

Voices from the Past

**Railroad Removal: Ashton to West
Yellowstone: Dean L. Palmer**

By Dean Palmer

March 27, 1982

Oral Tape by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Devon Robb October 2004

Harold Forbush- Of the interview being conducted today is the removal of the rail road tracks, ties, etc. of the rail road which existed between Ashton Idaho on the south and Yellowstone, Montana on the north. The one being interviewed this 27th day of March 1982 is Mr. Dean Palmer, P-A-L-M-E-R of Rexburg and Dean I appreciate welcoming you here this Saturday morning for this interview. Will you kindly state you full name and the date and place where you were born.

Dean Palmer- My full name is Dean Leroy Palmer and I was born here in Rexburg September 3rd, 1943.

HF- Now what is your present and current address?

DP- Route 2 Box 326 Rexburg zip code...

HF- Referring to the Palmer name I am sure there are several families here in the Upper Snake River Valley with that surname. Are you all related?

DP- No, none of us are related. There are three different Palmer families here and we have traced our genealogy back quite some distance and none of us have become related yet. So, my grandfather originally came out of Utah and I think Max's family came out of, Max Palmer's family came out Burley, Rupert area but I'm not sure where his grandfather came from and I'm not sure on Jean Palmers family line and where their from.

HF- Ok now these three persons, these other two persons, Max and Jean, you comment on are contemporaries or about your age.

DP- No, Max I would guess Max about forty-five to fifty years old and Jean must be about sixty-five.

HF- Ok, now is your father here?

DP- Yes. My dad lives out in Edgen. I was born and raised in the Edgen bench area and his name is Roy Palmer and there was quite a large family and his dad was William Palmer. I believed everybody called him Willy. The only thing I ever knew him by was Grandpa but I think everybody called him either Willy or Bill Palmer.

HF- And was he the first to come into the Upper Snake River Valley?

DP- The first Palmer, yes.

HF- First Palmer to come in and about what time did they get here?

DP- I guessing but I think that they came in I would say around 1910 to 1920. Somewhere in there.

HF- So they weren't one of the original pioneers and the family to which you belong pretty well settled in the Edgen bench.

DP- Yes, matter of fact all the brothers, all four brothers that there were in the family all live within a mile of one another so they've stayed there and there was eight living brothers and sisters and the furthest that lives away lives here in Rexburg so we are all native and have been here a long time.

HF- Now these would be Uncles to you?

DP- Yes, uncles and aunts.

HF- All right, of course Palmer is probably an English name.

DP- Yes that's correct.

HF- And so your ancestors came out of the British Isles.

DP- Yes, English and Danish are my ancestry and my wife was also English and Danish.

HF- Turning to the subject of our interview, Mr. Palmer, I've got a number of questions and maybe we ought to stick fairly close to each question and yet I'd invite you to elaborate so that the listener may well understand the subject of our interview when it's all done because this is a resource to history and it's intended for a resource whereby a person can go and listen to the tape and from that take notes and it will be a resource to which references can be made. The railroad which you removed this last year, 1981, was laid down and established by whom, what do you know about that railroad that was installed and when and where?

DP- Well I brought the profile with me that the Union Pacific Railroad furnished us to bid on the project. The railroad was actually constructed in 1905 to 1909 and at that time it was called the Yellowstone Park Railroad company and this was the Idaho division, they called it the Idaho branch. It was constructed during this period of time and I went across quite a few people who were in the area that have either their dads or their granddads worked on that particular line.

HF- How long a line was it?

DP- With siding and the turn around at West Yellowstone there was approximately sixty miles between Ashton and West Yellowstone.

HF- And do you know anything about the construction, who built it, the UP line I guess.

DP- Yes it was a Union Pacific.

HF- Only it was a Yellowstone branch line.

DP- Right, right. Yes we don't know the actual people that actually, well we know of some of the people who worked on the lines. I don't know their names particularly but as they built it I can see where they had a lot of problems in some areas because due to the rocks or sand or marshy areas. Now did you want me to talk about?

HF- Just go into the terrain a little bit.

DP- Ok. Alright, the terrain we started out at Ashton and we went right through the farms. There were farms that we traveled through when we crossed a lot of canals and ditches and so forth.

HF- More particularly let's maybe focus on what they had to go through in building this branch line.

DP- Well I would say that they at that time it was probably sagebrush and then they went up after they got through the sagebrush the flat area they went up by the warm river area and it looks like that they had spent a lot of time blasting rocks out to level a side out and they traveled for approximately about six miles along the river to go up to where warm river is today, the warm river campground is of today. It's approximately six miles along that river that we followed and it's rocky all the way.

HF- Now did they have to cross the Snake?

DP- No not at warm river right there, no, we haven't crossed the river yet. The only thing that we've crossed so far is a few canals and ditches that have been put in later.

HF- Right and those wouldn't have been there at the time that this railroad was laid out.

DP- No, no I'm sure it was.

HF- But they did have to bridge the warm river.

DP- Yes, now once we get into the warm river campground they had to cross Robinson Creek then they had to cross Warm river was just a very short ways from one another. Now those two particular bridges were the only two bridges that we had to disabandon and the reason is that they had to be taken out was because nobody would be responsible for those bridges because they Union Pacific Railroad, the reason that they are abandoning the line is so that, I mean it was an older line, they wanted to disabandon it so they would not have to continue to maintain it and be responsible for it and the forest service owns the property from the Warm river on up to West Yellowstone.

HF- Does the old bed way, the old railroad, follow pretty much a straight line, straight north?

