

MIDDLE FORK OF THE KENTUCKY RIVER

CHAPTER ELEVEN

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Once the Indians left the Cumberland River at today's Pineville they went up Straight Creek and then over a rugged ridge below Peter's Rock. They then descended an extremely difficult trail along the War Trace to the Middle Fork. Every Indian trail was seen by the white people as a 'War Trace' but most were just trails into hunting grounds. Less than 2% of the lands along the Middle Fork in what became Leslie County were suitable for farming and the rest was one vast forest. It was a poor farming country but it was a wonderful area for hunters; and most of the first settlers were primarily hunters first and farmers second.

The third generation Leslie County man, Charles Wooten told of his grandfather who'd been among the first men into the county. "My grandfather was fond of hunting. He has told me a thousand bear stories. Bears were more abundant then. Most crops never failed. Peach trees always bore fruit. There were a few buffalo then, also some elk. The last buffalo killed in this region was killed by Charles Wooten on Coone Creek. Elk would eat May Apples when the plants first sprang up. The hunters would watch for them then. The deer ate ivy when food was scarce as in times of snow. It did not hurt them. At such times the hunters would find them in the ivy thickets. I have heard my father say that he had seen 60 wolves in a pack. He was afraid to shoot lest they would attack him. IN early times it was hard to keep cattle on account of bears; hogs met the same fate. It was impossible almost to keep sheep, yet clothing was to be made from the wool."The hunters would kill all the wolves, bears, elk and deer and then the only furs they had to sell were coon, skunk and opossum; and they didn't bring much. They grew corn and had gardens but they needed some cash to buy salt and items they could not make themselves. All they had to sell were trees. In 1835-1836 an estimated 1,000 logs were brought down the Middle Fork and but 2,000 from the North and South Forks. The market was poor and it was years after the Civil War before logs brought enough to make it worthwhile to enter the logging woods.

Three species of trees were the first to be logged; The Poplar, the Cucumber or 'Cuke' and the Ash. The Norse people of Scandinavia thought that mankind sprang from the Ash tree. The Cucumber grew to heights of 60 to 80 feet on rich soils, on the cool slopes or in the coves. The bark was rough but the wood was light, soft and closely grained, durable and was used in making cabinets and carriages. The Hemlock, called Spruce Pine, by the local people grew in profusion but as it was so heavy it couldn't be floated and had to be harvested later when railroads were built.

The Chestnut Knob at 2,605 feet was the furthest point from which logs were first cut. On its upper end the Middle Fork drops 11.8 feet per mile. This meant that the speed of the water and the narrowness of the stream prevented the running of rafts. . Rafts never ran above Camp

Creek which was near Hyden.

There were many splash dams built on Spruce Pine Creek to bring the logs off of Chestnut Knob. Chris Anderson, who became known as "The Pine Mountain Yarning Logger", would tell, "We took out mostly poplar logs-four, five, six feet through; they were big logs! We'd get six or eight oxen to snake them logs outa places where they fell and roll them into a valley like, where the spring rains would bring a freshlet and we'd make a kind of dam we call a splash dam. Hit was made of small logs, leaned outward at the edge, with more logs underneath. And when the rains came, they'd collect back of our splash dam. Now we build a gate at the rim of the dam, and when the logs get floatin' around, we'd pull out the gate and the water would come out like a cloudburst and the logs came with it. Often as not, the logs would seem like they was ahead of the water, but I recon we weren't a-looking straight. If the logs get over to the river, we'd have to build another splash dam and do it all over again."

There are seven fords, or crossing points, on the Middle Fork, and one of the best was at Muncy Creek. Zachariah Morgan settled on Tug Point on a flat called Hardy's Bottom. Indians had told that silver could be found on the mountain above Hardy's Bottom; enough to shoe the white men's horses. Two men were said to have found some silver; enough to make one silver coin and a bullet. They never revealed where they found it. Zachariah's twin sons, David and Elisha, were excellent hunters and would load canoes with deer hides and hams and go down to Lexington to trade for basic staples.

At the end of the Civil War Peter Bray came to Muncy Creek still healing from a fresh bayonet wound. He was said to "use no tobacco, never wore glasses and had an excellent memory." Late in life, "He often kept his listeners spellbound with stories of how he killed deer and bear on Muncy's Creek when he first settled there. He told of being attacked by a wildcat, and of being pinned all night under a log when he was hauling logs to the creek with oxen."

One day Peter was, "up in the woods logging timber. He was bitten by a big rattlesnake. He got so sick that he had to crawl out of the woods to his house. He doctored the snakebite, but after that he wasn't as strong as before." Peter Bray was 97 years old when he had been bitten by the rattlesnake.

The Cherokee had a favorite camping site on Camp Creek and Fredrick Marshall Morgan bought a large portion of land around the old camp site. Like so many of the ambitious men in the mountains he sought to make money in many ways. He hired men to drive cattle to Richmond, Kentucky and he logged and sent rafts down the river. His granddaughter Mary Biggerstaff said, "They had a lumber camp there. Grandfather and his men did the logging with steers. They hauled the logs to the river and made rafts. When the rains came the women folk began preparing food for the men who took the

rafts down."

One of the men who manned the rafts was Lorenzo Dow Lewis. Mary Brewer said, "Everyone knew him as Lew, except his old black mammy, who called him 'Lewrenz'. In young manhood he became an excellent riverman, and came to know every detail of the Kentucky River, the rocks, the rapids, inlets, places to shun, and the best places to tie up for the night. After taking a raft of timber to Frankfort, he would travel by stagecoach to Richmond and walk back to Hyden." Wishing more out of life than being a rafter Lewis walked out of the mountains to attend college. He became a lawyer and then a judge over four mountain counties.

