

Bad Storms on Calling Lake

During the fall, in late October, while fishing for mink feed with another mink rancher, we had gone out on the lake with his boat. We were fishing quite close to shore, I was using two- 100 yard nets and he was fishing with 300 yards. We had gone down the lake three quarters of a mile and began setting his three nets, starting 100 yards from shore and setting out.

The weather was calm and cool with light overcast. The sun was showing through the overcast but was showing a definite ring, (indicating a coming storm). My friend discovered he had only brought one buoy with him. It was decided that the buoy would be put on the inner end of his three net set, the outside net had only the anchor but no markers above the surface.

We moved 150 yards further down the lake and began setting my two nets (200 yards). Having completed the task, we headed for home.

There was little change in the weather for the remainder of the day, and the ring around the sun remained visible until late afternoon. We arranged a convenient time to pull our nets the next morning.

However, in the late evening, a wind arose, at first not strong but getting stronger as the evening went on. By bedtime there were gusts, I would estimate to thirty miles per hour.

The next morning on rising, looking out on the lake, it was nothing but huge white caps rolling in with hurricane force winds from the N.N.W. There was little chance of getting our nets that day, as the flags on the bouys were going under with each wave. Even if we could have gone out with that wind, we would have probably badly damaged our expensive nets, pulling them in.

The wind had increased and was probably between fifty and sixty miles per hour. This wind never let up for a minute, and continued to blow all the day, with no change or slackening of the wind.

On the second day, we woke to unchanged weather and wind conditions. Some of the mink ranchers were becoming worried as their mink had gone two days without feed and were going into the third day. By bedtime that night there seemed to be little abatement of the storm.

I awoke some time in the early hours of the third morning. Although still blowing, the wind was abating. At ten o'clock, my fishing partner arrived, he thought by afternoon we might be able to get on the lake. There were still white caps but smaller and fewer, but there were still huge rollers coming in.

However, weather conditions continued to improve. By two in the afternoon, we were able to get out on the lake. First we went to the location of his nets. there was nothing showing, but we were sure we were in the right place. We then proceeded to where my two nets had been set, but there was no sign of them or the buoys.

We concluded that the constant working of the wind and the waves had chafed the buoy lines and they had broken the lines and the waves had taken the buoys away.

We immediatly came home and rigged up a drag, hoping to find the nets rolled, and on location, but not showing. Reaching the site of his set, we first commenced to patrol back and forth, hoping to catch the net with the weighted drag. We had no success, so we went down the lake to where my nets had been set. Once again, dragging produced nothing.

All the other neighbouring mink ranchers reported the same thing, their nets were gone from the set location. We decided the only thing we could do was reconstruct some of our torn, discarded nets and get them in the lake as fast as possible. The situation, as far as mink feed went, was now serious.

Putting leads and floats back on old nets was a slow and tedious job. I was waiting for the neighbour to arrive so we could set. When he did arrive, he told me that his closest neighbour had found some of their nets, and that they had seen some nets all balled up in a huge ball, floating just off the shore, on the south end of the lake. We immediatly went to the place they had described and found the net, it turned out to be my two nets. You never saw such a tangled mess- a net full of willow sticks, willow roots, and a number of fish in all stages from alive to falling to pieces.

Between the two of us, we managed to get this big ball of nets, weeds, sticks, roots, and bullrushes into the boat, (both the buoys and anchors were also in this huge mess).

I offered the neighbour the surplus fish from the nets, as he now had neither nets or fish for his mink. He said he would be glad to help straighten out the nets and pick out all the fish etc. We soon found it to be a slow time consuming job. We ended up by removing all the floats and leads, and finding many floats missing. We finally were able to find in the mess, one of the bridles, and got it free. We put the picked part of the net into a tub and slowly worked our way through the net, both buoys and anchors gave us much trouble freeing them from the mesh of the nets. By supper-time we had the nets picked and the good fish picked out from those too badly spoiled to be used.

After supper, he took his share and hurried home to grind up and mix his feed, and get it to his mink, I too did the same.

Early the next morning he arrived back at our house, took out the boat and dragged the area of the lake he would expect to find his nets in. But when going home, as he turned into the river, he spotted a big gob of stuff in the rushes. He quickly investigated and found his nets. When he finally got them all straightened out, he discovered the third net in his string had broken off and was never seen again.

Another mink rancher, who lives on the river, had stated that during that storm, he saw two net buoys float down the river in the current. It could have been that many of the lost nets went down the river, as many were never found. However, the next spring when the ice went out, there were quite a number of nets found floating among the ice cakes. Also, that spring and summer the shoreline produced a heavy crop of net floats that had broken off in the storm. It was not only the mink ranchers that lost nets, many Metis and Treaty Indians from the North End lost their nets as well, many were never seen again either.

THE END

Trapline Experiences and Others

An experience not soon forgotten- we were engaged at the time in fur farming (mink and marten).

Our source of a food supply (for the animals) was fish, mainly Suckers and Ling, from the waters of Calling Lake, where we lived on the south east shore.

Being in possession of a Commercial Fishing license, we were entitled to fish with six hundred yards of 4 1/2 inch mesh nets. In the case related below, we were using three nets of 300 yards and fishing 4 or 5 miles out from the eastern shore.

One beautiful quiet Saturday morning, my wife and I decided to take the kids along with us. We had a good boat, (a MacKenzie River Skiff) 21 feet long and 5 1/2 feet wide at the midships. The children were all young, ranging from ten years and down. The water was calm and with the engine (a Gray Falcon 9 H.P. Marine 2 cyclinder engine), the outward trip was pleasant.

