

# Botanizers in the Land of Conifers: Oliver Matthews, Al Hobart, Eugene Parker

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In the 19th century, both men and women took up botany as a popular avocation for the betterment of their minds, souls, and social lives (Keeney 1992). A number of men and women, some still living and others now dead, have played similar roles in Oregon botany, carrying the amateur scientist tradition well into the 20th century. The self-described botanical tramp Oliver Matthews had two friends in southwestern Oregon who shared his passion for botany and Oregon trees: Eugene Parker, who ran a cleaning business, and Al Hobart, who was an Agricultural Inspector at the California-Oregon “bug” station. These three men bonded over their interest in trees and the flora of southwestern Oregon and each played a role, as enthusiastic self-taught botanists, in bringing our flora to the attention of a wider audience.

## Oliver Vincent Matthews (1892-1979)

GREETINGS!!  
So began many of the letters that Oliver Matthews enthusiastically pounded out on a manual typewriter.

Oliver Matthews was a classic 19<sup>th</sup> Century botanizer who was fanatically devoted to the study of Oregon’s trees. A self-taught dendrologist, he described himself as a “botanical tramp” and spent much of his free time driving around Oregon in his Model A Ford (Old Henry) in search of the state’s biggest and best trees. The Forestry Club in the School of Forestry at Oregon State College granted him membership as an Honorary Fernhopper. A tall skinny man with a thin neck, round glasses, a shock of curly white hair and high-laced black shoes, Oliver Matthews was a familiar figure in every corner of Oregon. However, we like to think that southwestern Oregon with its great variety of conifers was his favorite place. This article focuses on his activities there.



Oliver Matthews (age 35) in front of door at Hueneme Beach Location on 31 August 1927. Photo courtesy of the Special Collections & Archives Research Center at Oregon State University.

## Salem Roots

Oliver’s father, James T. Matthews (1864-1942) was born in Penzance, England, and immigrated to Oregon with his parents in 1872. James was an influential and popular professor of mathematics at Willamette University; he and his wife, Rebecca Grant Matthews had two sons, Oliver and Donald (Lang 2009). Oliver Vincent Matthews was born on March 24, 1892 in Salem. Oliver graduated from the University in 1913, later receiving teacher training as a post-graduate at Oregon College of Education in Monmouth (now Western Oregon University). He taught grade school students for only a short time before deciding it was not his forté. He had no formal botanical training, but

trees and other woody plants became his life’s passion. Oliver’s mother often accompanied him on his travels (he referred to her as “Puss” in his field notes) before she died on May 20, 1942. His father lived only two weeks longer.

Oliver Matthews served in the army in Europe during World War I and then worked as an extra in the silent film industry in Hollywood in the 1920s. He became a carpenter and collected wood as a hobby. In 1928 he returned to Oregon, settling in Salem, where he worked seasonally in a cannery and as a carpenter. Comments in his letters like “my Beet job ended on Friday, September --th” and “Pumpkins are to start the 14<sup>th</sup> of October” refer to his work in the cannery. He would register at the cannery in June for the season’s work; he “thot [sic] maybe that during July (My job probably won’t begin till along in August) I would take a few short trips” (letter of June 21, 1957 to Al Hobart). He never married, so seasonal work provided him enough money to live and, more importantly, time to devote to botanical travel in the study of Oregon’s trees. His meticulous, typewritten field notes, and letters are remarkable; he often filled these with “HOORAYS and !!!!!!!!!, and finished with an increasingly large signature as his eyesight failed. He was an accomplished avid photographer of trees



Oliver Matthews next to his home in Salem, Oregon, undated photo, probably in the 1940s. Photo courtesy of the Special Collections & Archives Research Center at Oregon State University.

and landscapes; most of his images were donated to the archives at Oregon State University and are stored, along with 41 numbered scrapbooks and extensive fieldtrip logbooks, in the Valley Library. Scrapbooks contain everything from bills and bus tickets to letters and photographs.

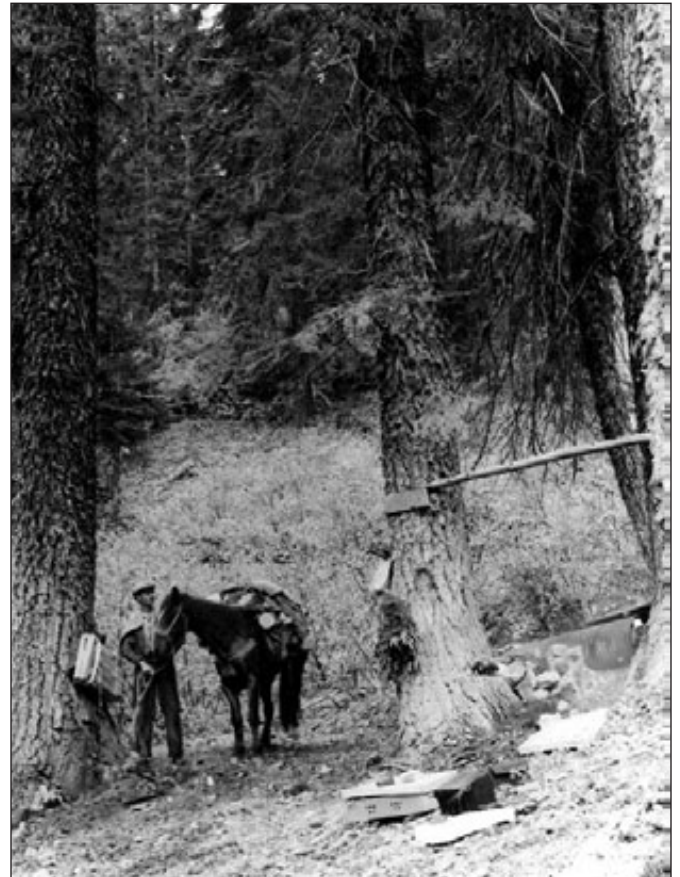
Matthews lived most of his life in the Salem house where he was born, but he never stopped his solitary wanderings, even into his 80s when his eyesight had failed him. During his final years in a retirement home, his crumpled fedora and white cane were frequent sights on Salem buses. In the words of his niece Ruth Tabor, he was “a loveable eccentric, a free spirit before it was fashionable.” This niece also said that although he had prostate cancer for a decade, he “simply died of old age in his sleep” in late March 1979 (Sullivan 1979).

