

A Beaver Colony

Written for The Western Home Monthly, by H. H. Pittman

WHILE searching for cut-lines and corner-stakes recently in Central Alberta, I came upon a small colony of beavers in a little stream known as "Trapper's Creek," running, I believe into the Medicine River. At this particular place the creek runs parallel with the precipitous bank on the east side of the great Saskatchewan River, not very far away. This district has a great deal of muskeg in it and is covered with a heavy growth, consisting chiefly of spruce, jack-pine and tamarack, with patches of poplar on the higher ground here and there. In the neighborhood of the colony the stream was bordered by small-leaf poplars, and it was these trees only that the beavers used in the construction of their house and dams.

Trapper's Creek, under normal conditions, is about six feet wide, varies from one to two feet in depth and flows rather swiftly. It is a proof of the intelligence of these animals to find that by placing a dam at a certain point they had succeeded in making a pool of an acre or more in area and from seven to eight feet deep. Also they had taken full advantage of the natural conformation of the land and had chosen the only place in the immediate neighborhood where such a pool could be made. The main dam was about fifty yards long and consisted of poplar brush and saplings, and on the upper side the interstices were filled with mud, making a barrier through which very little water penetrated. Both above and below there were several smaller dams, but these did not appear to serve any effective purpose.

There was only one house or lodge, and this was in the large pool. It was built of mud, poplar brush and small tree-trunks up to three or four inches in diameter and had an under-water entrance. The peak was fully six feet above the surface and the measurements on the water-line were about fifteen feet by twelve. Some small willows were growing at one side, but they had probably been there before the house was started.

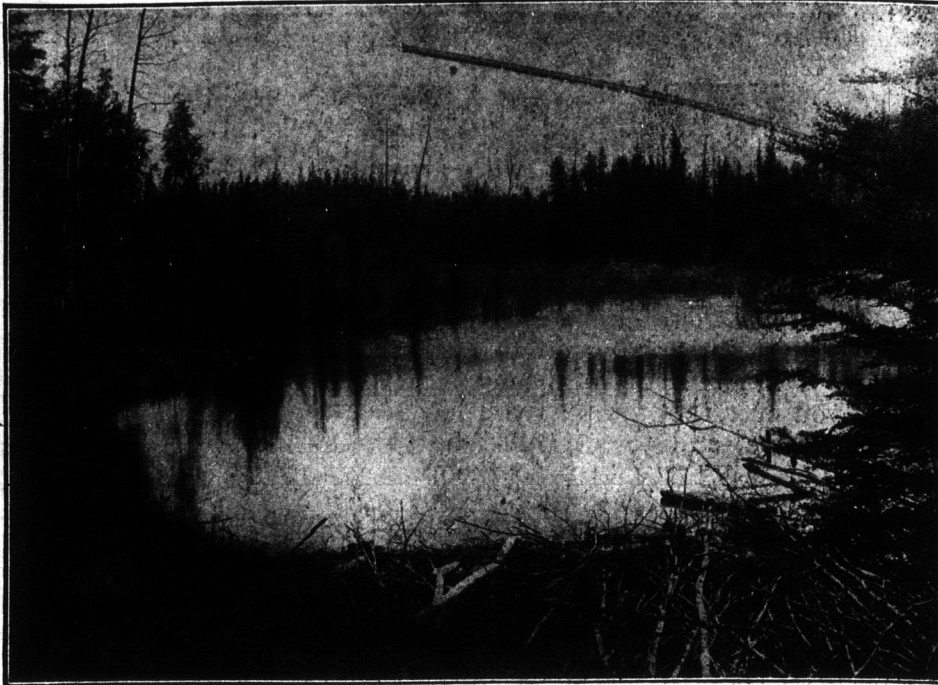
On the east side where most of the poplars were, trees were felled in every direction, the largest being twelve inches in diameter at the point where they were cut through. They were gnawed evenly on all sides and then allowed to fall where chance willed, no effort apparently being made to drop them where they could be most conveniently handled. The cuts were made from twelve to fifteen inches from the ground and the chips measured about one inch by two and a half. In many cases the fallen trees were completely denuded of bark, even the small branches being stripped. Trees intended for use have all the branches removed and are cut into sections from five to eight feet long.

The banks of a pool of this description were, of course, shelving, but in several spots on the east side there was deep water right to the edge, apparently excavated by the animals themselves, and paths up to the timber indicated that these were the places where the logs were

floated. There were many evergreens in the vicinity, but only the poplars had been touched.

In spite of the size of the large dam, I do not think there were more than four adult beavers in the colony. Owing to the amount of small branches and twigs lying everywhere, cut from the fallen trees, a quiet approach was impossible and only two of the animals were seen, although I spent many hours there on three consecutive days. One of them was among the willows in the pool and the other was swimming near the dam. I approached as quietly as possible from the north-east and got quite close to the beaver in the water. It was swimming with only the top of the head and back above the surface—and upon seeing me put its head down as if to dive, but came up for another look before disappearing altogether. The weather was dull and rain was falling at the time, so that a photograph was out of the question.

Even had a quiet approach been possible it is doubtful if the animals would have been about, for practically all the time I was there a pair of sinful Brewer black-birds with young were uttering their plaintive alarm calls, warning every creature in the neighborhood that danger of some sort was near. On the east side of the stream I found a pair of Magnolia Warblers and a short distance from the



Part of the Beaver Pond from the Dam

At present, beavers are receiving absolute protection, but I am afraid that when the season opens all these isolated little colonies will be wiped out. There are several impecunious homesteaders that I have met who are figuring upon making a little haul as soon as the law

Blackbird, ruffed Grouse, American Robin, Holboell Grebe and American white-headed Eagle

While staying here, I was told that, some time ago, the beaver season in the north was opened for about twenty days. Toward the close of this period, some surveyors encountered squaws on their way to a trading post with over five hundred beaver skins. Obviously trapping had been going on all the close season, the skins being kept until their sale was lawful. My host showed me a handsome (slightly damaged) cross-fox skin and also the hide of a beautifully marked, but rather small lynx.