On reaching our nets marked with a floating buoy and topped with a red flag, we commenced pulling the nets and picking the fish as they were pulled in. Everything went well and the three nets were pulled and picked. As our catch was good, we decided to reset in the same location. Re-starting the engine, and setting it at low speed, I began feeding the nets back into the water, while Doris handled the tiller, keeping the boat in a straight line while I fed the nets out. When we had 2 1/2 nets back in the lake, we noticed a black line of water approaching us from the W.N.W. direction. From experience, we knew this was wind and behind this black line we could see white caps. We sped up a bit to get the last net back in the lake, but before we were finished setting, the boat was bobbing around in the increasing wind.

By the time the third net was in and the buoy tied on, waves were getting big and really bouncing us around in these sixty feet deep waters. Quickly, Doris and the kids got all together and sat about midship on the floor just in front of the engine. I took my place on the back seat in order to handle the tiller. As the wind kept increasing, the waves continued to get bigger and we had to throttle down a bit to keep from running the bow through a wave and taking on water. With our load of fish and all six of us, we had enough weight to allow the boat to handle quite well.

Some of the waves were monstrous and my seat was only about four inches below the gunwales line. We were getting plenty of spray as the big waves battered the boat on the upwind side. Many of the waves I could not see over, in spite of the fact I was sitting quite high in order to manage the tiller.

Calling Lake is noted for its roughness in windy weather. The lake is roughly round, with no islands or bays, due to geographical features surrounding this lake.

The water gets very choppy with the waves only about ten feet apart and every third wave is a big one. A N.W. wind can cause hurricane conditions on the lake, as it has a 35 mile downhill run, unimpeded from the top of the Pelican Mountains that lie to the north and west of the lake.

As we closed in to shore, the water got worse, as the water became shallow, the waves began lifting the bottom and bouncing back. When we reached a depth of two feet, I jerked the tiller over and shot across the last fifty feet going at right angles to the waves, under full throttle and the boat slid half out of the water onto the beach.

We were indeed thankful to reach the shore safely, being wet only from the spray of the waves that we had quartered all the way back.

- THE END -

Of Bears And Things

While beaver trapping one spring, I got into a predicament with a mother bear and three cubs.

I would leave home for my cabin Monday morning, carrying enough grub to last me to the next weekend. My cabin for beaver trapping was thirteen and a half miles from home. The first nine miles of road were fair to poor and in those early years the last four miles were usually very bad, with endless mud. I would usually carry only enough food to get me through the week, and a few other pieces of equipment, I might need for a set before I reached the cabin.

Being it was early May, I had a good chance of seeing bears. My rifle, a 303 British, was kept at the cabin, but on weekends instead of carrying it back and forth between home and the cabin, I would cache it about half a mile from the cabin. I would wrap it up well in a piece of very light plastic, and pick it up on my return to the cabin the next Monday morning.

On this particular trip, I picked up the rifle from its hiding place, and bundled up the piece of plastic, carrying it in my hand and carrying the rifle under my arm. A short time later, I was approaching the cabin (about 100 feet from it) and thinking how nice it would be to get the pack off my aching back. Glancing ahead I saw a cub bear come out past the corner of the cabin. I stopped knowing the mother would be close, then another cub came into sight, following the first one. Right behind the second cub came mother and following her, a somewhat smaller third cub appeared.

The mother bear was a good big bear in excellent condition. These bears were on my path and coming straight towards me. I was standing perfectly still. When the old bear got about 75 feet from me, she stopped and began sniffing the air. She then swung off to the left, going into heavy spruce. However, before she left she sent the two biggest cubs up a big white poplar, but took the third cub with her and disappeared into this heavy area of spruce.

I had remained standing where I first stopped. My rifle still tucked under my right arm and the plastic still in my hand. As soon as the mother disappeared, the two treed cubs each sitting on a stub of limb, stared at me. I must of stood there ten minutes and none of us made a move. I was hoping the cubs would come down and follow mother. To get to the cabin I would have to pass them, because the tree they were in was a half a yard off the trail.

I waited another five minutes, when suddenly without any visible or audible signal, the two cubs came scrambling down to the ground. I fully expected they would take mother's track and head off into the bush. But no, when they reached the ground, each sat down, one on each side of the tree. I thought coming down out of the tree was a good idea and a good sign that they would follow mother, but as the minutes passed they showed no interest in leaving. The only interest they seemed to have was watching me.

After another ten minutes with no sign or sound of the mother, and no sign from the cubs of wanting to move, I got the idea that if I could startle them maybe they would move on.

Slowly, I let the piece of plastic in my hand open up while I held it between my thumb and finger. I shifted the rifle to my left then quickly jerking this plastic up and down in a snapping motion.

The results of my little theory were far from what I expected. The cubs, instead of heading into the bush, shot back up the tree. At the same time the mother bear exploded out of the bush and headed straight for me. She was one mean looking bear, every hair on her was standing up and her ears flattened against her head. She was coming at a fast trot, snapping her jaws like an angry pig, with flecks of white froth dripping off her jaws.

To say I was surprised by all the sudden action is putting it mildly. While I was waiting for the cubs to come down from the tree and leave, I had planned what to do in this sort of a case. I had been told by a trapper friend of mine from B.C. who had lots of experience with bears, that one should "NEVER RUN" from a bear.

