



# Life of a Logger

## Program Purpose:

This program will introduce students to the work and lives of 19<sup>th</sup> century lumberjacks through a living history slide show presentation.

**Program Length:** 1 hour

**Age:** Grades 5<sup>th</sup> and up

**Maximum Number of Participants:** 150

## Objectives:

After taking part in this program, students will be able to:

- Describe the workings of a 19<sup>th</sup> century logging camp, including the specialization of labor and their interdependence.
- Compare and contrast life 150 years ago with the present.
- Describe the history of logging in Wisconsin.
- Identify some positive and negative impacts the early timber industry had on Wisconsin's people, wildlife, and natural systems.
- Explain the ecological impacts clear cutting had on the Wisconsin landscape.

## Preparation:

Before the group arrives:

- Obtain the "Life of a Logger" kit and additional equipment from the Kiwanis room closet and the Janitor closet in Lodge
- Arrange the props. Set up table with cloth, apron, mixing bowl, spoons, pancake batter, cups, coffee pot with water, utensils, and oil lamp. Set log in cradle.
- Arrange logging tools around the set.
- Get into cookie dress and character.
- Set up the slide projector and screen.
- Set up indirect lighting. Turn off the main lights
- Set up the portable stereo with the "Log Driver's Waltz" cd and cue it.
- Recruit a volunteer to read the introduction card

## Basic Outline:

- I. Scene set up (5 minutes)
- II. Introduction (5 minutes)
- III. Life in Camp (winter) (15 minutes)
- IV. Life on the River (spring) (10 minutes)
- V. Lumberjack fun (15 minutes)
- VI. Conclusion and Questions (10 minutes)

## Materials:

Life of a Logger slide show  
Slide Projector and remote  
Slide projector screen  
Portable stereo  
"Log Driver's Waltz" tape or cd  
Lumberjack clothing (union suit, wool pants, suspenders, wool socks, boots, wool shirt, wool coat, wool hat, mittens)  
Cookie dress (skirt of pants, button down shirt, apron, handkerchief)  
Cookie props (table, table cloth, tin cups and plates, utensils, coffee pot, mixing bowl, wooden spoon, pancake mix and bag, hot pads, oven mitt)  
Oil lamp  
Logging props (log cradle, log, cross cut saw, cant hook, axe)  
Introduction card

## Introduction:

Before the class walks in, have the first cookie slide (#17) projecting on the screen. Be hidden "backstage." An adult volunteer should direct the audience where to sit and should direct the audience where to sit and give ground rules for the performance (be respectful, no talking during the show unless asked, save questions until the end). Then the volunteer should read the introduction card:

"It's 4 a.m. on a frigid winter morning. You're inside the cook shack of an 1858 logging camp in the gray light before dawn. It's cold and quiet. Watch and listen to see what happens." (Volunteer should exit)

After a pause, emerge from backstage, scratching yourself and yawning. Take the apron off the back of a chair and put it on. Sniff and rub your eyes and nose. Begin preparing the pancake batter in the mixing bowl, using the mix in the bag and water in the coffee pot. Mix with the wooden spoon. Scrape some batter out with your finger and test it. Make a face and mutter that it needs something. Light the candle or grab the lamp and walk toward the audience. Scream as if you see the audience for the first time. Scold the audience and say that you've told them a hundred times that you don't allow anyone I your cook shack 'tween meals. "Them's the rules!" Grab the wooden spoon and fling pancake batter at the audience. Rant and rave. Finally recover and say, "Uh, you don't have any ideas what I'm talkin' 'bout, do you? You ain't from around here are ye? You

must those new green jacks they's lookin' to hire. Well, I might as well s'plain what yer life'll be like, now that you've joined this outfit."

**Life in Camp (Winter):**

*(Sleep and meals)*

Unless you're a cookee like me, or a stew bum, you don't belong here in the cook shack. The only time you enter my domain is during meal times. Seein' as how it's not even 5a.m. yet, all the jacks is still asleep in the "ram pasture..."

**1. Bunkhouse (#48)**

- That is, the bunkhouse. We call it a ram's pasture cause it sure smells like one. You get two blankets and an armful o'hay – that'll be your beddin' for the time you with us.
- We got "muzzle loader" bunks -- that means they load from the end. Look around and choose your bunkmate carefully – you sleep two to a bunk. And don't worry 'bout getting' lonely, you'll have plenty o'company; more than you want, from the "greybacks." You know, the "creeping dandruff?" THE LICE! They'll keep you itchin' all night long. Course, if yer smart you'll figger out the secret to nighttime comfort. Are you smart? Nah, I best just tell you. Ever' night 'fore you hit the hay, taker yer longjohns off and turn 'em inside out. That way, all the lice is on the outside. By the time the creeping dandruff works its way to the inside again, you'll be fast asleep.

