

## Early Forest Service Rangers and Other Personnel

The following quote concerning personnel requirements described in the Use Book, the first manual that guided the people who ran the Forest Reserves or the National Forests, is from Breaking New Ground by Pinchot.

"Next to the Supervisor in importance, and often on the same level with him, came the Ranger. Like the Supervisors, under the law the Rangers were to be selected 'when practicable, from the states in which they are to be employed.' And that was usually, but not always, the wise thing. The Ranger was the man who must know, better than any one else, the details of forest and range, of trespass and use. He was the officer with whom the small men did most of their Forest Reserve business. On how he handled himself and them depended mainly their attitude toward the Reserves and the Service.

"Rangers, like Supervisors and Forest Assistants, were required to provide and keep their own saddle and pack horses wherever they were necessary.

"Every applicant for a Ranger job 'must be, first of all, thoroughly sound and able bodied, capable of enduring hardships and of performing severe labor under trying conditions. Invalids seeking light out-of-door employment need not apply.' " (that was a slap at the Land office, if you like, and certainly it was well deserved.)

The Use Book went on: "No one may expect to pass the examination who is not already able to take care of himself and his horses in regions remote from settlement and supplies. He must be able to build trails and cabins and to pack in provisions without assistance. He must know something of surveying, estimating, and scaling timber lumbering and the livestock business."

That was no idle talk. "The examination of applicants is along the practical lines indicated above, and actual demonstration, by performance, is required. Experience, not book education, is sought, although ability to make simple maps and write intelligent reports upon ordinary reserve business is essential."

Well, I remember a Ranger examination conducted by Fritz Olmsted in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. It required the candidate to prove by doing that he could run compass lines, chop, pack a horse, and find his way by day and night. It also included two other highly practical tests. The first was: "Cook a meal." The second: "Eat it."

That was what Pinchot and the Use Book had to say about the early rangers' qualifications. Although these standards were written with the western areas in mind, it was only a few years afterwards that rangers were being picked for the eastern forests on the same basis.

The early personnel (some of whom will be covered individually later) filled these requirements admirably. Although Pinchot was fired by President Taft in 1910 for political reasons before the time the eastern forests were put into operation, the warm praise Pinchot had for the Service personnel in his book Breaking New Ground could well be said of almost all the men who have served in the Forest Service in Georgia.

Here is a good place to pay homage to the wives of the men in the Forest Service and especially the Rangers' wives. In the days when help was very limited, these women often served as part-time telephone operators or messengers. Sometimes it fell to them to get a fire crew rounded up and on its way or to send out rations to crews on the fire line -- all without pay until in more recent years when some were put under contract to perform certain services such as reading weather instruments. Since the comings and goings of the men, especially during the fire season were uncertain,



just the "not knowing" was sometimes difficult to endure.

Before the days of improved roads and easy access to hotels, the ranger's wife often prepared meals for inspectors and other visitors; some did a good job of selling the Service and its work in the community, too. All in all, the wives have contributed quite a lot to the success and well being of the Forest Service in Georgia.

individually; later, some of the wives of the  
Assistant Foresters of the Georgia Forestry  
Department, began to do the same thing. They  
put their experience and knowledge to work for the  
Service, and the result was a more efficient  
and better informed public. The Forest Service  
in Georgia.

There is a great deal of work to be done  
in the future. The Georgia Forestry Department  
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## Personnel

As mentioned earlier, it seems desirable to devote some space to the early administrative personnel, their terms of service, and their work. Of special interest are the rangers and early supervisors.

Since the facts are a little clearer for the portion of the Chattahoochee that was originally the Savannah Purchase Unit and later a part of the Nantahala, it will be covered first.

The first ranger on the Savannah area and in Georgia was Roscoe Conklin Nicholson, who was born in Rabun County of pioneer stock on January 22, 1887, and died October 22, 1959. The old home place is still in the family and is located a few miles south of Pine Mountain, Georgia.

"Ranger Nick," as he was generally known, went to grammar school near the home place and later attended North Georgia College at Dahlonega.

"Ranger Nick" worked briefly with the Forest Service acquisition crews in the area and then was appointed as Forest Ranger for the U. S. Forest Service in 1912. His headquarters was in Clayton along with Supervisor's Headquarters until the latter was moved to Franklin, North Carolina in 1920.