DP- No, matter of fact it curves a tremendous amount as we work our way from the warm river camp ground we follow the hill side working our way up on elevation and course as

you know there was a tunnel up by Bear guldge and that tunnel is 557 ft long and it's a very big tunnel and everybody was quite concerned how we'd go through there but I can guarantee you that the size of the trains are it was very easy to go through with our trucks and our cat that we used to take up the ties and the only place that we'd have flat anywhere along the line was really up by the big springs in Island Park sighting areas. The rest of it curved back and forth and to the right and to the left and some places we went up and down.

HF- Well quite, in other words they had to make the tunnel, they couldn't go over it or around it, so they just had to go literally through it.

DP- They had to go through a particular mountain site their and they surely did and it's quite a miraculous thing. It's quite tall.

HF- Now is there a lot of earth and rock and formation about the tunnel on the upper side?

DP- Yes there certainly is I would guess it's around three hundred feet high. So I'm sure they spent a lot of time working on that tunnel and just before the tunnel they had to fill in an area that I'm guessing they had to fill it in 200 ft deep to fill it in because the way the mountain side was because a train can only go up a certain grade and I am not quite sure the percentage of the incline but I know they can only take a certain incline or the train can't pull it and that's why they either had to fill in or cut down to make the track half way on a gradual grade.

HF- Can you visualize that they experienced any problems going over, what is that passes into Montana, the continental?

DP- It's called Reas pass on the continental.

HF- Is that the same as...

DP- Reas pass is the railroad pass that goes into West Yellowstone and on top of the pass it is the continental divide.

HF- How do you spell Reas?

DP- It's R-E-A-S, Reas.

HF-R-E-A-S. What about that pass is it quite a high pass or what can you tell me about it.

DP- Yes the elevation there is 6935 ft above sea level and on that particular mountain we found a lot of springs just springing right up out of the side of the mountain and it made the railroad bed very soft. I always thought the railroad bed would be very hard where the trains traveled over it all the time but as we took the rails and the track or the ties off and we had to drive our trucks and equipment down it we found very many soft spots in the

track bed and it made it very difficult in some places to get our ties out. We'd have to fill in those soft spots with either gravel or rocks in some cases we had to bury ties in the ground to make it substantial to support the weight of our trucks.

HF- And they must have had to do something too when it was built.

DP- I'm sure they did at that time they were using horses and they had to pack it down too and I'm sure as they brought it up with horses that they horses helped back the dirt down to some what and they had to put culverts under some of their road beds to let the spring water drain off so it wouldn't soak up the road bed.

HF- So as we reconstruct the rail road, do you think, can you sort of suggest and maybe by reiteration the trouble spots. Of course one would have to be the hill just before you get to the mountain, the tunnel that would be a trouble spot wouldn't it.

DP- Yes definitely and the tunnel would have been one and I would say that probably sixty percent of the track line they had many difficulties with because of the terrain because of the mainly water, rivers and marshy areas. There was an area just down from, let's see, it would be up by between big springs and Island Park siding that was very soft and it just went through a big flat area and it was very spongy. It's just a big, kind of like a slew area and they must have hauled the dirt in their and went across that flat area but I can imagine all kinds of trouble.

HF- And Reas pass could have been also a troubled spot?

DP- Oh no question about that because they had to go there and survey first and naturally they had to cut the trees out and then they would have to cut and fill and then they were only able to work there for a short time. Down at the office down in Idaho Falls they've got a picture of them coming through the 15th of April and the snow was about three feet above the train still on that track line. There are trying to clear the track line so they can go up to West Yellowstone and it's the 15th of April they've still got snow they estimated at 18ft deep.

HF- Do you remember what year that was?

DP- 1972. I saw it on the picture down there at the Union Pacific Office in Idaho Falls.

HF- That's interesting isn't it? From your experience in removing was width of right away had they acquired?

DP- Most places it was a hundred feet, they go from the center of the track and they go, well most places, there were some places that varied, but most places it was a hundred feet from the center of the track was the right away through there, through those mountains.

HF- From the center of the track. Well then in other words you are saying that it was a hundred feet on each side of the center of the track so it would be 200 ft.

DP- Yes, right.

HF- 200 ft right away.

DP- And there were some places that it got down a lot smaller, that was the maximum and the minimum was 20ft each side of the center of the track which would be forty feet.

HF- That's interesting.

DP- But it depended on the area.

HF- Ok, now what gave rise, I think you have alluded to this, what gave rise for the reasons of removing the tracks? How many years had it been since they had actually had regular service up in there?

DP- It's about fifteen years ago since they had the last train go up the track and a lot of people wanted to keep the track and thought that boy, that's such a beautiful drive up there, and it really is, but the railroad estimated that it would take well over a million dollars to put the track alone back into shape to be able to make safe travel for the train going back up through there and so its never used that much and so therefore they thought it would be best to abandon the line and just not have to be responsible for it anymore and so there were going to turn it back over to the forest service who would have the property.

HF- So they abandoned the line, why the property there where the bed lay and so forth would be turned back to the Targhee Forest service.

DP- Right, on the Idaho side and it'll be the Galeton Forest service on the Montana side.

HF- How many miles do you have on the Montana side before you reach the terminal?

DP- There was about seven, let's see, there would be about seven miles.

HF- Now there wasn't a railroad that tied into that, that went into Montana. West Yellowstone is the terminal.

DP- Yes that's where the railroad stopped.

HF- And there wasn't any other line coming in from the other direction?