I have written of Hyden in 'Daughters of the Mountains' and who I consider the greatest person ever in the mountains; Mary Breckenridge, who started the Frontier Nursing Service. Mary lived a short way above Hyden at Wendover. She would write of rafting. "Since our people could not afford to haul supplies to the railroad to sell, even if on mountain land they could raise more than they needed for the support of their families, their mules, and their cows, the question was often asked us how did our people get cash money with which to pay taxes and buy shoes, along with other indispensable supplies they could not raise. They got it two ways. First a great many men, when their crops were harvested and molasses had been made from their sorghum cane, rode over to the railroads to get jobs for the winter months on what they called the 'Public Works.' The coal mines that had been commercially opened along the railroads took on extra men during the winter months. They too could use extra hands for a few weeks at a time."

"So common was this custom of going over to 'public works' to earn 'cash money' that syphilis was called in those days 'the disease that comes from the railroad.' There was almost no venereal disease in our section during the early days. We think that the pioneers who explored and settled the mountains must have been free of it."

"The second way people had of making money was in felling the big timber, making rafts of these logs, and floating them down the river on the tides---. There are big tides, little tides and even flood tides. Giant logs of white oak and black walnut, linden, and poplar were cut through the winter months, snaked down the sides of the mountains, built into rafts and moored for the first spring tide. The timber depreciated in value if there was a delay of even a few weeks in floating it out. Not only did the timber bring money to its owners, but many men were paid to get it out and build and man the rafts. This work was hard and dangerous. On the Middle Fork it took from thirty to forty hours for the rafts to reach Beattyville, where they were turned over to their purchasers."

"Three men went down on each raft to steer, and to fend off the rocks with huge poles. Sometimes, for all their skill and hardihood, the rafts would be tossed by the rivers swift current onto rocks and broken to pieces. Although men were sometimes drowned, the employment was eagerly sought after. I have seen more than fifty rafts pass Wendover on one spring tide."

Most years rafts did go out on tide but there were years of no tide. Mary Breckenridge told, "Only those who lived through the great drought of 1930 can grasp, even in imagination, the magnitude of that disaster. Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kentucky were the states with the most severely stricken areas. When we, in the Kentucky Mountains, had gone through the winter and spring of 1930 with almost no snow or rain and therefore no sub-soil water, and entered upon the scorched summer months, we knew we were headed for famine."

A study was conducted of the drought stricken fields "and we figured that by January 17 per cent of our families would be entirely without food, that 55 per cent would be without food in March, and nearly 70 per cent by the first of June. Over 92 per cent would be without corn before the next harvest." Corn on the ear was fed to their horses, cows and mules and ground corn fed their family.

As mentioned before men who'd gone north to work were laid off and returned to the mountains. On just one day 40 men stood in line to ask Mary for jobs. She called the men standing there, "The Corn-Bread Line." She had no jobs for the men

"Between June and September, when the wells and spring were drying up, dysentery and skin diseases flourished. There was a scarcity of water for bathing when sometimes the nearest well lay half a mile away."

"The only thing that kept our people alive was the American Red Cross." The "Red Cross allowance (was) \$2.50 a person per month, with a maximum of \$20.00 for even the largest families." The Frontier Nursing Service "supplied canned milk and cod liver oil to over two thousand expectant mothers and young children, and gave shoes and clothing that winter to several thousand more."

"The final tragedy of the great drought lay in the total loss of the only cash crop of the people, which was timber. All through the winter months in which there was almost no snow or rain, everybody had gotten busy making the rafts to take down on the first spring tide. But there was no spring tides. The rafts lay in the deep pools of the river, or along its dried bed on the bars and shoals. Tied up in them was the only money which could have come that year in this section of the mountains."

"It was early April in 1931 that enough rain fell to bring our first tide in two years.

When all up and down the rivers word was passed that the waters were rising, the excitement was like the return of troops from war. In a few hours the rivers rose ten feet, then fifteen, and the great rafts, which had lain so long at their moorings, swung out to mid-stream. The moorings were severed and on a mighty rush of current the rafts started down. As the first ones passed, the men on them started cheering, these quiet highlanders, and the people on the shores cheered back and waved at them. Then more rafts followed and over two hundred on the Middle Fork alone and for forty miles down the river the cheering men were answered by the people on the shores. Women dropped their hoes, men stood at their plows waving their hats. Like a triumphant army the rafts swept on. The drought was broken, the heavens had opened, the harvest was to come."

Every source I'd found said that no rafts came down the Middle Fork above Camp Creek. I believed it but then I found out the sources were wrong; so we'll go back towards the head of the Middle Fork and then up Greasy Creek to Big Laurel Creek. It was there that Henry Minard said that when he first plowed his land a stench so bad arose he could barely stand to finish his plowing. He thought a battle had been fought there and the decaying bodies had produced the smell.

Many men who had been boys and never had a chance to ride the rafts recalled running to the streams and rivers when they heard the free running logs slamming into the rocks. On wider parts of the river they could hear the rafts as they banged and scraped on the rocks. Standing on the banks and watching the rushing logs and rafts was a major source of entertainment for the boys.

On Big Laurel Creek Henry Minard told of seeing the first logs floated out. "After leaving the splash dams the logs always seemed to jam in bends and pile in big heaps. These heaps would break free with a great rush." Curt Roberts remembered his father's logs "rushing out to the river where men had to work furiously to keep the logs moving but even so many logs hung up. These were later retrieved by men with no legal claim to the logs." He said "these men were just looking for easy income."

An unknown author penned a lengthy article on March 25, 1928 that was reprinted in the Kentucky Explorer in October of 2008:

"Transporting Logs Down The River Was A Treacherous Job- An Account of a Thrilling Raft Ride Down Greasy Creek in Leslie County and The Middle Fork River."

"The simple order, 'When you see the top of Devil Rock, shove off', was for a group of five steersmen, ready to launch their rafts into the seething waters of the Middle Fork of the Kentucky River. The owner of the rafts, a veteran, who had followed the river for nearly fifty years, announced he would steer the sixth. Three bow hands were assigned each raft."

"The order was given far up on Greasy Creek at daybreak on Sunday morning early in the year. The river hands had been called together the night before at the end of a two day rain. The stream was already out of its banks and still rising slowly. The roaring and the crashing of driftwood, logs, and uprooted trees, being swept down by the rushing yellow current, could be heard more than clearly from the house a mile above in a hollow of the mountain range."

