

## Cutting Poles and Getting Stuck in Spring Sunshine

Doc showed up at my place early spring. He said, "Let's go down to the bridge and up that road the other side of the river and cut some posts and poles. I can sell them in town."

"Doc, we can't get up that road yet. There's still too much snow."

"We could get in there with the tractor."

"We couldn't get in with the tractor with the wagon behind it. We might get in with just the tractor, but that would mean yarding everything clear to the road."

"So? That's one way to get the poles out. Let's try it. It might be worth doing. Can't tell unless we try."

I thought about it. Not a lot lost if we just tried it, I thought. We could walk away from the effort and do something else if it didn't go right. I said, "Okay. Let's try it."

We left the wagon at the turnoff and took our chainsaws and the tractor up the hill to a stand of dead lodgepole. I slapped the tractor throttle down and mudded across the drainages crossing the dirt road and up the hill to a good stand of beetle-killed lodgepole.

We cut forty poles, dragged them down to the road, and chained fifteen of them behind the tractor. Dragging poles, I couldn't keep up the speed. The front wheels sank into the mud of the first drainage and refused to climb the ice shelf on the other side. The drive wheel spun on ice,

We ditched our saws behind a big ponderosa pine and walked two miles. One of northeastern Oregon's spring snow flurries hit us hard, with big, wet flakes in the wind. Snow melted on our clothes and soaked us in the first half-mile. I felt colder and colder as we walked up the road into the wind.

Doc thought it was great fun and funny, and I tried to stay in the good spirit of it. I said, "Freezing to death is an easier way to go if you're laughing all the way."

We walked over Camp Creek running muddy and high through the big culvert under the road. Cinnamon teal ducks leaped into the wind on noisy wings and flew up the valley. I broke into a trot. Doc trotted with me, but he said, "What's your big rush? It's a beautiful day to be walking."

"Beautiful day for running, too."

We ran into the yard, thundered into the house, stood by the kitchen stove, and soaked heat from burning pine. Laura fixed us food. Amanda and Juniper played noisy games through the house while wind and snow blew through the valley.

We loaded rocks into Doc's pickup and hauled them back. We jacked up the front of the tractor, filled the mudhole under it with rocks, let the tractor down, hooked the tractor to the poles, and pulled them up onto the county road. We loaded poles onto the wagon and went back for the rest. We had to fill another mudhole with rock.

Doc said, "It isn't wasted work. Once we get all the mudholes filled with rock, we can go in and out any time we want to."

Doc took the poles to town the next day and sold them for \$30.00. Pretty good. Twelve dollars for gas; nine dollars apiece for a long day's work.

Doc showed up the next morning before daylight. He said, "It's fifteen degrees out. The road'll be froze up, and we can get in there."

"We? What's this we stuff? You go get stuck if you want to. By yourself."

"Come on. You got nothing to do. I promised Kathy I wouldn't work with a chainsaw by myself."

"Ten years ago, I promised myself I would never again get stuck and have to dig out. Yesterday is the first time I got stuck since I made that promise."

"It's froze up. We won't get stuck."

"It's froze up about an inch thick. First time we break through that thin crust, we're stuck."

"I brought the big truck. We won't get stuck. If I chain it up, that truck will go where a four-wheel drive won't go."

"I know. Straight down into a hole."

"We won't get stuck. I've gone worse places with it. It has more flotation and more drive-surface than a four-wheel drive."

The guy's got confidence. And ambition. I said, "I'll go along and cut and load poles. But if you get stuck, you're on your own. I can't pull that big a truck out with the tractor."

"Don't worry about it. We won't need it. We won't get stuck."

"You won't get stuck. I don't have anything to do with the stuck or not stuck part of it. Remember that. I have a feeling you might need to."

"Now, Jon. You can't expect to get stuck. You have to keep your thoughts positive about it. No negative vibrations. Positive

vibrations will get us through.”

We cut poles. The morning warmed up. The snow remaining in drifts thawed to wet slush. I said, “Let’s call this a load. We’re going to have to leave it here and come and get it in the morning.”

“The ground’s dry enough up here. I’m going to turn it around so it’s headed out.” He backed and spun the wheels.

“Don’t spin the wheels. You’ll sink. I’ll get out and take a look.”

I got out and looked at all the wheels. “Nothing’s blocking you. Try to come forward, but come forward easy. Don’t spin the wheels.” He tried to come forward. The truck wouldn’t move, so he floorboarded it. The drive wheels spun and threw turf and mud, and the truck sank until it sat on the differential.

Doc got out. We walked around the truck and looked it over. “I told you not to spin the wheels.”

“I had to try something, didn’t I?”

“I kept my vibrations positive right up until you were sitting on the axle. Just flooded this outfit with positive vibrations. Either you slipped up on yours, or positive vibrations won’t float a loaded truck over mud. I have a feeling this truck is going to sit here a while.”

“Ah, we can get it out.”

“We?”

“You wouldn’t just abandon me, would you?”

“I would. I told you before we started, if you get stuck, you’re on your own.”

“We could try the tractor.”

“It won’t pull it.”

“If we jacked it up and blocked up the rear wheels, it would pull it.”

“I know this truck’ll be here until the snow all melts and the ground dries out. But you’re not going to allow me any peace until I prove it to you, so you see if you can get it up out of the holes, and I’ll go get the tractor.”

I walked across the meadow to the river and up the river a half-mile, to where beavers had built a dam after high water dropped. I crossed the river on the dam. Water ran in all the sloughs. I zigged and zagged about a mile and waded some of the sloughs. Ducks jumped into the air and flew away from me.

I climbed the fence behind the house. I warmed up inside the house, and I changed my wet boots, socks, and trousers. I drove the tractor down the road, across the bridge, and in on the dirt road.

Doc had unloaded the truck, jacked it up, filled the holes with chunks of wood, and let the truck down so the wheels sat on the wood. I hooked a chain to the truck and pulled, and the tractor wheels just spun. Doc gave the truck full-throttle, and the wheels spun off the wood filling the holes, back down to the differential in new holes, or actually the same holes, but wider.

Doc got out of the truck, looked it over, and shrugged his shoulders. He said, "Fishing's good this time of year. How'd you get across the river?"

"There's a beaver dam up a ways. I'll show you. I can get the tractor later."

We walked up the meadow at an easy pace.

Through the longer and longer days of spring I watched multitudinous birds celebrate ever-warmer sunshine. I don't know what Doc was doing, fishing maybe.

His truck stayed where we'd left it until late June. Long before that, I worked ranch work full time, and I let Doc do whatever he would do about poles and his truck. I figured he'd have to handle the whole thing no matter what he had promised Cindy.