

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

Building the Dam

Wilfred Woods: Grand Coulee Dam was the first dam to use long conveyors out and in, crossing the river.

Jack Hilson: There were batch plants on the cliffs. Debris, or overburden, came out on a half-mile long conveyor.

Rod Hartman: There were two great big trestles where the donkeys would bring great big cement buckets across the river. A great big crane would pick 'em up and put 'em down in the proper place—and they would dump it.

Cecil Scott: Yes, I worked on Grand Coulee Dam. First I worked on the Cleanup Crew, right down on the bedrock. Boy, that was hard work! If you didn't work, there was 10 guys waitin' to get your job.

That was in the middle of the dam. That was Cleanup Crew—you had to go clear down to bedrock, and had to sandblast that bedrock, clean it up. And there was all sorts of gold down in there. I took a bunch of pails of sand home to my dad, and he washed it out and got 3 oz. of gold. But they stopped us from doing that—so I worked down there quite a while.

Then a good friend of mine got me a job over on the muck conveyor. That was a lot easier, I liked that.

I worked on that muck conveyor about 6 months—and then I transferred to a Bell Boy on the Hammerhead Crane. That was really good. All I had to do was sit on the edge of a form and talk to the operator when they were pouring concrete. That was really good.

I'd tell him "Travel east...hold your travel, a little more stick, comin' down easy, hold your load, ok pick 'er up a little bit, that's good, highball! Take 'er home! We just poured a bucket of concrete!"

You worked 40 and it paid 50 cents an hour. After they took out everything, you had about \$19.60.

Edith Lael: My dad got work as a laborer, then on a jackhammer—and then as a Powder Man. He'd come home at night with dust all over his clothes. We just had a standpipe outside for water, and outhouses.

Inise Powers: I met my husband in a tavern. He was a cowboy, 6 foot 2 and handsome, and he had a car. He got one of the hardest jobs on the dam: concrete vibrator. They poured concrete in

16-ton buckets, with a crane and highline, and poured in five-foot slabs—which were finished absolutely clean.

Jack Hilson: The CCC did clearing. They lived on barges while clearing the riverbed.

Inise Powers: There were big trash racks behind the dam to catch debris coming down river. As the river rose, thousands of rattlesnakes floated down the river in the debris. My husband and I used to go to the trash racks and shoot the rattlesnakes.

The workers staying in the apartments were a carpenter foreman, who built forms and ladders, a donkey driver, a concrete man, vibrator man—and four engineers. We had a crush on them because they were college men!

The Monkey Men or High Climbers, scaled walls and drilled dynamite holes up on ropes. They drilled holes with jackhammers and set the charges. Our friend, T-Bone, had been a contortionist in the Barnum and Bailey Circus. T-Bone and another friend, Andy, were big and strong. I think they had been miners, too.