



Jasper B. Hills

1859-1933

Jasper B. Hills, known as J.B. or “Jap,” was a logging pioneer. Born in 1859, he was the first Caucasian male born in the upper Willamette Valley. His parents were among the earliest Oregon Territory settlers and named Jasper, Oregon, after this first son.

By necessity, Jasper Hills was a woodsman, hunter, farmer and a logger. Jasper married, raised a family of eight children, and provided for his family’s needs from the land and forest about him.

Hills’ activities as a logger and log driver on the Willamette and its tributaries are legend. His first logging experience occurred about 1890 when he cut balm wood and floated the short logs down the Willamette River to Eugene for manufacture in an excelsior plant. Clearing \$1,200 on this initial effort, Jasper Hills became a confirmed logger and river driver. He promptly signed a contract to

furnish logs, also by water delivery, to a Corvallis mill.

Timber was cheap and plentiful, costing Hills 15 cents to 35 cents per thousand board feet as it stood in the forest. His daughter, Hallie Hills Huntington, later wrote, “Emboldened by the success of the excelsior contract and the ease with which it had been accomplished, he signed a contract for delivery at the (Corvallis) sawmill at \$4.00 per thousand board feet.” This contract was for Douglas fir logs that presented Hills with problems different from those with lighter weight logs used for excelsior. On Lost Creek, near Dexter, Oregon, he found a stand of the proper timber and the logging show looked easy. However, Lost Creek was a small stream and required a dam to be built to impound enough water to float the logs down to the Willamette. Hills soon discovered that old growth Douglas fir was very heavy and

demanded more manpower to move than lighter balm wood. The logging was accomplished with men and horses as machine logging was yet on the horizon.

As the years passed and contracts were filled, Jasper Hills' hard work and successful river drives established his reputation. About 1905, always searching for better logging methods, Hills heard of a new steam-powered logging winch called a "donkey." He hurried to Portland to the Willamette Iron and Steel Company and promptly purchased just-completed Donkey No. 3.

With this new machine, which was to revolutionize logging practices, Hills took on a contract to deliver 14 million board feet to the Booth Kelly-Springfield mill. The logging was quickly accomplished. The river drive, however, which was to have taken 30 days, took 100 days due to a sudden drop in the river level. Thousands of beached logs and man-hours later, J.B. Hills barely broke even financially when the logs finally were delivered. He seemed to thrive on adversity, though. Hills continued to cut timber and drive logs down creeks and rivers until 1908 when new laws prohibited the use of dams and water release to transport logs.

J.B. Hills completed many large and successful log drives during his years on the river. The occupation of river driver was patently dangerous and demanding. In an era before life vests, hard hats and mandated safety standards, Hills was justly proud that he lost only one man to a river accident, despite two decades of hazardous exposure.

J.B. Hills was a forerunner of today's logger. His methods, primitive by current standards, were state-of-the art and led to dramatic advances at a time when America had an

insatiable appetite for lumber. Hills' perseverance, diligence and courage helped establish the timber industry in Oregon.

Jasper "J.B." Hills died November 4th, 1933, a pioneer logger with accomplishments as vast as the forests he logged.