Fred Galbreath at Humboldt State University - 1995
Transcribed from video by Matt Thompson

Introduction

This is transcribed from a 1995 video of Fred Galbreath speaking about his ranch, showing slides, and taking questions from a group of students at Humboldt State University. HSU Professor, Dr. Terry Roelofs, introduces Mr. Galbreath. The video shows a few friends and family in the audience including Mr. Galbreath’s daughter, Nancy Johnson, her husband, and Nancy Levensaler. Images of the slides shown during the presentation were extracted from the video, when possible, and included in this transcript.

Interview Transcript

Terry Roelofs:

This is a privilege that I have been looking forward to for a long time which is to introduce Fred Galbreath to the campus. Some of the folks in the audience have met Fred down at his ranch in Mendocino and this is the first opportunity we’ve had to have him here as our guest. Many of you are aware of the commitment that Fred has made to Humboldt by way of his land agreement and a generous trust fund to setup a long term study area in Mendocino. He is going to be sharing some of his thoughts of nearly fifty years of ownership of this piece of land and some of the thinking that went into his decision to include Humboldt in his long term planning. I said I would try to say something to set the stage here and embarrass him but I can’t go too far out on a limb here because he gets the last shot. You know, the thing about age is at first you can’t get old fast enough. You can’t wait to be eighteen, twenty one, and then after a while those decade leaps out there start to loom heavily as a forty year old, or thirty, or what not, then you reach a point where it becomes a matter of pride. [audience laughter as Mr. Galbreath shakes his head] Fred was born in 1901. He has seen some changes. He made a remark last night, one of the reasons he got into the ranching business was a love affair with two things, soil, the trees they grow, and horses. Fred has traveled extensively and it is still very clear having spent a little bit of time on his property with him, that I think in all of his travels probably one of the places in the world most dear to him is this ranch. That is what he is going to talk about today and if he doesn’t volunteer there will be an opportunity for questions. He knew Jack London. He told me last night that Ishi taught him how to do some animal tracking. There’s a man here that represents when he was first hunting ducks the daily limit was fifty birds. He carried two shotguns because the barrel would get so hot he could no longer shoot it. At any rate, it is an honor to introduce to you today, Fred Galbreath.

Fred Galbreath:

Actually, it is an honor to be here, and I mean that very sincerely. I have spent two days up here meeting the staff and the students and I am so happy, what I want to do, is going
through Humboldt State. I want to thank Terry for introducing me to that, and Mr. Christianson who has been masterminding the transition. I’m really going to talk to you about the ranch, its history, and some of the things that have happened. This is not a studious type of [not understandable]. I went into the ranching business because I worked in San Francisco in an office. I had two partners who were going to finance my dream of owning a ranch, and they would be partners, and of all the days to look at the ranch, to put down a check as a deposit, as I told the owner of this particular ranch don’t cash it because there is no money behind it. The day of this was Pearl Harbor day. My partners the next Monday after that fateful Sunday said no, we’re at war. I was able to get some financing through the government, the land bank in Berkeley, and get started as a rancher. I bought a book on sheep ranching and held it with my left hand and rode my horse with my right hand, and that’s about the way I learned about sheep ranching. I said I got government financing, and the one thing they recommended to me when they made the loan on the ranch, was that I cut down all of the fir trees that I could so I would have more grazing land. That was the thinking fifty, sixty, seventy years ago. Get rid of the forest even if the land was poor for grazing, but open it up for grazing. There were several reasons for having the fir cut down. One is, sixty years ago you couldn’t use our coastal fir for building because it was so tough when it dried you put a nail in it and the nail would bend and not go through. It wasn’t until after the last war that they began to use the fir from Mendocino County for building, using it green, it didn’t shrink and it proved to be a good asset as far as building lumber is concerned, when green and not when dry. That revolutionized the Mendocino County fir lumbering operations. You learned that only by trial and error and I did a lot of errors.

