

Bus Griffiths' *Now You're Logging*: A Graphic Novel about British Columbia Coastal Logging in the 1930s

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[See table of contents](#)

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NOTE AND DOCUMENT

Bus Griffiths' *Now You're Logging*: A Graphic Novel about British Columbia Coastal Logging in the 1930s

Gordon Hak

A COMIC BOOK is an unlikely entrée into the history of logging in coastal British Columbia, but Bus Griffiths' 1978 graphic novel *Now You're Logging* provides an intriguing window onto work in the woods in the 1930s. Griffiths worked for years as a logger on the coast, experiencing the camps of the 1930s directly. One of his prime aims was authenticity: he was tired of reading books on logging by people who had never spent any time in the woods.¹ *Now You're Logging* tells a story, replete with characters — who are, well, cartoonish — and romance, but it also takes the reader into the workplace, where skill, teamwork, and danger shape the daily lives of the men. Like Griffiths' other logging art, the book is an important historical document. The introduction to the first edition of the 119-page book was written by Daniel T. Gallacher, curator at the Provincial Museum of British Columbia: "It is not an overstatement to say that Bus Griffiths' works — both paintings and drawings — have become our most important resources for details on logging technol-

¹Shawn Connor, "Beyond the Grid: I'd Rather Be Fishing: A Conversation with Bus Griffiths," *The Comics Journal*, 187 (May 1996), 114. For a critique of Griffiths as a cartoonist, see Shawn Connor, "Beyond the Grid, Later, up in the woods..." *The Comics Journal*, 187 (May 1996), 111-2. For more art work by Griffiths, see the book that he illustrated: Peter Trower, *Bush Poems* (British Columbia 1978).

Gordon Hak, "Bus Griffiths' *Now You're Logging*: A Graphic Novel about British Columbia Coastal Logging in the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 55 (Spring 2005), 167-85.

THANKS FOR GETTING ME UP HERE WITH YOU, AL!

HELL...IT WOULDN'T BE ANY GOOD WITHOUT YOU, RED!

YOU MUST'VE FIGURED A WAY TO GET THE DONKEY ACROSS THE RIVER!?

I'VE GOT A FEW IDEAS--I JUST HOPE THEY WORK! I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT 'EM LATER--BUT I'VE GOT TO SEE THOSE FALLERS!

I'VE BLAZED A LINE TO THE RIVER--I THINK WE CAN WIGGLE BETWEEN THE TREES--THERE'S ONLY ONE "WINDFALL" TO CUT, BUT THERE'S TWO CEDARS I'VE MARKED JUST ABOVE THE RIVER--FALL 'EM AND BUCK A 48 FOOT LOG OFF THE BUTT OF EACH OF 'EM!

SHOOE, AL!

RED, WILL YOU TAKE THE SMALL BLOCK AND STRAP AND HANG IT ON THAT HEMLOCK BEHIND THE BIG FIR--I'LL PULL OUT THE BIGHT OF THE STRAWLINE--WE'LL PUT THE MOVIN' BLOCK ON THE FIR FOR OUR FIRST PULL!

WE'RE READY TO MOVE OUT! HEY DAVE! DID YOU SHACKLE THOSE GUYLINES TO ONE OF THE LUGS ON THE BACK OF THE SLEIGH?

YEAH! ALL SET, AL!

OKAY SNOOSE--GO AHEAD ON HER!

Logging Terms

- *WINDFALL--A TREE TOPPLED BY WIND
- *SHACKLE--TO FASTEN WITH A SHACKLE, OR CLEVIS
- *NOTE--FALLERS SELDOM WORE THE BONE DRY OR TIN COATS AS THEY WERE TOO STIFF AND RESTRICTED THEIR MOVEMENTS--A LOT OF THEM WORE TWO STANFIELD WOOL SHIRTS--THE UNDER ONE TUCKED IN THE OUTER WORN OUTSIDE OF TIE PANTS--THE OUTER ONE WAS BOUGHT SEVERAL SIZES TOO LARGE THEN BOILED IN WATER CONTAINING LINSSEED OIL--THE GARMENT WOULD SHRINK AND THICKEN LIKE A BLANKET, AND THE OIL GAVE A LITTLE WATER REPELLENCE--ON A WET DAY THE FALLERS WOULD OCCASIONALLY WRING OUT THE SHIRT TO AND IT BECAME SOAKED WOULD TAKE THE GARMENT OFF AND WRING IT OUT

Bus Griffiths

SNOOSE THE DONKEY PUNCHER ENGAGES THE MAINLINE FRICTION LEVER AND THE LINE STARTS TO WIND SLOWLY ONTO THE DRUM. HE JERKS THE THROTTLE OPEN, AND WITH A THROATY ROAR, THE DONKEY STARTS TO PULL ITSELF TOWARDS THE RIVER --

Working in the Rain. Bus Griffiths', *Now You're Logging* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing 1978), p. 64. Note the explanation of logging terms in the bottom right corner.

ogy, activities, nomenclature and slang-terms — the knowledge of which is vital for a firm understanding of the forest industry in its formative years.”²

Griffiths was born in Moose Jaw in 1913, moving with his family to the BC coast in 1922. By the 1930s he had given up office work and chosen to work in the forests. He kept logging until 1961, when he began commercial fishing out of Fanny Bay on Vancouver Island. At a young age he dreamed of becoming a cartoonist but local newspapers were not interested in his drawings. In the 1940s he conceived of recording logging history and telling logging stories in comic-book form, and a few of his works were published by Maple Leaf Publishing, a Vancouver firm. In the early 1970s he again took up the idea and the result was *Now You're Logging*.

