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The Start on the Trapping Trail

As has been stated earlier, the little town of Mercer is on the Turtle chain of waters. It is a journey of about twenty-five miles from the Northwestern Railroad at this point to the head of the water shed, the voyage being over some pretty rapids in the river, and across some pretty lakes. The Bucks' summer place is on the narrows which practically divide Turtle Lake into two bodies of water, and at this place we were advised that the trappers had their main camp, which consisted of a big wall tent, fitted up with a cook stove and supplies. It was our intention to make this main camp on the first night out, this being easy to do, since the distance by land trail was only about fifteen miles. We took the morning down train from Mercer to Manitowish, a distance of about three miles, and left the latter point a little after noon of a lovely winter day. A good logging road made us easy going for about five miles more, during which time we crossed the trapping line run by "old man" Buck, who had a number of sets for lynx and one for otter, but of course we did not stop to run any of his traps for him. After leaving the logging road we struck out across the lake known as Circle Lily, then a glittering plain of blinding white. Here we made good time, although Fay, Buck and I had to wait for Brandis and Norris.

Fur Sign and Trapper Talk

We arrived at the further side of Circle Lily Lake about the middle of the afternoon, or rather, Fay and I did, and we could then see Norris and Brandis well out from the shore on their way across. Between this lake and the first one of the Turtle chain there lies a low, swampy bit of ground about three miles or so across, heavily covered with thickets, timber and windfalls, offering hard traveling and good rapping at the same time.

"We have a number of traps set in this swamp," said Fay, "and I should think we ought to have something. Do you see the marten tracks? They

often hop along and follow a trail quite a way, sometimes until they find a trap. A fox will not follow a trail that way so much, but will parallel it. I have seen their tracks where they have been going along that way, and all at once I would see where old Mr. Fox had smelled something wrong, or got a notion in his head it wasn't all right, and had made a big jump and lit out clean away from the trail as tight as he could go. A fox is about the hardest animal we have to catch, though we do catch them right along.

"Now, a lynx is not a very hard animal to trap. Sometimes a lynx is the biggest sort of a fool. He won't try to spring a trap, or to run away from it, but will go right into it. He will follow along a trail for half a mile or so perhaps, and as we always want an animal to do that we sometimes use a drop or two of scent now and then, and we put scent on the bait. Fish oil is a good scent, or fish oil and beaver castor, or fish oil and parts of female animals. We don't rely on the scent altogether and have no secrets about it, but we use it sometimes. A lynx will follow a long way on the trail of scent, and it seems to be full of curiosity. Now, if you wanted to put out a sign over a trap to frighten away a fox, you would hang a red rag over it, wouldn't you? Yet I have often caught lynx by hanging a piece of red flannel over the trap. If a lynx sees a red rag hanging up that way he is about sure to go and see what it is.

"We bait all our traps with just whatever we happen to have handy, mostly pieces of rabbit. We caught some beaver not long ago, and we have used a good deal of chopped beaver for bait.

"When a man is running a line he has to have a good many pounds of bait in his pack if he is going far. I carry my bait in a rubber bag, made by sewing up one end of a rubber boot leg. This keeps it away from your other stuff, in case the warmth of your back thaws it out on the march.

In 'trappers' guide' books you see pretty pictures about how to build bark or slab houses for the bait, so that an animal is sure to get caught if he goes in. We don't do anything like that, for it's a bad plan. All our sets are just natural sets. We take advantage of natural objects only in laying our traps.

My young giant now pressed ahead over the fallen timber, up and down and around hummocks, over and under prone tree trunks and masses of up torn roots, walking with ease and swiftness, now and then striking a playful blow with the axe he carried in one hand. His pack of 60 lbs. seemed not to distress or encumber him, and he talked to me of the ways of the woods creatures as we went along. We saw plenty of sign as we got into this rough country, most of it marten sign; but at length Fay stopped, and called out:

"Hello! Here's that old lynx again." (Of course he called it "link.") "He's been through here two or 'three times before, and I believe there's more than one of them in this wind-fall."