DP- No, no. The only thing that the train did was take people and supplies into West Yellowstone and for the park after the park had already been established, Yellow Stone National Park had been established and this was the only ways and means of getting up

into the park at one time was through the railroad and that's why it was built up through there and when we got through the last tie or steel, we were about 50 ft from the Yellowstone Park line, so that's how close we were to the park before the train quit.

HF- So for so many years from 1909 until 1972, or approximately the UP had occasion to serve tourist by taking them up through and over and across this branch Yellowstone mine to the West Yellowstone Park entrance. Well now, whom did you contract? With whom did you contract to start removing?

DP- Well we originally bid the total job with the Union Pacific Railroad out of Omaha, Nebraska and it's where a high bidder gets the job because railroad writes up specifications for the removal of this branch line and they don't say there in their contract that they would like keep a certain amount of the rail and also a certain amount of the ties and then the rest of it will be turned over to the contractor for him to dispose of the materials and that's the way he receives his money and so they put it out to bid and whoever who pays the railroad the highest amount of money receives the job. Now, we bid the total job, when I say we I mean Brone Leshmen and myself, we formed a short joint ventureship here in Rexburg to work on this, and anyway, we missed the job we were not the high bidder so we did not get the total job. A firm from Chicago named LB Foster got the project. They got the bid. They called us up and asked us they said, where you live there and you bid the job, would you be interested in taking up the ties for us and we said certainly and so we got together with them and gave them a bid on tie removal and they would remove the steel. Therefore, we got the tie removal and LB Foster Company from Chicago took the steel of the lines.

HF- But did they, the LB Foster people, then had the direct contact with the railroad company.

DP- The Union Pacific.

HF- And you were a subcontractor, sort of?

DP- Yes, that's right, we are a subcontractor under LB Foster.

HF- What was your bid?

DP- Now are taking about a bid for the total job or for the?

HF- Let's take them one by one. What did they bid, what did LBJ bid?

DP- Well the Union Pacific railroad when they let out bids they never tell anybody what the prices are, what the bids are. They'll just send us back a letter in saying that they have awarded the bid to such and such a company and so therefore we don't understand or we don't know what their prices were and that's just one of their policies. Normally on a bid opening everybody knows what everybody else bid but their policies are you bid and they

award it to who they prefer and it's usually the high bidder but they don't say what your bids are.

HF- As between contracting parties?

DP- Right.

HF- They are really the only ones that know.

DP- Railroads are the only ones that knows.

HF- So when you subcontracted to remove the ties you made an offer to these people in Chicago. What was that?

DP- Now we paid them twenty-five thousand dollars to remove the ties from the track line.

HF- You mean they paid you?

DP- No we had to pay them. Now we had to pay them twenty-five thousand dollars and then we have to take up the railroad ties and we had to pay those guys the money and then we get the ties to our disposal and what we get out of them is how we gain our money.

HF- I see. Ok so was this twenty-five thousand dollars had to be paid in advance.

DP- Yes that's correct.

HF- Before the contract was signed.

DP- Now LB Foster has to pay the rail road in advance too before they can start on it.

HF- I see.

DP- And I'm sure that their bid was well over a million dollars to give you an idea because our bid was up there fairly close, so they had to pay over a million dollars to take up the line.

HF- Ok before you could remove the ties they had to, the Chicago firm, had to remove the tracks.

DP- Yes all the rails.

HF- All the rails. Who did that for them?

DP- They did that themselves. They had a crew of men that came in and they did that themselves.

HF- Would that had been early in 1981?

DP- We all started about the same time. They only had about two weeks start on us and then we followed right up behind taking the ties out.

HF- What kind of equipment did they use to take up the rails?

DP- Oh they have what they call a boil machine that goes along and those rails were 33ft in length and what they would do is go along with a machine that would hook onto those bolts and undo the bolts and some other guys would come by and pound the bolts out and they had what they called a spike machine would come along, it's just a little apparatus that rolls along the tracks and reaches down and grabs the spike and pulls it up out of the tie. Then after they do this they have another machine that comes along. It's like a crane type and picks up the rail and sets it off to the side off of the ties. Then they have a crew of men that come behind again that take all the plates and the spikes and things and stack them up along the side of the track line. Then we come by and pick up the railroad ties and move them out of the road and smooth the road up and they'll come back after we go through with semi's and with this crane again and load the rails back up on their semi's and they have to drive down the track bed because it's one way traffic and so we have to work together on it.

HF- I see. So you followed up after they got the rails removed and you followed up by taking out the ties.

DP- Yes.

HF- What inventory of equipment and manpower did you use?

DP- Well our peak of our construction there taking out the ties, we had 27 men working. We had seven dump trucks and a caterpillar loader that we put a special eight foot ties on to go along and pick up the rail road ties and we'd dump them on these trucks that we had. Then we would haul the ties down to Ashton, dump them and then we would stack them up and the truck would go back and get another load and then we hired some Spanish workers and they came in and sorted these railroad ties out according to there quality. Either number ones, twos, or threes and then we would put twenty-five of them in a bunk. Then we would band them up and then take a fork lift and stack up the railroad ties.

HF- Twenty-five in a bunch?

DP- Yes.

HF- Describe the length and the dimension of each tie.

DP- Ok the ties are seven inches by nine inches and these particular ties are fur. A lot of rail roads have oak but these particular ties on this line were about 98% furs and there eight foot six inches long. Then when you come to were there are switches are siding where they had quite a few of them along the track line you would what they called switch ties and some of the ties got up to as much as sixteen feet in length. But they would stay the same dimensions as far as seven by nine.

HF- The broadside would be laid down?

DP- Yes the broadside would be down.

HF- They would be laid on their sides, or broadsides.

