

How Grandfather Beat The Beavers

By LEM MEESE - Outdoors Writer

No one ever had to explain the expression "working like a beaver" to me. I know from first-hand experience what mighty toilers were these furry little animals with the big, flat tails.

You see, as a boy I lived many years in northern Michigan on my grandfather's farm. And on the lower 40 acres of that farm was a small body of water called Green's Lake.

The little lake was fed by a good sized creek that entered from the east and left by the west; and it was a fine lake in which to fish for pike, perch or Green's Lake, the bragging-size pike saw to that.

ON THE EAST shore of the lake grew sharp, marsh hay; and my grandfather pastured his cattle there and, for some mysterious reason, they always grew fat on the wily grass.

Green's Lake, like most other small lakes in that countryside, enjoyed a tranquil, somnolent existence for many years in my memory. But then the beaver came.

He and his mate probably swam in at night. When humans are even occasionally about, the beaver is rarely seen during the day.

The beaver — there were no more than two or three at the most — went to work with a will. And it wasn't long until they had fashioned a beautiful little dam down the creek about 100 yards from the west end of the lake. I was overjoyed, and so were my many cousins who

frequently visited my grandfather's farm. The beaver's efforts had converted the spot just below their dam into an ideal fishing and swimming hole.

My grandfather didn't mind the beaver invasion — at first. He didn't mind that the beaver cut his choice poplar and birch to build their dam, and he didn't mind that their efforts caused his lake to rise a little — at first.

BUT THESE BEAVER weren't satisfied with a small dam; they wanted a bigger and bigger one. Their energy was inexhaustible, and soon their dam grew very high.

My grandfather became alarmed. The beaver dam had grown so tall that it caused Green's Lake to back up and

flood his pasture of marsh hay. Now my grandfather was a devout, God-fearing Seventh-day Adventist; and he disliked hurting anything, especially an animal. In fact, it distressed him so much when he had to kill a chicken for Sunday dinner, that he always chased its boys away so we wouldn't see to such it disturbed him to have to cut off the fowl's head.

Yes, my grandfather truly loved all the creatures of the earth; but he decided the beaver must go.

HE WAS nearing 70 at the time, but week after week he would wade out into the cold, running water of the creek and trip a huge hole in the dam. He believed the beaver would grow weary of repairing the man-

made damage and paddle on to other climes.

He figured wrong. The beaver not only fixed up the weekly remnants of my grandfather's wrath, they actually built that dam taller by the day.

My grandfather grew desperate. His pasture was inundated to where it was fit for little else but water snakes and frogs.

His patience exhausted, he drove into town and bought several sticks of dynamite. He worked it up to the beaver so completely out of business that his furry nemesis wouldn't have the brass or fortitude to embark upon another rebuilding project.

HOWEVER, my grandfather made the mistake of mentioning the purpose of his explosives at the hardware store; and the local conservation man got wind of the prospective demolition job.

"No, Sidney," he told my grandfather, "I won't let you dynamite that dam even if it is on your property. I'll get rid of those beaver for you."

In a few days the conservation man appeared at Green's Lake with a pair of box-like traps made of steel and wire. He intended to catch the beaver alive and transport them elsewhere.

The first time the conservation man inspected his traps he found each one snapped and a large rock inside.

Shooting Hours

Basic shooting hours for small game hunting in Michigan are from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. EST, except during the November 15-30 period when the timetable runs from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Another exception covers woodcock which may be hunted from sunrise to sunset. No shooting is allowed in the Lower Peninsula on October 20 before 10 a.m. EST.

His second visit to his traps revealed they had snared nothing more than a pair of young saplings bearing the fresh tooth marks of a beaver. His third trip to Green's Lake turned up not only no beaver, but no traps either.

NOW I NEVER saw my grandfather go near those traps, so I can't say for sure he was the one who tampered with them. But I do know the conservation man was mighty cool toward him after that.

Anyway, my grandfather let the beaver build their dam without interference after that; and he quickly became his old self, a kindly, animal-loving man.

Instead of the marsh, he pastured his cattle on a hill on the north side of the lake. Though they didn't grow as fat, they seemed as contented as cows could be.

And, as for my cousins and I, we never did tire of visiting the swimming and fishing hole at the top of the beaver dam.

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