The book captures a particular time and place in West Coast logging. The depression of the early 1930s, coupled with the American Smoot-Hawley tariff of 1930, which largely shut Canadian lumber out of the US market, devastated the industry. However, recovery was around the corner. While the overall impact on the Canadian economy of the trade agreements reached in Ottawa at the Imperial Economic Conference in 1932 may have been “pathetically small,” there was a dramatic impact on the British Columbia coastal lumber industry. The deal allowed Canadian lumber into the British market on favourable terms, and soon coastal operations were running full tilt servicing new customers.³

The story is set in the coastal forests of BC, and here, as in the American Pacific Northwest, because of the massive trees and the topography, logging procedures were different from those found elsewhere. The ocean, too, was important in structuring the industry. Sawmills were concentrated in the Vancouver area and a few points on Vancouver Island. Logging was done up the mainland coast from Vancouver and on Vancouver Island. Tug boats pulled large rafts or booms of logs from the isolated camps to the mills. During the 1920s and 1930s Vancouver Island was increasingly emerging as a focal centre for the coastal industry. H.R. MacMillan, a forest industry tycoon, extended his operations to the island in 1936 when he purchased standing timber and a mill in the Alberni Valley.⁴ Bus Griffiths' life reflected this trend. He began as a logger in the Fraser Valley and up the Mainland coast, but by World War II he was living and logging on Vancouver Island.

²Daniel T. Gallacher, “Introduction,” Bus Griffiths, *Now You're Logging* (Madeira Park 1978), v. A 1990 paperback version featured an introduction by novelist Jack Hodgins.

³Gordon Hak, “Red Wages: Communists and the 1934 Vancouver Island Loggers Strike,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 80, 3 (July 1989), 82-3; John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto 1985), 219-21; Ian Drummond, “Empire Trade and Russian Trade: Economic Diplomacy in the Nineteen-Thirties,” *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 5 (February 1972), 35-47.

⁴Donald MacKay, *Empire of Wood: The MacMillan Bloedel Story* (Vancouver 1982), 119-37; Ken Drushka, *HR: A Biography of H.R. MacMillan* (Madeira Park 1995), 136-92.



Topping a Spar Tree, p. 12.

Technologically, Griffiths also captures a particular time. In the 1930s trucks were replacing trains for transporting logs over long distances in the woods, usually to the seaside. Developments in engine and tire technology, as well as modifications by local operators, made it possible for trucks to carry the large, heavy coastal logs. The Griffiths story is set in a truck logging camp, and one of the characters relates the history:

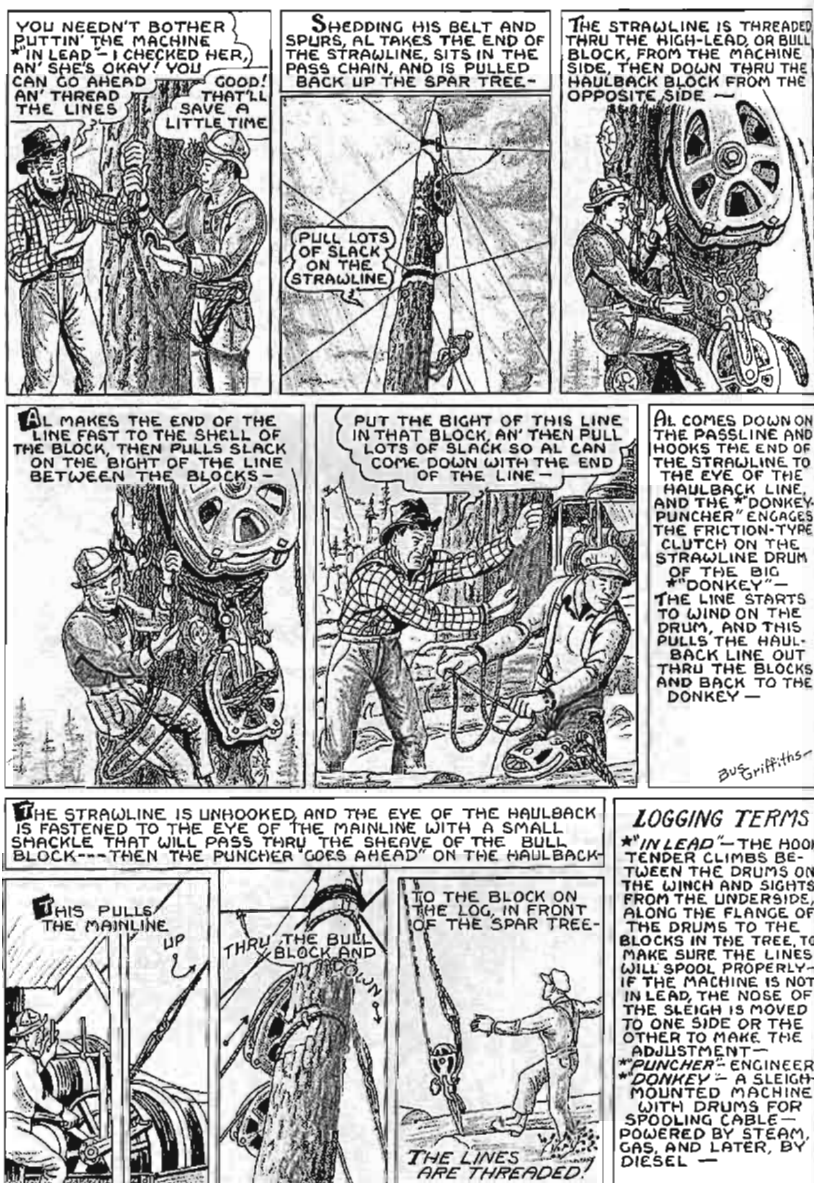
A FEW YEARS AGO A LOT OF THE GUYS SAID TRUCKS WERE NO GOOD IN THE WOODS—THEY FIGURED TRAINS WAS THE ONLY THINGS A LOT OF OUTFITS TRIED TRUCKS, BUT THEY WASN'T GETTIN' ANYWHERE—THEY THOUGHT THEY COST TOO MUCH, BROKE TOO EASY, AN' WOULDN'T PACK ENOUGH WOOD—BUT THEY WAS ALL FOOLIN' AROUND WITH SINGLE-AXLE JOBS—THEN SOME OLD FARMER FROM THE FRASER VALLEY STARTED HAULING LOGS OFF VEDDER MOUNTAIN WITH TRUCKS, AN' HE SHOWED EVERYBODY HOW TO USE 'EM—I GUESS HE WAS A MECHANIC, AN' A GOOD ONE—ANYWAY, HE MADE SIX-WHEELERS OUT OF HIS TRUCKS AN' THAT WAS THE ANSWER! (p. 26)