DP- Right.

HF- And do you have any knowledge as to where they got the fur.

DP- No I really don't. I never got into that.

HF- Now in the early days of this valley, that is when they started using the forest up here, why did have a tie, what did they call that business, tie lock, or tie something business and they furnished a lot of ties that were cut up out of the Targhee but I don't know from which area. It could have been out towards Kilgore, but I'm not real positive.

DP- No I wouldn't know that either.

HF- How much would each tie weigh approximately?

DP- A seven by nine inch eight foot long tie weighs approximately 145 pounds.

HF- And before those ties were laid down they were treated, creosol.

DP- Creosol right, completely through. Completely through 100% treated. Soaked clear through.

HF- Now how close were the ties laid to each other?

DP- The way we determined how many ties there are in a track line is that by we would take a thirty-three foot piece of rail and which 99% of the rail was on that particular line was all thirty-three foot lengths we would find a eighteen and a half ties approximately between each joint of the rail.

HF- Eighteen?

DP- It averaged about eighteen and a half actually.

HF- So there would be just a little more average of two ties per foot?

DP- No, they would be about 20 inches apart is what they'd be because then there's a thirty-three foot length, thirty-three feet and there are only eighteen and a half ties for an average into that thirty-three foot length.

HF- So around every 20 inches or so.

DP- To give you an idea, in a mile it figures out 2880 ties a mile and if you multiply that out there was approximately, and the reason we say approximately because some places it varied a little bit so we have to use the word approximately, there was about a 170,000 railroad ties in that 60 mile length, which is a lot of ties. Takes up a big area.

HF- What percentage of those were class A, B, C?

DP- Ok, we graded them as 1, 2, and 3's. We probably had about 40% number ones, and 35% number twos, and that would leave us with about 25% number threes on that particular line.

HF- And did you fix a value or did you let people come in and bid.

DP- No, we established a price on them at a retail price the number ones were selling for seven dollars each, the number twos five dollars and fifty cents each, and the number threes for four dollars and fifty cents each.

HF- Those were all stacked in the Ashton area were they?

DP- Yes we brought them all down to Ashton and sorted and graded and stacked them there and then were shipping them out from there.

HF- And your still in that process?

DP- Yes we have about 30,000 ties left to sell and then it will all be sold. Now, I might want to mention that the railroad did retail the contract said that they would retain around 50,000 of them. Now when we got all said and done, they only retained about 45,000 and we ended up with about 85,000 ties. Now the reason that doesn't come up to 170,000 ties is the fact that were so many rotten ones that had finally rotted away, even though they're treated they still rot and some of them had rotten away and therefore...

HF- You didn't even bring them in.

DP- Yes we had to, we brought them in on the trucks then we would pile the stuff up and we would still have a big pile of stuff.

HF- And burn it or whatever.

DP- Yes and some of it we burned along the track lines too.

HF- What would a three-three foot rod of iron, rail weigh?

DP- Well it depends on what they call it. Most of that rail up there was called ninety pound rail that means it weighs ninety pounds for every three feet. So if it was thirty-three foot weighs nine hundred and ninety pounds, just about a thousand pounds for each rail.

HF- So obviously you had to have equipment to lift them, two men one on each end couldn't do the task at all, couldn't even begin to lift them.

DP- No, no you couldn't even roll them over not with out a bar or something. No, there just too heavy because they are so low to the ground they are just dead weight.

HF- Now as that rail expands or extends over about twenty ties is there a couple of bolts or spikes in each tie, at least two?

DP- Yes there's a plate underneath the rail and there's two spikes, unless they are going around a corner and then there will be four spikes, if it's a straight run they'll just put two spikes one on each side so each tie has four spikes in it as a minimum and can have as many as eight.

HF- So the plate, there's two plates, and they fit up on either side of the rail and on each plate there are two spikes.

DP- Yes.

HF- So you would have a minimum of four spikes and a maximum of eight.

DP- And a maximum of eight.

HF- Now are there any bolts, you were talking about some bolts. Is that different from the spikes?

DP- Yes what these bolts are is that every joint at thirty-and three feet length they have what they call a joint bar which is about eighteen inches in length and there's one on each side and that's to hold the two rails together so when the train passes over it won't pull apart or spread on them and they have big inch bolts that go through there and that's what holds the rail, makes it one solid rail.

HF- That's very interesting and well now as you progress with the contract, and incidentally when did you actually commence the removal?

DP- It was about the second week of August when we started in.

HF- Of 1981?

DP- Of 1981.

HF- And did you start on the south end, the Ashton end?

DP- Yes we actually started right there on the south end of Ashton and started taking up the tracks and also the ties. Now everybody's always asked us the question why don't you just start at the north end if you going to bring them to Ashton and put the ties and bring them down on rail road cars? Well as we explained it would take two much money to get the track line into shape because there were a couple of landslides that had already taken place along the track line, they would have had to replace the track. In order to do that then the reason you can't do it that way anyway is the fact that you're always working on top of yourself because you can't remove anything below you and once you fill up that train car, where do you take it and its just too slow of a process so it doesn't matter where you start. You just can't hold them by trains, not through the mountains anyways, there is just no way.

HF- So you used dump trucks to transport the ties.

DP- Yes we had several of them.

HF- And now what would you do, go a certain way and then you would have to back up. How would you turn around?

DP- Well that was the thing. What they did that was so narrow in some places you might have a river on one side and a big rocky cliff on the other side and it might go that way for two or three miles and so we can't drive over the ties because it was too rough so we would have to wait till a truck pulled out with a load of ties, then we would have to back the other truck in because there was no other place to turn around and there places we backed our trucks as far as two and a half miles in to get a load of railroad ties until we could find a place where we could make a turn around with our trucks.