### In Pursuit of Oregon Trees

For over forty years, Oliver Matthews scoured the woods of Oregon with ax, camera, and notebook in hand. He needed the notebook to record precisely the location, date, and site conditions for each tree he found; the camera, of course, to record an image; and the ax to “clear an acre or two of forest if need be, so that the favored tree will stand alone in all its glory” (McCulloch 1958). He was taking photos for a book he planned to write on Oregon trees, “*Roughings Out*.” Unfortunately, he never published his book. But in his relentless search for information, he put 225,000 miles on one motor in a second-hand 1929 Model A Ford that he bought in Los Angeles in 1930, added 23,000 miles on a second engine until the odometer broke, and then tallied many thousand miles more until 1953 when

the body of Old Henry finally gave out (McCulloch 1958). After Old Henry, Matthews never had another car of his own and had to depend on public transportation or friends and relatives to give him rides, which severely limited his travels.

Matthews had “ABSOLUTELY no use for the little colored slide.” He bought a Karl Zeiss camera, set it at F:32, used an exposure meter, a sturdy tripod, and took at least four exposures of each subject. Sometimes more. “Film is cheap. What are a few dimes. You have traveled hundreds of miles, Flat tires, run out of money, heat and cold. What is a dime. PHOOEY” (letter to Frank Sesock (Callahan) dated August 11, 1974). Actually, film for that particular camera was not cheap; Matthews invested a great deal of money to capture in excess of 7,500 black and white pictures that, along with the camera, he ended up donating to OSU.



Oliver Matthews (age 47) with his pack horse at the Miller Lake campsite on June 5, 1939, which was reached after “a 1.5 hour breath-taking hike up the Miller Lake Trail.” Just out of the picture to the left was a “delightful little spring” among the Sitka alders. The larger trees in the photo he “took to be white firs.”

### The Oracle Oak

In Josephine County, a little tree growing along lower Grave Creek at the mouth of Poorman Creek caught the attention of children on their way to school because it was an evergreen broadleaf tree. Fame of the lone tree spread along with the mystery of how it could be native and the only one of its kind in the entire region (Anonymous 1957). In 1945, Matthews collected samples and, using Morton Peck’s *Manual of the Higher Plants of Oregon* (1961), he identified it as oracle oak (*Quercus x morehus*). He shared





Oliver Matthews' image of the "world's largest cypress" that once bore his name, taken from the trail to Miller Lake. Grayback Mountain is in the far background. Photo No. 4-102 65 5, taken July 6, 1941.

specimens with botanists in Salem and Corvallis, who concurred with his diagnosis. At that time, the only other known oracle oaks were in California. Of course, this intrigued Matthews and when he started tracking down leads for it, he found it in Douglas County and in other locations in Josephine County. When he visited Miller Lake with Dr. Albert N. Steward (Curator of the Oregon State College herbarium) in 1956, Oliver took a closer look at a small shrub near the lake that he had always assumed to be Brewer oak. To his surprise, it keyed to oracle oak. Having found so many widespread locations, he was mystified that he had not identified it long before. To his chagrin, he realized that he *had* seen it in 1931 and failed to identify it.

We now know that the explanation for the distribution of Oracle oak as widely scattered lone trees is that this oak (*Quercus ×morehus* Kellogg) is actually a stable hybrid between California black oak (*Q. kelloggii*) and interior live oak (*Q. wislizeni*). Although the current distribution of *Q. wislizeni* lies to the south of Oregon in California, fossils at the John Day Fossil Beds and Sweet Home fossil site indicate that it once grew in Oregon. *Quercus wislizeni* is one of the few oaks that will hybridize with *Q. kelloggii*. As a stable hybrid, Oracle oak reproduces and sustains itself generation after generation (Baldwin *et al.* 2012, p. 808).

However, it turns out that Matthews was mistaken in his 1956 identification of the scrub oak at Miller Lake. According to Frank Callahan, Matthews was correct in his original thinking that this

tree looked like Brewer oak and was also correct that it was a hybrid, but it is not oracle oak. It resulted instead from a cross between two white oaks: Brewer oak (*Q. garryana* var. *breweri*) and saddler oak (*Q. sadleriana*), a hybrid that is not uncommon where these two oaks grow near each other (Baldwin *et al.* 2012, p. 806).

### Baker Cypress

Siskiyou or Matthews cypress (*Cupressus bakeri* ssp. *matthewsii*, now *Hesperocyparis bakeri*) was named by Carl Brandt Wolf (1905-1974) at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, Claremont, California (Wolf 1948). Wolf and E. R. Johnson collected the isotypes (which are stored at the Gray Herbarium, Harvard University) above Seiad Creek, Siskiyou County, California, on October 9, 1934. According to Matthews, the Botanic Garden was looking for a cypress to replace Monterey cypress, a coastal species that did poorly when planted in the hot Central Valley of California. At the time, the Baker cypresses in northwest and southeast Siskiyou County were considered the same. But "That Man, Matthews, from far away Oregon showed up with a few pictures of Oregon's cypress trees" and "an intensive study in the nursery brought out . . . appreciable differences (between the two populations)." Matthews was elated that Wolf named it in his honor, and even more so when "Prof. Peck, in his 1962 [*sic*] revised edition of *A Manual of the Higher Plants of Oregon*, comes right out and gives Oregon's tree the common name MATTHEWS CYPRESS" (both quotes are from Matthews' correspondence in the Special Collections & Archives Research Center at Oregon State University).

