EARLY IN September, 1905, I went from Michigan to Minneapolis with the intention of working there until a job opened up in the remaining pine forests of the Gopher State. With the end of the log drive on the Peshekee River in Marquette County, Michigan, in the spring of that year, white pine logging on a large scale was over in that state. Wisconsin, too, was cleaned out, but some pine remained in northern Minnesota. Since I was nineteen and a lumberjack, I moved westward.

Through an employment office I got a job in the T. B. Walker lumber company's sawmill on the east bank of the Mississippi River at Minneapolis. The supply of logs in the boom at the base of the ramp was noticeably small when I went to work, and as the days passed those logs became poorer and poorer in quality. Finally the boom was dismantled, the boom sticks were sawed, and the sawing of logs into lumber at that mill ceased. I was told that the mill was to close permanently, and late in September I was laid off.

McGray Brothers, contractors for the T. B. Walker company, hired me to go to work in one of their camps near Akeley. A co-worker, Eddie Blair, and I were assigned to care for several teams of horses which were also being transported to the Akeley camps in an open railroad car.

Camp 11 to which we were sent was, as nearly as I could figure out, about ten miles northwest of Akeley. It was a large layout, located on high ground near a buggy pot-hole that was the source of water for all uses. The buildings consisted of a cookhouse connected with a bunkhouse for the use of the general crew, a second bunkhouse for the teamsters, two stables, a van, a blacksmith shop, and a shack for the foreman and his wife and two small children. All the buildings were in bad repair, and I learned that the camp had not been operated the previous year.

We were put to work repairing roads and
building new ones. All the work consisted of shoveling, grubbing, and chopping. I drove one of the teams that pulled out small stumps. As soon as roads and camp buildings were fully repaired, sawyers, deckers, more teams and teamsters, the blacksmith, and the clerk arrived to complete the crew for the season. Full work was on.

Few events broke the winter’s monotony. One evening a week or so before Christmas when we entered the bunkhouse after dark, we were greeted by a smiling sky pilot. On our part, the reception was not enthusiastic, and not one member of the crew joined him in conversation. He had brought with him several worn magazines, which he placed on a little table near the door. He fingered the magazines to attract attention, but no one seemed to give him more than a glance. After supper, the bull, as the foreman was called, introduced the sky pilot to members of the crew. All were polite, but during the sermon most of them twiddled their thumbs and spat into the gravel boxes as they sat on the deacon’s seats. After the too-long sermon the bull passed the hat and collected sixty-five cents.

Exactly at nine o’clock every night the flunky blew out the kerosene lights in the bunkhouse as he called “Roll-ol-ol in-in-in.” Everybody had to go to bed at once. Talking was taboo. Anyone who made any kind of disturbance or attempted to smoke soon received the impact of a well-aimed rubber shoe. Even the snorer had a hard time. Many of the devices contrived to stifle snores, but most of them were completely ineffective.

In the morning an hour or so before the crew got up, the flunky started the fire in the big box stove with kindling that he had prepared the night before. When it was well started, he summoned the crew with a prolonged “Roll-ol-ol out-t-t,” and another day began.

One Sunday afternoon two sleigh box loads of men, women, and children rode into camp to the accompaniment of jingle bells. They were Indians, who lived on a reservation near Walker and who had come to sell trinkets and other articles. The camp enjoyed their visit, and they stayed for dinner. They sold a few things, but I did not buy any.

DURING my entire stay in Camp 11 the only purchases I made in the van, except for necessaries, were eight photographs of the camp and crew. A photographer visited the camp in January, 1906, taking pictures of the crew at work. To this day I do not know why I spent so much money for the photos. They cost a dollar each, and I was earning only a dollar a day. Now I am
happy to have acquired those pictures, some of which are reproduced with this article.  

One of these photographs shows the Camp 11 bunch eating dinner in the woods. Dinner was served at these surroundings whenever a part of the crew worked at such a distance from camp that too much time would be consumed in going to the cookhouse to eat and then returning to the woods. A half hour or so before dinnertime the foreman or a straw boss selected a sheltered, centrally located spot, cleared away the bushes, and trampled the snow. Then he built a fire, around which the lumberjacks thawed themselves, and over which tea was brewed in a large iron kettle hung from a horizontal pole. Lumberjacks usually drank tea, rarely coffee.

The flunky, or the cookee, reached the fire with the food at about the time lumberjacks began to gather there. The sawyers, deckers, loaders, swampers, and road monkeys came from various directions along the roads, through the slashings, or through the uncut woods. As they approached the clearing the chilled men flailed their arms and hands against their bodies, and then hunched about the fire rubbing and blowing their hands to warm their fingers.

The food was transported in a large insulated box that was covered with a blanket. It was hauled on a small jumper (a one-bob handmade wooden sled) that was pulled by a horse or by two cookees. Different kinds of food were separately and neatly packed. The warm dishes were left in the pots in which they had been cooked, and the cold food was arranged on tin plates.

