

2014

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Recommended Citation

Geller, William (2014) "The Era of the Loggers: Revisiting a Lost Way of Life in Maine, between Rainbow Lake and Yoke Pond," *Appalachia*: Vol. 65: No. 2, Article 10.

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The Era of the Loggers

*Revisiting a lost way of life in Maine,
between Rainbow Lake and Yoke Pond*

William Geller

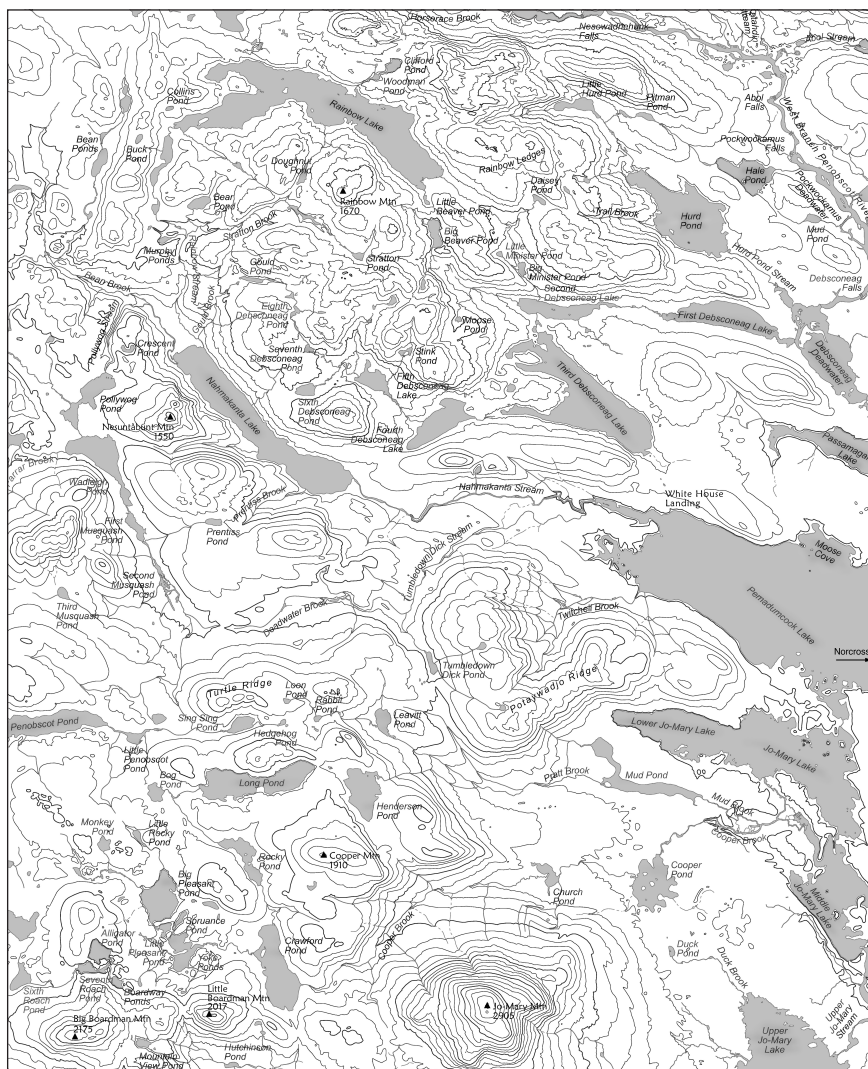


ON JULY 16, 1966, AT THE MOUTH OF NAHMAKANTA STREAM, an old logger watched the last piece of the log drive go through the sluice into the seventh and last boom of the drive season. The drive crew left, but he stayed, sat on the temporary dam built solely for this drive, and stared east across Pemadumcook Lake. This was the last time loggers ever congregated here for a drive, and within a few years, log drives ended in the Maine woods. For 131 years, members of his family and their friends had logged and driven the West Branch tributaries, ponds, and lakes: Rainbow, Bean, Stratton, Nahmakanta, Tumbledown Dick, Pollywog, Farrar, Gulliver, Musquash, Cooper, Pratt, and Jo-Mary, the northern half of an area now referred to as the 100-Mile Wilderness. He knew of three brothers who came north from Brownville in the earliest years. One traveled the Nahmakanta Tote Road to South Twin Lake soon after it opened to get to the foot of Nahmakanta Stream in 1835. One was a teamster on the Caribou Lake Tote Road working the section between Yoke Pond, near the head of Cooper Brook, and Wadleigh Farm on the Pollywog watershed beginning in 1837. The youngest brother walked the Caribou Tote Road in 1839 to the Joe Morris Farm at Caribou Lake to cut on Bean Brook.