In the sheep end of it, I had Marino sheep. I bought some pure-bred stock up from New Zealand during the war which is another long story because it went through the Japanese blockade. I was so proud of these imported Marino sheep. They were in quarantine in San Francisco and I can remember once during the time of their import I was going to the Mark Hopkins Hotel in a dinner jacket and I had to take my friends with me down to see my sheep. When they got back to the hotel they (sniffing sound) sniffed… The present ranch which I have which is going to Humboldt is a little more than four thousand acres, four thousand and three or four hundred, and as I mentioned last night, my dad told me if I ever should buy land, to always buy it with hills in it because acreage is measured horizontally. If you buy four thousand acres and half of it is hills, then you have six thousand acres. That’s the first thing I would mention when going to buy land, get hills.

In those days land was so cheap that people didn’t particularly bother with boundaries. You put a fence up where it was accessible, where there weren’t trees to knock it down, and to hell if you were on your neighbor’s property, or he was on yours, it didn’t make any difference. Land then was really cheap. I found, to my sorrow, that a lot of the land I bought in the first place was not really my land. Some of the land I bought, some of the land I didn’t know I owned, I did own. One night, it was raining hard and there was a knock on my ranch door and this man came in and he was a neighbor from about three or four miles away. He said Fred we just discovered that my house is on your land. It was. He said what shall we do? I said the worst thing you can do is to tell me. [audience laughter] Then one day the following year I was at the little house that we have, here was
a tree slope and that was the end of the ranch, right where the tree slope started, say a quarter of a mile away. I heard some chain saws going and I went out to find out what was happening, and my neighbor, Jack Mailliard, had his crew cutting down these trees on his land. So I got a hold of him and said come here, you’re cutting trees down that really I would like to have there for my view and lets see if we can trade some land. I’ll trade you some for this. We brought a surveyor in and to my delight the surveyor said I owned that land. So that’s the way it was. I know today, and I mentioned this, Don, there are two or three fingers of someone else’s land in on my ranch where you’ll have to worry about it sometime in the future. You just can’t go by fencing at all, or you couldn’t fifty or sixty years ago. You have to have a picture of how things were in those days. You didn’t have electricity. Your only power was gasoline. You pumped water for irrigation, or you had a machine for shearing our sheep. Everything is gasoline. We would use oil in the house for lighting; it wasn’t as it is today. We would drive, just before I bought that ranch, they would drive the lands from Yorkville to Boonville, which is about two miles, along the highway from a railroad car. Could you imagine driving lands along [highway] 101 today? But they did it fifty years ago. So things have been through radical change.

I have a few notes here. The use of redwood wouldn’t be acceptable today. They would cut down redwood trees for the heart lumber, make them into fence posts and pickets. The finest lumber we have is pickets and fence posts. Today they would go into superior paneling and things of that kind. They would cut trees down and leave logs eight to twelve feet in diameter, just leave them there because they’re a little too hard to get out. They used steam donkeys, not tractors, and the odds were if a log was cut down and you didn’t put a cushion under it, it would shatter. If it didn’t shatter and it was hard to get out, it just stayed there. I just pulled a log out about three or four weeks ago and it must have been there for a hundred years. The redwood was just as good as it was when it was cut down. The loggers left it.

Slides

I have some slides so you can see what I am talking about. Some of the faculty and students have been on the ranch in the last year.

Slide 1:

This is looking to the north and it’s the first ranch I owned, the one I bought on Pearl Harbor Day. It was a beautiful sheep ranch but wasn’t what I wanted really because I
wanted one with more trees, because I love trees. I would be up on top of that ridge, that distant ridge, and look down into the valley and see this particular ranch which we are now talking about, which is about two miles from the top of that ridge.

*Slide 2:*

That’s another view of the same.

*Slide 3:*

This is the road into my ranch. The ranch house is over to your right, and the pasture to the left. That’s a rail fence that has been there for heaven knows how long. That pasture is a dry pasture with Harding grass principally, with some meadow fescue in there, and it is very, very good forage for the sheep.

