

James Hoover

12/97, T1, S1

- JG: And interview with James Hoover of Imbler, Oregon on December 2, 1997. [tape paused] ...born and the place and then when you got here.
- JH: I was born in Macintosh, South Dakota in 1914. Me and another fellow and my mother came out here in 1937. We didn't have any job to come here and I had never seen a tree fall. My partner he had been in the CCs and he had seen trees fall. We, through luck, got a job with Cec Kelly. Cec was gypoin' for Mt. Emily. Started a job in the fall of 1937 and we got a job with him. We were pretty green. In fact, we were even worse than that. We kept at it until Kelly's job shut down and then we wintered up there on Meadow Creek. Then we was going up into Idaho. Before we went up I went and saw Bruce Morehead to see if we had a chance to get a job with Mt. Emily when the started up the first of the season in '38. He told us that we could get a job there so we came back then and went to work there in 1937. We put in a tent there at River Camp, we batch'ed, him and I. My mother was living here by that time in Imbler. We cut logs clear up until December of 1937 working out of the River Camp. Then they moved several of us saws up to Frog Heaven Camp. We worked up there then until I think it was the last part of February before the wood shutdown. Then we worked up there then the fall of 1939. I worked at Frog Heaven when they started to put that railroad down on Camas Creek. Then I was called down to headquarters to go to work with old John Stevens, an old Greek. His partner had quit and they said go down and work with him until he gets another partner. So I went down to start to work with old John and we were both satisfied and I worked with him for two seasons, 1939-1940. Then I went back to my original partner then.
- JG: Was that still cutting logs?
- JH: Still cutting logs.
- JG: Was that with the crosscut?
- JH: That was with a crosscut.
- JG: Yeah, still working with a crosscut.
- JH: No chainsaws goin' up there then, yet.
- JG: Was that all horse skidded then?
- JH: No. The horse skidding was in real tough ground where Cats couldn't get. There was only one place. Now, just above that rock dam at the mouth of the meadow the draw takes off to the west – I think they called it Draw Seven at that time. They put two gangs of us in there cuttin' for the teams and we cut that whole thing out. My partner and I cut out the north slope and the Mobley brothers cut out the south slop. That was all skidded with teams. Some of that wasn't too bad of ground. They wanted to keep... Apparently, they wanted to keep the horses workin' and they had plenty of work for the Cats in other places so they just put them in there and we worked there for a long time.
- JG: What kind of timber were you cutting in there on those two different slopes?
- JH: We were cutting mostly pine up until the war started. After Pearl Harbor we started cutting a little more other stuff. In fact, we started cutting quite a little

- spruce. But there was no spruce in that Draw Seven. The spruce was up the river clear up towards Chicken Hill. We used to go clear up on that Chicken Hill Road and then take off to the east of a draw that took off there and clear up into a big flat. There was some spruce in there that we cut. That was before we got moved back down onto Draw Seven. Right after Pearl Harbor we cut clear up Chicken Hill there a bunch of us. They were skiddin' up there, too.
- JG: What do they do then? They took and... With the decks were they hauling that to the railroad?
- JH: That was being hauled out with trucks and being hauled down to River Camp, a deck down on the river at River Camp. Then River Camp was loadin' out trains then. The trains were coming down to Hilgard and being picked up by the main line and take them into La Grande to the mill. It was quite a way to log. I imagine it was quite expensive, I don't know.
- JG: Do you remember about how much they were being cut in a year's time out there?
- JH: It's a little hard to tell for me. They were cutting millions of feet, I know.
- JG: I remember seeing a picture where they had the logs stacked on the railroad up the Grande Ronde someplace. It might've been around River Camp where they were just train car after train car loadin' 'em out.
- JH: That would be... They would be loadin' them out of River Camp. If there was anything lower below '37, below 1937, it might've been down on that big landing at Beaver Creek. After 1937 there wasn't anything loaded out of Beaver Creek as far as I know. I think it was all loaded out of River Camp and Frog Heaven, I believe.
- JG: Do you remember going up from Orodell here just out of the canyon going up towards Hilgard what the vegetation was like up the river there?
- JH: It was just pretty much brushy about like it is now. I don't think there was too much change in it.
- JG: 'Cause there's quite a few cottonwoods down along the river there. Of course when they put in I-84 they've changed some of that river up, location wise. But it's just about the same then? 'Cause right now there's, of course, quite a few big cottonwoods up through there.
- JH: I think they were quite a few cottonwoods then. Then there's been some fires, been some little fires along that river, too, that's cleaned out some of the stuff that used to be there. The stuff that used to be there is about the same as in the other groves, pine and a few scrubby tamaracks and stuff.
- JG: Do you remember from there up to River Camp as far as beaver for like beaver dams or any beaver activity over the years?
- JH: No, there wasn't any at that time, I don't believe.
- JG: I remember in 1955 I came out here and it had to be up there towards the guard station someplace there were some beaver dams there. When we were surveying I remember falling in one of those things.
- JH: I think that the beaver were startin' to come back. I think they were startin' to let 'em populate again.
- JG: There's quite a few... What I've researched there's quite a few years they're just hardly existent and then the Game Commission started transplantin' some in the late '30s to bring the population back up again.

