

## The Tall Tale of Paul Bunyan

Paul Bunyan was a lumberjack. He wore a red and black checkered shirt and a checkered logging cap to match, and his blue jeans were held up with bright yellow suspenders. On his feet he wore heavy work boots, and in his hand he always carried an axe. There are more stories about Paul Bunyan than there are stars in the sky, but the one thing they all have in common is that they tell how Paul was the biggest and best lumberjack that ever lived.

When America was a young country, logging was an important business. The land was covered with dense forests of pine and spruce and mahogany and oak. It was a growing country, and the land had to be cleared to make way for farms and towns. Lumber was needed to build ships, houses, stores, and courthouses. That is where Paul Bunyan came in.

Most folks think Paul was born in Maine, close to the Canadian border. Although no one seems to know exactly where Paul was born - or when - everyone does agree about one thing. He was a BIG baby!

It is said that at birth, Paul weighed eighty-six pounds, give or take a few, and he grew even bigger mighty quickly. Folks in Maine say that whenever Paul rolled over in his cradle, the whole neighborhood shook and the neighbors got worried. That's because if Paul rolled around too much he could knock over all of the trees for miles around.

His poor mother hardly knew how to keep Paul fed. Why, in a single day her son would eat seventy-four buckets of oatmeal with five gallons of maple syrup on them and then drink fourteen gallons of milk. Keeping him in clothes was an even bigger problem, for he grew so fast in all directions. At first, Paul's father made him a new pair of boots every day, but at last, he gave up! Paul was just going to have to walk around barefoot until he finally stopped growing.

One day Paul did stop growing. Everyone was relieved, because by that time Paul was as tall as the tallest pine tree. Now you might think that is stretching the truth, but there is no doubt, Paul was a mighty big fellow. You see, most folks only came up to Paul's ankles. Now that Paul was full-grown, he decided it was time for him to make his own way in the world. Paul's mother and father were sad to see him go, but secretly his mother couldn't help feeling a little relieved. As she told her husband, "keeping our boy fed was becoming an impossible chore!" So they climbed a great big ladder and kissed Paul goodbye. Then, his father gave him a new pair of gigantic boots, and off Paul went.

Soon he came to a logging camp. Although Paul had no experience with logging, he talked the camp foreman into letting him try it out. With one great cry of "timber!" he swung his axe across twenty trees, bringing them all down in a single blow. The foreman's mouth dropped wide open and he hired Paul right there on the spot!

Now, just about every other logger in the world would have been overjoyed to cut trees that fast, but not Paul. He was sad that he couldn't cut them down even faster. He puzzled over this until he came up with a solution to his problem.

His problem was his axe. Being as big as he was, Paul didn't use an ordinary axe. No, his axe had a head as big as a cow, and a handle that had been carved out of an entire tree. It worked pretty well at first, but when Paul really got it swinging, he had

a bad habit of breaking the handle. He sure went through an awful lot of axe handles until the day he decided to design himself a new axe altogether.

First, he got a fifty yard piece of rope. Then, he took the axe head off of his old axe and tied it to the end of the rope. When the other loggers saw Paul's axe, they almost died of laughing. But their laughter didn't bother Paul. Gripping the rope tightly in his hands, Paul whirled the axe around him. The other loggers watched in amazement as Paul made forty trees fall to the ground in a single whirl of the rope!

Paul didn't stay at the logging camp for long. If he had, there would have been no more trees for the other loggers to cut down, and they depended on their work so that their families wouldn't starve. So Paul decided to strike out on his own. He traveled far and wide, harvesting lumber, as he headed towards the nearest sawmill.

Then came the famous winter of the blue snows. The weather was mighty unusual that year. Day after day, thick blue snow fell from the sky until the land, rooftops, and even the treetops were covered in blue. It got colder and colder too, so cold that eventually nobody dared to go outside - nobody that is, except for Paul Bunyan.

On one of those cold blue days, Paul took off into the woods, whistling to himself to keep his mind off the cold. The trees sure looked beautiful with all that blue snow around them. Paul was busy looking around, when all of a sudden, he tripped over something, which he often did because his feet were so far below his eyes.

He looked down and there, to his amazement, he saw a pair of hairy blue ears sticking out of the snow! Paul scratched his chin. Then he reached down and grabbed an ear in each hand. He pulled as hard as he could and out of the snow popped a big baby blue ox.

The ox looked awfully cold, so Paul carried it back to his cabin. Once inside, he set the shivering ox down by the fire. All night long, Paul nursed the poor baby ox. When morning came, the young animal stood up, leaned over, and licked Paul on the cheek with her big, rough, blue tongue. The licking tickled, and Paul burst out laughing. "Babe," he said, patting the ox's neck, "I got a feeling you and I are going to be great friends!" And that was how the blue ox got her name.

Paul was happier that he had ever been. Now he had a partner to help him with his logging. He'd cut down the trees, and Babe, the mighty blue ox, would haul them to the river where they floated to the sawmill. Like his master, Babe grew up to an enormous size. No one knows for sure how much Babe weighed, but it's said that the distance between her eyes measured exactly one hundred and forty axe handles, three jugs of maple syrup, and a large sac of oatmeal all laid end to end!

