

# STANDARD TIMBER COMPANY LOGGING CAMPS ON THE MILL CREEK DRAINAGE, UINTA MOUNTAINS, UTAH

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## ABSTRACT

Beginning in 1867, extensive logging operations created camps, dams, flumes, roads, and other buildings and structures as part of the exploitation of timber resources in the Uinta Mountains of Utah that continues to the present. Although of relatively small scale as logging companies go, the Standard Timber Company, which began operation in 1912, created several work camps on the Mill Creek and Blacks Fork drainages and dominated timber harvesting on them until the late 1920s. Both archaeological and historical sources provide information about these work camps. The remains of these temporary camps contain information about logging camp architecture, diet and food behavior, ethnicity, furniture, camp layout, transportation routes, and other details of everyday life. Documentary sources contain information about the company and its operations, about logging procedures, about the economics of the logging business in 1912-1913, and about the hierarchical nature of the company's camps.

Over the past several years, I have been researching the archaeological and historical evidence of logging activities in the Uinta Mountains of Utah (Ayres 1983). My study area covers a relatively small portion of the northern slope of the Uintas. These mountains, where the maximum elevation exceeds 13,000 feet, lie in northern Utah just south of the southwest corner of Wyoming. The range is covered with mixed conifer vegetation, primarily ponderosa pine, and aspen trees and large open meadows, frequently located along streams, are scattered throughout. The northern face of the range is drained into Wyoming by 2 major streams: the Bear River, which flows into the Great Salt Lake in the Great Basin, and the Blacks Fork, which flows into the Green River and ultimately into the Colorado River.

Beginning in 1867 and continuing through 1869, the most intensive exploitation of the Uintas by logging interests took place. It occurred as a direct result of the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad from Omaha, Nebraska, to Promontory, Utah. During this relatively brief period, hundreds of men exploited the timber resources, leaving behind dozens of camps, roads, a flume, and other remains now deteriorating on private and public lands in the Wasatch-Ashley National Forest.

The logging camps in the Uinta Mountains were constructed to house men, equipment, supplies, and horses needed to produce timber products, primarily for the railroad. Most of the camps were established by timber contractors who produced and sold their railroad ties, bridge timbers, and cord wood directly to the railroad, in this case the Union Pacific, or to a wholesaler, also known as the "official buyer" for the railroad. In no instance, even during the 1867-1869 period of intense construction, did the railroad establish its own camps. Timber was cut both on sections that the federal government ultimately gave the railroad (odd-numbered sections) and on those

sections reserved by the federal government (evenly numbered sections).

After the completion of the intercontinental railroad and the driving of the "Golden Spike" at Promontory, Utah in 1869, the demand for timber products, such as bridge timbers and railroad ties, dropped off drastically. In short, a brief depression occurred; companies went out of business, and the unemployed loggers moved westward, took up ranching, or went to work for the railroad. The original, often hurried, construction was so badly done throughout Wyoming and Utah that even the government inspectors recognized that substantial portions of the railroad would have to be rebuilt. Therefore, in the 1870s, a resurgence of logging activity occurred on the north slope of the Uinta Mountains. Of course, during this same period, other timbered areas in Wyoming and Colorado also were re-exploited for timber resources.

The early 1870s were followed by a period of years that were characterized by a general reduction in timber demand and a concomitant decline in production. This era of limited activity, which lasted about 37 years, came to an end in 1912. In that year, the Standard Timber Company of Omaha, Nebraska arrived with a long-term contract to provide the Union Pacific with ties and other railroad-required wood products. The contract specified that up to 7 million ties were to be delivered to the railroad by 1922 (Baker and Hauge 1965).

The Standard Timber Company, incorporated in 1913 by Daniel M. Wilt, may have operated in the Laramie, Wyoming area as an unincorporated entity before moving west to the Uinta Mountains. Prior to the founding of the company, Wilt ran the notorious Carbon Timber Company on the Encampment River in northern Colorado south of Laramie. There, in 1907, he engaged in a massive program to steal trees on federal property, a crime for which he paid in 1910. Two years later,

he was in the Uinta Mountains (Routt National Forest 1975:39-40).

The company began work on Union Pacific-owned sections on the Mill Creek drainage basin of the Bear River within the Uinta National Forest, now the Wasatch-Ashley. Logging activities were initiated within a widely spaced area that encompassed 7 sections in 2 townships. An extensive network of camps, stream control devices, roads, and other support facilities were constructed beginning in the fall of 1912 while the company was still in the process of incorporating. A network of 10 camps was constructed in 7 sections, with 1 section holding 3 of the camps and 1 having 2 of them (Baker and Hauge 1965). At least 3 other camps were built later on the Mill Creek drainage in 1913, all on sections different from the original 1912 camps. Also in 1913, the company constructed another set of camps about 10 miles to the east on the Blacks Fork drainage of the Green River. Ultimately, the Standard Timber Company logged over most of the timber-bearing, Union Pacific-owned sections on the north slope of the Uinta Mountains, where it dominated the industry for over 20 years.