JH: They were protected back then, but then if there was any of 'em loose I don't think anybody was protecting 'em very much. If there was any hides on 'em, they got 'em.

JG: That or if they caused any problems.

JH: They wouldn't have caused any problems up the river.

JG: No, I was thinking down in the valley more that if their damming streams up or flooding or that type of thing or ditches. Do you remember... Of course all that was way before the dam at Perry. Do you recall anybody saying anything about when that was taken out of there? In 1926 is when they moved that mill over to Pondosa. That big log holding dam was still in there for that operation. Of when that might have been taken out?

JH: I don't know. I think it was out... I think it was out before 1937, though.

JG: I had on that history of La Grande they showed an early 1930s and it would've had to been probably somewhere they were blowin' at that time, probably between 1926 when the mill went out they moved everything. I didn't know if they lasted that long or if it was earlier when they actually took that out. Then they had another picture I've seen that had it identified and above Perry and another dam that was above there, but I could never tie that one down. It showed crossing the river and the railroad tracks on that. I don't know if you've ever heard anything or seen anything about that.

JH: No. There was a... There was a piece in one of the old papers, a reprint of some old news, one time that the river was surveyed for railroad clear from Hilgard clear up Chicken Creek one year and they was gonna go clear over the hill with it. The next year they never surveyed it. That was surveyed and I can't remember where... I kept that paper, but I don't know where it is. It was a reprint of some old news.

JG: I'd never heard of that one.

JH: I'll run across it someday and when I do I'll hand it to you.

JG: Yeah, it'd be interesting. I didn't realize that they'd gone clear up to Chicken Creek for logging there. I knew they were around Tony Vay's meadow, that Mt. Emily had property in there.

JH: That was all truck loggin' out there. If the trucks hadn't come in and hadn't got started I suppose they wouldn't put a railroad up there alright. But then this was a railroad that was going to be a commercial railroad.

JG: Do you recall anything of salmon runs over the years up the Grande Ronde of either seeing fish or knowing anything about what time of year and numbers or anything like that?

JH: I don't recall much about the salmon. There was a few up there. I was not working up in that part of the country at that time of year when the salmon fishin' was goin' on. About all I ever know about it is hearin' some of the fellows talk about fishin' for salmon.

JG: Do you know about where that would've been where they were actually doin' the fishing?

JH: It would've been up... I believe above Tony Vay's. Or it could've been anywhere there was any chance of catching any. I'm not very up on salmon fishing.

JG: How long have you lived here in Imbler?

JH: Ever since 1938. I moved here in the spring of 1938, almost sixty years.

JG: Do you recall much change in conditions of vegetation of the river out here around this area?

JH: This river out here gets pretty dry in the summertime because there's so much water being taken out of it. It goes down pretty much. There are a few beaver down in here in along the river. I've seen 'em.

JG: Was that in more recent years?

