

The saga of a mountain man

EDITOR'S NOTE — The author is a longtime chronicler of the Santa Cruz waterfront.

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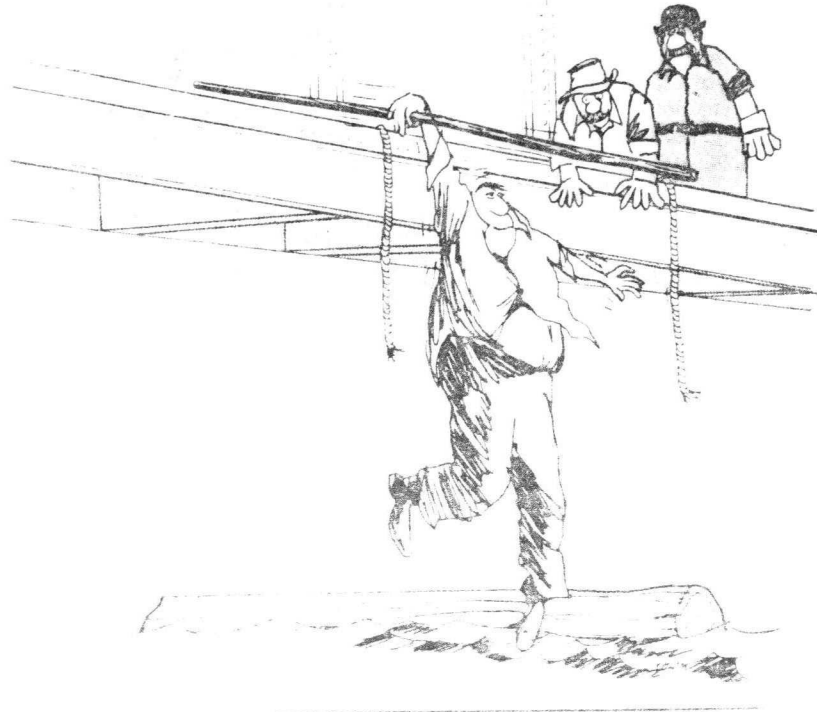
THERE ARE A THOUSAND stories of Santa Cruz yesterdays. This is the saga of a mountain man.

March 12, 1889 was a stormy night.

Outside — the wind howled and the heavens heaved forth the biggest rainfall in years. The San Lorenzo was running bank to bank. Mountainous seas, backed by a high tide, were playing havoc with Steve Washburn's boat and bath houses near the river mouth.

Inside, the boys were gathered in Manuel Silva's Pacific Avenue emporium of smoke, spit and strong stimulant. The bar, like the cuspidors and customers, was in a sloppy condition. Suddenly, all thoughts of conversation and conviviality ceased temporarily, for...

Jules Poleon, French-Canadian logger, had decorated the mahogany with \$100 gold. He defied any man to ride a log from the north city limits to the breaker line.



Fred Barson Sr. saw the wild ride

This is how it came about that D.A. "Wild Bill" Talbot made his epic safari to the sea.

Horrified citizenry the following morning gathered off the Anthony property above the Water Street bridge where "Wild Bill" embarked on a log. He carried a long green balancing pole. For crowd benefit he danced and then rode backwards. Sitting down he shouted "I'll

see you in Monterey."

But then "Wild Bill" was no novice at riding the timber. He had been known to carry a man on his back across Loma Prieta dam. While most men traveled on horseback or buggy from Felton to the Big Trees, Bill always preferred the watery route.

Fifteen knots or better — downstream on the crest of flood waters swept "Wild Bill" and his log. Passing under the Soquel Avenue bridge he laughingly spurned the warnings of Fred Barson and swimming Professor J.E. Armstrong.

Now the waters grew even swifter. The pace was turbulent. Still defiant — and still shouting "on to Monterey" — the mountain man thrust aside the proffered ropes of Henry Uhden and Frank Gilbert dangling from the railroad trestle.

Master of an almost lost art and master of the San Lorenzo was the logger. But he now faced the greatest test of all.

The day was March 13.

Straight into the jaws of a towering 15-foot breaker plunged the log, pole and man, to disappear from mortal view.

"Wild Bill" Talbot had ridden into eternity on a redwood to win \$100.

His body was found the following Tuesday at Aptos by clammer Ed Nichols.

The remains were buried by Wessendorf and Staffler.

This tale was related to the writer by Ernest Otto and Leon Rowland — at a Sentinel session of 2/21/1943.



Henry Uhden offered a hand