

SUMMER CAMPING NOTES

BENJAMIN ALMONTE, Cl. '53

For our 1950 summer camping, the Field Practice and the Forest Inventory classes were taken to the Bicol National Park to make an inventory of that scenic forest area located between the provinces of Camarines Norte and Camarines Sur.

Our party was composed of 34 students and members of the College of Forestry Faculty headed by Prof. Calixto Mabesa.

We boarded the Bicol Express at the College RR station on May 1, and had a comfortable though uneventful day's ride to Bicolandia in a coach reserved especially for us. At Sipocot where we got off we were welcomed at the station by District Forester Severino Nablo of Camarines Norte together with several forestry officials of that district. We then took a special Alatco bus for the Bahi Forest Station which was 26 kms. from Sipocot on the Sipocot-Daet road.

The station was located at the Camarines Sur side of the Bahi river beside a toll bridge in whose vicinity were a toll house and some six or seven houses. We set up our tents in that place which served as our main camp and headquarters from where the different crews of five boys each came and went in the performance of the timber valuation survey work. We worked six days a week with Sunday set aside as rest day at the main camp. By rest of course, is meant that we did nothing but wash our clothes, get our specimens in order, or leave for the neighboring towns when not invited somewhere.

A little birdie who has just shed its green feathers can't help but feel sorry for those guys who used to tell the Freshmen that summer camping was only a back-breaking experience where one, for the most

part, learned the fine art of wielding the delicate pick and shovel. We were luckier this year. Not only our backs but also a few hearts were strained—and our throats and most of the shoes, too—boy, what a scraping they got in that land where “only frogs drink water” and where the hospitable *daragas* could set the most granitic cardiacum aflutter with their soft and oddly accented “Sige Na Noy” intended to make you feel at home. They were really nice and friendly.

If by hearing the glowing accounts of our summer camping, those who were left behind are led to believe that we did nothing but enjoy ourselves in the neighboring sawmills, let them not be misled any longer.

We had our share of hardships too and if we have too often dwelt on the pleasanter side of our summer experience, it is only because we look upon such pleasures as rare novelties in a forester's life which help relieve our physical fatigue acquired in the performance of the rough and hard line of work we have chosen to pursue.

To the average young man, a forestry student's course of study, especially the Summer camping phase, is known to be a tough one. Why then should we dwell much on the hardships we have suffered when such hardships are only to be expected, being the rule in our course rather than the exception? To us, it is trivial. It is what we are supposed to get used to so we don't talk much about it because it is to most of us as plain as a pikestaff.

However, I would like to dispel the incipient impression on the campus that what we did down there was no camping at all but a summer vacation at the expense of the neighboring sawmills and hospitable cit-

izens, entirely discordant with the long standing traditions of the old School of Forestry, so I'll try to paint here a miniature picture of some of the hardships and discomforts we endured.

Each of the crews would start out from camp before 7:00 o'clock in the morning with most of the boys carrying a pack on their backs. Sometimes it would be a fine, clear sunrise with the promise of a sunny day ahead. At other times, it would be drizzling as we labored up the slippery trails to our respective strips in the heart of the forest.

The Bicol weather when we were down there turned out to be as capricious as our own Makiling. While working with the bright sun overhead a heavy rain would fall suddenly like cats and dogs accompanied by thunder and lightning and then, as abruptly as it started, it would cease and the sun would come out once more drying us a little.

Often, especially during the afternoons, the torrential rains would continue unabated, washing off our perspiration and drenching us to the skin. We could not seek shelter by the buttresses of the trees for fear of being struck by lightning and we could not just stand about in the open because it was so darn cold. We had to move about in order to keep warm and avoid getting chilled and since we could not just run or jump about senselessly, we would go on with the work at a brisk pace while thunder clapped overhead and with our poleman holding a flashlight aloft like a statue of liberty in the wilderness so that the compassman could sight him in the dark.

The green mountain leeches would emerge and somehow manage to get through our leggings into our soggy shoes and even get up to our necks and faces.

The ground would be slippery and now and then one of our comrades would tumble down flat on his back, never failing to elicit laughter from the rest of the boys--- good-natured, healthy laughter from the

lusty throats of vigorous young men bound together in strong comradeship by a common ordeal. At night in our makeshift huts after a supper of sardines the rigors of the day would be forgotten. We would button the necks of our damp shirts and sink into deep slumber to gain new strength for the morrow.

