

Paul Bunyan- The hero of the Michigan logger.

Logging in Michigan's northwoods was heroic labor in the 1800's. Every autumn work-toughened giants of the woods faced the grueling journey into the forests, forging their way up swift rivers with wearisome portages around rapids, beaver dams and other obstructions.

Once in their camps, the loggers found themselves locked in by snow and ice for five or six months at a time.

The workday was from sunrise to sunset. Their diet consisted of beans, salt pork, and sourdough bread. Evenings were spent relaxing around the shanty stove to the tune of folk songs and tall tales. The tallest tale of all the logging camping the nineteenth century quickly became PAUL BUNYAN.

The reputation of this giant logger came in large part from the telling and retelling of his feats around Michigan logging camp stoves. It was in Michigan and other logging states that Paul Bunyan was reputed to have found Babe, the blue ox who measured forty-two axe handles and a plug of chewing tobacco between the horns, and where Paul Bunyan's gigantic and romantic logging camps were constructed and furnished.

Perhaps the most famous of the hundreds of Paul Bunyan stories is the discovery of Babe.

It was during the Winter of blue snow which Paul spent in an enormous cave in Canada devoting himself to learning—reading every book he could put his hands on and sifting every shred of information to make himself wiser.

The strange blue snow had scared all the animals scurrying away to the North Pole. The bears were scared so badly that their hair turned white and so did that of their offspring—so we have the blue blizzard to thank for polar bears. Moose and all the other animals of the forest ran as far as they could because they were terribly frightened by the blue snow. Even Paul Bunyan's moose hound, Niagara, was scared away.

Niagara had kept Paul supplied with his favorite food, raw moose meat, so when he ran away Paul became hungry and noticed for the first time that the snow was a lovely blue instead of the traditional white. He went out to look for Niagara to no avail. Disappointed and heartbroken at the disappearance of his friend and provider, Paul Bunyan sat down in front of the fire in his cave; his shoulders slumped and face sad.

Suddenly he heard a thunderous crash in the direction of the river. In two bounds Paul reached the river and waded through seven-foot-thick ice floes to rescue a huge baby ox, which had fallen from a cliff. The ox was so big that Paul had to use both arms to carry him back to the cave where he warmed him by the fire and fed him moose moss stew because he couldn't find the baby's mother and there was no other place he could find enough milk to feed a baby that huge.

Paul figured the mother had been so frightened by the blue snow that when she gave birth, her baby was blue. The two wintered in the cave and from that time on were inseparable.

If you visit the town of St. Ignace you can see a statue of the gigantic Paul Bunyan with his blue ox, Babe, so that his memory, and the stories of the northern woods, will live forever.