



In it for the Lo[n]g Haul

“Normal” Haul Distances

When looking at a timberland investment, potential buyers look for wood-consuming mills that might buy timber harvested off that property. Under most conditions, those mills are within 100 road miles (160 km) of the timberland.

At Forisk Consulting in Athens, GA, they assume most of the timber consumed by a mill comes from within a 50-mile (80 km) radius circle around the mill. Because roads don't run straight from the rim of that circle directly to the mills, the haul from the edge of the 50-mile circle is more likely 75-100 miles by road.

Joseph Conrad at the Warnell School of Forestry at the University of Georgia found the average haul distance for 18 log truck fleets in Georgia was 56 miles (90 km).

“Normal Maximum” Haul Distances

Somewhere in the Forest Research Group files is a paper written in the early 1990s that says 125 miles (200 km) is the “normal maximum” haul distance in Maine. Forisk's maximum assumes a 100-mile circle (and somewhat longer road distance). Conrad found a maximum haul distance of about 185 miles (~300 km)—though most maximum haul distances were shorter.



Longer Log Hauls

Unusual circumstances can result in longer haul distances. A frequent sight in the Northeast is a Canada-based truck that has delivered a load of lumber to markets in the US and is now hauling logs back to the mill in Canada. A good indicator that these are Canadian trucks is that they are carrying logs on a flatbed trailer, not a log trailer. A grad school classmate from Pennsylvania told me he often saw Canadian trucks picking up logs in the woods there. This creates a loaded backhaul for the lumber truck and avoids sending an empty log truck to the woods.

Here are three examples of longer log hauls:

Southern Maine to New Brunswick

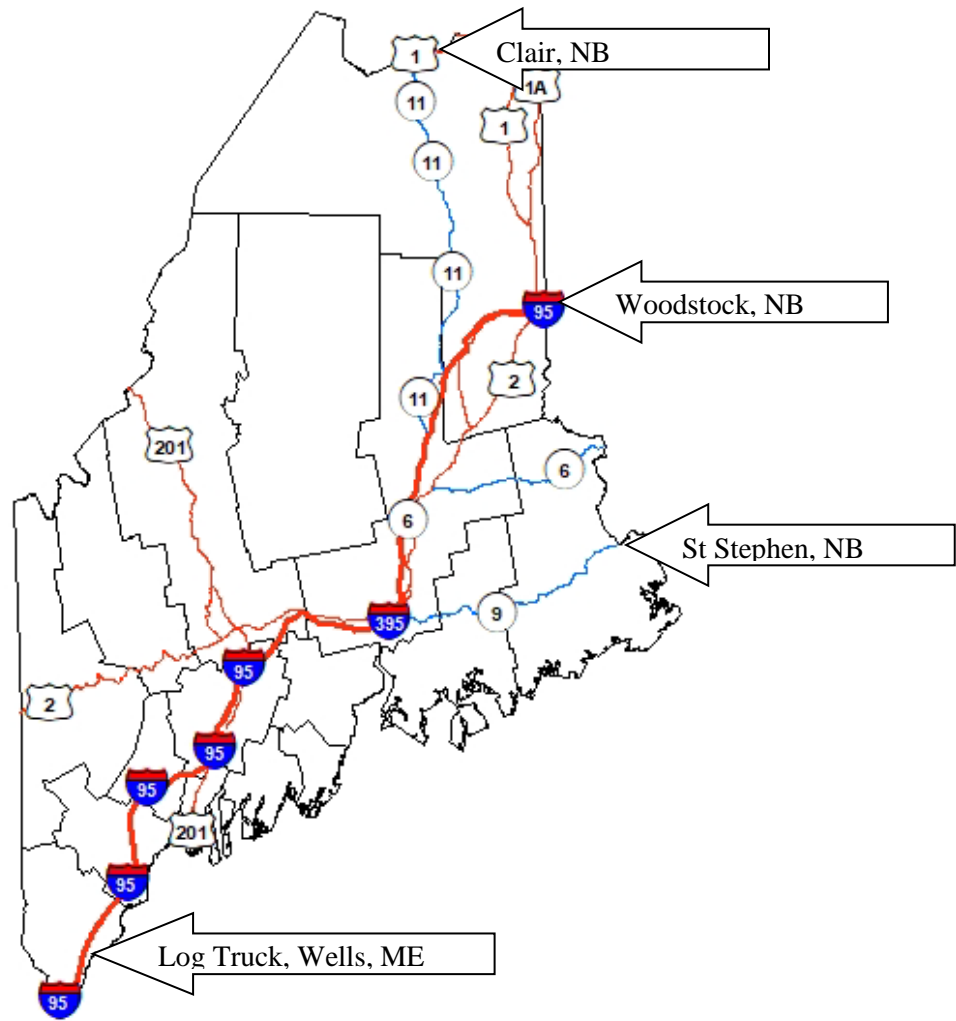
The first example of a long log haul is from southern Maine in 2013. Figure 1 shows a flatbed trailer loaded with logs approaching the Wells/Sanford exit (Exit 19) on the Maine Turnpike (I-95) and the routes it might take from here. This, as the exit number indicates, is 19 miles (~30 km) from the New Hampshire border. While we cannot be certain where this truck was going, it is far more likely it was headed for New Brunswick rather than Quebec because if it was going to a mill Quebec, it would have gone north through New Hampshire.

