

101 THINGS YOU CAN GET FOR FREE

Fabulous sweaters to knit / Canning & freezing are easy—and cheap
The medical basis of skin beauty—\$8.95 book excerpt
17 projects to enhance your home—from \$13 to \$48
Sew & save 50% on children's clothes
A very special love story by Joyce Carol Oates

*AUGUST
1974*

AUGUST 1974 33 CENTS

Family Circle

Dried
flowers
that
bloom
the year
round



MAN AND WIFE TEAM UP AS FOREST RANGERS



Penny and Emil Keck sawing a log for "Penny's bridge." Both run the Moose Creek Station in Idaho's Selway-Bitterroot wilderness district.

ON A mountainside hundreds of feet above the turbulent Selway River, Penny Keck knelt in the middle of the trail, opened her pack and took out a plastic bag containing 20 pasteboard cylinders, each bearing the words "ATLAS 40% GIANT GELATIN." She opened a big clasp knife and began to cut the sticks in half, exposing the crumbly brown material within. When she'd halved four of the cylinders, she gouged a hole in each with a pointed stick. Working very slowly and methodically, she said, "You want all the little factors with you. You don't want to treat this stuff with too much unkindness."

From another plastic sack she took eight blasting caps, each trailing a pair of blue and yellow wires. She inserted a cap into one of the holes she'd gouged, tied the wires in a half hitch around the cylinder, then repeated the careful procedure with the other caps. Her husband, Emil, who had just finished drilling eight holes in some huge boulders that had slid down the mountainside and blocked the trail, walked over to her. "Penny, that last hole I drilled should have about a third of a stick." She nodded and continued to prepare the cylinders.

Five minutes later, in the shelter of a large pine 100 feet above the boulders, Penny yelled "Fire in the hole!" and flipped the switch on the

detonator box to "FIRE." Tons of granite arched high into the air above the canyon and went whistling down toward the river below.

For Penny and Emil Keck, blasting through a rockslide with dynamite is all in a day's work. Their home is the Moose Creek District of the vast Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in northern Idaho. It is a country of rugged 10,000-foot peaks and deep forests drained by the Selway River, one of the most demanding white-water streams on the continent. On the 1,300,000-acre Selway-Bitterroot, no mining, logging or grazing are allowed. Guarded by the U.S. Forest Service, the land will remain forever wild and untouched, an area which human beings can enter only by foot, horseback, rubber raft or kayak.

"Home" is just a rough log cabin, for they often camp on the trail.



Moose Creek District—the heart of the Wilderness area—has 790 miles of trail and no roads. Within its 557,000 acres there are thousands of elk and deer, a goodly population of bears and mountain lions, and two year-round custodians—Penny and Emil. Some 25 miles from the nearest road, they are cut off from the outside world for months at a time. They live sometimes in a log cabin, but more often their home is a tent on the trail, even when the temperature drops to 20 below zero and the snow drifts five feet deep. Working together as a team, they hack out trails, build bridges and fight forest fires, using nothing but simple hand tools to perform feats that would humble a company of Army engineers. Their love of the wilderness is profound, almost religious, and for all its rigors, they exult in the life they have chosen.

I first met the Kecks a year ago, when I stopped at the Moose Creek Ranger Station while traveling through the Selway-Bitterroot. I was a very weary journalist, almost unable to walk after three days of a bad trail and a bone-jarring horse, and they invited me into their little cabin for rest and recuperation. Penny, a strapping girl of 31 with a no-nonsense haircut, stuffed me full of sourdough hotcakes. Emil was 61, with the body of a middle-weight wrestler—someone described him as "a keg of nails walking around on feet"—and an energy level that was mind-boggling. He moved about the

station at a trot, cutting hay for the pack string, chopping wood, supervising the district's young summer employees, building a treehouse for the district ranger's small children, and taking time out to tell me how he and Penny had come to take up their wilderness life.