"Forty mountainous miles from the nearest railroad and almost 100 miles along the river course from market, the river men became as spirited at the prospect of another battle with the river as a high school boy when the whistle is blown for his first game. Such a trip, they knew, would be flavored highly with adventure, the only chance many of them would ever have to visit the "cities down in the settlements" and ride a train. They also knew that an average of two men would start down on rafts each tide and never return."

"We are liable to run into high water after we pass the mouth of Greasy", the owner warned and told his steersmen to use their own judgment about tying up. Then as a compliment to their loyalty, he ordered the rope untied and the first was off."

"Slowly at first, the 30,000 feet of white oak timber swung lazily into the swift mid-stream, while the three bow hands, with the stem of 25-foot poplar oars above their heads, swept the paddles through the water the full length of the logs, that is, the width of the raft, and threw all their weight against the stem in a final lick. The low creaking of the oar on the heavy hickory oar-pin ended in a roar, when in throwing off the lick, a cloud of spray would envelope the bow."

"A snake-like movement would run along the raft as the flexible hickory poles yielded to the force of the oar. The drift yielded more readily to the "pulling" when it had gathered momentum in the current. In the midst of the fourth lick, the steersman called 'Hey your bow', and the paddle was lifted from the water immediately."

"The two hour trip to the confluence of Greasy Creek with the Middle Fork was a succession of slaving labor to ward off disaster at every turn, and the turns were encountered one for each length of the raft. The clumsy craft was swinging downstream with the speed of a racehorse now. The men were yelling and shouting with the joy of the moment, when all their power was not being applied to the oar."

"Greasy Creek is an almost continuous rapids from head to mouth, as those who fished around the mountainous rocks in mid-stream at low water can testify. The stream winds between hills so precipitous that squirrels may be seen passing through the treetops from one bank to the other. To men less skilled and courageous than these mountains river men, launching a raft in such a stream would have been suicide."

"Bring out the bow, the steersman yelled, as the raft shot around a point. No directions were needed, because the bow was being drawn to a slanting a rock on the left. The bow hands jumped across the oar and threw whole strength behind a full stroke that carried the bow clear. The last one-half of the craft dragged its logs across the rock with a succession of deep rumbles. The raft trembled from end to end, but the split hickory tie poles fastened to each end of the logs by seasoned basket oak pins held fast."

"Scarcely a single minute passed during the two hours that disaster did not threaten. The dragging stern had pulled the bow close to the left bank studded with jagged rocks. The current had too much of an advantage. The men, with drawn perspiring faces, used every ounce of energy. The steersman cross lifted, that is, threw the stern to the bank in their favor."

It was reported that the late John Fox Jr., Kentucky novelist, spent several weeks on Greasy Creek waiting for a 'tide' that didn't come. He had to content himself with incorporating several river stories in his novels. Probably, Kentucky's literature would have been richer if he or some other fiction writer could have recorded his impressions of this 'tide' 15 years later. The setting must have delighted him."

"If we can pass Juder Whirl and Corner Shoal today without tearing up, we will have a good chance," the steersman remarked, while tired men were resting in one of the long slow reaches after they had passed into the Middle Fork."

"Already the river was getting crowded with other drifts. At 2:00 in the afternoon Greasy Creek crew approached Juder Whirl. They were prepared by a long rest and "were hugging the point of the right, the only way of escape."

"Three acres of whirling waters filled with log rafts blocked the stream. Had there been room for one more raft nothing could have kept them out, but the whirl was full. Men were seen running along the outer rafts, waving their arms and yelling. It developed that they wanted to throw a cable to the moving rafts which would pull them out of the current."

"Short shifts of hard work were necessary at Cutshin Creek, Hellforsartin (Hell-For-Certain), Wilder Branch, and Possum Bend. The periods of rest were much longer now, and the men all gathered in the center of the craft. Possibly for the benefit of their audience, the terrors of Corner Shoal were painted in primary colors. Their stories of men being drowned and crushed to death there were not all imagination. They, perhaps, unwittingly, were giving an accurate forecast."

"Tie up. You'll get drowned if you try to go through Corner Shoals today", a group of men shouted from the bank, two miles above the shoal. The steersman will possibly have

the sympathy of automobile drivers for his remark, 'I have never let a man on the bank steer a raft that I'm on.' He calmly went ahead."

"A faint roar was audible more than a mile above the shoal. This increased to a heavy rumble occasionally punctuated by the boom-like ring of floating logs striking each other as the raft approached. The inevitable shout came just before the rafts in front were seen trying to right themselves for the plunge. The steersman was evidently puzzled. 'What is causing them to hit 'er crossways, and what is all that roaring?' he called. 'Hit her to the right a lick boys. Hey, y'e bow. What the?'"

"The trap was a wire cable from an abandoned footbridge swinging six inches below the surface."

"Hold to your oars. If you have to swim they will hold you up', the owner called as the heavy bow logs caught on the wire causing the stern to sink. He followed his own advice and came, one-half swimming and one-half walking, toward the bow with the stem of the oar in his hands. The bow was now turned one-half on its oar, but fortunately the swiftness of the water had swung the raft around, and they were able to grasp the tie poles near the lower end just as the cable was cleared."

"The raft plunged helplessly into the roaring sand breakers. Oars and every moveable thing was washed away. Men grasped the tie poles while they plunged through a succession of breakers that left them almost strangled with sand. They were weighted down with it while they dashed almost blindly in search of water to get the stuff from their eyes, ears and mouths."

"Meanwhile, the raft had been without guidance and was now plunging into the right shore, while the stern was in mid-stream with the boiling shore waters at the tail of the breakers threatened to rend the whole structure to pieces. The stern was seen to sink from sight with the steersman grasping a tie pole."

"After two minutes, the stern was washed out of the full current enough to float up. The pilot was holding yet and seemed to make no effort to get onto a safer part of the raft. Probably, he would not have had time, for the stern was thrown against a row of water birches with such force that it held against their springing tops."

