

IS HARD PHYSICAL WORK A GOOD BODYBUILDING MEDIUM?

BY TERRY TODD

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Terry Todd and Peary Rader at the 1988 Association of Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen Award Dinner at which Peary and his wife, Mabel Rader, were honored for their myriad contributions to the Iron Game. Terry gave the presentation speech for his good friends.

Preface: One of the attractions of country living for both Terry and me was that it provided opportunities to get exercise without having to go to the gym. Although we always trained with weights during our 44 years of marriage, we also enjoyed outdoor work of various kinds and often “took workouts” by gardening, cutting down trees, moving rocks, and other strenuous tasks. The story about the hay in this article happened in Austin, Texas, when Terry was just 20. The tree-cutting party was in Macon, Georgia, in 1974. In a very Tom Sawyer-like move, Terry invited some Mercer students to come out to the Millhouse and help him fell a white oak tree and to turn it into wooden shingles using only primitive tools. The shingles were to go on an 1812 log cabin he intended to reconstruct on our property. When he was offered the chance to move to Nova Scotia and teach at Dalhousie University, one of his greatest regrets was leaving behind the still unfinished cabin and the large pile of shingles we’d created by that time.

~ Jan Todd



EDITOR'S NOTE

by Peary Rader, Editor of *Iron Man*

This article will bring back memories to the older men as well as to some of you younger fellows who have been “through the mill” so to speak. In fact, we have recently received numerous letters from fellows who have found it necessary to do hard physical labor for a living because no other work was available and it is sometimes a bit of a shocker until you get used to it. We have several articles coming up on “workouts for the working man” for fellows who have to work at physical labor and still want to train.

I well recall my own youth when I had to work at this type of labor and how my fellow workers almost con-

tinuously “put me to the test” and I could tell you a lot of stories about it. I also well recall while working on the railroad how the bosses, knowing that I was a weightlifter, always came for me when they had some heavy work or heavy lifting to do. They used to have me work in the wheel plant, where car wheels weighing up to 850 lbs., had to be lifted and rolled into the wheel plant where they were machined and fitted to the axels. It took a lot of power to lift one of these and then balance it while you rolled it about half a block to where it was used. I would first unload a carload of these and stack them, then as they were needed I would roll them into the wheel house. There was a great deal of other heavy lifting that I was called on to do, and while I felt just a little “used” by this policy, it was also quite a thrill to be able to do this

work which no one else could perform. I never felt better and tougher in my life. I'm sure that many of our readers could relate interesting experiences of a similar nature. Just remember, hard work can be an asset sometimes to lifters and bodybuilders.) —P.R.

Almost everyone who has ever trained with barbells long enough to have any sort of a reputation as a weight man has found himself in a situation where he was either asked or challenged to do some hard, heavy work and “prove” how good weight training really was. Sometimes these situations have happy endings; sometimes sad ones. I have heard more stories than I care to remember about lifters or bodybuilders (especially bodybuilders) who, when confronted with some heavy work, either refused the challenge or failed to meet it. Bodybuilders are more vulnerable because their muscles are “showier” than those of the average lifter, and because they are often better at displaying these muscles. And many average working men, who feel threatened by the display of muscle size, are happy to see a man fail whose muscles were gained from “working out” rather than “working.”

I clearly recall the first time I received a challenge of this sort. It came from an uncle who had a cattle ranch, and who was himself a vigorous, powerful man. He had just cut several fields of hay, and the bales lay by the hundreds under the normally cloudless Texas sky. But



Terry and his brother-in-law, Frank Ray, sharpen the cross-cut saw before beginning the ambitious task of using only nineteenth century tools to take down the giant white oak tree.

a series of thunderclouds threatened rain, and my uncle called for help to stack away the hay in barns and sheds and save it from rotting and I went, knowing that the work would last on into the night as we raced to beat the rains. I had then been training about a year and a half and had gained about 35 pounds, and both my training and my gaining had been the subject of considerable family ribbing. And so it was with a good deal of genuine apprehension that I drove through the ranch gates that day and on down to the first field where the loading had just begun.

