

A Pair of Mitts

At thirty below Fahrenheit, your hands get cold quick, especially if you have no mitts. I had no mitts. They were somewhere out on the frozen lake in the dark where I couldn't find them.

I had struck the lake at sundown, which in those parts, comes about four in the afternoon. I was moving east and behind me the sky was an angry red scribble where the sun had dropped behind the sawtooth tops of the spruce.

I heard the wolves again and then the sound died out, which was worse than hearing it, because it meant they had found my trail. I visioned them bounding along, the leader with his nose to the ground, the others in a line behind, careful not to step off the trail into the deep snow on either side. They were still a couple of miles back with at least one ridge of low, rounded hills between them and me.

I made the skis sing along, heading for an island where I could build a fire and keep the wolves off. I wasn't terribly afraid. I had a rifle and an ax, and with a fire going, I wouldn't be in great danger.

My ski pole hit a ridge, jammed and flipped out of my grasp, taking my frozen mitt with it. By now it was too dark to see. I managed to find the pole by feeling around in the dark but there was no sign of the mitt. Moving my bare hand round in the snow, I realized there was no feeling in it.

I still had one mitt left. I took it off and put it on the frozen hand and went back to looking for the missing mitt. It was several

minutes before I realized that the mitt had slipped off the frozen hand. Now, I had no mitts at all.

There was no hope of finding the mitts on the dark ice and after a last desperate search, I moved on as quickly as I could, where the dark shape of the island rose against the stars. Both my hands were frozen and as the deeper snow of the island crunched under my skis, I stopped, opened my mackinaw and woollen shirt and thrust both frozen hands under my armpits, a trick I had learned from an old Indian. After an uncomfortable few minutes, I felt returning life.

Deep in the shelter of the trees, I pulled my ax out of my pack and cut branches. I made a pile of branches and sliced some bark off a birch tree and started the branches going with a match from the box in my pocket. When the branches caught, white flames leaped ten feet in the air. I piled on more branches and the flame leaped higher. The fire gradually burned a hole for itself in the snow and began sinking down below my feet. I still had my skis on and had worn a track from the fire to the trees and back again.

On the periphery of my mind, I was aware of the low, sobbing moans of the wolves. I knew they had crossed the lake and were approaching the island. I had to stop working every few minutes and hold my hands out to the fire to thaw them. Between roasting and freezing, they were beginning to resemble barbecued steak.

I remembered a jobber's camp on this lake. I hadn't been here for five years but I recalled that Cam-

my Kreutz had a pulp-cutting operation a couple of miles back in the bush. How would I ever find the place at this time of night?

There was quite a slope from the height of the island to the shore of the lake and I hit the hard-packed snow travelling fast, with enough momentum to carry me far out on the lake. Although snow was coming down in a leisurely manner, the night was still lit by moonlight. I looked back and saw the lead wolves tumbling onto the ice from the deep snow in-shore and my heart turned over. They looked just like big, playful dogs and there seemed to be five of them at least. I heard the short, sharp, excited yelps as they started out on the ice and the sound lent wings to my skis.

I was running on the hard packed snow my skis making about as good time as the wolves. I was all right if I didn't have an accident. The dark shape of the trees loomed ahead and through a lull in the storm I saw what I was looking for, a faint break in the trees marking, I hoped, the beginning of the tote road. It seemed to go straight up the ridge and I was not about to climb it on skis with the wolves leaping at me from behind. Now was the time to settle that problem. In the shadow of the trees I looked back. The dark shapes of the wolves coming helter-skelter on the moonlit snow, like figures on a lighted stage, made perfect targets. I blew life into my hands, got the rifle up and snapped off two shots.

Two wolves went down on the ice, one with a broken shoulder

By Thomas Van Dusen

and the other dragging shattered rear-quarters, moaning piteously. According to wolf-lore, the others should have stopped and devoured their brothers, leaving me fifteen minutes to make my escape. They did nothing of the kind.

They ran round in circles, whimpering. I realized one of those I had shot was the she-wolf, the mother or mate of the others. The other, since wolves mate for life, must be the old male. That meant I had only three cubs, or at least not mature wolves to deal with. The odds were evening.