Matthews widely promoted his namesake tree for cultivation in parks and arboreta. In 1965 he wrote to Al Hobart that his friend A.D. Radebaugh<sup>1</sup> in Dayton, Washington, "may write to you for Preston Peak Matthews Cypress seed. He is the manager of the local City Park, and is having lots of fun building up a little Arboretum in same. After considerable experimentation, etc. he is finally having very good success with the propagation [*sic*] of the MATTHEWS CYPRESS. He tells me the tree is extremely hardy to cold, and heat, but does not take kindly to transplanting. If your tree looks kind of peekged [*sic*] give it a shot of Epsom Salts as I told him to do. As the tree grows on rock rich in magnesium. He has had very good luck in giving this old fashioned remedy. Ha, Ha, Ho, Go...HOORAY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" (OVM letter dated Feb. 21, 1969).

Ken Chambers wrote to Matthews in 1974 confirming that "there are indeed plants of the Matthews Cypress at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England." Here is a sample of Matthews' enthusiasm: "That, folks, is about the story of how a grandson of our 1872 immigrant family from Penzance, Cornwall, England, with the aid of a few small plants, 'crashed' the Kew Gardens under the guise of *Cupressus bakeri* Jepson ssp. *matthewsii* Wolf. An honor accorded very few individuals. To have had the family name tacked onto any kind of tree, let alone 'crashing' the Kew Gardens, certainly was something for the hatband!"

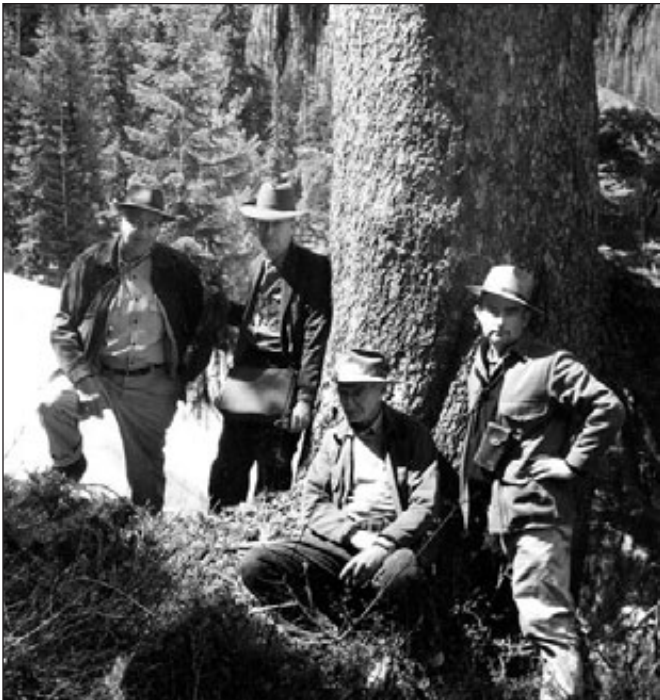
Since then taxonomic revisions eliminated Matthew's subspecies (Eckenwalder 2009, [http://www.conifers.org/cu/Cupressus\\_bakeri.php](http://www.conifers.org/cu/Cupressus_bakeri.php)). Sadly, with changing city priorities, the cypress trees planted in the Dayton City Park arboretum were later cut down to create ball fields.

<sup>1</sup> Director of the Green Giant Company office in Dayton, WA. The same company employed Matthews in Salem, OR.

## Weeping Spruce and Gray Pine

In 1941, “Dad had given his son \$100 to use as he saw fit,” so Matthews started pursuing his dream of finding as many of the World’s Largest Trees as possible for the American Forest’s Big Tree List. On July 5, 1941, he documented a weeping (Brewer) spruce (*Picea breweri*) on the north slope of Miller Peak in the Siskiyou Mountains that measured 46.44 inches in diameter. He extolled: “the beauty of the tree was just out of this world.”

In 1945, based on information from District Ranger Lee C. Port of the Rogue River National Forest, Matthews documented the first gray pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) in Oregon at Rock Point near Gold Hill in Jackson County (Callahan 2009).



Posing in front of the Miller Lake Brewer spruce on June 4, 1962, from left to right: Lyle Anderson from the Medford Forest Service Office, Dr. Elbert Little, head dendrologist in Washington, DC, Oliver Matthews (age 70, seated) from Salem, Oregon, and Eugene Parker (age 36) from Medford. Photo by Gene Parker.

## Engelmann Spruce and Subalpine Fir at Mt. Ashland

Matthews made a number of trips to southern Oregon, including a visit to Mt. Ashland (*a.k.a.* Ashland Peak) in search of subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce. In September and again in October 1937, he took Old Henry (his car) from Salem to Grants Pass, driving “by yourself” (according to his quaint, somewhat peculiar, habit of referring to himself in the second person). On both trips he traveled south through Murphy to Ruch along the Applegate River, then up Beaver Creek Road and along the Siskiyou Crest past Dutchman Peak to Mt. Ashland then down to the City of Ashland. The Civilian Conservation Corps had only recently completed construction of this Beaver Creek-Mt. Ashland Loop Road. On these trips he looked for various trees, including red fir (*Abies magnifica* var. *magnifica*), which he did not find, and Shasta fir (*A. magnifica* var. *shastensis*), which he did find, and from which he collected cones. He also procured wood of curl-leaf mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*) for a cabinet project, and reported seeing an interesting western white pine (*Pinus monticola*).



Krummholz of subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) at Mt. Ashland, July 1958.