The old man knew how quickly loggers had penetrated this region. In 1832 they were absent, and eight years later their numbers had increased and warranted these two supply routes. The Caribou Tote Road split the wilderness crossing to its western side and the Nahmakanta Road served those entering from the east. At first, men worked close to the waterways. Their oxen could haul two or three logs at a time a mile or two downhill, to the water. Loggers culled the first quality pine and drove them without dams. The crews worked up each major waterway and any tributary that would have a spring freshet sufficient to move the small volume of logs.

By 1841, the younger brother had worked his way east into Bean Brook. His older brother had reached Rainbow Stream's Third Deadwater, immediately east of the Bean drainage. Another crew worked on Pollywog Stream below Pollywog Pond. Over in the Yoke Pond area, they had worked right up Cooper Brook from the Jo-Mary Lakes. By 1845, the big first-quality pines were culled in this watershed.

In this undated photo, Maine loggers transfer timber from a horse-drawn sled to a Lombard loading platform—a steam-operated invention in use in the Maine woods after 1900. BELLE AND BARNEY WILLETTE COLLECTION, MILLINOCKET HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Logging started in the 1830s in these roadless watersheds south of Katahdin, some 100 miles north of Bangor, Maine, via the Penobscot River, West Branch of the Penobscot, and Nahmakanta Stream. APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB

The next year, they began cutting around Rainbow Lake, and were moving up the Pollywog watershed through Pollywog, Wadleigh, and the Musquashes to Sing Sing and Penobscot ponds. From Nahmakanta Stream, they worked up Tumbledown Brook to Tumbledown Dick Pond. During that same era

on Cooper Brook, they cut their way up Pratt Brook through Mud Pond to Leavitt, Rabbit, and Henderson ponds.

By the mid 1860s, the old logger's family had been part of operations that reached the end of each of the waterways and in most areas they had come back for the second-quality pine. Almost as soon as the pines were gone by the 1860s, his family began cutting spruce and by then crews were scattered throughout the watersheds every year.

During the 1860s, spring was a tense time for lumbermen and their crews. With so many cutting on each waterway, a large spring runoff was necessary to move the logs. But it was never guaranteed. Driving dams became the solution. The first experience in dam building in this region was at Nahmakanta Lake* in about 1868. During the next five years, loggers built rock crib dams in many places. Most would be a key part of the logging infrastructure until the late 1930s. The Nahmakanta Dam Company built on Nahmakanta Stream at the foot of both the First and Second Deadwater, Rainbow Stream (where four crib dams were built)*, Rainbow Lake*, Stratton Pond* and Deadwater*, Bean Ponds (three crib dams)*, Bean Pond Deadwater, Pollywog Pond*, Gulliver Brook (two crib dams), Wadleigh Pond, First Musquash Pond, Musquash Stream (also two crib dams), Sing Sing Pond, Penobscot Pond, Farrar Brook at Female Pond*, and Farrar Deadwater*. The Cooper Brook Dam Company built dams at Cooper Pond*, Church Pond*, Crawford Pond*, Yoke Pond*, and Big Pleasant Pond*, and Mud Pond inlet and outlet. The West Branch Dam and Improvement Company probably built the dams on the three Jo-Mary lakes.

The old logger's ancestors' log driving work also included stream improvements that were designed to minimize logjams. Logging crews used black powder to remove rock obstructions up until 1879, after which dynamite became the tool of the trade. The loggers built roll dams to flood out tough rocky sections; two on Rainbow Stream, four in Pollywog Gorge, one on Gulliver Brook, and one between Female Pond and Farrar Deadwater. The 6,100 feet of abutments (replaced in 1913) on three miles of Rainbow Stream always amazed him. Amid those abutments below Stratton Brook at an S turn, a crew built a 180-foot-log sluice on the floor of the stream to provide a straight channel. Elsewhere they dammed side channels and straightened streams. The men clear-cut the side streams and built splash dams at key intervals and a horse dam at the headwater pond. They blew out

*At all of these sites, the dam remains were visible in 2013.

these temporary dams each spring to drive the wood piled in the waterway. He thought nearly every body of water in this region probably had a dam of some kind at one time or another.