There is very little documentary material available that provides information about the companies that logged in the Uintas from 1867 to about 1930. For many, nothing more than a name is known. Fortunately, the Standard Timber Company is an exception, because a brief but comprehensive report was prepared by 2 U.S. Forest Service employees in 1913 (Baker and Hauge 1965). Included among the many subjects they covered are Mill Creek camp construction details, camp locations, the work force, the seasonal round, job specialization, timber production, wages, and lifestyle issues. Because this information is unique for the Uintas, it is desirable to discuss it in some detail.

The camps constructed in 1912 were located, as were most of the camps in the Uintas, in an area with easy access to marketable timber, where running water was readily available, and where, if horses were used, a nearby meadow could provide good summer pasturage. These camps consisted of from 6 to 10 or more log buildings, 1 to 4 privies, and occasionally a few small structures, such as a box partially buried in a stream or spring to keep perishables cold or to keep drinking water clean. Individual cabins were usually 10 by 12 feet or 12 by 14 feet, and cook and bunk houses were generally 12 by 22 feet in size. Barns were larger still, often reaching about 16 by 36 feet in size. It took 22 man-days to build a 12- by 14-foot cabin. Not counting the time spent in cutting logs to make these buildings, the cost of materials used averaged \$11.34 for a cabin with a lumber floor and considerably less for one with a split log floor. Only about 45 percent of the cabins had lumber floors. Lumber was expensive; it had to be hauled to the camps from Evanston, Wyoming, about 35 miles away and, therefore, was sparingly used. Lumber use usually was confined to doors, door and window framing, and some shelves, benches, beds, and tables. Often these were made of hand-hewn pieces produced on site.

At the beginning of 1913, the company's work force totaled 161 men who were scattered among 9 work camps, a headquarters or commissary camp, and a "river" crew. Of these, 125 were loggers making railroad ties and other wood products, 22 were teamsters or "haulers" (1 to 3 per camp), and 14 were engaged in other activities. Among the latter were supervisors, workers who cleared brush along streams where the ties were to be floated, and commissary staff.

For reasons not explained in the Baker and Hauge report (1965), the haulers were usually the ones who established the work camps. The hauler would build the road to the camp and construct a bunkhouse, a cookhouse, and a barn. In addition, 3 to 6 men might build individual cabins that would house 2 or 3 men each.

The logging and work force was made up of two groups of men: (1) the professionals, mostly Swedes; and (2) the relative amateurs, a group of local ranchers, sheepmen, and others who wanted to earn money during the winter months when their agricultural responsibilities were at the yearly low. The Swedes clearly out-produced the amateur groups and were the preferred employees; they also were the largest ethnic group represented.

Somewhat surprisingly, there were 20 women in 7 of the camps, including 3 at the headquarters camp. Three camps had 1 each, and 1 camp had 7 women. Generally, logging camps in Wyoming and elsewhere in the Rocky Mountain states contained few resident women (Wroten 1956:227). No mention is made by Baker and Hauge (1965) of children, but archaeological evidence indicates that they were present in some camps. The headquarters camp is thought to have had a school, at least during part of its existence.

The loggers and haulers followed a seasonal round that did not vary. Wood products were cut during the summer and winter (about 10 months total) and driven (floated) to the company's boom at Evanston, in the spring. At the end of the 6-week drive period, the men were paid. They spent most of their money in Evanston, primarily by getting drunk, and then, money exhausted, they returned to camp to repeat the cycle. Thus virtually full-time employment was provided to everyone who wanted it.

To organize the logging effort and to ensure that all areas, even those with poor quality timber, were completely cut-over, the company assigned each man a strip of timber to cut. The strip was 100 feet in width and was of varying lengths up to a maximum of 1 mile.

The workday was usually about 8 hours in length, but some, especially the Swedes, often worked longer days. Work behavior was traditionally left up to the individual logger or hauler, who decided his own schedule. If he wanted to take off a day or two, for whatever reason, he had to ask permission from no one. It was a no work, no pay job; the harder one worked, the more money one made.

The wood products, mainly hand-hewn railroad ties, also included saw logs, mine props, mine ties, stope ties, and cord

wood. The railroad ties were graded into firsts or standards, culls, and rejects. The difference between standards and culls was a matter of face width after hewing; standards were required to have a 7-inch face, and culls, a 6-inch face. All ties were required to be 8 feet in length and 7 to 8 inches thick. Rejects were not removed from the woods and no pay was given for them.

Loggers received 14¢ for a standard tie, 7¢ for a cull, 10¢ for stopes, 7¢ for mine ties, and 3.5¢ for an 8-foot-long mine prop. Saw logs, 10 to 16 feet in length, brought \$1.50 per 1,000 board feet. As a comparison, loggers in the same area in the 1950s received about 3¢ per foot for an 8-foot-long mine prop, or about 24¢ apiece.

It took an average of 17.5 minutes to make a railroad tie. The average daily output per man in 1913 was 12.7 ties, plus other wood products. The record for one man was 48 ties in one day, for which he received no more than \$6.72. On average, the daily wage per man was \$1.78 if all standard quality ties were cut. Generally the Swedes cut more ties per day than non-Swedes. Work on the 6-week-long drive was compensated at \$3 per day and board. Most men made more per day during the drive than they would have making ties.

