

Arborist takes passion for preservation to dizzy heights

Camp Kiwanilong Arboretum is a treasure trove of species

By CASSANDRA PROFITA
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — It started as a rather urgent need to stabilize Clatsop County's sand dunes in the 1930s.

The change in sand movement caused in part by the Columbia River jetties was bringing the dunes farther and farther inland, covering the native plants that once contained the sand and threatening homes and roadways along the North Coast.

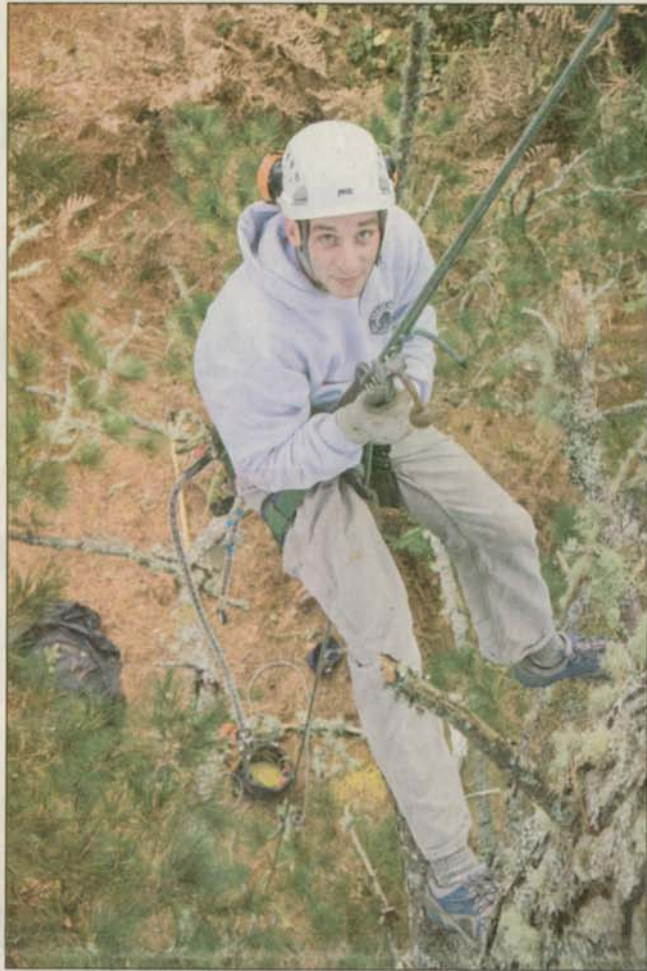
Looking for a solution, the Civilian Conservation Corps collected 100 different species of sand-adapted trees and shrubs from around the world and planted them in 100 25-square-foot test plots in Warrenton to see which ones would thrive.

Some of the plantings were Northwest natives: Crabapple, bigleaf maple, noble fir and Sitka spruce. Others, such as the coast redwoods, Monterey and ponderosa pines, black locust and red maple, were taken from across the U.S. But many hailed from as far off as Europe and China. CCC crews planted Chinese elm, white poplar,

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Luke Colvin, of Arbor Care Tree Specialists, hangs out on a massive Maritime pine tree Nov. 4 at the Camp Kiwanilong Arboretum in Warrenton. This Maritime pine is one of several trees targeted for a preservation party taking place at 9:30 a.m. Saturday.

ALEX PAJUNAS — *The Daily Astorian*



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Luke Colvin, who runs Arbor Care Tree Specialists from his home in Olney, wanders among the ferns and the massive jumble of branches from a crabapple tree inside the Camp Kiwanilong Arboretum in Warrenton. "I love this tree," Colvin said. "It reminds me of something out of 'The Chronicles of Narnia' or 'Lord of the Rings.'"

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ginkgo, Norway spruce and Scotch, Austrian and French maritime pine.

Now, more than 75 years later, 25 of those plots remain in the Camp Kiwanilong Arboretum, a little-known trove of exotic trees that sandwich the camp site.

"Once you know your pines, you walk through there and it's kind of mind blowing," said Kathleen Sayce, a Nahcotta, Wash., ecologist who has surveyed the grounds to figure out "what's growing where." The arboretum is home to at least 12 different species of pine, according to her findings.

But local arborist Luke Colvin of Olney says as the trees get bigger, the plantation is increasingly crowded, and the trees have to compete for sunlight; a dense canopy chokes off air flow through the stands and increases the risk of infestation.

Colvin thinks a little trimming could help preserve the arboretum's unique and historic composition.

