

Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

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Logging Methods Compared

Being happily old-fashioned and with a mind that comes readily unstuck from the world's woes, and focuses easily on its delights, has distinct advantages which, seasoned with a generous pinch of imagination, can make life seem pretty exciting and worthwhile even when helza-poppin all over the globe.

I'm constantly discovering strange and remarkable things in my little world that keep me in a state of delightful wonder, things that to a newer generation seem commonplace. Not having had the advantage of viewing the world from a point in time that made it appear

far different than it does today, they can't appreciate the points of comparison that so stimulate the interest of those of an earlier generation when they observe the modern wonders on every hand today.

To most people nowadays, especially the younger ones, such an apparently simple phenomenon as a small logging operation would hardly inspire the lifting of an eyebrow. But to me--well, here's an example of what's always happening to arouse my intense interest:

Across the canyon from my cabin, on the side of Crazy Ridge, a small outfit is busy logging out the "bug kill" in an area of dead or dying timber that has been infested with destructive insects and is being cleaned out of the otherwise healthy forest by the Forest Service, much as a surgeon removes a dangerous lesion from a human body.

For several days I've been listening to the machinery in operation over there, and trying to

read the messages of the tootling "donkey" whistle, which, in effect is the voice of the woods crew giving instructions to the donkey puncher, the man who runs the powerful machine that hauls in the logs to the landing.

In the early days of logging, the old ground-logging days when the tall, heavy-sledged steam donkeys had just supplanted the ox-teams, I began my logging experience as a whistle-punk. I'd sit on a stump with my hands in readiness on steel wire that was stretched between the donkey and the area from which the crew were sending in the logs. I'd relay the shouted signals from the woods end to the engineer by jerking the proper number of times on the wire, each jerk operating a steam whistle at the donkey that the engineer couldn't fail to hear above the roar and clank of the heavy equipment.

Some of the whistle signals I heard from across the canyon sounded strange to me and finally,

being able to stand it no longer, I hiked across and up the ridge to see what was going on. I found that the sound of the whistle was the only resemblance of this modern logging outfit to the ones of the early days. The donkey is a diesel, and of course the cumbersome wooden sled is only a memory to the older hands--most modern woods machinery runs on steel caterpillar tracks.

Beside the donkey is a mechanical marvel that resembles some prehistoric monster. With its long neck and steel jaws it reaches around and snatches up a heavy log bodily and places it on the waiting log truck in a matter of seconds. In minutes (or so it seemed to me) the truck was loaded and ready to head for the mill--shades of Paul Bunyan!

The entire crew over there consists of only 5 men: the "monster" operator, the engineer, the chaser, the rigging slinger, and the choker setter. The old steam donkey logging crew consisted of at least a dozen men. When I mentioned the

"sniper" of the old crews, the young rigging slinger asked me what the blankety-blank the sniper was. He had never heard of that long extinct character who expertly wielded his double-bitted ax to lop off the sharp edge from the front end of the log so it wouldn't plow or hang up on roots and rocks as it was hauled along over the ground.

This same youngster gave me a real surprise when he showed me how he "blew" the donkey whistle from out in the woods. No stringing of whistle wires for this space-age crew! He carries on his belt a small electronic device that transmits across space to a similar gadget at the donkey that activates the signal whistle.

Having had a first-hand glimpse of Yesterday to compare with Today, there seems to be no end to the interesting discoveries and surprises that are continually popping up to make life in general a pretty interesting experience.

The Farrier's Corner: by Ray and Michelle Smith

A Horse Named Phil Sheridan

In 1874, the United States Government purchased a black horse with a large white blaze for the 7th Cavalry. The horse was named Phil Sheridan after the Union general. Company A rode black horses, so "Phil" was assigned to that unit. He became the service mount of Sergeant Stanislas Roy.

On June 25, 1875, Roy, Phil, and the rest of Company A 7th Cavalry crossed the Little Bighorn River to join other companies near a huge Native American encampment. The ensuing battle would become legendary.

