

Forest History Foundation, Inc.  
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
with

Frank C. Fraser  
Fortuna, California

March, 1953

by John Larson

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Interview with  
FRANK FRASER  
March, 1953 - Fortuna, California  
by John Larson, Forest History Foundation, Inc.

My name is Frank Fraser. I was born in Bayside. That's between Eureka and Arcata. I first went to work for the Riverside Mill and Lumber Company in 1898. I carried water with several horses for donkeys and chutes. They were bringing in the logs then with ox teams and small steam donkeys yarding the logs.

*DOLBEER* The next job after that was tending spool on the donkey, on the ~~Del-~~  
~~berry~~ donkey. The little donkeys had a spool. Now they call them gypsies. You would take so many turns around this spool with the cable and take the slack away as it rolled in, keep coiling it on the ground. Then you brought the logs into the main road with the ~~Delberry~~  
*DOLBEER* donkeys. Then the logs were coupled up together - ten to twenty-five logs in a string coupled together, the larger ones ahead and the smaller ones behind - and they'd hook onto them with the ox team and pull them in over a skid road - skidded them in grease with tallow.

After that I started to run the donkey engine - I thought I was quite a man. I must have been about fourteen years old then. That was several years after. I started when I was twelve years old.

Well, the next step after that I got a job running a small locomotive, a little four-wheel locomotive - called it a gypsy at that time - hauling the logs from the landing into the millpond. Nowadays people would consider it quite a job getting those big logs going, but at that time it was the general way of doing it and they took it for granted that that was the only way of doing. We had from four to eight miles of railroad, I guess.

I stayed with that company there for quite a good many years. My uncle was logging superintendent and manager there and I stayed there until he retired, about 1910. I'd had different jobs. I started in working on the rigging around the small donkeys, and worked from one job to the other, to get to be what we called the chain-tender then. He was the donkey boss. He had six or seven men under him, and was in charge of getting the logs to the main road with these small donkeys. The men were mostly Canadians, North Ireland, some Swedes. It used to be the policy at camp to have a crew of North Irelanders and a crew of Canadians or Swedes working together, in order to get a little competition, you know. They'd compete with one another to get more work done.

After my uncle left, I went to work for the Pacific Lumber Company. I did the same kind of work for them, but the equipment had changed some in the meantime. They had gotten in some donkeys, drum donkeys in the

place of oxen. It was a bigger donkey with two drums on it to reel the line on. One to pull the load in and another one to pull the rigging back into the woods. You'd use the little donkey to get the log where you could get at it with the big donkey. And then you used the big donkey to get it to the railroad, and then loaded it onto the tracks with another small donkey. I was in charge of the crew for operating one of these big donkeys. There would be only about five men operating that, most of the crew would be in the woods on the small donkeys. Those logs had to be gotten into the main road and pulled up one behind the other and coupled together and the rigging all set on them before the big donkey came back to hook on. By that time they had done away with the grease skids and they were using water. There would be a man go ahead of this load, a few feet ahead of it and throw water in front of it, instead of the grease.

We lived in camps at that time, with big cook houses where everybody ate, and cabins for them to sleep in. Four men to a cabin usually. They fed very good. They fed, well, everything it was possible to have. These larger camps had their own pigs, their own beef cattle, and generally had a ranch connected with the company's camp in some way or another. Lots of them had their own milk cows. And they always had a store.

For entertainment in camp there were foot races and games, jumping and wrestling and boxing. In the summertime, they'd go swimming in the evening. Everyone would go swimming. They used to sing lots of songs. Lot of good singers there. They sang mostly old-time songs. You wouldn't hear them nowadays. The Canadians used to have several songs they sang about the river driving, the Macadavy River, wherever it was, and other rivers in the East. The Irish were great for having violins and singing by them, and singing little Irish ditties and lots of step dances. We worked hard and we had a good time and enjoyed ourselves every bit. We'd go to work in the morning, in the fall and spring, with an old kerosene lantern, started out in the dark, come back in the dark. Generally there was a place in these camps, a cleared off place where they could play. They played some baseball too. They was generally always pretty friendly, you know, would mix up pretty well. The week-end when they'd been to town and were pretty well loaded up, there might be a fight or two. But they'd forget it on Monday.

First job I had I got paid \$20 a month and board. And from then on, I think spool tending jobs were about \$40 a month, from \$40 to \$50, that sort of job, and also pulling rigging was about the same. I've done very little work inside the mill. I have done a little work in the winter time just to take someone's place when they would happen to be sick and laying off, is all.