*Slide 4:*

This is the ranch house that we have and when I bought the ranch, that was the owner’s home. It was a single-walled house and the kitchen had a dirt floor and the first week that I was there a gopher came up in the kitchen floor, amazing all of us. When we rebuilt the house we found a bill and a letter which was dated just after the civil war which showed how long ago it was.
**Slide 5:**

This is the house again, with the porch.

**Slide 6:**

This is part of – those are three Humboldt State people, and I can’t tell you who they are. There’s a shearing shed – the big building is a shearing shed. That’s the barn and the shearing shed is the one with a light colored roof.

Terry Roelofs: The Humboldt State person in the middle is Fred Galbreath.

**Slide 7:**

Fred Galbreath: This is down below the house. I have a little pond, you can see it, just a glimmer of a pond. Its a small pond with a lot of cat tails which I am trying to find out from the university how to get rid of and so far haven’t received any help. If any of you people know how to remove cat tails, please drop me a note. That road up there goes to Nancy Levensaler’s, who is here today. Her house is up on the ridge and that road you see winding up goes up there.
Slide 8:

This is the pond right by the house and that’s next year’s dinner. [audience laughter]

Slide 9:

That pond was only put in about two or three years ago.

Slide 10:

This is our main pasture I was telling you about.

Slide 11:
Again, the sheep in the pasture.

*Slide 12:*

This is the main lambing pasture. That is under irrigation when we have water. The ranch is located with the Navarro River running through it. This year we couldn’t pump water out of the river after September 1st so you couldn’t do any irrigating. In a normal year this is all under irrigation and I can run about two hundred lambs on it. The timber on the upper edge is mostly fir, some hardwoods.

*Slide 13:*

Again, this lower part of that pasture.

*Slide 14:*

This is a woodland road going up to a hunting camp on the ranch, and characteristic of the country when you are into the second growth timber.

*Slide 15:*
This is a hillside, showing the wildflowers.

*Slide 16:*

This is a ridge – you people are familiar with the Standish-Hickey memorial park [State Recreation Area]. Standish and Hickey had about three hundred acres of land inside my ranch which I didn’t know about. As I told you, people were not very careful about boundaries. This was on the ridge above it and I was able to get Standish and Hickey to relinquish it so it would count as part of the ranch. Standish and Hickey were big lumber people in Mendocino County at that time.

*Slide 17:*

Erosion. That’s a constant fight of any mountain ranch after heavy rainfall. You are fighting erosion all the time.

*Slide 18:*
That’s a view from one of the lookout points on the ranch.

*Slide 19:*

This is a Humboldt contingent coming up, taking a look.

*Slide 20:*

This is what they saw from that point. The ranch boundary is on that far ridge over there.

*Slide 21:*

There again is another picture from that same viewpoint.
Slide 22:

This is an entry into some old growth redwoods on that slope and there are some beautiful redwoods in that canyon.

Slide 23:

This is a pond at the back of the ranch and the main feature there are wood ducks in the wintertime. Thanks to you people I have two wood duck boxes which I’m going to put up here at this pond and hope they are inhabited this winter.

Slide 24:

[Image not available]

Another slope.

Slide 25:

[Image not available]

There’s a canyon. This is a wonderful place for deer to bed down they love to bed down under those oak trees in the fall when the acorns come, that’s where they gather the acorns.

Slide 26:

[Image not available]
That’s an oak tree, and it’s a big one. See the picture of the man down below the oak.

*Slide 27:*

This is a woodpecker tree. It’s just filled with holes and acorns from the woodpeckers and once in a while you see a bald eagle up on top, on the spar.

*Slide 28:*

Some of the redwoods.

*Slide 29:*

That’s one of the trails.

*Slide 30:*
That’s a canyon full of old growth redwood.

