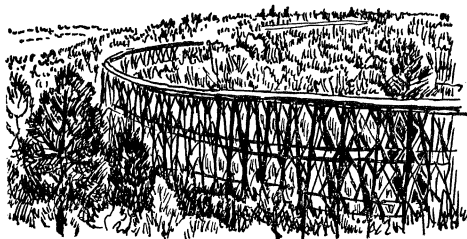


Chapter IX

THE FLUME



Soon after this Mother told Father she was getting tired of trying to raise six children alone, on nothing, and he would have to get a job where he could be home and make more money. He quit driving team then, and got a job on the Terry Lumber Company flume. This flume ran from the mill above Round Mountain to Bella Vista, a distance of twenty-eight miles. Maybe I had better explain to you the purpose of the flume and what it was like, as this particular flume was done away with forty years ago and I know of no other flume of its kind in existence today so you have very likely never seen anything like it.

The flume was used as a mode of transportation for lumber. It was a V flume with 32 inch sides so it held quite a lot of water. The frame of the flume was all built out of 4x6 inch and 3x6 inch timbers. The braces on the bents, as they were called were all 1½x6 inch boards, and the box of the flume was made of two 1¼x16 inch boards for each side. There was a walk on one side of the flume. It was usually made out of 1½x12 inch plank. The highest place in the flume was 120 feet. There was only one trestle that high, but where it crossed gulches there were several trestles 70 to 80 feet high. The box boards and stringers that they set on were all 16 feet long so there had to be a bent every 16 feet for twenty-eight miles. When these bents were built up to 80 feet or over high, it took a lot of lumber. The flume was kept full of water from Hatchet Creek and Montgomery Creek. The lumber was dumped into the flume at the mill and it would float down the flume to Bella Vista where it would be dumped out and piled into piles to dry. Some lumber, especially the top grades, were piled at the mill and shipped after it had dried out. About 75 thousand feet of dry lumber could be shipped in a day of ten hours and only about 50 thousand feet of green lumber. Sometimes the lumber would bunch up and stop. This was called a jam. The company had four stations along the flume. They kept two men called herders at each station and their job was to watch the lumber and if there was a jam to get it started again as quickly as possible. If the jam lasted very long, the lumber would back up and throw most of the water out and then it was hard to get the lumber going again. The flume ran within about a half mile of our place and station No. Four was just up the hill from our house. Father got a job as herder at Number Four Station. Bill was fifteen years old at the time so Father got him a job as the other herder.

They worked ten hours per day and each got two dollars per day. They worked six days herding lumber, then on Sunday they would have to work repairing the flume. On a thirty day month that made \$60 each or \$120 per month in the family. That was a lot of money to a family that had gotten along for so long on a little of nothing. There was a repair crew of five or six men kept at Station Number Four most of the time. They had to have a place to board so we moved from our house on the farm to the flume house, as it was called, so Mother could cook for the men.

There were eight of us in the family and with the six repair men that made fourteen Mother had to cook for. She was happy doing it though because Father was home and she had money to do with for the first time in her married life. The men paid 75 cents per day board and there was some profit at that as we had our own eggs and milk and in summer raised quite a lot of garden. We also raised part of the meat it took to feed the men.

We hadn't been living on the flume very long until the highest trestle on the flume fell down. It was close to Station Number Four. It being 120 feet high, the company decided to dig a cut through the hill and build it back where it would only be 80 feet high. They wanted to get it done as soon as possible so they sent forty men up to do the job. Mother balked at cooking for that many men for two weeks so they let Father spend all his time helping her. My job was to take the horse and buckboard and go six miles to Bella Vista to the company store nearly every day to keep enough food on hand for that many people. You didn't buy bread in those days like you do now so Mother had to bake enough bread for fifty people every day, besides planning everything else it took to fill them up.

I know we killed several hogs and cooked beans in a washtub, so they had plenty of pork and beans. They got hot cakes by the hundred for breakfast with either bacon or eggs and she always had pie or pudding for dessert at other meals. When I had a little time I would watch the men work. I never heard any of them kick about the food and I heard many of them brag about how good it was.

The mill ran all the time during the break in the flume so when the break was finished it took quite a while to catch up on the shipping. They always started to ship at the mill at midnight. The lumber would get to Number Four Station at four o'clock in the morning, and be at Bella Vista in a little after five in the morning. They always quit shipping from five to six in the morning. This was called slack time. If there was no trouble, the men at Number Four Station would have their slack time of one hour off from nine to ten o'clock. The lumber would start again at ten and run until two o'clock in the afternoon. The last board they shipped for the day always had a stake about six or eight inches high sticking up on it and the word "Joker" written with blue chalk on it. When the Joker came the men knew they were through for the day.

