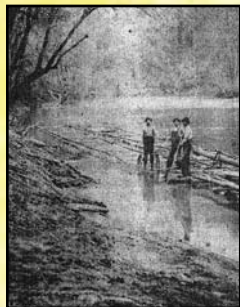


Accordion Bluff - Landmark in Time

by Darren Shell

So few that pass the rocky bluff adjacent to Willow Grove Campground know what it is that they see in that interesting bluff overlooking what was once a rich valley near the winding Obey River.



That old bluff stands as a testament to days of old — a modern day earthen monument to its rich heritage. Accordion Bluff was, and is, a special place in Dale Hollow history.

Let's talk about that big, beautiful rocky bluff that shares space with us on the Dale. Some days I float out in the middle of the lake and stare at that giant stone wall facing Sulphur Creek. I can almost see the hustle and bustle of yesteryear. It's an interesting site that should be shared. Even the name is a bit precarious. Let's start our story way back about a hundred years or so — around

the turn of the twentieth century. This part of the world was deep into one of the only forms of free trade that our area possessed - the log trade to be exact. Our local boys sawed huge trees, and then carted them to the river in preparation for the long trip down a watery trail leading to Nashville. The Obey and Cumberland Rivers offered a downstream highway — the necessary means of transporting hundreds of thousands of logs that eventually became furniture and building supplies for much of America. It was wood that fashioned our country.

But how does the old logging trade fit as part of the heritage of Accordion Bluff? It's simple, really. The logs are what gave our fine bluff its name. When viewed from far away, Accordion Bluff's characteristic vertical stripes remain quite visible. Those downward ruts in the bluff face do in fact look like the exposed lines of an accordion. It looks like someone stretched that mountain apart exposing the accordion-shaped linear lines for all to see.

But why are those long valley lines there? The logs did it. In the early 1900's, young America was in need of logs. Loggers would cut, saw, and drag the logs across the valleys and ridges by the path of least resistance, over ridge lines and mountain tops, to the pinnacle of entry into the river, where they could easily transport their wares to market. They would pull those trees to the top of the bluff and push them over the edge to the river below — dragging the soil, rock, and plant material along the way to the riverbed below — forever a visual testimony to the logging trade of the day. Once at the river, all of those logs could be built into a large river-worthy craft and ready for the one hundred mile trip downstream. Quite simply, they'd drag all those logs to the river...bind them all together ... and head south with their load. Each logger had their own "brand" for the end of the logs...much like a rancher for his cattle. They would stamp their mark into the end of each log to prove ownership once the craft met its destination. At its downstream location, the owner would be paid by the board-foot for his wares. Then he would make his way back to his home base in the Obey River Valley.

Those old log-routes are still SO visual on that bluff. I can almost see those logs sliding down the bluff and the people prying and pushing logs all over that bluff's surface. It's beautiful, really. You just have to see beyond what most see. You have to look with older eyes.

And there is yet another stripe across this rock face too. This one is left-to-right — almost indiscernible in its modern-day form. It's hard to believe that this was once a road — a heavily-traveled highway clinging to that tall bluff between the old city of Willow Grove and the town of Lillydale. It too is a huge part of our bluff's history.

So there you have it. Logs carved the up-and-down lines in

the bluff. Mankind carved the horizontal road line left to right up near the top. And the rest of us, we just ponder what once was on this giant rock face.

It's hard to fathom those old men pushing and prying logs down that old stone face and the old log rafts at the bottom bound together with hemp rope. It's hard to imagine men hardy enough to maneuver those hand-bound wooden craft a hundred miles to market. It's hard to picture it all ... all the many and fascinating repercussions stemming from our Accordion Bluff. What is now a simple, deep bluff was once a thriving and very much alive portion of a community whose very livelihood was the log trade. Each log was high-mileage, each man well-traveled, each hearty laugh and painful grimace swirled into history. Every man doing his job ... living a logger's life — much of which began on Accordion Bluff.



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Also available "The Last Smallmouth" co-authored by Tony Bean and Darren Shell



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