*Slide 31:*

Another canyon.

*Slide 32:*

This is a very big redwood. I’d say the circumference is about thirty feet.

*Slide 33:*

[no narration]
Slide 34:

This is a little waterfall on bedrock, there are three pools there. I’ve been tempted many times to wonder if I can find gold in this because it’s right on the surface. Bedrock is a kind of a place where prospectors a hundred years ago would love to work on. Someday, maybe a few years from now, I’ll be doing that.

Slide 35:

This is the Navarro River in the summertime without much water in it. In the wintertime it flows from bank to bank. It’s a torrent. You can’t cross it.

Slide 36:

This is a feeding barn I have on the backend of the ranch for winter livestock feeding. I’ve had to take the sheep out of this particular pasture though, it is about one thousand acres, because of the mountain lions and coyotes which I can’t control back there. They’ve killed so many sheep so I don’t run sheep there anymore. This feed barn is just a wasted structure.

Slide 37:
These are sheep right by our house.

**Slide 38:**

I do a little logging operation, cutting down diseased and dying fir, and redwood suckers that come up from second growth. If there’s a stump with seven or eight suckers around it, I’ll cut four or five of them so that twenty or thirty years from now they’ll have two good second growth redwoods rather than half a dozen bad suckers. This is a landing, where [this got rooted out for the winter??], where all the logs got thrown out from the mill. That’s just part of where we clean out the landing so it looks good and is good. That will be covered with mulch next weekend in front of the heavy rain so there won’t be erosion.

**Slide 39:**

I don’t know what this is.

**Slide 40:**
Pasture slope.

Slide 41:

This is a picture that I took of Terry Roelofs with his fly fishing. He put his flies into a hornet’s nest and we see what he got. [audience laughter]

[end of slide show]

I would like to share some of the things that have happened on the ranch, things that I remember because they were sort of odd; this isn’t perhaps what you came here to hear, you may want to have some scientific facts and things that you are not going to get them from me. My daughter, who is here, was with me one day. We had borrowed our neighbor’s bull, because they ran a few cattle on the ranch. We were taking it back to the neighbor who lent it to us and as we were going up the grade, she said, oh look dad, there’s a truck down there, down in the brush. We went down, here was a big hundred thousand dollar logging truck covered over with bay branches to conceal it. I looked in the glove compartment and found it was a truck owned by a firm in San Jose, and I read in the paper about them having some of their trucks stolen, so we realized we had found a stolen truck. I called the sheriff up, the next weekend Nancy and I were coming up to the ranch again, and to go into the ranch you have to go over a bridge. They had the bridge blockaded and the sheriff was there, he stopped me and said, “who are you?” I said, “well my name is Galbreath.” He said, “you own the ranch?” I said, “yes.” He said, “we’re just raiding it!” I have to go back on this story – there was a little lumber mill operating on my ranch at the beginning when I bought it. It was being operated by five brothers, the Cunningham brothers. The police were raiding this ranch because the Cunningham brothers were stealing trucks and Caterpillar tractors and bringing them to my ranch, taking the numbers off, and reselling them. Why I had a mill there is this – when I bought this four thousand acres, I didn’t have enough money to buy the trees. I made a deal with the man that owned it that I buy the land and he had the timber rights
for the next three years. He could take the timber out, which I couldn’t buy, but at the end of three years then I owned the timber, which was a pretty good deal. As I just told you, they were more interested in stealing than in cutting timber. They would ask me, “where are those redwood clumps?” “Well I’ve never seen any redwood clumps on the ranch.” They believed me. A lot of things like that happened.

Boonville is the metropolis of that place. My first experience in Boonville was when I was about thirty years old and I was a deer hunter, I thought. I was going down to Boonville one day and there came a man on whose ranch I had been, his name was Campbell, and he was leading a mule, and on it I thought was a bear wrapped up in a canvas. I went over to him and I said, “Mr. Campbell, what kind of a bear did you get?” “That ain’t no bear, that’s the man that was running off with my daughter and I killed him last night.”