More loggers also resulted in a tote road network. These supply routes developed along the edges of Nahmakanta Stream, Rainbow Stream, Pollywog Stream, Bean Brook, and Cooper Brook. Side roads reached into such tributaries as Stratton Brook, Gulliver Brook, Farrar Brook, Tumbledown Dick Brook, and Pratt Brook. This network of tote roads opened and closed until the early 1950s.

Toting work on the Caribou Tote Road began to change with the coming of the railroad, which reached Greenville in 1884 and Norcross in 1894; by 1900, the loggers were no longer using Nahmakanta Tote Road and Caribou Tote Road. Lumbermen had their supplies delivered to Norcross, where their men took them by bateau through North Twin Lake and across Pemadumcook to the mouth of either Nahmakanta Stream or Jo-Mary Stream. A headworks¹ at Lower Jo-Mary and Middle Jo-Mary dams pulled the supply bateau up so they could continue on to a storehouse at the Cooper Brook Tote Road at Lower Jo-Mary Lake. The last major supply route change came in 1920, when Great Northern Paper and Hollingsworth and Whitney agreed to connect their roads that linked Yoke Pond to Greenville and supplies for the upper Cooper Brook and Pollywog Brook areas began to come via Greenville.

Across from where the old logger sat was the supply boat landing. The earliest toters' names he could remember were Stinchfield and Heath from about 1896. Before then, Fred Heath had run the Jo-Mary Pond Shanty on the Caribou Tote Road. For more than 100 years, loggers toted supplies from here to Nahmakanta, where logging crews ferried them up the lake, and then teamsters took them east toward to the camps in the Rainbow area, or west through Prentiss Valley—to the Pollywog watershed. He had heard it was always good hunting along the road. The spilled grains and hay attracted birds and animals. Often the shanty workers had to stay up at night protecting the loads of hay and grain from deer and caribou.

¹Headworks: A raft of logs with a capstan that has a 1,000-foot rope connected to a 300-pound anchor. The anchor is taken by boat down the lake and dropped. Men then turn the capstan by hand, pulling the raft and boomed logs to the anchor. They repeat the process as many times as necessary until the destination is reached.

THE OLD LOGGER HEARD A SPLASH BEHIND HIM. HE TURNED AND looked upstream. Not far up was an old unmarked graveyard that included the grave of a logger who had died of smallpox. Decades before, swampers cut a new road section without realizing that they had crossed the unmarked graves, but the boss, who realized it, didn't tell the superstitious teamsters, who would have been afraid. When they bulldozed the landings in the early 1950s, a few of the graves were uncovered. Over on Lower Jo-Mary or Middle Jo-Mary lakes, a smallpox hospital camp operated in about 1881. The old logger knew men who ended up there after falling ill while cutting on Nahmakanta Stream. The laws required a separate camp for sick men and quarantined the rest of the camp to the cutting area.

A number of other loggers were buried up at Pollywog in unmarked graves. One died when a snub-line—a rope or cable used as a break to slow the descent of a horse-drawn, loaded sled—broke. The teamster heard it snap and quickly freed the horses that had survived. Members of his crew buried him in the traditional casket built of two pork barrels. Two waterfalls below the dam, a logger of another crew carved in the ledge the names of five men who died at the site. On another occasion, fourteen men went in for the winter, but didn't come out in the spring. They had all succumbed to illness. A drive crew buried two others, each with a marking stone, on Bean Brook just above its confluence with Pollywog Stream (in 1922).

A toot from the 2-year-old *O.A. Harkness*—a modern, 1964 towboat—as it began to tow the 3,000-cord boom roused the logger from his reverie. The first towing boat, the side-wheel steamer *F.W. Ayer*, began operating in 1893. Even the most powerful boat moved only at about three-quarters of a mile per hour, a little more than a half-mile an hour faster than the headworks he and nearly every one of his family had worked on. He was part of a crew over on Turkey Tail Lake in 1941. That crew had gone there to build a headworks, which they used to move 3,500 cords of wood at a time. Headworks at the Jo-Mary Dams were still operating then. They may have never used anything but headworks on Rainbow and the Rainbow Deadwaters, but he was sure they had on every pond on the Pollywog, Bean, and Cooper drainages. At Nahmakanta, two large supply wharfs with capacities of 60 tons made him wonder if the lake ever had a towboat.

