

GRAB BAG

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word nerd

By RYAN HUME

Timber [tɪm•bər]

noun

1. Prepared wood meant for carpentry or other building; lumber. Also, a single piece of wood that makes up part of a structure

2. Wood grown specifically for harvest and cultivation

3. *Informal:* a personal characteristic that qualifies someone for a particular position. Usually used with an adjective, i.e., a presidential timber

4. *Exclamation:* an expression yelled to warn others of a felled tree

5. *Nautical slang:* (*timbers, pl.*) one of the curved pieces of wood that forms a ship's hull



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX
A man walks along the deck of the Ken Rei bulk carrier in December 2014. The carrier left the Port of Astoria with nearly 5 million board feet of timber.

Origin:

Arrives in Old English with the current spelling around 900 by way of the cognate of the

Germanic *zimmer* and the Old Norse *timbr*, both of which mean “a building” or “room.”

The plural nautical

term enters English in 1748.

As an exclamation for a tree falling, the term originates in the north by way of



AP PHOTO/DON RYAN

A large fir tree heads to the forest floor after it is cut by an unidentified logger in the Umpqua National Forest near Oakridge, Oregon.

Canadian English and is first recorded in 1912.

“The object of the government in endeavoring to prevent the waste and destruction of public timber is, primarily, to preserve it for the wants of future generations — having, of course, due regard for the requirement of the present.”

—“Instructions to Special Timber Agents,” *The Daily Astorian*, Thursday, Aug. 23, 1883, P. 1

“The big raft of logs which contains many million feet of lumber, will put to sea this morning under command of Captain H. R. Robertson. The captain says that he has one of the finest rafts ever floated, and that the spars and timbers are A1.”

—“Derelicts at Sea: Are Rafts of Logs a Menace to Ocean Navigation?,” *The Daily Astorian*, Thursday, Aug. 20, 1896, P. 7

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