

## An Escape From The Tunnel

BY ANDREW GIBSON

*When last heard from, the two reluctant spelunkers had just reached the darkest part of the tunnel. The sunshine outside undoubtedly visible to anybody flying above the impenetrable B.C. clouds, seemed very far away . . .*

The silence and the darkness were absolute, and we remembered the rest of the story that the foreman had told us. He said that there was a legend that the unfortunate boss walked the tunnel regularly, still urging the men to work harder. Not that I believe in ghosts. There are bound to be perfectly rational explanations for hair lifting straight up, and for the absolute certainty that a presence behind is glaring balefully, and for the fancy that a faint voice is hissing, in a ghostly whisper "Get to work!"

But you know that we didn't allow such hallucinations to affect our work, particularly since we had some perfectly tangible things to worry about. We were now a quarter of a mile into the mountain, and the blackness, as Charon remarked to Cerberus, was Stygian. But there was an occasional faint rumbling, which our imaginations amplified into an avalanche which was even now blocking the entrance. And if we were trapped, and even supposing we escaped the rising water, who would rescue us. It was the July 1st week-end, and not a soul would be in camp.

Oppressed by such thoughts, we worked on, largely in total darkness, because we could only use the lamps when necessary to make a measurement. Usually, we weren't even within sight of each other — there were bends in the tunnel — but when one of us was illuminated, recognition was easy. Our hardhats were apparently floating above our heads, sustained on our vertical hair.

But we finally reached the end of the tunnel, and gazed with considerable emotion at the rough rock wall. We could almost feel the shade of the tunnel boss urging us on with our work, so that the work could be continued, after this long lapse. We felt better. But not for long. A sound smote our ears which filled us with horror. We stopped in our tracks, hard hats higher than ever.

The sound, which lasted a subjective ten minutes, but an objective five seconds, was one of breaking timbers, falling boulders, and then a few grace notes from smaller rocks. With that quick deductive sense which must have already become apparent in this account, we concluded that, since we were at the

very end of the tunnel, and the roof hadn't fallen in, the sound must be from the direction of the entrance. Our intellectual powers honed to a razor sharpness by terror, we further deduced that the entrance might now be blocked.

Thoughts of our loved ones crowded upon us. First, I saw myself, as in a mirror. Then my wife — how would she take the shattering news that the insurance company was about to give her \$200,000.00? Would she, in a frenzy of grief, hurl herself from the curb? And my children, poor fatherless innocents. Would this snap their already badly bent psyches? And my truck, faithfully keeping its vigil at the bottom — could it, with only three cylinders, survive the loss of my tender loving care? I was roused from these poignant thoughts by a choking sound from my companion. Switching on the light, I saw that he too was affected by the pathos of our situation. He was a rich purple colour, having swallowed his gum.

When he had recovered, we discussed our predicament, as rational people do in even the gravest circumstances. "Let's make a run for it!", I screamed with icy calm. His answer was equally controlled. In a falsetto vibrato, he lamented the lost opportunities of his youth, the unkind words spoken to his loved ones as recently as a week ago, and the unopened bottle of Johnny Walker in his suitcase. It was an emotional moment, but gradually the iron discipline of our Creed re-asserted itself, and we pushed from our minds any craven thoughts of leaving the transit, or — the cardinal sin engraved on the stone tablets in the vault at 6070 — leaving a hanging line unverified. We started work again, back towards the entrance, if it still existed. We worked silently, listening for any further sounds of collapse. There were none — only, in our fevered imaginations, the occasional ghostly chuckle from the foreman's ghost.

Our spirits rose when we came to a Y, where we met the watercourse. The level hadn't risen, so the water could obviously still get through, and maybe we could too. And further along, finding some boulders which we were sure hadn't been there before, we found what we hadn't seen before — another tunnel, on a higher level, connected to ours by a log and plank chute, which had collapsed. Was this what we had heard? To our intense relief, a little further on we saw light, and then a glimpse of that beautiful grey rainy B.C. sky, beyond the entrance.

Shortly afterwards we were outside, and our imaginations went back to normal. The foreman's ghost slunk back, defeated, into the shadows — but, I've speculated since, was the tunnel that collapsed the one from which he had tumbled?

I'm happy to report that we finished the job without further incident, and, months later, when the road was made, the machinery dragged up the mountain, and the new tunnel was drilled, it met the old one exactly. Much to our relief. Maybe, his job finished, the foreman now rests in peace.

## PROTECTION FOR OUR CHAINSAW OPERATORS

We would bring to your attention the following directive from the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Safety Branch:

*"The wearing and using of protective clothing and safety equipment on any operation defined as logging under The Industrial Safety Act 1971, Section 1, Subsection (kb)"*

The following is a minimum requirement for personal protective clothing:

### Reg. 109: Safety Hats:

"Where a person is exposed to head injury, he shall wear a safety hat that will adequately protect the head against impact and flying or falling objects."

### Reg 114: Safety Gloves, Pants

"Where a person is exposed to the hazard of injury from contact of his skin with (b) a sharp or jagged object which may puncture, cut or abrade his skin.

He shall be protected by: (e) wearing apparel sufficient to protect him from injury appropriate in the circumstances."

### Reg. 115: Safety Boots

"Where a person is exposed to the hazard of foot injury from (a) falling or crushing objects. (c) sharp objects. He shall wear foot protection appropriate in the circumstances."

### Reg 32: Guarding of Chainsaws

"The minimum requirement is that the machine be equipped with a safety chain and an effective chain brake that will stop the chain in the event of a kickback."

As it appears that the clearing of land falls under the definitions of logging in The Industrial Safety Act, we would suggest compliance with the above regulations.