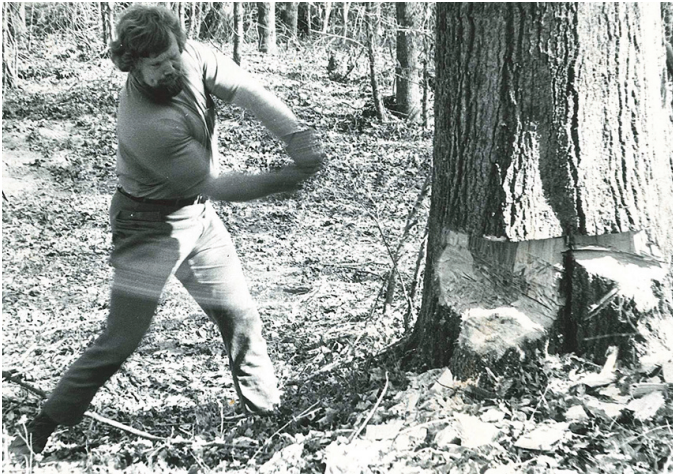
My uncle waved me over, pointed first to the hay and then to the thunderheads handed me a hay hook and said, “OK muscle man, let’s see what you can do with this hay.”

Well, we worked till it was “slap dark” as they say, and then we worked on by the truck headlights, sprinting against the rain. We’d load the truckbed, rush to a barn, stack the hay, then rush again to the field and load some more. My grandfather drove, and my uncle and I handled the hay. These particular fields were planted in alfalfa and so the bales were in the 60-80-pound range and were bound with metal wire.

As I worked beside my powerful and work-hardened uncle, I could sense that he was testing me by the pace he set. We ran from bale to bale,



I can’t recall all the last names but the work party consisted of: Frank Ray, Gene and Ernie, Terry and Jan Todd, Mike Gengler and Mary Betz (standing), Roger, Richard, and Mickey Parker standing behind the tree, and Timothy Ray, our nephew, holding the axe. Bob Goodwin took the photo.



Felling the big white oak began with axework. Although Terry was skilled in using an axe, he had all the students also give it a try. They found it hard work, and by the end of the afternoon there was considerable moaning.

tossing them into the truck and throwing them far over our heads again and again as we filled the dusty barn and sheds. And it seemed that as we worked, the pace increased, as we drove ourselves to save the hay and I began to be aware that there were more races than one being run that evening. My uncle was 42—I was 20. He weighed 185 pounds—I, 220. And he had come to the fullness of his strength by hard, lifelong work, while I had attained the most of mine in a gymnasium.

So the classic confrontations of age vs. youth; small vs. large, and “natural” vs. “manufactured” were all being played out in that rain-threatened Texas hayfield. He was in the high prime of his masculine power, but he knew it would soon begin to fade, whereas I had only begun to be aware of my own physical potential. He was rock hard and thickly compact at 5’8” while I was somewhat soft yet, not fully filled out, though I towered over him at 6’2½”.

And so we strove against the clouds while it was light, against the raincool wind after nightfall, and all the while against one another. Our hands began to cramp, and lock around the hayhooks; and our backs and arms began to stiffen in the chill wind, but we drove one another on. And then the rains came, sprinkles at first and then great drops, and we worked the last hour in a thunderstorm, and flashes of lightning illuminated the dwindling bales as we stacked our final loads.

And when at last I handed the final one of the 2000 bales to my uncle, he hooked it, boosted it on his knee, stacked it, and then turned to me as the rain rang on

the tin roof of the barn and softly said, “Thank you, son. You’re much of a man.” That night, more than any other, served as my *rite de passage*, my rite of passage, into manhood. Young Highlander Scots became men by being able to place the *clach cuid fir* (manhood stones) on a waist-high fence, adolescent Zulu warriors were expected to kill a grown lion, but I left boyhood behind forever that



Terry is using a cant hook—a tool to move logs. It consists of a sturdy wooden handle that works like a lever, with a movable iron hook that is snugged into the log to hold it in place. He’s trying to roll the log over so it can be cut with the crosscut saw from the other side.

evening as my uncle and I fought the storm and each other on that Texas hayfield.

