

THE DOG-HOLES OF MENDOCINO

California's coastwise lumber trade began with the latter days of the Gold Rush. People couldn't go indefinitely living in tents; there was an explosive demand for houses and for railroad ties and for bridge-timbers, and not too far away was an apparently limitless supply of redwood. The only problem was that of transportation -- and in its solution there was born an era of rough-and-ready shipping by sea which is perhaps unique in maritime history. There were no railroads to bring in the lumber, and what roads existed were wholly inadequate; the only answer was to ship by sea, and under conditions which called for courage, brute strength, and a breed of mariners capable of meeting challenges which today would seem appalling.

Cutting and milling the lumber was relatively easy, and so would be its unloading in San Francisco and other coastal ports. The big problem was how to get it aboard ship from along several hundred miles of rock-bound and unfriendly coast which, with the exception of Humboldt Bay, offered practically nothing in the way of harbors. By necessity, they learned to utilize the indifferent shelter of the coves at the mouth of some small river or creek, which came to be known as the Mendocino Dog-holes -- a place into which a dog could crawl, turn around and, with good luck, get out again.

There were few wharves, because you can't lie alongside a wharf to load, when you are practically in the first line of breakers. The answer was, in a sense, to go by air, either by a "rough and ready" wooden chute into whose upper end the lumber was dumped a plank at a time, to slide by gravity down to the deck of an anchored vessel, or by the "wire chute" where a steel cable permitted taking it considerably further off shore;

