

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

CONFESSIONS OF AN INDOOR TRAPPER

Being a young man with a curious capacity for getting into the wrong thing, and an almost incredible success in doing it the wrong way after I have got in, I naturally began trapping what the books called the "fur bearing animals of our North American Continent." I did not go all over the continent of course. Much as I love the fleet and fickle snowshoes and our woods and temple hills, I would not think of trapping all over our continent, matching my wits against those of the cottontail rabbit and pitting my intellect against that of the skunk.

No. Most of my trapping is done in a room 9x12 feet, containing a fireplace, a jug of cider and a whole library of valuable Books for Trappers. When the hard maple log begins making an anthracite baseburner look like a parlor match, and the cider has the zing-dooey to it of a good brut champagne then I light my pipe and pull down Ot Hiler's Guide to Mink Trapping. While outside the taunting wind roars round my fifty-five Berkshire acres, I read: "Mink are found in nearly all parts of our North American continent, living along creeks, rivers, lakes and ponds. While strictly speaking they are not a water animal, etc., etc. While small they are quite strong for their size." (I suppose after they grow up they begin to get large and weak.) "A Number O Newfangle will hold them, but boys, you had better take my advice: use a Number 1 trap." And so on and on. I read about a Texas trapper of mink who tells of what "does not fill his ideas of getting mink pelts" and about a Minnesota trapper who says: "Now, I am not a professional, but I make all animal habits a very close study, and a natural born nature lover loves to be among them in their wild homes and loves to set a trap once in a while just for experience. I will tell you how I set the traps to fool the minks."

Glorious, new, mysterious, unpunctuated literature, hand grammared, rustic style! Experience of canny, crafty old Solomons of the water set, the land set, the deadfall! Alas, I have never caught a mink in all my career as a trapper; I couldn't catch him if I had him in a rain barrel. But the fascination and fun of a section of life I otherwise might have missed are strong upon me; and I want to tell the hunterman or the fisherman that there is still another thrill left for him if he will turn amateur trapperman as I did.

Please understand however that I trap for protection, and not for pelts or pelf. I own hens; that's all I've got against the fur bearing animals of North America. Hens—yes, and a few fruit trees. So now you have the motive for the story, just the same as if you were reading a newspaper.

