

The Blazed Trail

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

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CHAPTER XXVI.

IN the meantime the main body of the crew under Thorpe and his foremen were busily tumbling the logs into the current. The men had continually to keep alert at any moment they were called on to execute their best judgment with quickness to keep from being carried downward with the rush of the water. Not infrequently a frowning or wall of forty feet would beset the brink of plunge. Then Shearer himself proved his right to the title of "white water" brawler.

Shearer was called nearly an inch length. He had been known to ride a mile without shifting his feet on a log so small that he could carry it about himself. For cool nerve he was unequalled.

"I don't need you boys here any longer," he said quietly.

When the men had all withdrawn he walked confidently under the front of the railway, glancing with practised eye at the perpendicular wall of logs over him. Then as a man rises Jack-straws he clamped his peavey and tugged sharply. At once the railway flattened and bowed. A mighty splash, a fluff of flying foam and crushing timbers, and the spot on which the river man had stood was buried beneath twenty feet of solid green wood. To Thorpe it seemed that Shearer must have been overwhelmed, but the river man always mysteriously appeared at one side or the other, nonchalant, urging the men to work before the logs should have ceased to move. History stated that Shearer had never lost a man on the river simply and solely because he invariably took the dangerous tasks upon himself.

In three days the railways were broken. Now it became necessary to start the rear.

For this purpose Billy Camp, the cook, had loaded his cook stove, a quantity of provisions and a supply of bedding aboard a scow. At either end were long sweeps to direct its course. The craft was perhaps forty feet long, but rather narrow, in order that it might pass easily through the shoot of a dam. It was called the "wanigan."

The huge, unwieldy craft from that moment was to become possessed of the devil. Down the white water of rapids it would bump, smashing obstinately against bowlders, against the branches of the stream side it would scrape. In the broad reaches it would sulk, refusing to proceed, and when expediency demanded its pause it would drag Billy Camp and his entire crew at the rope's end, while they tried vainly to snub it against successively uprooted trees and stumps. When at last the wanigan was moored fast for the night—usually a mile or so below the spot planned—Billy Camp pushed back his battered old brown derby hat, the badge of his office, with a sigh of relief. To be sure, he and his men had still to cut wood, construct cooking and camp fires, pitch tents, snip browse and prepare supper for seventy men, but the hard work of the day was over.

Along either bank, among the bushes, on sand bars and in trees, hundreds and hundreds of logs had been stranded when the main drive passed. These logs the rear crew were engaged in restoring to the current.

And, as a man had to be able to ride any kind of log in any water, to propel that log by jumping on it, by rolling it squirrel fashion with the feet, by punting it as one would a canoe, to be skillful in pushing, prying and poling other logs from the quarter deck of the same cranky craft; as he must be prepared at any and all times to jump waist deep into the river, to work in ice water hours at a stretch; as he was called upon to break the most dangerous jams on the river, representing, as they did, the accumulation which the jam crew had left behind them, it was naturally considered the height of glory to belong to the rear crew. Here were the best of the Fighting Forty, men with a reputation as "white water" brawlers, "men afraid of nothing."

Every morning the crews were divided into two sections under Kerlie and Jack Hyland. Each crew had charge of one side of the river. Scotty Parsons exercised a general supervisory eye over both crews. Shearer and Thorpe traveled back and forth the length of the drive, riding the logs down stream, but taking to a partly submerged pole trail when ascending the current. On the surface of the river in the clear water floated two long, graceful boats called bateaux. These were in charge of expert boatmen. They carried in racks a great supply of pike poles, peaveys, axes, rope and dynamite for use in various emergencies.

Intense rivalry existed as to which

crew "sacked" the fastest down the stream in the course of the day. There was no need to urge the men. Some stood upon the logs, pushing mightily with the long pike poles. From one end of the rear to the other shouts, calls, warnings and jokes flew back and forth. Once or twice a vast roar of Homeric laughter went up as some unfortunate slipped and soused into the water. When the current slackened and the logs hesitated in their run the entire crew hastened, bobbing from log to log down river to see about it. Then they broke the jam, standing surely on the edge of the great darkness, while the ice water sucked in and out of their shoes.

