# Laying Out and Building a Log Cabin

Oliver Kemp, 1908

Selected pages from Wilderness Homes.

Follow the illustrated construction of a cabin from squaring the sills to notching, fitting and raising wall logs.

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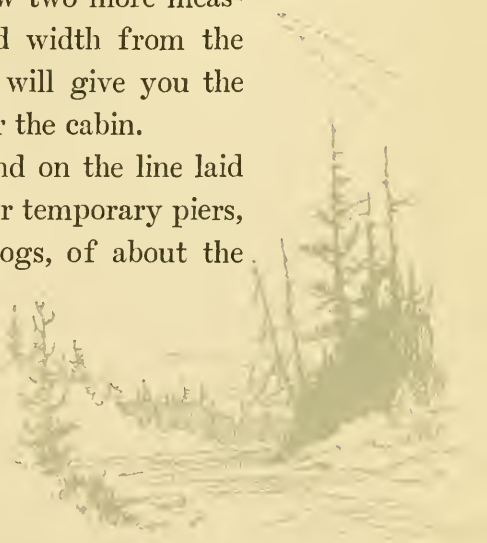
## CHAPTER IV

### BUILDING THE CABIN

CUT four stakes. Now, when you have decided upon the exact position you wish your building to occupy, drive one of the stakes at a corner. Measure the width of the building and drive another stake, and stretch a cord between the two. Then at a point as nearly as you can judge at right angles to this, measure off the length of the cabin and set the third stake. Now two more measurements of length and width from the first and last stakes set will give you the approximate position for the cabin.

Inside these stakes, and on the line laid down, you will build four temporary piers, either of stones or of logs, of about the





height you desire the building above the ground, remembering that the floor will be six to eight inches higher.

Put your sills together on top of these supports, and begin to level them. For this purpose you will require a straightedge about twenty feet long. Make it by nailing a couple of boards together that are about six inches wide, and long enough, of course, to give the desired length. Rest the straightedge upon the two parallel sills, and be very sure to place your level *on the center* of the straightedge, for this will sag some, and the sills may then be blocked up until they are level.

The sills are now to be set square. To do this, snap a chalkline down the center of two adjoining logs. From the corner measure six feet on one log and eight feet on the log at right angles. Then, with a ten-foot pole laid across to these points, push or pull the logs until the two ends of



An Expert at Log Cabin Building Can Make a Joint of the Logs that is Almost Perfect.

the pole exactly touch the six- and eight-foot points. Your building will be square, and the sills should be spiked together. Try the level once more.

Lay the foundation on a firm basis. You will probably have to go below the loam or upper crust of earth to the hard gravel beneath. Secure flat rocks, if possible, and if your piers (which should be every four feet) are built of them, be absolutely sure that each rock rests firmly and with no "teetering" on those beneath. Break the joints carefully. "If a rock doesn't fit, turn it over," is an adage of the stonelayer. It will usually be the solution.

Perhaps wooden posts would be better. These will last much longer if their ends rest upon a rock. But bear this in mind, a rock in contact with the earth will sweat and the moisture would in time rot the posts. This is easily avoided by using *two* rocks, one on top of the other. The upper

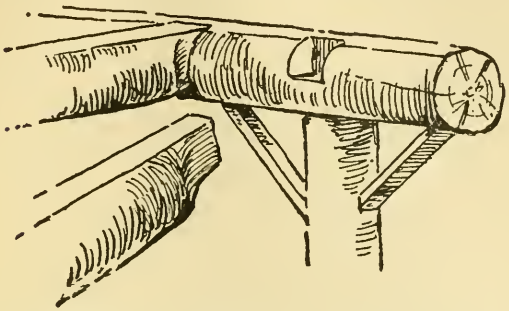
rock will never sweat. Cedar posts are best, though other soft woods, as pine, hemlock, etc., will do; the hard woods are not so durable. Treating posts to a good application of creosote will add much to their life.

When the supports are all fitted and in place they should be braced by two pieces running from the posts to the bottom of the sills. The temporary piers may be taken away when a sufficient number of the permanent piers are in place.