He thought about the similarity of developments between towing and hauling. Originally, oxen toted supplies and hauled wood. Logging crews had generally switched over to horses by 1895. His family knew of the use of the



Workers load timber onto a sled to be hauled to a river or stream landing in preparation for a spring log drive. The exact location and date of this photo aren't known.

BELLE AND BARNEY WILLETTE COLLECTION, MILLINOCKET HISTORICAL SOCIETY

first steam-powered Lombard tractors for hauling beginning about 1905 in other logging areas. Because of the uneven terrain, loggers in this area never used them except at Yoke and Crawford ponds starting soon after 1920, when the roads between Yoke Pond and Kokadjo opened. Initially they hauled supplies from Kokadjo to the Yoke Pond depot camp, where loggers unloaded them before they went on to turn around on the ice at Crawford Pond. One year, one machine went through the ice and remains on the bottom.

In the early 1930s, the long-standing tradition of logging with hand tools and horses began to change. Bulldozers came to build roads. The crews experimented with trucks in the Crawford Pond area where they moved 10,000 cords. Some pulled sleds and others had logs loaded on the truck body. Men unloaded the trucks by hand, tossing the pulpwood into Crawford Pond. The trucks never went down the tote road along Cooper Brook, but by the 1950s loggers were using the tractor road from Kokadjo to the Nahmakanta Stream Tote Road. They dumped logs at both Maher Landing and Nahmakanta Dam.

Mechanization may have replaced some handwork and horses, but it never replaced the ingenuity and resilience of the loggers. Whether it was difficult terrain, washed-out dams, forest fires, or any of a number of adversities, each logged watershed had its own story to tell. In the Cooper Brook watershed in 1886, F. W. Cunningham had to re-clear Pratt Brook before his crew of

25 men and 12 horses could start logging. The 1903 forest fire halted logging on the brook. Fires burned through the area again in 1908 and 1911. Loggers returned to areas below Leavitt Pond in the 1950s, cut the poplar that had seeded in and hauled it across the frozen Mud Pond to Lower Jo-Mary Lake.

Along Cooper Brook, loggers drove most years except between 1907, when the dams blew out, and 1915, when the dams were rebuilt. So many men worked in the area that the pile of bones of butchered meat at the Yoke Pond camp was still evident in the late 1970s.

The old logger would have liked to have seen the counterweight strategy used between the saddle on Boardman Mountain and Yoke Pond. The men attached loaded sleds at the saddle to a rope through an eye pin² and down to supply loaded sleds, the counterweight. Rocky Pond had a floating bridge at the narrows. Even though Long Pond flowed to Nahmakanta, horses hauled the logs across the flat plateau to Crawford and Big Pleasant. One of the largest crews the old logger could remember was the 100 men Charles Henderson had in the 1927–1928 and 1934 seasons at Church Pond. Crews in the late 1880s had been in the 50 to 80 men range. Beginning in the early 1940s, logging stopped above Church Pond. No one had yet returned. The last years of the camps at Church Pond were 1954 to 1955.

The old logger turned his memories to Nahmakanta Stream. Loggers started from where he sat; their supplies came here; it was a stopping, resting, and starting point. When the water was low, old bricks could be found down near the original streambed. A logger named Francisco Estes opened a mill on the water on the nearby point to the southeast soon after the railroad reached Norcross in 1894. What became known as the Maher Landing about 1900 had been a landing from the first to this last drive. About 1911, Great Northern Paper Company bought the area and built a depot camp serving both Nahmakanta and Cooper Brook watersheds until about 1917. The camp's 80-bed, white boarding house led to the name White House Landing.

Various logging crews cut Nahmakanta Stream's side banks nearly every year from 1900 to 1910. Estes had a circa-1900 camp at Howe Pitch where the horses used to ford the river. One year a team went through the ice and died. Crews tried building a bridge at the site, but it never lasted long. Nearby, logs came into the stream from Tumbledown Brook, which had a crib dam* not far upstream. The forest fires of 1903, 1908, and 1911 interrupted logging in some places along the waterway. Loggers returned in 1924 and the last drive

²This eye pin is still visible today in the ledge between Boardman Mountain and Yoke Pond.

was before the war. One of the old logger's first jobs was at Tumbledown Dick Falls*. The thunder of the wood crashing over the falls stuck in his mind.