The next big development after the bull donkeys was the inclined railroad. They built railroads right up the hill instead of chutes, you know. One of the big incline railroads was at Yosemite. But all the big lumber companies had inclines along in the twenties. They started along about 1920



with the high rigging logging, rigging spar trees and skylines. We used donkeys on those at first, but they were a different type. They were special built donkeys for that. They generally cut clear so they could swing that line when they wanted to change it. It was primarily developed for the inclined railroads to be set up on the higher ridges and log everything uphill, to the railroads. Especially in the redwood area where the breakage was so great. They got into rougher country and they needed this new type of equipment.

The next thing was the tractors. The tractors were used a long time though before they used any trucks. Tractors would lead our logs into the landing and load on the railroad cars. That was the beginning of the end of the incline railroad. That cut out the high line, too. Of course, high lines were used sometime afterwards on account of the rough country. Of course, they had to work out of that one system into the others, gradually.

I was with the Pacific Lumber Company until about 1928, then I went to work for the old Bayside Lumber Company, which Hammonds own now, as camp foreman. I was there quite a good many years. And then when that was finished, I went to Hammonds; then they transferred all the men that worked in there to their camp up on Little River in 1931. I knew Heitman, and I knew ~~Glenn~~ Hammond very well. ~~Glenn~~ Hammond was quite a boy; fine fellow. I knew his father, A. B. Hammond, too. Well, I run a logging camp up at Little River. Heitman was railroad construction man, and I guess he had something to do with moving the camp, too. By 1931 the crews had changed in this way, that there wasn't so many loggers in the crew. There were a lot of what we called "greenhorns" so that you had to break in almost every man you got. There was an entirely different crew altogether. Nationalities changed too - mixture of everything. The men went off to town more and there wasn't much entertainment in the camps. Done more fighting, quarreling. It wasn't as smooth as it was in the old times.

During the depression I worked for the Bayside Lumber Company - or it was called then the Humboldt Redwood, the Desert Timber people. I was running the logging camp there when the depression came on and I stayed in camp all during the depression and watched the camp, not operating, just looking after it. From Hammonds I went up to the Klamath River contract logging, and I contracted there for two or three years. You took a contract to get the logs to the mills for so much per thousand feet. And you had to fall them. They'd pay you whatever they agreed to pay and you'd have to provide the logs. It worked out very good, until the lumber companies would find you'd made a little money, and then they would cancel your contract out at the end of the year. They would only give you a contract from year to year. They got into a position where the logging costs were too great; they had to do something so they would contract it out to someone to get the cost down again. Then they'd do their own.

They started using wire rope about 1900; it may be a little bit before that, but right around there. Before then on the little donkeys they used manilla rope. I can remember when they first started using the wire rope. They used some wire rope and some manilla for a long time, and then finally done away with the manilla rope, but it took a long time, especially for the spool tenders to get used to handling this wire rope. You know, it was harder to handle, but it wouldn't break. Well, I don't know but that the other was probably as strong, but it was big and cumbersome, you know - the manilla rope - two inches in diameter. And you would get as much strength out of a much smaller, a 5/8ths wire rope. They had to do a lot of research work on that wire rope in order to get it to work right - took some time. And then they made it, built it a little differently. Finally they got it to working. No one liked it. Didn't want anything to do with it at all. Like the big donkeys. We called them the dumb donkeys when they come in; they would never work either, of course. They worked them for a few years and then they sidetracked them and didn't use them for a long time, and then finally went back to them, and that's the way the thing is.

My folks come from New Brunswick. Oh, I think, well, they must have come some time in the sixties. There was some of the younger fellows would come out every year, you know. My uncle that I worked for was from New Brunswick. Of course, they'd send back every year and get a few of the younger fellows. But they were all woodsmen before they came here; they'd worked in the lumber woods there, you know, hand logging. They were good men with an axe.

They made the falling wedges right in the camp in the blacksmith shop. Every camp had a blacksmith, and he made everything. Everything that was used except the wire rope was made right in the blacksmith shop. He was the blacksmith, the mechanic; and the whole works; he did all the mechanical work. If the small donkeys broke down or anything, the blacksmith would come out and fix them up. They didn't have any power hammers or anything like that. The blacksmith had a helper, you know, that did the striking for him. Sometimes when they'd have some heavy work, like making wedges, they'd put another man in and have two strikers. They never got anything better. The tools were just as good or better than anything they have nowadays.

I cruise timber now for anyone that wants it done. The work done in the woods qualifies you to do that sort of thing. You have a good idea of timbers, quality and what have you. I've been working sometimes for the larger mills and sometimes the smaller. Mostly people that owns timber that are selling it. They want to know how much is there. I don't know what they will do when they run out of people who know that kind of work. It's a good deal like logging now. If it wasn't for the tractor they wouldn't get a log out of the woods in the world. The falling is the biggest problem now in the redwoods, especially where breakage is so great. Why, all the good fallers in the country are right in the big companies. They get ahold of them and they keep them right there; they don't ever get away.