Everything possible in the way of preparation was done by the cook and the cookee before taking the food out. Roast beef swimming in broth or brown gravy, vegetable and meat stew (called slum-gullion), baked beans, boiled unpeeled potatoes, and at least one vegetable (usually turnips or rutabagas) steamed in iron kettles. All the bread had been sliced from big loaves, and a large jar of oleomargarine was sent along. For dessert there were plenty of crunchy cookies in large tin cans, and juicy raisin, dried-apple, or prune pies, already cut in quarters in the plates, which were arranged in a rack. The lumberjacks helped themselves to everything but the pie, which was rationed out by the cookee. The food was wholesome, appetizing, and plentiful. It was served on the same dishes used in the cookhouse. Each man had a tin plate, a knife and fork, a tin spoon, and a tin cup.

While eating, the lumberjacks sat on logs or stumps from which the snow had been cleared, or they walked about stamping their feet to keep warm. There was little time for conversation, and it was usually

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A load of logs leaving the skidway
against the rules to talk at mealtime. When the weather was very cold the food froze on the plates, and the lumberjacks had to eat with their mittens on. As soon as a lumberjack finished eating he went back to work — no loitering.

MY WORK at Camp 11 was somewhat roustabout. When anyone quit I was usually told to take over his job until somebody else was hired. Until the hauling season began in early December, I drove a team used in cleaning out roads, worked as a cook, bulled a few days, and helped the blacksmith in repairing the old sleighs and other equipment. When the road-building crew began to thin out, I went to sawing. For a while I was head sawyer; that is, I had to figure out the direction in which the trees would fall and measure the logs.

Besides felling trees and cutting them, I had to put bark marks on the logs. To do so I chipped off a strip of bark about a foot long and chopped the letters TBW in the wood. Bark marks helped identify the logs and protected the owners from poachers who could saw off the end brands.

The job I disliked most was skidding. Until I reached this operation I had always considered it a good job, but the teams of small horses that the McCray Brothers owned and hired made the work unpleasant. We were expected to accomplish more than we ever did, and the bull frequently found fault and scolded. The horses had been hired with the understanding that the owners should drive them, but they were actually driven by teamsters who had orders to get all they could out of them.

One day I was put at tailing — that is, rolling logs down the skidway skids to the deckers. That was a pleasant job for me, because I liked to whirl and show off the cant hook.

After the skidding progressed and the hauling began, I became a road monkey. My job was to keep the ice on the roads clean, shovel off the horse manure and other debris, and place boughs, hay, or earth on the down grades to prevent the sleighs from sliding too fast.

About Christmas, I was given a real job. I became helper on the road sprinkler. It was my task to handle the loading barrel, and, at the teamster’s order, pull the plugs from the holes and manipulate the spouts to sprinkle the ice ruts. This was a night job, because both teams and road sprinklers could not operate on one-way roads in the daytime. The teamster and I had supper early and went to work after the sleigh teams were off the roads. We worked until about 4:00 A.M., when hauling started.
After the thaws began late in February the sprinkling, the skidding, and the decking stopped. Most of the crew—the sawyers, swampers, and others—were discharged. Until then the teamsters had unloaded the logs on the lake. However, it was seen that the hauling had to be accelerated to get all the logs out, so I was told that I was to help unload them on the landing on Kabekona Lake.

I was amazed to see the large area on the ice that was covered with logs, and I was curious to know how they would be transported to a mill. The first teamster told me that the logs would be loaded at a side-track of the railroad across the lake. Each day I saw the locomotive smoke and heard trains pass.

Working at the landing was a nice job. We just unhooked the binder, and bunk chains, then with our cant hooks we flipped the ends of the logs and the sleighs were unloaded. Between loads I end-branded the logs with a branding hammer—I do not recall the brand. If the weather was very cold I built a little fire on the bank with dry evergreen twigs and boughs.

MARCH brought lengthening days, and with the increasing warmth of the sun, the snow began to melt. About March 10 the ice along the lake shore began to crack and break up, and the 1905-06 logging season ended. I had worked regularly every day and some Sundays, as well as Christmas and New Year’s. From the van I had purchased only mittens, socks, rubbers, and some Peerless and Standard chewing and smoking tobacco. I figured that four and a half months with some overtime would mean about a hundred and twenty-five dollars—a substantial sum. When I got my check, it was for seventy-eight dollars and some cents. I had not kept my own tally of time worked or of my expenses in the van. I looked at the check intently for a long time. It was much less than I had expected, but I knew there was no use saying anything.

On Monday morning we dumped our turkeys in the box of the tote sleigh and climbed in. We arrived at Akeley early that same afternoon, and by the next day I was in Minneapolis. Within a week I was on Puget Sound, where I worked in the big timber camps for nearly five years.