

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project  
Interview with Don Peterson  
October 22, 1979  
Bonners Ferry Ranger Station  
Interviewed by David Barton  
Questionnaire Information

DP = Don Peterson  
DB = David Barton

Tape 13, Side 1

DB: ...Using crosscut saws?

DP: No, that was the first chain saw I ever used.

DB: When did they start using those; when did they switch over from the crosscut to the chain saws?

DP: It was about...latter part of the '40s, that the real switch came. You seen a few two-man saws, and that, in the woods. One of the trouble with the two-man saw was that it was too big and bulky. We had sawyers that could out-saw the two-man saw with a Swede fiddle--the crosscut. And, it never really...never really did go over big. And, I can't remember what year it was...I think it was '49. Yea, '49 was the first one-man chain saw I ever seen in the country. It was a McCulloch. They used it on the Roaring Fire.

DB: Who invented that one-man, do you remember?

DP: I'm not sure who, who come out with the first one. It probably was a German, just off-hand. They were, they were that mechanically inclined. But, the one that we got ahold of was McCullough.

DB: When you started working in '48, was anyone still using horses and mules out in the woods?

DP: No. Well, I shouldn't say no. There were one man gypo outfits that were still using horses. But they were pretty well going away from it. Trying to think when Diamond got rid of their last ones. It was during World War II that Diamond Match got rid of their last teams. And, they were, they were probably one of the bigger outfits that used horses.

DB: And they switched over to trucks?

DP: Trucks and dozers.

DB: What kind of things were nuisances to timber up here in the north?

DP: We didn't...fire was about the main thing, really.

DB: Ribes wasn't too bad around here?

DP: At that time, no. And, we never got in the infestation of the beetles, and that, until later years. I don't know why either, because they had so much overripe timber, and that, in the country. You would have thought they would have gotten into.

DB: Has the ribes ever been a problem--big problem?

DP: The ribes they tried to take care of that with BRC, and there was no way that you could ever pull all the ribes and get rid of the blister rust, in the forest. I can't remember what year. About '60--'68 or '69 they put the blister rust control program...quit spraying, because it wasn't doing any good. They just delay it for a time. From that time on, then it started getting worse and worse and worse. And its really hitting the white pine now.

DB: Up here in the Kaniksu?

DP: Well, all over Idaho. There's whole stands of it growing out. One of the big problems they had, when they planted, '30s planted, I planted when I was younger, and that, they planted one species only. Might be 500 or 1,000 acre area, and they planted one species. If bugs get into that, they wipe out the whole, whole stand. And they're experiencing this in Coeur d'Alene now. On the Bret Creek Plantation, right below McPherson's. That whole plantation is dying on them because the rust got into it and then weakened it down, the beetles got into it--combination of blister rust and beetles.

DB: Back in the old days what were the main problems up here in the Kaniksu, in the forest?

DP: I'm trying to think when the spruce bug got in. I can't remember whether that was before I went in the Service. Yea, I had been.

DB: It was in the '40s sometime?

DP: It was in the late '40s--spruce epidemic. Got started. It wiped massive stands of spruce out.

DB: Back when you were a boy, do you remember where the sawmills were around here?

DP: There was, there was Humbird Lumber Company, at Sandpoint, which was located between the...what used to be the Northern Pacific tracks and the lake, and between Sandpoint and Pend Oreille. Ahh...I can't remember to others...too many others than those other then Meadow Creek Saw Mill, was the biggest. And Meadow Creek was bigger than Bonners Ferry, at one time.

DB: Where is that at now?

DP: Its on the Moyie River, about half way between Canadian line and Moyie out here. But as far as the ones down around Sandpoint, like I say, Humbird is the only one that I can remember.

DB: Were there many little gypo mills out in the woods?

DP: No, there wasn't. See, one of the things, when I was a kid, Humbird owned most of the land between Humbird and the railroad, they owned most of the land, north and north-west--north east of Sandpoint. And when Humbird went out of business they sold the land. And that's where a lot of people picked up their property, at that time.

DB: About how far north and north-east did they own--in miles?  
DP: I think Humbird came just about to the county line. They had railroads all over the country. All over the flats. You still go out and find rails and find old railroad beds, and that.

DB: So, when you started working for the private timbering companies they had already started using the jammers?  
DP: Yes. Hm-hm.

DB: OK. And, they were moving things by truck and by train at that time?  
DP: Yea.

DB: Were there any flumes left?  
DP: There was flumes pretty near at every drainage that had any water in it--they had a flume there. And where they didn't have the water, a lot of times they had the dry skids.

