Celebrating the Siuslaw
A Century of Growth
1908 - 2008
Siuslaw National Forest

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Fun Facts

June 24, 2008

As I Remember It: Life of an Early Forest Ranger

Note: C. P. Cronk came to the Siuslaw National Forest in the summer of 1910, serving first as a forest guard on the Hebo Ranger District, and later promoted to an Assistant Forest Ranger after successfully passing the Forest Ranger examination. In this excerpt from his memoirs, Cronk recalls his role evaluating homestead entries in the northern portion of the Siuslaw NF. Under the Forest Homestead Act (enacted June 11, 1906) up to 160 acres could be removed from forest-reserve lands for agricultural purposes. Cronk's task was to visit homesteaders to ensure that the claimant was working the land, living on-site, and able to transport crops to market. If successful meeting these conditions, the applied entry was patented, finalizing private ownership of former federal lands. Cronk wrote: "There were settlers who owned their land, absentee owners who had taken up land under the Timber and Stone Act. There were also the "timber homesteads," often fraudulent, some of which had cabins not much larger than a dog-house."

Except during the height of the fire season, much of my time was spent examining and reporting on homestead and "June 11" claims. The Siuslaw National Forest had more . . . Forest Homestead claims than any other National Forest, and examining them was a major assignment for me all the time I was on the Forest.

The variety of experiences incident to obtaining affidavits, etc. was great. Most of the information had to be obtained evenings. Homestead claims, taken up before the establishment of the National Forest, varied from a real home on burned over fern patches, to claims with over 100,000 board feet of old growth timber per acre, where there was no pretense to meet the homestead requirements. On the other hand, there were in heavily timbered areas, claims where the homesteader hoped to get something for the timber, yet took the claim because he loved the surroundings and endeavored to conform to the legal obligations.

I recall particularly the Wonderly brothers in the Siletz basin. One of them had the unique experience of having three houses destroyed by the time I knew him. The first, built in the creek bottom, was washed away. His second, higher up, was demolished by a tremendous boulder which fate directed, fortunately, in the owner's absence. The third house was burned. His fourth house was home when I knew him.

. . . At one point there were four claims that had been "proved up" with cabins around the common section post. This was known as "Four Corners." I had occasion to spend a night here on my first trip in this vicinity. The cabins were open, as customary, and there were plenty of blankets hanging on wires away from woodrats. But contrary to custom the grub box was locked. It was understood that I the absence of the owner any traveler made himself at home, putting everything in place on leaving. We rangers always left something to pay for the food used. The next morning I came upon an occupied homestead where I had a delicious breakfast to make up for my lack of supper the night before.