As Griffiths notes, the Fraser Valley has long been cited as the birthplace of truck logging in British Columbia.⁵ As well as allowing access to new areas of the forest and higher terrain up steeper grades, the improvement of truck technology allowed smaller, less capitalized operators to play a role because truck logging did not demand the construction of a costly logging railway network in the woods. So-called truck logging came to refer not only to a type of logging but also the size of an outfit. There were truck loggers — small operators organized in the Truck Loggers Association in the early 1940s — and there were the majors, big operators such as Bloedel, Stewart & Welch, and the H.R. MacMillan Export Company. While major coastal operators used railways through the 1950s, by the 1940s large and small operators were increasingly relying on trucks to transport logs. The other major technological change of the era was the advent of power saws. If trucks were relatively new in the mid-1930s, power saws had still not arrived. Successful experiments with power saws in British Columbia began in 1937 at a Bloedel, Stewart & Welch's Franklin River camp near Port Alberni.⁶

Now You're Logging takes us into a fictitious, isolated, small truck-logging operation in the BC coastal region in the 1930s. Accounts of logging procedures are detailed and precise. We learn how to top a spar tree, along with the main character, Al Richards, in six pages of drawings and text. Then Al learns, with the reader, the complicated job of rigging a spar tree on another four pages. Other aspects of the

⁵G.W. Taylor, *Timber: History of the Forest Industry in B.C.* (Vancouver 1975), 128-30; Ken Drushka, *Working in the Woods: A History of Logging on the West Coast* (Madeira Park 1992), 174-203.

⁶Richard Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest: Production, Science, and Regulation* (Vancouver 1998), 32-5. Rajala offers a fine overview of technological changes in the woods from 1880 to 1965 (7-50).



logging process are also covered with care and pride. The account of hauling the logs from where they are felled in the woods to the road where they are loaded onto the trucks introduces us to the work of the hooktender, whistle punk, chokerman, donkey puncher, and chaser. The rhythm, sounds, and violence of the process are captured in the prose:

THE CHOKERS SAIL OUT, AND RED, THE RIGGING SLINGER, BARKS HIS SIGNALS TO THE WHISTLE PUNK — WHITE JETS OF STEAM SHOOT SKYWARD TO HANG LIKE MISTY PLUMES AGAINST THE DARK TRUNK OF THE SPAR TREE, AND THE SHRILL WHISTLES ECHO ALONG THE HEAVILY TIMBERED HILL — THE CLINK OF METAL ON METAL CAN BE HEARD AS THE CHOKERMEN DRAG OUT THE STEEL CHOKERS AND SET THEM ON THE BIG BROWN LOGS —

A SINGLE SHOUT FROM RED, ONE SHRILL BLAST FROM THE WHISTLE, AND A JET STREAM SHOOT UP — THERE IS A BURST OF POWER FROM THE BIG YARDER AS ‘SLACKLINE’ OPENS THE THROTTLE — TWO LOGS LEAP FROM THE BRUSH, CRASHING DOWN SNAGS, UPROOTING SAPLINGS, BOUNCING OFF STUMPS, AS THEY FOLLOW THE PULL OF THE MAINLINE AND BUMP AND SLIDE IN TOWARDS THE SPAR TREE —

THE TURN REACHES THE LANDING AND THE SHARP JANGLE OF THE BUTT RIGGING CAN BE HEARD AS THE ENGINEER SLACKS THE LINES — THERE IS A SLIGHT PAUSE, AND THE CLINK OF METAL AS THE CHASER GOES TO UNHOOK THE TURN, AND THE QUIETER SOUND OF THE HAULBACK WORKING AS THE CHOKERS SAIL OUT TO THE WOODS AGAIN — (p. 24)

Special attention is given to the jobs of hand falling and bucking timber (bucking is the process of cutting the tree into log lengths after it has been felled). The coming of power saws after 1937 made hand falling and bucking of particular historical interest; Griffiths breaks the narrative of the story to describe the process in great detail. The poetry of the faller’s life was not lost on him, as is seen in the introduction to this segment:

TIM-BER-R-R!! THE CRY ECHOES THRU THE WOODS ... THE SOUND OF STEEL WEDGES DRIVEN WITH A HEAVY HAMMER, FOLLOWED BY THE “ZIP-ZIP” OF A FAST-PULLED FALLING SAW!... THEN THE CRY GOES UP AGAIN, “TIM-BER ...BACK IN THE WOODS”! THE SOUND ROLLS THRU THE WOODS LIKE THE DEEP HOWL OF A WOLF —

WOOD FIBRES TEAR APART, & AN ALMOST HUMAN CRY SEEMS TO COME FROM THE DOOMED TREE AS IT LEAPS FROM THE STUMP & CRASHES TO THE EARTH, ENDING A LIFE-SPAN OF HUNDREDS OF YEARS! ... **THE HAND FALLERS ARE AT WORK!** (p. 91, emphasis in original)

The following six illustrated pages outline the details of falling and bucking by hand. With such large trees the process is tricky and dangerous, and the clarity of Griffiths’ account is remarkable.

THE BUCKER!..... HIS JOB WAS TO CUT THE FELLEED TIMBER INTO LOG LENGTHS, WITH AN EYE TO SCALE & GRADE—IT WAS A HARD, DANGEROUS JOB, REQUIRING MEN OF MUCH PATIENCE & ENDURANCE—THE BUCKER WAS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE "MONEY MAKER" OF THE FALLING CREW—BY CAREFUL & SKILLFUL CUTTING, HE'D MAKE HIS CUTS TO GET THE MOST POSSIBLE BOARD FEET OF SCALE OUT OF EVERY TREE—THIS WAS VERY IMPORTANT AS THEY WORKED ON CONTRACT & WERE PAID A CERTAIN AMOUNT PER THOUSAND BOARD FEET OF TIMBER, FELLEED & BUCKED, AS SCALED BY A CAMP LOG SCALER—THE BUCKER ALSO MADE HIS CUTS WITH AN EYE TO GETTING THE BEST GRADE OF LOGS FROM EACH TREE—SO HE NOT ONLY MADE MONEY FOR HIMSELF & HIS PARTNERS BY BUCKING FOR SCALE, BUT WAS ALSO AN ASSET TO HIS EMPLOYERS BY CUTTING THE TREES FOR GRADE & MAKING GOOD LOGS—

THE SAW USED BY THE BUCKER WAS SPECIALLY MADE FOR THE JOB—A LOT DEEPER FROM BACK TO POINT OF TOOTH THAN A FALLING SAW, & SEVEN OR EIGHT FOOT LENGTHS WERE MOST COMMONLY USED—

IT WAS A TWO-MAN CROSSCUT, BUT ON THE PACIFIC COAST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, THE BUCKER NEVER HAD A PARTNER ON THE SAW—IF THERE WERE TWO BUCKERS IN A "SET" EACH ONE HAD HIS OWN SAW & WORKED ALONE—



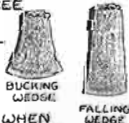
AN AXE SIMILAR TO THE FALLERS' AXES WAS USED BY THE BUCKER, THE DIFFERENCE BEING IN THE HANDLE—THE HANDLE ON THE BUCKER'S AXE WAS SHORTER, RARELY LONGER THAN 3 FEET, & HAD A SERIES OF NOTCHES CUT IN ONE SIDE, ABOUT A FOOT FROM THE END—THE NOTCHES WERE PUT THERE BY THE BUCKER WITH EITHER A KNIFE OR A FILE, & WERE USED FOR UNDERBUCKING—



WHEN THE TREE WAS CLEAR OF THE GROUND WHERE A CUT WAS TO BE MADE, THE CUT WOULD USUALLY BE STARTED OR FINISHED BY "UNDERBUCKING"—IF THE CUT WAS GOING TO BIND THE TOP CUT WOULD BE MADE FIRST & FINISHED BY "UNDERBUCKING"—THE BUCKER WILL DECIDE WHICH LOG WILL DROP THE LEAST WHEN THE CUT IS MADE, & DRIVE HIS AXE INTO THE LOG SO THAT THE HANDLE WILL BE MORE OR LESS PARALLEL TO THE LAY OF THE LOG—HE SHAKES A LITTLE OIL ON THE HANDLE IN THE AREA OF THE NOTCHES—TURNING HIS SAW UPSIDE DOWN HE WILL PLACE THE BACK IN ONE OF THE NOTCHES, & USING THE AXE HANDLE AS A GUIDE, & FOR LEVERAGE, WILL SAW FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE LOG UP TO MEET HIS TOP CUT—WHEN THE CUT IS FINISHED IT WILL BE ABOUT A HALF INCH CLOSER TO THE AXEHEAD THAN THE TOP CUT, THUS ALLOWING THE OTHER LOG TO DROP CLEAR—A LAYING TREE, WITH THE TOP HANGING, WOULD SPLIT IF THE CUT WAS STARTED FROM THE TOP SIDE OF THE LOG, SO THE BUCKER WOULD UNDERBUCK FIRST TO RELIEVE THE STRESS—THEN HE WOULD BUCK DOWN IN THE NORMAL MANNER TO FINISH THE CUT—