Babe and Paul were wonderful friends, and Paul felt that, together, there was nothing they couldn't do. But, although Paul and Babe were the best logging team you could find, it was sometimes hard for them to find work. That's because no logging company could afford to keep the two of them fed!

Why, on just one average working day, Paul would have five bushels of fried potatoes for dinner, forty-five pounds of beef steak, seven or eight hams, sixteen loaves of bread, thirteen dozen eggs, and to finish it all off, six hundred and seventy-eight pancakes topped with nine gallons of maple syrup. Paul would then wash all of it down with ten gallons of black coffee. So you can see why Paul and Babe weren't too popular around the logging camp cooks.

So Paul decided to start a logging camp of his very own. Paul's first logging camp was on the Onion River in the northern woods of Minnesota. He hired several hundred lumberjacks. Paul wanted this to be the biggest and best logging camp ever - and it was!

Old loggers who worked at Paul's camp claim it was so big that the men needed maps and compasses just to find their way around. Some folks say he dug the Great Lakes to supply the camp with water. The cookhouse alone covered four square miles. The food was carried to the dining room by means of horse-drawn wagons, and there was a pipeline that brought warm maple syrup to each table. I've heard on good authority that the food in Paul's camp was mighty good. Sourdough Sam, the camp cook, made a mean venison stew and some delightful fried chicken. But Sam's sourdough pancakes were every logger's all-time favorite. In fact, Same was the world expert when it came to making pancakes, and sourdough pancakes were his own invention. They say Paul drained a small lake to give Sam enough room to mix the batter.

And the griddle was so big that the kitchen staff had to tie great slabs of bacon to their feet and skate across it just to keep it greased.

After a while, Paul grew tired and restless. There were forests in parts of the United States that he had never been to before. So he decided to make his logging camp a traveling logging camp.

The very next day, Paul and his loggers set out westward across the United States. While traveling, they logged in the Dakotas, Oregon, Washington, and just about everywhere else in between. Now, all of this tree cutting might sound like it was unhealthy for the land, but Paul didn't do any harm. Although he cut down millions of trees, he made sure he replaced each one with a new seedling. He did this because, as a boy, he had learned that in order for a forest to flourish and grow, it needed to be treated with respect.

Whenever a new job came, Paul and his men would move the whole camp to it. This was easy, they'd simply place great big wheels under the dining room, cookhouse, and all of the logger's bunkhouses. Then Paul would link them all together with log chains and hook them to Babe's harness. The the mighty ox would go to work pulling the entire camp behind her as if it were as light as a goose-feather pillow.

One time Paul and his men were logging in Wisconsin. They had to use a road that was so crooked and tangled up that they couldn't even find their way to the forest. The road was such a mess that loggers going back to camp would run right smack into themselves coming the other way! Paul knew that something had to be done.

He considered the problem for a while and then the answer came to him. He simply hitched Babe, the mighty blue ox, to the road and yelled, "Come on, Babe! Pull! Pull!" Babe grunted and groaned and yanked as hard as she could. For a while, nothing happened. Then, with a loud CRACK - so loud that it sounded as if the earth was splitting in two, the crooked road lost all of its kinks and became as straight as a ruler.

Paul loved solving tricky problems like that. In fact, problem solving was one of his favorite activities. Of course, one thing leads to another, and all of this problem solving eventually led to some inventions. Paul was the man who invented the chainsaw, the double-headed axe, and all the other tools that loggers use today.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Paul's many accomplishments. It was Paul who got the round river to run straight and who dug the Saint Lawrence River. And when the Yellowstone River got frozen to the Missouri River during the winter of the blue snow, who do you think unstuck them again?

Paul also created the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachian Mountains. And here is how he did it. When logging was at its height, some important people hired Paul and his crew to dig a canal across the middle of the country so logs could float back and forth. So Paul started digging. Whistling as he worked, he shoveled so fast that before long he built up a great heap of dirt to the right, and one to the left. And that's exactly how the Rockies came to be on one side of the United States and the Appalachians on the other.

When Paul was finished digging the canal, Babe kicked in a huge bucket of water and turned Paul's canyon into the great Mississippi River. So as you can see, there wasn't much about the great outdoors that Paul wasn't involved with in one way or another.

Now, you're probably wondering what ever happened to Paul Bunyan, the greatest lumberjack of all time. Well, there are plenty of stories about that too! But most folks claim that the United States was just getting too civilized for Paul and Babe so the two headed north to Alaska - the only state truly big enough for the two of them.

Others, mostly loggers, insist that Paul Bunyan is still around the lower forty-eight. According to them, Paul's fame has made him want to retire as of late, and that he now spends his time relaxing deep in the northern woods.

So remember, if you're ever out walking in the woods one day and you hear a loud voice holler, "timber!" - so loud it makes the entire forest shake - don't be too startled if you turn and find yourself staring at the boot of Paul Bunyan, the greatest lumberjack of them all!