

Ream Sawmill

Drake Creek	1925-1942
Shotgun Spring	1942-1951

In 1925, Charles Lincoln Ream bought a sawmill from a man named Stinger who was operating the sawmill near Suplee, on Bear Creek. In 1975, when I interviewed Archie Ream, Jr., I asked him why Mr. Stinger sold his mill. Archie replied, “There were guys up there poaching deer and he had to testify at a trial and he figured they’d burn him out if he kept his sawmill there.” It wasn’t long before this that the vigilantes operated in Crook County and it is understandable that law had not yet taken a firm grip on the land.

The Reams had lived at Suplee where they had run sheep since 1900 when Charles moved his family from Vida, Oregon, where the family had lived since about 1895. But by 1925 Charles had moved his family to the Milk place on Crooked River some ten miles east of Post. During the time the Reams lived on Crooked River they would have had plenty of opportunity to look at the lush timber covering the north slopes of the Maury Mountains. It may have been the view that pulled Charles into the timber business.

He located his mill on a beautiful spot just south of the timber line near Drake Creek. This spot is generally referred to as the McCullough place. The location is not only beautiful but also an excellent spot for a sawmill. Close to the timber, close to the road, and abundant water. The pond that exists today is not the Ream mill pond although they may have been at the same location. Today’s pond has been enlarged and has become interesting wildlife habitat. This is private land and visitors are not welcome.

At some time Ream must have built a water diversion ditch to direct water from Drake Creek into what became the mill pond. A short distance southwest of Elkhorn Campground a diversion ditch takes water from Drake Creek and channels it down the mountain to the site of the old sawmill; Drake Creek itself passes some hundreds of yards west of the mill site.

The mill that Charles Ream bought from Stinger was steam-powered. Ream did his own logging using horses to skid the logs from the woods to the mill pond. Ream’s mill crew were few in number—just Charles and his two sons, Daniel and Archie, and one hired hand. In time the horses were replaced by a cat and additional equipment was acquired. One year Ream tried using gypo loggers but at the end of the year when he checked his books it was evident that he couldn’t make a profit with that much outside help. The mill could produce about 10,000 board feet of lumber a day. The Ream’s truck could haul only 5,000 feet so that meant two trips into Prineville a day. Ream sold most of his output to Midstate Lumber Company.

At some point Archie bought out his father and brother, trading his ownership in a threshing machine to Dan for his interest in the sawmill. In 1942 Archie Ream bought 160 acres (a quarter section for you greenhorns) just north of West Shotgun Spring. Forest Service Road 150 passes along the southern edge of the property. This, like the Drake Creek site, is a beautiful piece of land. The slope is not as gentle as one might think at first sight. I’ve walked the site several times (which is still owned by the Ream family) and huffed and puffed to get from top to bottom and back again. The mill site is still quite evident although the mill pond has almost disappeared because of silt accumulations. Archie told me, “[The land is] not fenced. John Q. Public doesn’t even know that he’s on private land unless they go where the mill or where the old houses and buildings were. About all that’s left is some of the timbers and the old mill pond which is basically full of dirt. There are cattails growing in it now. You can see signs of where the other buildings used to be around there.”

I asked Archie to describe a typical day at the sawmill and he replied:

We started about 8 o'clock if we were running the mill. We'd run the mill maybe three days, four days, and then we'd run out of logs. So then the three or four of us would go out in the woods and fall the timber and fill the pond up again. We had an old 1936 Chevrolet truck. We just cross-hauled logs on it with a Cat.

Do you know what cross-haul is? Well you drag the logs up beside the truck, then you put a cable or a chain around them, and put your Cat on the other side of the truck and just roll the logs up two poles that you have leaning up against the bunks. Then it just rolls them up on a log. You can't get a tremendous load on but you can get five, six or seven logs, something like that. Then throw a chain around it, take it down to the mill, and dump it into the mill pond. We'd do that until we got the pond full. Then we'd go back to running the sawmill again.

We'd only work about eight hours a day. If we wanted to go fishing over in the Cascades Dad would shut the mill down and we'd go over in the Cascades and go fishing.

Such are the joys of owning your own business, but it isn't all joy. The mill provided income for four families and sometimes five. But since the mill operated only during the summer months, the men all had other jobs during the winter. Archie usually worked for Midstate on the green chain. He didn't get much fishing done then (and it wasn't fishing season anyway). And then there are the financial obligations of owning forest land. Private owners of forest land are required to pay for fire protection. This is something like fire insurance but the owner makes the payment to the Oregon Department of Forestry. This charge is added to the owner's property tax bill. At some point the fire protection charge is paid to the state

by the county. If an owner does not choose to pay for fire protection and a fire occurs the state levies a heavy charge for fighting the fire.¹

I asked Archie if there was any spectacular event that he could remember about the mill. He replied,

...the only thing I can think of is when my Dad stuck his head in the headrig. I think it was a 52 or a 62 inch circle saw.... For some ungodly reason he wanted to see if the sawdust was going out the conveyor all right on the bottom. He just bent over to look and WHAM it took him right above the eye and put a few notches in his scalp. We had to bring him to town and get him sewed up.