He pointed to the tracks, near the trail where it passed through a section of massed and matted down timber, a "windfall" such as the lynx likes for a home. The big furry paws had left holes in the snow the size of horse's tracks. We followed the sign for a way, and I was following along this while Fay went ahead to look at some traps along a side trail. Soon after this Brandis and Norris overtook me, and we three started on down the trail together.

The Lynx in the Trap

Fay, who was a rapid walker and a hustler on a trail, was nearly a quarter of a mile ahead, when we heard him halloo to us, his voice at first sounding very faint and faraway. Knowing that something had turned up, we all crowded ahead as fast as we could, and at last I could distinguish his words.

"Here's your chance for your picture!" he sang out.

It was a chance, sure enough. From under the root of a fallen tree, where a few drooping boughs had aided in making a little den free from the snow, there sprang an animal as large as a setter dog, but with a flat head, close-laid ears and great thick legs and feet. In the dim light in which we first saw it in the deep woods, it looked quite black, but when we came closer, we saw the gray coat of the full furred Canada lynx — a lynx with the steel trap hanging to his forefoot, a lynx full grown and viciously angry all the way through. Our trip was not an empty one!

The lynx tried once more to loosen the clog pole, which was about 8ft. long and which was thrust into the roots of the tree, the ring of the trap chain being driven down tight on its larger end. Failing in this, he swung and whirled over the pole, spat, sniffed and clawed about, and then went back into his hole. He was a mighty mad lynx, if the usual cat signs of anger were any good.

"You get your photograph machine ready," said Brandis, after I had let the lynx chew the end of my snow-shoe pole awhile (the deep marks of his teeth are on the pole yet.) "I'm going to pull him out."

The lynx didn't want to come out at first, when Brandis pulled on the clog pole, but all at once he

let loose and came clear out into the trail at one motion, clearing a swath around with a spread foot that looked as big and ugly as a buzz saw. Then, failing to reach any of us, as Brandis crowded the end of the pole down into the deep snow, he lay flat with his ears down, his teeth showing and a most tremendous deep bass growl coming out of his mouth. It was the chance of a lifetime for a photograph, and it would have been worth a good deal to Field and Stream to print the picture of the beast as it lay there, fairly huffing with rage.

But alas! The same faking fraud of a camera which three times broke down with me out in the Yellowstone Park, and while only by a miracle did the work asked of it, chose this very moment to go wrong again. I got square in front of my lynx, at a distance of about 8ft., set the instrument, got Brandis to poke up the subject until he looked a very demon of wrath, and touched the Button! The camera did the rest. (I will say this was not an Eastman machine.) There was a faint, slow, half-way click. I knew, from former experience, what was the matter. The shutter doors, instead of passing free and letting in the light, only threw half way. They paused at just such a point that by no way possible could a ray of light get into the lens! My heart sunk, for I knew it was all over. It was not time to fix a camera, in front of a live lynx, in a dim forest, with the evening light already waning. Later the miserable fraud of a camera closed its career by tearing the film across, twenty miles from the railroad and in the middle of the trip. At great trouble and delay I sent back to Chicago for another camera and thus in the last half of my trip got some pictures after all.

But I got no picture of my lynx, and I presume I shall never have such another opportunity. Unwilling to admit the truth, I tried several times to get an exposure and once nearly lost a trouser leg by it. I was only about 6ft. from the lynx, and with my back against a cedar tree, when he made a sudden spring, tore the end of the pole out of the snow, and came at me with a circular sweep of his good foot which didn't miss my leg 6in. We surely had lively times there for a while. user leg by it.