**2. Camp (#15)**

- Course, I git to wake up the men when breakfast is ready. I blow on a big, long horn, called a bull horn or Gabriel and yell (as loud as you can) DAYLIGHT IN THE SWAMP! ROLL OUT! That generally gits 'em out o'bed.

**3. Cookee in dining hall (#45)**

- We got us a couple rules here in the cook shack. Rule #1: You get assigned seats. Rule #2: NO TALKING during meals. Those go pretty quick 'round here. You jacks git 'bout 15 minutes ta eat, and there ain't time to be jawin' with yer neighbor. You get in, set down, shut up, eat, and git out. Got that? (Have the audience repeat it back to you.) Good, you 'member them rules and you'll be just fine.

**4. More Cookees (#17a)**

- You'll like the food 'round here. It's kinda unusual to have a woman in camp, but I'm a good cook and paid well for it. This morning for breakfast we're havin' Murphies (fried potatoes), bacon, biscuits, oatmeal, flapjacks (pancakes) with blackstrap (molasses), sinkers (donuts), coffee, tea and some apple pie from last night. Good food and plenty of it.

- If you want to be a cookee, you better be an early bird. You'll be the first outta bed each morning, the last to bed at night, and you'll work seven days a week. But, if yer smart and work hard, you may work yer way up to being a cook, and the pay is good (\$80-100 per month for a cook, vs. \$26-30 for a jack).

*(Clothing)*

- But since you're jacks and not a cookee, you need to start looking like it. There's got to be one of you at least in this bunch that can pull off lookin' like a jack. Who's up to it? We'll make a lumberjack outta one o'ya. (Select a volunteer from the audience and bring them to the front. Have the volunteer put on one article of clothing at a time, explaining the feature of each. Allow time for pictures at the end.)

Longjohns(union suit) – make sure they're the model with the flap in back. Made of wool, kept them warm even when wet.

Wool socks – usually wore several pair

Boots – keep feet warm and dry (hopefully)

Wool pants with suspenders – allowed for freedom of movement. Also made of wool.

Wool shirt – more warmth

Wool jacket – (aka "Mackinaw") red color allowed the jacks to see each other from a distance

Mittens – preferred hand covering. Gloves were used only by those doing specialized jobs requiring use of the fingers, usually for writing (scalers, foreman)

Hat – wool again

Make sure the "lumberjack" gets a round of applause. While the volunteer undresses, sing or talk "Sixteen Men in a Pine-Slab Bunk" (see Appendix A). If the audience is not too rowdy, ask for some very dramatic volunteers to come to the front. The volunteers need to be able to act and do sound effects. Make sure these volunteers get a round of applause too.

*(Jobs)*

**5. Axemen (#24)**

- Okay, now the fun and games are over and it's time to GET TO WORK! If yer headin' out into the tall timber, there's lots of different jobs you might have. If yer good with an axe, you might want to be an "undercutter."

**6. Axemen (#25)**

- An undercutter is the first man to touch the tree. It's the undercutter's job to notch the tree on one side so

that it falls in the right direction. (Hold up the axe and demonstrate.)

**7. Sawyers (#26)**

- Then the “sawyers” come in. Sawyers use the cross cut saw to cut the tree down on the opposite side of the notch.

**8. Sawyers (#27)**

- After the tree is cut down, it has to be cut into manageable sized pieces – about 16 ft. long and weighing between 2000-4000 lbs. The sawyers have to cut 100 such logs a day.

**9. Swamper (#28)**

- Then there’s the swampers. Swampers are expected to cut all the smaller branches off of the tree. We call those branches the “slash.”

**10. Swamper (#29)**

- The branches are no good for anything, so we usually just leave ‘em on the ground. But swampers are also in charge of keeping the slash out of the “gutter roads” and “skid ways.”

**11. Saw Sharpening (#30)**

- Course, all that cutting sure does a number on your cross cut saw, and cuttin’ with a dull blade is no fun at all! It’s pretty common that blades get sharpened near ev’ry day.