Until the early 1960's, Emil Keck had spent most of his working life roaming the Northwest as a *gyppo*—a gypsy, or independent, logging contractor. Unlike many loggers, he had a deep regard for the environment and a love of untouched wilderness. He always tried to run his logging operations in accord with sound



Drills and even dynamite don't faze trailblazing Ranger Penny.

conservation practices and found it difficult to compete with other loggers who had no such scruples. Finally he decided to stop cutting down the forest and start protecting it. He joined the U.S. Forest Service and soon became the fire-control officer for Moose Creek District. He was in charge of forest-fire suppression and responsible for training lookouts, fire fighters and other young men who worked on the district during the summer months. He acquired a reputation as a stern but fair taskmaster, a good teacher of young people and a ferocious worker.

One day in 1967 Emil's boss, the district ranger, gave him some shocking news: One of the lookouts on Emil's crew that summer was to be a woman. "Who ever heard of a



The Kecks purposefully going up-trail with 90-pound backpacks.

girl lookout?" Emil told the ranger. "What you really want is my resignation. I'm supposed to be a tough guy — what's going to happen to my reputation if I've got a girl working for me?"

But the ranger insisted that Emil look over the girl's application. "I had to admit," Emil recalled, "that if I didn't look at the little box where it says 'male' or 'female,' she seemed well qualified. So I told the ranger okay — but I still didn't like it."

The female applicant was Penny Kummrow. She'd grown up on a farm near Portland, Oregon, the third successive daughter in the family. Her father, despairing of ever getting a son to help with the farm chores, taught Penny to use tools and run farm machinery. She continued to work on the farm even after she went to Portland State to major in

physical education and biology. She loved the outdoors and dreamed of becoming a fire lookout for the Forest Service, but realized that, as a woman, the odds were stacked against her. Every night after finishing the farm chores and studying for the next day's classes, she spent from 11 to 1 A.M. filling out interminable government employment applications. She applied to 50 Forest Service districts in all, and was delighted when she was accepted by Moose Creek, a true wilderness district.

When Penny turned up that summer, she quickly proved that she was strong and capable, but she and Emil got off to a bad start. Not long after she went up on her lookout tower, Emil hiked up to check on her. His inspection checklist covered everything from the lookout's knowledge of the surrounding terrain to the standard of housekeeping in the tower. When Emil made a critical remark about a housekeeping detail, Penny flared up: "You hired me to spot fires and I'll spot them," she said.

"That really got to me," Emil told me. "I didn't like being challenged by a woman." Emil decided to put her in her place. He bet her \$100 that he could beat her in a six-mile footrace from the lookout to the ranger station. Penny took the bet and they both went into training. But the race never took place—Emil realized that he could never beat this springy-legged young girl, and besides, he had started to view Penny in a different way. A recent widower, with full-grown children,

he found himself very taken with her. Toward the end of the summer he told her, "I hate to see you go back to Portland—I don't see how I can court you if you're 450 miles away."

Penny didn't go back to Portland—they were married in the fall and spent the winter as they've spent every one since, working side by side in the wilderness.

On that first meeting I was very attracted to the Kecks—touched by their hospitality, delighted by Emil's ebullience, impressed by Penny's competence. And so this spring, with photographer Gerry Brim-

don't do that. When you come in here you don't need to bring anything but yourselves."

Walking back up to their little log cabin, Emil told us enthusiastically about "Penny's bridge."

Each winter, when the fire season is over and summer staff gone, the Kecks build a trail bridge across one of the district's creeks or rivers. Over the first few seasons Emil directed the operation and taught Penny the techniques of wilderness construction. But this last winter, Penny herself took charge. "She designed the bridge and ran the whole show," Emil said.

Astride "Penny's bridge"; it can support a D-6, a medium-sized bulldozer.



scombe, I went back to Moose Creek to see them again. From the little logging town of Grangeville, Idaho, we flew by bush plane over mountains with summits still white with snow, and up the canyon of the Selway River. On the steep slopes below us we could see bands of elk, light tan against the green of new grass. When we landed on a little dirt airstrip tucked into the forest above the river, two dozen deer went bounding down the runway beside us, their white-flashing tails held straight up. Emil and Penny came out of the woods to greet us. "Glad to have you back," Penny said. Emil looked at the box of groceries we were pulling out of the airplane and said, "Hey, you guys, you

"I just took orders from her."

