



## When Lewiston, Idaho, Women Ruled the Logging Rodeo

*By Documentary Producer Dave Jones*

Four girls from a small Idaho town. Eleven log rolling World Championships. One pond monkey. This is their story.

Between 1958 and 1972, four young women from the timber town of Lewiston, Idaho, ruled the sport of log rolling, or birling, as it was also called. (It was also called roleo. More on that later.) Log rolling aficionados call it a perfect storm of opportunity. The timber industry was thriving. The Potlatch Forests Inc. mill in Lewiston gathered millions of board feet of timber from annual log drives down the Clearwater River. Roy Bartlett, a pond monkey in the Potlatch millpond, knew a thing or two about how to stay on a log. He and his co-workers practiced log rolling in their off-hours at work.

The savvy parks and recreation department in Lewiston knew a good thing when they saw it and asked Roy to teach the sport to the wider community. Thousands of young people in the Lewiston-Clarkston valley learned how to stay on a rolling log, or at least how to get back on it!

Roy was an award-winning log roller himself, and he had an eye for talent. Among the birlers under his tutelage were Betty Ellis, Barbara Peturka, Cindy Cook, and Penni McCall.

These four women and their pond monkey coach are the subject of a documentary entitled “Queens of the Roleo,” currently in production. These women were special athletes. They took the World Championships in Hayward, Wisconsin, by storm. Ellis and Cook won eight world titles between them. And each of these world champs will tell you up front: without the coaching of Roy Bartlett, none of them would have won a title. Bartlett might respond with, “Heck, I just loved to watch the kids compete.”

Today Bartlett is a spry 85 years young. His second bedroom in his modest Clarkston, Wash., home is a shrine to his log rolling past — a tribute to a sport that no longer thrives as it did when the mills were buzzing and logs were spinning under calked shoes. But he remembers every turn of every log like it was yesterday.

“Queens of the Roleo” documentary producer Dave Jones of Bend, Ore., has gathered hundreds of photos and newspaper articles as well as rare home movies of the “Queens of the Roleo” competing. Jones expects the film to be completed this spring. You can follow the progress at [www.facebook.com/QueensoftheRoleoDocumentary](http://www.facebook.com/QueensoftheRoleoDocumentary).