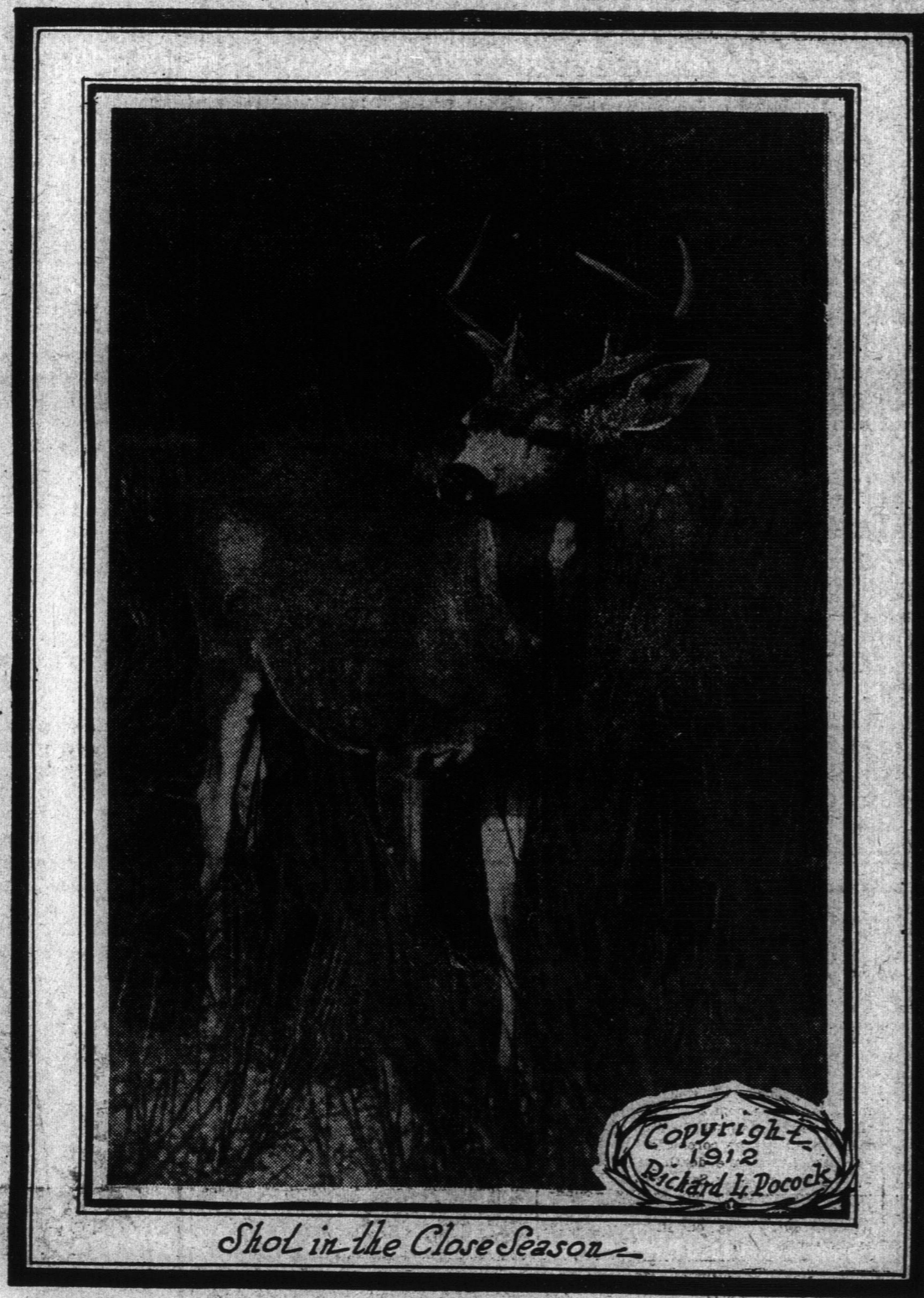
First off I bought a pair of boots and began to study tracks in the snow. I finally became so proficient that I thought a field mouse's track was a 'coon's track, a 'coon's track was my tabby cat's track, my beagle's track was a fox's track, and my sow's track was a deer track. All other tracks were rabbit tracks.

Having thus in a short time—and solely supported by my native Indian sagacity (my great grandfather was an Indian)—mastered one of the vital principles of the trapper's art, I bought two dozen traps, a pair of mittens, a drug store and a delicatessen shop. The drug store and the delicatessen shop were included because I early learned from books that Scent (as trappers politely call stink) either is or is not highly necessary to catching the fur bearing animal. Looking back at it all now, I can say without prejudice that it matters not one iota, not even a jot or a tittle to me whether I use scent or not; I cannot catch anything anyway.

However I was fascinated by the theory of the thing. It is noticeable in the human being even that the aroma of burning wood, Jockey Club, frying ham, clear Connecticut cigars, fusel oil, and the like, makes him stop, look, listen, partake, imbibe or at least investigate. Consider then the fur bearing animal. Lacking man's magnificent brainpower, he makes it up in nose power, and will smell all the smell off anything within the radius of a mile. No matter how much of a hurry he is in to get to a lodge meeting or a raiding party, he will stop dead in his tracks at the first suspicious smell and go over to investigate. Naturally, then, the amateur trapper ought to make his scent as suspicious as human ingenuity can contrive. I looked over some of the recipes for smells in the various Valuable Guides and thought they hadn't done very well. For instance, one expert said:

"Now boys"—they always begin that way without punctuation—"you want a right stiff smell so in midsummer chop up a muskrat fine and put in a glass bottle with stopper. Place this in the sun and when you see it decomposing chop up fine some nice rotten fish and add that and also some fine chopped onion. If a fox smells this you can bet your hat he will come."