Next morning we hiked up the trail to see the bridge. Now, a trail bridge is meant only to support hikers and pack animals, and it may sound like a rather minor piece of engineering. But Penny's bridge, when we reached it, was an impressive structure, 36 feet long, built of massive timbers which weighed up to two tons each. "How much will it hold?" I asked.

"I wouldn't be afraid to take a D-6 across it," Penny said. (A D-6 is a medium-sized bulldozer.)

Penny gave us a guided tour of the bridge while Emil hovered around, grinning with pride. "We've built it to last for 50 years," she said. "We've tried



The outdoor life means you wash outdoors, making do with a clothes-wringer, like Penny, and shave with a mirror against a tree, as Emil does.



Why scour it clean



When you can spray it just as clean...



with 409 Disinfectant Bathroom Cleaner.

FACT: Formula 409* does most bathroom cleaning jobs, like tile, tubs, sinks and fixtures, as effectively as scouring powder.

FACT: 409 is easier to use. No scrubbing. No rinsing. No scratchy grit.

FACT: 409 is a powerful disinfectant. Actually stops mildew up to 7 days.

409: The easy way to get your bathroom scouring powder clean.



© The Clorox Company, 1974

MAN-AND-WIFE FOREST RANGERS

From page 32

to make it look like a natural part of the country. We're very protective of the land, and in building the bridge we've tried to make as little impact as possible on the wilderness. We could have cut the trees for the timbers right here on the site, but we didn't because of how it would look. We cut them a third of a mile away and skidded them down here with a chainsaw winch." She went on to explain how they'd had to suspend cables from big trees in order to maneuver the heavy timbers into place. When they did, they padded the trees with burlap to keep the cables from scarring the bark. When they put creosote on the timbers to protect them against rot, they hung burlap sacks underneath to catch the drippings and prevent them from polluting the creek. "There's over a thousand pounds of concrete supporting the bridge," Penny said. "Can you see any of it?" I looked closely, and couldn't see any concrete whatsoever in the bridge supports—it had all been camouflaged with natural stone.

"Pouring concrete in the winter is a real problem," Penny said, "because if it freezes before it sets; it will just crumble. We have to cover it with plastic sheets and canvas and use lanterns to keep it warm. If it's well below zero, we have to put a wood stove in with it, and then we sit up all night stoking the fire to keep the concrete warm until it sets."

"Now come over here," Emil said, and he led us off to the side of the bridge. "Two of us camped here for two months. We had a big tent set up, and thousands of pounds of construction materials. Can you tell where we camped?" I looked around. All I saw was a forest floor with young pine and fir seedlings thrusting up from a bed of pine needles. I had to admit I couldn't spot any sign of their campsite. Emil pointed to the middle of the little patch of seedlings. "When we moved in, we dug up all these little trees and wrapped their roots in burlap to protect them. When we left, we replanted the trees, and we raked up needles and leaves to camouflage the site. We burned all our wood chips and sawdust, then hid the ashes. When we pull out, you can't see where we've been, and that's the way it should be, because this piece of land belongs to all the people of the country."

Life During the Winter

Later, back in their little cabin, the two of them described life in winter camp. At the beginning of winter, they had to move up to 6,000 pounds of construction materials, tools and camp supplies to the site. Sometimes they used pack horses to help, but usually they carried in the bulk of the material on their backs, carrying packs that at times weighed 90 pounds. (Experienced backpackers will go to extraordinary lengths—including cutting the paper tags off tea bags and trimming the borders off topographic maps—to keep their packs down to 35 pounds. Carrying a 50-pound pack, sweat pops out on your face and your legs feel rooted to the ground. Ninety pounds is an almost superhuman load.) They packed in a big wall tent for their winter home, and laid in large quantities of freeze-dried food. In order to have fresh fruit and vegetables, they developed an ingenious system. On Moose Creek in the winter, refrigeration is no problem—the danger is that fresh vegetables will freeze solid and spoil. And so the Kecks dig a deep pit in the ground, build a hot fire in it and, after removing the ashes, they place their fresh produce in the warmed hole. Thus protected, the vegetables keep reasonably well all through the winter.