JH: Yes. That's been, oh, not for the last few years because I haven't been down there, but it's been... Twenty years ago I was down there fishing one time and there were bank beaver, went out of the banks down there. They didn't have dams or anything, they just seemed to be working right out of the banks.

JG: How far down was that?

JH: That was just down here by the...the name of that bridge...

JG: The old bridge, the old highway?

JH: No, it's not a highway it's just a bridge that runs across to the east side. No, the highway bridge down there I don't think there's anything much down there except that's a very narrow spot there where that old bridge was.

JG: Do you recall... Weren't there quite a few blue heron nestin' down in the canyon there?

JH: I think there was a few. I don't remember there being very many, though.

JG: I just vaguely recall, that's been probably back in the '60s, where there were some nests, kind of a little spot there where they had a rookery. What about flood years? Do you recall anything about when you've had some real problems in this area?

JH: Yeah, 1965, wasn't it?

JG: December '64 was the one big flood where the rain hit the snow up the Grande Ronde and flood the whole valley out.

JH: Everything just slid down into the valley. I think that it...wasn't it just after the first of the year that it took the railroad bridge out here?

JG: Yeah. I think it was about Christmas is when it started. Of course there's such a volume of water coming down that... That's when it took the John Day bridge out down the Columbia and flooded this whole country. I don't remember the exact date that it took the Spruce Street bridge out, but it got that and there was a railroad bridge there – I saw a picture – there in Island City.

JH: Yeah, it took one of the bridges out. It took something out above that Island City bridge.

JG: Right there is the Spruce Street bridge, it took that whole thing out there at the park area. Do you remember about how long that water lasted? The high water? As far as being in the fields or how extensive that was?

JH: No. Some of the farmers would know more about that. There was a big low spot over there on the Cove highway, off to the north of the Cove highway where somebody had a tractor...a Cat sitting out there. It went in there and covered that Cat completely up. Finally, later on you could see the exhaust pipe sticking up. Finally they went in with a long line and hooked onto it and pulled it out. That stayed there for a long, long time. That was the highest water I think we've ever had here that I ever knew.

JG: I remember seeing it from up on Mt. Harris – we were working up there in the Forest Service – and could see that whole valley there. It looked like two-thirds of the valley was under water.

JH: My mother was living at Hot Lake there in that Hot Lake nursing home. I climbed up on the hill above there and I took two pictures down across there just side to side. I got that whole area there and it was all water, just a sheet of water.

JG: ‘Cause that’s all Catherine Creek there. I don’t think Catherine Creek came out too much, but then there’s so much snow around it it melted.

JH: Yeah, it just went down there and stayed. Then of course Hot Lake itself was low. Hot Lake was filled up with water and clear out this side and everything to the highway the only thing that was open was the highway and the railroad, if I remember.

JG: Do you ever recall any of the Indians fishing or being over in this country?

JH: They were fishing up Catherine Creek quite late. They were fishing up here...it was after they started talkin’ about that dam on Catherine Creek. I was up there one time with a bunch of us went up there fishing and we wasn’t catching anything. We were camped there and settin’ around and all at one some Indians came right up the creek with spears. I went out and talked to some of ‘em. They said they wasn’t gettin’ anything either. They said they just couldn’t see anything.

JG: Do you remember about what year that would’ve been?

JH: That would’ve been about...I’d say probably in the early ‘70s.

JG: That report for the dam was I think ‘74 is when they got into doing all the Corp of Engineers studying that.

JH: I think this was right after that. I think these Indians were just establishing the fact that they were still fishing, that’s about all. According to what that one told me he said, “we didn’t find anything.”

JG: Had you fished up there before or been up there when they did have...?

JH: I had never had, no, but there was friends of mine that had been fishing up there years ago back in the ‘20s and ‘30s. Jan, this is Jerry Gildemeister.

JG: Hi, Jan.

O: I was getting flour and I heard you talking about that. I didn’t know if you had pictures of that flood where it took the bridges out or not.

JH: No, I didn’t.

O: These are mine I took. That’s all that’s left of my friend’s home.

JG: You got this dated, then?

O: This is August of ‘65.

JH: August of ‘65.

JG: Oh yeah, afterward. ‘Cause it was in December of ‘64 when the water started.