HF- Were these big dump trucks?

DP- Yes most of them were ten wheelers.

HF- Ten wheelers? Boy that would take some skill to back up wouldn't it? Wouldn't that require a lot of skill?

DP- Yes it certainly did but not only that the track bed isn't all that wide. Most of the time the track bed is only nine feet wide and the truck is eight feet wide so you don't have a whole lot of variances and so in some places it got awful spooky and we did tip a couple of the truck loads of ties off but we never did ever tip one of our trucks over. Very close a time or two but we never did tip any trucks over.

HF- Were the trucks loaded by manual labor?

DP- No, we loaded them with a cat loader that we built some special kinds on they were eight foot long. We picked up about twenty ties at a time or twenty-five and dump onto the truck.

HF- But you would have to...

DP- Then we'd straighten them a little bit and then we would haul them down and unloaded and then raise the hoist and unload them and sort and grade them.

HF- Any others, rather problem encounters that you experienced? How about when you got to the tunnel? Was that a problem?

DP- No that was no problem. One of the biggest problems and its hard to imagine less you have done something like this, is communications because on a job like this you are always on the move, you're always moving, you never work in the same place twice, the guys would get lost because they would have to go down a different road. They didn't know if the guys were below them or above them, then they didn't know where the roads were, they didn't know which way they went and so we had a real communication problem. We had some radios but not everybody had a radio then when it come time to quit the guy on the loader didn't know if anymore trucks were coming and he'd already moved a mile from where we was in the morning of a mile and a half and so communications became a real problem.

HF- I imagine it was a sticky problem with maybe truck backing up so far and low and behold here's someone coming down from the other direction with a load.

DP- Yeah, because he doesn't know if there's anyone down there or not and it takes a lot of coordination and that happened a time or two. He got back clear in there and he had to pull out and clear back down and let the truck out and back in again.

HF- Now you did have a few intercepting roads though didn't you?

DP- Yes, there was a few and when we could we surely used them, I'll guarantee you that. Forest Service roads would cross once in awhile and anytime we could we would use those roads and make our turn arounds and stuff.

HF- And how long did it take you to complete this project? From the second week of August, I think you said, until when?

DP- We were about two and a half months at the time we got all the railroad ties out. There are all out of the track bed now and we got them out around the first of November.

HF- Have any winter problems, any snow before that time?

DP- No, not really we had them pretty well all sorted and graded and had them all out so we felt really good about that and we stayed right on it, we worked six days a week about fourteen hours a day to do that job and we liked it because it gave us an opportunity to work a lot of the men that didn't have work and we felt like we caused a lot of revenue here for the community and we felt really good about it and it gave us a challenge and opportunity.

HF- How much money did you pay out?

DP- We spent approximately \$300,000 dollars the first two months on that operation trying to get those out, few trucks and labor and stuff and all that money circulated here in the valley so we felt real good and confident about that.

HF- Now did you have a permanent camp in the area?

DP- No just at Ashton where we did out sorting and grading.

HF- So every night the workers would go back to their homes?

DP- Right, yes because the thing is we were always moving and that makes it tough because you're always moving and we had to bring everything and establish it at Ashton so we'd just meet there in the mornings and try to make sure we got everybody back at night time.

HF- Any accidents?

DP- Yeah, we had a couple little accidents where the trucks would either run into a tree or something trying to get their loads around. When you get a big truck load of those railroad ties and you're on a road twelve feet wide it's easy to have problems.

HF- So there was some property damage?

DP- To our trucks and stuff but we didn't do anything things as far as property sites.

HF- No personal injuries?

DP- No, nope we got by pretty well. There might have been a bruise or a scratch or something but no body got hurt. Well we really feel fortunate about that, no injuries.

HF- Now with the removal of that line, quite a lot of history was taken out?

DP- Oh, a tremendous amount. It's such a beautiful spot up through there. It's too bad that you couldn't have kept the line and used it for a drive up through there but I'm sure that financial it just wasn't feasible.

HF- Do you know what the forest service is going to do with it?

DP- They would like it to go back to the natural state I think, would like to have it go back to trees and stuff.

HF- What about a trail for scadooing, snowmobile trail?

DP- I talked to a few of the guys in the Forest Service and they said that they would like to make it so that it be a hike trail where you could down it or ride a bike but not motor vehicles, not cars or pick ups or anything like. They would like to have it for, because it's so beautiful and so quiet up through there that it's, I hope they do that, I hope they keep maybe the line clear so that people can walk along there because there are some beautiful views of the country side up there that nobody ever sees because there was not way to get up to it. Only up the track line.

HP- Now upon that bases, one could walk for many miles even without having to cross any water course. Isn't that right?

DP- Well you would cross the rivers and stuff and the culverts but they're still in all except for warm river, which you can get off and go out around anyway because there are enough bridges right there you can get around.

HF- So you could manage that?

DP- Yeah, you could start right at Ashton and go clear to West Yellowstone and never get off from it. You'd have to get off at Warm River where those two bridges are out and just come around them, which is only about a half a mile so that would be no problem.

HF- But that could be a real hike?

DP- Oh, that's a beautiful hike, yes. Matter of fact, when it came fall time I went and got my family and took my family all through there and they just thought that was beautiful.

HF- On a hike?

DP- No, we just drove along it because we were still working on the line and I knew that we could drive along it and we'd made a road and we used it as a road so we just drove along because we had a bunch of little kids.