Question from audience: Was that true, Fred?

FG: Yes, it’s true. I’ve told all the stories I know, those are all the easy ones.

Question from audience: What was your first job out of high school?

FG: I graduated from high school and I was given a chance to be an office boy or clerk for a firm in San Francisco called AF Thane & Company. The first week I was there I was delivering the mail and the president of AF Thane & Company was a man by the name of Murphy. I went to bring the mail into his office and the door was closed, it was a glass door, the door stuck and I went through the glass. I landed there. Mr. Murphy, who was connected with Pacific Lumber, and AF Thane & Company were the export managers for Pacific Lumber, the people up here. I’m in the marine insurance business. Subsequently, Pacific Lumber asked me to handle their ocean cargo exports. I came up and stayed in Scotia for as long as I can get to stay there. I handled that account and they exported all over the Pacific basin. Any other questions?

Why did I want a ranch? I think I hinted already, I’m a country man at heart. I had a love of animals, a great love of trees, plus good parents who also liked the out-of-doors, and I wanted a ranch. I kept it as a dream for years and years and years and finally I had the opportunity as I mentioned to you where I had some partners and with their money I was going to go into it, but I am blessed with which I realized has to be perpetuated. I do not want it to be, a hundred years from now, a subdivision. I don’t want it to be a recreational center of any kind. I want it to be what it is today, enhanced by what I look to you for, this student participation. An outdoor classroom where you have the opportunity to see things growing from the start, everything from all sorts of trees, animals, I don’t know exactly how to word it, but I think heaven is operating a ranch. Have I talked long enough? Any questions?

Question from audience: I’d love to hear your Jack London story.
FG: Well, Jack London was a friend of my dad’s, and they looked alike. They were very much alike in physical appearance. Mr. London would come down once in a while and come out to the house. I got to know him as a kid, five or six or seven, however old I was. Of course his books then were so well received and so popular that I was a hero in my school district because I could say I knew Jack London. He was a very fine man.

When Ishi was brought to San Francisco, my father and mother knew Saxon? Polk who was affiliated with many colleges, and because of that I met Ishi many times and he took me down to Golden Gate Park, which was right below the colleges, and showed me tracks of animals, he thought he showed me how to handle a bow and arrow. He was a very interesting man, I thought from my perspective, it’s too bad he died as a youth. He was only thirty-five or forty when he died. He was only in San Francisco three or four years too. He was well liked by everybody who met him, the doctors and the professional people who met him. He enjoyed life. If you’ve ever seen pictures of him all dressed up with a neck-tie and business tool on – he was a very good looking Indian.

On this particular ranch on one of the roads you saw here, there was a little stream. One year I was going along that stream looking for steelhead, and it was raining, and I heard this [swishing noise] and I happened to be over on my neighbor’s land, not mine, my mistake of course. While looking for steelhead in the little creek, I though I better get behind a tree, which I did; about four or five Indians came down stream with their spears. They had been spearing steelhead. I wanted to stay very quiet under the dripping tree while they did their job and I got all wet. We used to have Indians in that part of Mendocino County quite a bit. I had two working on the ranch for me. They were excellent workers. There was a little Indian reservation there and when I first came they had just ended. That was up at the Sagar’s [sp?] place. That was an Indian reservation. They were still making salad from the greens around, and I have as you know, Indian artifacts found near there. I welcome the participation of all of you who want to come down to the ranch. Some of you have already done that. So I can take you around and show you what we’re doing. We are trying to keep it in a healthy condition. That’s why I’m cutting down dead and dying fir trees. I’m trying, somehow, to get rid of some of the tan oak. That brings up another story.