**12. Dentist (#46)**

- We call the saw sharpeners the “dentists,” workin’ on the cuttin’ teeth and all.
- Speakin’ o’ which, a friend o’ mine by the name of Stub Nelson showed me how to sharpen a cross cut saw. I sharpened this one all by m’self. This saw ain’t been used since I sharpened it. Hey, that’s bad luck! Anyone want to try their skill at sawing?

(Pick several groups of volunteers from the audience, four at a time. Two volunteers sit on the log while the other two saw one end. Then switch. Give pointers: the volunteers should use their whole body and twist with their waist, not just pull with their arms. Break in periodically with the tips below. Make sure all the sawyers get a round of applause as well.)

- Sawyers have to work in teams of two. There’s a trick to using the cross cut saw. You have to only PULL, not push. If you push, the blade bends and you git nowhere.
- There’s actually two types of teeth on the cross cut saw: the “cutters” and the “raker.” The cutters are for cutting through the wood, and the rakers are for raking out the sawdust from the kerf (cut). If there were only cutting teeth and no rakers, eventually the sawdust would fill the kerf and bind up the saw.

**13. Skidders (#31)**

- Now, eventually all the timber lying on the ground cut in pieces has got to get to the bank of the river. So the “cant hook man” uses the cant hook (demonstrate) to roll the logs toward a special sled, called a “dray” or a “go-devil.”

**14. Skidders (#32)**

- They’re both small sleds that drag the logs a few at a time, usually pulled by oxen. The drays or go-devils drag the logs over the gutter roads to the skid way. There the logs get loaded onto the big sleighs.

**15. Sky Bird and Hookers (#33)**

- The job of getting the logs onto the sleigh falls on the “sky birds” and “hookers.” The hookers have to fit large, sharp hooks at the end of a chain around the huge logs, and the logs get pulled one at a time onto the sleigh.

**16. Sky Bird and Hookers (#34)**

- The sky bird stands on top of the sled and is in charge of arranging the logs as they’re loaded onto the sled. The teamster is in charge of driving the horses that pull the sleigh to the landing on the river.

**17. Sky Birds and Hookers (#35)**

- They all have one heck of a job, because those sleds can get loaded pretty high! The biggest load I ever saw was 40,000 board feet, and weighed 250 tons!

(At this point, consider singing or speaking “Little Brown Bulls” from Appendix B. The audience can sing the chorus “Derry-down-down-down, derry down.” Introduce with:

“Big sleds loaded up high reminds me of a song (story) about a contest between two skidders to see which team could pull the biggest load to the river. It was a contest between McClusky and Bull Gordon it goes something like this.”)

**18. Landing Man and Decker (#41)**

- Course, skidding served a practical purpose as well – it weren’t just about bragging rights. All those logs got to get to the riverbank and get unloaded. The “landing man” and the “decker” are waiting by the riverside to unload all the logs and stack them on the frozen river.

**19. Landing and Stamping (#40)**

- All the logs also have to get stamped. That’s so when they reach the sawmill, the mill knows who owns the logs and where they come from.

**20. Water Truck (#36)**

- The skidders may brag, but they get lots of help from other people too. Like the “sprinklers.”

**21. Water Truck (#37)**

- The sprinklers spray water on the skiddin' roads to ice 'em up. It's a lot easier for the horses to drag the sled over ice than through deep snow.

**22. Groover and Road Monkeys (#38)**

- The "groovers" also help by driving a sleigh with chisel-like blades over the skiddin' road to cut ruts in the ice. The logging sleighs follow the ruts to the riverbank.
- The horses pullin' those sleighs work really hard. They have to haul up hills and haul even faster on downhills. Sometimes a real experienced jack that got injured and can't work the tall timber no more will do a special job for the horses: spread hay on the hills. That's to slow the sleighs down so they don't run over the team. It takes a real keen eye.
- Course, we have a nickname for horses – "hayburners." Ye see, ye put hay into one end of the horse, and something's gonna come out the other end. We call them "road apples." That's where the "road monkeys" come in! That might be you! Often green jacks'll start out scooping road apples off the skid ways.

**23. Lunch in woods (#20)**

- All this talk of sawing, swamping, loading, skidding, and unloading is making me hungry. You can imagine how anxious the jacks are for a meal after a few hours work.

**24. Stew Bum (#18)**

- That's where the "stew bum" comes in. There's no time for the men to come all the way back to the cook shack for lunch. So the stew bum's gotta take lunch to the men.

