

HERE'S A CONFESSION, LEO, REVEALED MANY YEARS LATER 9/17/96

The "Asbestos District" was how many rangers outside of the region referred to this area. It was the result of comparing fire occurrences with the rest of the state. We can thank Lake Ontario and Tug Hill to our immediate west for the good fortune.

When conditions are right, we get our share of fires. They are mostly ground fires caused by poorly placed campfires or lightning. Lightning is much less considerate of the location and consequently fires occurring as such usually are harder to suppress.

One in particular stands out in my memory. It was roughly one-half of a mile south of Rock Dam on the South Branch of the Moose River. It was too close to the county line to call, so Morgan Roderick and I moved on it together.

He worked the fire with the forestry crew from Gould Paper Company and I went for more equipment. Another pump was needed to relay water to the fire. I secured the equipment and headed to the lumber camp on Balsam Lake for help with carrying it into the fire.

Leonard Pauquet operated the camp with a crew of French lumberjacks from Canada. His interpretation of my request was met with shrugs and expressions of reluctance that I could interpret on my own. A threat to call John Bourrall, woodlands manager for Gould Paper Company, to shut down the job got me five volunteers.

As we waded the river, the tension melted and we all enjoyed a good laugh at one guy's misfortune. He stumbled and fell with a pump on his back. Before we could react to help him, he struggled to his feet laughing at his plight and we all joined in. I made sure they lost little time from work and were well paid for their services.

There was never any shortage of help on the larger, more threatening fires, but the stubborn, less spectacular ones were a different story.

I was appraised of a ready and willing labor pool by Police Chief Crofut. High school students would go to any length to get legal time off.

It was not all gloom, doom and hard work and every ranger had stories of humor and unforgettable memories.

Morgan Roderick shared one of his with me the other day:

He and Ernie LaPrarie were working a ground fire visible on a high steep ridge. They struggled up through thick brush with back pumps of water on their backs only to find a convenient little brook full of water adjacent to the fire laughing at them.

I had many of my own and some of my best friends and acquaintances were people I met on fires. One incident at the time did not seem as humorous as it does today.

It started out with Leo Villiere paying \$20 for letting a brush fire get out of control. Leo has always maintained I felt worse than he did when I took his money.

To make a long story short – I lied, Leo.