

BETSY

1902

Shawnigan Lake Lumber Co.



BETSY on the log railroad West Arm Shawnigan Lake, 1902

From L-R:

Fred Allen (visitor), **Jim McClurg** (logging boss), **“Roving” Joe Baines** (rigging slinger), **Henry Alexander** (loader), standing at back—**Dick Davidson** (rigging slinger), seated at top—**Henry Hawkins** (hook tender), long legged young fellow worked on rigging, name not remembered, in cab—**Herb Hawkins** (fireman and head loader), **Bob Sproule** (engineer) boy in door—**Henry McClurg** (whistle punk) **Peter Fraser** and **Ab Grahame** (fallers)

Photo: Gerry Wellburn Collection, BC Forest Discovery Centre

No one knows for sure when the first railway logging began in British Columbia.

Photographs of railway construction taken in the early 1880's show the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway (Rocky Mountains) using rail cars to haul logs.

The "first" documented logging railway was in 1888 with "Old Curly" a 0-4-0 tank engine owned by the Royal City Planning Mill (New Westminster), which hauled logs from the lowlands of the Fraser Valley to a log dump near Port Kells on the Fraser River.

On Vancouver Island, the Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing Co. began moving logs in 1892 to their Chemainus sawmill with an older 4-4-0 locomotive.

In 1900, the Shawnigan Lake Lumber Co. built a "Walking Dudley" (1), and in 1902 they built another locomotive "Betsy".

The following is an article by Gerry Wellburn which first appeared in the August 1947 edition of the Harmac News, a company magazine for the H.R. MacMillan Export Company Ltd.

Betsy was a logging locomotive, but not one of those factory-built sissies that had to run on steel rails. No sir, she was a real logger's engine, built right at Shawnigan Lake to haul logs. And for years she ran on a real logging - road built entirely of wood.

Everything about Betsy was unconventional, although she was the last word in ingenuity for 1902. Her boiler and engine were bought by Wm. Munsie Sr., when on a trip to the American side, and they were shipped "knocked down" to the sawmill at Shawnigan Lake where these vital parts were assembled onto a wooden body, framed by George Frayne Sr. J. Potter, now of C.W.P. (2), remembers helping tighten some of the bolts.

Betsy, when finished, was 24 feet overall and weighed about 12 tons. Her boiler was a curious "T" type, that is a vertical boiler with front extension (a sort of 1902 uplift model), the entrance end being topped with a jaunty little spark arrester. Just how the two sections of boiler held together bumping along on a log railroad is not explained, but the amazing thing is that it worked well and Betsy remained in service for nearly twenty years.

Her engine was a two-cylinder vertical affair which drove through the centre of the floor to rather clumsy four-wheel trucks, the large double-flanged concave wheels of which straddled the log "rails". Her boiler, which originally carried 150 lbs. of steam, was centered over the front truck, and on each side was piled the 2 - ft. wood used for firing. Her back was neatly rounded with an iron water tank about four feet high, giving weight to her rear set of trucks. Special equipment included steam "jam" brakes, and a pail of skid grease. The grease was smeared on the log rails, as not withstanding Betsy's short wheelbase, she was apt to get stuck on the curves.

Earlier methods of log transport at Shawnigan Lake had progressed from the bull teams of 1890 to horses on the skid road in 1896. Four years later a pole railroad was built at the West Arm where eight horses pulled a log car about a mile to the Lake. In 1901 the cussing of the teamsters gave way to the groaning and clanking of a weird and wonderful “walking-dudley” (1) which pulled the log car a mile and half to the dump and pushed an empty car back.

Then came Betsy. She was a success from the start – real, new-fangled 20th Century efficiency, She handled two logs cars, one at either end, each fastened to the locie with a 16-ft. reach. She was always pulling a car and pushing a car. She averaged three miles and hour and extended the economic hauling distance to nearly four miles.

But better yet, Betsy helped load the logs, which were ground-yarded with a little steam-pot to skids alongside the track. The bunk load was rolled on with peavies and manpower, but to complete the load, Betsy was uncoupled and additional logs parbuckled with a line attached to her.

The log cars, built at the sawmill, had wooden bunks, faced with iron strips. Cheese blocks (3) were secured with pins, and a tricky job was to pry out the pin at the dump and release the block. Herb Hawking remembers more than one man flying heels upwards into the Lake when the logs started rolling.

The track was built with logs 12 to 14 inches in diameter on a 6-foot gauge.

What did Betsy cost? Old records of the company show that in 1902 \$4,865.45 was invested in “logging railroad and equipment” Details are missing, so it is quite possible that the figures not only included Betsy, but the two log cars, possibly a mile or so of track, and perhaps the water tank at the end of the grade.

(1) Walking Dudley – A donkey engine bolted to the floor of a flat car, with a cable anchored firmly on the top and bottom of the track. In forward gear, the engine would pull the flat car up the hill; in reverse, it would come back down. Able to drag 15 to 20 logs chained end-to-end behind it.

(2) CWP—Canadian White Pine Sawmill, Fraser River (1923-2001).

(3) Cheese Block—Metal wedges located on the log car bunks, used to secure the logs.

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