

Paul Bunyan, An American Legend

Paul Bunyan was born in the woods of Maine. He quickly outgrew the East, and moved to the expanse of the Midwest. He was raised on wild game, and lumberjack tales of tall trees and great pine stands. It wasn't long before Paul knew he wanted to spend his life in the logging camps.

When Paul was 14 years old and six feet tall, he spent his first winter in a logging camp as an axman. He was so strong that he could cut a tree down in one chop. He worked quickly, and would have a day's worth of lumber cut by lunchtime. He'd take a nap, then strap a team of horses, and help pull logs to the river. He was always well-liked in the logging camps, because he told jokes and sang.

In Paul's third winter, he was promoted to stamper (and had grown another 6 inches). He stamped some logs with such strength that the stamp would show up at the other end of the log.

In Paul's fifth winter, he had the great idea to hitch Babe the Blue Ox to an entire section of land, and have Babe pull the land to the river. Once they got the timber stand to the river landing, the lumberjacks were able to cut trees like they were shearing sheep. Babe returned that section of land to where it belonged, and the process was repeated with another section. Though that saved time, the crew once forgot to return a section of land, so the foreman made them stop.

Although Paul had many strengths, he was not very good at math. Fortunately, his friends were. When Paul was promoted to foreman in his sixth year as a lumberjack (after growing 8 more inches so that he was 7'2"), he made sure his friends were keeping track of the trees cut, the lumberjacks' wages, and other expenses. To save money, Paul asked his staff to stop dotting their "i's" and crossing their "t's." It saved the camp so much ink!

Lumberjacks fell over themselves to work for Paul. To be able to say you'd once worked for Paul Bunyan made you a legend among loggers. Before long, Paul had picked a crew that functioned like a well-oiled machine, the likes of which have not been seen since.

That same winter, he and his crew were cutting about 30 miles from camp. They made four trips a day from the stand of trees to the river. Paul thought that if they had ice roads, they could make six trips a day. They used a water-filled wagon like a sprinkler to make the ice roads, and the plan worked. However, that night, their wagon-sprinkler sprung a leak, spilling so much water that it formed the Mississippi River. Having an ice road that big made it even easier to transport the logs to market!

The next year, Paul gave all his crew double-sided axes, so they could chop two trees at once. Lumberjack Shot Gunderson was so good at wielding this new invention that he could swing an axe in each hand, and fell four trees at a time.

As a foreman, Paul had a great eye for finding high-quality stands of trees. He was also very efficient. One winter it snowed so much that a person could only see the tops of trees. Paul found a stand that had trees sticking 60 feet out of the snow. He cut the tops off those trees that winter, and met his goal for the lumber baron. The next winter, there was much less snow, so he went back, and cut the 100 foot stumps to beat his record from the winter before.

Paul could always find a good stand of white pine, but as more and more lumber companies moved into the Midwest, there were less quality timber stands. Paul moved farther west to be able to keep providing the lumber baron with the tallest, roundest, best quality timber in America. Although Paul never returned to the Midwest, he left legends and tall tales throughout all of Minnesota's cities and towns.