If a fox smells it! If! Why, I thought to myself this man is a craven, he is a falterer. Why should there be any if about it! Why not build a smell that would reach out and grab a fox three-quarters of a mile away



and headed in an opposite direction, twist his nose around at right angles until he got the full force of the concoction slam jam in the muzzle, then force him around still another right angle and lure him Lorelei fashion to your Number 2 Brake and Ram. So I tried out two or three. Now boys (you see I've got the habit) I don't claim everything on earth for these scenes, but they will rid the barn of rats and all other dumb animals and will call out the Board of Health.

Number 1 follows:
Six old subscriber eggs, 25 cents' worth asafoetida, 5 oz. garlic juice, 1 oz. oil of peppermint, 1 oz. oil of anise (or absinthe will do) 1 oz. fish oil, 1 oz. oyster juice.

Number 2 is easier to make, and even more powerful: Take two skunk glands and half a pound of limburger cheese. Dissolve in alcohol and add bay rum or your favorite perfume.

As soon as a fur bearing animal worthy of the name ever smells this he won't bother to come to your trap; he will simply fall dead right where he stands. There is a drawback about this method however. It seems the animals die so far away from the trap that you never can find them, and therefore—if you are commercially inclined—they are a total loss. But if you are a true sportsman you will admit the sportsmanship of it.

As I say, I gave a great deal of study to the scent problem and then I read on. I found out that the flurry tribe is wary of iron or steel; I was instructed to "boil" my traps "in hemlock boughs," so as to take the taint of the iron away. I don't believe I got hemlock boughs and I know they didn't boil; so I made some catnip tea and let it go at that. The farther I got into the trapping the more I saw that it really did not matter what I did; I was going to buy my skins from the farmer up the road anyway, and rather than monkey with all the fool restrictions which were placed upon successful trapping I preferred to originate my own methods.

For instance, one of the most fascinating puzzles about old style trapping is that, in setting for fox you must be careful not to go anywhere near your set, or else the fox will smell your footprints and tear off in the other direction. Mark this well: in setting your fox trap you must not go anywhere near it. Translated into ordinary, marble top language this means, in catching a street car be careful not to get close to it.

There are just two ways you can set this trap and obey the rules. One is by telepathy. You firmly fix a fox trap in your mind stand about twenty feet from where you want to catch your fox and Will the trap into position.

The other is by aeroplane. A simple little \$5,000 Bleriot will do. You get your trap

all baited, fixed onto a brush drag or loose limb of tree, climb into your monoplane, ascend gracefully and hover over the chosen spot long enough to let your outfit down by a rope. Then you cut the rope, fly away and get a lot of dry leaves, which you will shower upon the trap naturally and gracefully from your seat in the plane. In this way the fox will never suspect you. I have about made up my mind to offer this suggestion to the Hudson's Bay Company; not having tried it I think it will work successfully.

In my two years of trapping by a studied disobedience of the rules I have caught two red foxes (shot by a neighbor and sold to me for \$4.00 apiece) four skunks in my own traps (which proves that a skunk is an original and brilliant beast, one that will go to any pains in order to get caught) one 'coon, two buck rabbits (one in steel trap, one in box trap) one wood chuck (box trap) one neighbor cat, one horned owl, two hens (my own)—and broke the pointing leg of another man's favorite pointer. This year I am laying for a certain party's pig, which gets into my corn crib.

An Adventure With a Fox

The only trouble I ever had with a fox—that is where I was really afraid he would get caught—occurred last winter.

I had baited two No. 1-2 traps with my bare hands and carried them down to the stone wall. Then I had carefully tramped all the snow down around the set. Sure enough when I came by the next morning I saw tracks leading away from the 'orgy. Both traps were sprung, flopped upside down and the nice chicken bait gone.

I set them again and re-baited them. The following morning it was the same story. With success thrilling my blood I reset and re-baited for a third time. Sure enough! A third time the fox sprang the trap by flopping it upside down with his paw and a third time he ate the lovely bait (unscented.) Then I felt that I had gone far enough. So I set the trap upside down myself the last time, thinking that if he was bound to flop it over he might as well put his foot in it. That fox however was not an amateur. He came down one leg on a triangle, took a peek at what I had done and departed up the other leg of the triangle. The subsequent proceedings interested him no more.