There was a planing mill and a box factory at Bella Vista where the

flume ended. Bella Vista grew to be a town of around three hundred people. The company built their own railroad from Anderson to Bella Vista and ran a train each way once a day. You could ride the train in a box car free providing you would sign a statement that you would not hold the company responsible if you were injured or killed.

In June of the second year after we moved to the flume house, Mother had another baby. It was a boy and they named him Jasper. He only lived about a week. I remember Father was working about a mile up the flume the day the baby died and Mother sent me after him. This was one time Granny wasn't there. I always figured if she had been there she would have found a way to keep the baby alive.

Also another tragedy, or near tragedy, happened. During the second year Father and Bill worked on the flume, one day about noon the lumber quit coming and water began to go down. Father sent Bill up the flume to see what the trouble was. In a half hour the water had almost quit entirely and he hadn't heard from Bill. When one man was up the flume and needed help he would write a message on a board and send it down if there was still water running. Father was getting worried so he started out to find out what the trouble was. When he got about a mile and a half from the station, he found that twenty boxes, or about 320 feet of flume had fallen down. It was a trestle, most of which was 60 feet high. Father looked all around and yelled as loud as he could but could not find Bill any place so he decided Bill had been on the trestle when it fell and was, of course, under all that pile of lumber in the bottom of the canyon. Father came back to the station as fast as he could. I remember him putting his arms around Mother and saying "Our boy is killed." He sent me to get the repair crew who were working about a half mile below the station. I know I ran that half mile faster than I ever did before or since. When I got to hearing distance of them I yelled, "Bill is killed" as loud as I could. They all came running and went with Father up to the break to see if they could move enough of the lumber to find Bill's body. I wanted to go along but Father wouldn't let me. In about an hour they came back carrying Bill on a stretcher. We saw them coming and of course thought he was dead. They had a red handkerchief over his face and from a distance it looked like blood. But Father came running ahead of the men to tell Mother Bill was alive but unconscious. Father telephoned right away to have a doctor come out from Redding. It took the doctor three and one-half hours to get there. He examined Bill and said he thought he would come out all right, but if he didn't become conscious by the next morning we had better take him to town where he could examine him better. Bill came to his senses about midnight after being unconscious about eleven hours. No one ever knew just what happened but when the men got there some of them began to dig in the lumber and a couple of men, thinking Bill might not be under the lumber, began to look around in the brush. One of them found Bill lying under a bush near the end of the break.

The men all agreed that he couldn't have been on the part of the flume that fell but was at the lower end of the break where the flume was about 16 feet high and when the trestle fell, the telephone wire caught Bill and pulled him off and he had crawled up the hill about 50 feet to where they found him.

In those days there were no working men's compensation laws. If a man got hurt on the job it was his hard luck. He had to pay his own doctor bill and he was out whatever time he was not able to work. In Bill's case, it was about a month before he was able to work.

There was no lumber shipped down the flume in winter. If the flume broke down or if there was repair work to be done, the men had some winter work. As a rule the job was about an eight months of the year job. This gave Father some time to work on the farm. He always plowed and planted grain in the fall or winter so we would have grain hay to feed the horses and some to sell. In the meantime, Bill had saved some of the money he had earned and was going to Heald's Business College in Stockton. He would come home and work on the flume during the summer vacation until he graduated from college.

During this time I had gotten to be 15 years old. So I went to work on the flume too. I started out as a herder and the hardest part of the job for me was getting up at four o'clock in the morning when the lumber started to come. The first lumber to come in the morning would usually be timbers. All the way from 2x6 to 6x16 inches, these timbers would be in different lengths. These were tied together with short pieces of rope stapled to each piece, making a train of ten or twelve pieces. If any of the ropes were broken we had to stop the lumber and put on new ropes. When the flume got older the lumber would jam more so the board lumber was made into rafts of eight to twelve boards. An iron clamp was put on each end of the raft to hold it together. Then the rafts were tied together into trains of six or eight rafts after they were dumped into the flume. The herders had to watch for broken ropes on rafts the same as on timbers. The iron clamps were hauled back to the mill by team and wagon.

