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Pioneers tried to float logs down Salt River for sawmill in Valley

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Tempe might have been a sawmill town early in its history if Charles Trumbull Hayden had succeeded in floating logs down the Salt River from forests in mountains east of the Valley.

The year was 1873, and Hayden was building a flour mill at Hayden's Ferry — or Tempe — and needed lumber.

But the Salt River Valley was without trees suitable for lumber, and lumber was expensive to import. As a result, the hamlets of Tempe and Phoenix were adobe towns.

In May 1873, Hayden organized a party of eight men to go up the Salt River, fell some trees and find out if logs could be floated to Hayden's Ferry.

The men departed May 24 and traveled into country occupied by Apaches, who, in that period, were not always peaceful.

About three weeks later, Hayden returned to the Valley. He informed a correspondent for the *Arizona Miner* of Prescott that the Indians were numerous but friendly and that there was nothing to prevent sending logs down the river.

The party had made a canoe from a tree and put some logs in the river. Six of the men traveled with the logs while Hayden and a second man returned to the Valley.

On June 20, the *Miner* correspondent sent the following negative report:

"The Hayden party ... have returned, and pronounce the scheme a failure. With much toil

and difficulty, on account of rapids and boulders in the river, they descended a long way, when, having lost their arms, ammunition and provisions, excepting flour, they arrived at a canon so narrow as not to admit the passage of a log, and were compelled to abandon their boat and foot it. Mr. Hayden is still sanguine of getting sufficient timber on this side of the canons."

In July, Hayden made a second expedition to the mountains in pursuit of timber. This trip apparently was unsuccessful, too.

In May 1885, another expedition was made on the Salt River to determine if sawed logs could be carried downstream to Tempe.

This time, William Burch, a sawmill operator upstream on the Salt River, contracted to deliver railroad ties to Tempe.

Burch was accompanied by three men. They launched a boat in the Salt River about four miles above the river's junction with Tonto Creek in the Tonto Basin. Six days later, they reached Tempe.

The men reported that at one place, the river narrowed to 11 feet. They thought that would be an excellent place to build a reservoir to store water.

A Phoenix newspaper, *The Arizona Gazette*, said, "The absence of drift and the general character of the canon demonstrates most fully that such a project may be successfully undertaken. This ... will open to this Valley the timber belt of the Sierra Anche."

The newspaper's optimism, however, apparently was never rewarded.