JH: Then it got real bad in ‘65.

O: This is the underpass and here’s another picture, I took two of that house. This is the meat plant there on the river at Riverside. But I didn’t know if you had these or anything. These are mine. If you want to take them...

JG: That’s be great.

O: So’s I get ‘em back.

JG: Sure. I'll make a copy. I remember the underpass bein' where it was right up to the railroad.

O: This was down there by Riverside...I mean by the...on the river. That's my friend's house. That's all that was left of it.

JG: I remember that was really damaging there, that whole area. If we could just set 'em aside here and then...

O: Yeah, you can take 'em and use 'em, Jerry.

JG: Great. I appreciate it.

O: Boy, when she called me we were just hauling her stuff out up to my place.

JH: Do you want an envelope to put that in, Jerry?

JG: I can set 'em here.

O: Glad to meet you, but I just wanted to...

JG: I appreciate it.

O: I'm baking fruit cake.

JH: Jan, what year would your dad used to fish up Catherine Creek for salmon?

O: Dad and Grandpa and I?

JH: You was too small to fish up there.

O: No, I fished up there with 'em, too.

JH: Do you remember?

O: That was before Grandma died, so...from '42...

JH: But was you catching anything?

O: Oh yeah. Granddad caught one great big one. I was standing right there watching. Yeah, he caught one... I think it was about sixteen-pounder if I remember right. I have the figures over at the house. Daddy caught some up the upper Catherine.

JH: Was that up toward the park area?

O: Up towards the park, yeah. Because I remember...it was about '45 or '46, about '46 because he bought me a peasant blouse. That's how I remembered. I remember my first peasant blouse, real ruffley, you know how they used... I was fishing with him and all of a sudden he reached over and he dropped a little fish down my back. [laughs] Then at the dam there at Catherine Creek we used to fish for salmon there.

JG: Was that at the hatchery?

O: Yeah. Right over by Union. You can't get in there now.

JG: There's the... This was back in the '20s, though, there was a little dam there where the hatchery was, but then up where the water intake...is that the one you're talking about where the water for the city of Union?

O: Yeah, came in. No, Grandpa...I remember him taking me fishing all the time through there.

JG: What did you use to fish with? Just poles?

O: Granddad just had his old bamboo pole that he made. My sister and I've been trying to find it after my aunt...we had to move my aunt to the nursing home and we can't find it. She's found one. Granddad made our own bamboo, yeah, he made our own poles and put together.

JG: Do you remember seeing many fish in there?

O: To a kid then all those salmon there were...we'd remember.

JG: But I meant actually seeing ‘em coming up the river?

O: Oh yeah.

JG: What time of year was that, do you recall?

O: We fished there spring and fall, both runs. I remember that we were always fishing up there. That’s where I first seen my first salmon. Granddad caught one and he made an outline of it, you know, a little fish so he could keep it and I think it was about like this. Of course to me it looked like this when I was a kid, but it was a nice-sized one for this area. I’ve been fishing ever since I was big enough to walk – and hunt. I think Mother... I still have it, I don’t know where the picture is. Mother had one of my first hunting and fishing outfit. They bought me a little red jacket and pants.

JG: Do you remember doing anything up the Grande Ronde as far as fishing for salmon or seeing anything?

O: No. The only thing that I think that I can remember is we always went up there for trout, up the Grande Ronde. Wallowa Lake we always fished for yank. Of course then they changed the water way up there and yank went away for a while. You know where the lodge came down?

JG: Yeah.

O: Our Uncle Bing had the lodge and my granddad used to help him. The yank would spawn up that way. I remember just seeing them just... That’s when the elk were up there before they come in and killed ‘em all that one time. I’ll leave you gentlemen.

JG: Thanks.

O: I don’t know. Dad knows more than I do. That’s all I remember, those kinds of things. Hunting and fishing was my life.

