

7 FALLERS
280 YEARS OF
EXPERIENCE
0 INJURIES
7 SHARED PRACTICES



BC Forest Safety



INTRODUCTION

If we look at the incidents that have injured or killed fallers over the past 50 years, it is clear that no-one has invented new ways to injure or kill fallers. We also know there are fallers who have gone 30, 35, 40 and more years injury-free. So what kept them safe?

We asked 10 injury-free career fallers: “What are the key things you did every day as a faller that helped you to go a whole career without an injury?”

While all the fallers we spoke to were happy to share their opinions on what kept them safe, a couple of fallers -- who are still falling trees in their late 60s and early 70s -- declined to participate as they “didn’t want to jinx” their safety record while they were still working.

We found that the key practices these injury-free fallers used were all very similar, and identical in many instances. This booklet aims to share their wisdom, earned over a total of more than 280 years of injury-free falling!

We have focused on just a few of the key things raised by each of the fallers, then combined the things that were common to all the fallers to come up with their shared safe work practices on page 18.

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JIM BASSETT

He sums up his top work practices as follows:

“Focus on the work. You can have other things happening in your personal life and you have to leave them behind. Your head must be in the game and if it isn’t, walk away.”

“Have a good plan for who’s doing what and where. I always had a good plan for my own quarter, planning one tree at a time.”

“A really important thing for me was knowing I could cut the tree safely, not thinking I could cut it safely.”

“Walk away if the weather or anything else is off. Refuse unsafe work. Know you can always go back tomorrow.”

“Being physically fit and mentally prepared every day, getting a good night’s sleep really helps.”

“Loving your work and having a partner you enjoy working with.”

“20 years into my falling career, I decided I needed a change. I thought I would see if I could get a job as a Bullbucker. A few days after the interview, I was told I made the short list. The job was between me and one other applicant. I went to work the next day but all I could think about was how or if my life would change. After a couple of hours, I decided that I could not focus properly on falling, so I went home for the day. I will never know if that decision to go home saved me from incident or injury, but I think it was the right decision at the time.”



MORE THAN
37
YEARS

**Jim Bassett went
more than 37 years
injury-free as a faller.**





RAY “SMOOTHY” STORMO

He sums up his top work practices as follows:

“Learn the basics right. Don’t take any short cuts. Your undercut must be done well and always stand on the top side and get your lean right.”

“Plan ahead and plan your exit trail for every tree. Say to yourself, this is how I am going to get out, and be moving. Never be caught standing still! Never stay at the stump. If something goes wrong it won’t matter because you won’t be in the bite.”

“Work one tree at a time. Work the low point first. The lowest trees have to go first so there is no brushing, you can learn to put in an undercut and backcut but you have to know how to work your face. When you buck, always cut low-side first then finish cut from high-side.”

“Stay focused; don’t get lackadaisical if something is on your mind, put your saw down. Recognize you are having an off day and come back tomorrow.”

“Be well rested, don’t get lazy and find a partner you work with well.”

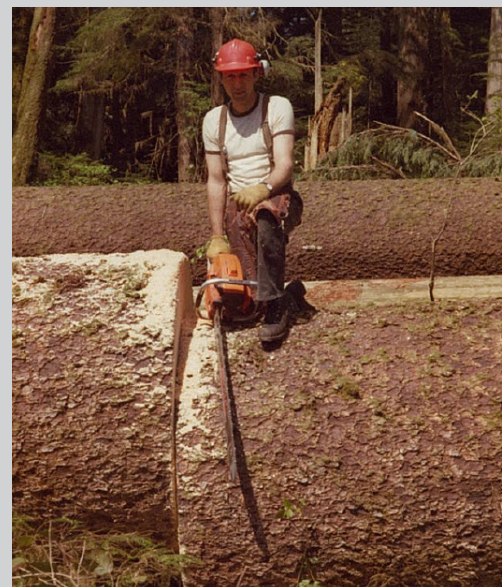
“Your saw must be sharp and cutting straight, it is almost impossible to line up your cuts and get your trees to go where you want them if your saw is not cutting straight.”

“Being able to buck left and right handed kept me safe. One day, I was bucking a moss-covered cedar windfall about six feet. It looked like it was laying flat in swampy ground and had been there for 50-70 years, with hemlocks growing from it. After I felled the hemlocks off it, I bucked the root off then went to the first cut, cutting the lower side from half way down, then on top, cutting the top side all around to about one quarter way down on the other side. Moving to the other side I cut the lower side, leaving about three feet of wood holding from top cut to bottom cut. As I started to cut the holding wood, a slab from the butt side came down, weighing more than a 1000 pounds! If I hadn’t been standing on the side toward the top, bucking left handed, I’d be done. Always buck left and right handed according to the safe side. Like me you can’t always tell (because of the moss and crap on the windfall) if it is as stable as it looks, but you can always choose to be on the safe side if you can buck and fall with both right and left hands.”



40
YEARS

**Ray “Smoothy” Stormo
spent 40 years
falling injury-free.**





CHARLES COWPAR

He sums up his top work practices as follows:

“Heads up always!”

“Plan ahead at least one hour!”

