A Historical Development of Gyro Logging on the Lower Umpqua River

by

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Approved:

Professor of Forestry
Dedicated
to my:
Father, Wm Esselstrom
Deceased Uncle, Al Esselstrom
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INTRODUCTION

To my knowledge there has never been a historical account of the activities of gyroco logging in the Lower Umpqua River area. It is my firm belief that such important operations should be put in writing for future use. No doubt, sometime in the future references will be made to any written material that can be found on the activities of gyroco logging in this section of the country. It is with this thought in mind that I will attempt to bring onto paper the most important developments of gyroco logging since this type of logging started.

Since 1930 gyroco logging has become one of the most talked of enterprises in the logging industry. Old-timers in the logging industry were rather doubtful for awhile as to its lasting ability, but at the present time it seems to be the only way logs are taken from the forest. Gyroco logging is very important in many ways, some good and some very bad; it gives the small man a chance to get a start in the logging business, it allows timber, considered out of the way, to be taken from the forest, it produces fire hazards, it makes sustained yield practically impossible, and it makes unsatisfactory living conditions for workers who depend upon it for existence. Due to the fact that this type of logging has become so large it should be given a place along side that of other types of logging. As was stated previously there has been no written material on this particular problem, due to this fact, my thesis should prove helpful for future reference on this problem.

This thesis is written as a history with important facts
being presented in a chronological order. The affects on the industry and employees is summed up at the end of the thesis. Material for this thesis was gathered from interviews with my father, Wm Esselstrom, and from personal knowledge.
Chapter I

Gyro logging is a recent development from the old type of large logging camp. It gained its prominence since large company holdings have been cut and the necessity has arisen for the logging of scattered stands of timber. This new type of logging operates best on small stands of timber where the logs can be taken out with one donkey and a "cat" and a few logging trucks. After one small stand has been logged the operator secures another small stand and moves his equipment to the new location. A small crew of men is used in these camps usually not more than fifteen or twenty and in many cases a smaller number. Many small stands of virgin Old-growth Douglas fir have been logged since the gyro loggers started operating, because the stands were too small to justify moving a large amount of equipment on the ground. These gyro camps are seasonal, because the wet winter weather will not allow "cat" logging and truck hauling on dirt road beds. Those who practice this type of logging can afford to move about from place to place, because their overhead is small and they are able to push truck roads into stands of timber that would not pay a large company to log. Their equipment usually consists of a "cat", small fleet of trucks, and possibly a small steam or gas donkey. In most cases the "cat" is equipped with a bull dozer and a set of drums. With this amount of equipment a logger is able to secure and log small stands of timber otherwise, considered impossible to log.

When the gyro loggers is used the general thought is that the term is applicable only to the modern type of logging, but this is not true. Even as far back as the days of the oxen teams
there were individuals who were practicing gyroo logging. In most cases these men owned their timber along some river or stream large enough to float the logs to the nearest mill. The capital necessary to begin an operation of this kind was very little. Jack-screws were the motive power used to put the logs into the water. Some used a log chute which was constructed out of logs with down grade enough to carry the logs to the water after they had been put into the chute. This is a very economical way to put logs into a river, because the only expenses were those wages of the men employed. A set of fallers and buckers could keep five men busy with jack-screws in this type of a set-up. For this kind of logging it is necessary to peel all the bark of off the logs in order to make them slide down the chute into the river. The most logical time for this is in the spring when the sap is "up" in the trees. A large iron bar flattened out on the end, known as a soud, is used to peel the logs. In the spring of the year the sap slips from the logs with very little effort making the job of peeling very simple. This seasonal type of work helps to convince, that this "hand-logging" might be classed as gyroo logging.