A big problem during bridge construction—incredible as it might sound—was getting enough exercise. Normally both Emil and Penny run—not jog, run—from three to five miles a day. They feel that working and living as they do, their very survival depends upon being in top physical condition. But in the winter on a bridge site, the snow was too deep for running. They were baffled until Penny hit on the idea of an Exercycle. They ordered one and backpacked it in to their campsite. On a typical day, they got up at about 5 A.M. Emil built the fire and did camp chores while Penny raced off 20 miles on the Exercycle. Then, while Penny prepared breakfast, Emil put in his 20 miles. Afterwards, regardless of snow or freezing temperatures, they took outdoor showers from a gasoline can of warm water suspended from a tree. Then they put in eight hard hours of work on the bridge.

One winter a rancher near the border of the wilderness area was forced to go on a trip and leave his stock unattended.

To page 40

And so—as if they weren't getting enough exercise—after work each evening Emil and Penny snowshoed two-and-a-half miles to the ranch, fed 29 head of stock, four chickens, a cat and a dog, and then snowshoed back to their tent, ate dinner and collapsed into their sleeping bags.

For anyone who likes the outdoors at all, the Kecks' way of life has a potent appeal. During the days that we spent with them, we saw deer and elk grazing every morning and every evening; and once Gerry and I watched a black bear explode away through the timber. The forest was full of birds—blue-black Stellar's jays, burly little juncos, sweet-singing lazuli buntings, a golden eagle riding an updraft above the Selway. One day we hiked five miles up the river and camped on a sandbar. Around a fire of driftwood we dined on freeze-dried food—delicious to a trail appetite—and Emil told yarns of his days as a logger. In the background there was not a sound of an automobile or a motor, nothing but the wind and the rush of the river.

Idyllic, yes. But the wilderness can be hostile. Emil's predecessor as fire-control officer had been killed in a forest fire, and a forest supervisor died when his plane crashed on the crude little Moose Creek strip. Didn't they worry about the hazards, I asked—particularly since during much of the year they were cut off from any outside support?

Danger in the Woods

They'd had, Penny admitted, a close call or two. There were rattlesnakes along the Selway River, which added a certain risk to their morning runs. Bears could get into your camp if you weren't careful about your food. Once, crossing a swollen stream, Penny fell into the torrent, and her heavy pack wedged her under a fallen log, but Emil plunged in and loosened the packstraps and got her free before she drowned. "You can't make many blunders," she said, "or they take you to the undertaker."

What would they do in case of an accident or sickness? "We'll just have to take care of ourselves," Penny said. "Emil has had his appendix out, and he wants me to have mine out too, so we won't have to worry about it." They had a shortwave radio, and in an emergency it might be possible to climb up to the top of a mountain and get a message through to forest headquarters in Grangeville, 60-odd miles away—although the headquarters receiver was only manned five days a week. Emil shrugged and said, "People used to be self-sufficient and they got along fine. Daniel Boone didn't have any telephone or social security program. He left Cumberland Gap with a dog and a gun. Out here—this is the only place a man can get back to the way it was when the first man crawled out of his cave, left his bearskins and his woman because the baby was crying, and he knew he had to go out and kill a deer. That man didn't have any telephone."

The Kecks do hard physical work, and it is customary to think that such labor requires little more than brute strength. But spending time around

them, one becomes increasingly aware of the tremendous amount of skill and knowledge their life-style demands. The skill to fell a tree and make it land precisely on a chosen spot; the skill to move a two-ton log for a mile with nothing more than a hand-powered winch; the skill to look at a boulder, judge its rock type and weak points, and know exactly where to place a charge to blow it up. The knowledge to find a stump that contains pitch, and then use it to start a fire in a drenching rain. Every day they spend in the woods they call upon a hundred bits of specialized learning and ability. One afternoon Penny and Emil started hewing out a tree trunk to make a base log for a cabin. The trunk was 30 feet long and 18 inches in diameter; and with nothing but hand tools they had to flatten it on two sides, making the flat surfaces smooth as a tabletop. Emil roughed out the log with an adz, while Penny followed him with a slick—a tool like a giant chisel. She slipped the slick over the log and shaved off wood as smoothly as if she were slicing cheese. It looked easy. I asked to try it, and she handed me the slick with a grin. At my first stroke the slick dug into the log and stopped dead. After 10 minutes, sweating and exhausted, I gave up; all I'd managed to do was gouge up a few square inches of the log's surface.

