Linin' Track

Linin' Track
(Traditional)
Ho, boys, is you right?
I done got right
All I hate about linin' track
These ol' bars 'bout to bust my back

Chorus:
Ho, boys, cancha line 'em track
Ho, boys, cancha line 'em track
Ho, boys, cancha line 'em track

Let's see Eloise go linin' track
Down in the holler below the field
Angels are workin' on my chariot wheel
Chorus

Mary and the baby were settin' in the shade
Thinkin' of the money that I ain't made
Chorus

Well, I bin on the river, nineteen and ten
But I didn't have no women like the drivin' men
Chorus

Moses stood on the Red Sea shore
He was battin' at the waves with a two-by-four
Chorus

Well if I could I surely would
Stand on the rock where Moses stood
Chorus

Mary, Marthy, Luke and John
Well all them 'ciples now they're dead and gone
Chorus

Well you keep talkin' 'bout the break ahead
Ain't said nothin' 'bout my hog an' bread
Chorus

Ho, boys, is you right?
I done got right
All I hate about linin' track

These ol' bars 'bout to bust my back
Chorus

Source: Transcribed from Koerner, Ray and Glover 'Blues, Rags and Hollers'
Red House RHR CD 76. Their source was a Leadbelly recording on Stinson
which 'was passed around quite a while before settling' into above.
A version appears in John A. Lomax & Alan Lomax 'American Folk Ballads'
Macmillan 23rd Printing 1972 at page 14 under the title 'Tie-shuffing Chant'. The gang leader sings first line of each verse. The Lomaxes provided the following illuminating description of lining track:
'Tie shuffling' is the lining or straightening out of the railroad track. To understand the work-rhythm that forms the chant it will be necessary to describe Henry Trevelyan's section gang as it worked to the tune. Henry, the foreman, stooped over and squinted off down the shining rail; then stood up and bawled out directions to his gang in the impossibly technical language of the railroad. They, with heavy bars
off down the track, jammed their lining bars down under the rail on the inner side, and braced against them. One of their number, a handsome yellow man, when he was sure they were ready to heave, threw back his head and sang. On the first and next to last beat of every verse, each man threw his weight against his bar; the refrain was repeated until Henry, who had kept his eye on the rail meanwhile, shouted his directions about the next 'johnnyhead'. At that signal, the song was broken off , the gang stopped heaving, and the whole scene was repeated a few yards on down the track.
Sounds a bit more organised that Utah Phillips' description of 'gandy dancing' on 'Irish banjos'!

The Lomaxes give other verses, some from Odum and Johnson's 'Negro Workaday Songs' Univ of NC Press. For example:

I got a woman on Jennielee Square
Ef you would die easy, lemme ketch you there

The reason I stay wid my cap'n so long
Ever' mornin' gimme biscuits to rear back on

July de red bug, July de fly
Ef Augus' ain' a hot month, lawdy, I pray to die

Went up de mountain, to de tip-top
See my baby do the eagle rock

PS
apr00