



FROM MILE-HIGH PEAKS RANGERS WATCH FOR THE FOREST'S WORST ENEMY... FIRE

A lonely life on a mile-high mountain — that's what George Brown, Forest Ranger, lives for five months of the year. He's one of four rangers who man the firetowers in Pisgah National Forest, keeping almost a 24-hour vigil, watching for the tell-tale wisps of blue smoke which mean only one thing—a forest fire!

George—or "Brownie", as his fellow rangers call him—moved into his tower home around the middle of October. And there he stayed until the twenty-first of this month, when the long sought-for rain finally came—ending one of Western North Carolina's worst droughts.

The Pisgah District of Pisgah National Forest maintains four firetowers: one atop Pilot Mountain, one on Ferrin Knob, one on High Top Mountain and the fourth, which is manned by Brownie, on Frying Pan Mountain.

The Frying Pan Tower is located just a few hundred yards off the Blue Ridge Parkway, between Wagon Road Gap on U. S. Highway 276 and Mount Pisgah. Accessible only by foot-trail or by a narrow jeep road from the Frying Pan Gap Picnic Area, it stands at an elevation of 5320 feet. Though the tower is equipped with a telephone and a two-way short-wave radio, it has no electric lights. At night, written reports, reading, and pre-

paring and eating of evening meals are done with the aid of a kerosene lamp. Lights aren't needed during the day, for the walls of the ten-by-ten room atop the tower are all windows. Power for the radio is obtained from a storage battery, kept charged by a gasoline-powered generator. Water for drinking and cooking must be carried from a spring about 200 yards down the mountain.

The tower-dwelling ranger heats his "one-room castle" and cooks his meals with a small wood stove equipped with a flu-oven. Firewood is plentiful, the only difficulty being the carrying of armload after armload up the tower's six flights of steep stairs.

To those who have never experienced living in a firetower, it might appear that living alone on a mountain top would be a hard, monotonous life. But, according to Brownie, it's not that at all. The short-wave radio is on 24 hours a day. Every few minutes there are reports coming in concerning the spotting of a fire; the progress being made in the fighting of a fire, either in the Pisgah District or in an adjoining one; weather reports—to which every ranger, especially during the fire season, listens intently; reports from rangers equipped with walkie-talkies or mobile radios who are in the process of tracking down a poacher or other law violator; and occasionally, though

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