I quickly shifted the rifle to my right hand and got it half up. This is when plan two came into effect, but like plan one the results were not what I wanted. I'd planned that if she showed a sign of charging, I would in a good firm voice, order her to "stop" or I would shoot her dead. This seemed to be a pretty sound plan. So with the sights on her and her still coming towards me at a fast pace, I put plan two into effect, except my voice failed. Instead of a firm voice coming out, a frightened squeek passed my lips. I guess she was so surprised she did stop, her ears came up and her fur began to lay down. She was still snapping her jaws, but she turned away from me, called her cubs out of the tree and disappeared into the bush.

It was a nice warm day in May, but I found after it was all over, I was shivering without feeling cold. More about this same bear and her cubs later.

A second episode with mother bear and cubs took place the following Thursday at three in the morning. I was peacefully sleeping in my bunk, when I was suddenly awakened by a pounding on the west wall of the cabin. Sitting up in bed, I recognized what was making the noise. The previous spring I had found the last section of stove pipe in the cabin was badly burned out and needed replacing. On one trip to the cabin I had taken a replacement stove pipe from home; however I could not find anything around to get me high enough to do the job. I decided to cut down a couple of slim dry poles and nail a few steps on them and by leaning it up against the eaves, I was able to replace the burnt out pipe. When the job was finished I laid the ladder on its side against the wall, the eaves would protect it from the rain. This bumping noise was caused by something banging it back and forth against the wall. There was also the noise made by a five gallon pail being rolled about. Each time the pail went over, the handle would fall and hit the side of the pail, a sound I easily identified. Coupled with that, I could hear something scuffling around the roof.

I had been a bit late getting my previous days catch skinned and with evening and darkness coming upon me, it got too dark to see to remove the castors from the last beaver. I decided I would put him in a pail and hang it in a tree over night. However, I could not find a suitable tree handy that a bear would not climb. My eye fell on a long spruce pole that I used to fish beaver out of the creek. With my axe I made a sort of point on the butt end of the pole, then punching a hole against the wall of the cabin, I stood the pole up, leaning it against the ridge of the roof. Seeing this would work, I took the pole down and wired an old pail with the beaver in it to the top end. Setting it upright again, I then wired the pole solidly to the ridge pole of the cabin. The noise on the roof was one of the cubs trying to climb this one and one-half inch pole.

I carefully slid from my sleeping bag as quietly as possible. I was aware there was a board in the floor that squeaked badly when I stepped on it. While feeling on the table for my flash light, I located the offending board and stepped over it. When turning on the flash light I temporarily ruined my night vision. It was darker than the inside of a pocket. I made my way to the door, which had a small window in it, by feel. Pressing my nose up against the glass and looking out I could see nothing. I thought if

I could make out the sky line across the creek, I could orient myself a little better, however with a heavy over cast sky, I could not see a thing. As my eyes began gaining back their night vision, dim outlines were coming into place. As my vision improved I was seeing a bit. Within seconds I was able, as I thought, to see the sky line that was formed by second growth poplar, across the pond. I tried to place things in front of the cabin by this sky line. Suddenly it struck me, the sky line did not look right. It looked too level, and I knew from having seen that sky line so many times, it was far from level, for in reality, there were clumps of tall trees and clumps of short trees forming that sky line. I looked at this sky line once more and to my horror I could see what I had taken for the sky line was the back of a big bear standing cross ways to the door. This sky line, as I thought, was only six inches from my face. I was so startled by this fact that I let out a yell. The old mother bear swung her head, looking at me, putting the end of our noses about four inches apart, with only a pane of glass between us.

I was so shocked by seeing her so close, that I almost broke my own neck jerking my head away from the window. Knowing bears detest loud noises, I felt my way to the stove and took the frying pan off the wall. Getting the hammer, I pounded the bottom of the pan, setting up a horrible noise. I looked out the door and the sky line had disappeared and all was quiet except for the cub coming off the roof, then through the window I saw a small black ball shoot by.

A day later, I saw tracks in the mud of an old bear with three cubs heading west.

THE END

More of Bears

One spring when the creeks began to open and loose the covering of ice, I headed for my trapline to begin spring beaver trapping. My destination was my beaver trapping cabin, thirteen and a half miles out on my line. I built this cabin about central to my beaver area.

My pack was heavy as I was taking out equipment I would need daily. These extras, including grub for five days, all added to the weight. Being it was in the last ten days of April I had left my rifle at home, making my load eight pounds less. In my experience the bears didn't show up till the first week in May, so I would not need my rifle on this trip.

The last three miles of trail was a winter logging road and was a nightmare of water and mud. The road was narrow and lined on both sides in long stretches by second growth alders and willows. After much slipping and sliding and scrapping the clinging mud from my rubber boots, I was able to get off the road and follow an old survey line to my cabin that was approximately one half mile ahead. On the trail to the cabin I took off my pack and left it there. I had a little .22 rifle which I took along.

About 50 yards up the trail, I had a wolf snare set on a game trail, a trail quite often used by wolves, and as the wolf season was late in closing, I had left the snare set in hopes of getting a wolf.