I don’t know if all of you young people realize that up until the last forty years, leather was tanned by tanning from the tan oak bark, not by chemicals as today. They used to, in my time up there, there was a big tan oak operation and it was nothing to see a twenty mull team coming down the hills with loads of tan oak, going down to Cloverdale. The man who was a foreman on my ranch, when he was in high school, would run a mule train all the time after school. You still find an occasional time where a tan oak mule teams will come down the slippery sides of that hill. One time Nancy Levensaler and I were riding down on a horse, or coming down a steep trail and we came across a load of frying pans, coffee pans, it looked like the stuff that prospectors used last century, and I think undoubtedly he came down with a mule load of equipment and his mule bucked it all off, and we found it all.
Irrigation in those days, on that one field you saw where we have modern irrigation. A hundred years ago they tried to irrigate there by using water from up above from some of the streams. They used a riveted pipe, a four-inch pipe. They put dams across Suffroni Creek but they couldn’t contain the water because in those days they had very, very heavy storms and heavy water fall and the dams I think would be washed out. The remnants of the pipe were there and are still there. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen riveted pipe but we have a lot of it still as a remnant of what they did. Those people worked pretty hard. Today with our modern equipment, we don’t know what hard work is. Any questions? I hope you have some.

Question from audience: Does your land have any fault lines or any earthquake problems?

FG: If there are fault lines, I don’t know them.

Question from audience: Do you have ranch staff that helps you take care of it.

FG: Yes, I have a man on the ranch.

Question from audience: One?

FG: On the other ranch, I had three. I was a little more active two years ago than I am today. Today I can’t. I have one man on the ranch all the time. During the logging season, or when I’m cutting out trees, I have a special crew that does that. All of you are not too familiar with the old saws we used fifty years ago, two man saws, one on each end of the saw. No one ever heard of a chain saw in those days. The logging operations taking place then were all men from Finland coming over. They didn’t speak English. They were great loggers. They would use these big saws, and then the chainsaw came in after the war and revolutionized the business.

Question from audience: I was wondering if you could say something about the use of fire, way back when, the Indians, or maybe how you used fire?

FG: When I was in my teens and did a lot of hunting in that back country, we camped at night on the hill. The world was on fire, everybody was burning, always. That continued every year up until recently. I did a lot of burning to keep the underbrush down. There are by products because that fire destroys trees to a certain extent, but it does keep the brush down and that means you don’t have the terrible wildfires that you have today. I’m a believer in controlled burning very much. Today’s rancher fights an impossible battle because today there’s litigation on everything. By any chance if a fire spreads over into a neighbor’s piece of land, mostly likely you’ll be sued. Twenty years ago, fifty years ago, they would thank you for helping clear out the land, not today, they would sue.

Question from audience: Do you know how the Indians used fire?

FG: Yes.
Question from audience: Could you tell us how often they would burn?

FG: They would burn every summer. They did that for two reasons. The principle one was for the sprouts for the deer. After you burn you get fresh green tender sprouts and the best way to find a big fat buck is to find out where there’s been a burn and they are eating that. Also they did that to clear land, same as we do.

Question from audience: Could you fix a date to when the Indians stopped burning and the ranchers took that over?

FG: I don’t know. I wasn’t born then. I’m old but not that old.

Question from audience: They weren’t on the land when you acquired it?

FG: No. No they weren’t.

Question from audience: Have you noticed the number of mountain lions increasing on your ranch?

FG: Can I answer that question later? I’ll answer part of it now. Yes, we’ve had an increasing number. My grand-children were coming up to bring their family this year to camp on the ranch and because we had so many mountain lions, we had three I think at one time, they called it off. They were afraid to bring two and three year-old youngsters up. We’ve had an increasing amount. I think there are too many mountain lions. We don’t have the bounties on mountain lions as we used to and they are a protected species. If you have five thousand mountain lions, in two years you have fifteen thousand. In a dry year, like this one, they are coming down from the mountains looking for water and game. I never believed that mountain lions were something to worry about until this year. I think they have been driven to do things they normally would not do because of the conditions. Does that answer your question?