"The man was on the outer edge facing the current. The raft was pivoted near the middle, and the current was forcing the bow under the water until the power of the bent saplings would raise it again. The steersman was urged to swim away but he held on. He was being forced under and up at regular intervals of ten seconds. After about five minutes of this, it was found his foot was caught between a tie pole and log, so he couldn't get loose."

"The man, by almost superhuman strength, managed to force the upper end into the current, so it would swing free. When they reached the owner, he assured, 'She is well rafted,' the truth of which they were willing to accept. His foot was released, and the immediate situation of the raft demanded their attention."

"How they ever got through alive no one could say, but they were past Rush Rock in the smooth waters of Turkey Bend. They had no oars nor anything else, except the water-logged food sack that had been fastened to a tie pole."

"This experience was one of many that Sunday. It was not difficult to find floating oars, so the raft was equipped before it had gone a mile, and the men, weary and nerve-wrecked, began to prepare for a landing."

"The site was not well chosen from the viewpoint of supplies. Two miles below they found a two room house with 15 river men wandering around. First comers had leased the floor of one room for sleeping quarters, and all that could be done was to get a promise of supper and breakfast with the understanding that 'havin to feed so many men you will have to not be choicy."

"The menu was severely simple. Following this supper, it was decided to 'lie out under a cliff'. One was found one-half mile above, and a big fire was built."

"The breakfast, an exact fellow of the supper, was hastily eaten before daybreak, and the second day of the trip began. The water is not ordinary very rough below Buckhorn, but the large number of rafts made it almost impossible to use the oars, because they were so close together. The men were cautioned to be prepared to land any time for a dangerous jam was almost certain."

"Several dangerous places were passed during the day and no trouble had come to them. The raft had passed Athol, Lee County. Calls were relayed from miles below to eddy up, that is, stay near the bank, where the current is not so swift, or the river would be blocked. Among the warnings came the cry, 'Blockade at Bear Creek.' All was excitement along the creek for a blockade meant obstruction and a hopeless jam of thousands of rafts."

"As far as could be seen downstream, men were rushing about frantically trying to land, others put it down as a false alarm and continued to float. The Greasy Creek raft followed the latter course. The steersman said he could 'tie 'er mighty quick if he had to."

"The jam was seen to be a fact when they were a quarter-mile above Bear Creek."

"No chance being seen to get to the bank, the pilot called that he would bridle her to the little sycamore that was about the length of the raft downstream. The rope was tied

near the stern and coiled for throwing. A man jumped into the forks of a tree and called for the cable. He did not get it in time to tie, and the drift had passed him several feet. Someone told him to hold the rope and jump. He was hauled through the water so rapidly, he didn't get a breath until he was pulled out."

"It was later learned that a power boat worked all the following day before thousands of rafts were released."

"Slack water from the government dam made movement very slow and monotonous when they approached St. Helen's, Lee County, to board the trains in the direction of Hazard, Perry County. Special coaches had been provided, and the conductor locked the doors to the other cars."

"There was open evidence that more than a few bootleggers had found eager customers. The whiskey and psychology of being one of a mob rather than a responsible individual possibly accounted for the turmoil that followed."

"Some of the older men tried to maintain order, but the confusion increased. No one could say how many shots were fired through the train windows. Strangely enough, no one was seriously hurt. The conductor, a man who had handled similar crowds on his trains for many years said he solved the problem of getting along with such mobs. 'I simply come to a sidetrack and set the coaches off' he said. 'I have done it many a time,' he added."

"For almost a century, timber had been the principal money crop of the Eastern Kentucky Mountains. At first the heavy growths of walnut and yellow poplar along the stream banks were chopped down and cut into lengths with an axe. When run to Frankfort, they brought 25 cents a hundred feet. Today the value of scrubby timber is worth more than 30 times that amount."

The Juder Whirl told of in the Greasy Creek raft trip was called Judy's Whirl by other men. Confusingly one man who told of Judy's Whirl was named Juder; Juder Stidham. Many of the rafters on the Middle Fork were familiar with the preaching of the Rev. George Barnes whose sermons featured a raft which drug rafters down into the "Whirlpool where Satan rages." The image of men dying as they tried passing through a whirlpool might have been in the back of Juder Stidham and the five other men who were to take two rafts through Judy's Whirl. Juder told of passing through the whirl:

"The rafts had been in the water for a long time. They were not floating very high in the water, which made it difficult to guide them properly."

"Not far from where we started was a very steep curve in the river. The curve caused a whirlpool that would tear a raft to pieces in seconds. ---this whirlpool was known to all rivermen as Judy's Whirl. Our rafts, being hard to guide, landed right in Judy's Whirl. The rafts went round and round and finally broke in two in the middle, making four pieces. We lost out food and coats."

"We managed to get the rafts back together by using cable ropes to tie them. Then the rafts floated out of the whirl and we were doing fine until one struck on a rock. The river was rising and the raft I was riding floated off the rock after we untied one of the cable ropes that was holding it together. The raft headed downstream in the shape of a vee, since only one side was tied. We were unable to get the raft tied back, and it was getting dark. The raft got completely out of control, and there wasn't anything we could do."

"As the raft passed some low-hanging boughs of some trees, the oar on the end of the raft where I was broke and was lost. I then left the raft by way of some low hanging tree limbs. In a minute or so, the half of the raft where I left hit a big rock in the middle of the river and was lost. The other two men managed to tie the other half of the raft to a tree, and we found a place nearby to spend the night."

"The next morning we tied three pieces of the raft together. Four of us went on with the raft, and the other two returned home. We got mighty cold on the trip without our coats. After we reached the market, we caught a train, rode to Combs in Perry County, and walked home from there."

"The trip was one of the last made down the Middle Fork River. I was the only one of six men that didn't have to swim during the trip. I am glad I made the trip, but I never wanted to make a second river trip."

The Bull Creek, yet another stream named for the killing of a bull buffalo, enters the Middle Fork on the left and the Cutshin enters from the right. The Indians had said the

coming together of the three streams resembled a turkey track and the white men named the area Turkey Track.