From this point, there are three likely routes for this truck:

- 260 miles (420 km) to St Stephen, NB
- 290 miles (465 km) to Woodstock, NB
- 350 miles (560 km) to Fort Kent, ME

And all this driving just gets the truck to an international border crossing—it must travel still further to get to a mill.

Figure 1. Truck Hauling Logs in Southern Maine, Heading for New Brunswick

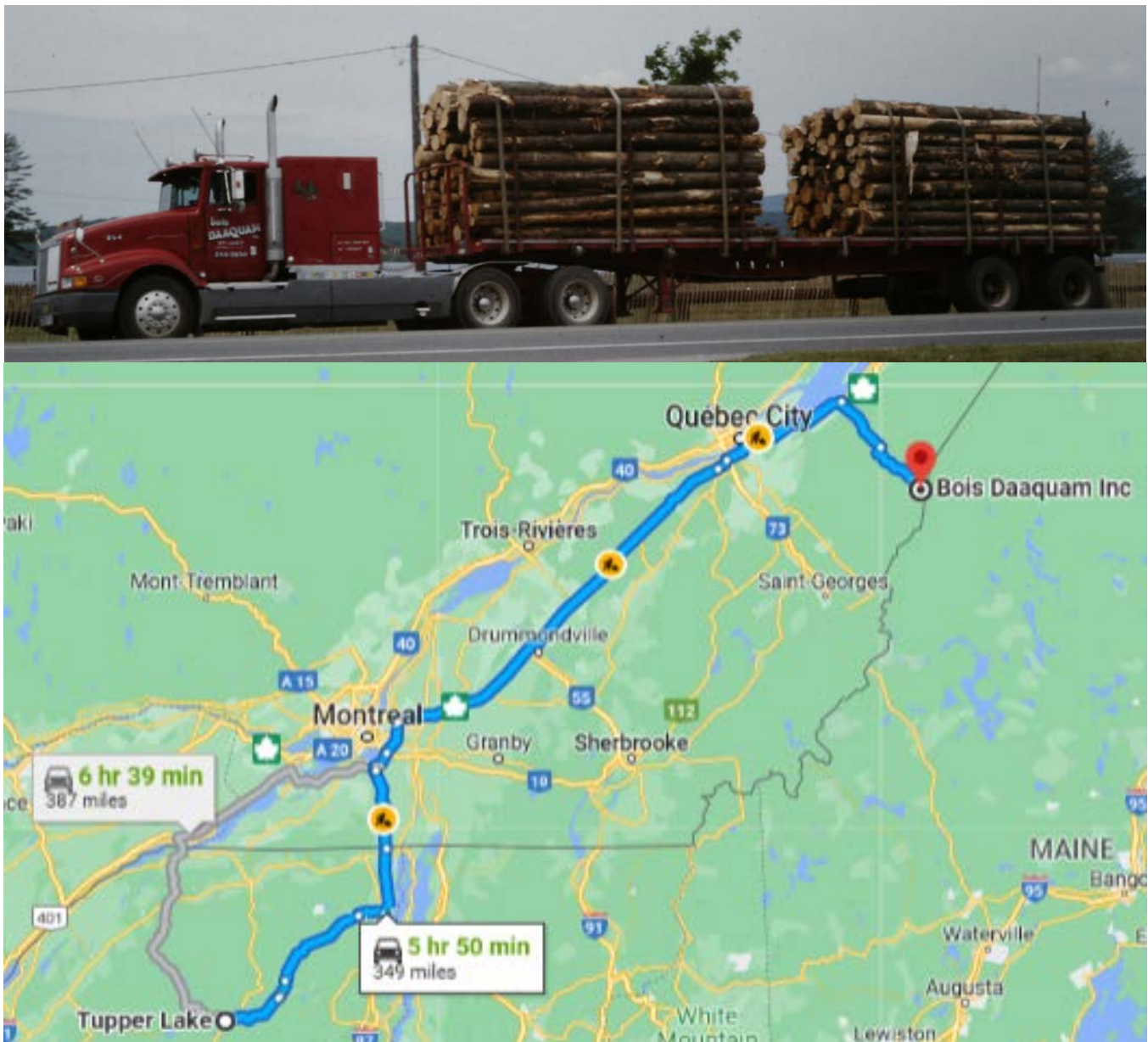


The Adirondacks to Quebec

The second example is of sawlogs being hauled from Tupper Lake to Quebec in the summer of 1993. Figure 2 shows a flatbed truck in Tupper Lake. The sign on the truck door says it is from the Bois Daaquam sawmill in Saint-Just-de-Bretenières, QC which is on border with Maine, southeast of Quebec City.

This driver is looking at a 350-mile (563 km) trip back to the mill. (We don't know all the roads into Tupper Lake, but we drove in on one and out on another. The steep grades and sharp turns made both roads exciting in a car and would likely be *very* exciting in a fully loaded truck.)

Figure 2. Truck Hauling Logs in Tupper Lake, NY



Eastern Maine to Deferiet, NY

The third example is a story we were told of pulpwood being transported from eastern Maine to Champion International’s pulp mill in Deferiet, NY in the late 1980s (Figure 3). Snow conditions in the Adirondacks that winter restricted logging in that region, so Champion shipped pulpwood from its timberlands in Washington County, ME to the Deferiet mill. One complication was that Maine truckers did not want to drive all the way to Deferiet. So, the Maine trailers were unloaded at Champion’s area headquarters in Colebrook, NH and reloaded on other trailers for the remainder of

the trip. We don’t remember exactly where Champion was loading those trailers at the start of the trip, so the distance is from their woodyard in Cherryfield, ME—575 miles (925 km).

This was pulpwood! Apparently, the cost of moving that pulpwood for a few weeks was less than the cost of shutting down the mill for a few weeks. (The mill closed permanently closed in 2021.)

Figure 3. Cherryfield, ME to Deferiet, NY via Colebrook, NH



Summary

Logs are normally hauled 100 miles or less by logging trucks.

One exception is the backhauls by flatbed trucks from Canada that haul lumber from Canadian mills to markets in the US Northeast, then carry logs back to Canada. The trip from Tupper Lake, NY to St-Just, QC was 350 miles. The trip from Wells to New Brunswick may have been that long. And that truck could have picked up its logs in the middle of Pennsylvania—400-500 miles from Wells, ME.

The pulpwood example is unlikely to be repeated because the forest products industry (except the REITs) has divested itself of most of its timberland so the mills are unlikely to bring in wood from hundreds of miles away.

References

Conrad, Joseph L., 2018, Costs and Challenges of Log Truck Transportation in Georgia, USA, *Forests*, 2018(9):650-664



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