

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TIMBER CRUISER

10/17/00

August 18, 2000

Up at 4:30 a.m. Put on the coffee and fix a good breakfast of pan sausage and eggs from the Lowville Meat Market. Make two ham sandwiches, toss in a couple of Payday candy bars and a Dr. Pepper six-pack and two cans of beer in a cooler.

Paint guns, a case of paint, tally book, tally sheets, marking stick and packs sit waiting in the garage from the night before. Ten after six Mike Black, forester friend from Long Lake, pulls in the yard ready to go. We load up, checking with each other to be sure that we haven't forgotten anything essential.

The hour-long ride down to Nobleboro is spent reviewing the work and talking about deer hunting. At 7:10 we are on our way into the woods and spend the next hour enduring the rigors of one tough woods road.

At 8:30 a.m. I mark the first tree, a 16-inch diameter breast-high red spruce. It's a tree close to the adjoining property line and two eye-level blazes are facing into the sale area on the stump before tallying it by specie, log height and diameter breast high (DBH) in the tally book.

The boundary quarters up and across an ever-steeper slope through a mixed hardwood stand. Mike leads off following the boundary facing his paint marks toward the sale area where they are followed by me. I would be kidding myself if I thought I could stay ahead of a guy slightly more than half of my age.

By 10 a.m. I am ready for a rest and a drink of water. Mike has been back and forth checking to see if I am still coming. On one check he has to help me locate my markings stick which I had left on a creek bank when I filled my canteen.

By noon it's hot. I am wringing with sweat and my legs are aching along with my shoulders. We eat lunch with our backs against a tree and discuss the quality of the wood we are marking. I give Mike one of my sandwiches – too hot and tired to have much of an appetite. We get up to begin again and I can hardly get my old legs working again.

The afternoon finds us with a strip along the boundary close to as far as the furthest end of the sale will go for this year. It's a long walk back out the old tote road

we end up on, but like the old horse headed for the barn, my tired old legs find new energy and I am looking forward to one of the two beers I brought along.

Back at the truck we find Tom Williams and four fishing buddies getting settled in camp for some trout fishing. The ride back out to the main road doesn't seem nearly as bad with my mind on the hot meal and shower ahead. It's 6 p.m. by the time Mike drops me off and he still has over an hour to his home.

Supper is ready and so am I. The shower feels great and my pajamas and easy chair even better. By 10 p.m. I am ready for bed and I ease in, careful not to promote leg cramps. Before I fade away I lie there asking myself if I am up to the job and why am I even trying?