THE BUCKER HAD A SLEDGE HAMMER & A WEDGE SACK CONTAINING THREE OR FOUR BUCKING WEDGES—THESE DIFFERED FROM THE FALLERS' WEDGES, AS YOU WILL SEE IN THE SKETCHES—THEY WERE NOT AS LONG AS FALLING WEDGES, & THE BOTTOM WAS MORE FAN SHAPED—THE MAIN REASON FOR THIS FAN SHAPE WAS BECAUSE IT MADE THE WEDGES MORE EFFECTIVE, USED AS "HANGING WEDGES"—THAT IS, DRIVEN INTO THE LOG CROSSWAYS TO THE CUT—



WHEN THIS WAS DONE TO STOP A CUT FROM OPENING TOO QUICKLY & SPLITTING THE LOG, & ALSO TO STOP THE LOG FROM ROLLING ON THE BUCKER WHEN THE CUT WAS FINISHED—



THE BUCKER HAD A MEASURING STICK WHICH HE USED FOR MEASURING THE LOGS BEFORE MAKING HIS CUTS—THE STICK WAS 8 FEET LONG & MARKED OFF EVERY 2 FEET—

WHEN THE BUCKER MEASURED HIS LOGS, HE ALLOWED AT LEAST AN EXTRA 6 INCHES FOR WHAT WAS CALLED "SNIPE"—THIS WAS TO COMPENSATE FOR CROOKED CUTS—



The book notes the seasonal rhythm of camp life. Heavy winter snow made logging impossible, so in most years there was a break over Christmas for a few weeks. The men left camp, most heading to the city, downtown Vancouver, the centre of social and cultural activity for unmarried loggers from all over the coastal region. But some, such as Griffiths, were connected to small communities near the logging sites where they worked. They constituted the "homeguard" and were often linked to a piece of land and a family.⁷ There was also usually a break from logging in the heat of the summer, when the fire hazard was acute.

Danger in the woods was and is part of logging. The many things that could go wrong while falling and bucking trees; manipulating massive, heavy logs over rough terrain; and using power machinery, pulleys, and cables meant that injury and even death were an ever-present threat on the job. In the 1930s logging was recognized as one of the most dangerous occupations in the province, and the death toll per thousand board feet of logs taken out of the woods was rising. As a member of the provincial Workmen's Compensation Board noted in 1932: "At one time the average used to be one [man] killed for every 50 million board feet of logs hauled, now this has increased to one killed for every 47 million feet."⁸ Workers, the provincial compensation board, union organizers, and companies all recognized the growing problem. Union organizers blamed speed-up, the increased pace of work in the woods, while the companies targeted worker error, launching safety campaigns to educate workers about the dangers in the woods.⁹

There are three incidents in the book that cause injury, but none occurs during the very dangerous activities of falling, bucking, and yarding. In one case, a worker checking out a new logging area slips in the ice and snow and falls over a canyon cliff. He is saved by the book's hero. A second injury is a twisted ankle that happens while a character is hunting. The most interesting incident involves an overloaded logging truck that loses control coming down a hill after the brakes give out, and then, after swerving to avoid a group of workers, crashes into the truck shed, causing an explosion. A number of men are injured. Why was the truck overloaded with logs? Before the crash, the camp foreman berates the loader for putting too many logs on the truck, arguing that the heavy loads are hard on the trucks. The loader responds by saying that the foremen were "always bellyachin' for more bloody logs," and that the extra log allowed them to finish up for the day, thus giving the men more time off. After the accident, the loader was fired (p. 32).

Overall, in *Now You're Logging* danger is accepted as part of the job, and this daily concern, as well as the heroic responses of workers to save their comrades af-

⁷Richard Mackie, *Island Timber: A Social History of the Comox Logging Company, Vancouver Island* (Victoria 2000), gives a fond account of homeguard loggers and their families, based on the reminiscences of people in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island.

⁸*Labor Statesman*, Vancouver, March 1932.

⁹Hak, "Red Wages," 83-4. See, too, Andrew Mason Prouty, *More Deadly Than War! Pacific Coast Logging 1827-1981* (New York 1985), which includes material on BC.



ter a tragic event, enshrines the loggers as a breed apart. This is very different from Roderick Haig-Brown's logging novel *Timber*, set in coastal British Columbia in the same time period, which offers proper unionism as the way to prevent injuries and lower the high death rate on the job.¹⁰

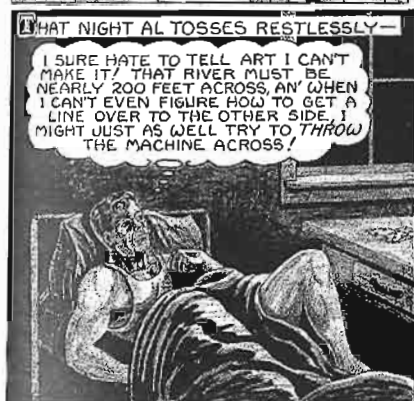
Yet, as Griffiths shows, danger is not all that there was to work in the woods. The skills of the fallers and the buckers, the teamwork needed in the crews, especially in the yarding process, and the constant creative challenges were also integral to logging. Much of the story involves the efforts of Al learning the complex intricacies of logging. This notion of skill is further wrapped up in a package of masculinity. The loggers are tough, skilled, independent, and proud. The drawings reinforce a stereotypical masculine image. Big men with bulging muscles work in the coastal camps. Their rough work clothing distinguishes the loggers from supposedly effete urban men, and when the loggers prepare to go to town they look strange in their city clothes. The men are tough and so is the camp foreman, who blusters and bullies as he prods his workers into getting out more logs. If, as Richard Rajala has noted, "machine pacing, the essence of the factory system, had come to coastal logging," the push system of foreman rule still had a role.¹¹

Loggers were largely white, and this is reflected in the story, but Griffiths adds a wrinkle. Race is a crucial issue in the history of British Columbia, where workers of Asian descent played an important role in many industries. Periodically, in the last half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, politicians and labour leaders whipped up anti-Asian sentiment, often at times of economic distress, forcing the imposition of restrictive policies.¹² There were significant numbers of workers of Japanese, East Indian, and Chinese descent in the shingle, saw, pulp, and paper mills.¹³ But some Asians, though relatively small in number,

¹⁰Roderick Haig-Brown, *Timber* (Oregon 1993), original, 1942.