**25. Frozen beans on a tin plate (#21)**

- But, you gotta eat fast. If you don't, those beans'll freeze right to your plate.

**26. Lunch in the woods (#22)**

- You get 'bout 15-20 minutes to fill your belly full o'hot grub, then it's back to work 'til close to sundown.

**27. Dinner (#47)**

- Then the men head back to camp and come into the nice, warm cook shack for dinner. Same rules apply as breakfast! Who 'members 'em? (Audience should repeat)...(*Chores*)

**28. Barn Boss (#43)**

- After dinner you might have some chores yet to do: sharpening saws or axes or mending clothes. The animals also have to be takin' care of – that's the job of the "barn boss." You hafta like workin' with oxen....

**29. More Barn Boss (#44)**

- ...and horses and mules. The hours are about the same as mine, but it smells a heck of a lot better in the barn than it does in the bunkhouse.

**30. Nighttime Fun (#49)**

- Nighttimes' usually spent relaxing or entertainment. Sometimes the boys'll take turns settin' on the deacon's seat an tellin' some pretty tall tales about the timber they cut that day. Other boys'll have a smoke, read an old newspaper, or play cards.

**31. Shaving (#50)**

- Sundays is the one day off a week. The men might get a shave...

**32. Clothes washing (#51)**

- ...or boil their clothes on Sunday to try to kill the greybacks. Course, some jacks consider this bad luck, so they don't wash their clothes all winter long, 'til spring.

**33. Back to camp (#42)**

- Speaking of spring, you greenjacks ain't even heard the best part about logging. See, we only been talkin' bout the winter logging scene – from October to March.

**Life on the River (Spring):**

(*Jobs*)

**34. Logs on river (#4)**

- In the spring, all those logs waiting on the riverbank sill have to git to the sawmills. This is where the real experienced jacks turn into "river rats" and "river pigs."

**35. Stand on one end (#6)**

- The river pigs are the jacks who ride the logs downriver. It's called "burling." To do this, they have to wear special shoes, called "caulked boots." That means that there are short spikes set in the soles of their boots. These spikes help keep 'em from slipping off the logs as they ride them downstream.

**36. "Sound of a groaning devil" (#9)**

- You might think, "Now why would any fool be riding logs downriver?" Well, somebody had to watch for and break up log jams when they happened. There might be a downed tree, exposed rocks, or just the logs themselves get tangled up and stop moving, and somebody has to keep em' going.

**37. River Pigs with Peaveys (#10)**

- All the river pigs use a special tool, called "peavey" (See Appendix D). A peavey's a lot like a cant hook, but there's a spike on the end of it. Peaveys are used to roll logs in the water; cant hooks are used to roll longs on land.

**38. Dynamite if necessary #10)**

- If a logjam was real bad, sometimes they'd have to dynamite it loose.

**39. No good balance (#7)**

- Course, river pigs need to have pretty good balance to keep from taking a spill. Burling is mighty dangerous work. If a river pig falls in between two logs, he can git killed. Many a river pig has been buried on the riverbank, either from drowning or getting' crushed. Sometimes his crewmates will hang his shoes on a tree to mark the site.
- In fact, there's a famous ballad about a young teacher who learns that her boyfriend is killed by drowning in the Wisconsin River, called "The Little Eau Pleine."

(At this point, consider singing or talking a few of the main verses from "the Little Eau Pleine" in Appendix C.)

**40. River Pigs (#2)**

- There's no doubt river pigs were a brave bunch. But they weren't the only ones. The "river rats" are another breed of log riders, 'cept they ride rafts. See, on stretches where the river is real wide, you can lash logs together to make a raft.

**41. Rafts (#28)**

- A small raft is called a "crib" – it's about 16 feet square. Six cribs together make a "rapids piece," and three rapids pieces side by side make a "Wisconsin raft."

**42. River Pigs (#27)**

- The rafts are steered using a big oar, mostly used to rudder. Good thing too, since we're near one of the most treacherous stretches on the Wisconsin River, called "Devil's Elbow." There the river turns 90 degrees – imagine trying to bring a raft through that!
- That's not the only danger neither. "Devil's Elbow" is also the site of the "Grand Eddy," one of the biggest natural whirlpools in the river. Why, I've heard it's 20 feet across and cribs just disappear into it when they go through. Heck, if you've a mind you can watch river pigs ride the rafts through the Narrows from the Gates bridge. There's a picture of it right over there.
- Why, I know a man named LeRoy Gates who gives shows riding rafts through the Narrows, though I ain't never seen it m'self.