Another way the first gyroos logged was with the family horse. A large number of farmers in the olden days put in several thousand feet of timber a day with the "old mare," dragging the logs to water in a chute similar to the chute used by the "hand-loggers". Logging this way does not require as many men as "hand-logging", but it will not get as many logs a day as the other method. The only men used were a set of fallers to fall and buck the logs and two men to help put the logs in a position
so the horse could drag them into the chute where they would
ride by gravity to the river. It was not necessary to peel the
logs in this method but to speed up production the logs were
peeled on the riding side. Of course, in the spring when the
sap was "up" the logs were peeled to make handling of the logs
easier in all movements. An operation of this kind was very
profitable, because in most cases the farmer would use his sons
for the work and probably hire the fallers. If the logger happened
to own the timber his expenses were cut down a great deal, by
this good fortune. The majority of expenses came from wages
paid and towing charge from the logging operation to the nearest
sawmill. Of course, the price of logs in those days was less
than that of today, but the profit in the long run was more than
that received by the average gypoo logger today.

The most troublesome problem in those days was getting the
logs to market. Unless the logger was on tidewater, he would
have to hold the logs in a raft until the winter rains came and
raised the river enough to carry the logs down to tidewater.
From this point it was a matter of hiring the towing done by
some company that was in this kind of business. The amount of
the charge was determined by the distance the logs were towed.
The type of towing boats used in the old days were considerably
slower and equipped with less power than the tug boats used at
the present time.

In the early days of logging in western Oregon there were
very few sawmills of any large size to which gypoo loggers could
sell their logs. About 1900, the Gardiner Mill Co., built a saw-
mill in Gardiner near the mouth of the Umpqua river. This mill
was large enough to buy any logs that gypo loggers might put into the river, as-well-as, handle the production of logs put in by its own logging camp up the river. Gardiner was the leading sea port of western Oregon for several years, until Marshfield and North Bend on Coos Bay became superior due to better harbor facilities and a better "hinterland". Gardiner had its boom during the time of sailing ships, these ships drew less water than our present steamers, as a result the shallow bar at the mouth of the Umoqua river made it impossible for the steamers to use the port at Gardiner. After a few years the steamers took over the coastwise lumber trade and Gardiner suffered a rather severe set back in the lumbering industry. The sawmill at Gardiner quit operating and finally the company was liquidated. The main reason that they could not compete was that the new steamers could not get into the harbor to take out their cargo. This company had a fleet of its own sailing ships that were much slower than the new steamers. The Port of Umoqua, Port Commission tried for several years to secure an appropriation from the government to improve the harbor so that steamers would be able to enter, but failed each time. In the meantime the mill at Gardiner ceased operating, because of lack of markets and facilities. Also in the meantime the Southern Pacific Co. had built a railroad through Reedsport, a new town across the river from Gardiner, along with the railroad a new sawmill was built there. Between the time, when the Gardiner Mill Co. shut it's mill down and the time the new mill started in Reedsport there was very little logging done on the Umoqua river.
Chapter II

In 1918 the lumber industry of this locality took a considerable jump when the Port Commission succeeded in getting an appropriation from the United States government. This appropriation was to be used for the improvement of the harbor and to build a jetty at the mouth of the river. In the meantime a sawmill of considerable importance had been established at Reedsport. This mill was of the latest type and was capable of sawing 200M bd. ft. per eight hour shift. The mill was built by the Winchester Bay Lumber Co., who operated their own logging camp at Winchester Bay, at the mouth of the Umpqua river. However, the company was willing to buy logs from small operators if the grade of logs was up to specification. Another mill was constructed in Reedsport, in 1916. This mill was not as modern as the Winchester Bay Lbr. Co. mill nor was it as large.

In the early 1920's the forerunner to modern gyroco logging started to take shape. Several small outfits started setting up their equipment on different stands of timber that were the most handy at that time. Crude, homemade logging trucks first saw service about this time along with the first Best 60 tractors. These two pieces of machinery proved very profitable where the ground was not too rough and the haul to the water was short.