"Ranger Nick" says in an article he wrote for Sketches of Rabun County History that the first prevention work was started in 1913. First telephone line was built



from Clayton to Pine Mountain in 1915. About the same time, the first horseback trail in the area was built from Clayton to Rabun Bald partially along the Blue Ridge Divide, and a telephone line to Rabun Bald soon followed along with other lines that gradually tied in the entire Savannah Purchase Unit area with the Ranger's Office in Clayton.

In 1926, "Ranger Nick" and his principal guard, Alex Singleton, invested personally in a bloodhound which had 2 pups. These dogs were used with considerable success in tracking down people who set fires in the woods or were careless with fire. The prevention factor apparently was as much a success as the actual tracking operations. The dogs were also carried to other districts.

In 1917, he reports the beginning of making small sales to local people. The energy with which "Ranger Nick" used this means to help the people in the area through sales of hewn ties, poles and tan bark is one of the outstanding features of his administration. This work provided many people with their only source of cash income and, especially during the depression years, was a great boon to the area.

Hardly enough can be said here of the fine qualities of this man. He was patient above all else, he took time to acquaint his helpers with the work to be done and asked for their suggestions about how to get it done. Although he didn't appear to push and hurry too much, the end of the day usually saw measurable accomplishments. He was a model

citizen, active in community and church affairs and highly respected by all who knew him. He was Sunday School Superintendent at the Clayton Methodist Church for about 40 years and served the church faithfully as long as he lived. He was a charter member of the Clayton Lions Club, and the club honored him with a bronze plaque that was imbedded in a boulder along the trail leading into the Coleman River Scenic area when that area was dedicated to the memory of Ranger Nicholson in 1960. A very nice ceremony was held at the time with the Rabun County High School band taking part. The occasion was well attended by people from the area where he worked.

Ranger Nicholson retired in 1952 after about 40 years service with the Forest Service and went to the "Land of No Fires" in 1959. He was survived by his wife, Emma, and two children, Roscoe and Margaret. Margaret married a local merchant, Charles Marchman, and son, Roscoe, has a responsible position in the Atlas Rocket Program.

The second Ranger on the Tallulah was N. B. Alter, who served from 1952 to 1961; and the third was a former Assistant Ranger with Nicholson and Alter, Earl A. Parsons, who is still on the district making this district unique in that in about the 60 years since it was established, it has had only three rangers.

William Arthur Woody, who for some 27 years served as District Ranger on the Blue Ridge District, became a legend



in his own time and was probably the most colorful character the Forest Service has known in Georgia.

Ranger Woody was born in Suches, Georgia, April 1, 1885, and died in 1945. He first worked on acquisitions, doing his first day's work on April 1, 1914. He received a Temporary Appointment as Forest Guard May 1, 1915, and was appointed District Ranger July 1, 1918. As of August 1, 1920, he had served 5 years, 5 months and 19 days when the Civil Service retirement system salary deductions were started.

Woody was known as "Kingfish" or "Bull of the Woods" to his friends. His 240 pounds astride his black horse "Queenie" and his sometimes carrying a side arm probably earned him these nicknames. Michael Frome, in his book Whose Woods These Are, refers to him as the "Barefoot Ranger" because of his desire to dispense with his shoes whenever he could.

The many stories told about Ranger Woody are much too numerous to be set down here, and some will probably never be recorded. He was an outspoken man who addressed even visiting Forest Service personnel, some of whom outranked him, in familiar and sometimes unflattering terms. He was frank in telling his supervisors what he would or would not do, and whether or not he had their approval did not seem to worry him very much. For instance, in the 1920's when the Forest Service decided to collect grazing fees for stock using government land, Ranger Woody said it was impractical

since it would cause too many fires; and, therefore, he would not do anything to carry out the collections. During the CCC days, he had dams built for recreation purposes that were never engineered or given approval higher than the ranger level. But he knew people; and since forestry is about 50 per cent people, his administration of his area of responsibility was generally good, at least for the moment, and much of the time had good long-term results.