I shall never forget the first skunk I trapped. A skunk is evidently by nationality a Tartar; it is one thing to catch him and a highly more interesting thing to get possession or him. In the shade of a sheltering pine I had embedded a No. 1 Brake & Ram with a decayed chicken's head; and early one morning accompanied by a bodyguard of one hired hand and two dogs I espied a beautiful little black and white beast pounding around with my trap on his right front leg. I took

my rifle and put a .22 long through the skunk's head; then the skunk took his rifle and put a cross section of misery into the hired man's eye. I kept back a little way and took off a piece of the skunk's nose with my second shot. The skunk curled slowly around—the factory must have been working well that morning (the olefactory I mean)—and mowed down both dogs at one smell swoop. I and the skunk were alone together, my bodyguard being in hospital with terrific pains in their eyes. I put two more bullets into his head; if a man had had that much lead in the same place he would have been dead long ago. But the skunk yawned as if it was the mere shank of the morning, and tried for me with a wide out-drop, a cross between a spitball and a fadeaway. It crossed the rubber all right—my boot. Then it occurred to me I was wasting valuable ammunition on an ungrateful and unkillable fur-bearing animal of our North America continent; so I cut down a young sapling and approached. The sapling was about seven feet long. I gave the skunk a bang over the head with the butt of it; he stiffened out. I stepped nearer. Then up came the tail again; as I gave him another tap he tried for me again. By now the bosky dell smelt like a gasworks. Six different times did that chicken-stealing, fur-bearer discharge those aromatic spirits of lemme-alone-yuh. Each time he managed to hit something; the last time it was my coat. And as for vitality! A nine-lived cat is a tottering, debilitated specimen of extreme anaemia alongside of a skunk. Nowadays when I get a skunk in a trap I just stand around all day and jeer at him and taunt him and make slighting remarks about his vitality and his power of smell; and about an hour I rap him over the phenology with a pole. Along about dusk he dies of a broken heart.

"Rabbit Hot, Rabbit Cold," Etc.

In re. rabbits, I realize that snaring rabbits is not any longer de regeur, comme il faut, or au fait. With me it goes farther than that; it is nix komm raus. I once tried to snare one that came under an old apple tree which was too tough for it to 'girdle.' I bent the sapling over and I fixed it in the fork of the thungumteig as per Hoyle, and I arranged the fine wire noose, and I backed it up with the dingus and the doodad and the beezedang. Then I put the carrot in position. Because every day the rabbit came up from behind, kicked the carrot loose, sprung the noose into thin air, as the poet says, and calmly nibbled the vegetable at its leisure. I never did like the idea of snaring them, anyway; they'd be sure to squall out in the middle of the night, and then I'd have to go out in the dark and my pajamas and bludgeon them, to have any peace. If I have any killing to do, I prefer to do it decently and accurately in broad daylight, like any other honest farmer.

But the fur-bearing animals of our North American continent are not so considerate; they kill my chickens and my fruit trees at night.

Just as I finished this I went out and caught a rabbit in a box trap. Be that as it may, and believe me, this is my idea of trapping.

Also of eating. I can smell it now, being fried in butter out in the kitchen; boiled spuds with their jackets on; and a spanking hot dish of brown gravy to crown the feast.

Oh—well. All right. Make fun of me as a trapper. But I know where I get off. Right here.

Ge! And corn bread!—Harris Merton Lyon in Recreation.

Practical Information for Young Trappers

1. The skunk and civet cat become prime earliest in fall and are of poor quality first in spring. The raccoon and opossum are of good quality next, followed by the mink and weasel. The muskrat has its best fur in December, January, February and March.