"This is an absolutely stunning, beautiful area that has been unmaintained as to the tree structure and canopy," he said. "Without reducing the canopy, you'll start having failures."

Colvin went to Camp Kiwanilong as a kid and now makes his living scaling giant trees on the coast and cutting out dead wood and redundant branches to keep them healthy. Though he's already volunteered his skills to help keep the arboretum intact, he knows there's more work needed than he can do alone.

On Saturday, he's holding a tree preservation event at Camp Kiwanilong in the hopes of recruiting new members for his "Arborists in the Arboretum" volunteer group. The day will start with a fruit-tree pruning clinic and continue with a "tree preservation party," where he'll demonstrate how to maintain 75-year-old Sitka spruce, maritime pine and Scotch pine trees in the arboretum. A donation of two cans of food for the Clatsop County Food Banks will get visitors into both events.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson thinks it's a great idea. She's planning to attend the preservation party to support Colvin's effort.

"We tend to think about Camp Kiwanilong as a camp, not as an arboretum," said Johnson. "I was just intrigued by the idea, and I wanted to lend my support to what I think is a very admirable young man's interest in this historic arboretum."

Trees could use help

For years the arboretum has been a tree museum for kids, said Camp Kiwanilong ranger Trinda Little,



ALEX PAJUNAS — The Daily Astorian
Trinda Little, left, a Camp Kiwanilong ranger, and Luke Colvin, of Arbor Care Tree Specialists, gaze at the size of an incense cedar Oct. 31, a tree that is out of its element on the North Coast. Incense cedars are mostly found in the mountains of southern Oregon and the Sierra Nevadas.

"part of the living, breathing classroom."

The Tillamook-Clatsop Chapter of the Society of American Foresters installed a trail in honor of Astoria forester M.H. "Slim" Schragger and labeled about 60 different species for visitors to identify.

Colvin said without a little help, some of the aging trees in the camp's arboretum are at risk and may even pose a threat to campers on the trail if they fall. With so many species planted so close together, the arboretum isn't like a natural forest, he said.

Competition for sunlight has created some lopsided trees with too many branches — Colvin calls them "redundancies" — on one side, or too much weight at the top of the tree, which he calls "tip weight." Other trees have dead branches just hanging on or branches that have stretched out so far to catch the sun's rays that they're straining the tree trunk.

By trimming just five pounds off the end of a branch, Colvin said, he can relieve the tree of 75 pounds of stress at the trunk.

"The less stress on the tree, the less chance there is of overall failure," he said.

To trim the trees, Colvin launches a climbing rope from a "big shot," basically a large slingshot. After securing ropes to the crotch of a tree, he scales the branches without the aid of potentially damaging gaffs or spikes and uses various



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From left, a helmet, harness, rope and a big shot to launch a line up into a tree are among a few of the necessary items used for tree climbing.

saws to cut off dead wood or excess growth.

Sayce, who works as a scientist for Shorebank Pacific in Ilwaco, Wash., said an ecological dilemma awaits arboretum managers as the 75-year-old exotic trees begin to die. Sayce has spent her free time surveying the trees in the arboretum and along the North Coast, where the CCC went on to plant trees and shrubs along 19 miles of the shoreline.

"What's going to happen in another generation when all these trees die, and how hard should we work to preserve them?" she wonders, noting that many of the trees in the arboretum aren't native to

the region and might not naturalize to produce young trees on their own.

"Two hundred years from now, when all these trees have died from old age, should we try to recreate it? ... It's an interesting little bit of living history that might hang around for 100 years or it might not."

Colvin said his tree preservation techniques could prolong the life of the existing trees and encourage productivity to keep the arboretum intact as long as possible



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A long-limbed Chinese elm grows horizontally, reaching out for sunlight from under the dense canopy at the Camp Kiwanilona Arboretum.

Tree pruning clinic planned Saturday

At 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Arbor Care Tree Specialists and the Clatsop County Master Gardeners are holding a fruit tree pruning clinic at Camp Kiwanilong in Warrenton. Admission is two cans for the Clatsop County Food Banks.

The clinic will be followed by a tree preservation party from 1 to 5 p.m., where certified arborist Luke Colvin of Olney will demonstrate how to maintain 70-year-old Scotch pine, maritime pine and sitka spruce trees in the Camp Kiwanilong Arboretum.

Colvin is recruiting members for a new volunteer group, Arborists at the Arboretum, which will be dedicated to preserving the camp's historic trees and trails.