John Jones on his Stenographer
With best of reason dotes,
She's the only living person who
Will take from him his Notes!
The others demand Cash.

And for another reason, too,
He swears that she is great,
She's the only woman in the world
To whom he dares dictate!
He's married.

MISCHIEF MAKER

Now Strong and Robust

An adult's food that can save a baby proves itself to be nourishing and easily digested and good for big and little folks. A Brooklyn man says:

"When our baby was about eleven months old he began to grow thin and pale. This was attributed to the heat and the fact that his teeth were coming, but, in reality, the poor little thing was starving, his mother's milk not being sufficient nourishment.

"One day after he had cried bitterly for an hour, I suggested that my wife try him on Grape-Nuts. She soaked two teaspoonfuls in half a cup of warm water for 5 or 6 minutes. Then poured off the liquid and to it added a like amount of rich milk and a little sugar. This baby ate ravenously.

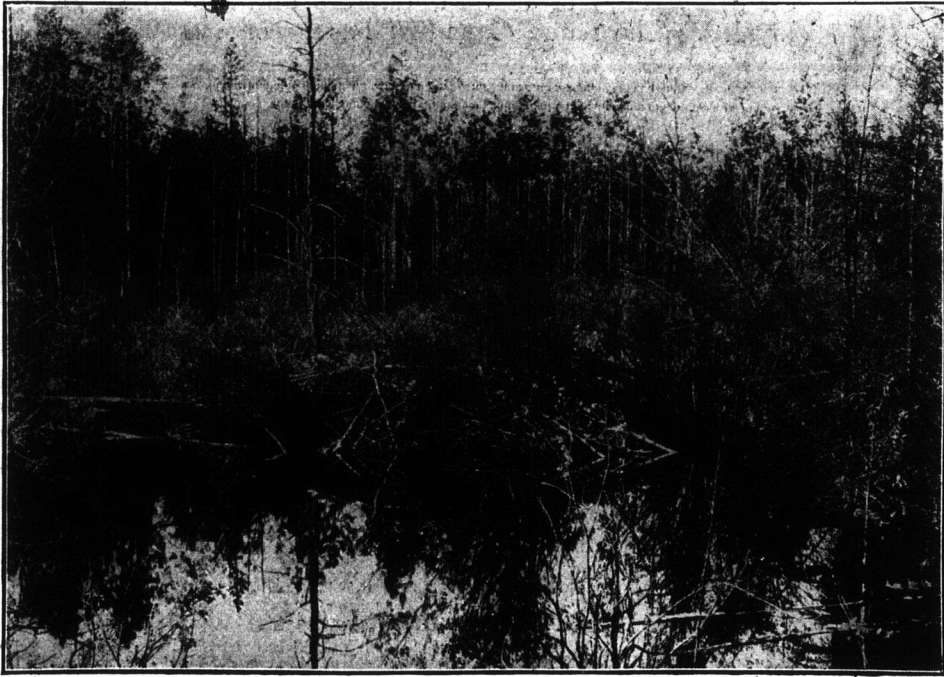
"It was not many days before he forgot all about being nursed, and has since lived almost exclusively on Grape-Nuts. To-day the boy is strong and robust, and as cute a mischief-maker as a thirteen months old baby is expected to be.

"Use this letter any way you wish, for my wife and I can never praise Grape-Nuts enough after the brightness it has brought to our household."

Grape-Nuts is not made for a baby food, but experience with thousands of babies shows it to be among the best, if not entirely the best in use. Being a scientific preparation of Nature's grains, it is equally effective as a body and brain builder for grown-ups. "There's a Reason."

Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true and full of human interest.



A Corner of the Beaver Pond

west bank, in an open space, there were some nighthawks, but I did not find any nests. I also saw a Spruce Grouse with a brood of chicks, and several others in the trees. I had at least three interesting rodents within gunshot at one time—the beavers, northern hares, and red squirrels. It is probable that the little Chipmunk (*Eutamias quadrivittatus neglectus*) was close also.

permits. Of course, the people are more important than the animals, but one cannot help feeling sorry to think that probably the only places where these interesting and intelligent rodents will be found, will be in the far north beyond the bounds of civilization, unless something is quickly done to prevent their absolute extermination in the settled districts.

On my way to the little town where I was staying, I rode by a clearing on the evening of the third day, where the lesser Yellowlegs were nesting. Apparently some eggs had hatched, for a female flew towards me uttering a very plaintive whistle. When quite close, she turned and tried to settle on the wire strand of a fence. The shape of her feet made this difficult, so, keeping one foot upon the wire, she dropped the other upon the rail beneath—a rather odd-looking position—keeping up her mournful calls until I was a considerable distance away. She would have made a beautiful picture, but being short of plates, I hesitated to risk spoiling one in the poor light.

A few days later I visited some more beaver colonies in small streams about thirty miles south of Trapper's Creek. In several places in this district, where for one reason or another, the water had fallen, old grass-covered dams were used as foot-paths across marshy spots. Rain commenced while I was down in this part, forcing me to stay for four days in a log cabin, built in Idaho style by an old lumberjack who acted as host.

Bird life was not plentiful here and the only species noticed were the slate-colored Junco, white-throated Sparrow, lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson Snipe, Brewer



Trees Cut Down by Beavers