

Advanced Trappers Workshop at Killbuck
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It all started with a phone call from OSTA Education Coordinator, Keith Daniels. "Hey Eric can you do an Advanced Trappers Workshop on October 31"" and November 1st at the Killbuck Marsh Refuge outside of Shreve?" "Oh ya Keith, I can probably do that" ... but one question" "What do I do?"

And that is how it all started! After talking it over with Keith and finding out the whole scoop, I decided ""yes, I can do this!"

There were three boys who had registered for the event. All brothers from Columbus, roughly two hours away from Shreve.

Day One:

Well, after driving for about an hour that beautiful Saturday morning, we finally arrived at our destination. When I talked to Kevin Higgins that morning, I was informed that there were three more local boys who were going to attend. Wow, major problem. You see, I told another instructor, Mark Bassinger, to just enjoy that Saturday with his family, because I could manage the three boys who had registered. Now it looked like I was going to have six, plus my own son Dakota.

Well, the three from Columbus were 'no shows'. So at about 12:30 Nathan, Josh and Nick, and their fathers; along with Dakota and myself, headed for the swamp.

Since Nathan and Josh had already taken the course, they pretty much knew what to do. Right off the bat all four boys began spotting trails to and from the different ponds. After setting several trails up, we came to a point where the dike we were walking on crisscrossed another dike. Here four ponds joined together.

The place was literally covered in sign. Both Nathan and Josh quickly began setting up trail sets at the water's edge. Now, one thing you need to know is that the majority of the sign was otter sign. So the topic of the day quickly turned to, how not to only catch fur, but to also avoid fur.

While Nathan and Josh were busy making sets, Nick and Dakota were sounding like a couple of hounds hot on a trail. They were spotting trails and feed beds, and places where muskrats were digging in the banks. Soon they were both going at it like a couple of seasoned pros.

Nick quickly figured out how to set #110's for blind sets in muskrat trails. In the meantime, Dakota decided to make a pocket set for a raccoon.

Once we continued on our way, I made three different types of sets, which consisted of a blind set, a pocket set (set up with a drowning wire) and a snare set on a raccoon trail.

About as soon as I finished these up, the boys continued making more sets as fast as they could.

We soon came to a couple of muskrat huts out in the swamp. And here is where both Nathan and Josh showed off their experience. They both quickly began to gather up equipment to make a trek out to the muskrat houses. I followed, but rather slowly. You see, in the areas that I trap, muskrat houses are basically non-existent. I quickly became the student rather than the instructor. Even the instructor can learn a thing or two.

After making a few more trail sets we decided to call it quits for the day, AS we walked back to the trucks we all had high hopes for the next day.

Day Two:

As Dakota and I headed towards our destination Sunday morning, we both had high expectations for the morning's catch. Even though I am a long ways from my childhood days of running a trapline, I still felt a great bit of anticipation at checking the first traps in a long while.

Upon arriving at the Ohio Division of Wildlife headquarters, I quickly set up a skinning area and waited for everyone else. Well, I didn't have to wait long. On Sunday's trip, we had two newcomers, Paul Skolmutch and Mark Bassinger. Mark had offered to come along on Sunday, and this time I wisely took him up on his offer-

As we started out that morning, I noticed that everyone walked with a little more bounce in their step. The first two or three traps drew a blank, but at the next one Nathan caught a muskrat. The next set also produced a muskrat for Nathan. The first one was in a bank den and the other one was in a blind set.

The next set was one, which Nick set up on a trail. Well, the muskrat got away. Since Nick is only seven, he still has a lot of years to practice on those muskrats. In the meantime, Josh picked up his first muskrat of the day in another blind set. Josh also took another one in a natural channel set. We already had four muskrats, and we weren't even halfway done.

When we came to the next group of sets, everyone was moving along rather quickly. The first set was a natural tunnel set that Nick had set up. Unfortunately, nothing decided to go through the tunnel on the prior evening.

The next two sets were the blind set and pocket set, which I had made. Well, at least somebody was catching something, because I sure wasn't.

The next set produced another muskrat for Nathan. He also caught another one in a trail set near one of the muskrat houses. As the boy's fathers, Mark and myself stood watching Nathan and Josh pull their sets, we suddenly heard Nick, Paul and Dakota start yelling that we had something big in one of Josh's trail sets. As they all stood there dumbfounded, trying to figure out what they had, I heard Dakota say "Dad, we got a beaver!"

So we all took off to see what was making all the commotion in the water. Sure enough there was a beaver, held fast in a #1 longspring. How, I still don't know, but it had him by three toes on that big webbed foot. Well needless to say it didn't take long to turn him loose. I believe Josh really wanted to keep his first beaver, but at twelve years of age and catching a beaver in a #1, I personally believe Josh won't have too much trouble catching beaver as he gets older.

The last several sets we checked were all empty, but as we headed back, everyone was full of talk about the beaver Josh had caught. Nathan was quite happy with his four muskrats and Josh was happy with his two also. The four little trappers were out in front, eager to skin their catch.

When we got back to the building, Mark Bassinger took over with a demo on muskrat skinning, and as with all demos I have seen, I picked up a couple of tricks on how to do things Just a little bit better.

In closing I would like to give a big thank you to Kevin Higgings and the Division of Wildlife, for the use of their facilities. On behalf of the OSTA, we really do appreciate all you guys and gals do for us. I would also like to thank Mark Bassinger for his help. Mark is getting to be an old pro at these field day events, and I for

one, truly appreciate all he has done. And to Nathan, Josh, Nick, Paul and Datkota you guys are what really made this event worthwhile. And last but not least, I want to especially thank Bob and Dan Skolmutch for helping out with the kids, but most importantly for passing on our heritage of trapping to your children. Because, for myself, that is truly what this is all about.