

HOW TO BUILD A LOG CABIN

By Daniel Carter Beard

You must have logs with which to build and it may be necessary to cut down the trees yourself. Remember before beginning to chop to cut away all brush within reach of the axe so that you may swing it by the handle without striking anything. Very serious accidents often happen when the blade of the axe strikes even a slight twig which deflects it or, in other words, causes it to glance and strike a leg in place of the tree trunk.

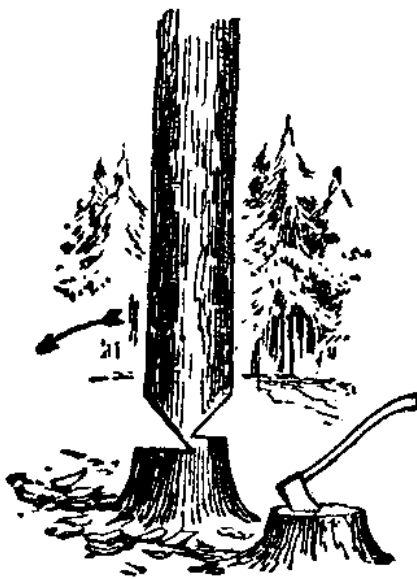


Figure 1

After cutting the brush away cut the kerf or notch on one side of the tree as shown in Fig. 1. Cut this notch big enough to do away with the danger of pinching your axe. If the kerf is too small and there is danger of its pinching, cut another notch above it and split out the space between.

Make your first notch halfway or more through the trunk of the tree, then cut the second notch on the opposite side of the tree a trifle higher than the first notch. When the wood separating the two notches becomes too small and weak to support the tree, the trunk will naturally slip and fall in the direction of the lower notch.

Do not stand behind a tree when felling it, because it is liable to kick, that is,

shoot backward, and a kicking tree often results in fatal accidents. Don't try to fell a tree against the wind. If the wind is blowing briskly from the wrong direction, leave that tree alone until the wind dies down or blows from the right quarter. After a tree is felled and the branches are trimmed off it may be cut up into logs of any given length. While doing this stand on the log with your legs spread apart and chop between them, making the kerf as wide as the diameter of the log. You will find it much easier to cut a log in this manner than it is to try and roll a log over and cut one side and then the other. When cut, the logs should be rolled on a skidway, the latter consisting of some small logs with the lower ends resting on the ground and the other ends resting on a log or bank. (See Fig. 2.)

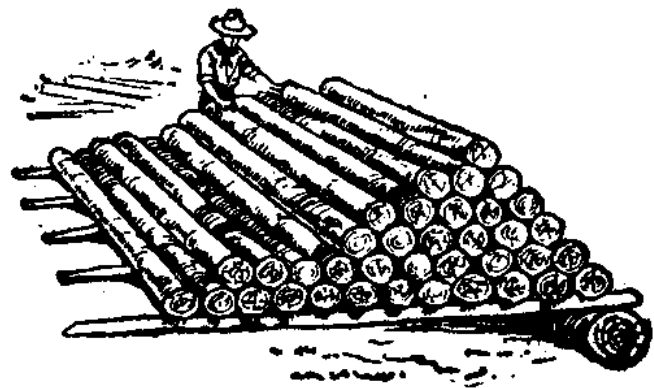


Figure 2

NOTCHING THE LOGS

To lock the logs together so that they will not roll apart when your house is built, it is necessary to flatten the ends or notch the logs near the ends. You may cut flat notches or round notches, or square and flatten the ends of the log like those in General Putnam's camp at Redding, Connecticut. The simplest notch is the rounded one shown by A—B, and C, Fig. 3. In some places people dovetail the ends of the logs together, but a rounded notch answers all purposes, and if the logs are straight it makes a snug cabin.

CHINKING

A log cabin made of straight spruce logs may be chinked with sphagnum moss, the kind of moss you find in wet and marshy places, the kind the florists use to tie up roots and plants. Or the cabin may be calked with tow, as one calks a boat; but when you use pitch-pine logs, like those in my own cabin, or hardwood logs, they are seldom as straight as spruce and consequently the spaces between them are wider. They may be filled by quartering some logs, and using the quartered pieces to fill up the chinks, or the chinks may be filled with stones and chips held in place by mud or clay. Mix your clay as you would mortar and let it be about the same consistency or softness as putty, make it in balls and push the balls in between the chinks. The mud chinking will last for years. Some of the mud in the chinks in my cabin in Pike County, Pennsylvania, has been there now for ten or twelve years. It was chinked up before the Boy Scouts of America or England were born. It is the pioneer log house built for a summer home.

TO SQUARE THE CORNERS OF YOUR CABIN

Cut a stick and make it exactly 10 feet long and mark off the feet on it. With it measure from the corner 8 feet on your bottom log or sill log, and on the log which lies across the sill log measure from the same corner 6 feet. Adjust these two logs so that your 10-foot rod will touch the 8-foot point with one end and the 6-foot point with the other; then your foundation will be exactly square, that is, 90° or a right angle. If you doubt it, look into your geometry where it says that a square on the long side of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides; thus we take the first 8 feet and square it, $8 \times 8 = 64$, then the 6 feet, $6 \times 6 = 36$, then the 10 feet, $10 \times 10 = 100$ and 64 plus 36 equals 100, hence we know that this is square.