About 50 feet from the snare a black object rose to its feet. I saw it was a two year old black bear, and he definitely was not in a very good humor. He had gotten through the snare to his flank and was lunging toward me. Now I don't have much faith in a .22 for shooting bears, but I felt I could not turn around and walk home for my rifle. Slowly I approached him with the .22 ready. I knew it would be useless to shoot him in the head, as the bullets would just ricochet off his skull. I noticed every time I took a step closer he would lunge at me and each time he would lunge he would swing his head around and bite the snare. Each time as he bit at the snare he would expose the back of his head to me. Raising the muzzle of the .22, I took another step and sure enough he lunged and swung his head to bite the snare. As his head swung around I fired and he dropped like a stone. Quickly I got four more bullets out of my pocket and gave him four more bullets through the head.

Upon skinning him, I found my first shot had killed him. The bullet had entered right behind the ear and went down the ear channel to the brain. He had died instantly.

An Unexpected Catch

This experience took place many years ago. It happened during a winter, moderately good for lynx.

I had a good number of lynx sets out and had about ran out of large traps. Going around my sets, one day, I got to thinking, there must be some way to make a lynx set that would not be catching rabbits all the time.

There were lots of rabbits that winter and almost always there would be one rabbit to take out of a trap, which meant I could have had a lynx if the curious rabbit had stayed out of the set.

As I proceeded looking at my sets, the idea came to mind. Why not make a set too high for a rabbit to get into the trap? Before, I had reached home that night, I had in mind just how such a set could be easily and quickly made. I had all the details of the set in my mind, and could see in my mind the exact spot I would make it. The next trip I took along a # 14 Newhouse double spring trap, along with haywire and a lenght of string.

The place I had in mind was an area that had been burnt in 1949, it had been an area with a lot of white poplar growing along with willow alder and birch. Having been burnt, all the mature trees had been killed and had fallen. There were many windfalls on the ground and the young, new growth, about the same mixture as the original cover, was growing thickly over the whole area. On reaching the place I planned for this set, I first required a standing stump about twenty four inches high and ten inches in diameter, and quite punky. Such a stump was not too hard to find.

Spotting a suitable stump, I cut all the way around it, detaching each surface root with my axe. I then simply pushed it over and trimmed off the stub of the tap root to make the bottom fairly level.

Carrying it over to my trail, I set it upright tight against a taller stump of a tree, of similar diamteter, that had been previously broken off seven or eight feet up, and I attended to bedding the bottom of the newly placed stump firmly. Then with the back of the axe I pounded down the whole centre, leaving the edges quite a little higher than the centre. I set my trap in this hollowed out centre.

Before bedding down the trap, I took a couple of good hand fulls of the pounded punk out, and put it aside for a covering. I knocked out two notches to accomodate the springs. Now, my trap was sitting flush and level. Taking the punk I had set aside, I sprinkled it over the trap, making certain I didn't get anything under the pan. I added a few leaves on top for a natural look. Now came the lure pole . I cut a two inch poplar, twelve feet long, then taking my rabbit and string from my pack sack, I tied the string to the skin and the other end to the toggle pole. I Stuck a dry limb on either side of the stump to discourage anything approaching from the side. Now the lure pole was leaning against the taller stump and the rabbit skin was hanging directly above the trap and gently turning in the breeze. The set was now complete.

For the next three to four weeks nothing but rabbits passed the set,. If there had been any snow fall since the last trip, I would take a small limb and gently brush off any excess snow over the trap and leave just enough to cover it.

About a month later on a Saturday morning, my son and I went to inspect the traps. At least half a mile before the set described, I had a conventional lynx set in a brush enclosure, there we saw two timber wolf tracks. A mink had been caught in the trap. The wolves had gingerly reached in and pulled the mink out by the head. They were only able to pull him clear of the cuddy, then they bit off the head and tail and broke the two back legs off. I took along what was left of the mink and we continued on.

About fifty yards from the stump set, I happened to look to the right of my trail and could see a six foot wide patch of snow covered with black dirt and debris. I called my son's attention to it. We stopped and stood looking at this black patch on the white snow and decided probabaly a bull moose had pawed it up. The wolf track, still following the trail, had not passed there. This was quite close to this stump set. From a short distance the trap appeared unmolested, however, I could see that the toggle pole had been ripped out of its bed of snow and small shoots broken off and flattened. We quickly took off up the drag marks. We followed the track another quarter mile and my son spotted him. He had tried to go through a thicket of alders and had got hung up. After several shots I got him in the head and killed him.

He was a really pretty wolf, very light in color and dark tips on his guard hairs made a pleasing pattern. The skin was perfect- a heavy coat of fur, no rub or mange.

He was sold through and graded as W.A. (Western Arctic). The sale statement, when received, showed top price for timber wolves being \$94.00, my invoice showed \$97.00.

Apparently, he had stepped on the short stump with his front foot to reach the small rabbit skin, which turned out to be a fatal mistake.

SHORT RANGE SHOOTING

This episode took place on my trapline during the 1960's.

A neighbour and I went out moose hunting. It was mid September during the calling season. We arrived at the cabin in late afternoon, we made a pail of tea and had a light snack, by this time it was about six in the evening. We left the cabin, taking our rifles and a birch bark horn.

About a quarter mile from the cabin we came to a fairly well used game trail. I located my partner just off this trail, where he was able to see a fair distance in each direction. I took my rifle and horn, and went off across the game trail. I sat myself down on a convenient windfall, and began to grunt two or three times every ten minutes, and listened for an answer. I had been calling, maybe half an hour when I got an answer. The answer came from off to my left. I immediately grunted in answer. Each time I grunted the bull would answer, soon I could tell he was moving across in front of me, but didn't seem to be getting any closer. I kept looking over my shoulder, expecting to see my partner coming, but there was no sign of him. The moose had probably moved five hundred yards across in front of me, answering every time I called.

