

Clank of chains echoed through woods

Bull team loggers used brute force to move logs

By Curt Beckham

The clank of heavy log chains, a bull-puncher's loud "gees" and "haws" interspersed with highly flavored language were the usual sounds echoing through the logging woods in these parts around 1900.

Bull team logging was in full swing as it was one of the earliest methods used to skid logs from the woods. The size of those enormous logs being pulled by several yokes of oxen as shown in early day photographs is amazing. The work was hard and slow according to Ed Clinton, an early day bull team logger. Not many of those old bull team loggers are around today to relate how that kind of logging was done.

Edward O. Clinton was born in Norway, Ore., on May 13, 1882. He was the survivor of the immediate family of Coos County Pioneer John W. Clinton. Ed had eight brothers and three sisters. His wife died in 1968.

Ed worked hard all of his life, retiring from the Georgia-Pacific Company at age 75. When he was 13 years old he began working in his father's logging camp at Riverton, near the Coquille River.

His initial job was to clean the bark and debris from the skid road, a job for which he was paid 50 cents per day and board. In those days, loggers lived in camp and boarded at the company cook-house.



Pay doubles to \$1 per day

In a short time, Ed was moved up to barker with his wages doubled to \$1 per day. The logs were peeled bare with an axe and a spud as they lay in the woods.

Ed's father logged for several years. After the Riverton job, Clinton logged at Norway, Fat Elk and on the Middle Fork of the Coquille. John Clinton owned several yoke of oxen. About 1904, he bought a steam donkey and Ed became a donkey engineer, often referred to as a donkey puncher. No doubt this moniker was a transfer of meaning from the bull team driver who was known as a bull-puncher. Ed also

worked as an engineer in a sawmill for Ed Price at Riverton.

John Clinton was an expert blacksmith, making the iron dogs and rings as well as doing other smith work necessary in running a logging camp. Ed described his brother, Jim as an excellent yoke maker, Jim would construct the heavy yoke from a piece of tough maple.

The term, "Bull of the Woods" probably came from those early-day ox-team loggers

He would first rough out the pattern to the desired form, burn or char the edges, then apply the drawing knife, and finally sand the yoke to a shining finish. Two heavy iron rings were fastened to the center of the bottom part of the yoke. Lighter wooden bows were fashioned to fit around the oxen's neck and fastened to the yoke.

Log chains and iron dogs were standard equipment. The Clintons used four yoke of oxen in yarding and five yoke to skid the logs to the river. Log chains with hooks and rings on each end allowed the yokes of oxen to be hooked on in tandem. Ed said that a yoke of oxen could pull much more than a span of horses. Long legged

steers were generally used as leaders with strong bulls making up the remaining units. More than likely the term "Bull of the Woods" used in describing a husky logger is a derivative of those bull team days.

A bull puncher commanding gee (left) and haw (right) while using a three to four foot stick with brad in one end and controlled the oxen.

The skid road was made out of cross poles placed at regular intervals with a saddle chopped out for the logs to ride in. The dogs were driven into the sniped end of the log in such a manner that the natural ride of the log would bedown.

"Gee" and "haw" got the brutes moving at a plodding pace

The hooker had a helper who set the dogs and hooked the log chain. If on a steep road the oxen next to the load would have a pole attached in wagon tongue fashion to the yoke and into the front end of the log. The log would push them along without running up on their heels. The skid road poles were greased regularly for easier pulling.

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