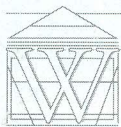


THE ART OF MOUNTAIN WATCHING

—BY KEVIN GRANGE—

At North Cascades National Park, rangers posted in fire lookouts get a unique perspective on one of our nation's most fascinating ecosystems.



When you work as a fire lookout in Washington's North Cascades National Park, your day begins at 5:30 a.m., when the sun rises over miles of immense glaciated peaks, blasts through your window-walled cabin, and pin-balls off the propane stove, lightning stool, and Osborne Fire Finder, sending diamond light in all directions. There is no snooze button on this "alarm clock," and even if there were, North Cascades park rangers like Gerry Cook and Kelly Bush wouldn't push it. There is work to be done: snow must be boiled for drinking water, the cabin must be tidied should a park guest come to visit and, most important, a vast expanse of pristine wilderness needs to be looked after. It is July, fire season in the North Cascades, and despite the early hour, the day is hot, forest dry, and punctured purple clouds brood on the horizon.