“Always have Plan B!”

“Keep work gear in top shape!”

“No working under the influence!”

“Stay focused!”

“Love your Job!”

“Evaluate your patch every day as you walk to and from your face noting hazards and timber lean. Also note ground debris and wind-falls (buck accordingly). Keep your eyes on falling trees and anything they may brush or jar loose from impact (snags, etc.)! Never turn your back to your face. When filing or gassing up, expect the unexpected, more so on windy days! Also keep your third eye on your partner and all machinery in your workspace. Your choice, your LIFE!”



MORE THAN
50
YEARS

**Charles Cowpar is still
falling and has gone
more than 50 years
injury-free.**





DON ZAPP

He says the number one factor that kept him safe was Safety First!

“Always start your day well rested and alert. A good night’s sleep is so important. You cannot function properly without it.”

“Pack a hardy lunch and make sure you have plenty of water to rehydrate.”

“If you are having personal problems at home, your mind may not be on the job. Take some time off. Remember there is help out there. Falling is not only physical, it is also mental.”

“Always work with your partner as a team. If you have a difficult partner, ask for a new partner. It is best for all concerned.”

“Always have a plan with your partner before you start your day. Radio contact throughout the day is important. Have lunch together and talk about the morning.”

“Never be embarrassed to ask for assistance from your partner. With a difficult tree it is always a good idea to have a second opinion. This doesn’t mean you are incompetent. It makes you cautious and safe.”

“Always stay in your comfort zone. Always know your limitations and stick to them. Never be harassed into falling someone else’s hang ups, especially when purposely left. Only continue when you have all the information, and it is safe, e.g. when a tree is not safe to be felled, maybe the best alternative is to blast.”

“When it is too windy to fall safely, always ask to be moved to an area that is safe, or call it a day. Again, never be harassed to fall when you feel it is unsafe. Tomorrow is another day.”

“If you remember the #1 rule of Safety First and always take your time to assess your day, it will go well. Know what good falling practices are and do them. I watched fallers for a long time before I started and I knew what a good faller looked like and what a bad faller looked like. When I saw fallers injured that really bothered me, so I wanted to be a good, safe faller.”



Don Zapp went
35 years injury-free
as a faller.

35
YEARS





GREG CLAYTON

His top safe work practices include:

“Avoid brushing timber at all cost. If you don’t brush timber, nothing is coming back at you.”

“Be prepared, have an exit and a backup exit trail. Always be in motion and never run blind, keep your eye on the tree when using your getaway trail.”

“Always do a 360 degree assessment of the tree you are going to fall.”

“Good training is key. I worked as a scaler for six months, scaling four fallers twice a day. I got to see the good fallers as well as the ones you would not want to be like. I had excellent training, the person who trained me is still falling today, he has been doing it for more than 50 years and has not had an accident.”

“Zone in on the job every day, do not let anything else get into your head, if you cannot, stop work and try to re-focus; if you can’t, go home; there is a lot going on in life and it can be a real challenge staying focused.”

“Have a plan for where the tree lands. ‘Aim it’ so less chance of hang-ups and brushing of timber.”

“Heads up always; after bucking check your face, it gives you a different view.”

“Be a good listener especially if someone is telling you they see something – a snag or a hang-up – that you don’t.”

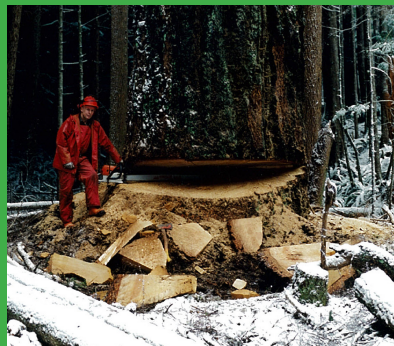
“I think the key to a successful falling career is limiting your mistakes. Over the years you learn to minimize your mistakes. One of the worst I have encountered is brushing, whether it is brushing canopies, saplings, chunks, windfalls, logs, snags or trees it is all bad. I had two brushing lessons that stood out. I will start with number two. I was falling at Gold River in 1973. I was on steep ground near the sideline. I had a heavy leaning balsam 3 feet in dia. Fairly tall. I tried to angle it downhill towards sideline, and in the process I brushed a large green hemlock 125 feet away. I watched it go by the hemlock bending it away from me. To my surprise when it rebounded back it kept coming. It broke off about 30 feet up, “punko on the far side” coming straight for me. My trail away from the stump at an angle back was not an

option. I was not sure how far past the stump the tree would reach. My new route was at a right angle from the stump trying to avoid the width of the top. I was 30 feet away from stump when the top of the tree hit the stump reaching 20 feet beyond. While running I thought the top might side wind a sapling at me. It is a good thing I was watching the tree I had just felled.

“Another time I was falling at Head Bay in 1969, in about three feet of snow, flat ground. I had to fall a large buckskin spruce 7 feet dia. 140 feet tall fairly sound, not many limbs. In my fall line were a group of three hemlock saplings 8 or 9 inches in dia. I elected to fall the spruce snag towards the saplings to save time and energy walking on spruce instead of deep snow. I fell the spruce on the saplings and walked back away from stump on an angle. Ho Hum. To my surprise when I walked back to pick my saw up, there was 6 foot sapling top sticking in the snow about 10 feet behind the stump. My scaler bullbucker was coming in at the time. We had a good discussion about the incident, shortcut or mistake.”