A story is told of William Begley who while living in North Carolina, "had a dispute with a neighbor over some cattle. When taken to court, the neighbor swore a lie about the affair, and William told the neighbor he would kill him. Shortly thereafter, the neighbor was going along a road carrying a baby when William shot him in the legs. For this reason William left North Carolina, and came to settle on Bull's Creek" in 1800.

By a strange twist of fate there would be a cattle camp just across from Bull Creek at the mouth of Cutshin Creek which became involved in a "Cattle War." I will tell of the Cattle War in my 'Boats on the Kentucky River' book. Cutshin Creek was named after a man who was hacking out a tray from a block of a Buckeye Tree slipped and cut his shin with his axe. To stop the bleeding the man stuck his leg in the cold water.

The water in the mountain streams and rivers always seemed to be cold. I can't recall anyone ever saying the water was warm.

There were many remains of the ancient Indians found on the Cutshin and Wooten Creek which flows into the Cutshin. Those finding the remains thought they were Cherokee. Up Cutshin, near Yediss, there is a rock known as Jaw Bone Rock, because so many jawbones have been found near it. Orme Brewer, who lived on Cutshin Creek recalled finding a skull, beads and pottery under a cliff near her house.

When Hyden Wooten was a young man he use to plow Dixon Bottom in Wooten (a tiny village). There was a rock that always caught his plow. Hyden left the country but never forgot that rock. When he returned 16 years later he dug the rock from the ground and found a skeleton sitting upright beneath it.

James C. Brewer was said to have been a peculiar men who had the habit of brushing the seat of his pants when he got up from a seating position. He became the first postmaster in Leslie County. He built a dam across the Cutshin at Wooten and set up a watermill. His son Albert was a strict disciplinarian and a man of many trades. He was a blacksmith, wagon maker, carpenter and operated a sawmill.

There are dozens of stories about the soldiers and bushwhackers that ravaged the Cutshin during the Civil War and for years after the war people were still leery of those traveling at night. George Pigg from Clay County and two other men had walked to Leslie County seeking work in the logging woods. As darkness fell they went up a lonely road that ran up a creek with banks shoulder high. The men heard a noise that kept getting closer and when they realized it was a fast approaching horse the frightened men scrambled up the bank to get out of the way. They watched as the rider "Hell-for-leather" came galloping past,

sparks flying from the horses hooves.

The men stumbled on for miles without seeing a light in any cabin when at last they saw a light in a one room cabin. They sought shelter for the night and were let in although the man and his wife already had another couple staying with them and they only had two beds. The two married couples shared a bed and the three men the other. There was no sleep that night as they all got to talking, sharing tales and happenings. The people in the mountains were very isolated and loved having company. Come daylight the women killed chickens for breakfast and the talk continued.

In March of 1868 the State Legislature had authorized \$2,000 to remove obstructions in the Middle Fork so that there would be a clear channel to run rafts. In 1885 the Mountain Echo newspaper reported, "People are logging extensively on the Middle Fork."

A tale was told by Floyd Wells of three men from Wooten Creek who were taking a raft downriver and, "the water got too high for a run. So they tied the raft to a large elm tree in a sparsely settled area. They saw a small farmhouse and made a draw to decide who would go there to get some food. The unlucky man went to the house and though the farmer and his wife were out in the barn feeding what livestock they had, there was bread and a kettle full of boiled chicken at the house."

"There was an empty pail by the stove. The man poured the boiled hen into the pail, took all the bread, and went back to the raft with the food."

"Then he said to the other men, 'I have the best people I ever met at that house. They gave me all their food and said if you need any other help, give us a call. We like to help people in need.'"

"When they had eaten all the food, the man who had stolen the food said, 'Men, I went to get the food, now one of you need to return the bucket.'"

The man that returned the stolen bucket said, "Good lady, I'm returning your bucket. I can never thank you enough for being so kind to help out and give us so much good food."

The angry woman responded with, "You rouge! You stole all our supper."

The old farmer went to get his gun and the rafter began pleading trying to convince them that he was not the guilty man. He told them, "That two low down scoundrels at the raft stole the food and I didn't know they had stolen and they paid me to bring the bucket back."

The angry farmer told the man, "You go tell them rouges to bring me \$10.00 or else I will call the law and send them to the penitentiary for housebreaking." Ten dollars was a lot of money then but it was better than going to prison so they paid them.

The Wooten and Cutshin area had been thick with White Walnut, called 'Butter Nut' Walnut. The white walnut was a smaller tree than the Black Walnut but it did reach heights of seventy feet. But unlike the black walnut the white walnut was usually forked or crooked making it a less desirable saw log. White walnut was used for the interior woodwork of fine homes and for furniture. The Black or Curley Walnut was in high demand for ornamental woodwork. Such trees were often five feet in diameter and forty feet from the first cut to the first limb, free of knots and blemishes. One walnut cut near Wooten dwarfed even these logs. Thirteen yoke of oxen were needed to move the log to the creek and the poor teamster driving the team could not see over the log.

There came a time when there were few logs to fall along the Cutshin. In April of 1922 the last raft came down the Cutshin after Chip Begley cut a "boundary of land" and invited neighbors over to put together a raft. While the men readied the raft women cooked a meal, quilted and visited among themselves. No story seems to have come down concerning this raft's trip down the river so I like to think of the rafters there waiting for the coming of a tide like that described by Mary Breckenridge:

The "rains fell upon us like torrents. Three tides in ten days left us with inundated roads, heaps of mire and quicksand, great washouts---a waste of angry waters tearing madly down the craggy slopes into the creeks and branches and bearing with them the river logs and boulders and the earth itself in landslides."

On down the Middle Fork, Pleasie Begley was sitting on a creek bank when a stranger rode up and asked for directions. Trying to make conversation Pleasie asked, 'Sure is a rough place ain't it?'

The stranger responded with "Its Hell-For-Sure."

In time the seven mile long creek would become the Hell-Fer-Certain Creek. Mary Breckenridge wrote of the creek, "We often had reason to dread the quicksand, at the mouth of which came after every tide." A woman would start a Sunday School there and it may have been the only Hell-Fer-Certain Sunday School in the entire nation. The Rev. Dickey would come and preach in the 28 by 24 school/church building and was displeased when he saw women there chewing tobacco.