Even when the weather was fair, we had some difficulties with the rugged terrain. Now and then our survey line would strike a ravine which we had to cross by straddling a mossy log that had fallen across it. Holding onto vines, we would clamber down and up the sides of a deep river bed. There were steep, rocky slopes which we could climb one at a time for fear that rolling boulders might bowl over the man following behind. Not till the preceding man is safely up could the next follow. When we encountered terrain like those, we got hoarse yelling "Watch out, below....." and what's more disconcerting, it delayed the progress of our work.

Need I state here too that during our stay there we got more than what we could take of sardines, dried fish, and either mashy or half-cooked rice? But then, we were always ravenously hungry and have found out that a cold lunch mixed with a little rain water does not taste so bad after a heavy half-day's work. Gnats were aplenty too but we have found that cigarettes though damp with sweat were effective repellants.

To the outdoor-loving students who have seen no more of the forest than that of the scraggy slopes of Mt. Makiling, the first day of work and the first night of camping under the towering trees in a virgin stand are memorable events worth reliving in the thoughts once in a while.

In certain sections of the forest, not a few of us were amazed to see the clear forest floor with only a little undergrowth. Where we expected to find a thick, dark

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jungle, we saw what seemed like a city park ground, somberly lit by silvery sun-rays filtering through the thick foliage overhead. Dead, brown leaves covered the ground like a soft golden carpet and there were numerous places where, save for the rippling murmur of a little stream, not a sound could be heard, not even birds or insects, nothing but the gentle moan of the wind or the scarcely audible cawing of a far-off *kalaw*—only those and the deep silence; that, and a vague awareness that there, one is in union with nature itself, in a state of oneness with the Infinite.

Night in the giant woodlands is so different from the daytime. But before I proceed, may I beg your tolerance if I, in my greenness regard the trees we have seen as giants? If you have been used to nothing but coconut trees or santols in your backyards or to the acacias and banabas that line some of the city's better streets, how else could you look upon three or four-log red lauans usually about one meter in diameter and sometimes as wide as two meters.

Those mammoth hulks, of course, we could not see at night. We could only feel their presence around us as we lie in our rude open hut and stare through the cracks in the anahaw roofing at the dark boughs above over which the pale starlight was glimmering.

With the quick advent of nightfall the creatures of the forest gradually come to life, breaking the stillness of the daytime as the cool mountain air is filled with the myriad chirps and twittering of insects in the dark mingled with the screech of night birds. Far away from the flickering campfire, a deer would bellow and a hunter's shots would ring out. We would talk in low tones and speculate on the origin of the phosphorescent bits of matter that litter the ground like so many green coals in the dark, but always that nocturnal forest trill

STANDARDIZATION . . .

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give us a salary commensurate with our capability, education and training.

We members of the forestry profession must admit that the fault is partly ours. We have never been vociferous in our bid for better wages. We used to believe that "silence is the better part of virtue."

It will be to the best interest of the employees of the Bureau of Forestry if the foresters' salaries will be standardized at once and those concerned will include in its calendar of activities a campaign, personal and otherwise, to this end.

It is with high hopes that our plea—"standardization of foresters' salaries will meet proper recognition and reward very soon and the forestry profession raised to the standard in which it rightfully belongs.

THE MANAGEMENT . . (Cont. from p. 11)
devoted to protection, administration, and supervision of forest utilization.

In view of the limited personnel and funds available, it is your civic duty as Filipinos to cooperate in the prevention of unnecessary destruction to our forests, especially against illegal *cañgin*-making. The conservation of our forests by wise use is the only means by which we can pass this great natural wealth from the present to future generations. You alone can help to protect and save it from destruction.

would prevail until, weary from the day's hard grind, we would be carried off into the deep oblivion of sleep.

For the hospitality of the District Forester's Staff in the area under Forester Severino Nablo, we will always be grateful. So are we thankful to the different sawmills in the area where we met many alumni of our school who gave us much sensible advice and made our stay a very enjoyable one in spite of the hard work. Last but not least in our esteem are the kind people of Bahi, Tuaca and elsewhere where we were welcomed.