

In the Bush

At the head of the tramway a track is cleared out into the bush, and along this track the logs are dragged in. The bushmen, working in pairs, first of all fell the trees handy to their line of communication. Theirs is a job requiring strength, skill, physical fitness, and, in South Westland, a complete disregard for rain.

Leaving the mills early in the morning, and their homes still earlier, they travel up the tramway for perhaps several miles to the railhead on a petrol-powered jigger. Then they clamber over smashed foliage and fallen logs to the stand of timber on which they are working. They might start work in oilskins and end up in trousers and singlet. What does a little external moisture matter when you are wet through with perspiration, anyhow? On the job they cut with axes a scarf in the tree to be felled. This is a sharp V, its depth depending on the girth of the tree to be cut. Its purpose is to direct the line of fall of the tree. With valuable timber it is necessary to be exceptionally accurate, as a bad fall might break the tree or other valuable trees still standing.

Next, the two bushmen attack the other side of the tree with a long crosscut saw, cutting into the point of the scarf. Before they reach it, a wedge is driven into the cut to keep it open, and then one handle of the saw is removed and it is pulled right through. A couple of smacks with the maul on the wedge and the tree begins to topple and crash.



The "fidler" cuts the logs into manoeuvrable lengths.

Then the tree is topped and any branches jutting out from the trunk low down are lopped off.

The next job is to get the logs in to the tramway. This is done by a low or high lead and is called "snigging." With a low lead or ground haul the logs are pulled along the track by cables from the steam-winch at the tramway. A "dee" is cut in the top of the log, and around this the cable is passed. This end is also roughly rounded by axe to assist it to slide over obstacles. Two logs may be hauled in on the one cable, and this is called a "drag." When the winchman applies the pressure in they come (or do they?) along the cleared track. The difficulty is that the logs will often stop at an obstruction and dig in, causing much fraying of the ropes and the bushmen's tempers.

These difficulties are largely overcome by an American method of "snigging," called the high lead or overhead. With this method there are two tall trees, one at the winch and one in the bush. An endless cable runs out to the bush tree, returning via another track along the ground. This endless cable is attached to a free block which travels on a cable high up between the two trees. The drag of logs is attached to a line from the block and the block is pulled in, bringing the logs with it. Should they catch on any obstruction they are lifted over it by the natural pull from the block above. The life of the cables is four times as long with the high lead. There is a proportionate effect on the life of the bushman's temper.

At the tramway head the logs are either rolled up slips and dropped on to the bogies or lifted at the point of balance by a cable running up over the winch-tree and dropped on to the bogies. These four-wheeled bogies are spaced according to the length of the logs and may carry five or six trunks.

When the load of logs is ready they are hauled down to the mill by the small steam "loco" along the 3 ft. 6in. gauge tramway.

Building these tramways is a big job in itself, for they must be well laid and then maintained. Cuttings are put in and small viaducts constructed. Some