

Duane Holm
U.S. Forest Service
Randel, Washington

Randel
Jul 20
9 AM
[illegible]

Miss Sally B. Loving
5817 N. Washington Blvd.
Arlington, Virginia

[drawing of look out on Hamilton Buttes]
Hamilton Buttes
Elev. 5756

- Aerial for temperamental radio
- Lightning rod for thunderstorms (glass-logged stool inside)
- Stovepipe to carry win down into stove & blow ashes in face
- Shutters that rattle when the wind blows hard (most of the time)
- Both sides of 40 panes of glass that must be cleaned
- ↙ water trail – 1 mile straight down
- ↘ civilization – 8 miles almost straight down
- → Arlington - ± 3000 miles

Hand-tooled (pocket knife) stationary by Holm

W.S. Forest Service
Randel, Washington
Thursday, July 12.

Dear Miss Loving,

I'm sitting here in my lookout – perched up on a hunk of rock called Hamilton Buttes. It's early in the evening, and although the sun doesn't set here til almost ten o'clock. I'm having to use a kerosene lamp. I'm completely engulfed by a cloud of bitter, tannish smoke which has been drifting through the valleys all afternoon from a big fire on Huffaker Mountain, almost twenty miles from here. They've lost almost six thousand acres in a day and a half, but tonight they said it was almost under control. A hot dry wind has been coming in off the eastern desertland, and the bottom has dropped out of the humidity. This afternoon the wind about-faced and everything looks better. There's something morbidly fascinating about a forest fire, aside from the grim horror of it. The work is neither romantic nor dramatic – it's just nasty, dirty, backbreaking work – never knowing the whole picture. And yet every one of us – from the

dispatcher down to the last lookout wishes he were there instead of sitting where he is. So instead of being out on the line, I'm sitting here, relaying messages back and forth over the radio, and writing long overdue letters.

My mail came up in the evening, day before yesterday. They bring my mail and groceries up every two or three weeks, whenever they've nothing else to do. And included, at least, was my scholarship application blank – due August 1. So I would like you, if you would, to write one of my three recommendations, It's for Ag school scholarships, asking for “information particularly as to his character, scholarship, interest in agriculture (forestry)’s classified as agriculture, and need for this financial assistance.” City boys from out of state have two strikes against them, but it's worth trying for. The address is Vice-dean Russel B. Dickenson, School of Agriculture, The Pennsylvania State College, State College, Pennsylvania.

We left the day after the party – by we I mean four of us forestry students, in a panel truck. We made it to eastern Oregon, where I caught a bus, in four days. You know, you can read these high-sounding poems and grandiloquent anthems with a grain of salt. But going across the country, you find that it's too big – both physically and spiritually – to comprehend. The trip itself was worth it to me. And especially after reading A. B. Guthrie's “The Big Sky” and “The Way West.” I was intrigued by the country it had dealt with. Jim Bridger's fort and particularly the rivers fascinated me – the Platte, the Green, the Snake, and finally the Columbia – there's just no other word for it but majestic – I can feel as they, the pioneers felt, when they came out and saw the Columbia rolling to the sea.

It's beautiful country here. Gifford Pinchot National Forest covers a million and a half acres along the western slope of the Cascades, from the Columbia to the foot of Mount Rainier. There's a string of big snowcapped old volcanoes which runs from Washington to California – and I can see five of them. Rainier looms up to the north along with Mount Baker. Mount Saint Helens, a soft rounded cone is to the southwest, Mount Hood, a sharp cone a hundred miles away across the Columbia below Portland is to the south, and to the southeast rises the challenging fortress of Mount Adams. It's not as steep nor as high as others, but it is challenging. Emetaz (the Swiss kid from Penn State) and I want to climb it. Do you remember Justice Douglas' book which came out last year, “Of Men and Mountains”? This is his country, here, and the Goat Rocks to the northeast, and Mount Adams particularly.

The sun has set and the sky is still kind of light. There is still a violent pink wash over the western mountains and there are no stars. This line about “blood-red sun” is no exaggeration. It's after hours now, and the lookouts are shooting the bull now. The radios are a fascinating source of entertainment. They are FM sets and as I stay on standby all day. I can hear almost every station in the forest – even Lookout Mountain. The last two days all that's been on war messages concerning the fire in our district. Most days you can hear all the other lookouts as they check in, spot fires, or relay messages. You can imagine the characters vividly, and you feel that you would recognize Tatoosh or Great Ridge if you met him.

Contrary to popular opinion, a lookout has a lot more to do than just sit and watch for fires every once in a while. I live in a fourteen by fourteen glassed-in cabin, but boy can it get dirty! I have to sweep it three times a day, and every three or four day I have to scrub it out. There's firewood to drag in, buck up, and split and there's cooking. I'm eating very well, and I'm enjoying it a lot – particularly baking. I've baked biscuits, rolls, cornbread – and I even tried

a cake-recipe straight from the Forest Service Guard Handbook! I hiked down three and-a-half miles of mythical trail to the Cat Creek Guard Station. (You don't eat cake alone!) Aside from being a bit heavy, Emetaz and I agreed it was pretty good. When Ranger Jacobsen brought the groceries in, we finished it off. (Was he surprised!) Yesterday I spent half a day blacking the stove. I think I got the stuff equally distributed over me, the floor, and the stove. And today I did my washing – jeans, shirts, socks – I've still got another batch to do. When you have to pack all your water a mile straight up, and heat it with mountains of firewood you've cut yourself, it really hurts to wash clothes. However, must me done.

The animal life is rather scarce here. I have three sleek, fat chipmunks, one scrawny ground squirrel, and a chubby little “mountain beaver” or pika. He sits out on the rocks every morning and barks, and then goes about his daily haying. These pika's cut grasses and store them for wintertime, just like any farmer. The birdlife is even scarcer. A few hummingbirds, grouse, jays – a pair of lovely mountain bluebirds, which unlike ours, are a light blue all over. I spent this evening identifying a brownish bird that was playing around in the updrafts that come up off my cliffs. After looking the books over, I'm adding a Gray-Headed Rosy Finch to my list. Whatta name! I'm enjoying the trees. Seeing all these fir and spruces emerge from the dendrology textbook is really thrilling. The rarest animals here are human beings – there's only one – me. In a few weeks there should be some sheepherders on the grassy burned areas below. They're odd, lonely men, but very friendly I'm told. They like to talk, and they bring up fresh lamb meat and vegetables. It will be something different, and as it is, I'm spending almost all of my time “learning my country – using binoculars to learn every ridge and stream.” It's more difficult than it sounds. Oh yes, later on in the season, the huckleberries come out, bringing in people, the nearly Yakima Indians, and bears. And then's when we have pie every night!

What's the progress on the new Civics Notebook? Is there anything I can do? I'm dying to help on it. Maybe this fall, I can work on Senate House rulers. It would be fun.

Well my lamps beginning to flicker and it's getting bedtime. Maybe you're wondering why I write such long letters – it's because I don't know when they'll get mailed, so there's no hurry. So till then, goodnight.

Duane

P.S.

Well, I must look up your address. You know I've still got the address book you gave me. It's well travelled and getting fatter all the time. [Illegible Initials]