

THIS WINTER MAY REVIVE ART OF ROOF SHOVELING 1/09/96

Well, it looks like we have an old fashioned Adirondack winter for a change. For many Johnny-Come-Latelys it's going to be an introduction to roof shoveling. I might add, you may be lucky if you get by with just one episode.

The past 10 years have spoiled many newcomers who may have thought it was not necessary to shovel their roofs. The average snowfall for those years was 14.89 feet. Compare that figure with the 10-year period from 1971 to 1980 when we averaged 24.44 feet. During the winter of '77 we received 34.02 feet and needless to say, that year and many of the others most roofs had to be shoveled twice.

Shoveling my own roof last week provided me with ample opportunity to reflect on my past experiences in the roof shoveling business. When you were responsible for as many roofs as I was at Bisby, it really becomes a business.

My roof shoveling career started back in 1959, working for George Elthrope on some of the many camps he was caretaker for. I was only 32 at the time and George was about 65. I welcomed the extra work and I was eager to show George what a good worker I was. Naturally, I assumed that at my age and physical condition I would easily be able to out-shovel George. How wrong was I.

George had one steady pace that never varied from start to finish and he made every move count. I was able to keep up, but never was able to outdo him. He taught me that no matter how menial the task, there is always a better, easier way to do it.

The right tool is most important and the first thing a novice learns is that one shovel (or any other hand tool) is not the same to everybody. Dave Herlehy and Bud Russell both learned this fact on one of their first jobs when they picked up one of the other crew member's tools. I'll let them tell you about it.

I am not going to give any pointers to some of the old woods hicks who have shoveled as much or more than I have. I may be able to help some of you young guys just starting out make your job a little more enjoyable.

Wear real wool and not that Alabama wool I have seen some guys wearing. If you are really serious, a pair of rain or Gortex overalls will keep you warm and dry. Waterproof gloves are a must. They need not be too heavy as you will find that as long

as you keep dry, the work will keep you warm.

A snowmobile is handy to get to and from work and snowshoes are a must. Aluminum ladders are easier to carry around, but I twisted many of them getting them out of the snow after the job was done. At times a one-man crosscut saw is handy for carving off big blocks that can be slid off the roof. We tried this one time and a four or five-hundred pound block rolled back into the camp taking out a window - sash and all.

I like long-handled heavy aluminum shovels with a yoke handle installed at the end of the handle. It will save many trips down off the roof to retrieve your shovel.

I remember the winter of '71 when my shoulders ached so badly I couldn't sleep. A trip to Doc Emerson and a shot of cortisone would fix you right up. He told me he was using it by the gallon that year.

I am not in the business of roof shoveling anymore so I have no axes to grind, but I can tell you from experience, it's money well spent. Better safe than sorry.