The conveyor took the sawdust from the mill to the burn pile. The Ream mill did not use a wigwam burner, just an open pile of burning sawdust and edging. Archie remembered,

...We had a blower and it burned all summer long. I've thought about that years later because I'm retired from the Forest Service now and fought a lot of fires But July, August, September, that fire burned there day and night. Never did have a problem. Not any at all. It's a wonder we hadn't burnt the mill and everything else up. We never did have any kind of fire.

Archie Ream retired from the Forest Service where he was the Fire Management Officer for the Big Summit Ranger District. He had previously worked as the Forest Dispatcher at the supervisor's office in Prineville.

Because Archie had been a private sawmill operator and had also worked for the Forest Service I was especially interested in his views about the problem of over cutting the forest. Archie said to me,

1. The fire may or may not be fought depending on the surrounding land. If the owner's land is "unprotected" and the surrounding land is in no danger (it may not be forest land) the state can decide to ignore the fire.

We overcut and we overcut for years and years and years. Once I mentioned to [the Forest Service] Timber Staff that we were way over our allowable cut and he says “Don’t worry about it. One of these years something will happen and we won’t cut anything and then we’ll get back even again.” Well, that year never did happen as you know.

This sentiment has been expressed by many other timberland owners, sawmill owners, loggers, and Forest Service personnel. The problems of over cutting and “allowable cut” will be explored elsewhere in this book.

The Ream family lived at the mill during the summer months and one can still find the locations of the several cabins that were built. The Reams harvested all of the merchantable timber by 1951 when they ceased operations. The mill’s equipment was sold. The family will log again when the remaining trees reach maturity. It won’t be soon.

The white square seen near the bottom of the map (on next page) indicates the Ream property contained inside the boundary of the Ochoco National Forest, Maury Mountains. The southwest corner of the property is next to Forest Service Road 150. From the photo below, it would be easy to assume that the land is quite level but that



it not the case. The land sloped significantly, but not uncomfortably, to the north, down-slope on the northern side of the Maurys.

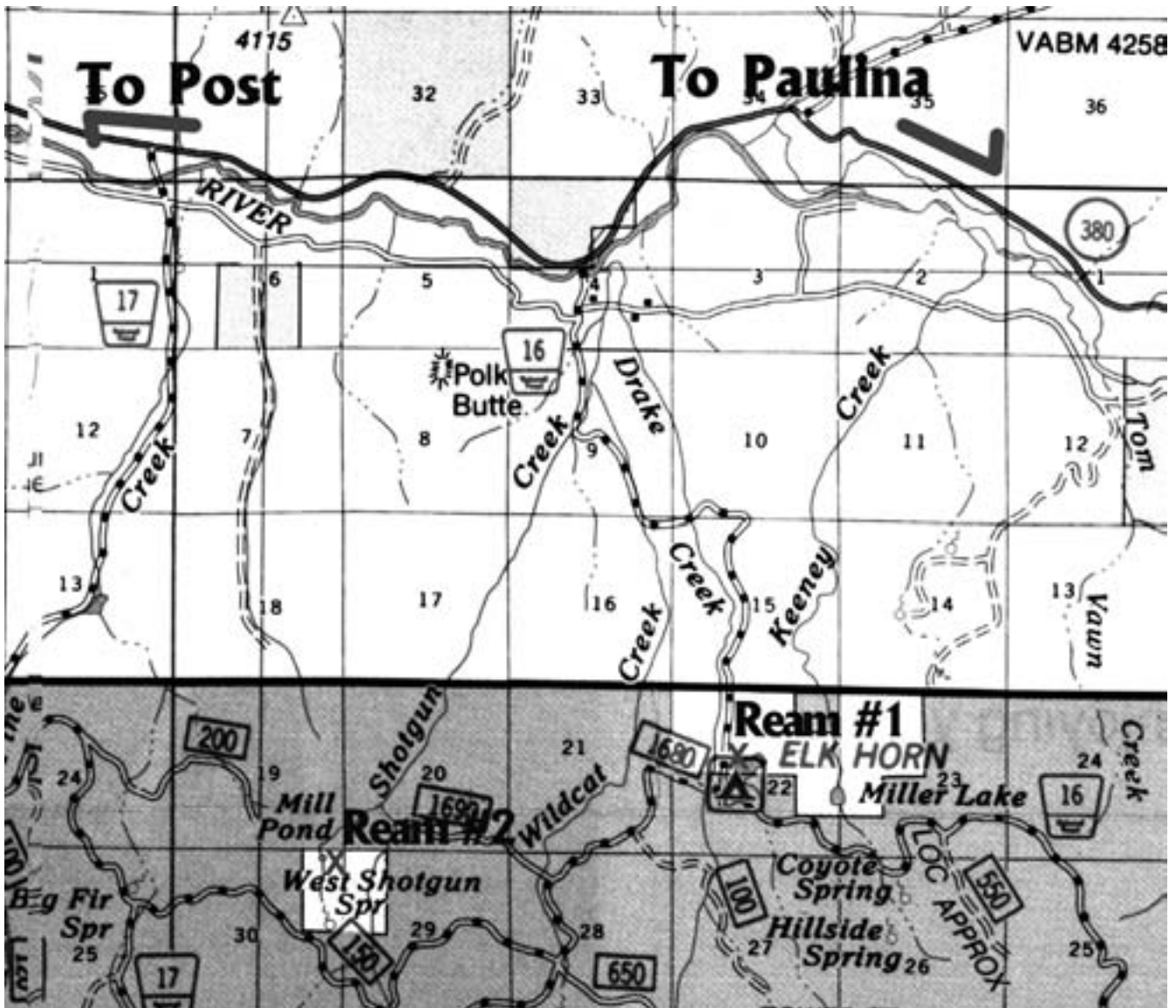
At first glance, one has the impression of being in a park but the more you look the more you realize something is amiss here. Litter is everywhere, signs of habitation, and the more you look the more wide-spread is the litter.