In 1925-26 Paul Wessela started a small operation on a stand of his own timber at Scottsburg, which is located 16 miles up the Umpqua from Reedsport. He built a log chute around the side of a mountain, which was about a mile long. This was chute was made of small logs and served as a good means of transport-
ation when it was raining and when the sap was "up" in the trees. Jack-screws were used to start the logs at the upper end of the chute, this was the only motive power needed to carry the logs to the river. The grade of the chute was sufficient to put the logs into the water. The number of men hired on this job was very few consisting of the following; two of his sons, and two friends. They would put into the water an average of 15 to 20 logs a day which would have a total scale from 20 to 30M board feet. This is very good production considering the fact that very few men were employed and very little overhead was needed to start the operation. A year later a tractor was bought to log some of his timber that wasn't accessible to the log chute. This operation was one of the first to use a tractor around the Scottsburg area. It required a haul of about one-half mile from the felled trees to the river. In addition to his original crew this required hiring a tractor driver and increased the overhead of the operation considerably, however, this move increased the production of logs per day.

About 1926-27 a new lumber industry entered Reedsport, the company's name was the Umoqua Mill and Timber Co. This company built a new sawmill in Reedsport with a capacity of 200M board feet per day. The company also had a large holding of timber up Smith River, a tributary of the Umoqua. By having another mill to dispose of logs meant a great deal to the small outfits along the river. This meant that they could bargain with the two mills if they had an exceptional grade of logs. It also meant that there was a much larger market for their
logs and the security of going ahead with new developments was much greater. This was during the most prosperous times in the recent history of lumbering so the small operators received a very good price for their logs.

During this time gymco logging raised from it's infancy to middle age. With the use of tractors and trucks the small outfits started to spread out their operations to several districts along the river. Another factor that helped to further the development of the small operations was the use of gas donkeys to yard with. Many of the small outfits used old discarded automobile motors mounted on boughten hoists to yard with, and in many cases this type of power proved very successful. The only trouble with most of the homemade donkeys was the fact, that in order to get sufficient power the motors would have to be geared so low that the donkeys had very little speed. For short hauls these donkeys were very successful at yarding, they were also used very efficiently for loading trucks. In a great many cases Fordson tractors were equipped with a set of drums for main line and haul-back and used either as a yarder or loader. From this type of donkey came the present large gas and diesel donkeys mounted on sleds and equipped with lines and drums very similar to the large steam donkeys of that time.

Chapter III

In the first year of the great depression the mill owned by the Umpqua Mill and Timber Co. shut down. Everyone supposed that it was a short lay-off, but it proved to be pretty long, as the mill has not run a day since 1930. Of course, this was a very hard blow to the logging industry in Reedsport, because
the Winchester Bay Lumber Co. mill was expected to close down at any time. To the surprise of all interested in the lumber business this mill did not shut down and throughout the whole depression the mill kept working and was shut down only for occasional repairs. However, the company did shut down its big logging camp in Winchester Bay and became dependent upon the small outfits for its supply of logs. This stimulated the gyppo loggers and several new outfits started operation during this time. Many new outfits managed to keep going and succumb the depression while other were forced to go out of business. This was a great era for the use of homemade donkeys, because most of the operators did not have the money to buy new equipment and could not get the credit with which to buy. It is very interesting to note how many stands of timber were logged during this period and a reasonable profit secured there-from, that would not have even been considered during good times.

My father and uncle, Wm and Al Esselstrom, were operators of just such a logging camp. They had a gas donkey for their motive power and used it to cold-deck and sky-line the logs from the woods into the river. This camp was located about four miles up the river from Reedsport. A small crew was used compared to the amount of logs put into the water per day. The crew amounted to about fifteen men and they put out around 90-100M board feet per day. This is a fairly good size log scale per day considering the fact that only one small donkey was used to get the logs. With only one donkey it was necessary for them to move from the cold-deck to the sky-line after the logs had been cold decked. This was a short job, but it served
as a starting point for two of the most successful gypo loggers in the Lower Umpqua district.