Since that time, I have had countless occasions to use my strength on, and develop my strength with, other things besides barbells and dumbbells. I live in the country and have quite a few acres, so there are chores of all sorts which are made easier by the strength I built and



After the tree had been felled, Mercer student Bob Goodwin helped Terry use a crosscut saw to cut the tree into lengths suitable for making shingles and firewood.



Terry and Bob Goodwin work together to split some of the white oak logs into chunks suitable for shingle-making using a hickory maul and an axe as the wedge.

maintain with weights.

Lately, I and some students of mine have been making roof boards (shingles) to go on a big log house that we're working on. We decided to do the work the old way—that is, we decided to cut the big white oaks down with axes and a two-man 'gator tail (cross-cut saw), section them into two foot "rounds" with the crosscut, roll them with cant hooks, split them with hickory mauls and dogwood wedges, and "rive" the shingles with a locust wood mallet and a froe. At the turn of the century virtually all homes in North America were roofed with shingles and all shingles were split or "rived" by hand. We decided to do it this way for two reasons. For one thing, nothing we could read could ever "teach" us as well about how hard our ancestors worked; and for another, we decided that the exercise would do us good. None of my students had ever used a 'gator tail, or a cant hook, or a maul, not to mention a froe, and very few of them had even used an axe in a serious way. But when we tackled those big white oaks, everybody got all the exercise he wanted and then some. The accompanying photographs only hint at the nature of the task we set for ourselves when we decided to turn a 100-year-old white oak into shingles.

Almost all 'gator tails (crosscut saws) you see are in the five to six foot range, although 18 footers are available to cut the truly immense trees (firs, sequoia, redwood, cypress, oak, poplar, etc.) Sawing is really wonderful work for the shoulders, upper back, arms, forearms, and hands. It's a good combination of resistance and repetitions, guaranteed to give a deep and thorough pump.

Handling an axe is also a complete upper body exercise, one which works all the muscles involved in sawing, and several more besides, such as the muscles of the waist and sides.

Work with a cant hook is the "deadlift" of lumberjacking. A big cant hook will weigh 12-20 pounds, but with it you can roll a 4000-pound log that five men couldn't budge. It gives you leg, hip, and lower back work, as well as some work on the upper body.

And now a word about the maul. Anyone who has ever used a 20-pound maul and has seen the force with which it drives home a wedge, can truly appreciate the word "mauled" (as in "Yankees maul Red Sox"). In the old days, iron was so expensive that people made their own sledgehammers out of hardwood and called them mauls. And they made their wedges out of even harder wood and called them gluts. The way a log was split was to place an axehead along the grain, drive it in with the maul, and then place the longer and wider wooden glut into the split opened by the axehead, and then drive the glut into the log with the hardwood maul.

We've made our mauls out of hickory and locust, our gluts from locust and dogwood. An afternoon spent swinging a twenty-pound hickory maul is an afternoon long to be remembered. Everything is worked, if the maul is swung properly, especially the upper body. During our work on the trees, which took a month, I didn't touch a weight, but my arms, particularly my forearms, increased in size. And all of my students reported feeling larger and stronger from all the work. Hard as it was, most of us felt sad when we were through.

Now of course most of you will never have the occasion to get in the hay or to fell a huge tree and section it up with axes, saws and mauls, but all of you will have opportunities, even challenges, to do some "real" work. When this happens, accept the challenge. No better way to prove the value of progressive resistance exercise exists than being able to outwork someone doing a hard and heavy job. And while you're promoting the iron game, chances are you'll be adding to your own size and strength by working your body in a vigorous but unusual way. So when all this is added to the simple joy you'll get from a job well done, those who refuse a challenge of hard work by saying, "It would upset my routine," or "I'm not due to work out til tomorrow," or "I might get an injury," don't seem to be helping anything or anyone, especially themselves. As the good book says, "Whatsoever cometh to thy hand to do, do it with all thy might."