DB: Were those being used?  
DP: I...the only flume that I ever remember being used was off of Falls Creek, up here. The flumed lumber from the mill down to the catch chain and then they hauled with truck from there.

DB: Where is that located at?  
DP: Out in the Flats out here, just west of Naples.

DB: How far is that from Bonners Ferry?  
DP: It's about 11 miles.

DB: About eleven miles. Would that be northeast?  
DP: It would be southeast.

DB: Southeast.  
DP: Southwest, rather.

DB: Do you remember seeing any chutes out in the woods?  
DP: Yea. There's chutes all along the Kootenai River, here. Remember seeing chutes off from...well, both the east side and west side down out of Sandpoint. Real old ones.

DB: Were they being used?  
DP: No.

DB: When do you think the last chutes were being used around these parts?  
DP: I kind of imagine, it was probably middle '30s--'36; '39--I believe.

DB: When was the last log drive in these parts?  
DP: The last log drive was on Priest River. That ended about eight years ago, something like that. It hasn't been that long ago since log drive. They still bring logs down the St. Joe. With tugboat and in rafts.

DB: At Priest River, where did they take the logs on the drive--where was the destination?  
DP: They put them in to the Pend Oreille River and took 'em down to Diamond National's Mill, in Newport. That was before Albany Falls was built--the dam.

DB: What other kinds of industries were there in this country, up Kaniksu, besides timbering?

DP: There was...wasn't too much, really. Other than farming. There were some people that smoked fish, and that. And, shipped them..ah..

DB: Where would they go to--the fish?

DP: They bootlegged whitefish off Pend Oreille Lake, during Depression. During the Wintertime they...the whole town would move right out on to the lake. And, it was good money; they were paying \$.30 a pound for everything over 12 inches. And, what was under 12 inches, the kids went out and peddled them on the streets. Down by the... what I know as the ball park...but Memorial Field, in Sandpoint, was a green house one family made their living strictly off the green house. But, there was different things. There were people that made boats; and...Ross Halls was the photographer. They had pretty well...I don't think there's too much new industry, just more people in the same industry, then what there was then.

DB: What kind of big farming do they have around here?

DP: Down around Sandpoint, their main farming was strictly, what I call survival farming. At that time, 40 acres, eight acre farms, you raised little beef, few milk cows; you sold your cream. It was something that you could survive on is what it amounted to. Now, I think, the biggest share of the farming is either stock, grade A dairy; up here it's grain.

DB: What kind of grain?

DP: Wheat, barley, this type. They're going into the hops now, up here. And then, a lot of people now are selling hay, and that's all they do. Strictly raise hay and sell it.

DB: Were any of your family or friends ever involved in mining, up here?

DP: I had a brother-in-law that was miner down at Wallace. And, that's about the only mining...I done a little gold panning down the Vermillion River..

DB: Did you find anything?

DP: Nothing for pay. I...I...you can go over there and find color any time you want.

DB: Which were the best jobs to have up in, up in the Kaniksu area, when you were a boy?

DP: I think the best paying jobs were probably some of your more skilled people in the mills. Like your overhead crane operator, this type of thing. The sawyers made good money but, back then, they only worked during the Summer. They didn't work year 'round. Consequently, they had to save enough from the Summertime to live on during the Winter.

DB: There's some...somewhat strange names for peaks and gulches around here and everything. Maybe if I read off a few, you might be able to tell me how you think they got their names. Like, Two Tail Peak, did you ever hear stories of that?

DP: Two Tail. I've never heard the story on that.

DB: How about Twenty Mile Pass?  
DP: Twenty Mile Pass, at one time was 20 miles from Naples. And, that's how it got its name--was the mile marker. And there used to be a cabin at Twenty Mile Pass, Forest Service Cabin. And, when we were working trail crew, and trails, and telephone line, we used to stay in the cabin.  
DB: Do you remember when it was torn down, or...?  
DP: It was burned...let me think...must have been about '57, '58, in there someplace.  
DB: How about Tungsten Mountain?  
DP: Tungsten I don't know a thing about, not on the name.  
DB: There's that Paradise Valley, too.  
DP: Paradise Valley, I've heard that somebody landed up there and homestead and they thought it was just plain paradise. That's how it got its name. They've split part of Paradise Valley off now, and they call it Pleasant Valley.  
DB: Pleasant Valley.  
DP: It lays on the west side of the highway. Ah...when I first chasing girls, I guess, the whole, whole flat up here was Paradise Valley.  
DB: Oh, I see.  
DP: And, now they getting so roads split places and they change names.  
DB: How about Roman Nose Lake or Point?  
DP: Roman Nose Peak, gets its name from the shape of the mountain. You see it from the highway it looks like a Roman nose. And, everybody, I suppose, just looked at it and called it that.  
DB: How about Katka Peak?  
DP: Katka Peak was named after the town of Katka. And, how Katka got its name I don't know. It got it...when the railroad was built, there was a small town.  
DB: Is that not there anymore?  
DP: The old Katka School is there, and there's one house left out of the Katka town. There was, originally, about 10 houses at the town.  
DB: When did that town flourish, do you remember?  
DP: Around 1893. In those years there, when the railroad came.  
DB: What's that close to now, Katka Peak?  
DP: Katka Peak's about, mm...I suppose, about 15 miles east of here. East of town.  
DB: How about Burro Ridge?  
DP: Burro Ridge, as far as I can find out...there's a lot of prospects over in Boulder Creek, and that...and the way I understand it, somebody lost their mules, or their burros, and found them on that ridge. And, that's how it got its name.  
DB: Where were the...who were these prospects that you're talking about?  
DP: There was...at the time of, gold was found in Canada,