It was a dull cloudy evening and in big timber the light was beginning to fail. I knew it was going to be dark all too soon. That moose made that trip from my left to the right, three times that evening. Finally, I gave up as it was too dark to see my sights. Going back to where my partner, Charlie Collyer was sitting (he had never moved), I said to him, " didn't you hear that moose answering me" ? He said " no, but I wondered why you were calling so much ". So I told him that the grunts he heard after the first twenty-five minutes, half of them were made by the moose, and the other half were made by me. He said he thought it was me doing all the grunting.

We made our way back to the cabin, made more tea and a light snack and went to bed. We awoke the next morning to a clear sky, but with a very high wind. This would be an excellent day to hunt moose, in spite of the fact the fireweed and asters were all dry and cracked when stepped on. However, a moose would never hear you over the wind.

Charlie decided he would get out immediately, with the hope of seeing game. I am never fully awake until I have had a hot drink and something to eat. When he was dressed and ready to go, he told me he planned to go North two miles, hit a logging road running South Southwest and follow it two miles to where it joined the line we used to come in on the day before.

Taking his rifle, he left and said that he would feel more like breakfast when he got back. I soon boiled up a pail of tea, made a slice or two of toast and then would be ready to go out. The wind remained very high and constant from the N. W. Leaves on the poplar trees were rattling and spruce tops were adding their contribution. and numerous small branches were breaking; all told a perfect day for hunting.

You had no worries about stepping on twigs and breaking them, as the woods were alive with the sound of breaking twigs. One was able to walk along, just watching in all directions. I crossed the line where the moose had been moving back and forth the night before. I was travelling in a S.E. direction, until I reached the south end of this patch of timber. I then proceeded N. up the E. side of this patch. I came upon a lightning struck tree. This large green spruce was thirty inches at the butt. The lightning must have hit the very top, as there was a hole in the ground you could put a pail in, where the bolt went into the ground. Numerous chunks of the trunk were scattered around, you could see sky through the crack in the tree, thirty feet from the ground. My friend and I had seen this tree shortly after it had been struck.

Now, to get back to the moose hunt; about one hundred yards N. of this lightning struck tree, I hit a game trail running N.N.E. The bush for the next two hundred yards was quite open with mainly big trees - both poplar and spruce. This game trail went over a slight rise, but was relatively straight for the next two hundred yards. After reaching the top of the rise, I could see ahead, a big heavy spruce that had blown down. It had been down long enough for all the needles to have fallen off, but having so many limbs you could not really see through them. It had grown right along the game trail and had fallen at right angles away from the game trail. However, between me and this fallen spruce, there was a very big black poplar - a good thirty inches through, on the opposite side of the trail. Going down the trail, the stump of the fallen spruce wasn't visible, being blotted out by the black poplar. I reached the black poplar and was at the point of walking by it, when I caught just a glimpse of some quite large black thing, moving west quite fast.

On the far side of the downed spruce, I stopped. I fully expected to see maybe a bear coming out and going west. At the same time I jerked up the rifle, flipped off the safety, and supporting the barrel with my left hand, I was just in the act of taking a step to my right, when out from behind this big black poplar shoots a three point bull moose on the high run. He saw me and cut off to the S.E.

With my stock still under my left arm. I raised the muzzle with my left hand and pulled the trigger.

That moose was dead when he hit the ground. His front end went down first and he fell with his front legs out in front and his head between them, his back legs straight out behind, lying upright out of his belly. Later examination proved the bullet entered just below the right ear and went through the brain and out the other side of the head.

I bled him and left for the cabin, for the equipment I needed to butcher him. Charlie was not back at the cabin yet, so I left a note written on a squirrel stretcher and left it on the table. Stowing my gear in the pack sack, I left for the site of the kill.

A half an hour later, Charlie arrived. Going over the whole re-enactment, we discovered I had shot the moose at around a distance of eight feet.

THE END

Accident On the Trapline

One beautiful day about mid March, I had spent a good part of the morning sharpening my axe, a 3 1/2 pound head, single bit pole axe with a 36 inch handle. The reason for having a very sharp axe was for cutting the stubs of willows clumps that were growing in wet ground on low sloughy areas or along creeks where much moisture is available.

Some years before an oil company had a seismic line from the lower bush end of the airstrip to a point about 1 1/2 miles into the bush. The line was running in a N.E.-S.W. direction. For the most part, this line ran through the meadow and muskeg land. At the upper end of this line, close to where it terminated, it had gone through this section of springy willow clumps. I had been told the line had been made by a Nodwell with a blade on the front.

The area I planned to cut the stubs from was only 100-150 feet long, but these willow stems stuck up about a foot and would be very damaging to the tobaggan track. The reason for wanting this trail was it ran through an area that was quite productive for fur, and we made this a spur line as it did not connect with the area where we had our main operations. At that time it was a six mile drive to get to our best operating area. By removing the stubs mentioned above and cutting 200 yards of trail through light bush, we would come out on a big meadow that was right in our main trapping area and would cut the travel distance in half.

So on this day after lunch, I loaded my axe in the truck along with my pack sack, as I had a few beaver snares in a dam on a creek, a bit beyond the end of this line. I drove down past the upper end of the airstrip. A local pilot had built himself a hanger for his Cessna 180, at the upper end of the strip. When I passed there he was working on a light aircraft belonging to a man from Sandy Lake. Our local pilot was an area engine and air frame mechanic as well as a pilot. As I went by the hanger he waved to me, he was to play a very important part, as you will see as this story unfolds.

