**Paul Bunyan Tames the Whistling River**

Minnesota, Tall Tales

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

The Whistling River - so named because twice a day, it reared up to a height of two hundred feet and let loose a whistle that could be heard for over six hundred miles - was the most ornery river in the U.S. of A. It took a fiendish delight in plaguing the life out of the loggers who worked it. It would tie their logs into knots, flip men into the water then toss them back out onto the banks, and break apart whole rafts of logs as soon as the loggers put them together.

This fact by itself might not have been enough by itself to get Paul Bunyan involved. But one day Paul was sitting on a hill by the river combing his beard with a large pine tree when without warning the river reared up and spat four hundred and nineteen gallons of muddy water onto his beard. This startled Paul somewhat, but he figured if he ignored the river, it would go away and leave him alone. But that ornery river jest reared up again and spat five thousand and nineteen gallons of muddy water onto his beard, adding a batch of mud turtles, several large fish and a muskrat into the mix. Paul Bunyan was so mad he jumped up and let out a yell that caused a landslide all the way out in Pike's Peak.

"By jingo, I am gonna tame that river or bust a gut trying!" he cried.

So Paul sat for four days eating popcorn and trying to figure out how to tame that river. He ate so much popcorn that the air was soon filled with white bits and the ground for three miles around was covered with eighteen inches of popcorn scraps. This caused several hundred small animals and a few dozen birds to conclude that they were in a blizzard and so they froze to death. This furnished the loggers at the camp with pot pies for several days.

Just as he ran out of popcorn, Paul decided that the way to tame the river was to pull out the kinks. He would hitch the river to Babe the Blue Ox and let him yank it straight. Of course, Paul knew that an ordinary log chain and the skid hook wouldn't work with water. So he and Babe took a short walk up to the North Pole. There, Paul made a box trap baited with icicles that he set near a blizzard trail. Then he and Babe wandered away. Paul started to throw icebergs out into the ocean so Babe could play fetch. But he had to stop the game since each time Babe jumped into the water a tidal wave threatened to swamp the coast of Florida. After lunch, Paul went back to check the trap. He had caught six young blizzards and an old nor'wester. He put two of the young blizzards in his sack and released the rest. Then he and Babe went back to their camp.

As he walked into camp, Paul yelled to Ole, the Big Swede to build him the largest log chain that's ever been built. Then he staked out the two blizzards, one on each side of the river. Right away, the river began to freeze. By morning, the river had a tough time rearing up to whistle because it was frozen solid for more than seventeen miles. When Paul Bunyan finished his breakfast, he harnessed Babe and wrapped the chain seventy-two times around the foot of the frozen Whistle River. Yelling to the men to stand clear, he shouted at Babe to pull. Babe pulled that chain into a solid bar and sank knee deep into solid rock, but that ornery river refused to budge. So Paul grabbed the chain and he and Babe gave such a yank that the river jerked loose from its banks and they dragged it across the prairie so fast it smoked. After a while, Paul looked back and saw the river was as straight as a gun barrel. But the river was much shorter with the kinks out, and all the extra lengths that used to be in the kinks were running wild out on the prairie. So Paul got his big cross-cut saw and a lot of baling wire and sawed the extra lengths of river into nine-mile pieces, rolled them up and tied them off with the baling wire. He later used them to float his logs when he logged out the desert.

But now that it was straight, the Whistling River lost its gimp and refused to whistle. Which made everyone mad at Paul Bunyan, because now they didn't know when to wake up in the morning. Paul might have been in real trouble if Squeaky Swanson hadn't showed up right about then. Squeaky's speaking voice was no louder than a whisper. But when he yelled, you could hear him clean out in Kansas. So each morning Squeaky got up at the crack of dawn and yelled the blankets off of every bed in camp. Naturally, the men found it hard to sleep in the cold without their blankets, so they got up. Squeaky was a great success, and for the rest of his life he did nothing but get up at dawn and let out one really loud yell.