Divide the length of the cabin as nearly as possible into spaces of about eighteen inches and mark off these divisions on the long sills; this gives you the position of the floor timbers.

The sills should now be notched to receive them. The notches may be two or two-and-a-half inches deep, measuring from the top of the log, and about four inches across.

The floor logs must be squared on one side, and each end cut down to fit the size of the notches in the sills. Thus you will have an absolutely level floor, in spite of

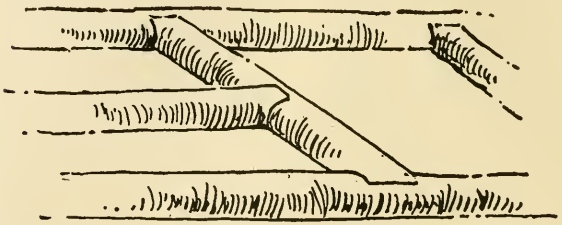


Sills Notched for the Timbers. Method of Bracing Supporting Posts.

the fact that the logs used for timbers are of varying diameters.

Now you are ready to begin on the walls. Put your first log in place and mark it for the cut for the under log, leaving at least one foot or fifteen inches of the log to project at either end outside of the building. This can best be done with a pair of com-

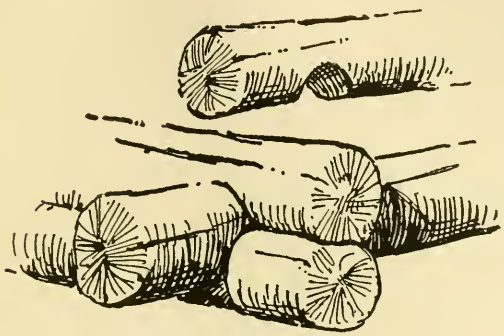
passes, set the depth of the intended cut. Holding the compasses so that one point is directly over the other, let one point rest against the side of the bottom log, the other point touching the bottom of the top log. If you now move the compasses



When an Opening in the Floor is Desired this is the Method of Handling the Timbers.

slowly over the bottom log, the upper point will mark the exact shape of the cut to be made. This should be done on two sides of the log. When the operation is completed, take the log down and turn it bottom side up to make the notch. The notch is always, of course, on the bottom to prevent the water from getting in and rotting

the log. The notch should be slightly scooped out in the center, so that the outer edges may be brought to a joint. The log is now put in place and, if it fits properly, may be fastened to the under log by a spike driven through the corner.



On a long reach on the sides of a larger building (eighteen feet or more) the logs should be fastened together by an additional iron pin, driven through about the center of the logs.

It will often happen that the poles are not straight; you may force the bend out

of the log by means of the cant-dog. Therefore, if the upper log is to be pulled in, set the hook in the upper log, with the point resting on the lower one. Now pull on the lever and the log will be forced into place. Then drive your iron pin.

These iron pins may be had of any blacksmith, and consist of lengths of half-inch rod, sharpened at one end.

If your logs are six inches at their largest diameter, pins of ten inches in length will be about right.

The logs should be laid alternating butts and ends, and from time to time measurements should be made to ascertain whether the four walls are going up of equal heights. If not, look through your logs and select those of larger or smaller diameters, so that the difficulty may be fairly met.

When you reach the height of the windows and doors, make two saw cuts in the




Constructed in this Manner a Considerable Amount of Time and Labor is Saved by Doing Away with the Necessity of Notching the Logs at the Corners. The Windows are Made to Slide.

last log and almost through it. This leaves an opportunity for the further sawing when the time comes. It would be disastrous to make the openings now, for the corners of the building would be left entirely unsupported.

You will have found it no easy task to raise the heavy logs into position; as the walls rise, the difficulty increases. You will need skids on which to roll the logs up, and these are merely two logs laid from the ground to the top log. Lay the new log at the foot of these. On the upper log of the cabin fasten a rope opposite each skid. Carry the ropes down and around the ends of the log to be raised and back again to the top log. The log may now be easily drawn up by means of the ropes.