Turning to the right and along the north boundary of the airstrip, I drove just beyond where it is intercepted by the highway. At this point is an old A.F.S. stop over cabin. I might mention that there was a bad mud hole 100 yards before the cabin, this was successfully passed and I parked the truck. With my pack sack on my back and my axe over my left shoulder, I headed down the airstrip. Shortly I hit our snow shoe trail (past the 3 wire fence).

The trail I was on, leading up to the seismic line, was very good for walking, as it was a snow shoe trail that had thawed then refroze, making the surface smooth and level. For the first 300 yards I was on the glide path of the airstrip, then turning a bit to the left, I started up the seismic line, through Jack pine patches of muskeg. About a mile from the airstrip the line went through a thick bluff of white spruce ranging in size from slim saplings to eight inches on the stump. All through these spruce were many black poplars, and for some reason or another most of them were dead. However many of them were down and it was one of these downed trees laying across the trail, that caused this accident. The tree had probably been dead before it fell, and now as it was lying in the leaves and needles the rotting process had begun. It was, as I remember, about a four inch trunk with the bark still on it. The next act is something I have often thought about but never figured out why I did what I did.

On my feet I was wearing Bushman rubbers with a leather top and felt fillers. Now there is the mystery, I stepped on this trunk with my right foot and instead of stepping over it with my left foot, I stepped on it with that foot as well. I guess the sun shining on the trunk warmed it up. As the tree was dead, probably the bark was cracked and open, allowing the previous fall's rains to soak the wood under the bark. The sun shining on the bark was enough to melt the frost that held it in place. As my left foot came down on the trunk, I felt the bark slip and my right foot slid into the left foot with enough force to break the bark loose under it. Both feet slid up the trunk to the left, while my body was falling to the right. My body was half way to the ground when it flashed through my mind, "get rid of the axe". As I fell I noticed a small pile of brush poles along side the trail. My thoughts were to get that axe beyond that pile. With the axe still on my shoulder, I jerked downwards on the handle, using my shoulder as a fulcrum. This move came too late. I got the axe away but I was too close to the ground and the axe hit the pile on the near side instead of going over it. As I hit the ground, I saw the blade turning toward me. I jerked my head away as much as possible, but as my shoulder reached the ground, stopping my fall, the entire left side of my head and face lost all feeling. The feeling did not return to those parts for several hours.

I immediatly scrambled to my feet. I could see from the corner of my eye, a fan shaped spray of blood shooting out from the side of my head. There was no feeling in the side of my head or face. I jerked off my mitt and with my fingers tried to locate the source of the bleeding.

With the loss of feeling this was not an easy task. I applied as much pressure as possible to the cut. Realizing I was in a very serious position, I grabbed up the axe and turned around and headed down the trail. I could feel the warm blood running down my neck and under my clothes. I realized that speed was vital and I thought I could run but I soon realized that only increased the blood flow. Fighting down panic, I decided the best way would be to set a good long stride and travel as fast as I could without increasing my respirations. As I mentioned before, the trail was in good condition and easy to walk on- thank goodness. Realizing that the bleeding had slowed a bit, I prayed to God for the strength to get me to help, and this He did, as I am certain that the bleeding slowed so that I could make it on my own. I realized there were three things that could happen; I could go into shock, I could pass out, or I could collapse from blood loss. Amazing as it may seem, I had no sense of weakness or feeling faint. I had walked a mile and was less than half a mile from the truck. Soon I was to the end of the airstrip, I ducked under the top wire of the fence and on straightening up, I was suddenly struck with a feeling of nausea. Soon I was back to my truck, I stood the axe against the bumper and wriggled my right arm out of the shoulder strap of the pack sack. I had to remove my left hand from my head to get the shoulder strap off my left shoulder. The blood began to spray again, so I pulled the strap off and re-applied pressure. I got myself into the truck by pulling myself in, hanging on to the steering wheel. I got the truck started, and five hundred yards brought me to the main road. I noticed the plane the pilot had been working on was gone and the sliding doors to the hanger were closed. However, his own truck was still parked there. I stopped beside his truck and got out and went to the small back door of the hanger. I opened the door and looked in, his Cessna was there, other wise it was empty. I was a bit puzzled, so I stood thinking of my next move. This pilot had a small building behind the hanger that he used as an office. I noticed smoke coming from the chimney, I called his name, but no reply. I walked over to this building and before I could even turn the knob on the door, it opened from the inside. I guess I was a pretty grizzly object. The pilot's mouth dropped open and he threw up both hands and stared at me.

I said to him, "Leo, I lost a lot of ketchup, could you take me to the health nurse?" This brought him out of his shocked look, and he ran out of the building, leaving me to close the door. I stepped down off the steps and started toward the truck. The pilot came running out of the hanger carrying a blanket which he spread over the seat of his truck. He helped me in and still to this point had never uttered a word. After helping me into the seat, he jumped in the trunk and started the engine and we were off to the clinic.

