Henry Haefner (1884-1978)

Henry Haefner was an early forester and oral historian in the Siskiyou National Forest. A 1908 graduate of Iowa State University, he began work for the U.S. Forest Service in July of that year. His first assignment was with the Coconino National Forest in Arizona, working in a crew of eight men doing timber-cruising work.

In January 1909, given a choice of duty assignments, Henry chose the newly designated Siskiyou National Forest in Oregon. For the next sixteen years, he worked as a technical assistant doing land classification and managed timber sales, among many other duties.

It was a time when many national forests had been newly designated, and not much was known about their resource holdings or ther actual boundaries. Haefner's job was to familiarize himself with the land base for the Siskiyou National Forest, which meant traveling its 400-mile circumference and meeting its inhabitants.

Many of the people Haefner talked with were what he later described as eighty-something-year-olds who were veterans of the California and Oregon Gold Rush, the Rogue River Indian wars, and the American Civil War. In the 1910s, many were still living on their homesteads or claims in the mountains, and his documentation of their lives proved invaluable for establishing a historic record. The people he met also became the sources for the origins of the geographic place-names that we know today.

In his reminiscences (published in 1959), Haefner reported that he first met an octogenarian named Baker in 1911, when the Forest Service was shorthanded in fighting a fire just north of the Rogue River near Marial. When the need was greatest, Haefner wrote, a "large old man in a battered derby hat and old Prince Albert coat with no baggage of any kind" showed up and asked for a job. Baker was a former Indian-war veteran who had mined around Waldo, where he claimed to have made more than $600 a day. The money never stuck with him, however, and Haefner noted that he had a great time "mining, gambling and chasing wild women through the mining camps" of southern Oregon.

Haefner met not only many characters but also the first rangers, who were "strong, active, self-reliant and fearless men." Many people who lived in the national forests had no use for and greatly resented the new regulations, and those early rangers set the precedent for the management that would follow.

Written by Greg Walter

Further Reading:

Haefner, Henry E. *Some Reminiscences of an Early Forester 1909 to 1925 and 1930*. Portland, Ore., 1966.

Haefner, Henry. "Reminiscences of An Early Forester." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (March 1975): 39.

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