

Following the Log Chute

Down, down, down the mountain....

Timber was transported from the Sacramento Mountains using horses to pull the logs to the railroad tracks. The lack of water in the area made the use of traditional water-fed log chutes impossible, and so wooden chutes were made that allowed the logs to skid down the mountain.



Image courtesy of Tularosa Basin Historical Society

In the 1890s the logging industry was booming in the Sacramento Mountains. In the early years, trees were felled with hand saws, cut into twenty-foot sections and hauled by mules and horses to flat landings. Once an entire train load of logs accumulated, they were taken down to the Alamogordo mill to be sawn. The weight of the logs and the steep grade limited each train to fifteen cars.

By the 1920s, tractors and overhead cable systems were used to haul the logs which increased efficiency. By the 1940s trucks proved to be more economical than the railroad, resulting in the last regular train down the mountain in 1947.

The average tree was 24 inches in diameter, with some as much as 6 feet across. Often a hundred feet tall, trees were cut into 20-foot lengths to be loaded onto the train.



Image courtesy of Tularosa Basin Historical Society

The men who transported timber down the log chutes were called 'bullwhackers.' They drove the animals that pulled the logs down the skidway.

The log chute had to be slippery to convey the timber, and usually the youngest workers, often boys, would ride down the chute to "grease the skids."

"The log finally flew down the mountain in its head-long flight, free and clear. I let out a good mountain yell of triumph..."

(Jessie De Prado Macmillan)



Image courtesy of Sacramento Mountains Historical Society