At that time the clinic was a log building, close to the road and adjacent to the North fence of the cemetery. On reaching the clinic, Leo was out of the truck and up on the step of the clinic. He pulled open the storm door and the solid door but it only opened half-way and was stopped by a railing on each side of the porch. Leo grabbed the inner door, sticking his head in, I heard him say, " Hilda, can I bring Ken Sutton in ? " Her reply was sure, bring him in. Mean while Leo had stepped down off the step and holding me by the arm, helped me up the steps (up to this point I had managed to get out of the truck and up to the steps on my own). Hilda had reached the door and pulled it open, as we were stepping up, her reaction was like that of Leo's. She stepped back with a look of horror and stared at me. When we were ready to enter, she soon became the excellent nurse she is. She pulled a chair into the middle of the room and told me to sit there. Hilda then got busy gathering the supplies she would need. First she tried to get the worst of the blood off my face, then she told me to remove my hand away from the face. I let my poor old arm drop, it felt about ready to fall off after being so long in the same position. As soon as the hand was removed, blood began spraying again, she quickly stopped it with a pad. When I had straightened my arm out, a huge blood clot that had formed in the elbow of my jacket, came slithering down the sleeve. It fell out on the floor right beside Hilda. She squealed and jumped away from it, and for a few seconds the clot just layed there like Jello. A much smaller clot had pooled in the palm of my hand and it also came loose and fell along side the larger one.

Hilda soon had all the pads etc. in place and began winding my head in gauze bandages. I had no idea how many bandages she used. She finished the job with a nine foot pressure bandage. Turning to Leo, she said , " Get him to the hospital (in Athabasca) as fast as possible." In those days it was fifty miles to Athabasca because the road wound back and forth avoiding the muskegs. Now the distance is only forty miles and the route is much more direct.

As we left, Hilda said she would radio the hospital, warning them not to remove the bandage before the doctor was present. She got the message through, but due to a shift change, the nurses that attended me on my arrival had not received Hilda's message from the preceding shift.

After we were on our way, I attempted to talk to Leo. After several attempts with absolutely no reply, I gave up.

Leo told me later, he was afraid I would go into shock through loss of blood. He told me he had taken a First Aide course some years before, and was trying to recall what measures to take when a patient goes into shock. He also said his truck had never been driven to Athabasca at the speed that it was driven on that trip.

Finally we reached Athabasca and went down the ramp into the emergency entrance of the hospital. The truck had scarcely stopped before Leo was out of it and reaching for the button that would bring assistance to the emergency entrance. Soon two nurses came hurrying down the ramp with a wheel chair. I was put in it and quickly taken directly in to the surgery suite.

As soon as we had reached the hospital, Dr. Kiltz had been notified that an emergency case was awaiting his attention. Two nurses, having not been notified of Hilda's message (due to shift change), lifted me on to the operating table. One nurse began to undress me while the other began to remove the bandages from my head. When the nurse who was undressing me got my pants down, she cried that I had also cut my leg. The heavy wool underwear was soaked with blood. I assured her that this blood had run down my neck inside my clothes, which was confirmed when they removed my top shirt. My shirt, from the neck down to the hem was soaked with blood, as was my sock and felt liner in my boot on the injured side. The nurse who was removing the bandages from my head seemed to be the senior nurse. She asked the other nurse to get a basin and sponge to wash away the old blood. When the last pad had been removed, the wound began spraying out blood again. In trying to staunch the flow of blood, they both got sprayed and it was very noticeable on their white uniforms. They continued to work on me using one then another pad to try and stop the bleeding. Controlling the bleeding was very difficult.

When the doctor appeared at the operating table, the nurses quickly laid out the needed equipment and the doctor began stitching up the wound which was nearly four inches long and went from the temple to well back on the head.

Later I was to learn from Dr. Kiltz the reason why the bleeding was so hard to control on this wound. He found that the main artery to the brain had been completely severed. He also told me that the lower half of the ear was dangling and while he was sewing it up, blood continued to squirt from the artery and land on the surgery suite wall.

With my wound all sewed up and the bleeding finally stopped, I was given a sponge bath and put into pyjamas and placed in a room by myself.

Shortly after, the supper wagon arrived on the scene and I enjoyed a good supper. An hour or two later, a lab. tech. came in with her little tray of syringes, tubes and needles. She tried several times in both arms to get a blood sample; she never succeeded.

After supper that night I had asked the nurse to raise the head of the bed. About nine o'clock Dr. Kiltz came to the hospital to check on the welfare of his patients. When he came to see me, he stopped just inside the door and just kept looking at me. This lasted so long it was becoming embarrassing. He then paid me the greatest compliment I've ever had. He said, "Mr. Sutton, you're a real man." He then turned on his heel and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

I take no credit for my part of this experience, I'm sure I survived by help from above.

I was discharged from the hospital on the eighth day.

THE END

Heart Attack

In March 1978, I suffered a massive heart attack. I had had a warning about two weeks prior to the heart attack. I was out on my trapline and had reached my first set. This trap was set for mink and was in a creek. At the set spot there was a high steep bank where the creek went around the foot of the hill.

I was able to drive the truck to the edge of the bank, where I parked. After making my way down this steep bank to the trap I found that nothing had been caught everything was in order.

I started climbing back up the bank to the truck. Half way up (probably 75 feet) I suddenly ran out of breath. This struck me as odd as I had been up and down that bank many times before and it had never effected me like this. I then stopped and rested a few minutes and my breathing returned to normal. I completed the climb to the truck. Once again I noticed a little shortness of breath as I reached the truck, but it was not as bad as before.

