

## LOGGING IN THE ST. CROIX RIVER VALLEY

### OBJECTIVES:

1. To show the importance of the St. Croix River in transporting logs to market.
2. To understand that treaties with the Ojibwa and Dakota Indians opened the river valley for logging.
3. To describe some of the problems loggers had in driving the logs to market.

### LESSON OVERVIEW:

The St. Croix River was an important river highway for logging. During the winters in the final half of the last century and through the first decade of this century white pines were cut along the tributaries of the river at many logging camps north of Taylors Falls, Minnesota and St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. In the late spring and early summer the logs were driven down river, some traveled a distance of 100 miles, to the boom site at Stillwater, Minnesota. At the boom logs were sorted and rafted to saw mills along the Mississippi River. The rocky gorge known as “the Dalles” of the St. Croix River at Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls was a particular challenge for the log drives and the scene of several large log jams.

### CLASS TIME:

1. Treaties signed in 1838 with the Ojibwa and Dakota Indians opened the St. Croix River Valley to logging. Lumbermen from the east knew of the tall white pines along the tributaries to the St. Croix River. They wasted no time in staking out claims to stands of white pine. Most of the choice timber was north of Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls.

The logs were cut in the winter and piled along the tributaries. In the spring when the water was high the logs were tumbled into these tributaries and driven down to the St. Croix River. All the logs cut in the winter logging camps merged in the St. Croix River to start a journey of as long as 100 miles down river. The river was often so full of logs that a person could walk across the river on them and see nothing but logs in either direction. One of the trickiest places for the log drivers was to maneuver the logs through the rocky gorge called the “Dalles” at Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls. Often the logs would jam where the river made a right angle turn at “Angle Rock”.

Thirty miles further down stream the logs were sorted at the boom site just above Stillwater; each lumber company had their own brand on the logs. The logs of each company were made into rafts and either floated or towed to saw mills south along the Mississippi River.

2. Log drivers sometimes called “River Pigs” guided the logs downstream. Their work started in the spring when the water in the river was high. These men had calked or cleated boots to keep their footing on the continually moving mass of logs. Their prodding pike poles kept logs moving which threatened to either tangle up in a jam or get stuck in the mud. A floating cook shack called a Wannigan followed the drivers downstream. This broad flatbottomed boat was designed to take the jostling of the logs and ride the rapids. At night the drivers camped out along the riverbank. About being a driver one man recalled, “It was always

wet and cold". The trip for the drivers and their logs from the logging camps to Stillwater took about two months.

3. The Dalles of the St. Croix River at Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls was a hazard for driving the millions of feet of logs cut each year. Angle Rock, where the river makes a right angle turn was the sight of many log jams. The river is narrower at the Dalles than up river. It is not hard to imagine the problem of loss funneling into the Dalles and having to make a sharp turn. Possibly the largest jam in history happened here in 1886. The spring of 1886 was a dry year and the water levels in the river and its tributaries were dropping. Lumbermen worried that there would not be enough water to drive the logs down river. Suddenly heavy rainstorms in the first week of June changed all of that. Logs were sent downriver at a furious rate. Logs could not turn the corner at Angle Rock before they were crowded from behind by more logs. Logs began to pile on top of one another and blocked the river. More logs floated into the jammed logs and by the time the damage was done 250 million feet of logs were part of the jam. Logs extended for seven miles up river from Angle Rock . It took two hundred workers over six weeks to break up the log jam.

4. There are still traces of the log drives on the river today. Many logs are buried in the bottom of the river. Occasionally one of these logs will get loose and come to the surface. These are called "deadheads". Only the "head" or narrow end of the log can be seen. There are many logs buried in the sand at the bottom of the river near the picnic and camp area of the Minnesota Interstate Park. Recently, a "deadhead" log was examined that came to the surface and the logger's brand on the "butt end" or large end of the log could still be seen. The end was cut off the log and can be seen in the park's interpretive center. There are still logs in the bottom of the deep water of the Dalles. A large number of logs were removed from the river during the 1930's. The logs were cut into lumber which was used to build many homes in the area.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think a log driver would be "wet and cold" most of the time?
2. What do you think were some dangers a log driver faced?
3. Why do you think it would be difficult to prevent a log jam once the logs started to get tangled up in a jam?
4. Why do you think people went to all the trouble of pulling "deadheads" out of the river?

## Student's Review Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the name of the boat you are riding on? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name three rock formations that you have seen on the Scenic Boat Tour.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the Captain's name? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What river are you travelling on? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What two states are you going between? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What propels the boat you are on? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Where on the river was the largest log jam? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What rock formation was the river named after? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Why is the river brown in color? \_\_\_\_\_
10. When and where was the treaty signed that opened up the river to logging?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What were two of the Indian Tribes in the area? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. When was the last steamboat to come up the St. Croix to Taylors Falls/St. Croix Falls area?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What replaced the Steamboats? \_\_\_\_\_
14. What is a Wannigan? \_\_\_\_\_