After you have the first few logs in place you will discover that it takes some strength to hoist the others up. To simplify this, lay a few logs on the wall to act as skids and by the aid of ropes roll the other logs up these skids. Reverse each alternate log so that the big ends will not all be at one side of the wall.

The American log house differs from the Canadian log house principally in the shape of the roof; so says my book on "Shacks, Shelters, and Shanties" from which I am cribbing this material.

So that you will remember the gambrel roof, learn this rhyme.

"Gambrel! gambrel! Let me beg
You'll look at a horse's hinder leg;
First great angle above the hoof,

That's the gambrel, hence the gambrel roof."

When you wish to make an opening for a doorway or a window in a cabin, saw a section out of the top log, that is, the last log which crossed the proposed open space (See Fig. 4), then nail a couple of cleats, one on each side of the proposed opening to hold the logs in place, and go on with the

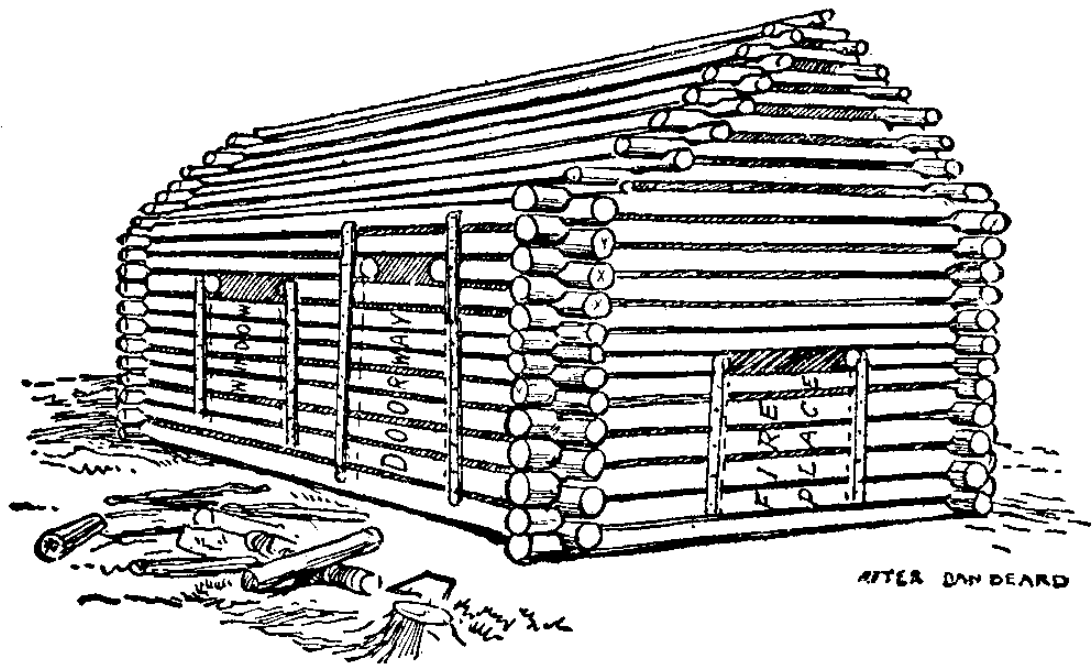


Figure 4

building of your cabin. When the cabin walls are finished, it is an easy matter to saw out the doors and windows as indicated by the dotted lines in Fig. 4, after which nail a slab or board against the ends of the logs in the opening to form the door jambs or window jambs, then the cleats may be removed and the nails in the jambs will hold the logs in the proper position.

The roof of a house is supposed to be built with small logs or poles. In making a roof, as in making walls, remember to reverse each alternate log or pole so that you have a thick end and a thin end all the way up. This will prevent one side of the roof being higher than the other side.

The house may now be roofed over with planks, or shingled with shakes, clapboards, splits, or bark, according to what is available in the section of the country in which you have built your cabin. Shakes are boards split from sections of logs by the use of a froe or even an axe.

The cabin may be a "mudsill" that is, have a pounded earthen floor, or it may be floored with puncheons. Puncheons are logs that are flattened by scoring and hewing off the rounded surface.

We have described a one-pen house. A two-pen or Southern saddlebag house is just what its name implies, two cabins set in line with each other about 10 feet apart and one roof extending over the two pens. The space between the two cabins in the South is called a gallery, in other places an areaway, and in the North a hallway. In this case the hall is open at both ends.

A saddlebag makes a most delightful summer camp. The doors to the cabin open on the gallery and are thus protected from the rain and wind.

There is scarcely a great man in early American history who did not know how to wield an axe and all were either born in a log cabin or lived considerable time in such a home. Although George Washington

was skillful in using the axe, one of the greatest axemen among our great men was Abraham Lincoln.

It might even be said that American history was written with an axe.

BSA Handbook for Boys, 32nd Edition 1925
Woodcraft, page 103

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