2. Test all traps carefully before setting them. In case one is defective, do not use it.

3. Never take a dog over a trap line. It has a tendency to drive away many fur bearers.

4. Small birds—and I include the hawk, crow, etc.—are not good bait for any animal, unless they are alive.

5. An excellent way to kill either a mink or weasel after it has been trapped is to first stun it with a club, and then crush in its ribs. When this is done, there will be no blood clot on the pelt. While the absence of it does not make a fur more valuable, it improves the appearance—and this counts when a sale is made.

6. Deadfalls and snares, while effective when constructed by professionals, should not be used for taking the smaller fur bearers, by an amateur. Steel traps will answer his purpose much better.

7. The habits of the animals you would trap must be learned before you can expect any great degree of success as a pelt hunter.

8. Dry furs in a cool, shady place, where it is not damp.

9. On the pelts of small fur bearers intended for market, put no salt, alum, or other preparation. Often, in case a skin of a bear, etc., is perfect, it can be mounted, then it is advisable to sprinkle salt around the ears, etc.

10. Traps may be marked with a file or



steel punch. The best place is on the bottom.

11. A good bait may be made by chopping up fish and leaving it to rot in the sun.

12. Parsnips, turnips, apples, potatoes, carrots, etc., are excellent bait for muskrats. Dried herring will attract the raccoon and opossum. The carcass of a muskrat is an excellent "draw" for the mink or weasel.

13. Visit your traps every morning. Skin the animals as soon after they are caught as possible. Furs left on too long after the bearer is dead, often turn blue on the pelt side. These will never grade prime.

14. If an animal is frozen immerse it in running water. This will thaw it very quickly, without injury to the fur.—Geo. I. Thiesen in Outdoor Life.

The Poetry of It

Angling is the poetic form of fishing. A mere hook, a piece of string and any sort of animate thing holding them near a body of water constitute a fisherman, and the fisherman may resort to any means to obtain his fishes. He may fish in season and out of season, and he may be as greedy and blood-thirsty as he wishes—still he's a fisherman. Not so with the angler. His title is dependent upon his methods of fishing. All anglers are fishermen true, but all fishermen are not anglers! Conditions, rules and methods govern the angler the same as the yachtman and the military man are governed by condition, rule and method. A mere boatman is not a yachtman and a hoodlum biped with a gun in his possession does not make a soldier or a sportsman.

The angler is a gentleman. He limits his catch, respects the legal season, fishes with appropriate tackle, is humane to his quarry and honest with his friend. Fishing means taking fishes honestly or dishonestly humanely or cruelly, in respect of numbers or in slaughtering quantities. Angling means taking a gentle number of fishes on correct tackle, in a humane manner, in legal fishing time.

A SPORTSMAN

He is nothing great to look at;
He's not outstanding tall;
A ready smile,
And no great style,
A sportsman—that is all.
Straight and true is the sportsman,
For he never thinks fear or fail;
"Well done! Be of good courage!"
You can hear his friendly hail.
And if he's got to go under,
He takes it straight, with a grin;
"It's a fine old world to live in,
And the best man's safe to win!"

Does he wonder why men love him?
Why he never has to call?
He leads the lot
And knows it not,
A sportsman—that is all.
Heart steel-true has the sportsman,
Clear eyes that never quail;
His only boast is for others,
None hear a self-told tale.
Finking, or fouling another
Is with him the coward's sin;
Praise if you dare, he'll tell you plain
To "Stop that confounded din!"

Never a thought to impress you:
Ready to take his fall;
What's left to say?
He goes his way,
A sportsman—that is all.
Aims too hole does the sportsman,
With courage to dare and fail.
Makes of earth a better place
With his friendly goodwill hail;
"I'm down; no matter, on with you!"
"Ill-luck is met with a grin;
"It's a fine old world to live in,
And the best man's safe to win!"

M. I. HOPE.

"Been hunting?"
"Yes."
"Any luck?"
"Some. Found a man who would cash a check when the game warden told me what the fine was."—Washington Star.

"What you want, I suppose, is to vote, just like the men do."
"Certainly not," replied Mrs. Baring-Banners. "If we couldn't do any better than that there would be no use of our voting."—Washington Star.