



Axe Thrower HITS THE **BULL'S-EYE**



A NOVA SCOTIAN LUMBERJACK KEEPING OLD FAMILY TRADITIONS ALIVE

by Sandra Phinney

Darren Hudson is a fifth generation Canadian lumberjack. He's also a seven-time World and 12-time Canadian Log Rolling Champion who's on a mission to keep the lumberjack tradition alive. Darren is passion personified. He is also funny, driven, and – one might say – a tad nutty.

When he's not engaged felling troublesome trees through his tree removal service, he's teaching others how to do things

like throw an axe, chop a log, or how to keep from going into the drink while standing on a rolling log in the water. He does this as part of a company he created called the Lumberjack AXExperience situated on the beautiful Barrington River in southwest Nova Scotia.

Darren got his first taste of log rolling when his family did a film for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation back in 1983 titled *The Last Log Drive*. The six year-old couldn't resist the urge to get on the logs in the water. "There I was on top of those spinning, sinking logs, trying to be light-footed and fast-moving to avoid sinking below." He was smitten. "I knew that was me, and decided then and there I would be a lumberjack."

Darren comes from a long line of sawmill operators, guides, and lumberjacks. His great grandfather, Uriah Scott, was a licensed guide in Nova Scotia. In 1932, Nova Scotia guides were invited to be part of a show at Madison Square Garden in New York to promote hunting, fishing, and guiding. Fellow guides Watson and Eddie Peck made the trip as Uriah was too busy guiding to go, but he was amused by the hoopla associated with the event, which included movie stars like Roy Rogers, and native Americans wearing full headdresses.

Closer to home, Darren's uncle – Phil Scot – paddled in a 3,300-mile centennial canoe race from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta to Montréal in 1967. He arrived just in time to take part in the log rolling trials, securing him a place to compete in the World Championships – which he went on to win nine times.

Another uncle, Stanley Scott, was famous on the river drives all around the country. "He was in demand for hooking up the booms, setting up bumper logs and tearing logs away from jam sites," Darren explains. "Although fleet footed, he didn't compete competitively past the age of 20 on the international scene, as he was too busy raising a family and working at the sawmill."

In 1994, when Darren was 17 years old,



PHOTOS Contributed

Previous page and above Darren Hudson practices his log rolling at his camp on the Barrington River, NS

he signed on as a lumberjack with Hank Peters. "Hank was in his 80s at the time but I traveled around the states with him and nine-time world champ Dan McDonough. These two men made a huge impact in my life. I also rolled with Dan. He was a big guy and didn't take it easy on me. That's how I started."

His journey as a professional lumberjack has taken the Barrington native on repeat trips to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, China, and across the U.S. and Canada to perform. These shows are historical and humorous re-enactments of "old time" lumberjack competitions which include log rolling, axe throwing, tree climbing, log sawing and other skills. It's all about

proving ones prowess in a quest to be "Bull of the Woods" and, of course, to win some prize money.

In the olden days, the prize would often be a rifle or skinning knife. Today, the top prize for a world championship is usually \$1,500 (per skilled activity). Sounds like a lot of money, but factoring in the amount of training time (three hours a day, six days a week for three to six months), you can see it's all about love, not money.

Darren has also appeared on the David Letterman Show, and did stunt work as a double for actor Steve Martin in the movie *Cheaper by the Dozen 2*.

Any mishaps along the way? Sure, like the time he blasted through a log using a



PHOTOS

Darren Hudson

Above Visitors to Darren Hudson's lumberjack camp enjoy the hot weather.

wicked underhand chop. He let go of the axe, turned around, and met the flying axe smack in the face. Although he required plastic surgery to save his nose and fix his lower lip, that didn't stop him from competing full bore the next day, albeit he was sporting 50 stitches and looked like Frankenstein.

Three years ago, Darren decided it was time to come home, build a lumberjack park on Barrington River, and provide experiences to visitors and local of all ages. It didn't take long to garner some attention. In fact, the star of the CBC Rick Mercer Show saw a clip of Darren on the national news one night and thought "Hey, I would like to do that!" Then he said, "Hey, I have my own show. I can do that!" The filming was hilarious and was a big boost to the business.

Coming into his fourth season, people can come to the park to learn about (and do) various activities related to being a

lumberjack. Kids can sign up for weekly camps where they also canoe, kayak and learn camp skills. Darren and his partner Suzy Atwood run a men's and women's axe-throwing league as well as a Monday drop-in "keeners" night.

In his spare time the outdoorsman is setting up the Canadian Axe Throwing Association, which he hopes will streamline the sport and create more opportunities. Ultimately, his goal is to see this sport as part of the Olympics.

"Why not?" muses the 38 year-old. "Targets can now be reproduced, axes standardized, and distances can be regulated. There is potential to grow this sport to the highest level," he says with a grin. "Everything's in motion."

If you look deep into his eyes, you know he's not kidding. That look is the same determined look his uncle Phil had, who said before going into a world competition: "I'd

rather die out there than lose."

Darren also has plans to stage events to make (or break) Guinness World Records in the realm of lumberjack events. And don't be surprised if he shows up log rolling on the Rideau Canal in Ottawa – or throwing his axe on Parliament Hill!

Watch out world. This lumberjack is on the move.

For more information, go to www.wildaxe.com