When he returned to Ashland in 1958, Matthews was no longer driving, partly because of failing eyesight, but mostly because Old Henry was beyond repair. On his 24-26 July trip to Mount Ashland, LaRea Dennis (Johnston) and her boyfriend accompanied him; she was an MSc student at Oregon State College working with Dr. Albert N. Steward, curator of the herbarium. Her thesis project was the Flora of Mt. Ashland. The objective of the trip was to confirm reports of an alpine fir and an Engelmann spruce near the peak’s summit. They spent the night of 25 July with LaRea’s parents in Rogue River. The next day the three of them and LaRea’s parents headed for Mt. Ashland where Howard Hopkins (USFS) met



Oliver Matthews in the Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) stand on Mt. Ashland, September 1958.



them. Matthews received considerable cooperation from USFS personnel, most likely because of their common interest in trees but, perhaps because the Supervisor of the Rogue River National Forest at the time was Carroll E. Brown, known to Matthews as "Cousin Carroll."

Although their search for Engelmann spruce on the summit was unsuccessful, they did find and identify subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) which Matthews photographed, and they collected a herbarium voucher specimen (Oregon Flora Project Atlas).

LaRea Dennis had to return to Corvallis on Monday July 28, but Matthews apparently remained in southern Oregon at least through Tuesday July 29, staying at his Cousin Carroll's house in Medford. He traveled by bus to the Ashland Ranger District Office to arrange a trip to the East Fork of Ashland Creek where Willis Lynn Jepson had reported finding Engelmann spruce in 1906 (Jepson 1909). Forest Service personnel advised him that September would be the best time to visit those trees so Matthews decided to return then. On September 24, 1958, he went with Mr. H.A. "Red" Thomas, the Ashland District Ranger, to examine that stand of trees. Matthews photographed the Engelmann spruce and collected specimens for the herbarium (Oregon Flora Project Atlas). He ended his October 2, 1958 letter to Ranger Thomas with "Thanking You again for a most wonderful and PROFITABLE ride that day."

### Matthews' Magic Circle at Miller Lake and the Miller Lake Botanical Area

As a fan of coniferous trees, Oliver Matthews became enthralled with the high country in the Siskiyou Mountains of southern Oregon. He planned for it to be one of the key features of his book on Oregon trees and campaigned vigorously for the designation of a Forest Service Botanical Area at Miller Lake. Here is his description of his Miller Lake Magic Circle: "Starting with Miller Lake itself, as the center, draw a circle, in this case one with a radius of 6 miles, just wide enough to include 'The Big Tree,' the big Douglas fir there at the Oregon Caves Natl. Mnt." What made this area special to him was that, in this small circle, he had found at least half of the 35 conifer species native to Oregon, "including the rare Matthews cypress," which was understandably quite special to him. After decades of urging from Oliver Matthews, in the 1970s the Applegate Ranger District set aside the Miller Lake Botanical Area.



Map of the Magic Circle at Miller Lake, the land of the conifers. "Starting with Miller Lake at the center, draw a circle with a radius of 6 miles...and it will include at least half of all the conifers native to Oregon." Prepared by Oliver V. Matthews.

His 1956 list of conifer species in this magic circle included:

1. Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*): Oregon Caves (Oregon's second largest specimen, 1956);
2. Grand fir (*Abies grandis*) at the end of Sturgis Fork Road
3. Oregon yew (Pacific yew, *Taxus brevifolia*) along Sturgis Fork Trail
4. Sugar pine (*Pinus lambertiana*) along Sturgis Fork Trail
5. White fir (*Abies concolor*) above Miller Lake
6. Shasta fir (*Abies magnifica x Abies procera*)
7. Siskiyou cypress (Baker cypress, *Hesperocyparis bakeri*) world's largest, east of Miller Lake
8. Weeping spruce (Brewer spruce, *Picea breweri*) world's largest, east of Miller Lake
9. Incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*) east of Miller Lake
10. Mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*) east of Miller Lake
11. California red fir (*Abies magnifica*) east of Miller Lake
12. Western white pine (*Pinus monticola*) east of Miller Lake
13. Knobcone pine (*Pinus attenuata*) world's largest, Steve Peak Trail
14. Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) near Iron Mountain, Steve Peak Trail
15. Port Orford cedar (*Calocedrus lawsoniana*) back of the Oregon Caves
16. Alaska cedar (*Callitropsis nootkatensis*) above Frog Pond Gulch, California, also Whiskey Peak, Oregon.

His 1969 list also included noble fir (*Abies procera*) and dwarf juniper (*Juniperus communis* var. *saxatilis*). Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) grows just outside his arbitrary circle, at Azalea Lake.

### Oliver Matthews Research Natural Area

During the development of the Rogue River National Forest Plan in the 1980s, new Research Natural Areas (RNAs) were considered, including a proposed Craggy Peak RNA that included all botanically-significant portions of the Miller Lake Botanical Area. Most RNAs are named for a geographic or biological feature, but in their 1990 Forest Plan, the Rogue River National Forest decided to give the Craggy Peak area the commemorative name of Oliver Matthews RNA. This was intentional recognition of Matthews' contribution to the general public's appreciation for native trees and for his efforts in establishing the Miller Lake Botanical Area. According to the Plan, features of the proposed 1,429-acre RNA include a Shasta red fir-white fir forest, Brewer's spruce showing maximum development and, in one 30+ acre mixed conifer stand, the world's largest and tallest specimens of Baker cypress. Given how excited Matthews was to have a tree with his name on it planted in Kew Gardens, we can almost hear him cheering "HOOORAAAY !!!!!" for the naming of a Research Natural Area as a tribute to this remarkable "botanical tramp."



Oliver Matthews, on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, renewed his acquaintanceship with a big leaf maple tree that he played in as a child on the Willamette University Campus, Salem, Oregon. Photo courtesy of Special Collections & Archives Research Center at Oregon State University.