What was called "The Confluence" is now the head of Buckhorn Lake but was once where the Grassy Branch, Wilder Branch and the Middle Fork met. The first members of the Huff family who came to Wilder Branch claimed to have come from Persia but their descendants claim they were of Scots-Irish descent. In the 1830's a John Huff began a thirty year search for gold and silver but never found any. There was a second John Huff who was orphaned at a young age and then tenderly raised by Polly Begley. She was poor and John went without shoes even in the coldest of weather.

One cold night Polly heated an iron, wrapped it in rags, and then put it at John's feet before she went to bed. Polly pulled back the covers and looking at John's feet remarked, "Well John your foot looks like a big Moccasin Pie." A Moccasin Pie is a baked Apple Turnover. Poor John went through life being called, "Pie Foot John."

As an adult John and his wife ran a boarding house for rafters. His wife tended her large family and prepared meals for the always hungry rafters. She fixed them supper, gave them a hot breakfast and a sack lunch for the trip.

As were so many men Sherman "Sherm" Huff was a farmer who worked in the logging woods hauling logs to the river with ox teams in 1891 before bringing Push Boats up the river hauling supplies to Hyden.

In 1918 Lew Lewis built a house for his niece to use as a boarding house for loggers but it was never used for that purpose. When Phyllis Sizemore Hefelfinger later lived in the house as a young girl her brother frightened her with ghost stories. He would say, "Do not go down by the river after dark as it is haunted. You will hear loud noises and babies crying. When it rains here at the house, blood seeps out of the ground." This ghost story seems to come from a series of three separate killings in the area.

In 1892 Moses Hignite had bought land to run a sawmill and then got into a land dispute with a Huff. This Huff lay for days to ambush and kill Moses. Then for some reason Peter Hignite killed his own brother, 'Capp.' Peter in turn was killed. I do not know the details of these killings but it was said that a "wake" was held for Capp in the little log cabin of the Hignite's. Capp was propped up in the corner and whiskey was offered to the dead Capp and then passed around to his family and friends.

The river below the Confluence resembled the river so many rafters told tales about. It seems the river was so crooked that if the rafters left their boarding house in the morning, ran hard all day, and tied up for the night, they could still walk back to the boarding house they had left in the morning. Rafters were full of tall tales.

There were rafts run from Grassy Branch. Elbert "Ebb" Herald was the sixth child in his family and his birth must have overwhelmed his father for the "same night I was born my father took another woman and left." Ebb was raised by his mother till she died and then he went to live with his father, Ebb said "Leslie County at that time, "was a very isolated country up there, mind you---there was not one foot of railroad, my father looked around and there was plenty of work to get done, and he went to work cutting logs."

"Really, if we ran short on money from one season to the other we could go to the merchant and he would supply us with what we needed: meal, flour, sugar, coffee, salt, horseshoes. But in the Fall of the year the tide would come so we could deliver a load of logs

we'd settle with him. It wasn't only us, it was quite a few of our neighbors that did it."

"There wasn't any sawmill to sell them at closer than Beattyville, a right smart piece away." There was a sawmill in the county. In 1890 Huges Morgan and his son Blevie had hauled a sawmill in two wagons from Pineville. Any logs cut below the Morgan's Mill could not be brought up the river to the mill. The lumber cut at Morgan's Mill was carried to market on log rafts or flatboats. Later there would be stave mills in the county.

Lumber firms would send price lists to the loggers. Ebb mentioned the Bellepoint Lumber Company, Noble and Hyden, Lilling Company and Bannings and Reyonlds Company. He said, "Which ever (offered) the most money that was the one we would sell too. We'd get maybe twenty five dollars a thousand feet, it'd depend on the size of the timber. Some timber brought more than others. Walnut and white oak brought thirty-five a thousand but beech and smaller grades we done well to get twenty-five." He said the buyer came and "after measuring the logs put their brands on them."

"Me being eleven years old, there was always something that a eleven year old boy can do. My daddy wouldn't let me get on the raft then but I'd help (haul the logs to the river). When I got to be seven-teen or eighteen years old I was big enough to handle an oar."

Like all boys looking forward to their first run he might have been surprised when he was told he could go. "When I got permission to go on my first trip I was looking forward to that and hoping the tide would come soon. I couldn't do my work. I had to watch the river. It was just something to imagine, to think about. I had never been down that river before. Later, after I had made a few trips, I learned that it was just work." Ebb quickly learned that, "There was no fun because there was always a possibility of anything." That 'anything' included every danger rafters faced on the river.

"We logged because it was a necessity. Back in them days when I was a young man, and during my grandfather's time and my daddy's time, they looked ahead and they seen what they needed to do and that's what they did. My father, he was always lucky, we never did have an accident. I've torn up a few rafts, but we never lost but a few logs. In logging you had to be a very strong man and you had to be a man that could face danger."

To reach the river with their logs, "(We) cut roads through the hills and hauled our logs down to the river banks with work oxen and horses. At the river we made rafts. If it were real big logs-anywhere from twenty-four to twenty-eight inches (in diameter) we would take about sixty-five logs (in a raft). If they were smaller logs-anywhere from eighteen to twenty-two inches-we'd take seventy-five to eighty on a raft, which would amount from eight to ten thousand (board) feet, depending on the length of the logs."

He told of the difficulties of making up a raft. "One time we were rafting and it was an

awful cold time. I had a younger brother, you might say a half-brother, the same woman wasn't our mother. Farris was six months younger than I was. Me, Jasper Langan and my daddy was down in the water and me and Farris was using augers. You always have to have augers to raft with, to bore through the tie poles." This auger was not a small brace-and-bit but nearly as tall as a man. "A man could stand upright and turn the auger at the bend in the tool which was about chest high."

Using the auger "was the hardest work of the whole bunch, boring holes. We was rafting (and) we (had) a five quarter auger---We'd take turn about. Maybe I'd use one half the day and he'd use the other half day. Along in the evening he (Farris) was using the five and he gave out o something. So Farris went up on the bank and he went to driving the team and rolling these logs in the water."

