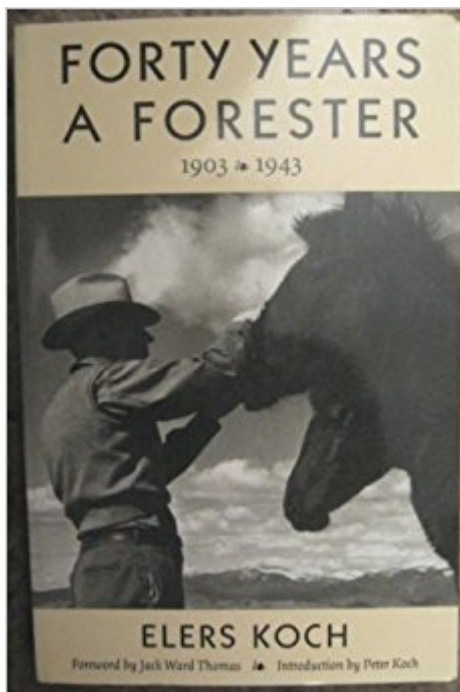


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# Elers Koch: Forty Years A Forester



## Synopsis

1998 Crown of the Continent Nature Writing Award. Elers Koch was a groundbreaking silviculturist, a pioneering forest manager, and a master firefighter in the early days of the United States Forest Service. Working as one of "Gifford Pinchot's young men," he helped to establish the boundaries of most of our national forests in the West, designed new fire-control strategies and equipment, and served through all the formative years of the agency. *Forty Years a Forester*, Koch's entertaining and illuminating memoir, is published here in its entirety for the first time, along with the author's controversial essay "The Passing of the Lolo Trail," an impassioned plea to embrace the principles of forest conservation. Sprinkled with personal anecdotes and family photos, *Forty Years a Forester* reveals one remarkable man's contributions to the then-new science of forest management and his role in building the human relationships and policies that helped make the U.S. Forest Service prior to World War II the most respected bureau in the federal government. At the same time, the book vividly describes the natural world that Koch so carefully tended. Readers will find tales of political imbroglios and personal heroism, along with a few old-fashioned campfire yarns. For forestry students, western history buffs, scholars, and lovers of a good story, these reminiscences give a detailed history of the early days of the U.S. Forest Service and provide an authoritative and very human snapshot of an important period in the growth of an American conservation ethic.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Elers Koch grew up on the Montana frontier in the late 1800s. After earning a master's degree in forestry from Yale University in 1903, he joined the newly established Bureau of Forestry, which was

to become the U.S. Forest Service, to which he dedicated himself until his retirement in 1944. As a forester, he founded the Savenac Nursery, at that time the largest nursery in the Forest Service, and published numerous articles in professional journals. In addition to being a major innovator in forest management and fire-control technology, Koch was an exemplary family man, a skilled mountaineer (the first to ascend Granite Peak, Montana's highest point), an outspoken wilderness advocate, and a successful novelist (*The High Trail*, 1953). His own adventure narratives, his scholarship regarding the Lewis and Clark expedition routes, and his knowledge of northern Rocky Mountain place-name origins served as valuable resources for contemporary novelists and historians. Writers Bernard DeVoto and Norman Maclean can be numbered among Koch's friends and admirers. DeVoto in particular was grateful to him for defining the route and campsites of Lewis and Clark during their traverse of Montana and northern Idaho. Elers Koch died in 1954.

This is a must read for all foresters.

Excellent in every way.

I love the serendipity of research. In reading about early logging in Idaho for a novel I'm writing, I realized that I must understand the early Forest Service and the men who patrolled the national forests and sold its trees to the lumber companies, and made darn sure the companies took the right ones and tidied up afterwards. I discovered *Early Days in the Forest Service* (reminiscences by retired forest rangers) and in Volume One I found Elers Koch. And then I found this memoir - what a gem! Born in 1880, he grew up in Bozeman and had adventures as a youth. His work in the early Forest Service has the lure of a mountain man novel. He knew his wilderness. And he wrote exceedingly well. Highly recommended for the lover of Idaho and Montana forest lands and mountains. Author *The Wolf's Sun* *A Devil Singing Small*

Elers Koch (1880-1954) was part of the Bureau of Forestry when it transferred to the Department of Agriculture in 1905 and became the United States Forest Service. With his contemporaries, he established the groundwork that underlies the Forest Service today. He retired from the Forest Service as chief of Region One in 1944 and put the finishing touches on this book in 1949. It is a collection of memories told in story form. Elers Koch was an excellent writer. The reader will find this book a joy to read and very informative. The book is of historical value, rather than an account of the Forest Service today. Forestry has changed in many respects since 1944. The book is valuable in

that it reflects the thinking of a forward-looking forester at the mid point of the twentieth century. It describes the evolution of fire-fighting, communications, transportation, silviculture, and personnel policies within the Forest Service. There is an interesting final chapter providing a document Elers Koch wrote in 1935. Although somewhat out of step with Forest Service policy at the time, it advocated changes which were implemented later when the government established wilderness areas in Idaho. The book has an excellent index. The 1998 republication has an appendix and lengthy introduction provided by Elers Koch's son Peter. It is a recitation and exaltation of the Koch family. Readers should not allow the introduction to deter them from reading the material that is the heart of the book.

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