

RECRUITMENT OF LOGGING WORKFORCE IN A NEW AREA

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BACKGROUND

The East Coast District commenced plantation logging on a very modest scale in 1985. Loggers who had for decades worked native forest in the area were mostly retired or out of business through the native forest protection movement. Residual loggers working the occasional farm shelter belts were few in number, unequipped for high production and generally limited to inconsistent fine weather production.

The first plantation logging unit utilising an 071 Madill and an 18 tonne boom loader brought key contract personnel from the Kaingaroa region. Four of the nine man unit were ex Kaingaroa cable loggers, one of which had 071 experience. The remainder of that original crew were inexperienced local people who had a yearning to become part of what is to be a significant local industry. Generally they were from forest silviculture backgrounds and had basic poversaw work skills.

Over the five year period up to 1990 the East Coast logging workforce has grown from that original nine up to thirty-two. The level of skills has improved for those who have stuck at it, but the labour turnover has been very high.

Just over half of the current workforce have greater than four years logging experience. The percentage of local workers has grown from the original 55% in 1985 to today's 72%. Turnover is still high with the most significant influencing factors being gang specific. Some gangs hold their labour, some are forever turning workers over.

Of the five prime contractors now in the District, three are locals with low capital intensive setups, the other two are higher

capital cost, higher production units whose principles have shifted into the area.

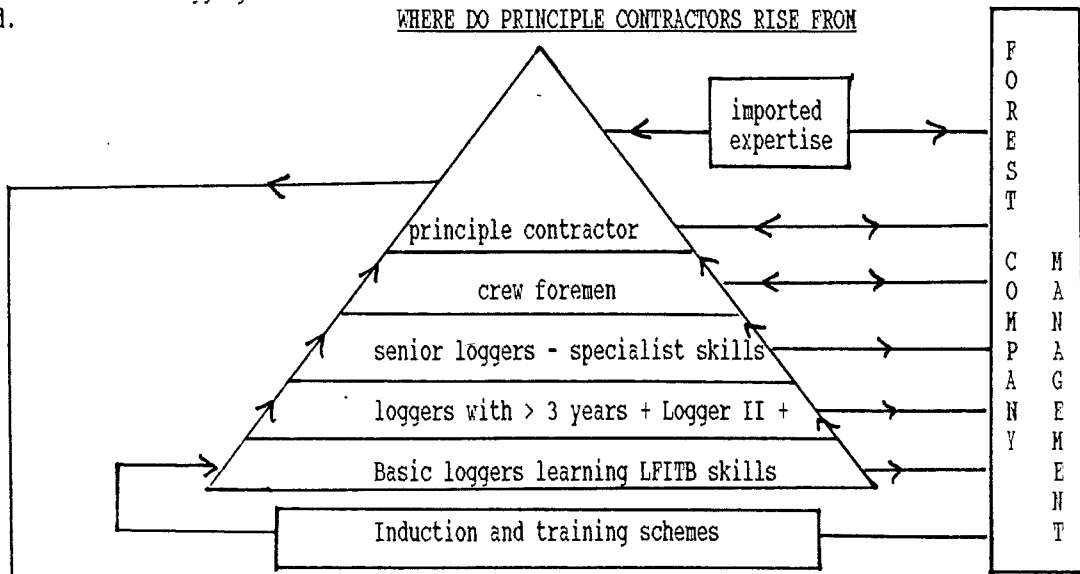
The growth in direct logging employment over the past five years of just 4.6 extra loggers per annum has at times been difficult to maintain. Forecasts for the current decade show a requirement on average for 12 extra loggers per annum to meet the non declining yield of East Coast Districts plantation forests. Loggers do generate additional loggers and as the East Coast logging pyramid grows there may be less difficulty in filling the lower pyramid tiers. However, it is obvious that the numbers will not be coming from outside of the District. All other Districts forecast significant logging growth over the next decade and there are a lot of easier propositions than the East Coast. All of the original Kaingaroa loggers who established the first cable unit in 1985 have now returned to Bay of Plenty operations.

To be effective in the East Coast logging must utilise a majority of relatively capital intensive cable logging units. While there are still a number of low cost sled mount, truck mount type yarders available in NZ their suitability to East Coast terrain and crop conditions is very limited. To be successful in firstly, attracting finance for the better equipment and secondly, operating it as a successful business, loggers require a sound record of experience and ability. Likely it will be these prime contractors who will be most difficult to find for East Coast.