Greg Clayton went 42 years injury-free as a faller.

42
YEARS





GARRY CLARK

His top safe work practices include:

“Stay in shape.”

“While falling and bucking, be 100% on your game all the time. Turn off things that might be on your mind on the home front.”

“Think things over before you start cutting. Develop a good plan for each situation and never be too proud to blast a dangerous situation.”

“I have always felt you had to be on your game at all times in falling. To be able to recognize hazards, and how to deal with them safely. There were so many overhead hazards to watch for, and also bucking. Plus good planning in how to fall a quarter safely. You weren't just looking out for yourself. You were looking out for your falling partner also. Having the face ready for him, when he was ready to come back towards you. Telling your partner of any hazards you may have seen coming up.

“And never being too proud, to get your partner over for a second opinion. And always keeping your cool, no matter how dangerous something may be. Use your head and plan a safe remedy to whatever comes along. For myself, I loved falling every day of my forty four years out there.”



44
YEARS

**Garry Clark went more
than 44 years injury-
free as a faller.**





BILL GALLOWAY

His tips include:

“Good tools make the job easier and safer.”

“New saws are coming out all the time so do not be afraid of change.”

“Proper maintenance of bars and chains is critical.”

“Keep your hearing protection in good condition or hearing loss will get you later in life.”

“There is nothing worse than working with a worn out bar and chain. Always make sure you turn your bar over each day and clean the rails and oil holes. Learn all you can about filing a chain it can make the world of difference. If you dust or rock your chain stop and file it instead of trying to “make it work”. I have tried to “make it work” and all I did was get frustrated and upset with the results. When you are frustrated and upset you make poor decisions and we all know what can come of that.

“At least once a week take the time to tighten all the bolts and make sure your chain brake and throttle lock are working. Oh yeah, you should clean your filter each day.

“I always wanted to be a faller and do it well. I watched a lot of fallers as a kid and saw who was good, who wasn’t and who I wanted to be like. When you do a good job you are safer too.”



Bill Galloway
spent 32 injury-free
years falling.

32
YEARS



We reviewed the interview notes and discussions that we had had with all the fallers. They said these are the things they all did that kept them safe and injury-free.

We all know these things and how to do them, but these fallers did them consistently each and every day:

- 1 Stay focused, head in the game. If anything is off, stop and walk away**
- 2 Plan well; site assessment, tree by tree**
- 3 Always keep your eye on the tree; have a getaway trail; and a Plan B**
- 4 Learn the basics and learn them well**
- 5 Only use good equipment; sharp chain, no worn out bars**
- 6 Ask for a second opinion; use machine assist or blast**
- 7 Be fit for work; well rested, clear mind, sober, good nutrition and hydration**

To order a poster of the best work practices these fallers used to keep them safe (above), please go here:
www.bcforestsafesafe.org

Disclaimer: Please note that as the photos included in this booklet are historical ones, the PPE worn (or lack of PPE) in the photos is not to current regulatory standards and should not be followed.

Got feedback on the booklet and poster?
We'd like to hear from you. Email: **falling@bcforestsafesafe.org**.



FINAL OBSERVATION FROM PETER SPROUT:

I hope this booklet helps all fallers realize it is possible to go injury-free for their entire career in one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. The safe work practices mentioned are not new and I would guess most or all of us would agree with what they are saying. I would also suggest that most or all of us actually use the safety practices mentioned. So if we do not disagree and we also use them, then why is it more fallers do not go injury free for their entire careers? For what it is worth I think the difference is that the fallers in this booklet followed their core beliefs every day and if they couldn't, they reassessed their work plan and made adjustments, took a break to re-focus or stopped work and went home for the day. How many of us, myself included, can say we did that? In our industry it takes a lot of discipline to not bend the rules. On more than one occasion I continued to fall when there were other things on my mind or I was in an upset condition. I now know that had I stopped and taken the time to reassess or cool down, I would have eliminated a lot of the close calls and one injury.

You can convince me one or maybe even two fallers can go 35 plus years without an incident by being lucky. You cannot convince me seven fallers can go more the 280 years incident-free based on luck. As fallers we know luck does play a part in this but as the old saying goes "you have to be good to be lucky". Always follow the practices listed in this booklet every day and if you cannot, stop and re-evaluate your plan, take time to re-focus or go home for the day.

Thank you

We thank all the fallers and their families for their generosity in taking the time to share their experience, expertise and knowledge. They spent many hours helping us in the hope that this booklet would help make a difference for those who continue to fall and buck trees. So while the words are brief, they are also very powerful. They come from people who managed to fall and buck trees their entire career without an incident and we should listen to what they have to say.

We hope that their practices will help many more fallers have an injury-free falling career, because all fallers deserve to go home safe at the end of the day.

Peter Sprout, Falling Program Manager, BC Forest Safety Council,
Retired October 2016

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