### Take a Field Trip to Miller Lake

Matthews invited one and all to take a "look-see to satisfy one's own curiosity about the trees" near Miller Lake:

"For convenience, it starts there just south of the Rogue River Bridge there at Grants Pass, Oregon: where the Redwood Highway, US 199, takes off to the right, and the Old Pacific Highway, US 99, takes off to the left. Somewhere in between these two highways watch closely for Oregon Highway 238 for Murphy and waypoints, follow same either along the north or south sides of the Applegate River, in either case a most pleasant drive, to the community of Applegate. But before we turn right south up Thompson Creek, it might be well to digress for just a minute and drive on east to Ruch, turn south for the Star R.S. [now Siskiyou Mountain Ranger District office] for maps, the latest road and trail information. Then back to Applegate. . . . After a long steady uphill climb to come to what down through the years the writer has called 'The Hump' (Summit) . . . just a short distance further down the road, taking off pretty much on the level to the right, west, we come to a second logging road, namely one up Sturgis Creek, and points west: the final objective. . . . Jog right here, and follow same to where it crosses the creek there at the foot of the Lewis Creek Logging Road. If the conditions are favorable, one might be able to drive up this road, then turn right, west, to end up about a half mile below Miller Lake. With lots of Cypress trees. . . . Otherwise one will have to take to the old Trail, a steep rough 1.5 mile – 1.5 hour hike in to the lake."

Barbara Mumblo, botanist on the Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District, offers a current version of directions to Miller Lake: From the town of Applegate go west 0.1 mile on Hwy 238 to Thompson Creek Road. Follow Thompson Creek Road approx. 12.5 miles to the top of the ridge to a junction of three additional roads. Take Road 1020 to the right and go downhill about 1.5 miles to a junction where Road 1020 continues to the right and Road 1015 goes to the left. Follow Road 1020 for about three miles to road 400. Follow Road 400 to the river (Sturgis Fork). The bridge has been removed at this location so your choices are to ford it with a high clearance vehicle (when the stream is low) or wade across and walk. In the fall of 2012 the ford was improved for use but after winter it may be rough. The trailhead is about four miles past this river crossing at the end of the road. Miller Lake is about a half mile from the trailhead.

Alternatively, you may start from the Star Ranger Station (where you have obtained maps and learned about the latest road conditions). The Ranger Station is seven miles south of Ruch on the Upper Applegate Road, so continue on Upper Applegate Road to the south end of Applegate Lake (about twelve miles). At the stop sign, turn right on Carberry Creek Road (called Road 10 or County Road 777). Follow Carberry Road for about nine miles before turning left on Road 1015. Continue on Road 1015 about 0.7 mile to Road 1020, then follow Road 1020 about three miles to Road 400. Follow Road 400 to the river (Sturgis Fork). From there the directions are the same as above.



**Alva L. Hobart**  
**(1898-1981)**

Oliver Matthews first wrote to Al Hobart in October of 1956 after getting his name from J. A. Mattoon, Ranger on the Siskiyou National Forest. Oliver Matthews and Al Hobart became fast friends through their mutual love of Oregon native plants and especially their enthusiasm for trees. Fortunately, much of their correspondence has been preserved.

Alva L. Hobart was born February 13, 1898 in Wisconsin. He served in the US Navy during World War I. A life-long bachelor, he lived in the Illinois Valley for 52 years and spent untold hours scouring the Siskiyou Mountains to learn their botanical secrets. His cabin in Packer's Gulch was near the mouth of Packer's Creek on the Illinois River south of Takilma, just across the state line in California. After working in a lumber mill in the Illinois Valley, he served for ten years as a seasonal (April or May through October or November) Plant Quarantine Inspector for the California Department of Agriculture at the Redwood Highway Inspection Station. Although the timing of this work interfered with his botanical explorations, one thing he liked was that they worked ten or twelve days in succession followed by five or six days off, giving him opportunities to "get into the mountains for 2 or 3 days of prowling a couple of times a month" (letter to OVM dated April 19, 1957).

Al wrote a column called *Winding Trails* for the Illinois Valley News from August 22, 1963 to January 16, 1969. The column on June 25, 1964, featured his autobiography: *Al Hobart and "Little Toot," his Faithful Steed*. (Little Toot was his 4-wheel-drive jeep.) Here it is in its entirety:

"In answer to a rapidly diminishing number of requests, (I think we received one or two) for more information about the "Young Man of the Mountains," Al Hobart, the Illinois Valley News proudly brings you this refreshing autobiography of our own man from the Winding Trails. While Al states he lives in California (which he does) we think it should be explained that the Illinois Valley, in its rambling layout, accidentally slopped over into our neighboring state a time or two. This is no reflection on Al for settling there, however, he probably didn't realize where he was there, either. And to help explain it further, the only way out of Packer's Gulch, barring helicopter or Al's feet, is through Oregon and the Illinois Valley. He belongs to the Valley, make no mistake about that." —editor of the Illinois Valley News.

"In 1898, on February 13, an event took place in the little village of Fairchild, Wisconsin, that was to have an important bearing on my entire life, and to play fantastic tricks over the years with the thinking of my friends and



Al Hobart, on the Sky Lakes Trail, August 1964. Photo from Hobart collection, courtesy of Lee Webb.

relations. On that date I made my first and most important debut. I had arrived.

At the age of seven, having spent my first school year in Fairchild, I moved with my parents and three brothers to Willapa Harbor in the state of Washington. We made our home in the old town of Willapa, and there I spent my early youth and school years, graduating from high school and into the U.S. Navy at the age of seventeen.

The years following my navy experience were devoted in large part to a mixture of various occupations and mild adventure, the latter always managing to interfere with the former at just the right time to prevent permanent entanglement with profession or homemaking. I celebrated my completion of a three-year course in electrical engineering by traveling around the rim of the United States.