around Fort Steele a lot of that played out and the prospecters dropped off in different parts of this country. And they, they did prospecting on the ridge; Bussard; Queen; Tungsten. There's prospects and tunnels and mines all over that. Boulder Creek has been quite heavily prospected.

DB: Were these people working in the early 1900s or the late 1890s?

DP: They were...some of them were in the early 1900s and then a lot of them were during the Depression. They didn't have anything else to do so they went prospecting.

DB: How about Hell Roaring Ridge?

DP: I have no idea how that one got its name.

DB: There's Silver Dollar Peak too.

DP: Silver Dollar Peak. Haven't heard of that peak. Silver Dollar Mine is up just under Tungsten, and how that got its name, I hate to say.

DB: How about Bussard, B-U-S-S-A-R-D?

DP: I don't know for sure. I...the only thing that I can assume is that somebody seen a turkey buzzard up there.

DB: How about Moyie--M-O-Y-I-E?

DP: Moyie.

DB: Moyie.

DP: I'm not sure where that got its name, but its been changed. On the old, original plats, it was spelled "M-O-Y-E-A", I think, it was--they changed the spelling on it. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the original name may have been Indian.

DB: Aha. Do you know were any of the old CCC camps were located?

DP: Yea. There was one at 126.

DB: Where was that close to?

DP: Its up Smith Creek, about six and a half miles. And there was one at the dirt ovens which is on up Smith Creek, on the West Branch. There was one up on Deer Creek...

DB: About how far up the west branch, excuse me?

DP: Let's see...that's...you got another six miles on up Smith Creek. There was one on Deer Creek at about the eight mile. The officer's quarters still stand on that one. It was just about the same location as the old mill site for the Buckhorn Mine, on the road. Ah...the only ones I'm real sure of, around. A lot of the roads, and that, were built by the 3Cs, but I don't know where the camps were located.

DB: Were they pretty popular around here, the 3Cs?

DP: Yea. Yea, it...it was work, at that time, and they done a lot of good work. Built roads, trails, lookouts. They worked out some of the old ranger stations too. But, Round Prairie Ranger Station, Smith Creek Ranger Station, Snyder Ranger Station, and that.

DB: Can you remember any stories about some of the old rangers that used to work here, the...back when you started?

DP: Oh...Hank Peterson, used to be ranger out in Shiloh just before it was consolidated into Sandpoint. The only thing that I really remember about Hank was...he know where the big fish were. He'd go in the evening and it was nothing before he come back with five, eight pound fish. And, nobody knew where he ever went and got them. He...he was quite a fisherman. Hank later become a scaler, and retired from Forest Service as check scaler.

DB: What did a scaler do?

DP: Measured the timber, once it was into the mill--for quality; from defect, this type of thing. Hank Vish..these people, are people that never had any college education. Hank was ranger at Sandpoint. Falls, he's in charge of BRC control for quite a number of years. Ah. Major Kelley was ranger up Priest Lake, back in the early '40s. Lee White, Forest Supervisor, in the early '40s.

DB: Are most of the rangers, the ones you are mentioning, either retired or dead now?

DP: They're retired. Retired now, yeah. Lee White, I don't know...I don't think he ever retired from the Forest Service--he quit and went to work for MacFarland Pole Company.

DB: Well, back when you were growing up, what did people in Sandpoint do for entertainment?

DP: During the Wintertime a lot of it was ice skating, sleigh riding, this type of thing. Summertime was swimming.

DB: Did they have dance halls back then?

DP: They must have. Because I can remember the folks going dancing, every once in a while. The main street of town there was...there were more bars and churches then there was anything else in town. I'm trying to think...seems to me that one time there was...God, sticks in my mind...27 beer joints in town. Some of them are still there.

