

The unfortunate man's food cache consisted of a long pole with a canvas sack tied to the end. The pole was leaning against a tall birch tree. It was known that MacDonald had been in the habit of keeping his bacon and butter cached in this manner, so as to remove it from the reach of wild animals. The bottom of the sack had been torn to pieces and all the food was gone. The birch tree showed claw marks where the animal had climbed to the height of the canvas sack. This cache was close to the spot where the body had first been found.

There was little doubt as to what had happened. MacDonald had been attacked by the bear either on his way to the creek to get water, or returning from there. The hammer, likely taken along to break the creek ice, was his only weapon of defence as his rifle was still leaning against the cabin wall when the tragedy was discovered by the wood contractor. And the hammer could not have been of much use in the struggle that ensued.

It was common knowledge in the district that the bears were more numerous than usual that season, more particularly on the flats as there was a scarcity of berries back in the hills and they had been coming down to the rivers and creeks to fish. But the fish supply, also, was limited, the greater number having gone to their spawning grounds farther up river. As a result the bears were hungry and dangerous. It was about time for them to den up for the winter but, instead of being fat, they were thin and starved, and in that condition would not hesitate to attack a human being.

A search of the surrounding hills for the bear was without result, the recent snow effectively hiding any signs. Either the animal had moved into a new hunting district or, despite its hunger, had gone to its winter den.

This is the second incident:—

In July, 1933, a member of the Force left Keno accompanying a prospector who intended to stake a mineral claim at McNeil Creek, ten miles distant. The prospector, unarmed, was carrying three stakes on his shoulders; the policeman carried two more stakes, his packsack and rifle.

At a point close to their destination the two men were faced with more of the thick brush through which they had been travelling, and which made progress difficult. By striking straight through the brush the distance to their objective would be about half a mile; it was twice as far to take the more open route and skirt the brush. For the better walking the prospector took the longer way.

Arrived at his destination the Mounted Policeman watched for his former companion. Soon he saw him, coming along in an open space on the far side of the valley. A little later the Mounted Policeman looked again. The prospector was only three hundred yards away and coming in a direct line; he was still in the open space but getting nearer to the edge of the brush.

But it was something else that brought all the Mounted Policeman's faculties to the alert. Close behind the prospector were three bears, one large and two small, following their unsuspecting trail-maker closely.

The Mounted Policeman seized his rifle, but at once realized that he could not shoot at the bears without chancing hitting his partner, as the prospector was straight in the line of fire.