On several occasions, when I was young and of possible, if questionable, matrimonial material, I almost made the serious mistake of staying too long in one place. Once I had even bought a marriage license, but luckily, just at the last moment, the moon and Jupiter slipped out of phase, and the deal was off. Outside of that, my life has been relatively smooth and beset with few hazards.

In June 1930 I made a mistake that proved to be the happiest and most important event in my life—I went prospecting up the wrong river! For several years prior to that time I had been working in the meat packing industry in Washington. On our vacation my closest friend and co-worker, John Dingman, and I decided to go down and pan gold in Smith River, where John had been once long before. When we crossed the east fork of the Illinois River, Fate whispered (and John echoed) "This is it, this is Smith River." So I drove up the wrong river, and here in Illinois Valley, in Packer's Gulch, just inside California, I found not gold but the place I knew at last was home, and here I happily put down deep and permanent roots.



Al Hobart with his jeep, Little Toot; this was the byline photo for his newspaper column, "Winding Trails," in the Illinois Valley News. From Hobart archives, courtesy of Lee Webb.

For a number of years, I worked in the lumber industry here in the Valley as an edger operator, after which, for ten years, I was an inspector at the Redwood Plant Quarantine Station. Now I am retired and devote almost all my time to wild plant studies. My principal hobbies and greatest joy are studying, hiking and mountain climbing, all of which fit in as important adjuncts to my botany work.

Although my formal education ended with high school, except for occasional intermissions I have never stopped studying, the acquisition of knowledge of the world we live in having always been of the deepest satisfaction to me. And so the study of wild plant botany came as a natural to me when I found myself settled here among the forested mountains of the botanically rich Siskiyou, the sort of environment that I have always loved above all others.

Always interested in natural history, in the past twelve of fourteen years I have made a determined and intensive effort to catalog the wild plant life of my home region, the Siskiyou Mountains. In that period I have found, identified and written the descriptions of more than 1200 wild plants. The healthful exercise and deep satisfaction involved in this occupation to me is incalculable. One of the greatest thrills I have known was being given official recognition for having first discovered two new plants for California, the little water club rush (*Scirpus subterminalis*) and the snow dwarf bramble (*Rubus nivalis*). My greatest ambition is, of course, to find one new to Science.

More than once I have been told that if I fell into a swill-barrel, I'd come out smelling like a rose; and when I think of the strange quirk of chance that led me to mistake one river for another, and the many happy and profitable years that have followed that lucky mischance, I can't help but agree."—Al Hobart

By 1963 Hobart had retired from the Inspection Station, and thus spent most of his time "tramping the mountain trails, studying the wild plant life of the Siskiyou." In a letter responding to Siskiyou Forest Supervisor J.R. Philbrick's request that he not drive the old roads into the new Kalmiopsis Wilderness, he wrote, "As an amateur botanist... I look upon the Siskiyou Mountains as my private little world. The goodwill of the Forest Service is a very important adjunct to my happy existence in that world, and my conduct has always been and will be in accordance with that realization" (letter on Dec. 5 1963 to J. R. Philbrick, Forest Supervisor Siskiyou National Forest).

Hobart compiled a 289-page book covering the flowers and trees of the Siskiyou Mountains of southern Oregon and northern California. He left a copy of this book, which was never published, with his good friend and fellow botanist, Veva Stansell of Pistol River.

Al Hobart died at the age of 82 on January 23, 1981 in the Mount Hope Retirement Lodge in Cave Junction. He was survived by a sister, Georgia Tooker of Los Angeles.

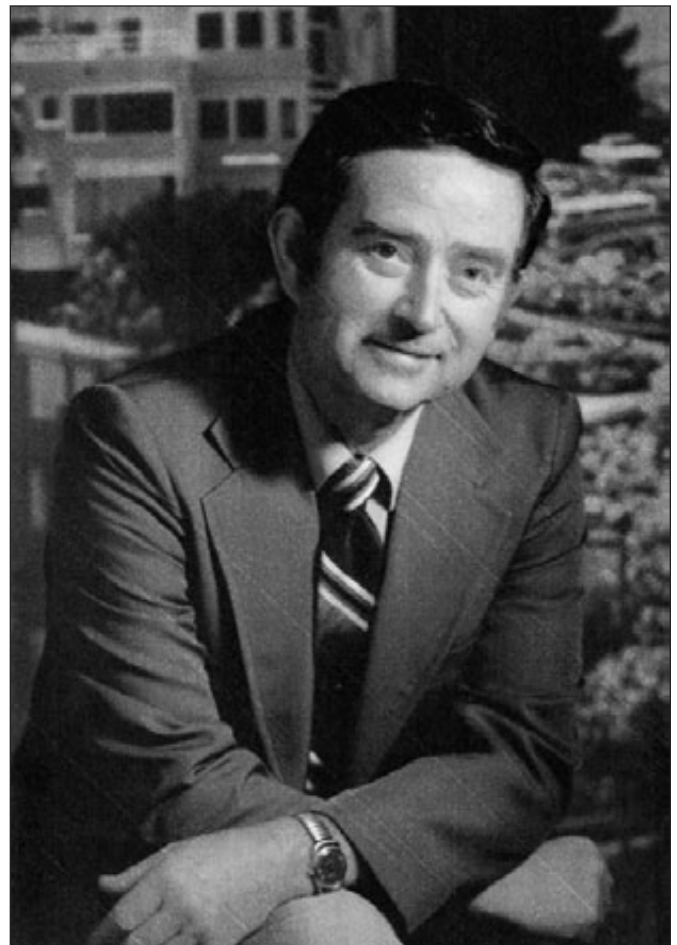
### **Eugene L. Parker (1926-1993)**

Many of the letters between Matthews and Hobart wrangled endlessly about the identification of true firs. The authority on *Abies* species in the Siskiyou Mountains of southwestern Oregon

was Gene Parker of Medford, who began corresponding with Oliver Matthews in 1960 (Parker 1988).