Behind the rear Big Junko poled his bateau backward and forward exploding dynamite. Many of the bottom tiers of logs in the railways had been frozen down, and Big Junko had to loosen them from the bed of the stream. He was a big man, this, as his nickname indicated, built of many awkwardnesses. His cheek bones were high, his nose flat, his lips thick and slabby. He sported a wide, feculent straggling mustache and long, eyebrows, under which gleamed little fierce eyes. His forehead sloped back like a beast's, but was always hidden by a disreputable felt hat. Big Junko did not know much and had the passions of a wild animal, but he was a reckless river man and devoted to Thorpe. Just now he exploded dynamite.

The sticks of powder were piled amidships. Big Junko crouched over them, inserting the fuses and caps, closing the openings with soap, finally lighting them and dropping them into the water alongside, where they immediately sank. Then a few strokes of a short paddle took him barely out of danger. He huddled down in his craft, waiting. One, two, three seconds passed. Then a hollow boom shook the stream. A cloud of water sprang up, strangely beautiful. After a moment the great brown logs rose suddenly to the surface from below, one after the other, like leviathans of the deep.

Thorpe and Tim Shearer nearly always slept in a dog tent at the rear, though occasionally they passed the night at Dam Two, where Bryan Moloney and his crew were already engaged in sluicing the logs through the shoot.

The affair was simple enough. Long booms arranged in the form of an open V guided the drive to the sluice gate, through which a smooth apron of water rushed to turmoil in an eddying pool below. Two men tramped steadily backward and forward on the booms, urging the logs forward by means of long pike poles to where the suction could seize them. Below the dam the push of the sluice water forced them several miles down stream.

where the rest of Bryan Moloney's crew took them in charge.

Thus through the wide gate nearly three-quarters of a million feet an hour could be run, and at length the last of the logs drifted into the wide dam pool. The rear had arrived at Dam Two, and Thorpe congratulated himself that one stage of his journey had been completed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE rear had been tenting at the dam for two days and was about ready to break camp when Jimmy Powers swung across the trail to tell them of the big jam.

Ten miles along the river bed the stream dropped over a little half falls into a narrow, rocky gorge. It was always an anxious spot for river drivers. The plunging of the logs head-on over the fall had so gouged out the soft rock below that an eddy of great power had formed in the basin. Here, in spite of all efforts, the jam had formed. The bed was completely filled, far above the level of the falls, by a tangle that defied the jam crew's best efforts.

The rear at once took the trail down the river. Thorpe and Shearer and Scotty Parsons looked over the ground.

Without delay the entire crew was set to work. Nearly a hundred men can pick a great many logs in the course of a day. Several times the jam started, but always "plugged" before the motion had become irresistible.

"We'll have to shoot," Shearer reluctantly decided.

The men were withdrawn. Scotty Parsons cut a sapling twelve feet long and trimmed it. Big Junko thawed his dynamite at a little fire, opening the ends of the packages in order that the steam generated might escape. When the powder was warm, Scotty bound twenty of the cartridges around the end of the sapling, adjusted a fuse in one of them and souped the opening to exclude water. Then Big Junko thrust

the long javelin down into the depths of the jam, leaving a thin stream of smoke behind him as he turned away, zigzagging awkwardly over the jam. The long, ridiculous tails of his brown outwary coat flopping behind him as he leaped. A scant moment later the hoarse dynamite shouted.

Great chunks of timber shot to an inconceivable height. Entire logs lifted bodily into the air with the motion of a fish jumping. A fountain of water gleamed against the sun and showered down in fine rain. The jam shrugged and settled. That was all. The "shot" had failed.

The men ran forward, examining curiously the great hole in the log formation.

"We'll have to flood her," said Thorpe. So all the gates of the dam were raised, and the torrent tried its hand. It had no effect. Evidently the affair was not one of violence, but of patience. The crew went doggedly to work.

Day after day the clank, clank, clink of the peaveys sounded with the regularity of machinery. It was cruel, hard work. A man who has lifted his utmost strength into a peavey knows that. Any but the Fighting Forty would have grumbled.