JH: Her dad used to use a snorkel deal. They had a deal fished up with a glass and then he’d look down in and look for salmon. [recording interruption] ...was against the wall. I know her dad used to...told me a lot of times of usin’ that thing. He said, “oh, it was fine, we can see anything down there.” [laughs]

JG: I know way back they used to pitchfork ‘em I guess into the wagons and jig ‘em and everything else, just anyway to catch. Back there in the first part of the century Duane West over here talked about his grandfolks I guess used to pitchfork ‘em the same place that Jan was there right at Catherine Creek. Do you recall anything along the Grande Ronde when they’re building I-84 – or it was I-80 at that time – as far moving the creek or anything during that construction time? Were you up there?

JH: I know a lot of places...there were several places that it was before they moved it. Down this way from the Hilgard Junction the old road used to be on the north side of the canyon. It went along there and then it crossed on a bridge which you can still see the remnants of it there yet. There was a farmhouse...not a farmhouse, but there’s a house just above the road there. It’s still there yet, some people living in that yet. Just above that then that road crossed over onto the other side of the bridge. It crossed over the railroad track and crossed over the river on an overhead bridge that the ropes swung around like that. There was a restaurant, a good little restaurant, set in there right along side of it and a filling station and

everything. The road ran along and...let's see, how the devil did it go? It had to cross back over the river someplace between there and Hilgard Junction.

JG: I've got the old aerial photos that I can track that. I just didn't know if there was anything special as far as vegetation along that river where they took out, as you recall?

JH: I don't believe they did. I don't believe that there was anything of importance except just brushy stuff about like what grows along the river up above there that was in there that they moved, took out. But they straightened the river in a few places along there a little bit.

JG: Guys ask me one thing, do you recall anything about when they were logging cottonwood of what they would've used that for?

JH: I don't recall them ever logging cottonwood.

JG: I don't know anything about that except when the settlers first came here there were some settlements right on the creek where there's probably cottonwood for the cabins.

JH: They wouldn't use cottonwood for the cabins, I don't believe, if they could get to the timber.

JG: That was over in Catherine Creek. I don't think anything existed 'cause that was a long ways from timber, but that was in 1860 so I kind of think they might've used it at that point.

JH: They would've, yeah.

JG: It wouldn't last very long, I know that.

JH: It would last alright if they got good straight stuff and kept it dry there would still be signs of it there. There was probably over in Catherine Creek up in there places that was probably cottonwood that were straight enough to use.

JG: I'd never heard of 'em logging cottonwood, but that came up in the discussions with somebody that indicated that they cut cottonwood and we're just trying to see if anybody knew about...

JH: Up above Tony Vay's as you turn...isn't that Fly Creek that comes in right above that?

JG: Sheep Creek.

JH: Yeah. We sliced out some road up there one time after a logging season and there was a lot of big tamaracks along there. Those big tamaracks had been chopped into up about, oh, about that high off the ground, just about axe high. They had been strips of 'em chopped into about that high, about that much of a strip, and that wide. It had growed out and over 'em so that it was way out over 'em. Some of the fellows there, the old-timers that were raised back up in the Flora country and country up in there that knew, and said that was...they was testing for shakes when they done that. It was logical because those big tamaracks looked like they would just make enough shakes to cover all the buildings.

JG: I remember up by Starkey there were some really massive tamaracks back in the '50s and '60s in there. They're just really large.

JH: There was a lot of them test places chopped out in them big trees. There was probably six or seven of them along there along the creek. That's kind of an open creek in there. There isn't much timber out a little ways, but along where they



were going to make the road there was a lot of lodge pole and stuff they were cuttin' out.

JG: Would they make the railroad take the Cats to push the roads up through there?

JH: They would take the Cats and doze out the stumps and punch in the roads. The slashers... All the slashers would do was just fall trees and burn 'em and burn the brush and stuff and get them off. Then of course if there was a stump that was too big the Cats couldn't handle it the powder monkeys would shoot it later on. I don't know when that road was put in, but I think this was in 1940, I believe, is when they slashed that road out. Maybe it was 1941 or '2...it wasn't '42, it was 1940 or '41.

JG: Was that the one going up toward Chicken Creek?

JH: No. It was the one that was takin' off to the west just above Tony Vay's.

JG: Oh, to Sheep Creek.