The Lynx is Easily Killed

This lynx was finally killed by a blow over the back of the head from a snowshoe pole, and I was surprised to see how light a blow sufficed to kill it. "They all talk about the toughness of lynx and wildcat," said Fay, "but they ain't hard to kill at all, if you hit 'em over the head right. But they'll fight all right. If a trapped lynx breaks loose, it's more'n likely he'll come for you. Once last winter I was out on the line, and I had a rifle along. I only had two or three cartridges along, and shot away all but one load. Then I came to one of my traps that had a live lynx in it. I thought I'd just shoot him, so I cut away, but somehow he moved, and I hit him in the foot and cut it loose from the trap. You can bet he didn't run. He just came for me a-jumping. It happened that there was a club sticking up in the snow, such as we nearly always leave near a lynx trap, and I just grabbed it and swatted the lynx over the head with it when he jumped at me."

Such was Fay's brief version of an affair that would have been good for two columns in a New York daily, or which would have served many men for a life-long story of their own heroism. I confess that the prowess of these big cats deteriorated in my esteem from

The Well and the Weary

Fay now went on ahead to camp, which was still four or five miles away, while we repacked our worthless camera and again took up the march. To my surprise, Brandis did not stop to skin the lynx, but strapped the body on top of his pack, which must already have weighed 50 lbs. It seemed to give him not the least trouble, and again I marveled at what custom and habit will do for a man. It would be impossible for one unused to it to carry such a pack even on the best of roads.

When we emerged from the cedar swamp we came to the shore of Turtle Lake, which lay before us a great white plain, perhaps five miles across. Even then, in the distance, the figure of Fay Buck was growing shorter and dimmer in the distance, as he kept up the clipping gait which he had struck. After this distant guide we followed, the trail lying perfectly straight to the point of an island. At the edge of the lake I put on my skis, and from there on in it was like flying for me, as the snow was good. The others plodded along, clumpety-clump, Brandis silent, mechanical, tireless, long-haired, blue-eyed and picturesque. At the last two miles Norris, who had been sick not long before, began to weaken and tire very fast. We took his pack, but still he did not freshen, for the step of the web shoe is much harder than the slide of the slei, and requires more muscular effort. It was now growing bitterly cold and we felt the wind keenly out on the lake. Three-quarters of a mile from camp Norris walked to a stump on the shore of the lake, which we were skirting, and sat down. This was bad, and I knew he was about played out, so we dug down deep in Brandis's pack and got out the brandy flask, which was kept as a last resort in a case of this kind. I

gave him a Billy Hoffer drink— what the screw-top of the flask would hold. Then we persuaded him into camp, which we reached at dusk.

"The Main Camp"

We found the central camp of our trapper friends a very comfortable affair, thanks to the transportation facilities afforded by water in the summer season. The camp was located in the heavy timber at the narrows of the Turtle Lakes. It was composed of one big wall tent with a smaller one ended on to it at the rear, the latter being used as a sleeping place. In the big tent there was a table, a good cook stove and a few rough stools. A rope was stretched over the stove for a drying line. There was a good pile of stove wood back of the stove. In the sleeping tent there was a perfect stack of good blankets. Everything was eminently comfortable. When we went in Fay had supper nearly ready. Fay is a fine cook and not a trapper of the shiftless kind. He baked as nice a pan of biscuit as one ever saw. And there was some of that same sausage that we smelled frying when we first found Mrs. Buck getting breakfast. And there were pork and beans, and tea and sugar. By the time we had our wet outer socks drying on the line everything was ready, and we ate as only such folk can. Surely the day had been a busy one, and not one of child's play, but work for men. My first day in trapperdom did not bear out in the least the old tradition of the easy, lazy and shiftless ways of the trapper. If those were ever successful methods they would not do to-day.

But we were almost too comfortable for my notion of the correct thing. The blankets were too abundant and thick and warm, even though in the morning when we awoke they were covered with a thick frosty rime from the con-

gealed breath (the thermometer was 6° below zero). I signified my wish to tackle something tougher.

"You'll get it tough enough if you go the round," said Fay, grinning as he looked at Frank Brandis; and Brandis replied with his slow smile.

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