I will never forget my first pay-day. I had worked 25 days the first month and when I got my first pay they gave me two \$20 gold pieces and a \$10 gold piece. That was before the time of using currency. On my second pay-day I had worked a full month so I got three \$20 gold pieces. I didn't get to keep it all though. It all went into the family pot and I got just what I needed. Out of my second pay-day I got enough to have some badly needed dental work done. I went to Redding and stayed overnight to get the work done and it cost me \$24. I also bought a dollar Ingersol watch and some new clothes. When Bill came home that spring, there wasn't room for all three of us to work as herders so Father got the job as foreman of the repair crew. He got \$2.50 per day for that job. This was another reason he took it. Later I worked with him on the repair crew. I was what they called a sawyer. My job was to saw all the parts that the other men put into the flume. It

wasn't as hard or dangerous as the other work, but I had to learn how to cut all the different parts of the flume.

Most people that one comes in contact with for any length of time while we are in our teens, as I was when I went to work on the flume, have an influence on our lives, either for good or bad. My first boss was Harvey Klinger. He was a good man and all the working men liked him. I don't remember of ever hearing any of the men criticize him. I thought at the time if I ever got smart enough to be the boss, I would be like him.

Because of the flume work being dangerous, it was hard to get men to work on it and most of the men that did work there were heavy drinkers. They would hang around Redding until they were broke and when they couldn't get a job any place else they would come to work on the flume. They would work until they got a little stake then quit and go back to town.

One man, George Montgomery, worked as a herder at a one-man station between Station Number Four and Ingot. While he worked there it was said that he drank a quart bottle of whiskey every day. In those days whiskey cost a dollar a quart so he spent half of his \$2 wages for whiskey. When he ran out he had the men at the station near Ingot get the whiskey and ship it down the flume to him on a raft.

Another man I remember was Otis Storer. He was a young man, not over twenty or twenty-one at the time he was working on the flume. When he got a couple of drinks he liked to show the other men how good he could dance a jig. One time I saw him put a quart bottle of whiskey to his mouth and drink at least a large water glass full without stopping. When he set the bottle down he said, "If my mother would have given milk like that she could never have weaned me."

At that time they were shipping slab wood from the mill down to Ingot to be used at the smelter that was running there. The wood was great to jam so we all had to go up above Ingot every Saturday and Sunday and herd wood. It was a disagreeable job - especially in the fall when the water would be so cold it would freeze our fingers. On one of these trips Otis fell off the flume. He only fell about twenty feet but he hit on a timber four feet from the ground and broke his back. Nothing was ever said about it by the men but I think he took one too many swallows that day. The men telephoned to Redding and had a livery rig come out and take Otis to the County Hospital. It took the rig three hours to get there. We had packed Otis to the hotel at Ingot and I had to sit with him until they came to get him. I never felt so sorry for anybody in my life as I did for him. The last I heard of him he had gotten so he could sit in a wheel chair.

One time before Otis broke his back, I was working on the repair crew. Paul Boaquin was repair boss at that time. Some way - I don't know how they got started - but the men were discussing religion. We had been working on a trestle about sixty feet high. It was lunch time and we were lying on the grass on the hillside. Paul said, "I believe if a man fell off that trestle, while

he was going through the air everything he had done wrong in his life would flash through his mind and he would have time to ask God to forgive him and he would go to heaven." There were five or six of us there. One man expressed the opinion that he doubted whether a man would have much time to talk to God if he fell the full sixty feet and he said suppose I was working only half way to the top and fell. What would happen? Most of the men thought Paul's belief was a good one. Otis was one that thought Paul had the right idea. Paul was a good man and one on the job that didn't drink so what he said made me think. I thought, "Now he is older than I am so maybe he knows what he is talking about." But later I decided that if a man had to get right with God, why wait until he was falling through the air with only a few seconds to do it in. After Otis fell and broke his back, I felt so sorry for him I couldn't ask him if he had time to ask God's forgiveness while he was falling the twenty feet.

Another lunch time we were resting after lunch. It was about the time the Wright Brothers were trying to fly their first plane. Some of the men thought that man would never be able to fly. A couple of men expressed the opinion that the Wrights might succeed but man would never fly very high or fast. I remember there were two or three buzzards flying around overhead. A man named Matt Merchant said, "You see those buzzards up there? When ever man can figure what keeps them up there, he will be able to fly and not before."

One of my most vivid recollections of this time was the San Francisco earthquake in April of 1906. There were so many people killed in it that anyone having relatives there was worried for fear they might be one of the dead. A lot of people thought the world was coming to an end. Bill was working in Stockton at that time and was talking of taking a job in San Francisco so we were relieved to hear from him and hear he was still in Stockton.