Collins, the bookkeeper, came up to view the tangle. Later a photographer from Marquette took some views, and by the end of the week a number of curiosity seekers were driving over every day to see the big jam. A certain Chicago journalist in search of balsam



Washed his forehead. "You boys," he remarked politely, "think you are boring with a mighty big anger."

"My God!" screamed one of the spectators on top of the cliff. At the same instant Wallace Carpenter seized his friend's arm and pointed. Down the bed of the stream from the upper bend rushed a solid wall of water several feet high. It flung itself forward with the headlong impetus of a cascade. Even in the short interval between the visitor's exclamation and Carpenter's rapid gesture it had loomed in sight, twisted a dozen trees from the river bank and foamed into the entrance of the gorge. An instant later it collided with the tail of the jam.

Even in the railroad rush of those few moments several things happened. Thorpe leaped for a rope. The crew working on top of the dam ducked instinctively to right and left and began to scramble toward safety. The men below, at first bewildered and not comprehending, finally understood and ran toward the face of the jam with the intention of clambering up it. There could be no escape in the narrow canyon below, the walls of which rose sheer.

Then the flood hit square. A great sheet of water rose like surf from the tail of the jam; a mighty cataract poured down over its surface, lifting the free logs; from either wing timbers crunched, split, rose suddenly into wracked prominence, twisted beyond the semblance of themselves. Here and there single logs were even projected bodily upward, as an apple seed is shot from between the thumb and forefinger. Then the jam moved.

Scotty Parsons, Jack Hyland, Red Jacket and the forty or fifty men had reached the shore. By the wringing activity which is a river man's alone they succeeded in pulling themselves beyond the snap of death's jaws. It was a narrow thing for most of them and a miracle for some.

Jimmy Powers, Archie Harris, Long Pine Jim, Big Nolan and Mike Moloney, the brother of Bryan, were in worse case. They were, as has been said, engaged in "flattening" part of the jam about eight or ten rods below the face of it. When they finally understood that the affair was one of escape, they ran toward the jam, hoping to climb out. Then the crash came. They heard the roar of the waters, the wrecking of the timbers; they saw the logs bulge outward in anticipation of the break. Immediately they turned and fled, they knew not where.

All but Jimmy Powers. He stopped short in his tracks and threw his battered old felt hat defiantly full into the face of the destruction hanging over him. Then, his bright hair bowing in the wind of death, he turned to the spectators standing helpless and paralyzed forty feet above him.

It was an instant's impression—the arrested motion seen in the flash of lightning—and yet to the onlookers it had somehow the quality of time. For perceptible duration it seemed to them they stared at the contrast between the raging hell above and the yet peaceable river below.

Yet afterward, when they attempted to recall definitely the impression, they knew it could have lasted but a fraction of a second.

"So long, boys!" they heard Jimmy Powers' voice. Then the rope Thorpe had thrown fell across a cauldron of tortured waters and of tossing logs.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

URING perhaps ten seconds the survivors watched the end of Thorpe's rope trailing in the flood. Then the young man with a deep sigh began to pull it toward him.

At once a hundred surmises, questions, ejaculations, broke out.

"What happened?" cried Wallace Carpenter.

"What was that man's name?" asked the Chicago journalist, with the eager instinct of his profession.

"This is terrible, terrible, terrible!" a white haired physician from Marquette kept repeating over and over.

A half dozen ran toward the point of the cliff to peer down stream, as though they could hope to distinguish anything in that waste of flood water.

"The dam's gone out," replied Thorpe. "I don't understand it. Everything was in good shape as far as I could see. It didn't act like an ordinary break. The water came too fast. Why,

it was as dry as a bone until just as that wave came along. An ordinary break would have eaten through little by little before it burst, and Davis should have been able to stop it. This came all at once, as if the dam had disappeared. I don't see."

His mind of the professional had already begun to query causes.

"How about the men?" asked Wallace. "Isn't there something I can do?"

"You can head a hunt down the river," answered Thorpe. "I think it is useless until the water goes down. Poor Jimmy! He was one of the best men I had. I wouldn't have had this happen."