We (Callahan and Lang) knew him because of his enthusiasm for trees, particularly the genus *Abies* in southwestern Oregon. One of his primary contributions concerned the relationship between noble fir, *Abies procera* and California red fir, *A. magnifica*. Parker made a convincing case that our so-called Shasta red fir (*Abies magnifica* var. *shastensis*) might be a hybrid between noble fir and red fir. His argument was most persuasive when presented, in person, in the field with his extensive collection of frozen cones, branches, and needles from throughout the ranges of the three taxa. Some scientists, such as Dr. Jerry Franklin at the University of Washington, questioned Parker's ideas and evidence, but Parker didn't seem to be particularly troubled by this. Others recognized Parker as a local authority on the true firs; for example, when Tang-Shue Liu was working on *A Monograph of the Genus Abies* (Liu 1971), he stayed at Parker's home and traveled with Parker to the local hotspots for true firs. The author mentions Parker's contribution in his acknowledgments: "Mr. E. Parker, located at Medford, Oregon, Specialist in the native firs of the western United States, joined us to the Rogue River National Forest, in the southern part of the Cascade Range." To Parker's credit, modern molecular studies (Oline 2008) validate his hybridization idea.

Among his many talents were his artistic abilities and skill as a pen-and-ink draftsman, best displayed in his illustrations of his beloved trees, especially foliage and cones. I (Frank Lang) managed



Eugene Parker at age 54, in 1980. Photo courtesy of Kevin Parker.



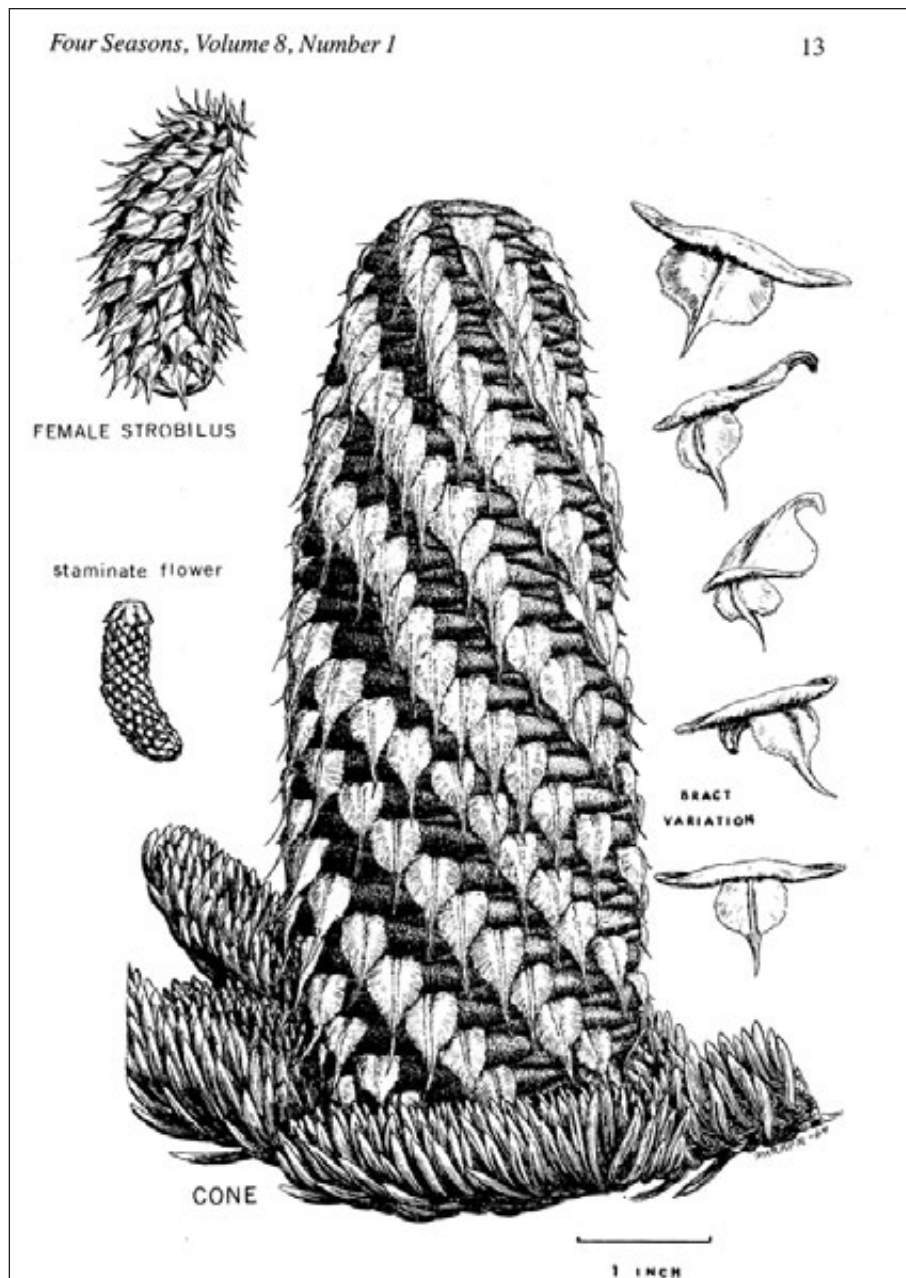
to get him to give a demonstration to at least one of my biological illustration classes. Unfortunately, following his death, his widow Lesley forwarded the drawings to Jack Duffield (US Forest Service Tree Geneticist) in Seattle, Washington, who died several years ago in Shelton, WA. The whereabouts of the drawings is unknown, a loss to southern Oregon botany.