HF- Now a person with a jeep or a pick up could do that same thing?

DP- Oh yes, matter of fact a lot of the hunters used that road last fall, the hunters that were up there.

HF- It's smooth enough so there wouldn't be no problem.

DP- Oh, yes for the lower end, the upper end you'd have some problems but this lower end you wouldn't have any problems.

HF- That would be interesting wouldn't it? That would be a fine thing to do. Well I appreciate this interview on this subject. Anything else that you'd wish to present to the listener for historical purposes?

DP- Yes, Judge I remember when I came and talked at the Rotary I told you about some date nails that were in the spike or in the ties. Now at one tie they would go along and when a tie got rotten or bad they would pull it out and put a new tie in there. Well at one time they drove nails in there with a date on it and that's to tell the guys when they replaced that tie and I brought some of these here and they say that they are a collectors item and I'll give these to you Judge and you can take them. You can see that there're quite large.

HF- What's that date?

DP- That's 1931. It just says 31 on it and I've got a 35 and I think there's a 30 and if you can tell Judge there's two of them that are 29's. That's a 29 right there that you've got your index finger on, and there should be another 29 right there, that's one of them and there's, let's see where is the other one at, well anyway these nails are quite keep sakes and there's two of them that have 29 written on them and they must have been made by two different companies because it's got a different stamp.

HF- ...two. This particular subject matter deals with Mountain West Bark and again on this 27th day of March, a Saturday 1982, I'm interviewing Mr. Dean Leroy Palmer and Dean I understand that a new business has been established here in Rexburg which you referred to as Mountain West Bark.

DP- Yes, that's correct.

HF- Tell me a little about who heads this business and what is it?

DP- Frank Daniels and myself got thinking about this waste product that Louisiana Pacific down here was burning and course as you know, you tell these are getting quite expensive, power bills are getting high and heat bills are getting high and we knew that there had to be something done with the burning that was going from the lumber mills and so we got involved in with some other people and talking to them about decorative bark that we use for landscaping and also soil adds that go into ground that help mellow the soil so that your plants will do better in the gardens and the lawns and things of this sort, potting soils. Anyways, we made a deal with Louisiana Pacific to take their waste products and manufacture it into a useful product and therefore we eliminated the burning, we cleaned up the air, we cleaned up the debris, and made a useful product out of a waste product.

HF- When was this commenced? When was the idea formed?

DP- The idea was formed back in 1980 and we never got really going, we made our contract with Louisiana Pacific in the very first part in January of 1981 and we started construction in March 3rd of 1981 of a bark plant down here in Rexburg just west of Louisiana Pacific and we now employ about seven men down there full time.

HF- What did you do, acquire an area of ground down there?

DP- Louisiana Pacific had some ground on the west side of the tracks and they have leased that to us, then we have leased some other land to put our stock piles on because...

HF- How much ground actually do you have, an acre? Two acres or more?

DP- I'm guessing we have around five acres down there.

HF- And that would be right next to the south fork of the Teton River wouldn't it, or close?

DP- Yes, we are awful close to that. We are right next to a canal bank there and we're just north of the Utah Power and Light substation down there and we have about five acres and if you were to go down there today you would see mountains of this soil prep and soil aid that we have, and also decorative bark that we have and we're shipping it everyday.

HF- Now do you have a building?

DP- Well we have an office trailer down there and yes we have what they call a bagging building is the only per say building we have down there, but we have a squirrel cage, that we call it, is a rotating drum that separates all the items as they come over to us. They had to put some large machinery in and they call it a hog and it breaks all this bark down and the fines and it comes over in a pipe, it's blown over in a pipe and it comes down into a hopper and goes up into a conveyer belt and then into the squirrel cage and the it separates it, it's a big separator is what it is.

HF- So there is a conveyor that takes it from Louisiana premises where its debarked from the tree, or something and then its conveyed by a belt or something down to your facility.

DP- Oh yes.

HF- On top of the ground?

DP- No, it comes into a big hopper or we can run it on the ground and use it as our convenience either way we'd like to do it.

HF- What is it a belt, up there?

DP- No, it comes over in a big tube and it's just blown over.

HF- In a tube?

DP- Yes, a big long tube.

HF- Is the tube on the ground?

DP- No, it's above the ground. It's about thirty or forty feet in the air as a matter of fact.

HF- And it's supported by some kind of columns; I see and what would that be several hundred feet wouldn't it?

DP- Oh, I believe they said they put in about 370 feet a pipe when they come from where there...

HF- What size of pipe is that?

DP- Eight inch.

HF- Eight inch pipe and it's blown over. What in the heck kind of jigger would you, to blow it over?

DP- They just got a big blower on there, and of course it's a sealed pipe so once the air starts through it the only way out is the other end and it never plugs up on us. It just blows right on through.

HF- Plastic?

DP- No, its steal.

HF- Steal pipe.

DP- And when you are over there listening, and you'll have to come down and listen to that because all of the sudden you'll hear something that goes bing, bing, bing, and it's a rock coming through there and you can hear it banging on the pipe as its coming along through there.

HF- What's the rock for?

DP- Well it's just caught up from a tree or something.

HF- Oh, I see ok. Otherwise it's just like bark.

DP- Yeah, we get the sawdust and everything comes there, all their waste stuff that they used to burn, used to have a heck of a time trying to keep it all burned and there was

always a cloud of smoke over the town and now they don't burn anything and we've turned it all into useful products.

HF- So you actually take from that facility, bark, all the excess, all of the waste?

DP- Yes, the planter shavings, the bark, everything yes.