I sat in the truck for about five minutes, till my feelings returned to normal. I then drove to where I had squirrel sets, that were set up in two patches of timber. I parked the truck. After putting on my snowshoes, I went another two miles to a cabin to leave my lunch there. I started out through the timber tripping all my squirrel snares. I got a few squirrels, but it was well past noon, when I got back to the cabin. (I should mention that I had probably another 20 to 30 snares in another patch of timber, but this was closer to home.) After having my lunch I returned to the truck and drove home.

During the rest of the day I never experienced any more shortness of breath.

A few days later, I decided to go and pull the snares and go back to the cabin and bring all my big traps down to another cabin in preparation for beaver trapping in the spring. I had left a dozen Newhouse traps at the first cabin. I had wired the chains together for easier transportation. With the traps ready, I then packed my sleeping bag and other items I would require at the beaver cabin.

I put on my pack sack and then hung the traps over my shoulder, half of the traps to the front of my shoulder and the remaining half behind my shoulder. I got my snow shoes on and started down the trail. The trail was in good shape, 'till I was within half a mile of my destination. I then began to feel an ache in my left shoulder. I put this down to the fact that all the weight of the traps were cutting off the blood supply. But with only a short distance to the cabin, I kept going. When I got to where I turned off the trail, I had a hundred yards of trail to break. When I reached the cabin, I left the traps and sleeping bag there, and took off for the truck. The ache in my shoulder was still there when I reached the truck. I got in started it up. In ten minutes the pain I had, left so I decided to go and trip the last snares.

I donned my snow shoes and started out. The first three quarters of a mile was fine going with no problems. However, the next half mile was through an old burn with lots of wind falls and very thick under bush. I again experienced the pain. I got to thinking that if anything happened to me out there, it would be a tough job getting me out of there. So with that, I decided to go back. After I reached the truck. I rested a few minutes, then drove home.

I told my wife, Doris, about this experience; she then decided to phone the nurse, who said she would be down right after supper. The nurse and her husband arrived, she took my blood pressure and found it to be very high and my pulse very fast. She asked her husband to go to the neighbours and get a blood pressure pill. After returning with it, I was given the pill. From then on she took my blood pressure every hour till midnight, (apparently the pill had no effect, and the high readings remained the same). Before she left, she told me that if I had any more chest pain, I was to go to the hospital in Athabasca.

After we went to bed that night I slept well through the night. On arising the next morning, I found we had gotten a half an inch of wet snow over night. After breakfast I went out to get a piece of pasteboard to put our snowy boots on, when we came in from the outdoors. The pasteboard was in a small shed and the door was hinged at the top. To open it required me to raise both hands above my head. After I brought my hands down, I was struck by the most intense pain throughout my whole chest and upper arm area. The feeling was a crushing weight on my chest like that of a D8 cat, sitting on my chest. I staggered back to the house, my wife told our son to get the car, we were going to the hospital.

With my son driving, I was sitting in the passenger seat. After about half a mile, I decided to go sit in the back seat where I could lay down. I don't remember much of the trip, as I was in great pain.

Upon reaching the hospital, I was taken to the emergency entrance. My driver came out with a nurse and a wheel chair and they promptly wheeled me into the hospital. The doctor was already there and I was soon in bed and given a needle, which quieted down the pain and made me very dozey. An oxygen tank was wheeled in beside me and a mask was put over my mouth and nose. I can't remember breathing in straight oxygen. Some time later, I took off the mask and I experienced no difficulty breathing.

The next day, Doris came in to see me and talk to the doctor. He told her he would like to keep me another day to stabilize me, then if she liked he would have me transferred to the U. of A. Hospital in Edmonton, by ambulance. This was agreed on.

The next day I was accompanied by a nurse to the U.ofA. Hospital and placed directly into the Intensive Care Unit. I was wired to machines with various cords and suction cups, which in turn were attached to monitors in the front of the room. There were six patients in the I.C.U. at one time with six nurses in attendance around the clock. These nurses sat in front of the monitors watching the dails. If for instance a cup came off a patient, the monitor showed a flashing red light and also indicated the number of the bed the patient was in. Immediately the nurse would come and see what the problem was.

I was in the I.C.U. for three or four days, then transferred to a semi-private room. After a few days a nurse was assigned to me. Her name was Susan Theiry, and she came from the coal branch country, south of Edson. She was already an R.N., but was taking further training at the University and I was her patient.

The first day under her care, I was given light exercises to do in bed, after which my blood pressure and pulse, etc. were taken. She would constantly take notes, marking down every detail of appearance, attitude, cooperation of the patient and otherwise. The second, third and forth day, were days of walking and climbing. When walking, she would put her arm around my waist, and I would help support myself by putting one arm around her waist. By doing this it was almost impossible to fall. She would take me up and down the corridor at a very slow pace. If my blood pressure, pulse, etc. showed no sign of distress, then

I would walk a bit farther the next day. On the third and forth day she walked me down to the stairs, leading up to the next floor and to the first landing on the stairs. To climb the stairs, I was to step up on to the tread with my right foot, then bring my left foot up beside it. The next step was the same, take a step with the right foot, and again follow it with the left foot. This continued until I reached the landing. Coming down was done in the same manner as climbing.

The last day she didn't hold me, but accompanied me down the corridor, and observed me climbing and coming back down. She always strongly emphasized the importance of walking to aid the recovery of a heart attack patient,(the doctor also stressed this).

The next day, the doctor told me I would be discharged the next day. I spent the night at Tony and Judy's (my son-in-law and daughter). I came back home the next day.

I took about two years to fully get over this heart attack.

THE END