The logistics of training loggers to fill crew positions thru company training schemes using L & FITB standards can be managed, given Company and contractor support. The prospect of increasing the number of principle contractors with capital intensive setups by 16 in a period of 10 years, requires a very decisive

and organised approach.

The following paper outlines two of the more interesting projects East Coast have undertaken to build their logging workforce pyramid.



Interaction With

Required to Demonstrate

Forestry Companies

Man management skills
Business management skills
Logging ability
Mechanical ability
Financial security/ability

Financiers

Equity ability
Business ability
Logging track record
Rapport with Forestry Companies

The Logging Workforce

Man management skills
Financial security
Logging ability

RECRUITMENT OF OVERSEAS CONTRACTORS.

i) Why

Cable logging in steep wet country where there are small to non existent landings is not a well developed practice in New Zealand. Overseas however European and more particularly loggers of the Northwest Pacific accept those situations as the norm. There are significant gains to be made by importing expertise to mingle with our own workforce. Most large NZ forestry companies, research organisations and consultants utilise foreign personnel to gap technology rather than re-invent wheels at additional cost. In the early days of NZ exotic logging Kaingaroa forest was set up with a number of Canadian loggers who had expertise beyond our local ability of the day.

Timberlands East Coast have in a similar vein recruited a principle logging contractor from Canada. The contractor is a third generation logger whose immediate family own and operate a cable logging business approximately equal to the whole of the North Islands cable logging production. Their exposure to cable logging in general far exceeds what is practical for the average NZ logger. Because of the current and ongoing downturn in work in the Pacific North West region, loggers of that area are in search of more stable and expansion oriented industry. NZ, Australia, Chile and the Southern States where plantation forestry is the norm are more likely to offer logging expansion to the P.N.W., where native forests are badly overcut and conservation pressures are mounting.

To import such expertise is a rather difficult assignment.

ii) Commitment of Contractor and Employer.

To begin with the would be contractor must be extremely determined to make things work. There are so many hidden hurdles to cross that 90% of normal applicants would

never make the grade.

From the would be employers point of view it must also be very clear that this task of importing a contractor is paramount as there is a large amount of time, hassle and expense associated with it.

iii) Pre Decision Research.

To establish the abovementioned determination of both parties the two must interact and research one another for some time. As the initial approach is best from the would be contractor, the immigrant must first visit NZ. The initial visit will familiarise him with New Zealand, the nature of our people and the broad opportunities in our logging industry. On their return home, research into shipping, equipment, immigration, etc is carried out. A second visit to NZ is then undertaken during which more definite avenues are researched. These would include logging costs, logging opportunities, industry set up and interaction, immigration policies, housing and schooling, financing options, leisure opportunities, etc.

At this stage the would be contractor is reasonably well acquainted with NZ but the would be employer may know little about him. One or several visits to their offshore operations is a wise investment to ascertain the experience of the contractor, his real equity, his reputation, his past business, standard of living, family situation, etc. With respect this task should be carried out thoroughly as there is inevitably a culture gap where misinterpretations and or overstatements may give rise to latter problems.

iv) Decision to Move to NZ.

Having visited one another several times and both parties being comfortable about moving forward the Contractor should then discuss details of the possible contract and perhaps have his family visit NZ.

Assuming there is still a win win situation for all the right reasons, details can then be commenced. These include

- i) Immigration - To immigrate to NZ is no small exercise. It is expensive, time consuming and very frustrating.
- ii) Contract - The logging contract should then be set so as to allow :
- iii) Financing in NZ.
- iv) Importing/Shipping etc.
- v) Labour recruitment.
- vi) Training in NZ standards etc.
- vii) Housing, schooling, etc.

The whole affair is time consuming. To complete immigration can take at least one year depending upon the case peculiarities. If it takes two months to organise a new contract with a NZ contractor then allow four months to do it with an overseas contractor. There are financing problems outside of the norm and communication around the globe takes time.

Equipment, furniture, etc being imported into NZ creates many headaches. It would be wise to minimise such or go to the expense of appointing an agent. In particular immigrants find vehicles and household effects very expensive in NZ but they are also difficult to import without incurring extra expenses with NZ authorities.

v) Post Immigration Requirements.

With the new Contractor in place, a large commitment and understanding is required by the employer and others who interact to ensure that NZ standards are attained.

