, single file, down such a newly seeded roadbed.

Up came Dean's imaginary flintlock and he was the proud possessor of a meal for his pioneer family.

By this time, the boys had absorbed enough of the conservation viewpoint to be dismayed at the looks of a clear cutting of a hardwood stand. Here, all the trees had been cut down. Actually, I explained, this is an approved method of harvesting mature timber designed to encourage the seeds of more desirable species to germinate and grow, forming a new stand. The sunlight now can reach the ground; but prior to harvesting, dense stands of mature trees might have eliminated any such sprouting. Deer also benefit, as the cleared area provides excellent browse for them to feed on.

We had a chance to compare the looks of a younger stand of timber that had been thinned with that of a clear cut area. Thinning accelerates growth of the better trees in a timber stand and insures a good supply of acorns and other tree



*Hiking trail (lower right) through natural arch, Daniel Boone National Forest.*

food (mast) for squirrels as well as other wild animals.

Wildlife was given a helping hand at the site of an old sawmill. The cleared area at the millsite was a natural place for game to seek food. Hence it had been planted with the orchardgrass and white dutch clover which are preferred foods.

The value of wildlife in the Daniel Boone National Forest is most easily seen in the recreation it provides. But the enjoyment of hunting, fishing, and trapping is only part of the picture. Local communities profit from the sportsmen's purchases of gas, hunting equipment, overnight accommodations, items from local craft industries, and farm products like honey and country hams.

Seeing the amount of horseplay in the rear of the jeep, I decided to put the excess energy to work, and we headed for Tater Knob fire tower. The climb up the tower ladder actually slowed them down only slightly—boys being boys—but the long-range view from the top kept the questions flying.

Naming all the landmarks gave me an opportunity to see the area pretty thor-

oughly, but it was the regular towerman who made the most important observation. About half a mile to the north was a patch of pine timber, the tops brown under the sun when they should have been green with new spring growth. This clearly indicated the beginning of an attack by Virginia pine sawflies, and called for insect control work. It would be the start of my schedule of activities for the following week, for sure.

### Clearing for Copters

From the tower we could also see a helispot, one of the many clearings developed for helicopter landings in the forest. These clearings are used both for fire control and wildlife management. The forest had been using helicopters for a good many years to fly in men and equipment for firefighting.

The cleared spots, usually on top of the many ridges, serve also as wildlife dining areas, remote from human interference and ideal for browse.

I led the way down the tower stairway, and down a trail maintained by the forest

for both hiking and hunting use, and also for access to any fires that occur deep within the forested area.

In the Daniel Boone National Forest is a very intricate system of hiking trails, many leading to scenic overlooks where a family can view the massive cliff line topography along with nature's carvings of natural bridges and arches.

This particular hiker trail, appropriately named Cedar Cliff Ridge, followed the ridge and valley back to Chestnut Cliffs above Leatherwood Creek.

If it hadn't been a working day I would have yielded to the clamoring boys, as the trail is a very inviting one, but instead I promised them a backpacking hike plus a cookout for the following day.

### Dogwood at Fullest

We did relax over the lunch that we'd brought along and enjoyed the white dogwood now at its fullest. The dogwood blossoms before the other trees leaf out, making a dramatic opening for the natural beauty of the forest.

The spring rains had encouraged the blooming of the small violets, purple and yellow, the spring beauties. And the may-apples were pushing up through the leaf mold.

After eating, the boys and I continued our rounds following a forest road down Martins Branch, where a stream improvement project crew was hard at work.

This creek helps feed the Morehead Municipal Water Supply, and here in the forest we can help keep the water plentiful and hold down excessive siltation of the reservoir.

The project crew workers were now constructing rock structures along the banks of the streams.

These structures called "gabions" control the flow of the stream and protect the streambanks from eroding. The "gabions" direct the flow of the stream away from the bank, causing the current to carve holes in the bottom of the creek, which make excellent fishing holes. The boys pointed out that the holes would be fine for swimming, too.

Parts of the stream plan needed to be modified, as the streambed was sandier

than expected, so I had to spend some time with the work crew.

In any event, it was late in the afternoon when I was ready to go, and later yet when I had rounded up the three explorers. We then headed directly for our campground at Rodburn Hollow.

On the way, we saw what can happen to a forest through human carelessness. Two weeks ago a fire, started by a hiker's discarded cigarette, had raged along a hilltop, burning some 200 acres before it was brought under control.

The boys had never seen such destruction before. The blackened and scarred timber stood awkwardly over the ashy ground strewn with burned brush and fallen branches. The dead trees not totally destroyed would be sold in a salvage sale later on, as a preliminary step of a reclamation job. All wildlife had left the spot, homes and food destroyed for many months. Loss of ground cover made this a weak spot in our control of soil erosion during the spring rains. The forest's beauty was gone. Even three 10-year-olds could get angry at the picture around them, a never to be forgotten experience.

"If I were the ranger, I'd make the guilty people come out here and see what they'd done"—Jesse's comment brought forth murmurs of approval from each of the other boys.

Rodburn Hollow lies just beyond the Triangle fire tower. So after checking in at the tower, we went at once to set up our tent and lay a fire for an evening meal. The boys pitched in, proud to help, but like me, tired from a big day. I could see we would be crawling into sleeping bags good and early.

As the day drew to a close, I realized how much we had seen. I only hoped the importance of the forest and its value were as clear to the three boys as they were to me.

Sheer enjoyment on the part of the vast majority of people ranked high on the list of values. And enjoyment of all of the forest's resources—recreation, water, wildlife, and timber—depends on sound management under a sustained yield plan of multiple use.

A national forest does speak quite well for itself, don't you agree?