¹¹Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest*, 25; Richard Rajala, "The Forest as Factory: Technological Change and Worker Control in the West Coast Logging Industry, 1880-1930," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 73-104; Gordon Hak, *Turning Trees into Dollars: The British Columbia Coastal Lumber Industry, 1858-1913* (Toronto 2000), 116-32.

¹²Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1914* (Vancouver 1989) and *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver 2003); Gillian Creese, "Class, Ethnicity and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1880-1923," in *Workers, Capital, and the State in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1988), 55-85; Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Opinion towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal & Kingston 1978). For recent accounts of workers in the mining and fishing industries, see John Douglas Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working-Class* (Montreal & Kingston 2002); John R. Hinde, *When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal-Mining Industry on Vancouver Island* (Vancouver 2003); Alicja Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia* (Montreal & Kingston 1996).





CHINESE BOLT CUTTERS WERE BROUGHT IN AND THE CUTTING STARTED—WHEN FALLING A TREE, THEY FIRST MADE A SAW CUT ON THE UNDERCUT-SIDE, AND THE SNIPE WAS CHOPPED UP FROM THE UNDERSIDE TO MEET THE SAW CUT—THIS WAS DONE SO THERE WOULD BE A SQUARE CUT ON THE BUTT OF THE TREE, AND THEREFORE NO WASTE IN THE BUTT BLOCK—



THE BLOCKS WERE CUT 56 INCHES LONG AND SPLIT WITH HAMMER, STEEL WEDGES, AND A SPLITTING BAR—EACH BOLT WAS ABOUT FOUR FEET IN CIRCUMFERENCE—THE BOLTS WERE STACKED ON END SO THEY COULD BE TALLIED—IT TOOK ABOUT 32 BOLTS FOR A CORD, AND THE CUTTER RECEIVED 75 CENTS PER CORD—



WHILE THE CUTTING WAS GOING ON, MORE SKIDROADS WERE BEING BUILT THRU THE TIMBER—THE BUILDING OF THE FLUME WENT AHEAD AND TWO MORE CAMPS WERE BUILT—EACH CAMP HAD BARNs WITH STALLS FOR 30 TO 40 *HAY BURNERS—



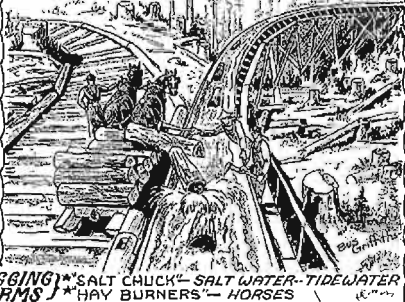
FINALLY THE FLUME WAS FINISHED AND THE PILING DRIVEN FOR THE BOOMING GROUNDS—16-FOOT SLEIGHS WERE BUILT, WITH RUNNERS MADE OF GUMWOOD, AND EACH SLEIGH COULD HAUL TWO CORDS OF BOLTS—NOW THEY WERE READY TO START HAULING OUT THE SHINGLE BOLTS!



THE SKIDROADS WERE BUILT SO THAT TWO OR THREE ROADS WOULD CONVERGE AT ONE SPOT ALONG THE FLUME—THESE WERE LANDINGS AND PLACED WHEREVER THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE LAND WAS CLOSE TO THE LEVEL OF THE FLUME—THE LOADED SLEIGHS WERE DRIVEN ALONGSIDE, AND PARALLEL TO THE FLUME—



MEN WITH PICAROONS PULLED THE SHINGLE BOLTS OFF THE LOADED SLEIGHS INTO THE FLUME, AND THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY TO THE *SALT CHUCK—OVER 1,000 CORDS OF BOLTS HIT THE CHUCK EVERY WEEK—



LOGGING! *SALT CHUCK—SALT WATER-TIDE WATER TERMS! *HAY BURNERS—HORSES

also worked in the woods, not just as cookhouse workers, and Griffiths draws this out.¹⁴ A four-page detour from the narrative allows a character to reminisce about a crew of Chinese woods workers who once logged and prepared shingle bolts near his home (p. 39-42). It was a large camp of some 200 Chinese workers. They felled the trees and then cut them into 56-inch-long bolts, which were transported to the ocean shore via a flume. The bolts were then loaded onto cribs and towed to shingle mills along the Fraser River. There was a racial division of labour in the camp; white workers were the bosses and better-paid teamsters. Griffiths is sympathetic to the plight of the Asian men, noting that while they were poorly paid, they were also industrious and ingenious on the job. His brief account of the Chinese camp tweaks the common logger image, reminding us that skill, hardiness, and coping with danger cannot be associated solely with the white logger of myth.

