

## TEREDO LUMBER FROM THE PORT GAMBLE MILL

This teredo lumber, often mistakenly called wormwood, has been milled from decommissioned log-boom boomsticks from the lumber mill at Port Gamble, Washington. Until its closure in December 1995, the Pope & Talbot Mill was the oldest continuously operating lumber mill in the United States. The boomsticks were long logs, joined by chains (called boomchains) that were used to encircle and contain floating rafts of log bundles which were destined to be cut up at the mill.

These boomsticks spent most of their 20-50 year working lives in saltwater, and were therefore susceptible to infestation by teredos, sometimes called shipworms. These wood-boring animals are actually clams in the bivalve family (bivalve means two valves or shells). The amount of damage teredos can do to wood in waters worldwide is staggering.

The most common teredo in the Pacific Northwest is called *Bankia setacea*, which can be up to 3 feet long and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick, which is the diameter of the holes they bore. The two halves of the shell are small, about the size of an adult's baby fingernail, and are located at the front end of the animal. Teredos have a membrane-thin body, so it appears the main function of the wood into which they bore is to provide a safe home and body support. A Teredo enters the wood as a larva ( $\frac{1}{5,000}$  inch in diameter) and drills a tiny hole. Once inside the wood it eats and grows, enlarging its burrow as it grows.

The Teredo spends its entire life trapped and protected inside its log burrow. Like most clams, teredos are primarily filter feeders, straining plankton from water drawn in through the small opening at the tail end of their burrows. Oxygenated seawater also needs to be transported along the 3' long body to the head end where the gills are located. Teredos do digest some wood as well. At the peak of their growing season teredos can bore up to  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of wood per day, often turning a good log to a Swiss cheese mush in a year or less. The front portion of the shell is razor sharp and pushes ahead in a methodical rasping fashion. Teredos often secrete a calcareous lining to their burrows.

The boomsticks milled into teredo lumber were mostly Douglas Fir or Western Hemlock, and many were original old growth logs, some over 500 years old. Milled teredo lumber is a specialty wood used mainly as decorative wall paneling, in furniture, or in fences. It enjoyed widespread popularity in the seventies when infestations were particularly severe. Its rustic quality is especially attractive in homes and cabins, rec rooms, family rooms, and in restaurants and other businesses. It is a good choice for a distinctive coastal look and nautical themes.

Port Gamble, Washington is one of the only places in the entire world where teredo lumber is milled and produced today. It is extremely recycled and extremely unique.