JH: Yeah. The one up Chicken Creek was already put in by that time. They tried to put those roads in about a year or two ahead of the time they were gonna log to let 'em get settled and get hard.

JG: Do you remember anything about the mining up the upper Grande Ronde and the dredging?

JH: Up in there there is the old...what the dickens is the name of that old mine?

JG: Camp Carson was the big one.

JH: Camp Carson was up above up on the side of the mountain, up on the side of the flat there. But down below right along the river there's one there that comes in right there...do you know where Vera Creek comes in?

JG: I'm not familiar with that one.

JH: Right across from Mirror Creek from the south there's an old tunnel that comes in from the river – it won't show any probably now – but that used to be quite a tunnel.

JG: There's the Rainbow Mine and the Indiana Mine.

JH: Indiana's the one, I think. Indiana came in right straight across from Mirror Creek and it had rails in it at one time. I was never to go close to the thing because I was afraid of it. There was always water in it and there was water worked out of it and it was always rusty so there was rails back in there quite a ways. Then across from it there was a mine that people were working on a little bit off and on and have ever since, that was in the mouth of Mirror Creek. Mirror Creek comes in kind of from the north. Then there was other mines in there and there were dredgings in there below that a little ways and there were dredgings in there above that. So there'd been dredgings in there quite a little while after the Indiana Mine was being used.

JG: Do you remember anything about when that dredging was done at all?

JH: It had to been done...let's see... Camp Carson was discovered and started in 1865, I believe, so this was probably done about the time that other dredgings were going on, about the time that other dredgings were getting popular, and this might've been just a little bit later. I don't think it was ever quite as successful as it was over across...

JG: I guess there's so much clay in there from what...I was up at the Mining...Geology Division there and they had some of that written down where it's hard to separate some of that gold out of...

JH: Clay is dynamite when you're working. My gosh, you know, him and I after we came here, Doug Post and I, we went up and worked up in Idaho, up in Moscow. Out east of Moscow there was a mine out there that the Chinamen had worked years and years ago and then an old Irishman came in and he worked it later on. The Chinamen had put tunnels in and then the water had got in and tore the tunnels out. The Irishman he put in a few tunnels. We was working in places in the side of the bank. We had a sluice box and we were getting a little gold. We had some clay and the clay was getting as much gold as we were getting. I'll tell you, it was just impossible! That darn clay would go down through that sluice box and just pick your gold up. But it's a funny thing. We panned and tested some of the Chinamen's pailing piles and never got a bit of gold out. They had some way that they...

JG: They did a good job of extracting.

JH: Whether they handpicked it or what, I don't know.

JG: I guess about the only other thing, do you recall anything about any ditch construction around or other where they changed the creeks besides what we've talked about? Anything major? There's a lot of little small irrigation ditches and like that.

JH: Nothing major, I don't believe. That would have to be down here in the valley or close to the valley, wouldn't it?

JG: Yeah. Of course over there in Catherine Creek, but that was all about the same time as the state ditch was 1870, you know, that was way, way long ago.

JH: Yeah, that was when the big ditch was put down through. I can't recall anything of any ditches being changed or anything done to 'em much.

JG: I think that covered pretty much the ones I was trying to fill in here a little bit. I guess you have some pictures that...

JH: Yeah, I've got some pictures here I want to...[recording stopped]

JG: One other thing that I forgot about was any large forest fires do you recall while you were here?

JH: The one at Anthony Lake, I believe that was in 1960.

JG: Yeah, '60 was that one.

JH: There's been two or three up on the side of the mountain here. There was one... Let's see, there was one before I came here which must've been 1936. That was freshly burned off partway up the side of the hill over there, the side of the mountain. Then there was another one later...

JG: Was that Mt. Harris?

JH: Mt. Harris, yeah. The west side of Mt. Harris. That's been burned off about two or three times.

JG: I remember since then there's been a big fire up there.

JH: The last one they had they fought with airplanes and everything else and I think he was the worst one.

JG: I didn't know if during the time that you were here if you recall anything in the late '30s or into the '40s there or early '50s of any large fires?

JH: No. [recording stopped]