Question from audience: Do you ever have community groups come in to do trail work or road work like CCC?

FG: We do that all ourselves. The only outside help we bring in is the shearing. We bring in a shearing crew which consists of about five shearers, and they [?] them to do the shearing. They’re outside.

Question from audience: How did you become involved with Humboldt State?

FG: Through a very good friend of mine. A man by the name of George Brown, who talked to me one day because I was a little upset with something that happened in the direction of going to a group to take it over. I mentioned this to a Mr. George Brown who was a very good friend, who had an equally good friend, his name is Terry Roelofs. Mr. Terry Roelofs introduced me to other people and I knew Humboldt State by
reputation, a very fine reputation for forestry, fisheries, land protection and development, and after a year of talk [?].

Question from audience: Is your direction set forth in your deed in which you want it managed, are you stipulating certain things.

FG: Yes, definitely.

Question from audience: Do you have any beaver on the land?

FG: There have been two men there with big beards.

Question from audience: What do you sell the wool for?

FG: For coats, it’s all fine wool, not coarse wool. All types of worsted, fine wool. Do you have a wool blanket? I don’t know if it came from the Galbreath ranch or not. Look and see.

Question from audience: You mentioned when we were down there, we saw a lot of pig activity. You mentioned the pig is a problem for you. How long has it been going on and what do you notice the trends are?

FG: The wild pigs, we call them wild pigs, they are all domesticated pigs that have reverted to a wild state. The hog is the only animal I know that changes its physical characteristics by going wild. Our domestic pig is a big animal with big haunches and a sort of thin skin. When you take a wild pig, the descendants of a tame pig, and he comes out with great big shoulders, tusks, and a very heavy fat protected pad and a heavy skin. Fifty years ago there were a lot of pigs in that part of the world, wild pigs. They were sold at the market. The young pigs would be caught and the rancher would sew there eyes so they couldn’t run and drive them down the road to Cloverdale where they would go and take them away. They were pretty well wiped out. About fifteen years ago the pigs began to come back from somewhere, I don’t know where, and I never saw a wild pig on my ranch for the first many years I had it and then suddenly they began to show up, and we had lots of pigs come. So they are a nuisance and they eat the lambs. I’ve seen pigs wait for a lamb to be born so they can eat the just born lamb. We pretty well control that now. They tear up the land with their tusks; they’re not a welcome guest.

Question from audience: You said that you had cattle on your land before. Why did you stop or do you still have some now?

FG: Two reasons. That country doesn’t, in my judgment, have the strong grass you need for cattle. The rains are pretty heavy there. It’s nothing to have eighty inches of rain, and when you have that much rain, you don’t have the strong grass. The other reason is that all that land is fenced, with pastures, cross fencing. When you have cattle and they decide the pasture is greener over in this pasture they go through the fence. The only
cattle I have today on the ranch are my neighbor’s. We have beef almost every night. [audience laughter]

Question from audience: You talk about erosion being a constant problem. You can see in some of your slides some old gullies, there healing over. Not everybody cares about land the way you do. I wonder if you have some comments about the people that hand your land before you did.

FG: All my comments are not too happy about that. I don’t think there was the care given. Land was cheap. You’re not going to spend twenty dollars protecting two or three acres of land that you can go out and buy for the same amount of money. They just didn’t do it. We try to protect it now, not because of the cost of the land, but to save the land. When I first went into ranching, where the Navarro River comes down that irrigated pasture, I didn’t know too much about erosion or the way streams would ruin the banks. My foreman did. He was a real great man. He said let’s cut trees down, these worthless trees, and chain them or cable them as a protector, and put gravel behind them. That would work in spots but in other spots it wouldn’t. One year, twenty years ago, I began to plant willows, taking them from the bank, the willow that grew along the river, and transporting them to where I was having erosion trouble. I even brought in a pile driver and drove old steel rails from the Northwestern Pacific Railroad down and put fencing, wire fencing along, and put willows behind them. That proved to be very successful. I did that for about a quarter of a mile, the treacherous part of the river, where I have good bottom soil and an irrigated pasture. I really saved the pasture by doing that. On roads, we put in water bars every fall. We do a lot of mulching. Any skid roads are mulched very thoroughly. Roads are susceptible to erosion and if you don’t drain them properly or put culverts in you can have a lot of erosion. When I went over to that ranch, there wasn’t a culvert on the ranch, or any of the ranch roads. Not a one. It’s not too hard to put culverts in. They’re not too expensive. So I put in culverts all over the ranch now.