During the summers when logging operations were in full swing, a number of people lived here; the number is not known but from the amount of what appear to be camp sites (or home sites) the

number wasn't small. It is easy to get the impression that as one site became too littered the residents moved to a new site.

Yet the natural beauty of the spot cannot be overlooked. Here at the base of a mountain in the "high desert" there is an abundance of water; some areas are almost swamp-like. The ground is generally covered with grass, bright green in spring, more golden as summer passes. Cattle do graze here and there is evidence of their being here but on my many visits there were no signs of overgrazing. I have not identified who owned the livestock.

Ream Sawmill Photo Album





Within the areas obviously “lived in” are at least two still-standing “facilities.” Notice the pipe to the left of the throne: There was no obvious use for this and no speculation is made. The structure in which this convince was placed is constructed of corrugated metal, heavily rusted—probably never painted.



The photo on the right was taken “down stream” of the main mill buildings foundations. This is now a dry wash; Shotgun Creek flows to the east of the site. It would appear that this rubble was either dumped or blown by the wind when the mill’s use was discontinued. This photo shows only part of the overall rubble site.



South side of main building, looking north. The mill pond is behind the photographer.



The Ream Sawmill was in operation during the years I was in high school but my interests then were not what they are now and I never ventured into the Maury Mountains until after I returned to Prineville in 1988. Yet as a young child I played among the Ochoco Lumber Company's operations. Why I wasn't run off I have no idea. The men were very good to me, allowing me to ride the boards as they moved down the chains, the "elevator" on which a man stood to remove the stickers and shove the lumber from the dry kiln cart to the chain. No one ever said, "Hey! Kid, get out of here; its dangerous around here."

Ochoco's operation was my vision of what all sawmill looked like. Coming upon the Ream site made it evident how simply a small lumber manufacturing operation could be. When I interviewed Archie Ream, Sr., I asked how profitable his operation was. He responded, "It kept food on the table."

GREEN GOLD

In the fifty-some years since the Ream mill operated, the site's topography has changed. Below you see the log pond which has almost silted in. The brown area is last year's crop of cat tails. It must have been early spring when this photo was taken. Photographer was standing some yards south of log pond facing north. If you

look closely you can detect the slope of the land.

The log pond area was excavated flat but the main mill building sat on land sloping to the north. You can detect this when looking at the underside of the foundation structure if the eye requires confirmation.



And where, you might ask, are the photos of the original mill site? None were taken.

That site is now the property of a friend and there is no visible evidence of sawmill operations having been there. The original log pond has been much enlarged and is now a man-made lake.

There are a couple of cement foundation-looking chunks of cement about but I confirmed that

these were part of an irrigation system one of the several families that have occupied the site since 1925 installed.

The site is one of the most beautiful in all of Crook County. At an elevation of just about 4,700 feet you have a full 270° view with no evidence of civilization in sight. No wonder Kyle is always in such a good mood!



Skid roads come in all shapes and sizes and make use of different forms of motive power.

These two were reproduced from a defunct timber industry journal.