Until 1924, logs came into Nahmakanta Lake from every direction. Sluices lined the steep west side. Haul roads came in from Wadleigh and Prentiss valleys, Sixth Debsconeag Lake, and Gould Pond. The Rainbow Fire of 1924 brought logging around the lake to a halt. The fire started about halfway up Rainbow Stream near Murphy Ponds and burned east along the top of the ridge of the north shore, and by the 1960s, loggers still hadn't returned to that area. But they returned to the west side in 1938 to 1939, reopening tote roads in the Prentiss and Wadleigh valleys. The last logging in that portion of the valleys draining to Nahmakanta was in 1961 to 1963, the year of the last camp at the dam.

The 1924 fire halted logging east of Rainbow stream, on the north edge of Rainbow Lake, and on the south edge, but not on the southeast corner. The west end was untouched. The slash left from the 1923 spruce budworm salvage operations, which engaged two dozen operators, helped fuel the fire. A construction crew rebuilt the dam at Rainbow Lake in 1941, and the last drive there had been before 1952.

In the Pollywog watershed, the old logger loved watching the logs come down the 150-yard, 70-foot-wide natural granite slide* above Second Musquash Pond. He thought the last logs to slide down it came from Penobscot Pond in 1935. Until about 1920, horses hauled the logs cut around the western half of the pond the short distance to the Roach River. Only one person he knew ever worked on Farrar Brook where, in 1914, Great Northern Paper experimented with cutting and driving short wood. The Farrar Brook Tote Road was impassable in 1933, suggesting that the last drive probably took place some years earlier. One of the old logger's sons, on a crew coming in from Kokadjo, cut in the Musquash area in 1962 to 1963; the crew trucked the logs to Nahmakanta Stream. Down on Bean Brook, a crew did so much blasting that in one spot* the water disappears underground by summer. In 1925, and again in 1934, crews rebuilt the three Bean Pond dams to support a few more years of logging. By 1966, as the old logger sat thinking of those days, no one had yet returned.

A motorboat interrupted the old logger's thoughts. Piloting it was Rex Hale, caretaker for the nearby Chamberlain camp at the carry to Third Debsconeag Lake, White House Landing. The old logger looked across the water

to Chamberlain's three log camps. After a crew removed the dam in the next few days, the camps would be the remaining visible reminder that someone had likely lived here every year since the logging began.

He heard the small waves lapping the sides of Rex's boat as it silently drifted in next to the old logger, but he kept his mind and eyes fixed on the Harkness as it slowly disappeared down the lake. A logging tradition had ended where it had started. Sport camps, where people came to hunt and fish, had come to this area of the Maine woods starting in the 1890s. Tonight he and Rex would probably reminisce about sport camp history. Rex's dad had worked here in 1910.

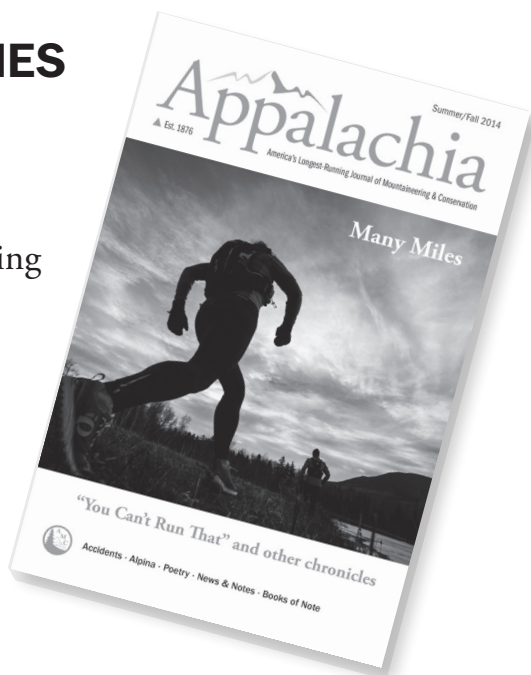
WILLIAM GELLER is the retired vice president for administration at the University of Maine at Farmington. He will tell the next chapter of this area's history in the next issue of *Appalachia*.

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