

'Ground Cover,' Redwoods Making Comeback In County Fire-Torn Area

Ranger Les Gum Leads Way On 70-Mile Inspection Trip

By Frank N. Jones

It was a proposition of "over the hills and far away" last week as Chief Ranger Les Gum of the Felton state division of forestry took two newsmen on a tour of fire lookouts and other forestry installations in the area between Felton and San Mateo county.

The jaunt was taken to further acquaint the newsmen with fire fighting problems and what preventative measures are being taken. A similar tour was made last year.

Those who shook off the desk shackles for a six-hour scenic journey over the Santa Cruz mountain fire trails were Publisher Fred McPherson Jr. and Frank N. Jones, county editor.

Another of Gum's guests wore a heavy red coat despite the heat, but he didn't complain. He was "Terry," seven-year-old Irish setter owned by the writer. Last year "Terry" bounced out of an open jeep and landed on a hot rock. No such mishap marred this trip as it was made in a forestry sedan.

After being fortified by a cup of coffee in the immaculate Felton mess hall, the party set out for Eagle Rock lookout via Empire grade. The first stop was made at the California Youth Authority camp near the end of the grade.

At the CYA camp Ranger Gum explained a re-forestation experiment. Young Monterey pine, Douglas fir, and redwood trees are being grown to be later planted in burned off areas.

The party then went through the Locatelli ranch to Eagle Rock lookout. The lookout at the extreme end of Empire grade is at an elevation of 2400 feet and commands a sweeping view across the San Lorenzo valley to Loma Prieta, Mount Bielwaski, China grade, Big Basin state park, Pine mountain where last year's 19,000-acre forest fire started, and the Pacific ocean.

The fire watcher was George Heathorne, a veteran in the forestry service who recalls being at the Locatelli ranch when the lookout was dedicated in 1938. Heathorne has only one complaint. He wishes Frank Paone's Star View drive-in theater above Boulder Creek would show more technicolor films. He can see the big screen two airline miles away, but the color epics are more distinct and he wants more.

Heathorne reported rattlesnakes especially in evidence this year. He said two dogs owned by Dante Locatelli had been bitten by a snake but were rushed to a veterinarian by brother Ernie Locatelli and saved.

After leaving this scenic viewpoint, the party headed northwest and entered Coast Counties Gas and Electric company property above Mill creek dam. Under the guidance of the forestry service, CYA youths are learning road building. They are also re-building a telephone line.

It was in this section of the county that the Pine mountain forest

fire last September did the most damage. Much of the burned areas were left with "islands" of bushes and trees but in the upper end of Scotts creek and Mill creek even the leaf mold burned into the ground. The power company estimated fire damage in excess of \$100,000 to lines and flumes. Now the Big creek installation is abandoned.

Much new growth is in evidence today and fire-blackened redwoods have cool, green clusters of leaves which will soon develop into branches, proof of the durability of the redwood. This new growth presents a great contrast to thousands of dead knobby pines whose heavy sap proved their undoing in the flames. The state division of forestry is working to re-plant the burned areas.

After a chat with Bob Pool, bulldozer foreman on the Mill creek fire road to the coast, Gum learned that bridges were out. The party then re-traced the Mill creek road to Empire grade. It was then lunch time so Gum simply telephoned Big creek suppression station that the party would shortly arrive.

Gum chose the Warren-Ella ranch road down to the coast. This road is on Santa Cruz Portland Cement company land and joins the quarry road near the plant. The Warren-Ella ranch buildings, the largest structural loss in the last year's fire, have not been rebuilt.

On the way down from the grade to the coast there was much evidence that many of the redwoods will "come back" and that the ground "cover" is rapidly hiding the scars of the fire. After the fire there were more "islands" here than at Mill creek.

The party was greeted at Big creek by Foreman Al Day and immediately proceeded to devour a huge lunch. After an inspection of the suppression station which is built on the site of a fish hatchery washed out in the winter of 1940, the party drove up the Coast road.

Upon reaching Whitehouse creek, Gum drove up this canyon road past Creed's old mill, the scene of a five-acre fire two weeks ago. The road continues on up in the coastal hills to Chalks mountain lookout.

This lookout, although painted the same

One Of Many Scenic Beauty Spots



Retention of natural beauty might be likened to liberty—both require eternal vigilance. In Santa Cruz county there are hundreds of spots like this upper

San Lorenzo river scene that must be constantly protected against the dread forest fire. Official fire protection agency for the rural areas is the state

division of forestry at Felton, which works with the various fire districts. The state allocated \$133,500 and the county \$15,000 for fire prevention the past year.

and at an elevation of 1600 feet, is not visible from the Coast highway. It is set back from the edge of the Coast hills.

The fire lookout at the Chalks was R. L. Jones of San Francisco. When the party arrived he was with his wife prepare a peach

pie. The stations have bottled gas refrigerators and stoves.

This pleasant scene prompted Ranger Gum, a veteran of 25 years with the state and federal forestry services, to recall the "good old days" when watchers in the Tahoe country spent weeks without a visitor.

The party then headed up the Chalks ridge to Sandy Point. This station is for forestry crews who are ready at a moment's notice to take off for a fire. It is only seven miles from Big Basin state park headquarters.

After Gum made an inspection at Sandy Point, the forestry car headed back for Felton, via the park and Big Basin state highway. In all, 70 miles were covered on the trip.

Back at the station, Ranger Gum was asked for information as to what Santa Cruz county residents and visitors can do to prevent forest fires. This information may be found in a separate story on this page.