They were quickly met by charging warriors. Roy and his fellow cavalymen engaged the warriors in a firefight and were incorporated into Major Marcus Reno's skirmish line. In the chaos, Phil was struck by a bullet. According to Roy, Phil seemed to go "crazy". He was unable to steer the horse, yet Phil charged in the proper direction with Roy clamped firmly to his saddle. The men raced for a row of trees along the river and set up a new line.

The cavalymen dismounted to fight amongst the trees as the warriors closed in. Major Reno's scout was shot through the head as he stood beside him. A rapid and "disorderly" retreat ensued. Unfortunately for Roy, he could not find Phil. He yelled to

a passing lieutenant that he could not find his horse. The lieutenant brusquely told him, "Take any horse you can find and get out of here quick, or get on behind someone. Get out any way that you can on a horse!"

Roy frantically scanned around and saw a cavalryman coming along leading four horses. One of them was Phil. Leaping into the saddle he tore out of the grove as one of the last retreating men.

They were running for high ground on the far side of the Little Bighorn River. About 100 yards along, Phil was shot again. This time he was hit through the lower jaw, just behind the corner of his mouth. He went down hard, dumping Roy. Roy went off so violently that his gear flew up over his head and he lost his carbine. Only his pistol was left and Phil was down. An unhorsed cavalryman is often a dead cavalryman.

Suddenly Phil leapt back to his feet. Instead of continuing to flee to safety behind the other horses, he froze and allowed Roy to remount. The wounded but loyal Phil once again resumed his race to the river. Reaching the river, the horse did not hesitate to plunge in and forded the water belly deep.

Pulling out of the water, one last obstacle stood in their way. They had to scale a bluff. Phil was bleeding badly at that point and, part way up the bluff, he gave out. Roy was forced

to abandon the horse and run for his life on his own two legs.

Major Reno and the men met up with Captain Benteen and three more units atop the bluff. They planned to go to the assistance of other units under the command of George Custer. A hail of bullets from Native American warriors ended that plan. They were trapped in place and decided to fortify their position and defend as best they could. Roy courageously went back down the bluff to look for Phil.

Phil was still alive and somehow Roy got him up the bluff. Reno's men were under siege during scorching temperatures, cut off from water. Periodically, select soldiers made runs to the river for water. Several were successful and managed to carry a few pots back. This was given to the wounded first and soon ran out. No water could be spared for horses.

On the evening of the 26th of June, the Indian warriors retreated towards the distant mountains. At first, the cavalymen believed it to be a trick and remained on the hill until the 27th when additional cavalry arrived.

The bodies of Custer's men and horses blanketed the battlefield and Roy was assigned to a burial squad. The work was gruesome and Roy later recounted how he eventually became sick from the heat and stench. Following that grisly job, Roy was tasked with rounding up surviving horses and killing a group of about

20 of the wounded animals. To his dismay, Phil was on the kill list.

Roy noted the horses were a "pitiful sight". Those that could go were taken to water. According to the soldiers, the animals sank their faces in the river nearly up to their eyeballs.

Roy could not bear to kill Phil as he credited the horse with saving his life. He argued his case to his commanding officer. The officer relented and spared Phil's life. Phil recovered and was assigned to Sgt. Roy for the next 14 years. By all accounts, Roy doted on the horse. Finally, after 16 years in the cavalry, Phil was deemed unsuitable for continued service and sold to an unnamed civilian buyer.

Sgt. Roy received the Medal of Honor and continued in military service. He was promoted and served in various battles and conflicts including the Spanish American War. In 1913, he died of cancer in a military hospital at age 66.

References:
Koster, John. (2018, June) "Saved by Phil Sheridan". Wild West: The American Frontier. Pp 64-69.
Reno-Benteen Defense Site - Little Bighorn Battlefield National ...
<https://www.nps.gov/libi/learn/historyculture/reno-benteen-defense-site.htm>

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