Now You're Logging plays with a number of stereotypes. In popular culture loggers are renowned for drunken ribaldry in the haunts of the city during their time away from camp, but Griffiths' two main characters stay near the camp and become associated with a family that, unsurprisingly, has a daughter of marriageable age.¹⁵ There is, then, a family side to the "timber beasts." Domestic life in the story is very traditional. Marriage, child rearing, and household management are at the core of the lives of the two women, mother and daughter, who make an appearance in the story. This portrayal of women and family life, though superficial, challenges popular understandings of loggers. Woods workers of the past are often remembered as just being single, with women only appearing in the role of prostitutes.

Similarly, Griffiths' presentation of leisure does not fit the typical image of the logger. During their time off, the main male characters in the story enjoy the great outdoors. They go hunting and fishing, where they again demonstrate skill and face danger. Indeed, we get long accounts of both hunting and fishing expeditions. The best-known aspects of logger leisure culture — drunkenness, gambling, fighting, and visiting prostitutes — are not stressed here. Showing the loggers at ease in nature also allows Griffiths to engage another stereotype. Writing in the 1970s, Griffiths is confronting the emerging environmental movement, which depicted logging companies and working loggers as industrial pillagers. Griffiths is sensitive to the devastation of logging, at one point referring to a logged-off site as the "STARK RAPE OF THE LAND," (p. 25) but he bristles at the notion that loggers were uncaring wood butchers. As he says about the loggers, "EVEN AMONG THE

¹³ Audrey Kobayashi and Peter Jackson, "Japanese Canadians and the Racialization of Labour in the British Columbia Sawmill Industry," *BC Studies*, 103 (Fall 1994), 33-58.

¹⁴ According to an industry tabulation, in 1935, 5.3 per cent of workers in the logging industry were of Asian descent, 15.3 per cent in saw and planing mills, 30.5 per cent in shingle mills, and 22 per cent in pulp and paper mills. "Number of Orientals in comparison with other nationalities employed in British Columbia lumber industry years 1929 to 1935 inclusive," (sic), University of British Columbia, the Library, Special Collections Division, Council of Forest Industries Papers, v.66, f.9.



CRUDEST, MEANEST, AND TOUGHEST, THERE WAS A GENTLER SIDE, AND A GREAT LOVE OF NATURE AND THE OUTDOORS —” (p. ix). Recently Maureen G. Reed has interrogated the simple, interconnected binaries of environmentalist-logger, male-female, and rural-urban in her study of a small Vancouver Island logging community in the 1990s.¹⁶ Griffiths’ work raises the same types of questions. Most importantly, in engaging the storied view of the loggers’ way of life, he draws out complexity: loggers were independent and settled, carefree and responsible, forest destroyers and nature lovers, tough and sensitive, individualistic and part of the logging team.

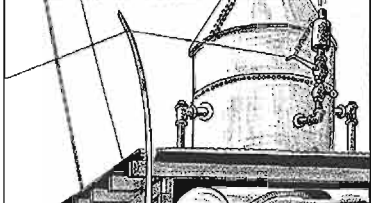
Griffiths’ representation of loggers, though, is still part of a tradition that celebrates these workers’ uniqueness. They had a particular work jargon, a fascinating work environment, an unchallenged toughness, and their own culture, both on the job and off. Celebrated in poems and stories, loggers were exceptional. Maureen Reed, too, echoes this portrayal, noting that like logger-poet Pete Trower, she remains “convinced that logging is ‘larger than life.’”¹⁷ Others, such as Richard Rajala and myself, have suggested that logging was more similar to other industrial activities than is often thought. There is, of course, a rich culture associated with loggers and logging that is not shared by other industries and occupations, but the construction of this cultural representation of woods workers and woods work needs more critical analysis. The portrayal of loggers as heroic, carefree, manly, tough, and independent, working at a calling rather than a job, served employers well in battles against unionism. Did real men need a union? Moreover, consumers of this representation, which was celebrated in industry trade journals, were often owners, managers, and accountants (male, urban office workers) who enjoyed being linked vicariously to rough-and-ready, masculine, wilderness workers. The complex logger myth incorporates constructions involving race, skill, masculinity, urban anxieties and longings, rural self-definitions, and conceptions of nature. However, this should not obscure loggers’ membership in the industrial working class.

In line with much of the heroic tradition, Griffiths’ characters are rather oblivious to the larger political economy. We meet the owner of the logging operation and there is a vague sense that big timber owners reside elsewhere, but the characters largely live in a narrowly circumscribed mental and physical geography. The main character, who questions his life as a worker, is finally offered the job of foreman at a big logging operation. His skills and capabilities have been recognized and he now has the security to settle down and marry his sweetheart. Not all workers in

¹⁵ Richard Rajala addresses the emergence of permanent and semi-permanent logging camps in “Bill and the Boss: Labor Protest, Technological Change, and the Transformation of the West Coast Logging Camp, 1890-1930,” *Journal of Forest History*, 33, 4 (October 1989), 168-79.

¹⁶ Maureen G. Reed, *Taking Stands: Gender and the Sustainability of Rural Communities* (Vancouver 2003).

