

Englishman Travels to Vernonia to Meet The Axmen

By Scott Laird

Here in Vernonia we often hear about the worldwide popularity of the television series *Axmen*, seen on the television network *History*, which features local logging outfit, Mike Pihl Logging. But, in late July and early August, Vernonians had a chance to see just how world-wide that popularity is for themselves.

Daniel Furnell, aged thirty-two, from Kent, England, spent a two-week vacation traveling to Vernonia and visiting with Mike Pihl Logging. Furnell spent time with Pihl crews in the field, and got a chance to see and experience logging Northwest Oregon style, as well as some real Vernonia hospitality.

Furnell is a "forester" or a "woodsman," as they are called in England-- in other words, he's a logger. In an interview during his visit, Furnell explained that he works with his father in a family business that cuts and sells firewood to private homes.

That's what logging is like in England, mostly harvesting firewood which is sold to their customers. "I'm slowly but surely taking over the business and trying to get it a little bit more modern and use a few more machines," said Furnell, in his strong English accent. "But Dad's still stuck in his way and can't quite let go yet. But he's coming around to my way of thinking."

Furnell explained that the kinds of trees available in his part of the country, Silver Birch, Sweet Chestnut, Beech, Ash, and Oak, lend themselves to a different type of logging than we are used to in the Pacific Northwest. "The

Sweet Chestnut we use for wood-burning stoves and also to make ranch style fencing-- what we call post and rail," Furnell explained. "There's a traditional way of cutting called 'coppicing,' where the stump has four or five different trees coming off of it. Once you've cut them off, the actual stump will re-grow and we can harvest anything between ten and twenty years old. And that produces a nice six- to eight-inch



Mike Pihl with his new friend from England, Daniel Furnell.

round that is absolutely brilliant for logging and fencing. It's a bit of a quicker rotation than your forests out here."

Furnell went on to explain some additional differences between English and Oregon Logging. "We don't have the machinery that you guys have out here, like the yarder, mainly because it's a lot flatter. We predominately use tractors and trailers to bring the wood out."

It was Furnell's interest in logging and the Axmen show that brought

him to Vernonia. "Series One of the *Axmen* was shown in the UK last year," explained Furnell. "And because I work in the woods back home it was very interesting to me. So I got in contact with Mike Pihl Logging because I wanted to buy a pair of Braces-- what you call 'suspenders.' The lady I was speaking to didn't know what I was on about, because I wanted to order a pair of braces. The language barrier was a bit of a problem. We both spoke English very well-- but I wanted braces and they didn't have braces for sale," said Furnell, chuckling. "And then I said I wanted them to keep my trousers...ah, my

pants up! When she realized what I was on about, she told me they were suspenders, which in the UK are what ladies use to hold up their stockings. But I bought them anyway, and as you can see I'm wearing them now! So they've traveled from the US to the UK and now they've come home again-- but only for two weeks!"

While placing his order, Furnell expressed his interest in actually coming over to see the guys logging for real. "The TV gives you a sense of it, but it's not the real thing." The Pihl family invited Furnell to come for a visit and so he did.

He had a chance to go out in the woods with the crews and even got to get his hands dirty a bit. "We repositioned the yarder and reset the lines at Gunners Lake," said Furnell. "It was perfect. I wish I could do it a little bit more. I got to get out and do a little bit with Kelly, Leland, and Tuttle and Keith. And Mike Pihl took me over to Camp Olsen. I got to see some other guys do some work with their machines. I didn't get to have a go, which is understandable because of safety issues. So I watched and took lots of photographs. It was very misty-- just fantastic! Absolutely beautiful!"

Furnell visited Camp 18, and stayed around for the Vernonia Friendship Jamboree, where he rode in the parade, and the Logging Show, where he was rewarded as the person who had traveled the furthest to be at the show-- and went home with a Tony Hyde-carved log chair.

Mike Pihl said he enjoyed playing host to Furnell. "Daniel is just an English gentleman, a super nice guy," said Pihl. "It was a pleasure to have him come out with us."

Furnell was thrilled with his visit. "It was a chance of a lifetime," he said. "So I grabbed it with both hands. I've got so many stories to tell back home and I've taken so many photographs. This is a brilliant town. The people of Vernonia are so friendly. The first night I walked into the bar at the The Lyons Den, it was amazing. I was a complete stranger, and I was welcomed right away. It's such a friendly atmosphere, very welcoming."

Old-timers or Long-timers

By Charles Comstock

Some say that our lives are like a highway. Others feel it is similar to a river. The common feature is that they are going away to somewhere. Recently, former residents of our community returned on that highway or came upstream on the river to join those

who had never ventured away for the Old-timers Picnic. Hearing about the planned recognition of Bob New, who has given so much to those of us who remember the past, some related thoughts came to this aging mind.

That popular event in Vernonia every August is called the Oldtimers Picnic, an opportunity to renew friendships and discuss the ol' days and special memories. In a way, it's a misuse of the word "old" as Vernonia is really quite a young town. Only 125 years or so ago,

early settlers were finding their way to the valley to homestead in a primitive wilderness. Meanwhile, other developments across the country were more established, specialized agricultural commodities supported their economies, a transcontinental railroad was a near reality and much more. If still living, those people could consider themselves real 'old-timers'.

Glancing around the community now, there are some 'long-timers' who can remember when Bridge Street was unpaved - dusty in the summer and muddy ruts during the winter. Many sidewalks - if they existed at all - were locally manufactured wood planks and not concrete. Wood was the product of choice - logically - for building things. Representing some change was the new Washington School, built in the early 1930s with its red brick facade, a proud addition to Vernonia then and symbolic of quality education for young people since.

Along the way, Vernonia has experienced great

times of growth and development as well as some difficult years, especially during the Great Depression. Following the years of hardest times, the re-opening of the Oregon American Mill brought more prosperous times to the community. The familiar sounds of the mill operation, smoke from the haystack burner, the mill whistle sounding and the daily interruption of traffic as log trains crossed Bridge Street hauling timber to the mill were a chorus of progress welcomed by everyone. Gone were the days when ten cents would buy a loaf of bread, a quart of milk or a gallon of gasoline -- if only a dime was to be had.

This is the era that many 'long-timers' and those who followed will recall -- mostly the good times. Remembering particular teachers and school functions, a bit of mischief or maybe a prank or two, early jobs, swimming at Dewey Pool, boyfriends and girlfriends -- the experiences shared. Other recollections may include movies at the Joy Theater, the water fountain on the corner by Miller Mercantile with constant flowing

cold water, the special Christmas decorations each year in the front window at Oregon Gas and Electric and the worn-out model A Ford Truck that was the town's only defense to combat local fires. The way things were then as they are remembered now provides the conversation at the annual Oldtimers Picnic. That's the way it has always been.

But are these people who share interests and memories from the past really "old-timers"? By putting emphasis on longevity rather than age, let's think of

ourselves as "long-timers" rather than "old-timers". It sounds more positive, too! Just one more thought to ponder as we re-visit those memories from the past.



Faith Reynolds and Ralph Condit were honored as the oldest Grads in attendance at the Old Grads Picnic in August.



Bob New, along with his wife Delores, was honored with a plaque and flowers in a surprise ceremony for his contributions to preserving Vernonia history.



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