Immediately after the depression all of the large logging operations on the Umpqua were abandoned, with the result that the gypo loggers were given a new stimulus. It can readily be seen the affect that the gypo loggers had on the lumber industry in this district. None of the gypo loggers were large enough to bargain with the only mill that survived the depression. As a result the mill was able to quote its own prices on logs and the loggers had to take the price or quit logging. The mill did not cut prices to any great extent, but it was consistently under other mill prices by one or two dollars. During this time the Winchester Bay Lumber Co. was depending on several small gypo loggers for its supply of logs. The Baldridge Bros. were operating a medium sized camp on the old location of the Winchester Bay Lumber Co. at Winchester Bay. This supply of timber soon ran out and as a result the Baldridge Bros. moved their equipment to some timber they had acquired on Smith River. This timber was a part of the holdings of the former Umpqua Mill and Timber Co. who had abandoned operation in 1930. This new camp on Smith River was not of the type commonly considered as a gypo camp. It was equipped with steam donkeys and had access to a railroad with which to transport the logs to the river. The camp employed between 75 and 80 men, which is considerably larger than the average gypo camp. This camp was operated for a period of two years, at which time my father and uncle contracted to finish up the job which amounted to about one year's logging. When this change came the crew was decreased and the size of production
was decreased also. Although these were large camps as far as men employed and size of production were concerned they did not last long enough to be classed as a regular logging camp. It was while working on this job that my uncle, Al Esselstrom was killed, September 3, 1938. This terrible accident as quite a blow to my father and slowed down the camp production for some time. The job was completed soon after this accident and my father had to look for a new location on which to log.

About this time a new group of loggers formed a company and started a small logging camp about four miles up the river from Reedsport. This new company was named after it's two most prominent loggers, Ray Willard and Roy Waggoner. They purchased a new RD8 "cat" to yard with and rented a small steam donkey to load with. The truck haul was contracted to one of the local truckers in Reedsport. Jack Murphy, former student of Forestry here at Oregon State College was killed while loading logs on a truck at this location. This job proved to be a short one, because the price of logs was not great enough to cover the expenses of the company.

Gypo logging has served as a starting point for several loggers who have started out as choker setters or some other minor job in a camp. After several years they would rise to the job of rigging man and finally to hook tender or superintendent of some large logging operation. In this vertical mobility in the industry they have established for themselves a reputation that served as a foothold for a start in the logging business. After a man has acquired a reputation for himself it is not hard to get credit backing by some individual who has the sufficient
capital to start a small operation. One very good example of this is, Schrogren and Whittick Logging Co. who started with practically no equipment and a few men, on a stand of timber across the river from Scottsburg in 1932-33. They had very good success and finished up this job, despite handicaps, with a well earned reputation of getting logs in a hard show at a small cost. At the present time they are considered one of the most successful and one of the major lumber logging companies in the Coos Bay area.

The next job that my father had was on Smith River, a tributary of the Umpqua, which was a small job in the winter of 1938-39 and was done with a AC 80 "cat". This kind of logging was not satisfactory due to the amount of rain that winter and the condition of the ground which caused an abundance of mud. In most of the coast area and especially around the Umpqua, "cat" logging in the winter time is not a very suitable way to take the logs out of the woods.

In the winter of 1938-39 one of the largest logging booms in the recent history of the Umpqua river was started. This boom was started by Howard Hinsdale, President of the First National Bank of Gardiner; Baldridge Bros. Logging Co.; and H.W. Kissling, Managing Superintendent of Winchester Bay Co. mill. These men formed a company called, Gardiner Lumber Co. They secured an option on 250,000,000 bd. ft. of virgin Douglas fir timber located on Camp Creek and Mill Creek tributaries to the Umpqua about 13 miles up the river from Reedsport. This company also purchased the old discarded mill at Gardiner and erected a new mill in it's place, the new mill was to cut about
125,000 bd. ft. per day. When the company was formed it was planned that Kissling would handle the manufacturing of lumber, Baldridge Bros. would do the logging, and Hinsdale would take care of the business end of the company. To get the timber to the mill in Gardiner required the building of three splash dams in the two creeks mentioned before. Two dams were built in Camp Creek and one was built in Mill Creek. With these dams the company planned to tap one of the largest stands of virgin Douglas fir left in western Oregon, although they did not have an option on all of the stand, with the dams located as they are options on new timber would be easy to get.

