

Trapping as a Family
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At the last convention in Mansfield, we attended for the first time and picked up an issue of the Buckeye Trapper. I read it several times through. I found it to be a good magazine with interesting articles. I came up the hard way in trapping, with no one to show me how to trap, with only a copy of "The Trappers Companion" from Fur Fish and Game. I made a lot of mistakes (this is a good little book but the information is very dated) and learned from them. I have been trapping a lot of years in total, but have a lot to learn yet.

I started out trapping in High School and viewed it mostly as a means of income. I managed to take enough fur to buy gas and insurance for my old jeep. After I started working, other things took priority (Girls) and I got away from the sport altogether. The only right thing I did at this time was to give all my old longspring traps to a kid who was just learning to trap. Now I find that there were always other reasons to trap that I did not realize at the time.

After many years of not trapping at all, my father purchased some acreage in southern Ohio. This land included a major creek that held a good number of beavers. I had never had an opportunity to trap the large rodents in the past and thought it would be fun to give it a try. That first year produced a few beavers, but more importantly got me back into trapping. The next year I thought that it would be fun to try my hand at snaring fox and raccoon (in my bygone trapping days snaring was not yet legal in Ohio). The end result has been that I now trap more than I ever had before, it has even replaced many of my hunting activities.

Trapping, as many of you know, lends itself to being a fine family activity. This was a fact that was lost on me during my first years of trapping. Now that I have a family consisting of a wife and three girls, I have found it to be much easier to take the little ones along to set water sets and snares, than to take them along squirrel or deer hunting. Silence and little girls in the woods do not seem to go hand in hand. However, while trapping they are free to ask questions and make old Dad think about why he does things on the trapline the way he does.

We home school our older two girls and have found trapping to be an excellent opportunity to teach our girls many lessons in wildlife management, the environment, the habits of wildlife and problem solving skills.

I took a week of vacation and set out with the camper and family, to do a little trapping in about the third week of the season. I took the children out one at a time to make sets with the exception of foothold sets for fox. I guess I still like to keep the chances for scent to a minimum at baited sets. However, I did not find that having the kids along while setting snares reduced the catch. Keeping them a short distance away where they could still see what was going on kept them interested in what I was doing and solved the problem of boredom associated with sitting quietly, waiting on grey squirrels at the crack of dawn. Water sets for muskrat were made with their help and as any trapper knows, muskrat trapping suits this bill to a tee. Even my youngest, Heather, who was three at the time, was able to participate in a small way. She would walk the easier walks with me and I was surprised at her ability to make her way along.

I would generally check the traps alone in the early morning and would get to the camper to find the girls looking out the camper window to see what we had caught. I will never forget the first fox I brought to them that week. Both older girls waited until they were alone with me and asked the same question, "Did you catch that fox in one of the traps I helped you set?" This was a question that was repeated every morning and I was very glad that they got the answer they were looking for most of the time. They even took a surprising interest in the skinning of the animals and handling of the fur.

The older girls, Natalie (8) and Amy (6), did their schoolwork in the camper with Mom while three year old Heather helped Dad with the campsite chores in the late morning. The older two, after being done with their

lessons would take turns helping Dad make new sets and move or remake old sets that had made a catch.

Taking some time out of the season to trap with the kids at a more leisurely pace was one of the best trapping experiences I have ever had. Seeing their satisfaction at making a catch on a trapline that they had helped set out, outweighed many times any fur I missed by taking more time than usual to set the line out and making fewer sets. I don't want to give the impression that I think you should not take the young ones hunting anymore in favor of trapping; but for my young girls, trapping seems to be more enjoyable than hunting or fishing. Rules of quiet and stealth are replaced with discussion of the habits of animals and techniques of trapping. Keeping mostly on the move helped them keep comfortable on the cooler days rather than freezing in a tree stand, and they love to find a track that Dad didn't see.

Finally a word about my wife, Crystal, who did most of the work that week and is infinitely patient (furs stored in the camper freezer and the like). She has always understood my love of the outdoors and shared in it, even when it meant doing some things she wouldn't have done without some encouragement. Thank you.