In particular retraining to NZ industry safety standards, training to achieve required log grade and quality of presentation, assistance with labour require-

ments, general contacts, etc, become a task of the employer, who by now is the Contractors closest contact.

vi) What are the Payoffs.

For all of the work involved in importing overseas expertise there are real paybacks for the employer, the contractor and the industry as a whole.

- i) It is only healthy that NZ chases the standards of its offshore Pacific neighbours who compete in the same log and lumber markets.
- ii) In an area such as the East Coast, where skills are light and there are no locals with relevant expertise and capital the immigrant will provide both to produce a principle contractor.
- iii) The new to NZ contractor will tend to take non experienced people and train them into his logging systems, rather than be moulded by partly experienced workers as could be the case if a less experienced principle were in charge.
- iv) The resultant logging crew will quickly attain production standards close to those which exist in the P.N.W. There is a real danger in an area like the East Coast, that because of skills deficit, low standards could become the norm throughout the industry expansion stage at least. The highest standard is the one to set the example and create a healthy competitive atmosphere as exists in the B.O.P. tractor/skidder logging scene. This is the most significant payoff which over the next decade can easily be worth tens of millions of dollars to an area like the East Coast.

LOCAL TRAINING SCHEME FOR LOCAL CONDITIONS.

i) The Cost of Not Training.

Below every successful principle contractor is a team of skilled reliable workers. In an area where there is no recent history of logging there is little or no real perception of what logging involves. This situation, present on the East Coast, tends to limit worker recruitment to an employees choice rather than an employers choice. The industry can always stand some school leavers or other new unskilled workforce members. When there is a dynamic increase in numbers required to achieve a relatively specialist logging programme such a drift along recruitment programme will likely reduce standards and productivity. This situation is ever degenerating to the extent that industry would become non competitive, non exciting and generally attract lower class people into temporary positions.

After several years of lobbying, public displays, field days and press awareness programmes, Timberlands East Coast have commenced a joint venture worker training programme with the local Tairawhiti Polytechnic. Logging training has often been debated as either a contractor or company responsibility. This debate is invariably centered around cost of the training and that is the very misconception. Certainly there is a high cost involved in training but it is a cost to whole timber industry, which, particularly in the East Coasts case, is also a cost to the community at large. The degenerative process of an unskilled workforce would severely restrict East Coast forestry opportunities.

ii) An Industry Training Scheme.

As small as the East Coast logging workforce is there is but limited opportunity for new entrant training with contractors. Timberlands and Tairawhiti Polytechnic have this year commenced their first annual cable logging course.

The course, running from February to November inclusive, caters for school leavers or other non skilled workers to learn cable logging to the extent where they will understand all aspects of gang performance in the East Coast type terrain. The major course subjects include :

Power saw training
Cable system training
Equipment understanding
General forestry training
Rigging, breaking out, skid organisation,
Logmaking, Introduction to falling,
Environmental effects, man management
Logging costings, logging workstudy
Attainment of LPITB Logger III
Mapping, roading, cable analysis.

The course intake of 12 students are taught almost exclusively by Timberlands logging staff, at least one being with them at all times. The Polytechnic provide a vehicle, basic equipment (powersaws etc) class facilities, student bursary of \$40 per week minimum, reimbursement to Timberlands for staffing and general overview of the course. Timberlands, with assistance from its contractors provides a venue for practical experience. Similarly, London Pacific Ltd, who hold a local stumpage sale with Timberlands, are providing access to their logging contractors and some financial support to the course.

The course is 70%+ practical infield logging experience. Following initial block introductory sessions the remaining subjects are scattered to suit throughout the year.

Students on the course are drawn from numerous walks of life, they are all local, range from 18 to 38 years of age and generally have a minimum of school certificate maths, etc.

The objective of the course is to provide local industry with semi skilled workers who have the understanding and ability to consolidate into senior loggers and perhaps foreman or principle contractors. Emphasis of training is on overall efficiency of cable logging.

The extensive trainee selection process has resulted in a very positive attitude among the trainees toward their future prospects in the industry.

Should even half of the trainees make it through the Timberlands Tairawhiti Cable Logging Course to become skilled and succesful local loggers then the industry will be far better placed. The running of the course is a large commitment but with skilled people being a major requirement for industry success there is little option for East Coast but to maintain such a programme over the next decade.