Life on the Pamlico

Frankie Arrants, Logger

By: Kristi Young

Introduction

Have you ever seen a twenty foot tree, a foot in diameter, be chipped up in a matter of seconds? Have you ever seen a skidder, bouncing on seven foot tires, dragging six or seven trees at once as easily as you or I removing sticks from our lawn? That's the magic I found visiting the log woods with Frankie Arrants on a very cold (17 degrees) and windy day.
Life on the Pamlico

But the adventure and excitement of the activity on the logging site soon made me forget just how bitter cold it really was.

On January 10, 1994, I was the guest of Frankie Arrants, the owner of Arrants Logging, Inc., to observe his logging operation. He logs primarily for Weyerhaeuser and was logging Weyerhaeuser land located in Windsor the day that I visited him. Mr. Arrants met me at the "paved" road with a four-wheel-drive truck that would take us over the rutted, frozen dirt roads that led us back into the woods. He was very thoughtful and patiently answered all of my novice questions concerning his domain, the logging industry.

Life: How long have you been in the logging business?

Mr. Arrants: I have been in the trucking business now for almost twenty years, but I have only been logging for about sixteen.

Life: How did you get into the logging business?

Mr. Arrants: Well, like I said, I had been into the trucking business already for about four years when I got into logging. The logging process had always fascinated me, and I wanted to get into a business where I could haul my own product to better utilize my trucks. So I guess logging just seemed to fit.

Life: Who do you mainly log for?

Mr. Arrants: Oh, I do all of my logging for Weyerhaeuser.

Life: What does your usual job out here consist of?

Mr. Arrants: My job varies according to the stand of trees that we are cutting, how far along we are into the project, and how smoothly things are running that particular day. I mainly make sure that everything is going okay with my workers, and then I also operate a lot of my own equipment; after all, that's where all of the excitement is.

Life: I guess that's true. After all, you got into the job because you liked the work, didn't you?

Mr. Arrants: Yes, it all still fascinates me, even after sixteen years!

Life: About how many people do you employ?

Mr. Arrants: Between the office and out here, I would say that I keep about eighteen on the payroll, so I always cringe when Fridays roll around!

Life: So what is the normal process that you follow to cut the trees and get them to Weyerhaeuser?

Mr. Arrants: The fellabunchers go through and cut down the trees, the trees are delimbed, and then skidders haul them to the loaders [which are stationary]. Once the wood is at the loader, the loader measures the wood and cuts it the length that it needs to be. The wood is then put into different stacks, according to the type of wood and the size, and eventually loaded onto the trucks to be hauled away.

Life: So the loader actually has the most difficult job?
Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Arrants: Exactly. Your most skilled and competent workers must be on the loaders at all times, or the job won't get done.

Life: Are they the ones that decide what wood goes into what stack and where it goes?

Mr. Arrants: Yes. Like I said, the loader is the one who really must know what he is doing.

Life: Do you own all of the trucks that carry the wood to Weyerhaeuser?

Mr. Arrants: Well, I own a lot of them, but I also hire out trucks to help.

Life: How many of the different types of equipment do you own?

Mr. Arrants: I own two fellabunchers, two loaders, one chipper, and six skidders.

Life: Is all of your equipment heated and air conditioned?

Mr. Arrants: All of it is except for the skidders. Hopefully, the next ones I buy will be, though.

Life: How much does something like a skidder cost?

Mr. Arrants: A good skidder will usually run you about $106,000.00, plus $21,000.00 for the heavy duty tires. So it's right at about $130,000.00 all together.
Life on the Pamlico

The Loader Cuts Logs to Desired Length.

Life: Wow, that's pretty expensive!

Mr. Arrants: Yes, but something like the chipper can cost as much as $285,000.00 for just one machine!

Life: Just what exactly does the chipper do?

Mr. Arrants: Haven't you seen all of the trucks headed for Weyerhaeuser that are full of little chips?

Life: You mean the ones that fall out all over the road?
Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Arrants: Yes. Well, the chipper is a machine that does exactly that. You feed it the trash and limbs that aren't good enough to be shipped in the log form, and they are chipped up and sent to Weyerhaeuser anyway.

Life: And what are the chips used for, once they get to Weyerhaeuser?

Mr. Arrants: They are usually used for things such as paper. Even the trash wood is chipped up and put into the furnace to provide power.

Life: So just about everything out here is utilized?

Mr. Arrants: Well, we try.

Life: Is anything out here done manually?

Mr. Arrants: Yes, actually the delimming is done manually. I have bought a delimber, but I haven't started using it yet. It should cut down on all of the manual delimming, except for the very large trees where about twenty percent of the delimming will still have to be done manually.

Life: So is the manual delimber actually someone who cuts off every limb with a chainsaw?

Mr. Arrants: Yes.

Life: Won't the delimber improve the safety of the operation?

Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Arrants: Well, fortunately enough, we have not had any accidents out here in quite a while. The delimber machine will, however, definitely cut back on the risk of an employee getting hurt. The workers will all be inside machinery then.

Life: So you move from spot to spot, logging at different Weyerhaeuser land locations?

Mr. Arrants: Yes, I don't ever know where I'm gonna be next!

Life: How long have you been in this particular area?

Mr. Arrants: I've been in this area now for almost two months, but it depends upon the amount of rain and the timber stand how long we will stay in the various spots.

Life: And how many loads do you think you've taken out of here?

Mr. Arrants: I'd say that we've probably taken out over 1,000 loads since we've been here. We average about thirty loads a day.

Life: And are you almost finished here?

Mr. Arrants: Yes, we should be finished here by tomorrow night. That's part of the excitement of being a logger; you never know where it will lead you next, or how the operation will go!

Life: What happens to the land once you've finished logging it?
Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Arrants: Weyerhaeuser will come in and turn up all of the land, then they'll replant it.

Life: And how long will it take those trees to grow before they'll be ready to be logged?

Mr. Arrants: Approximately forty years. But what people do not understand is that when I come in here, the forests are full of dead trees and undergrowth. And when I finish, Weyerhaeuser will plant a better crop of trees than what was here before.

Life: So you're not ruining the forest, you're helping it?

Mr. Arrants: Exactly!
Life on the Pamlico

Conclusion

Frankie Arrants helped me to see the log woods from the logger's point of view. The news is full of the environmentalists seeking to save the spotted owl, or, closer to home, the red-headed woodpecker. Yet Mr. Arrants' logging operation cleanly clears the land for replanting and revitalization of the forest. It provides the opportunity of a healthy forestation of the land. The logging is done in several thinning operations, which allows the trees to grow larger and healthier and finally in a total harvest. This process takes about thirty years from planting to full harvest.

Mr. Arrants made me feel very welcomed, and it was obvious that he loves his work. He has a good rapport with his workers and is very safety conscious in all aspects of his operation. He normally runs a fellabuncher or a skidder himself, but he devoted the afternoon to teaching me about logging, for which I'll always be grateful.