His greatest claim to fame seems to be through his interest in the game and fish. Sometime just after being made Ranger, he acquired five deer fawns - Billy, Nancy, Nimble, Bessie and Bunny Girl, and raised them at the ranger station on his own until they were about two years old. In the mid 1920's, he became involved in bringing deer in from North Carolina (Pisgah National Forest). The first were kept in a twenty-acre enclosure near the Noontootla United States Game Refuge which was set up in 1924 and where the first Wilderness hunt was held October 2 - November 29, 1940. The hunt and Ranger Woody received a great deal of publicity through the sports writers and the men who took part in the hunts. After his death, the hunters honored Woody by putting a bronze plaque on a boulder in Woody's Gap. (It was later removed by vandals and a second plaque has been installed on the same boulder after it was moved down into the settlement at Suches and reads: "Pioneer Conservationist.")



Woody was survived by his wife June, two sons, Walter and Clyne, who worked for and have retired from the Forest Service, and a daughter, Mae, who is married to a retired Forest Service engineer Rezin Pidgeon.

There were other pioneers not so well remembered as Woody and whose service periods are not at this time clear. Apparently, Max McCullough was the first man assigned to ranger duties on the Georgia Purchase Unit. He served briefly with the acquisition crew in Clayton, Georgia, in 1912 and then transferred to the Georgia Unit being stationed at Three Forks on Rock Creek sometime during 1913 and perhaps 1914. Little is known of Max McCullough, but he must have had a lot of problems and left the Forest Service when some of the local people burned his house down after telling his wife she better get out. He was found dead along a railroad track in Tennessee a few years later.

Dallas E. Edmondson was born near Coopers Creek on October 15, 1880, and died there March 8, 1931. He apparently followed McCullough as ranger about 1914 and worked there until sometime in the 1920's according to the best information presently at hand. The people who remembered him say he was a tall, spare man, quite good looking and "just the type one would pick for a forest ranger." He apparently did his best to follow Forest Service regulations; and when someone had a permit which required the holder to help fight fires, he expected just that. When the Forest Service decided to

collect grazing fees he started to collect them; however, he had lots of problems, especially fires. Due to stress and strain his health failed, and he became too ill to work. People in the Cooper Creek area say he lived several years after he left the Forest Service but was not able to work at anything else.

When Edmondson left the service, the two ranger districts were combined into the Blue Ridge District with Woody as Ranger; it remained this way until 1936 when the Chattahoochee was created, and the Blue Ridge District was again divided.

Further research should bring to light more specific dates pertaining to these early employees and the times they experienced.

The earliest Supervisors and their terms of service are hazy since it is unclear when they were primarily acquisition people and when they became general administrators. Harold G. Spahr, who was first at Clayton, possibly in 1911, went to Blue Ridge, Georgia, via Highlands, North Carolina in 1914. He set up a Supervisor's Office in Blue Ridge and stayed there until 1918 when the Supervisor's Office for Georgia and Tennessee portions of the Cherokee National Forest was set up in Athens, Tennessee. Spahr left the Forest Service in 1921 to become Treasurer of the Georgia Highway Department. His interest continued in forestry, though, since he was one of the first three men to serve



on the Georgia Forestry Commission. Mr. Sidney Thompson followed Spahr on the Cherokee and served as Supervisor in 1921 and 1922. Charlton probably followed Thompson. Jimmy Shields followed Spahr on the Savannah District.

The first supervisor of the Chattahoochee was P. F. W. (Walley) Prater, 7/36 - 11/36, followed by:

|                                          |                |
|------------------------------------------|----------------|
| William H. (Bill) Fischer, 12/36 - 12/40 | 4 1/2          |
| Willis C. (Bill) Branch, 2/41 - 7/41     | 4 yrs<br>5 1/2 |
| Hugh S. Redding, 8/41 - 9/43             | 2 yrs 1/2      |
| Clarence K. Spaulding, 12/43 - 8/52      | 9 "            |
| Fred N. Newnham, 8/52 - 3/57             | 5 "            |
| Paul Y. Vincent, 3/57 - 12/65            | 8 "            |
| Gilbert H. Stradt, 2/66 - 6/67           | 1 - 4 1/2      |
| Darold D. Westerberg, 7/67 - 8/71        | 4 yrs.         |
| Vaughn H. Hofeldt, 8/71 - 4/74           | 2 3/4          |

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District Rangers and terms by Districts as presently composed:

Armuchee Ranger District

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Horace O. Mills     | 8/16/38 - 11/30/42 |
| Orrie W. Hanson     | 1942 - 1943        |
| Robert D. Williams  | 1943 - 1952        |
| Johnie E. Davis     | 1952 - 1953        |
| George W. Biskey    | 1953 - 1957        |
| William J. Chapparo | 1957 - 1960        |
| John R. Allen       | 1960 - 1963        |
| John B. Fortin, Jr. | 1963 - 1966        |
| Paul E. Fuller      | 1966 - 1971        |
| Jack R. McCormick   | 1971 -             |

| <u>Brasstown Ranger District</u> | <u>Period</u>      | <u>Headquarters</u>  |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Max McCullough                   | 1912-1913(?)       | Rock Creek           |
| Dallas E. Edmondson              | 1913-1924(?)       | Coopers Creek        |
| W. A. Woody                      | 1918-1924(partial) |                      |
| (all of Blue Ridge or Brasstown) |                    | Suches, Georgia      |
| W. A. Woody                      | 1924-1945          | Suches, Georgia      |
| T. S. Seely                      | 1945-1951          | Suches, Georgia      |
| Harry R. Wright                  | 1951-1958          | Blairsville, Georgia |
| S. F. Postlethwait               | 1958-1961          | Blairsville, Georgia |
| Russell F. Griffith              | 1961-1963          | Blairsville, Georgia |
| Lee E. Poague                    | 1963-1967          | Blairsville, Georgia |
| John B. Fortin, Jr.              | 1968-              | Blairsville, Georgia |

#### Chattooga Ranger District

|                     |           |                      |
|---------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Roscoe C. Nicholson | 1936-1951 | Clayton, Georgia     |
| W. O. Stewart       | 1951-1953 | Clarksville, Georgia |
| George R. Anderson  | 1953-1961 | Clarksville, Georgia |
| Ralph H. Freeman    | 1961-1963 | Clarksville, Georgia |
| Lewis J. Smith      | 1963-     | Clarksville, Georgia |

#### Chestatee Ranger District

|                     |              |                    |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Max McCullough      | 1912-1913(?) | Rock Creek         |
| Dallas E. Edmondson | 1913-1918    | Coopers Creek      |
| W. A. Woody         | 1918-1945    | Suches, Georgia    |
| Theodore S. Seely   | 1945-1951    | Suches, Georgia    |
| Spencer H. Palmer   | 1951-1957    | Dahlonega, Georgia |
| George W. Biskey    | 1957-1971    | Dahlonega, Georgia |
| George Hemingway    | 1971-        | Dahlonega, Georgia |

Cohutta (Prior to 1936 Conasauga and Jacks River portion administered as part of Ocoee District of Cherokee National Forest - Headquarters Sheads Creek, Tennessee from 1936 to 1958 same as Toccoa District.)

|                       |           |                     |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Howard W. Burnett     | 1958-1962 | Chatsworth, Georgia |
| Berkeley J. Spilsbury | 1962-1965 | Chatsworth, Georgia |
| Raymond G. Weidner    | 1965-     | Chatsworth, Georgia |

#### Tallulah (Part of Nantahala until 1936)

|                 |           |                  |
|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| R. C. Nicholson | 1912-1952 | Clayton, Georgia |
| Bruce Alter     | 1952-1961 | Clayton, Georgia |
| Earl A. Parsons | 1961-     | Clayton, Georgia |



Toccoa Ranger District

|                     |             |                      |
|---------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Max McCullough      | 1912-13 (?) | Three Forks-Rock Cr. |
| Dallas E. Edmondson | 1913-24 (?) | Coopers Creek        |
| W. A. Woody         | 1924-36     | Suches, Georgia      |
| W. W. Bergoffen     | 1936-37     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| M. M. Bryan         | 1937-38     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| Joe J. Ennis        | 1938-42     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| Clinton G. Johnson  | 1942-43     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| G. E. Lethcoe       | 1943-47     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| Spencer H. Palmer   | 1947-51     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| Brooke R. Davis     | 1951-61     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| S. F. Postlethwait  | 1961-65     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| Harry F. Janssen    | 1965-67     | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |
| Larry E. Cope       | 1967-       | Blue Ridge, Georgia  |

Robert C. McCallister  
 W. C. Strickland  
 George E. Anderson  
 Ralph A. Green  
 Lewis J. Smith

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Chattahoochee National Forest

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