Haulers who moved finished ties from the cutting strips to the stream banks for the spring drive were paid 8¢ per tie. Pay for moving the other wood products was not recorded by Baker and Hauge (1965), but it was certainly less than the rate for ties. Sometimes the haul from a strip to water was up to 2 miles distant one way, but most hauls were much shorter. Haulers used sleds in wintertime and generally did not haul during the summer, as they could easily keep up with the rate of production. Eight to 10 loggers were required to keep one hauler busy. The tie hauler, if diligent, could make as much as \$16 per day.

The logger's costs were primarily for board, which could be provided at the cookhouse for \$1 a day, and about the same amount if he lived and cooked by himself. Other major costs were for tools and clothing. Tools included an axe, a crosscut saw, a broad axe, a bark peeler, files, a saw set, a pickaroon, and a wedge at a cost of about \$15. Except for the files, the tools could be expected to last for several years. Clothing costs averaged \$45.70 per year. All the tools and items of clothing needed were available at the commissary or company store, which was no more than 2 miles distant from any of the 7 camps.

The haulers, who also purchased their supplies at the commissary, had equipment costs substantially higher than for the tie producers. A hauler's outfit, consisting of a sleigh, team of horses, barn, and tools, might cost \$640. The cost of hay and grain for the horses, which had to be freighted into the commissary camp and then transported to the hauler's camp, was about \$42 a month. When considering all expenses, including depreciation, the hauler's net profit amounted to about 2.66¢ per tie.

The main camp was served by a twice-weekly stage that delivered mail, food, and passengers. A charge of \$1 per man

per month was made for mail delivery, and express packages cost 50¢ to \$1 each. Seeing that the commissary refused to sell beer and liquor, it is tempting to speculate that the vast quantity of whiskey bottles in trash deposits in every camp originally arrived there through the courtesy of the stage driver, for a fee, of course.

The cost of freighting goods from Evanston to the headquarters camp was 65¢ per 100 pounds. Freighting was generally done in the early winter when large stockpiles of food, supplies, and equipment were assembled. Afterwards, the twice-weekly stage provided for all the company's hauling needs. Hay was obtained from Wyoming ranchers, as were fresh meat and eggs. Flour, apples, and potatoes came from Idaho; fresh and canned vegetables came from Utah; some canned goods came from Omaha, Denver, and California; and condiments came from a Chicago wholesaler. Some goods were purchased in Evanston. Although plenty of food was available at all times, it tended to be rather simple and monotonous fare consisting primarily of evaporated milk, coffee, flour, beans, bacon, canned vegetables, canned fruit, canned meat, and similar items.

The commissary operated on a net profit of 25 percent on an estimated gross annual sales of \$60,000 from 181 adult customers.

A blacksmith shop was operated by the company at the headquarters camp. Loggers and haulers were charged for all of their repairs so that the shop made a small profit for the company.

With the year-around high prices charged at the commissary, and with the drinking binges that occurred at the end of a drive, most loggers had little to show for their year's work when they returned to the woods after the drive was over. The net annual profit a logger might have made, after living expenses were paid, probably amounted to no more than \$400; for some it might have been as little as \$77, according to Baker and Hauge (1965).

The Baker and Hauge report (1965) uniquely documents life in 1913 logging camps in the central Rocky Mountains. This report helps interpret and understand the archaeology of the camp remains and is an integral part of the historical archaeology research being conducted there. The 1913 report makes it clear that loggers and haulers in the Uintas lived a simple, honest, and uncomplicated life of isolation, hard work, and relatively poor pay. In general, pay, which was on a piece-work basis, seems low when compared to the level of skill required to hew a tie to the strict railroad guidelines. To perform the work expected, each logger and hauler had to provide and care for his own tools and equipment.

There was little or no recreation or entertainment available and probably little was expected. The report states that alcoholic beverages were not sold or encouraged by the company; however, vast quantities of beer and whiskey were routinely consumed, often to the detriment of work, but they provided a measure of relief from the isolation and tedium.

Employees had little choice but to patronize the company's commissary, or store, and its blacksmith shop. The store was seen by the company as a profit making enterprise and only secondarily as a convenience for its isolated employees. The men and families were provided automatic credit that was covered by their past and future production.

Although there were several negatives in working in the logging business, the men enjoyed a certain amount of freedom not available in other forms of employment. They did not have to punch a time clock or account to anyone about when to begin, and when to quit, work, and they had full-time, year-around employment if they wanted it. Many men preferred their independence and the absence of an authoritarian work

regime. For the most part these men were self-directed loners who never married. Within reason, they did what they wanted; no more, no less.

The 1912-1913 seasonal round employed by Daniel M. Wilt was usual whenever timber products in the central Rocky Mountains had to be floated to market. This pattern persisted until the late 1920s, when technological changes altered life in the woods forever. With the introduction of trucks to haul wood products to market, the pattern was disrupted. Because trucks could not negotiate the deep winter snows, tie production ultimately became a summer activity, and the logger was left only with seasonal work. He had to spend winters working elsewhere or, as was often the case, he was unemployed.

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