The horror of the scene was at last beginning to filter through numbness into Wallace Carpenter's impressionable imagination.

"No, no!" he cried vehemently. "There is something criminal about it to me! I'd rather lose every log in the river!"

Thorpe looked at him curiously. "It is one of the chances of war," said he.

"I'd better divide the crew and take in both banks of the river," suggested Wallace.

"See if you can't get volunteers from this crowd," suggested Thorpe. "I can tell you have two men to show you trails. I need as many of the crew as possible to use this flood water."

"Oh, Harry!" cried Carpenter, shocked. "You can't be going to work again today, before we have made the slightest effort to recover the bodies!"

"If the bodies can be recovered, they shall be," replied Thorpe quietly. "But the drive will not wait. We have no dams to depend on now, you must remember, and we shall have to get out on the freshest water."

"Your men won't work. I'd refuse just as they will!" cried Carpenter, his sensibilities still suffering.

Thorpe smiled proudly. "You do not know them."

"By Jove!" cried the journalist in sudden enthusiasm. "By Jove, that is magnificent!"

The men on the river crew had crunched on their narrow footholds while the jam went out. Each had clung to his peavey, as is the habit of river men. Down the current past their feet swept the debris of flood.

Soon logs began to swirl by—at first few, then many—from the remaining railways which the river had automatically broken. In a little time the eddy caught up some of these logs, and immediately another jam threatened. The river men, without hesitation, as calmly as though catastrophe had not thrown the weight of its moral terror against their stoicism, sprang, peavey in hand, to the instant work.

Thorpe's face lit with gratification. He turned to the young man.

"You see," he said in proud simplicity. "With the added danger of fresher water, the work went on."

At this moment Tim Shearer approached from inland, his clothes dripping wet, but his face retaining its habitual expression of iron calmness. "Anybody caught?" was his first question as he drew near.

"Five men under the face," replied Thorpe briefly.

Shearer cast a glance at the river. He needed to be told no more.

"I was afraid of it," said he. "The railways must be all broken out. It's saved us that much, but the freshest water won't last long. It's going to be a close squeak to get 'em out now. Don't exactly figure on what struck the dam. Thought I'd go right up that way, but then I came down to see about the boys."

"Where were you?" asked Thorpe. "On the pole trail. I got in a little, as you see."

Dr. Powers the foreman had had a close shave for his life.

"We'd better go up and take a look," he suggested. "The boys has things going here all right."

The two men turned toward the brush.

"Hi, Tim!" called a voice behind them.

"Jack told me to give this to you," he panted, holding out a chunk of strangely twisted wood.

"Where'd he get this?" inquired Thorpe quickly. "It's a piece of the dam," he explained to Wallace, who had drawn near.

"Picked it out of the current," replied the man.

The foreman and his boss bent eagerly over the morsel. Then they stared with solemnity into each other's eyes.

"Dynamite!" exclaimed Shearer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOR a moment the three men stared at each other without speaking.

"What does it mean?" almost whispered Carpenter.

"Mean? Foul play!" snarled Thorpe. "Come on, Tim."

The two struck into the brush, threading the paths with the ease of woodsmen. It was necessary to keep to the high inland ridges. The pole trail had by now become impassable. Thorpe and his foreman talked briefly.

"It's Morrison & Daly," surmised Shearer. "I left them 'count of a trick like that. I been suspecting something. They've been laying too low."

Thorpe answered nothing. Through the site of the old dam they found a torrent pouring from the narrowed pond, at the end of which the dilapidated wings flapping in the current attested the former structure. Davis stood staring at the current.

Thorpe strode forward and shook him violently by the shoulder.

"How did this happen?" he demanded hoarsely.

The man turned to him in a daze. "I don't know," he answered.

"You ought to know. How was that shot exploded? How did they get in here without your seeing them? Answer me."

"I don't know," repeated the man. "I jest went over in th' brush to kill a few partridges, and when I come back I found her this way."

"Were you hired to watch this dam, or weren't you?" demanded the tense voice of Thorpe. "Answer me, you fool."

"Yes, I was," returned the man, a shade of aggression creeping into his voice.