HF- And then once it gets over into the hopper, the items are graded into size.

DP- Yeah it goes up into what they call a squirrel cage because it rotates and it has different kinds of screens in there and it falls into bends and then it's all separated for us so all we have to do is go in there with a big loader and scoop it up and then we pile it up and when we get a load or a call for a certain item, certain size of bark or something like that it's already graded for us.

HF- And how many grades, sizes do you have?

DP- We have three sizes of bark and we have several different soil peps.

HF- Ok, now the sizes of bark, the decorative bark, it comes in three sizes?

DP- Yes, we call the large bark, medium bark, and then pathway bark, the pathway being the smaller bark. That's the way it's demoted in the landscaping business.

HF- Ok, now to but bark under an evergreen tree to keep the moisture in and so on what size would you use of those three?

DP- Well I like to use the pathway bark but most people use the large bark and that seems to be the most popular but I like the smaller bark myself. I think it looks a lot better but everybody has their own preference there and I've brought some bark with today that I'm going to leave with you today Judge. This is a piece of fur bark. You can see that it's quite thick, fur bark is very thick. I've got two pieces of that and I will leave those with you and also I've got a piece of pine bark from over in, it's the largest piece that I've got here. Now that's more, you might be able to feel the difference there between the two of them. There thick but it's...

HF- What kind of a tree does this come from?

DP- That's a pine tree, there.

HF- It isn't lodge pole?

DP- No, it's not lodge pole pine. No they just have a real skinned bark. This comes over from the Salmon area and I'm not sure of the name on that one.

HF- It isn't Douglas?

DP- No.

HF- It isn't a fur?

DP- No it's not a fur, it's a pine.

HF- It's a pine.

DP- But there is quite a bit of difference and when you really look at them but there's very few of those trees around. That's why this is one of the only mills in the country that has a hundred percent fur trees that they do a hundred percent fur and that's why this is an ideal bark plant.

HF- This is Douglas?

DP- That's Douglas fur.

HF- Ok now you found out that for your pep part of it, Douglas fur is the best?

DP- Well no, for the bark it is but just for the bark.

HF- For the decorative bark is your Douglas fur.

DP- Yes, right.

HF- And this Douglas fur here.

DP- Yes and the largest one is a pine. Now we have been using that and it works good but you can't find very much of it.

HF- I see.

DP- If we could find more of it that'd be a different story but there isn't that many in the forest that are getting cleaned up and the problem that it's happening now...

HF- Are the various colorations?

DP- Yes there is.

HF- And it's quite attractive.

DP- Oh, very attractive stuff. Yes, when it's displayed out as far as around your shrubs and trees and stuff like that it's very pretty decorative. That's why they call it decorative bark.

HF- Now on your pep which makes your soil more light and easy to handle and so forth, how is that made?

DP- Well that's just the fines, the sawdust, and everything else like that. What we do, we take it and it has quite a bit of, it has to stabilize and what stabilize is that if you had to take plain sawdust and put it on your soil, it takes from your soil until it starts to break down. So we have to set it out into piles and let it heat for a period of 90 days to 120 days and let it heat and darken and after it gets to a certain point, it will add to the soil and not take away and it makes your soil mellow, especially people that have clay soils or accolade type soils. It takes it and makes it mellow so that the soil can breathe, it's easy to work, the plants do a lot better, it's not really a fertilizer, it's a soil conditioner sort of, of a product.

HF- What's in that sawdust? Is it an acid?

DP- It's a turpentine type stuff in there and it has to just completely neutralize. Neutralize is what it does and after it does that then you have a nice useable product you can put into your yard and actually it does fertilize in a little ways but it's not really a fertilizer but it's more of a soil conditioner. It just makes your soil mellow and easy to work and it's easy to plant things and things grow good in it because it breathes and it's not all clotted up and everything and that's what it's for.

HF- Do you put fertilizer with that soil builder?

DP- No, we don't hear but people with take it and put it on their gardens and stuff to make their soils mellow and then they will go ahead and put commercial fertilizer or whatever they feel like.

HF- Well in your talk that one day I think you mentioned that you did bring in barnyard manure.

DP- Oh, ok and mix with it and that way it does have some fertilizer but we are experimenting with that and we are coming up with a lot better product we feel and we are only mixing about 10% of that with it and it helps stabilize it a lot faster to because of the heat. It gets up to about 175 degrees in those piles we have done there.

HF- Do you water them: of course you would have to?

DP- Yes we have to water them in the summer time where it's been raining lately we don't have to do that. Just in the summer to have moisture in there so it will heat.

HF- Now how is this product sold?

DP- We've gone through a broker who is for West Nurseries out of California and they arrange for the different nurseries around the country to buy this bark and the soil pep and we either sell it by bulk in semi loads or by bags. Most of the nurseries kind of like the

bags but there are some that like to buy bulk because people come in and 'I want a pick up load,' or something like that. So they will buy a semi load of it bulk and just dump out on the ground and then their people will pick it up that way.

HF- So if I went over there to your place and wanted a half a load a pick up, half load, how much would that cost me of your pep?

DP- A half a load would be about \$25 dollars, I believe.

HF- And that would be just a soil builder?

DP- Yes right.

HF- And then probably be the best to get my decorative bark in bags?

DP- Yes most people, or you can get it bulk over there if you wanted the way we are right here but with most places we don't send bulk bark because they like it in the bags at most nurseries but here where we are right next to the plant you can go down there and get some see.

HF- Are people in the area starting to do this?

DP- Oh yes a tremendous amount. We'll have 50 pickups in their in the next 30 days. Trucks and everything thing else they've got coming in.

