

[Page 1 - In the North River Lumber Woods](#)ISSUE : [Issue 7](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1974/3/1

In the North River Lumber Woods In 1923, with nothing but the double-bit axe and the crosscut, 700 men from all a- round Cape Breton and beyond cut 45,000 cords of pulpwood. They cut it, landed it by the river, came back in the spring and blasted the frozen piles and drove that wood along the brooks and branches of the North River, till it gathered at the boom at the Murray Road. Willie Petrie told us: "I always knew there was work there, from when I was so high. They were working there before I was born, I suppose. We had to travel then. We used to walk from Cape North right up to North River, stay at Murray there, at the boarding house. Sometimes you'd go on the Aspy. Then next day walk back into the woods. Sometimes you'd get in with the tote team if there was a tote team going in you'd get a ride, but it would be just as easy to walk as to get on one of them, There'd be a bunch of us travelling at a time. Half a dozen or like that. You didn't bring no saw or axe. They had it all when you got in there." 'a?-'::';-?' Alex Matheson, Blacksmith: I was born in 1898. We lived out back here in a place called Big Hill, I wasn't interested in forge work then. We were over on the farm, trying to make a living over there. A lot of horses and' cows. And then I went to work for this lumber company in 1919. I hauled wood, drove team for a while • then I went with the blacksmith, Dan MacRitchie. At first I was just a helper, take the shoes off the horses and nail them on • he made the shoes to fit them. I'd use the sledge hammer. He'd hold it and I'd beat it. I worked for two years with him, then he went away. My day was breakfast at 6 o'clock and about 6:30, quarter to 7 we were out in the forge and we worked all day, till 6 o'clock. And then sometimes if there was anything broken or a horse'd pull a shoe • you'd have to go out and fix that up, that day. Every horse was supposed to be working, next morning. The horses were the main source to get the wood out. The wood was hauled from the woods back a mile and a half, 2 miles to the river and piled along the river so it would be ready for the spring when the ice would break up and the snow was melting • and that wood was thrown in the river then and it was floated down to Murray to the mill. We didn't make the horseshoes; they were coming in • just the plates. But you had to caulk them • you had to turn the heels and then put the toe caulk on. In the summertime it was just a dull piece of steel welded on the toe of the shoe. And in the wintertime that toe was sharpened, taken to an edge so it would grip on the ice. Nail that onto the horse. Trim the hoof, keep it snug, keep them shaped as good as you could. If you had a lot of hoof to take off you might put a hot shoe to the hoof and in the winter the hoof would be frozen, would be hard • well you'd have to kind of thaw it out with a hot shoe and then rasp it. There was a spell one winter • a month or a month and a half • I was responsible for 120 horses. It happened they couldn't get a man or the fellows wouldn't stick. I stayed 13 years. We didn't make any of the harness equipment but you had to keep Whippetrees made. Whatever kind of chains they needed • chain was coming readymade but we were putting different kinds of hooks and rings on them. We had what they called the wood hook for handling the pulp • you'd have to keep them repaired, keep them pointed, Picka-



roonies • I made some. That would be in the spring of the year, when they'd be put? ting in this wood. It's a sharp-pointed pick, and you put an axehandle in it. Some were made from a double-bit axe. Cut one blade and leave a spur on it. And sharpen CAPE BRETON'S MAGAZINE, NUMBER SEVEN WRECK COVE, CAPB BRETON, NOVA SCOTIA SECOND CLASS MAIL • REGISTRATION NUMBER 3014