

The Last, Worst, and Best Day of the Season
Article from May - Jun 2003 Buckeye Trapper
by Justin Walters

The day started like all of the other days of the 2001 trapping season. I had managed to get a little trapping in here and there, between going to school and doing homework. I had caught around a hundred muskrats, seventeen raccoon, two gridders, my first red fox, along with two others, and a half dozen mink. My season ended pretty quickly when the hard freeze came right before Christmas. The freeze ended my muskrat trapping because I trap mostly ponds.

All I had out now was a few mink sets in a creek on the other side of town and two fox traps that produced the other reds. One of the fox traps was in a field by my house. It was in the perfect location. The dirt hole was set in the corner of a soybean field where a road ran into the field. This was the only access point to the field where the fox ran. My dad caught fox in the same spot for years. This is where I had caught my first red two weeks ago. I remade the set and had not caught anything since.

Today I had decided that this would be the last day my traps would see action until next trapping season. The day was December 28 and there was a good two inches of fresh snow on the ground. As my dad and I rounded the corner of the field my hopes of another red sank when I saw two dogs standing by where my dirt hole once was. As I approached the set I could see that I had caught the biggest dog by the front pad. A thousand things were running through my mind. Whose dogs were they? Were they mean? If so, how mean? As I got closer I found out that they were mean and that the person who owned them must be financially unstable or lazy, because the big one had an old collar with about ten different pieces of chain cobbled up for a lead. All of this mess was wrapped around the chain of my 1-1/2 BMI coil spring.

The animal was on the thin side with large mats of fur covering most of its body. As for the smaller dog it looked a little better. I guess the two were familiar with each other, because when I went to get a closer look the little one started growling and took off after me. I ran back to the old red Chevy S10 and discussed this predicament with my father. He said, "Son we have two options. We either call the dog warden and have him come get them out or we let them go ourselves."

We sat in the truck for a few minutes and tried to figure out which option was the best for the dogs and for ourselves. My dad and I were not vaccinated for rabies and we knew how bad the shots were if you were bitten. We figured that the dog warden was out of the question because it would take too long and we had the other sets to pull. So we decided that we would release them ourselves. I mean come on how hard could it be? We had let go a 60-pound plus female beaver a few years back that I caught in a raccoon snare by a pond.

We then drove back to the house and got all the things that we thought we would need, and put them in the back of my dad's pick-up. We grabbed our release pole that we used for fox trapping and the homemade one that my dad used to use before we bought one. We also took two walking sticks, an old coat, and two pairs of thick leather gloves. Now we were off driving down the road that led to the set. I said a prayer that the dogs would be gone but they weren't. Dad drove the truck right up to the set so we could jump in if the situation got out of control. Dad's plan was to catch the little dog first and put him in the back of the truck since we had a truck cap. Then we could deal with the big one.

We put on our gloves, I grabbed the new catchpole, and dad got the old one. I went right up and tried to get the loop on the little one's neck but he went up under the big dog's feet. He then persisted on growling at me. I guess I just made a distraction for dad because within a second his pole had the small one. The little dog started whining and dragging his rump as we put him in the bed and shut the door. Next we went for the big one. Dad once again prevailed in catching the big dog with his catchpole. This left me the job of releasing the dog's foot and untangling the mess of chain. Dad told me to put the coat over the dog's head to calm it down.

It also wouldn't be able to see where I was. Dad then held the dog with the pole as I stepped on the springs of the trap and unwrapped the chain. I decided it was too dangerous to try to unhook the chain from the collar because of the mouth full of pearly whites.

We then made our way to the truck. I got there first because I didn't have 40 pounds of muscle wanting to go every way but towards the truck. I got in the passenger's side and shut the door. I then crawled across the seat and opened dad's door. He was nearly exhausted from holding onto the dog, so he just sat down on the seat and closed the door on the catchpole. My dad then pushed the release and the dog ran off down the fencerows. Dad and I took a minute to regain our strength. We then went out and dropped the tailgate. Within a flash we were back in the truck. We watched as the little one walked out onto the edge of the truck bed and deposited a brown "present" on the tailgate right before he jumped off. I couldn't believe what he just did. I mean we helped out his buddy and then he does this.

We weren't out of the woods yet though. I asked dad if he saw it run off and he said, "No, why?" I told him that I didn't either. We then started looking around for the little dog when dad started up the truck and reversed her up. All of a sudden there it went from under the truck and in the direction of the other dog.

Dad gave me a high five and we were off to check our next and last set out on a farm about a half-mile away. As we neared the field where the other trap was set, I could tell we had something, even though the trap was on the far side of the field. We were probably about 600 to 700 yards away, so I knew it had to be big. Dad started mumbling and saying something about another dog. I was too busy to comment on his reaction because I was getting my new spotting scope that I got for Christmas set up on the truck window. As I zoomed in on the catch circle I could see that we either had a huge German Shepherd or a coyote. Dad didn't believe me until he looked for himself. Dad said something about it being another dog, because there aren't any coyotes out here. I took another look but couldn't really tell. So dad started the truck and drove towards the set. When we got within a hundred yards dad shut off the truck and I got a closer look. I had a loss for words. It wasn't a dog it was my first coyote! I took off running towards the set to get a good look at him. It turned out to be a big old male that ended up tipping the scales at nearly forty-five pounds. This turned out to be the last, worst, and best day of the season. ### Justin Walters, 3060 Panther Dr. N.E., New Lexington, OH 43764