

1. A VISION FUELED BY FIRE

In 1907, while on his honeymoon, forester Elers Koch viewed the abandoned homestead along Savenac Creek and dreamed of building a nursery. Work began the following year. But by 1910, fires destroyed the fledgling nursery along with millions of forested acres throughout the region. The “Big Burn” could not destroy Koch’s dream. Trees were needed to reforest the land and, by 1915, the nursery was fully stocked with 10 million young trees. By the mid-1930s the nursery was the largest supplier of tree seedlings in the U.S. Be sure to notice the trees growing here. They were planted after the fire and still stand, more than 80 years later, as a tribute to Elers Koch’s dream and the resiliency of a land scarred by fire.



Savenac, 1915

2. BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

You are now standing on the original Mullan Road, the first engineered road in the northwest. Named after Lt. John Mullan who led the military expedition and built the road between 1859 and 1863, Mullan Road became the primary pioneer route for prospectors into Montana, Idaho and Canada. Finally in 1914, after years of inadequate schools and even less adequate road maintenance, residents of the west end of Missoula County rebelled and a new government—Mineral



Yellowstone Bridge

County—was formed. Thanks to new government leadership, some creative pothole filling, help from area merchants, and liquid encouragement by local saloonkeepers, what was renamed the “Yellowstone

Trail” was open and running, linking Missoula to Wallace, Idaho and beyond. Directly ahead lies the old Yellowstone Bridge from those early road building days. The new road opened the

nursery to automobile traffic and visitors, which in turn led to new improvements to the appearance of the nursery.

3. 2+2=TREE

In the early days, trees at the nursery were called 2-2 stock. A tree spent 2 years in a seed bed like the ones originally in

this field, and then 2 more in a transplant bed. While here, notice the remains of the original irrigation system throughout the field. Although seed beds were irrigated by ditches from Savenac Creek as early as 1909, it wasn’t until 1933 that an underground irrigation system was installed. By 1938, the system also provided domestic water to the new buildings.



Elers Koch, 1914

4. ELMERS KOCH: FORESTRY AT ITS FINEST

In addition to founding the Savenac Nursery, Elers Koch was Assistant Regional Forester in the Northern Region and is remembered as a pioneer in the field of forestry and forest conservation. His greatest satisfaction came from planting trees.

“It is always a joy to see them and watch their development, year by year,” Koch wrote. “When a Forester goes to St. Peter for a final accounting, I am sure that when he is asked what he has done with his life, if he can point to thousands of acres of a once ugly burn now covered with a growing forest, it will offset many sins.” Koch’s love of growing trees did not go unnoticed by his colleagues. “Koch Specials” were trees left uncut in harvest areas to provide a seed source for new trees. The larch in front of you has long been known as the Koch Tree in memory of Elers and his contribution not only to this site but to the field of forestry.

5. GROWING INNOVATION

Up the hill from here are the remains of the original seed extractory. It’s important to note that in addition to being