The logs were yarded into the creek above the dams and carried down the creeks to the river a distance of 11 miles from the farthest dam. These dams are very successful in the winter months, but are useless for about two months during the summer when there is a scarcity of rain. After the dams had been tripped and the logs arrived at the river they were rafted and towed down the river 15 miles to Gardiner where the mill was located. A road was constructed into the northern side of the stand and these logs were dumped into the river at Scottsburg a distance of 18 miles from Gardiner. Griffith Logging Co. contracted this part of the job from the original company. My father and his partner, Ken Richards, took a contract to log Mill Creek just above the dam on both sides of the creek. A "cat" and small donkey were used to do this logging.

The only trouble with the entire set up was the fact, that in constructing the mill poor engineering was used and the boilers installed were much to small causing a shortage of steam. Under this condition the mill was able to saw only a third as
much lumber as was originally planned. A situation like this naturally called for the installation of larger boilers, which was just completed about a month ago. During the winter of 1939-40 the upper dam in Camp Creek washed out while the logging operations were closed for the winter because of wet weather. At the present time this dam has been reconstructed and the Baldridge Bros. are logging in this area again. Another source of log supply for the mill in Gardiner was from a camp on Weatherly Creek which is tapping the large Smith River fire burn of 1938. This camp requires a truck haul of about 6 miles to Scottsburg where the logs are dumped into the river at the head of tide water. This camp is also run by the Baldridge Bros.

Last year when the camp was started they were using a RD8 for yarding and a small gas donkey for loading. At the present they have increased this equipment to three donkeys for yarding along with three "cats". Some of the logs from this camp are sold to the Winchester Bay Lumber Co. mill, as-well-as, the mill in Gardiner. Although this area has been burned the timber is of a very good quality.

At the present time my father and gardner, have a small camp about 8 miles from Reedsport on the highway going to Marshfield. The camp is located on the divide between the Umpqua drainage and the ocean. This is a small stand that has about 10,000,000 bd. ft. of virgin Sitka spruce. They are using a small gas donkey for yarding and a small steam donkey for loading. Four trucks are used to haul the logs about 13 miles to North Slough, a tributary of Coos Bay, where they are dumped. Here the logs are rafted and towed to the Pulo and Paper mill.
in Empire, which is about 15 miles from the point where they are dumped. This stand of timber can be classed as a pure stand of Sitka spruce, although it is very limby this does not reduce the quality, because logs that are used for pulp are permitted to have numerous knots. This brings the gyroo logging situation up to date in the Lower Umpqua region.

Chapter IV

The discussion that follows is concerned with the importance of gyroo logging to the industry and the men employed by this type of logging.

During all of these years from 1930-39 the only market for logs as that of the Winchester Bay Lumber Co. Although this company did not pay a large price as could have been received elsewhere the expense of shipping the logs to other markets, such as, Coos Bay mills, would have amounted to more than the difference between the two prices. In all of the years of unsettled labor conditions and strikes this mill has not had one single strike. Although most of the men working in the mill are union men they are not of the type who are radical and expect their employer to pay more wages than is possible. If this mill was to go one a strike these men employed in the mill and those employed in logging camps would loose a great deal of money and more than likely they would receive very little increase in wages. A majority of the men who work in the gyroo camps are also union men, but as yet there has been no trouble about strikes between men and the employer. One point that might be brought out at this time is the affect that gyroo logging has on union men. When a union man gets a job in a gyroo
Camp it is rather indefinite as to the length of time he will be working. As a rule the camps do not know if they will be operating for two months or a year, so when a man transfers from one union local to another and the job lasts only two months or so he is forced to move some-where else and transfer to another local of the union. With the job being in such an indefinite state of employment the employees are constantly moving from one town to another with their families. This moving about from one town to another has a tendency to create poverty struck conditions among the families and is inducive to poor education of the children. The affect of gyroo logging on the horizontal mobility of the people affiliated with it can very easily be seen by looking at any of the small coast towns in which gyroo logging is practiced. As a rule the towns are small and the living conditions are far below the average of other towns. The people of these towns are not able to plan their activities for any great distance in the future, because of their dependency upon gyroo logging which has a rather unstable income for them.