I started up the ridge in the storm, digging the edges of the skis into the deep snow. It was hard work, and before I was half way up, I was sweating like a pig. I kept my hands inside my jacket and moved up, carefully, methodically. I heard the wolves yelping again as I gained the height of land and looked back through the snow curtain. Three vague shapes racing through the trees towards the ridge, I could make out the trail dropping steeply to the valley and thanked my lucky stars I was wearing old-fashioned Norwegian skis with strap-on bindings, equally versatile for cross-country or downhill in the dark through unknown bush. My memory of the trail was that it dropped straight down through the trees, with about five feet clearance on either side, wide enough for a sleigh with a load of logs.

I put my feet together, bent my knees and dropped straight down into the blackness. I could hear the yelping of the wolves behind

me. At the same moment, in the dark bowl of the valley a light flickered. I watched it come closer, hoping I wouldn't hit a root or stump in the dark. The wolves were falling behind in the loose snow and within a few minutes I was sliding to a stop in the yard of Cammy Kreutz' jobbing camp. I knew the wolves wouldn't follow into the lighted yard. I went up the steps and banged on the door and was admitted by Cammy Kreutz, bearded, dirty, in gum-rubber boots, work pants tucked in and braces over his dirty, grey underwear.

I sat down beside the stove and he pushed a crockery mug full of Alcool into my hands, which by this time were like boxing gloves. By using both together, I could get the mug to my mouth. Over Cammy Kreutz' head a cord ran across the cabin and from it dangled suits of winter underwear.

Cammy Kreutz' four sons snored heavily on double bunks as we sat there drinking with the smell of drying underwear filling the cabin.

"Have any trouble gettin' here?"

"Dropped my mitts on the ice."

"Well, forget about it, man. Drink up."

Behind his head snow was lashing against the window and I could hear the keening of the wind. Inside, it was warm and comfortable. My hands were beginning to pain me, but the alcool had started a glow in my stomach and it was slowly stealing through my system. I decided that I might just make it through. h

Castor Concessions

By Peter Romme

Winter has Eastern Ontario in his icy grip and shows no sign of relaxing or letting go.

One Sunday morning the thermometer outside the kitchen window reported it at -40 Fahrenheit.

Metric Canada tells me that, at that temperature, Celsius and Fahrenheit come together. Which goes to show that when it gets this cold anything will get together in order to keep warm, as the old philosopher used to say, cold winters make for happy marriages and big families.

In spite of the cold weather the cattle still go back on the cornstalks and dig through the snow for cobs that the combine missed last fall. Only on the coldest days when the wind is bad do they stay around the buildings.

The large round bales of hay and cornstalks that I am feeding them work very well, except that it is impossible to remove the twine from the bales as it is frozen into the material and covered with snow and ice. They should be stored inside in this climate. Starting the tractor these cold mornings is not the easiest thing to do.

The way real cattle prices are, I sometimes wonder why I bother with these cows at all. It certainly is not the money, but they make nice company.

The one positive thing about all the cold weather it sure makes me happy to be working in the pigery where it is nice and warm. The chores get done exceptionally well there lately, not fast mind you, just well.

One item that is sure to raise every one's temperature is the rate of interest. Interest rates are very high again although they apparently have peaked and are slowly coming down.

Winter is also the time to catch up on new developments attend meetings, and seminars. Kempville College is having their first ever Farmers Week from Feb. 16 to Feb. 21. Every day will feature a different aspect of farming.

Well folks, try to keep warm. A stiff drink will do the trick; non-drinkers can huddle a little closer to the wife. As for me I aim to do both.

Griffith


CARTAGE LTD.

- Tandem Trucks ● Loaders
- Dump and Hopper Trailers
- Snow Removal ● Equipment

Rentals

- Agricultural Lime

RUSSELL



Charlie
445-5344

Lloyd
445-2820

CONTINENTAL MUSHROOM FARM

GROWERS OF SOME
OF THE FINEST
MUSHROOMS IN THE WORLD



*is happy to be part of the team that will
help make Eastern Ontario prosperous
by working hard and
working together we will succeed*

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BEAT
INFLATION?

See my beautiful collection
of nearly-new clothes.

DRESSES
BLOUSES





PANT SUITS
SLACKS



By appointment—
Mary Lukac 445-5246

**MICHEL A.
COUSINEAU**

B.Sc. Com. Accountant

Accounting system, Bookkeeping procedures, Payroll services, Financial Statements, Special Assignments.
Box 88, R.R. 3, Russell, Ontario.
(613) 445-5291 K0A 3B0

**COCHRANE'S
DAIRY LTD.**

Russell, Ontario.

FRESH DAIRY PRODUCTS
HOME DELIVERY

COMPETITIVE PRICES LOCALLY OWNED

Phone **445-2959**