

BY JOHN L. ESTES, IN COLLABORATION WITH JERRY W. PETERMAN



Alberta Trap Line

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After several contacts, finally during the 2003 DSC Convention, Jerry sidled up to me and told me he thought he may have found what we were looking for and suggested I talk to Chris McKinnon who was an exhibitor. We both talked to him for some time and later during the convention we gave him a deposit for December 2003.

It proved to be a wise choice and much more than we expected. We knew it was not really a "hunt" but that it would be a wilderness experience, running a trap line to collect various available species. We hoped to pick up several North American critters, including a wolf and a lynx for each of us.

We arrived in Calgary on December 12, 2003 and upon checking into a hotel we learned

that the US had captured Saddam Hussein that day. We flew to Edmonton the next day and were picked up by Chris. We drove about two hours virtually due north to his home at Calling Lake, Alberta.

Chris lives with Sharron, his fiancé (and as of last July, his wife) in a two-story log house overlooking Calling Lake (a very large lake), which, of course was frozen solid at this time of the year. There is a very large kitchen and a dining/living area downstairs complete with a fireplace and satellite TV, along with their bedroom. Upstairs is a large room with four double deck beds. It is very rustic, comfortable, interesting and well decorated, with various North American trophies, especially white tail deer. Some are spectacular. Until recently, white tail deer and black bear hunting was his staple hunting activity—about 40 hunters per season. Since then Chris purchased "Bonnet Plume Outfitter in the Yukon Company", where he offers dall sheep, moose, caribou and grizzly bear, although he will continue the deer, bear and his trapping adventure in Alberta.

That far north only gets daylight about 9:00 a.m. this time of the



year, so we did not get up very early in the morning. We drove about thirty minutes to the area where Chris has the trapping rights. His cousin, Kevin, was with us and we were pulling a large, flatbed trailer with two four-wheelers on it. The temperature was -4° F. The terrain was fairly flat and heavily wooded with mostly conifers. Due to a recent heavy snow, the limbs of the conifers held as much snow as possible. It was a virtual moving, continuous Christmas card—gorgeous, especially after the sun rose and the snow glistened. It was awesome and a real highlight of the trip.

Chris was driving a new, top of the line, Ford King Ranch pickup, fully loaded (including a sun roof). It was a pain to get in and out of because he had oversized tires and lift kit. It was very comfortable once you got in it. Jerry and I had been careful not to overdress since we would be in the truck a lot of the time, and we had insulated coveralls to put on when we got out to ride the four-wheelers.

We visited several sites where Chris had previously put out traps or snares and soon recovered a fish that was frozen stiff. Later, we unloaded the snowmobiles and drove down to a cabin Chris was building. When it is finished, it will be large enough to comfortably accommodate two people and a

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guide, gear, cooking equipment, etc. It overlooked the wide Athabasca River that was frozen solid.

As we drove along during the day, when Chris saw spoor crossing the road, he would stop and set out a trap or snare appropriate for the critter whose tracks we had seen. Neither Jerry nor I knew anything about trapping, but Chris explained a lot to us as we proceeded through the trip. Chris has an engaging personality and did a great job in explaining trapping. I would not say that either Jerry or I are now experienced trappers, but we understand the basics. (Jerry hoped to put them to good use on his ranch, but to this date, I have had no reports from him of any success.)

Most of the roads we traveled were well-maintained, as there was a lot of oil and gas production in the area.

Later that same day, we offloaded the four-wheelers again and drove down a small creek that was frozen—mostly. We did break through once and Chris had to wench out the four-wheeler that he and I were on. We set traps near two different beaver houses. This necessitated cutting out a block of ice with a chain saw to get to open water and placing traps suspended between two poles where the beavers were expected to travel.

One day we came to a place where Chris had put out the carcass of a

deer that had been killed on the road. There was a lynx on it that I was able to harvest. A little deeper into the woods we found two snared wolves that we also collected. Chris wants to eliminate as many wolves as possible as they prey upon the deer.

Later that same day Chris and his cousin, Kevin, walked into the woods where he had previously set out some snares and we heard Chris hollering excitedly. They soon came out carrying a coyote and a large white wolf. He said this color phase is rare and the wolf was as big as they come. (In fact, the taxidermist in Edmonton, who has mounted a lot of wolves, had to build up the form to accommodate such a large one and said it was the largest he had ever mounted.)

Later in the trip we collected beaver, marten, a short-tailed weasel and a snowshoe rabbit. Jerry also collected his lynx and wolf. Other possible species are red fox, cross

fox, mink, muskrat, and river otter. During the trip we collected almost twenty critters.

We were very fortunate with the weather in that there was no precipitation at any time and it was sunny most of the time. The temperature ranged from -4° to a balmy 36° F on the last day.

Chris charges \$2,500 each for this 2X1 adventure and each hunter gets to keep one animal of his choice. The hunters can also keep additional trophies for the then prevailing fur price.

If anybody is interested in adding some critters to a collection, having quite an adventure, including learning a lot about trapping and if lucky weather-wise, seeing some unbelievable scenery, we HIGHLY recommend this one to you. Chris and Sharron have now exhibited at our convention for the last four years and will be back next year—look them up. *ST*

Lady Hunter Specialists

Maurine Cain came to New Zealand as an observer with husband Richard, but then took a SCI 345 Wapiti of her own with a single shot. Richard says, "She now has a bigger bull than I do and she won't soon let me forget it."

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We get our share of lady hunters at New Zealand Wildlife Safaris...and the lot of them are darned good hunters and excellent shots. Terry Pierson delights in taking apt ladies hunting. Many ladies have come to New Zealand as shoppers and tourists...and have left very avid big game hunters, to wit, Maurine Cain. And...there was still plenty of time for shopping

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