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Alex Gillis and the Big Sleigh or, "The Servant on the Mountain" It was for firewood. It's very steep, part of that mountain. It's a continuation of Cape Mabou. Well, I suppose it'd be Mabou Mountain, Northeast. Fall of 1946. (Did you used to take wood off of that mountain before?) Oh, yes. I remember one December my father and 3 of us, of the sons--it took us 3 weeks to take the winter's wood down. And I figure--I didn't have my stopwatch--but this came down in less than a minute. It took us just a day and a half to build it, two of us. Two heavy bird's-eye maple skids, 30 feet long. And we nicked them (notched them) to prevent the cables from wearing. The wood went on full length-- trees went on full length--crossways. The skids were about 11 feet apart. And 3 cross members. And they were nicked down and bored, drilled, and heavy drift-bolts put in, 12 of them in the cross members. Then, it had two binders on, steel wire. (And what would the binders do?) Binding the wood, the load. The trees were full length across. The skids were about 30 feet long. But side? ways it would be, depending on the trees, well around 40 feet in width. And about 3 feet thick, high. You can figure out how many cords that would be. We had to tie it to a tree--we had steel cable, old mining cable. And we tied it to anchor it, 'cause it was on the slope. And we tried to put rollers under it, to be ready to go. The ditches were in under it. (Let me take you back. This was a place where you usually had gotten wood, right?) Lower down. We never took it off the top. It's better higher. We knew of one place where there's a valley, and the trees were straighter and longer. Easier to split, and so on. (And how far up the mountain are we talking about?) Where the sleigh was? Just at the top, where you can see-- one of those bare spots there. (How far did you think you were going to have to travel?) About 1200 feet, I'd say. (What was the old way of doing it, for you, before the sleigh?) Oh, twitching--cutting, and leaving two branches. And putting a half-hitch with a small, slim chain or a heavy rope, like we used for pitching hay in the barn. Put a couple of half-hitches on there. Sometimes you could take a few small ones (trees). And someone'd be twitching it home with perhaps two horses. That is, when we took it off the front of the mountain. Which was quite a few hundred feet below where the sleigh was set. One horse, one time, (my brother) Angus was coming down--I was quite young then-- he had one hand on the bit of the bridle, and on the hame. And the log caught--a stump, or roots of a tree. And something broke. And the horse went heels over head. It's that steep. (How long would it take you to get your winter's wood, before the sleigh, with all of you working?) Three weeks, I think it took the 4 of us, when we took it off the front. But there's another route around-- it's close to 3 miles, over the highway and up back. Which is up a more gradual slope with our sleighs. In the wintertime, when the snow was quite heavy. (So where did you get the idea to try a new method?) Well--friction and gravity. Coasting with a little sleigh when we were young, I suppose. Something between all of that. I did house-moving, too, and different things like that. Rough construction. (Did you tell your father the idea? Did he think it was a good idea or not?) Except that people were telling him that it was aimed pretty well at the barn! He didn't seem to worry.



There's a deep gully running this way. The Queen Mary couldn't come over that, it's so steep. But people passing on the road thought it was aiming pretty well on the barn. But it would have to raise another steep bank that would meet it. So we had it aimed for a brook where there was a mud. We didn't care if we had to shovel mud and snow, where it would land, as long as we didn't have to climb the mountain. Story Continues on Page 59