

My First Year Trapping
Article from May - Jun 2002 Buckeye Trapper
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How did I get interested in trapping in the first place? When my uncles came around to visit, they would ask me about the groundhogs I hunted and how many I got. Then they would tell tales about their Uncle (my great-uncle) Bake (real name Basil) and his trapping adventures. (I would later learn what tales meant.)

I listened intently about how Bake would get my dad up to run traps with him. The time they caught a feral cat, which Bake thought was a wildcat and poor ole dad had latched onto Bake's leg scared out of his wits. Then they would tell about the muskrats Bake would catch and an occasional mink. That's when I asked dad if he would take me trapping if I got some traps. He agreed, but said I would have to buy the traps myself.

I started baling hay when I was in sixth grade for our neighbor, and it was coming up time for them to bale again this year. I took my money that I earned from baling hay and my allowance for mowing our yard and the neighbors yard and set out to buy traps. I ordered some traps from a mail order catalog. I ordered three #1½ jump traps, two #2 jump traps, two # 1½ long springs and three bodygrip traps.

The day the traps arrived, I got them out and practiced setting them. The bodygrips were pretty tough to set for me at first, but then I got the knack of it. Dad told me that Uncle Bake used to dye his traps with walnut hulls to darken them. We had a walnut tree behind our house, so there was no problem getting them. My hands were stained for a couple of weeks, but it sure did brown the traps up pretty well. I didn't wax them because I never learned about it until later, while reading an article in Fur-Fish & Game.

When it came time to set traps, I found out that dad was just a youngster and he never watched Bake set the traps, he just tagged along and was an extra set of hands to carry the catch. So, I had to start this on my own. How do I make a set for fox?

Back then fox and raccoon season came in early. I found a road-killed rabbit, picked it up, and was going to use it for bait. I staked the trap down and buried the rabbit. I took the fur off the rabbit and covered the pan with it. So what did I catch? A hawk!! (*Editor's Note: this is why the use of exposed baits are now prohibited by today's trapping regulations.)

Needless to say, it was an experience getting it out of a 2 jump trap. Luckily I had a heavy coat on, it bit at me and flogged me some too. I pulled that trap and figured I better ask someone who had trapped before how to set it.

My friend told me that a friend of his dad trapped some and he would ask some questions the next time he saw him. In the meantime, I thought why not set it at a groundhog hole. Maybe they will hunt around one of them. I put the trap near the entrance and covered it with grass. I didn't catch anything there for two days, and when I did it pulled out of the trap and got away. I was really getting discouraged at this point.

Finally muskrat season came in, and my friend had picked up a couple of bodygrips also and we went to a ditch that we had permission to trap. We set traps at the entrances and the next day we had muskrats!! I thought it's about time! My dad tried making some board stretchers out of plywood. They were ok, just a little thick. Dad showed us how to skin a muskrat, and then we skinned the rest.

It was time to sell our muskrats, so dad found a place for us to go. It was Mallow Fur Co near Clarksburg, OH. It had been raining that evening and it was really dark outside. We were really disoriented, not knowing where we really were. It was back along a gravel road. We walked into the fur shed and actually gagged!! There were skunks on the floor ready for skinning.

My friend and I ran back outside to catch our breath. Dad came back out laughing and caught us before we made it to the car. He said, "It's your fur, you go in and sell it." So we took a deep breath and went back in.

Mr. Mallow was an elderly gentleman who wore a cap and smoked a pipe. He looked over our rats and told us that they were pretty good rats. He paid us \$1.75 a piece for them. We thought that was pretty good. We watched some of his hired help breezing right through the skinning and fleshing. We thanked him and told him we would be back again. He sold us some wire muskrat stretchers and said he would prefer we put them up on the wire instead of the plywood stretchers. We were pretty happy with our money and new supplies. We couldn't wait to set out more traps to catch more fur.

I discovered a set that really worked for me in the field next to my house. There was a field tile about 10" in diameter that had caved in. I had seen some coon tracks around it, so I set a trap in the running water inside the tile. The water was probably about two inches deep. That set produced a grey fox, three raccoons, a muskrat and a mink.

From knowing nothing at all that first year and catching the animals I did with the number of traps I had, I thought I did very well. My season total was 27 muskrats, 3 raccoons, 1 grey fox and 1 mink. Towards the end of the season the fur prices were going up a little. I was hooked hard on trapping. I could hardly wait until the next year to start trapping again.

I want to thank both my parents. They supported me in this new hobby. Both mom and dad drove me around to check my traps. My mom even helped carry a raccoon I caught out of the field tile.

I would like to say that I wish we had the trapping workshops and trapper's education classes back then that they have today. It would have helped a great deal, especially knowing about what not to do, like exposed baits. I also wished that I knew about the OSTA back then. The trapping demonstrations and equipment tips are invaluable! The information knocks years off on the learning aspect of trapping. For all you young trappers, take full advantage of the free classes and demos. It will help you learn a lot faster than I did.

Take care all, and I hope you have a successful season.