

## Logging In the Coquille Valley



### LUMBER INDUSTRY A HELPER IN COQUILLE'S SOLID PROSPERITY

Of the lumber industry on the river some figures are furnished by E. E. Johnson, who has been engaged in that line for years and is probably better informed than any one else.

There are eight sawmills on the river of a capacity of 20,000 feet of lumber per day, or more. The two largest, situated near Bandon, are the Moore and Dollar mills, each having a capacity of 100,000 feet. The Prosper mill, also on the lower river, is rated at 25,000. The two mills at Coquille, the smaller of which is owned by Mr. Johnson and running steadily, can turn out 65,000 and 40,000 per day, respectively. The Myrtle Point mill can cut 30,000. The Whitaker mill is the smallest of those mentioned, cutting 20,000, and there is also another small mill at Bandon rated at 30,000. These are not all in operation at the present writing, but Mr. Johnson estimated that, counting poles and ties, 100,000,000 feet a year are sent out over the Bandon bar. In addition to this, the Smith-Powers camps at Powers are sending out ten to twelve million feet of logs per month, all of which go by rail to the C. A. Smith mill at Marshfield, one of the largest and best equipped plants of the kind in the world.

When one considers how large a part of the expense of the logging camp or mill goes for labor, it is seen that the lumber industry furnishes support, directly and indirectly, for a large part of the population of this valley; and when it is known that the Smith-Powers holdings in their present field of operations contain enough timber to keep them busy for over fifty years, at the present rate of cutting, it is seen that the future as well as the present prosperity of the valley lies largely in its timbered hills. And the impression must not be given that the timbered area mentioned, tributary to Powers is more than a fraction of that still untouched on this river and its tributaries.

Looking at the cut shown on this page, which illustrates the latest development of logging methods made possible by the application of modern power, and looking back over the progress of the industry since "the early days," one is forcibly reminded of the contrast in the methods by which the logs were brought from the stump to the mill in the early sixties and the ways by which the same work is compassed today. In those days only the most primitive methods were used. The trees were chopped down with axes, sawed into lengths that could be handled, and brought to the landing where they could be rolled into tide water, by "main strength and awkwardness." Ox-teams furnished the power, three to five yoke being used. Even the steel "dog" had not made its advent and the log was moved by a chain passed around the end of the log. There was no thought of a "skid road." The first skids used in the roads were long poles placed lengthwise, which prevented the

log from digging into the ground, but gripped it tenaciously between them. Then it was discovered that water furnished a plentiful lubricant, and the water-packer became an attaché of the bull-team, and the five-gallon coal oil can became in demand. Then some genius discovered that the plan of placing skid across the road at a distance less than half the length of the shortest logs was practicable and a great improvement. Later some wandering woodsman brought reports of the use of grease on the skids "on the sound" or elsewhere, and someone tried it, and whale-oil, tallow and cheaper lubricants helped to ease the burden on the cattle. Even soft soap was used in one instance as an experiment, at the suggestion of a man who wanted the soft job of making the soap; it was not a brilliant success.

By these and other improvements the field of logging operations was extended until it was thought practicable to put in timber within one mile of the water, but that was considered the limit. The remark was often heard that "this country was about logged out." Then someone had the enterprise to build a tramway of poles, on which cars with concave wheels were run, with horses or oxen to furnish the tractive power, and the deadline was again moved back further from tidewater. This first tramway was built by J. A. Yoakam at Sumner, and anyone who saw him and several assistants, herding the horse team down the track on the run, to keep under headway until the landing was reached, is not likely to forget it.

A real railroad, with iron rails, was not thought to be within reach on account of the expense, but such a road was at last built by the late John A. Garfield on Isthmus slough, and was found to be practicable. Since then the distance from tidewater at which timber is considered "within reach" has been gradually extended until now the outermost landing of the Smith-Powers camp is about 75 miles from the Smith mill booms—and the end is not yet.

The application of steam to the work in the woods was long in coming to Coos county, and the patient ox with long horns and perforated hide held his own manfully against the influx of modern ideas. The stories of steam donkeys in use "on the sound" were listened to with interest but without conviction, until the late W. H. Noble broke the ice at his camp on Isthmus slough, since which time the bull team has gradually faded into the background, until now the steer is known only as a beef critter in Coos county. Now the electric motor is apparently skirmishing for a possible opening for the supplanting of the donkey.

Another great change from the early logging methods is seen in the completeness with which the timber is cleaned from the area gone over. In the old days only the best trees were cut, and only those of considerable size.

A suspicion of rotten spots or ring-shakes would often save the life of an otherwise handsome monarch of the forest. The stumps were cut high from the ground, a length of ten or twelve feet of good lumber often being left standing. The tops were also left long on the ground, logs not being cut above the first limbs. The logger who would have put a hemlock or white fir log into the water would have been thought either weak in the upper story or desirous of cheating a too confiding mill company. Now it seems that the Smith-Powers camps, at least, are endeavoring to remove from the ground every possible foot of merchantable lumber.

In this connection, the matter of reforestation presents itself. The general government has devoted much attention to this, and private individuals and corporations in the lumbering business have planted trees and done much work to start new forests on the lands denuded of their timber. The Smith-Powers Co. has done much of such work in this county. This is all good and will perhaps save many years over the slower processes by which nature would do the same work. But whatever may be the case elsewhere, in Coos county Dame Nature has a system of her own which is sure, if slow. Among the decaying stumps of the earlier logging camps there can now be found a thrifty growth of young trees which are already reaching a size which commands them to the attention of the lumberman. When a tract has been logged off, fire soon finds its way into the debris left on the ground and a supply of ashes is left as a fertilizer. The first growth to come up is fern, and several annual crops of this helps to again cover the ground with a coating of vegetable matter. Then the alder gets a foothold, and a dense growth of that quickly-growing tree springs up. This flourishes for a term of years and the falling leaves perform their annual service of enriching the ground. Protected by the alder growth, fir, hemlock, spruce and cedar saplings make their appearance, their seeds being distributed by some of the mysterious processes by which nature accomplishes its work. The alder thicket shelters the small forest of the future until the saplings eventually surpass their guardians, and the fittest of the new growth begin to show their heads above those of the alder. Then the alder usually dies out slowly, while the survival of the fittest prevails in the new forest and helps to thin the growth to prevent over-crowding. All this takes many years, but it accomplishes the work, and it can be asserted that, without the help or hindrance of man, Dame Nature would again clothe all these hills with thrifty forests.

The hills north of Coos Bay may be pointed out to the visitor, as an object lesson, being easily seen from Marshfield or North Bend. All old settlers can remember when these hills, which had been devastated by a great fire before the advent of the white man, were dry, barren and desolate in appearance. The old stumps stood here and there, and the bodies of those which had fallen were not concealed by any brush, no green growth being visible. A look at these hills today shows them covered with a healthy forest which will some day furnish a field for new logging operations.

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