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LOGGING WITH HORSE AND OXEN

Western Maryland, West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania have been home to large scale timbering operations since the late 1800s. Early loggers labored with hand equipment, teams of horses, oxen, and mules to cut the trees and remove them from the forest, a far cry from the mechanized equipment many people associate with the timbering industry today. Yet, the traditional ways have not yet passed into history; in fact, they may be enjoying a renaissance as evidenced in Flintstone, Maryland, where two friends find time to enjoy their outdoor hobby of horse logging.

Henry Maier of Oldtown, Maryland, and Leo Eby of Bean's Cove, Pennsylvania, take quiet pride in working their teams of horses and oxen in an environmentally friendly process. Large scale timbering operations typically require mechanical logging to be cost effective. But as Leo explains, "Years ago there were massive wooded areas, but

today the boundaries we see are smaller, so it's not always practical to bring in heavy equipment. That is when horse logging may become cost effective. I view it as a practical solution to timbering a small, wooded area or for other special situations. Horse logging is also for people who have a different perspective, those who view the forest as 'God's Garden,' (a term the Department of Natural Resources officer, John Mash, used for the forest). But for me, it's mostly a hobby." Henry agrees that horse logging is "environmentally friendly. Heavy machines generally need large areas to turn around, and their weight is dangerous to roots of other trees. Horses don't tear up the ground or the skid paths nearly as much as power equipment would. We can also preserve other trees in the woods because horses are agile and able to make sharp turns without disturbing other vegetation. From my perspective, horse logging is mostly for fun and exercise for the horses."



Previous Page: Henry Maier (left) with Bob and Barney and Leo Eby (right) with oxen Lion and Tiger, after the tree was felled.

Right: The tree was cut into eight foot lengths and then split in place into quarters, before being "skidded" by horse and oxen. Leo Eby (right) is hand-splitting the long log.

Below: Henry and the horses, Bob and Barney, pull a "quarter" apart after splitting. The horses then drag the quartered logs to an area where they could be placed on trucks (photo above).



The use of draft animals to skid logs is re-gaining notoriety not just in Western Maryland, but across the United States as well. Proponents of horse logging point to economic and environmental benefits, including cost of an animal (about \$3,000), weight of a horse, (about 2,000 pounds), and total start up costs (\$5,000 to \$10,000 versus \$50,000 to \$100,000 for power logging), as reasons to consider the traditional horse logging method of removing trees from the forest.

Where horse teams cannot compete, however, is when large scale clear cutting operations are required because the animals are too slow. According to Dan Hedderick, Forester for the state of Maryland, “We have seen a growing demand for horse logging. People like the traditional ways of logging because there is less disturbance of the forest, especially when pulling out an individual log. Horse logging can be better for selective cutting of both saw logs and veneer logs.”

Leo and Henry put their equestrian skills to the test on April 1, 2006, when a 175 year old, 100-foot White Oak tree crashed to the ground on Henry and Nancy Maier’s property in Oldtown, Maryland, an event witnessed by a group of residents who were eager to experience a glimpse into the past. However, the stars for the day were not Leo and Henry, but Bob, Barney, Prince, Baron, Tiger, and Lion, the draft horses and oxen that provided the power to extract the fallen tree from the forest. “The horses are amazing in the woods, and they really like to work,” commented Henry. Leo directed a team of Percheron draft horses, named Bob and Barney, while his friend Henry worked Prince and Baron, the Belgian draft horses.

Bob and Barney eagerly responded to the teamsters commands. Whips or rods are never used or necessary for this work because the horses are eager and quick to respond to verbal commands. For the horses, this event became a labor of love as the fallen tree was “limbed, parted, quartered,” hitched to the team and skidded out of the forest. Henry notes, “The horses are willing to work hard all day long; they really seem to look forward to the next hitch of logs.” Leo supplemented the pulling with his team of Chianina Oxen, named Tiger and Lion. Both the horses and oxen can readily pull more than their own weights



(about 1,900 pounds) depending on grade, weather conditions, and distances.

Neither team received formal training in logging. According to Leo, “I just began working them and making them familiar with the wooded environment. An important point in the learning process is to team an experienced



horse with an inexperienced one. The older horse teaches the younger one.” Henry noted that during the heyday of traditional logging when horses were commonly used, they could skid logs a half mile to a landing without a teamster behind them, drop their load, and then return to the felling site without verbal commands.

Bob and Barney demonstrate great power as they lean into their harnesses, pulling a section of log. The horses are eager and willing to work and seem to look forward to pulling the logs.



Leo has enjoyed horse logging since 2000, but it has been a dream since elementary school days after reading *Singing Wheels* (a story about the adventures of a family heading West) and other books about early American life. “After reading those books, I became interested in working animals.” Henry has enjoyed horse logging since his acquaintance with Leo following retirement several years ago. The location of his farm, a deep respect for the environment, and affection for his draft animals make logging an ideal hobby. Henry and Leo’s pastime has also shown that human needs for forest products can be met while nurturing the rural environment. 🌱



Top photo: Henry drives Bob and Barney as they pull a full log from the area.

Above: N.T. Smith poses with the stump to show the size of the white oak tree.

Right: Tiger and Lion, young oxen, look on as the horses do the pulling. The oxen are still being trained, but will eventually pull their load as well.





Above: Gentle giants, Baron and Prince shown here with Clare Maier riding Baron. Clare (owner) often rides Baron and at 18.2 hands, that's riding tall. Baron and Prince are Belgian Draft horses.

Below: Henry and Leo demonstrate the way it used to be done with the crosscut saw. A lot of skill and back pain go into using a saw of this type but a good practiced team can rip through a log like this in no time. This big tree was cut down with chain saws, not a crosscut saw.



Left: Bob and Barney, a pair of Percherons owned by Leo Eby, stand ready to pull a large log. Once the command is given these two put everything into it (see cover shot taken right after this photo). They are amazingly strong and love to pull.

Above right: Prince and Baron head home (dragging Henry along) after an evening of work.