There several aspects to consider when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of gyroo logging. The most important of these is the affect of gyroo logging on silvicultural methods of the modern forester. It can readily be seen that gyroo logging is clearly a "cut out and get out" method of exploiting the forest. The reason for this is the fact that gyroo loggers are in the business to get all that they can get with as little expense as possible. They do not have the capital to reseed or replant the forest that has been cut, and can not afford to leave good sound seed trees for regeneration
of the forest lands. At the present rate of expansion, gyroo logging will be the only type of logging in this area and in nearby areas, within a few years. If this is going to be the case some very definite action will be necessary so that our forests will be regenerated for future use. It seems that no thought is given to the future of the logging and lumbering industry, all the attention is given to the present when clear cutting seems to be the common practice. The stands logged are so small that it is impossible to practice sustained yield methods. In the opinion of the greater foresters of the day, sustained yield is the only way that our forests can be preserved and conserved for the future supply of lumber. It only stands to reason that if our present practice of gyroo logging is allowed to go on for years to come, the forest lands will be depleted to an extent where it will be impossible to practice sustained yield methods.

Many gyroo loggers "cut out and get out" without any thought as to the future of the forest in the way of fire prevention or protection. The common practice is to cut out the timber that has been bought and leave the brush and slash to be disposed of in any way that may happen. Usually this is taken care of by some careless hunter or traveler who drops a lighted match or cigarette. This is one of the most dangerous fire hazards of the forest, after a start in the brush and slash of an old logging camp a fire readily spreads to all nearby timber and soon the entire area is on fire. Gyroos do not have sufficient capital to hire men to fire the slash at the proper time of the year and prevent the fire from spreading to other parts
of the forest. A few of the more forest minded loggers plan to fire their slash in the spring just before the fire season starts and before the brush becomes to dry from the early summer heat.

This type of logging makes it possible to cut old over-ripe trees that are in, out of the way places and for this reason have been passed up by other operations. It is commonly known that old over-ripe trees are a detriment to young and thriving trees of the forest and should be cut when they are in this condition. These small outfits can go into a stand of over-ripe trees and log it, where larger companies could not afford to put their equipment on the ground. In many cases these trees are not of a very high quality, but the quality is sufficient to make a small profit for most gyro loggers. This is one of the few points in favor of this new type of logging.

In recent years this type of logging has swept the coast regions of Oregon. Large company logging camps have been abandoned and practically the entire supply of logs is now depended upon gyro loggers. Many sawmills have several of these small outfits working for them, in a comparatively large mill that will cut from 150 M to 300 M it takes the production of a number of these small gyro loggers. At the present time the number of gyroos on the Umpqua can supply the two mills in this district, but if another mill should happen to come into the picture here there would be a demand for more gyroo logging camps in the region.

Summary

1. Due to the fact that this is an historical thesis there are no definite findings.
2. Gyoo logging has very definitely taken over the logging industry in this part of the state. Although this is not the best type and most suitable from the laborers standpoint it serves as a means of making a living. Because gyoo logging is a season type of work men who follow this work must depend on some other kind of work during the season when the camps are shut down or move to another part of the state where logging is a year around industry. Not only does it cause horizontal mobility of it's employees, but is also retards the education of any children who might be influenced by it's seasonal activities.

3. If at all possible gyoo logging should be put on a year around basis. This would eliminate much of the trouble now experienced by employees who have to move from job to job to get work the rear around. Gyoo loggers should be made to dispose of their brush and slash when each job is finished. There is nothing that can be done about the future of the timber supply, unless they be required to leave a certain number of trees per acre for seeding purposes.