HF- You comment about the man who was quite anxious to make sure that he got his \$50 dollars worth that was quite an amusing account. Well now where is this bark and soil pep going?

DP- We sent a tremendous amount to Denver, Utah area. I'm quite surprised we sent a lot of bark back to Green Bay, Wisconsin. It seems like they sure like it back in that country even though they have a lot of forest and stuff back there and trees, they like this mountain west bark, and I guess that's where maybe we got our name from, but they like this mountain west fur bark and they just love it and their people are used to it and then know it and they want it and we send a tremendous amount of it back there and in Illinois and Indiana back in that country takes a lot of it.

HF- Now is the Louisiana Pacific able to be a sufficient supplier?

DP- No matter of fact, they have been done for about the last six months due to the economy. They've promised up that they'll start up by the 15th of next month which will be the 15th of April of 1982 and we are getting what they call hog fuel up to some of these other mills because they take all this product and instead of buying natural gas or using oil to run their factories they use these waste products from these mills and we haul some of that up there to them and we bring decorative bark back. There are some plants up there that have some fur and also some of this heavier pine bark and we haul it back

and we run it through our system here and send it out that way so that's what's helping us out a lot here.

HF- So you stockpiled a lot of this hog fuel and you're hauling it to where up in Montana?

DP- Yes most of it in Missoula, Montana area and Dillon.

HF- And you bring some of this decorative bark and so forth back.

DP- We bring the bark back.

HF- And interesting little experience the other day I had one of your haulers in on a traffic citation, over weigh coming across the mountains, picked up a lot of ice and snow and moisture and so on, so he's got a little problem to settle in early next week.

DP- Yeah he told us about that, I don't know what I would do on that one.

HF- Any other thing you, in the cost do you want to say anything about the price that is charged to these bags?

DP- Well we are selling the bags here, of course the broker takes a little money, but we sell a bag of bark which is three cubic feet for \$1.30 and the soil pep is seven dollars a yard and course there are 27 cubic feet in a cubic yard so, the soil pep is the least expensive but the bark is the most popular thing that we have to.

HF- Now I mean there are some real redeeming features about this business, it's none pollutant, in fact it's saving pollution and taking it from occurring and you're using a product that was formerly, just totally burned.

DP- And we've turned it so what we have done and it does several things. They had a big burner that causes air pollution and it's all gone. We've taken that product, established a useful product and when you do that you create employment that helps the economy so it's a helpful all the way around. Before they didn't have anybody out there burning it and now we have seven full time employees trying to take care of the useful product plus everything else that we do, so it's created revenue for the community as well as ourselves.

HF- And you're just getting started?

DP- Yes we have just been going just a year today's since we have been a really going on it.

HF- And the potential is real great?

DP- Matter of fact I was down there talking Frank Daniels just a few minutes before I came down here, we came across a guy last year from Japan, and they would like to buy

from us if we can supply it, one million tons of this soil pep for their country in Japan a year. Now to give you an idea we figure that we could come up with 20,000 tons as all out of this particular plant which is only 2% of what they need or what they would like to buy from us and so the potential is quite great and Louisiana Pacific want us to go open up other plants that they have around, other mills, and get this product and make a useful product out of it.

HF- And you may do this?

DP- Yes, we may do it and another saving that we're thinking about and they're doing it around the country is that they are not burning anymore, you will not find very many mills burning but they are selling it for hog fuel and this hog fuel goes over and it saves on petroleum because we don't have to burn natural gas and oil to heat these big factories and plants anymore. We use this waste product that we have been piling up and burning for years.

HF- For example, the American Potato plant our north of town is bringing in their hog fuel from the stud mill up state.

DP- Up to St. Anthony and they're bringing it in and stock piling it and using it and I forgot what they figured their savings was, but it was a phenomenal amount of money. It heats their whole plants and runs their whole system and it saves a tremendous amount of money as well as petroleum products which are extremely high and makes itself more self sustaining.

HF- Well I think that all this is a complement to you and Frank Daniels, ingenuity, imagination and these things take place in free enterprise and you see some great results don't you?

DP- You certainly do and that's one of the biggest things that I enjoy about life and especially this country and I'm a real believer in the country as the fact that if I want to do something, the only limitations that's on me is me myself and we still have all the freedoms we enjoy here and when you competitiveness the scriptures tell us "there must needs be opposition in all things," but nevertheless in this country and in this day and age we are still able to do the things we like and if we want to go out and better ourselves we have the opportunity and what makes the country go, I remember if you don't mind a little story here, I remember I had pneumonia about a year ago and I was home and Hogan's Heroes was on TV. and Colonel Hogan was telling the Colonel who was a German officer he said there is only one difference between your country and ours. He says in your country, he says Hitler thinks for you and in our country we all think for ourselves and he says that's the only difference between our two countries and I thought that was quite a comment. I've thought about that many times and what Frank and I want to do, and what I want to do is of course for my family is to make a better country, a better community and a better city for my kids coming up and anything that we can do to better ourselves for our future generations, I'm 100% for that.

HF- What do you figure that it has cost you to launch this project for your equipment, for your facilities down there and so on?

DP- We figured we spent basically around \$450,000 with it for equipment, construction, materials and everything. So it's quite a sizeable undertaking at this time.

HF- But if you can furnish, how many tons a year from this plant?

DP- Well at least 20,000 tons, that's not counting the bark, that'd be just for the soil pep. But we have no problems getting ride of it.

HF- Well that's tremendous; I commend you and Frank Daniels. Thank you so much today.

DP- Yeah, thank you.