"Well he wasn't suppose to roll these logs in the water until we were ready for them. Sometimes I would go out and bring them under the tie pole, and sometimes Jasper would go out and bring them out. This time he (Farris) let down a big poplar log down under the tie pole, he turned another one loose and this log hit the one I was on. That caused waves and whenever he turned that one loose, why four more appeared!"

The four logs, "rolled, left the water bouncing up and down, pitched me towards the raft. Naturally I went down. Way down. When I come up, I come up under the raft. Jasper Langan was watching me and when I went under the raft he grabbed this other spike pole, and when I came up he give me a shove toward the deep water. That way when I come up the second time I didn't come up under the raft, I come out in the water. Well naturally when I come up out of the water he didn't wait for me to attempt to swim or anything, and I don't guess I could. So he reached out with his spike pole and got my clothes." Jasper's actions undoubtedly saved Ebb's life.

When Ebb was asked why Farris had sent all those logs into the water at the same time creating a danger for the men making up the raft. They wanted to know if there been any trouble between him and Farris. Ebb would say his brother did have a 'strange turn' but he and Farris had always gotten along.

"When we would get the logs rafted together and there comes a tide of the right depth of the water we would get people to ride these logs down. You couldn't turn a raft loose when the water was too high and too swift. If you did you would lose it: you couldn't control it with your oars. Whenever the tides would get at the right stage we'd turn our raft loose and sometimes if it were a real heavy raft it took four men to turn it. If it wasn't too big three men would be alright, two in the bow and one in the back."

When asked why he had quit logging and rafting he replied, "One year when we bought a boundary of timber up on Grassy Branch---we had to haul our logs about four and a half

miles on a wagon. We'd leave home before daylight, we'd get home after dark. So that was hard money and I guess that was one thing maybe enticed us (to quite logging.)" Ebb left unsaid the fact that these men operated on borrowed money and raising the capital to pay the labor costs became harder as the profit margin all but disappeared due to the high cost of moving the logs to the river.

The Elkhorn Creek comes in from the left and Bert Begley said it was possible to walk across the Middle Fork at the shoals there but the rocks were slippery and if you weren't careful you could fall in. Bert said that "There were so many Begley's each set was given a nickname to tell who was descended from whom. My family is the White Eye set."

He told of logging on the Elkhorn whose head lay near that of Hell-Fer-Certin and Bullskin Creek which ran into the South Fork of the Kentucky. Bert said "The trees were cut by a crosscut saw then hauled to a ramp by mules or a yoke of cattle. The ramp was built on a steep place and filled with two or three logs, with two poles on each side." From this ramp logs could be rolled up and loaded onto a tram car. He said "tram rails were laid up to the ramp and ran to about where the Elkhorn School was on Elkhorn Creek."

"They engineered the tram line by eyeing it out, taking advantage of the lay of the land. The rails were of steel and the crossties wood. The steel was hauled by teams of mules or oxen. The crossties were cut by men using broad axes on the Elkhorn. The tracks were braced by running them between two big trees that were fairly close together. They would pin the crossties to the trees by boring holes through the crossties and then to the tree. They used hickory wooden pegs to hold them together."

"Of course, the tram car ran without power. There was one man on the back of the car to guide it and brake it. If there was a low place in the land the rails were built up on a post. They had to keep it fairly straight and at a downwards slant. They had to go down the hills with great speed, so as to make it up the next hill."

"I have heard people say that when Ance Estep would go down the steep hill at Pud Wests on Ned's Fork that his shirt tail would be standing straight out behind him. It was considered a great skill to be able to run a tram car. You really had to know what you were doing. If you threw the brake too soon it would wreck the car. Some were killed at it. Polly Barger told about her brother, Leige Hamblin being killed on Ned's Fork when a tram car wrecked." Her brother Leige was just sixteen when he was killed in 1916.

The tram cars Bert wrote about were set on four to six wheels and were just six to eight feet long as longer cars wouldn't have stayed on the rails when loaded with logs. One large or two smaller logs could be put on each car. If there were not too steep of a grade a second car could be hooked onto the first car. The cars were drawn back up to the top of the grade by mules or oxen.

Logs were sent down to the Corner Shoals by Justice B, Begley with the brand of E.B. The Corner Shoals was a gathering place for the local men. Whiskey drinking was a major source of entertainment along the river. A favorite toast was:

Father, Son and Holy Ghost

The one that drinks the fastest

Can have the most.

One dark night men were sitting around a fire at the Corner Shoal drinking, joking, and telling ghost stories. Surrounded by total darkness it would have been easy for the men to visualize frightful 'haunts' out beyond the flickering firelight.

Then down the slow moving water a barely discernible form came drifting out of the blackness. Ever so slowly it came exposing a mouth, a big nose, and the biggest eyes the men had ever seen. The more timid men began to back away from the fire but Beige, who was either braver than the rest; or drunker, stood his ground saying, "I'm staying. I'm not afraid."

His best friend Joe told Beige, "I'm leaving it with you because it is too big for me."

Taking out his .38 pistol he fired it at the oncoming monster and then called out to his frightened buddies beyond the light of the fire, "I've got him caught."

His friend Joe hadn't retreated as far as the other men so he relayed the message, "Come on back we've got it."

Having stopped the monster Beige wasn't willing to share the credit and called out, "Well, I'm the fellow that got it."

When the men returned Beige was sitting astride a huge log with a big Z painted on the end. It was a loose log with a brand.

The present day Buckhorn Lake, built as a flood control measure, has changed forever where the mouths of creeks use to be. Buckhorn Creek received its name in 1816 when Jerry Smith killed a four point deer and hung the antlers over Buckhorn Spring. Jesse Bowling came to Leatherwood Creek about 1800 and seven generations of people lived in Bowling Town. The town had churches, a school, grocery, blacksmith shop and saw mill. All this and the people were swept aside for the construction of the lake.