WHILE THE RIGGING CREW IS STRINGING OUT THE YARDING ROADS, HOWIE, THE "WHISTLE PUNK" IS TAKING OUT HIS WHISTLE WIRE — HE OPERATES A JERK WIRE WHISTLE, WHICH CONSISTS, SIMPLY, OF A TAUT WIRE STRETCHED FROM THE VALVE ON THE WHISTLE TO A SPRINGPOLE ON THE ROOF OF THE DONKEY THEN OUT TO THE WOODS — A SPRING HOLDS THE VALVE CLOSED AND ANY JERK ON THE TAUT WIRE OPENS THE VALVE AND OPERATES THE WHISTLE —



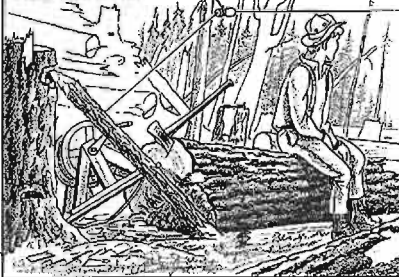
BEING A RATHER INGENIOUS LAD, HOWIE HAS INCORPORATED SOME OF HIS OWN IDEAS INTO THE SYSTEM — HE HAS THE WIRE ON A SPOOL WHICH IS MOUNTED ON THE FRAME OF A PACKBOARD — AS HE WALKS OUT FROM THE DONKEY THE WIRE UNWINDS, CONTROLLED BY HIS GLOVED HAND —



HE HAS THREADED A NUMBER OF OLD PORCELAIN INSULATORS ON THE WIRE, AND EACH HAS A PIECE OF CORD ATTACHED — WHEN A LENGTH OF WIRE HAS UNWOUND FROM THE SPOOL, HOWIE TAKES OFF HIS PACK, AND GOES BACK AND STRINGS UP HIS WIRE, ATTACHING THE INSULATORS TO ANY CONVENIENT SAPLING, ETC. —



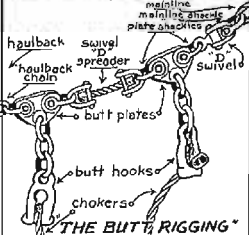
REACHING A VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH HE CAN BOTH SEE AND HEAR THE RIGGING CREW, HOWIE TAKES THE PACK FROM HIS BACK, WINDS THE WIRE TIGHT WITH THE CRANK ON THE SPOOL AND JAMS THE CONTRACTION BETWEEN ANY CONVENIENT OBJECTS TO KEEP THE LINE TIGHT —



WHEN HOWIE WANTS TO "PICK UP" HIS WHISTLE WIRE HE JUST REVERSES THE PACK, SO THAT THE SPOOL IS IN FRONT OF HIM AND WINDS THE LINE UP, UNTIEING THE INSULATORS AS HE COMES TO THEM —



AND NOW, HOWIE HAS HIS WHISTLE WIRE STRETCHED OUT, THE CHASER HAS COUPLED THE HAULBACK TO THE BUTT RIGGING ON THE END OF THE MAINLINE, AND TRUE TO ART'S EARLIER PREDICTION THE CREW IS LOGGING IN HALF AN HOUR —



THE BUTT RIGGING

LOGGING TERMS

"WHISTLE PUNK" SIGNAL MAN ON YARDING CREW — HE RELAYS THE SHOUTED ("SCREAMED") SIGNALS FROM THE HOOKTENDER AND RIGGING SLINGER, IN TO THE ENGINEER ON THE DONKEY, BY MEANS OF HIS WHISTLE WIRE —

BUS Griffiths

the 1930s, however, achieved salvation through social mobility. Unions were active in the woods during the period, and organizers, many of whom were communist, led notable strikes by Vancouver Island loggers in 1934 and 1936. The BC District of the International Woodworkers of America was established in 1937.¹⁷ Unionism is not mentioned in the book.

Now You're Logging offers a particular version of the loggers' life, but it still captures many aspects of work in the coastal forests of the 1930s, and does so in an accessible manner. There are many popular histories of British Columbia coastal logging, chock full of photographs, but Griffiths offers black-and-white drawings, and, as birdwatchers inspecting field guides know, drawings often provide a more effective way of presentation.¹⁹ As a work of fiction it stands comfortably with other narratives, such as Haig-Brown's *Timber* and Martin Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West*, in giving helpful perspectives on the history of the loggers' world.²⁰

Andy Parnaby suggested the idea for this segment and Bryan Palmer offered constructive advice. I thank them both.

¹⁷Reed, 231. For a collection of logging poems by Trower, see *Chainsaw in the Cathedral: Collected Woods Poems 1964-1998* (Victoria 1999).

¹⁸For accounts of labour organization in the coastal woods in the 1930s and the history of the IWA, see Hak, "Red Wages;" Andrew Neufeld and Andrew Parnaby, *The IWA in Canada: The Life and Times of an Industrial Union* (Vancouver 2000); Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madiera Park 1984); Myrtle Bergen, *Tough Timber: The Loggers of British Columbia* (Toronto 1966); Andrew Parnaby, "What's Law Got To Do With It? The IWA and the Politics of State Power in British Columbia, 1935-1939," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 9-45.

¹⁹Beyond books listed in the above notes, helpful pictorial histories include Ed Gould, *Logging: British Columbia's Logging History* (British Columbia 1975); Wilmer Gold, *Logging As It Was: A Pictorial History of Logging on Vancouver Island* (Victoria 1985); Robert D. Turner, *Logging By Rail: The British Columbia Story* (Victoria 1990). For the earlier period, see Mary Shakespeare and Rodney H. Pain, *West Coast Logging, 1840-1910*, National Museum of Man Series, History Division, Paper No. 22 (Ottawa 1977).

²⁰Martin Allerdale Grainger, *Woodsmen of the West* (Toronto 1964), original in 1908.

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