

THE LONE

WOLF

By
Dave Schmitz

This story is about a wolf, but even more than that it's about the way we think and feel about wolves. The media has made wolves into everything from docile wild dogs that can do no wrong to half human, half wolf killing-machine phantoms of nightmares. Perhaps they are somewhere in the middle.

In December 2015, I spent three weeks out on my remote trapline about 50 miles north of the Arctic Circle. With very low snow the trail conditions were more than brutal. Between the brush and the tussocks and an epic landslide that blocked part of the trail for a half mile, it took me over a week just to break a trail to my former cabin site and start trapping.

That first evening at camp, I cut wood and split it with a heavy maul with a long yellow handle. After setting up my Arctic Oven tent and getting my wood supply, I drove my Skandic back to the truck for a second 25 mile trip. I was returning from my truck the next day with two sleds loaded with gas, bait, traps and a barrel stove. That's when I first came upon the tracks of the wolf. He walked down my trail like he owned it; through 15 miles of brushy trail, onto the frozen river and right up into the cabin yard where I had my tent. That evening when I was splitting wood for the fire, I had to do it with the axe because I could not find my maul. "Geez," I said to myself, "I must be losing my mind. I thought sure I leaned that maul against the big spruce." I filed that info under the "odd" of my mental filing system.

At 10AM the next morning (that's the crack of dawn in the Far North), I took the Skandic out to break some trail and found fresh lone wolf tracks coming toward my tent. The tracks broke off thirty yards away, where he jumped off into the deeper snow heading downriver. Quickly, I went back to the tent and grabbed my .22-250 rifle in case I saw him. After cutting a half mile

through overgrown willow, alder and birch, I had found nothing but more tracks. I returned to the tent for a hot drink. I discovered fresh tracks coming out of the woods just 40 yards from my tent and heading upriver. "Hmmm," I said to myself, and filed that into the "strange" section of my brain.

When I returned from getting a load of poles to repair my cabin roof, I spotted some yellow in the center of wolf tracks from the day before. "Looks like a natural pee post," I thought and grabbed a plastic bag to collect some fresh urine for a set. But as I approached my "pee post" I saw that it was actually the tip of my yellow-handled splitting maul!! The wolf had dragged it down the riverbank and 25 feet out onto the gravel bar. When it got stuck in the snow, he milled around and finally abandoned his trophy. I filed that under the "bizarre" of my filing system. I found myself checking behind and around me with my headlight as I worked in the dark that night cutting wood and working on the cabin.



Years before, when I was trapping with a dog team, a pack of wolves had come near camp one night and I heard a wolf howl very close. I went out with my headlight on and shined it out on the river. Suddenly, my light caught two green dots about 80 yards away. Then the two dots blinked and shone green again. Ever make eye contact with a wolf? Few people have, but I remember that clearly, and always will remember the hairs going up on the back of my neck. That same feeling came to me as I was working in the dark that night. Was he close by watching me? I can't say.

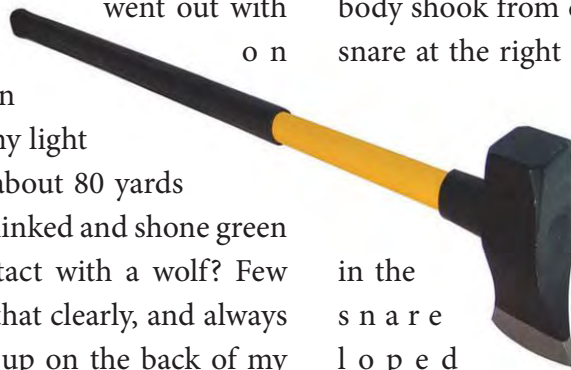
Two days later I needed to make another trip back to the truck. This time, I was headed home for Christmas with my wife and my two now, college-age daughters. The wolf tracks were again fresh on my trail. He was very interested in my new wolverine cubby set, walking up to within a couple of yards to sniff at the beaver meat. Then he was back on my trail toward the truck. He continued to leave fresh tracks in front of me. I could tell by reading his tracks that he was close enough to hear my machine, because he would stop, fidget around and head down the trail at a trot.

As the hours went on, I must have gotten closer because when he would stop, listen, and take off again, the tracks showed his pace had increased. My heartbeat increased also, and I was getting excited to maybe see him. Best of all I had spent time very carefully setting a snare in my trail three days before for just this wolf. I knew I was getting closer to the snare and I could see he had increased his pace to a lope. I stopped, took my .17 HMR rifle from its case and put it in

my lap in case he was fresh-caught in the snare. He had been following the trail for over 10 miles and there was strong reason to believe he would continue.

Then I saw the snare and it got unbelievable. My body shook from disbelief at what I saw. I had set the snare at the right height, with a conservative opening and it was well camouflaged by willow twigs around the snare. Unfortunately, the snare was just as I had left it. The wolf was NOT in the snare. The tracks loped up to the snare and directly on the other side they loped away from the snare. "Everyone knows that's just not possible," I thought to myself. I could not decipher in my brain any way an adult wolf could jump through this snare without it catching on his chest and closing. I stood there, rifle in hand, running through all possible scenarios and none seemed feasible. The only one that seemed to fit was that I was dealing with a wolf from the fables.

As I started the machine and made a trail around the snare and continued down the trail in the arctic twilight, the hairs on the back of my neck were standing erect. My eyes continued to scan the trail for something I had to file under "unexplained."



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TRAPS FOR SALE

60+ Victor No. 4 with teeth welded onto jaws, and most are cable with drowners.

4 Victor No. 3N (gapped jaws)

12 Victor No. 3

2 Victor No. 2 double spring

2 Victor No. 2 single spring

1 Victor No. 13 jump

1 Victor No. 4 with teeth

2 Victor No. 3 coil spring

55 Victor No. 1 Stop Loss

9 Oneida Jumps

4 Conibear 110

10 Conibear 330

1 Diamond Brand No. 21 double spring

3 Diamond Brand No. 32 single spring

8 Gibbs No. 4 Single Grip

1 Triumph Easy Set Triple Clutch 3-xx

2 Triumph Easy Set No. 2

1 Triumph No. 2 double spring

3 Triumph No. 3

23 Blake & Lamb No. 1 stop loss

2 Blake & Lamb No. 2 Coil Spring

1 Blake & Lamb No. 1 1/2 single spring

1 Blake & Lamb No. 2 double jump

1 unknown No. 2 single spring

1 unknown No. 2 jump

2 Easy Set Square Set No. 2

1 Sargent No. 3

1 StaKawt No. 1

25 Muskrat Stretchers (the good type)

3 fleshing beams

1 skinning gambrel

15 coyote or bobcat homemade drying boards

— many are from old growth clear cedar

Several mink boards (homemade — very nice)

Several raccoon boards (homemade — very nice)

25+ Beaver Hoops — some solid some adjustable.

The equipment was used for two traplines (my dad and myself) in the 60s and 70s when we were taking 100 to 200 beaver a year along with the other usual catches.

I am only interested in selling all at once... not piecemeal. Buyer to pay/ arrange for shipping... I will certainly box up or take to the shipper at my expense on my end.

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