One night as we were having dinner, I asked if they ever had cabin fever—after all, for months at a time they see no human beings but each other. "On a job we sometimes have a pretty harsh exchange of ideas," Penny said. "But cabin fever—no." They have a system of working and living together. "No matter how much you love each other, out here each person has to retain something to himself or herself." All chores—including traditional "woman's work"—were equally divided. "This thing wouldn't work if Penny did all the damn housework," Emil said. "I don't want my wife bringing me my pipe and slippers."

"I wouldn't do it anyway," Penny added.

Emil, dynamic and extroverted, seems to be the dominant figure in the marriage, but Penny clearly has a mind of her own and there are some areas where she is obviously in charge. It is because of her influence that Emil has become such a remarkable physical specimen. He was always a man of strength and endurance, but at the time he met Penny he weighed 208 pounds. He now weighs 160, and at the age of 62 he can run the mile in six minutes—wearing his logging boots. He planned to enter the Senior Olympics, he said, and believed that he had a good chance of beating the existing senior record for the mile. Penny shook her head and said, "Not yet. You've got to drop 10 more pounds. You've got to build up your endurance. And you've got to put in more training time."

At the end of the dinner, Penny dished up some hot apple pie she'd baked in the wood stove, big hunks for Gerry and me and a modest slice for Emil. He stared at it and said, "That's not a very big piece."

"Well, you know why," she said.

The next day, as Penny was packing some gear for a hike to a new bridge site up the river, I asked her if she had any regrets about abandoning her intended career as a teacher. "Out here I found something very special," she answered. "I can be of as much value out here as I could be in teaching. I broke a barrier here. I was the first woman ever to work on this district. I did a good job, and now the Forest Service has begun to feel that maybe women can do work in the wilderness."

Indeed, the Forest Service, traditionally a bastion of horny-handed masculinity, has been enormously impressed by Penny. Emil, of course, has long since been converted, and he now believes that a motivated woman with a reasonable amount of training in woodcraft can do any job a man can do, from felling a tree to fighting a fire. And his superiors at headquarters have come around, too. For the past few summers, from six to eight young college women have worked right beside men on the district, fighting fires, building trails, and manning—or womaning—lookout towers. This summer, seven young women are working alongside 14 young men. "A girl who wants to do this kind of work," Penny said, "must be aware that it's a tremendous undertaking. The skills can't be learned overnight. It can be physically and mentally exhausting. A girl will either hate it and run away in two weeks, or else she'll love it and stay. It is a special life, and the land . . . one can't find the words."

A Model and Teacher

As the sexual barriers break down, and as city-weary Americans rediscover the outdoors, more and more young women are trying to get jobs with the Forest Service. For those who come to work at Moose Creek, Penny is both a model and a teacher. Yet, ironically, she has not really been employed by the Forest Service since her first summer as a lookout. Because of a service anti-nepotism regulation, no one is permitted to work under the supervision of a relative, and at Moose Creek, Emil would be the supervisor of almost any job that Penny might hold. Thus Penny, who puts in as many hours on the job as her husband, doesn't get paid a cent for her work. The district ranger has tried to get an exception made in Penny's case, but so far the ranger has not been able to get approval from Washington.

Neither Emil nor Penny feel that the current arrangement is fair, but they do have hope for the future. "The Forest Service is always trying to get me to run a school," Emil said. "They are afraid the old woods skills will disappear with the old-timers like me. Well, Penny's a young-timer who's already learned them. Three years from now I can retire. When that happens, Penny deserves to get my job."

"But what will you do then?" I asked. Emil laughed. "Why, we'll just switch," he said. "For seven years now Penny's been working for me for nothing. When I retire, I'll work for her for nothing."