DB: Well, about the time you were born, Prohibition was about over. Did you ever hear stories about bootlegged booze or anything?

DP: Yea. You hear a lot of 'em. There's some old stills, still in the country. Nobody's ever bothered to go in and get 'em. The...neighbor bootlegged. He kept salt pork in a crock out in the back yard. I never could figure out why he had it. 'Till one day we went over and picked the thing up, god it stunk to high heaven--he had his booze underneath that salt pork, in the ground. They shipped it in out of Canada in hollow logs. They'd ship logs in, and take a hollow log and fill it full of bootleg and then plug the hole in the end. There was any numerous ways of bringing the booze in.

DB: Were there a lot of homebrew people?  
DP: There was a lot of homebrew. There was a lot of stills.  
DB: Do you remember any other way that they brought it in, other than hollow logs?  
DP: A lot of them brought it in their vehicles; or sleigh, underneath the hay. They'd go get a load a hay in the sleigh...  
DB: How was customs like?  
DP: I don't remember the customs too much. The...evidently they was fairly strict. I don't recall anybody ever bringing it directly through customs, with themselves. They'd either throw a hollow log in the river and float it down, or they'd ship it in the car. But, the last bootleg...and I can remember was...hmm..quit about five years ago, here in Bonners Ferry. There was one quit about four years ago in Priest River.  
DB: Why'd they quit?  
DP: It just wasn't profitable anymore. And the fine and that was too heavy. I 'magine. And the people who were doing it were getting quite elderly.  
DB: Yea. What did eh...what kind of things did people gamble on, around here?  
DP: The gamblin' mainly was punch board, slot machines.  
DB: What's a punch board?  
DP: Punchboard is a small board that they put numbers in little teeny holes. And then they'd have different prizes. A lot of them used rifles as the main prize. You paid so much per punch and you punched them out, and you got the number and it matched the prize and you won. But the slot machines were the biggest thing. It brought in Canadians in droves--you can't believe it. The Past Time, for instance, in Sandpoint had 75 machines, at one time. And I don't know how true it is, but I heard the tax...they were illegal...but the tax that the city of Sandpoint alone took was three hundred thousand per quarter. So, there were a lot of machines within the city limits.  
DB: What kind...what denomination machines were there?  
DP: Dollar on down. Down to the penny. They didn't care who played them. Kids play 'em, anybody could play them.  
DB: When did they become illegal, do you remember?  
DP: I can't remember just when.  
DB: Then you were...?  
DP: They were illegal all the time.  
DB: But when they got cleaned out.  
DP: When they got cleaned out...I can't remember.  
DB: Were you a young man, or...?  
DP: It had to have been about the mid-40s. That they finally kicked them all out. They never got them all out then. The state line, between Coeur d'Alene and Spokane had them up until, just a couple of years ago. And they crop up every once in a while.



DB: How about prostitution, were there ever any prostitutes in Sandpoint?

DP: Not too many. I know about two houses in Sandpoint, at different times, and then one in Priest River, and that was it.

DB: About what general time periods were the...?

DP: Ah, when I was a youngster there was one house in Sandpoint. And then oh...along in the latter '50s, early '60s there was one in Sandpoint. The last one was pretty well kept quiet. It was strictly special clientele. Everything for the house came in the mail. Never bought anything in town. One, in Priest River, was in the late '40s. And, that was shut down because of the...they got a new father in there, the Catholic Church did, and he swore up and down he was going to close the joint. They found him floating in the Pend Oreille River; then the authorities had to do something. Somebody dumped him off the bridge. Whether it was to do with the house, or not, is hard to say.

DB: Have there ever been any Chinese up around these parts?

DP: Chinese worked the railroads, quite heavily. Both Sandpoint and Bonners. You can still find evidence, occasionally in old coins with metal detectors. Like out there, by Clarks Fork, just as you come into the lake, you can find the opium bottles, underneath the overhanging rocks. And that's where they went for their opium dens. Parts of their pottery you can find.

DB: Now, how far north from Clarks Fork is this?

DP: It would be, oh...about half way between Clarks Fork and Hope.

DB: Are there any Chinese graveyards down there?

DP: I don't know of any. Chuck would know more than I would on that. Up here, they were in town up here until they finally loaded them all on the train and shipped them all off.

DB: When was that?

DP: I don't recall. Paul Flynn can tell you this.

DB: Were you still around, or here?

DP: I was in Sandpoint at that time, and a...

DB: Do you have any idea why they sent them off?

DP: They just didn't want to have them around.

(END OF TAPE 13; Side 1)