

The Forest Ranger as a Specialist

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What a Ranger Should Know, and How He Should Be Trained



It is almost platitudinous to say that the success of any administrative organization depends primarily on the character of its personnel. The great fundamental problem in all organizations having a number of employees is the improvement of the standard of these employees. One need only recall the revolution which the efficiency expert has produced in modern industrial plants, the training school for employees maintained by so many of the more complex manufacturing and distributing industries, such as department stores or electrical supply factories, or the naval and military service schools which train the men to greater efficiency in their duties, to realize that everywhere, in all branches of industry, the need of special training is realized and active steps are being taken to provide it. In the work of forest protection and administration this need is in no degree less urgent. In European countries such as Germany, France and Switzerland, employees in the governmental forest services are required to undergo a long and painstaking course of training and to serve an apprenticeship extending over years. In the British India forest service men are trained for rangers and higher positions at the forest academy established and maintained since 1878 by the Imperial Government at Dehra Dun, where instruction is given both in English and in the vernacular. In the United States all employees of the service below the grade of Associate United States Forester are required to pass a rigid practical examination to qualify for employment and are then employed only in subordinate positions on probation and are required to demonstrate their fitness for permanent employment before being accepted by the service. Higher positions are filled only by promotion from lower grades, and promotion and increase in salary are given for merit alone.

The Canadian Custom

In Canada the fact that forest employees require any special qualifications of training has scarcely yet been realized. It might be well to call attention to the variety of employees in the Dominion service in one district alone. These include twelve distinct classes, as follows: — Forest Supervisors, Forest Assistants, Forest Rangers, Fire Guardians, Surveyors, Book-keepers, Stenographers, Carpenters, Cooks, Packers, Teamsters and Labourers. The qualifications for a cook, a surveyor, a stenographer or a carpenter are fairly well defined and can be readily appreciated by anyone.

So also the forest assistant must have a technical training in forestry which involves a college course in the science as a general rule. But when we come to the forest ranger no such special requirements are realized. There is an almost total failure to appreciate that the work of a forest ranger is a highly specialized employment calling for a physical and mental equipment and training no less susceptible of exact definition than is the profession of the surveyor, the cook or the book-keeper. Present-day methods of fire protection for standing timber are as much advanced over the methods of twenty years back as is the modern motor fire-truck an improvement over a bucket brigade. In similar measure have the requirements for the position of forest ranger advanced, although this has not been generally realized. No longer in those countries where forest fire protection has been developed along modern scientific and practical lines, is the forest ranger handed an axe and a badge and told to go out into the woods and prevent fires, any more than is the modern soldier given a war-club and told to go out and fight the enemy. The present-day ranger is a unit in a highly perfected organization. Fires are located for him by lookouts station-