The bottoms along Buckhorn Creek were filled with gigantic walnut and polar logs festooned with grapevines as thick as Jerry Smith's legs. These trees drew loggers. Johnny Mason Taulbee said his uncles came from Negro Branch in Breathitt County to log. "Uncle

Nellius and Uncle Miles would go to Buckhorn every fall and work until the weather got bad and then they would come home. This gave them money for clothes and other things they needed during the winter. They worked for Mowbray and Robinson Logging Company. Uncle Neelius and Uncle Miles helped work all the timber out of Buckhorn.”

Logging and rafting here was just as dangerous as it was throughout the mountains. Ronnie Gay told of his great Uncle Chester Gay. “He lost his arm as a young man when he was helping his brother-in-law, John D. Hoskins (Ronnie’s grandfather), tie a raft of logs to the shore to spend the night when Uncle Chet threw the cable across the water. Somehow the cable snapped back and caught Chester’s arm and pulled it off. They were floating logs downriver to sell. The hardship did not deter Uncle Chet from becoming a very fine schoolteacher.”

The schoolteacher Henry Howard also ran the rafts. In 1918 he remembered a raft which was made up of oak and poplar and was five hundred feet long and took a crew of thirteen to take it down to Miller Creek below Beattyville. The Middle Fork had grown in size as it had been fed by many creeks but a log raft of that length was unusual on the Middle Fork.

I do not know if Henry and Miller Howard were related as there was just a brief note saying; “Miller Howard was married but a short time to Martha Cook when he boarded a raft and was never seen again.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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Those men who worked on the river always spoke of a Coal Tide, A Salt Tide, a Raft Tide, and in the last years of the striping every log out of the mountains, a Tie Tide.

Any man who has ever worked in the woods considered the Oak Tree to be special. It had always been that way. The Oak was held in high regard by the Greeks, Roman, Teutonic and Celtic people. The ancient Druids held their religious rites in oak groves. The mountain people may not have known of these ancient people but they knew their Bible.

Abraham entertained an angel under an oak. Gideon was sitting under an oak when an angel spoke to him. Saul and his sons were buried under an oak. Rebecca's nurse, Deborah, was buried under "The Oak of Weeping". King David's beloved but rebellious son Absalom was slain after riding his mule under a oak and catching his hair in the branches.

The White Oak of the deep woods reaches heights it never does in the open fields. The crown is narrower as the tree extends itself upwards to reach the sun as it competes against surrounding trees for sunlight. The trunk is free of limbs and knots which make it ideal for barrel staves. Kentucky's famed whiskies and Bourbon are aged in white oak barrels. The white oak was used because of the density of the wood. When Maple or even Apple-wood was used the barrels leaked too much. Up to 3% of the whiskey put in a white oak barrel was absorbed into the wood.

Small white oaks were used to make railroad ties. Mention has been made of ties cut at a saw mill but huge numbers of ties were cut in the woods. Men and half-grown boys wielding broad axes stood beside the round tree trunk and chopped four sides to square the tie. This was called Tie Hacking and the men were called Tie Hackers. I knew the older Ray brothers well and they told me their father, a small man of 5'5", would carry a tie out of the woods on his shoulder. Once their father was told he couldn't carry two ties. The small man stood as two men lifted a tie on each of his shoulders and he walked out of the woods with them.

Writing about railroad ties Mary Verhoff told, "The industry has been a boon to the farmers. Some of them 'follow' tie-making as a business. These men receive twelve and one half to fifteen cents a tie for their labor which consists in making the ties and sliding or snaking them to a navigable stream or wagon road. When this part of the work is done by the owner of the timber a considerable profit is realized, especially when transportation is by water. Hauling to the railroad, which costs about two cents per mile, reduces the profit." She said that a team of horses would pull a wagon load of twelve ties.

My father worked at a saw mill in Cabool, Missouri in the 1930's and he saw farmers bring in a load of ties. He said the famer and his wife sat on the seat and five, six and seven kids had sat on the ties. After the ties were sold the famer bought crackers and cheese for

his family and then they stood down at the railroad depot. When the passenger train came in a Black Porter stepped off and put a small stool on the ground. He would pull out a whisk broom and dust the stool off before the passengers descended. The Black Man always pretended he never saw the family gawking at him. These people had never seen a Black man before.

"The Kentucky Railroad Commission in 1905, reduced rates on ties, which in some instances had been two and a half times as high as those on low grade lumber, a much more valuable commodity. The producer had thus been forced to sell to the railroad, or ship by water."

Whenever possible logs were snaked to a riverbank where hackers worked them into ties eight feet long and six by eight inch widths. Thirty ties were lain lengthwise in the river to make a raft. A second raft was then made and attached to the first raft with a coupling pole which kept the rafts far enough apart so the whole raft could bend around the curves on the river. In the lower river, where it widened out, many rafts were joined and 1,500 ties formed a raft that could reach 2,000 feet long. This size raft created nightmares for the lockkeepers further down on the river as the raft had to be dissembled at each lock and then put through the lock a section at a time. There were 14 Locks and Dams on the Main Kentucky River.

Tie-rafts ran in smaller tides than that required for log rafts. Green oak wouldn't float but dried or seasoned oak would. The ties had an uncanny ability to push through gravel beds. The current pushing from behind caused the ties to work up and down and that scooted the gravel out of the way. Tie rafts could run in several inches of water; however they were slow moving. Fishermen use to catch rides on the tie rafts and cast in front of the raft to try catching fish scared up by the raft.

Two or three men were all the crew needed to begin a run. The men would lash their gear, food and bedrolls to the first raft in line as this raft tended to stay together even if the second raft was torn apart in rough waters. One rafter rode the bow and a second manned the stern. To make a bend in the river the stern man sunk his pole into the bottom of the river and snubbed hard against the side of the raft causing the bow to swing the direction need to round the bend. Crossing a shoal both men poled to help the raft work its way over the rocks and gravel.

Slow water in the deep pools between the shoals required the men to pole. Each man took a side and putting their pole on the river bottom, leaned hard against the pole and then walked steadily to the stern. This was repeated over and over again until they reached the swifter water; or another Damn shoal. Tie rafts were not as dangerous to run as log rafts but they required hard work to take down.

