

**First Beaver**  
**(How Hard Could It Be?)**  
**Article from November - December 1999 Buckeye Trapper**  
**by Tony DalPra**

I went into the "95-96" season with high hopes for a good catch of raccoon and muskrats. This would be my second year back into trapping in 17 years. I had forgotten how much I still enjoyed the sport. With a nice catch of 40 raccoon and 65 muskrats, and the weather going down hill, it was time to try something new.

I was always intrigued by the guys in the fur shed talking about beaver trapping at this time of year. Ice on the ponds and creeks, snow on the ground, raccoon trapping takes a slide until the January thaw.

The problem with beaver trapping in Wayne County is that someone has already laid claim to where there are any beavers. I got lucky when I talked to my neighbor who owns land along a river bottom. Although he traps raccoon and beaver himself, he had not been able to set any traps during the previous two years because of work. I asked if I could trap a small section of his property in hopes of getting my first beaver. The section I asked for was a half-mile from my home. The 200 yard strip of land is where I had set up my deer stand in early September. By the end of October, almost the entire stand of 50 to 75 three-inch maple trees had been reduced to stumps. My deer stand, in a small oak tree, was now standing out in the open, all by itself.

One of the guys in the fur shed deals in used traps, and I was able to buy two #4 footholds and two 330's. The first Saturday of beaver season, I picked up my nephew, Chad, to help carry the supplies. (By the time you carry everything back to where the beaver are, it is obvious why a lot of people pair up or use volunteers.)

At each end of the stumps there was a nice slide. This would be my first attempt at beaver trapping, I set a #4 trap seven-inches under the water with a couple of guide sticks. Both were staked at the bank with a drowning wire attached to a cement block. One of the 330's was set where the bank and a tree root formed a "V" shape, I set a 330 with a dive pole over top, and I put a little lure in the back of the "V". The river was divided in two by a pile of brush in shallow water. The other 330 was set in the narrow path three feet from one of the slides.

Like any rookie I thought, "this won't be too tough to catch my first beaver." Well, you're right! It was! After changing the traps at the slide three times because the water depth kept going up and down, I realized the two trees the beaver were working on were only semi-fresh when I set the traps, and they were now brown. Seven days now, and no beaver. The weather turned cold, so I pulled out disappointed.

The next weekend it was sunny and 10 degrees when I went back to look around. I knew the lodge was downstream about 100 yards. Returning to the landowner, I got permission to move down to the lodge. Determined to get my first beaver, I started chopping a hole in the ice where I thought the run was coming out of the food bed. The river was down, and after my third hole I found what I believed was a run in two feet of water.

To beginners and young trappers, NEVER go out on the ice without checking the thickness of the ice and the depth of the water first! I used small holes and a stick to know I was on six-inches of ice with two-feet of water underneath.

I placed a 330 in the run thinking this would be easier (WRONG). Three days in a row, in the dark before work, I had to reset the sprung 330. The fourth day after work I reset the trap in a small area next to the run. I did this with four pencil-sized twigs wired to the trigger. The twigs were shaved half way back on both ends.

The next morning in the dark I broke the ice away, shined my light down in the clear water, but there was no

trap. I grabbed the anchor wire connected to a tree on the bank and gave a pull. My adrenaline started flowing as I realized the wire was stuck under the feed pile. I put my shoulder glove on, reached under the ice, carefully found the spring, and started pulling. As I pulled up I let out a loud "YES"! My first beaver! About a 15-pound kit caught by the back foot. I wasn't sure how it happened, but I would take it. I pulled the trap the next day since a warm front was coming in with the possibility of snow and rain. This would send the river up at least two or three feet with ice flows.

As happy as I was with my first beaver, it was just a kit compared to the 50 pounders that the guys in the fur shed had. So that wasn't enough. Ten days after my catch the river was down to normal and the ice was all but gone. I took one #4 and set it on a shelf seven inches below the water, at the bottom of a slide used by the beaver to check out the top of the bank lodge. I figured after being frozen in for three weeks they would check out the integrity of their lodge. I wired up my cement block and looped my wire through the stake on the top of the bank. I then proceeded with my attempt at my first castor mound, then added lure and fresh wood shavings.

I headed out the next day (Sunday morning) about 9:00 a.m. to see if the first warm night, along with no ice in three weeks, would prove helpful. As I stood on the bank above the slide I saw two things - a large beaver track in the middle of my castor mound and an empty trap bed. Pretty cut and dry right? Wrong! As I looked down between my legs I saw the stake, but I didn't see any wire!! Earlier I said I looped the anchor wire through the stake. I was so happy at how well my set looked after I made it that I forgot to finish typing off the wire. Rookie mistake!

After slapping my forehead and saying a few choice words I headed into the water. I got half way to where the block should be and I was to the top of my hip-waders. I grabbed a twelve-foot pole off the feed pile, which had an L shape end and started fishing. I found the wire, lifted it and turned the pole so it would loop the wire. I started tugging on the pole. First I saw the block; then came the beaver wrapped up in my loose wire.

I finally had what I set out to get; my first adult beaver, a 49 pounder. That ended my year. By trial and tribulation you always learn a lot your first year. Just don't give up!

I would like to thank you fellow trappers for your articles. There are always people wanting to know more, or try something new. That is what keeps this sport fun. I would also like to thank the guys in the fur shed for their help and instructions.