Callahan and Lang joined Parker in the field on several occasions. They visited the general type locality of Shasta red fir at Panther Meadow on Mount Shasta<sup>2</sup>, looked at firs along the Siskiyou Crest from Mount Ashland to Dutchman Peak, and hiked the Pacific Crest Trail from Cook and Green Pass east to examine a stand of Pacific silver fir Parker discovered in 1961 between Copper Butte and Joe Creek (in northern California). In September 1991, the three of us checked on the status of the subalpine fir krummholz near the summit of Mt. Ashland. Parker wrote a report on its status for the Forest Service, including photographs, maps of the stand and its location, and a written assessment of the stand's nature (size, age, number of cone bearing stems) and recommendations for its preservation (Parker 1991).

From the previous paragraphs, one might wrongly assume that Gene Parker had a degree in botany or a related field. His obituary makes only a passing mention of forestry, making his botanical accomplishments even more remarkable. Eugene L. Parker was born September 23, 1926 in Medford and died on October 24, 1993 in Medford. He attended schools in Medford and on Mare Island, California. He married Lesley B. Schleigh on May 11, 1946. The couple had three sons and two daughters. He served in the Army Air Corps from 1945 to 1946 and again from 1950 to 1951 at Mather Air Force Base in California. After returning to Medford, he worked at Timber Products for several years. He was also a tree faller. From 1961 until retiring in 1988, Parker owned and operated the Service Custodians Janitorial Service. After his retirement, he drove a bus for the local school district. During the last five years of his life, he was a bus driver for RVTD (Rogue Valley Transportation District). An avid pilot, he enjoyed building and rebuilding airplanes and was a member of the American Experimental Aircraft Association. As a former member of the Medford Linebackers, he supported local football teams and also enjoyed hunting and fishing.

His stationary letterhead reflects Parker's own view of his role in botany:

<sup>2</sup> John G. Lemmon, author of the name, simply mentioned the slopes of Mount Shasta in his description (Lemmon 1890).



Sample of illustration of a conifer cone, Noble fir (*Abies procera*) by Eugene Parker. Reprinted from *The Four Seasons* 8(1):13.

“Eugene L. Parker  
CO-OPERATING IN TECHNICAL RESEARCH OF  
THE WESTERN CONIFERS  
FIELD COLLECTIONS AND INVESTIGATIONS  
BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATIONS.”

At the bottom of the page is the logo of the Society of American Foresters between the words Member Retired.

### Acknowledgements

Julie Hall with the Grants Pass Daily Courier tracked down the obituary for Al Hobart. Jerry Black searched the archives at OSU for images of young Oliver Matthews. Lee Webb (retired, Siskiyou National Forest wildlife biologist) provided the images, old letters and other records for Al Hobart. Wayne Rolle (Rogue-Siskiyou

National Forest botanist) gave us information on the proposed Oliver Matthews RNA. Barb Mumblo (botanist, Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District) provided directions for reaching Miller Lake and the newspaper obituaries for Eugene Parker and Oliver Matthews. The Special Collections & Archives Research Center at Oregon State University provided images from Oliver Matthews' records. Kevin Parker and his wife Jean Maxwell provided the photo of Eugene Parker and reviewed his biographic section. Stephen W. Edwards of the East Bay Regional Park District granted permission to use the illustration of the cone originally published in their publication, *Four Seasons*. Jeri Chase, Agency Web Coordinator/Public Information Officer with the Oregon Department of Forestry, checked their archives of *The Forest Log* for us.

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Frank Lang has a long history with southern Oregon botany, retiring as Emeritus Professor of Biology at Southern Oregon University after 31 years and with NPSO (State President twice) and *Kalmiopsis*. He was the first editor of *Kalmiopsis* and has served on its editorial board since 2004. Previous articles in this journal include John Jeffrey in the Wild West: Speculations on His Life and Times (1828-1854?) and Plant of the Year, Green-flowered Wild Ginger (*Asarum wagneri*). He was honored as NPSO Fellow in 2000. His interests include history of botanical exploration of the Pacific Northwest, fern evolution, threatened and endangered plants, Charles Darwin in the Southern Hemisphere, Patagonia and Tasmania. Known as Dr. Nature Notes, he has produced over 300 radio scripts broadcast weekly on Jefferson Public Radio communicating the wonders of the natural world to the public. A selected script is published in each issue of the *Jefferson Monthly*. He has also contributed a large number of online entries for the Oregon Encyclopedia; as he says, he is computer literate (and he has a sense of humor).



Frank Callahan, member of the Siskiyou Chapter, is a conifer fanatic, and avid pursuer of big trees of all kinds. This botanizer is also crazy about pretty flowering native bulbs (*Calochortus*, *Chlorogalum*, etc.). His previous articles in *Kalmiopsis* include California buckeye, Gray pine, and Hinds walnut. He manages Callahan

Seeds, which markets tree and shrub seeds. He was President of the Siskiyou Chapter for two years. He now serves with the Southern Oregon University Herbarium volunteers when he is not out roaming the valleys and mountains of Oregon and California, following his mantra "Never Stop Discovering!"

Cindy Roché came to Oregon in 1998 and joined the Siskiyou Chapter that fall. Previous articles in *Kalmiopsis* include *Asarum wagneri* and *Centaurea xkleinii*. After a sojourn in *Asteraceae*, she now focuses on *Poaceae*. She teaches a workshop on grass identification at the Siskiyou Field Institute each May and is currently working with the *Carex* Working Group on a *Field Guide to Grasses of Oregon and Washington*. She currently serves as regional coordinator in Southwestern Oregon for the Quilts of Valor Foundation and also enjoys gardening, backpacking, bicycling, yoga, and raising chickens.