**43. Dell House (#29)**

- Course, there's quite a reward if you make it though Devil's Elbow. Right around the corner is the Dell House. It's a wild place, owned by a fellow named Robert Allen. I hear him say once that he was very proud that no one was ever killed in the "Dell House, but, he said, "I won't vouch for the

grounds." He manufactures and sells that "Devil's Ewwater," y'know, that's one of the only places the jacks can get liquor – the foreman don't allow it in the logging camps.

**44. Saw Mill (#11)**

- Enough fun and games. All that lumber's gotta move! We gotta git it to the saw mills and get it cut up. It used to be the river rats had to float the lumber all the way to St. Louis to get it milled, but know there are over 100 sawmills right along the Wisconsin River. Our lumber builds thousands of homes across the state, and cities like Madison.

**45. Big Pines (#12)**

- In some ways, it's kinda sad, though. Some of those trees are just gigantic. Why, I laid down on a stump one that was cut, and the stump was bigger across than my body is long! When they crash, it makes a tremendous noise.

**46. Cutover area (#13)**

- Course, after all the timber in one area is cut, the logging camp has to move on. Sometimes you can hardly reco'nize a place after it's been logged. It looks like a graveyard.
- Why, I used to hear people say that a squirrel could traveled from one side of the state to the other without ever touching the ground! The canopy of the pines was that big and all connected. Course, that's not so much the case anymore.

**47. Lumberjacks (#16)**

- But, as far as the jacks're concerned, if it's a tall tree, it needs cut, and that's their job. They sure are a colorful bunch. Boisterous and proud. We had a funny-looking writer (Dick Menefee) visit not long ago, wanting to write about the lives of lumberjacks. I thought it sounded kinda pretty, so he left part of his description with me. This what he wrote:

*"His morals were of the highest; no good woman need ever fear trusting her safety with him. He might be intoxicated; might be a veritable-looking ruffian; but he always remembered he had a mother whom he believed in. He would fight and drink and curse – and do it over and over again – but he was always ready for a long-houred day's work in the woods ... Being a lumberjack in those days... was no weak-man job. He must be a 'he-man'; must be an adept at road-making in the woods; must know all there was to know in the handling of a team, if a teamster; must know the scientific use of a saw or an axe; must know good from bad timber from a measured glance at the standing tree; must know how to load one of the huge logging sleighs and how to properly pile up the logs in a huge pile upon the bank of some*

*stream wherein the winter's cut was later on to be transported down by the water to market. He must know just how much of a flood-head in the river was needed to move the timber in the least possible time; he must know the art of 'riding' a log while it was being floated without being 'spilled' in the icy waters of early spring-time driving ... For all his faults, the early day lumberjack was morally and mentally a gentleman."*

Sorden, L.G. Lumberjack Lingo. Spring Green: Wisconsin House, Inc. 1969.

Wells, Robert W. Daylight in the Swamp. Minocqua: NorthWord Press, Inc., 1978. ISBN 0-942802-07-1.

Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, "Forest Ecology" Lesson Plan.

Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, "Frozen Beans on a Tin Plate: Lesson Plan.

**48. More river pigs (#5)**

- Fun loving gentleman, always entertaining, good for a game, a laugh or a dance (See Appendix D). Speaking of a dance, those things are pretty popular with jacks on Sunday nights. There aren't many women around so the men have to take turns playing the woman by wearing a bandana around the arm. If you refuse, you have to donate a pound of tobacco to the "poor-box."
- One of my favorites is called the "Log Driver's Waltz," and its about the fact that river pigs are such good dancers because their feet are so quick from burling logs in the river all day.

(At this point, consider playing "Log Driver's Waltz" and starting a small dance. Ask volunteers to come to the front to dance with you. Once they catch on to the moves, invite other couples come up and dance as well. Make sure all get a round of applause at the end, and take a bow.)

**49. Lumberjacks (#1)**

- Well, enough fun. I been jawin' so long I'm gonna have about 100 hungry jacks beatin' down the doors of the cookshack 'fore long. You greenjacks got any questions about your life as jacks, you best ask 'em now.

**Conclusion:**

Leave about 10 minutes at the end for questions, then thank the audience for coming and hustle them out. Don't forget to take a bow!

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