



A Tower That Talks

Wayne Stone Logging's yarder helps keep them in the game

By Jeff Mullins

At a time when logging jobs are getting harder to find, Wayne Stone Logging, Inc. of Sandy, Ore., has been able to find work.

Stone's crew pulls turns with a BU98 Skagit tower, a mammoth yarder that, until two years ago, had been idle for 15 years and relegated to the scrap heap. Although many would consider the BU98 to be a relic from the past (like the artifacts at Camp 18), two years ago, Stone bought and refurbished the 110 foot tall tower. Today, it is an important part of his diverse operation. Indeed, that tower has been key to securing some jobs in a time when it is an understatement to say, "Jobs are scarce."

School of Hard Knocks

No stranger to harvesting timber during economic downturns, Wayne Stone is acquainted with doing what is needed to keep afloat. In 1977, acting on a lifelong desire to become a logging contractor, Stone bought a 1967 Mack truck and began hauling logs. During the slowdown of the early 1980's, he hauled rock instead of logs to make ends meet.

In 1981, even as timber harvests from federal lands dried up, he bought a partnership into his father's small logging operation with a SJ4 Skagit swing yarder. After his dad died later that year, Stone began to slowly grow the company adding equipment and taking jobs as opportunities arose.

By the flood of 1996, Stone was poised and ready to secure a timber salvage contract to clean out the North Fork Reservoir on the Clackamas River near Estacada for Portland General Electric (PGE). Flood waters had filled the reservoir with a large volume of trees including some very nice old growth. As tugs pushed logs to the boat ramp, Stone used his John Deere 892, a Caterpillar 235, and a rented Linkbelt 4300 to snatch the stems from the water. A John Deere 648 skidder also pulled trees from the water, many with root wads still attached. Logs were then cut to length and shipped to mills while shovels fed a Diamond tub grinder and Peterson horizontal grinder to reduce debris. By this time, Stone's equipment also included a Madill 071 and an Eagle carriage.

Quarter Century of Flexibility

Stone's ability to secure work and grow his company over the past 25 years has hinged largely on his ability to take on all types of logging jobs. Operating with a philosophy, "steady work comes to the contractor who has the equipment needed to do what ever job is available," has served him well.

Today, his customers are primarily larger commercial timber companies like Hampton, Weyerhaeuser, and Wilken-Kaiser-Olson (WKO) who typically provide steady work. Stone also takes private and forest service jobs, especially when the market is bad, and he buys timber and land himself when he gets a chance and the price is right.

Stone says his company is still working today because of the diversity in his equipment and the good men who work for him.



The Right Blend of Equipment

In 2009, Stone Logging fields equipment to support a cut-to-length side, four tower ground-based operations, and shovel sides. His CTL operation includes a Timbco 445 feller buncher with a Quadco 5660 head and a Waratah 622B head on a Kobelco 235 carriage. A John Deere 648G skidder or Caterpillar 517 swing grapple is available as needed for pulling turns.

Stone's towers include a 42-foot Diamond 210 swing yarder used in conjunction with a Super Eagle carriage for thinning operations, an 071 Madill, a 172 Madill, and the refurbished 1967 Skagit 98 with 110 feet of lift, capable of reaching out almost 3000 feet to yard in heavy wood. Eagle Mark VI and Bowman Mark II sky cars are matched with the yarders and timber size.

Kobelco 330 shovels with Waratah 624 processors merchandise stems and Kobelco 290 and 250 shovels round out the operations, allowing Stone's company to compete for almost any job that becomes available. Fiber is shipped by both company-owned and hired trucks. Among Stone's 22 hard-working employees are his son, Zachary Stone, and son-in-law, Andrew Sloan.

At the Site

When TimberWest visited, a seven-man crew was retrieving turns from over 2,000 feet out across a deep ravine using the Skagit 98 and a Bowman Mark II sky car. The sky line was secured 50 feet up a tail hold tree to extend the reach to the unit's far extreme of the slope opposite the tower. To increase productivity, turns were connected alternately by two choker setters, one on the near downhill slope and another on the far opposing face. This arrangement ensured the Bowman carriage and Skagit were seldom idle.

On the landing, Jerry Young, age 71, smoothly threw levers, pressed pedals, and put the Skagit's 6-speed Allison transmission through the courses. In 1967, when the big tower was new, Young worked for Grimm Logging as hook tender on this very machine.

2,000 feet away, not far from the other end of the sky line, hook tender John Wood prepared another tail tree for the next swath of turns. John had also tended hook under the shadow of the big Skagit tower when working for another contractor 20 years previously. When he learned the Skagit would be sold on an internet auction (Iron Planet), John convinced Wayne Stone that it would be a good machine. While the crews all worked, Wayne's wife, Debbie, purchased the tower for \$500. The much bigger investment came in the following six months during which mechanics completely rebuilt it. The purchase has proved to be a good decision.

Keeping the Crew Busy

Stone's current job using the Skagit tower is estimated to be 750 MMBF on approximately 35 acres of steep Longview Timber land. Notably, the tower was first set up on the same landing nearly a year earlier to harvest 100 acres of state land for Hampton. Before the Hampton job was complete, Longview Timber contracted Stone to harvest their adjoining unit. When complete, a total of 135 acres will have been harvested by one big tower sitting on one relatively small landing.

Like his current contract, most of Stone's near term work is the result of previously secured jobs. Even the jobs that he is working are experiencing delays and have shipping quotas limiting the amount of wood he is allowed to produce each day.



“The sad thing,” Stone says, “is that I have such good workers that I hate to have to lay anyone off if it comes to that.” Consequently, to keep his men working, he is pursuing jobs like forest service stewardship topping and inoculation -- jobs he would have passed on during better times.

Someday a Skagit BU98 may be parked at the Camp 18 logging museum, but for now, Wayne Stone Logging expects that its new life will last for many years. And until the market improves, it is likely that diversified operations like Stone’s stand the best chance of sustained work.