Question from audience: I’d like to hear more about how you would like to see your ranch managed in the future.

FG: I would like to see the land protected thoroughly. I would like to see trees allowed to grow without disease or without logging, except as necessary for old or dying trees. I’ve touched on some of the things. I would like to see erosion prevented where possible, so the land and the ranch stay pretty much as it is now. You asked a question that seems easy to answer, but it’s not. I think the best way to say it, I’ve spent fifty years developing it and I would like to see the next many, many decades under the stewardship of Humboldt continue; whatever seems right.

Question from audience: Is part of that in your mind that it stays a working sheep ranch?

FG: Yes, if possible. Sheep raising in most parts of the west is unprofitable. That would be a problem. I don’t make any money today on sheep ranching. I would be better off
financially if I took all the sheep off. I sort of like them there. I see them as an excuse to call myself a rancher. [audience laughter]

Question from audience: Do you have any sons or daughters or grandchildren that want to participate in what’s going on.

FG: They have all been too smart to [?]. [audience laughter]

Question from audience: Could you give us a little insight towards tan oaks and true oaks?

FG: I’m not allowed to use those words. [audience laughter] Tan oak to me has no real reason to ever be alive. The sheep will eat the acorns somewhat but they don’t like them. They would rather have the white oak or black oak acorns. I’m cutting out tan oak now to allow young redwood to grow but that’s an expensive deal.

Question from audience: Is that successful?

FG: I just started this year. I’ve taken ten loads of tan oak out. It costs me a hundred dollars a load, overall expenses, to get rid of them. I’m hoping that Louisiana-Pacific will put a chip mill in for tan oak or hardwood and that’s going to help. Tan oak and young madrone are a nuisance where you have a deciduous forest.

Question from audience: What would you like to see done with the true oaks (white oaks, black oaks, live oaks)?

FG: Leave them.

Question from audience: Do you want to see any research done?

FG: Yes, very much so. One of the problems today is the way the live oak, white oak, black oak; the young sprouts are eaten by sheep and deer. You can’t go around and put wire protection around every young one, but if you don’t you won’t have any left. It’s very interesting, what some of the people see when they go up there. I’ve had to take sheep off of some of the pastures because of coyotes. In those pastures where there are no sheep, the young oaks are coming up beautifully. They’re being protected.

Question from audience: Even with the pigs?

FG: They will plow up the land but I don’t know about them eating the young tree growth. If they do, I don’t know it. The pigs are bad enough for their other qualities. They eat the acorns. They’re great competitors for the acorns. When I first went into sheep ranching, my daughter who lives in Marin County, one of her tasks in the wintertime when we lived in Marin was to go around and accumulate acorns so I could take them up to the ranch, for the sheep. Times were tough in those days.
Question from audience: Do you rotate your sheep to different parts of the land and leave some fallow?

FG: They range in the pastures. I used to do that but there are pastures today I can’t use. You’re talking textbook handling and that’s the way to go, but I’m not doing that.

Question from audience: What about wild turkeys or llamas?

FG: We have wild turkeys as you have seen. They are a recent acquisition. They started coming in about fifteen years ago. Someone brought them in from Tennessee, and they’ve spread all over. They’re not good for eating, though. No one eats them, but they’re great to look at.

Thanks.

[audience applause]

[end]