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BILL'S CORNER

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CHECKMATE CORRECTIONS

Over my career, I have had the great fortune to spend time with some of the most talented trappers and wildlife control professionals in the country. Anyone who knows me knows that my great respect of the coyote has fueled my pursuit over my entire career to be the best that I can be capturing this formidable adversary. I have always felt that setting out to consistently capture the coyote is like playing a cool game of chess. If it's not challenging, I don't see any reason in doing it!

I remember in the early 90's

when I had the great fortune of spending 2 weeks in the field on sheep ranches in the desert of Utah with Mike McMurray, a known professional in the field at the time. 12 to 14 hours a day we spent in his truck driving all over the desert capturing coyotes and I soaked up all the instruction I could and have relentlessly used it to pursue coyotes ever since. While I didn't like Mike's cooking (he cooked everything in lard and I think I lost about 10 pounds in those 2 weeks), I had a blast learning some of the very basics of coyote trapping!

Location, location, location

Mike would say consistently at every stop throughout the desert. You can have the best set, the most awesome baits and lures, and great equipment but if you aren't on location, it won't do you any good. That advice still holds true today with not only coyote trapping, but all trapping!

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of enjoying great relationships with some of the best. Rob Erickson, Bob Noonan, Mike, and many others, but I didn't get to this point in my career because I was personally so smart or ingenious, rather, because of great people and pioneers like these guys who were always willing to pass along ideas and information.

A few months ago, I read an article in the Trappers Post about a set called the Pipe Dream by Mark Zagger. I read the entire article, as I always do when it has anything to do with coyotes, and the set was fascinating to me. Not only its approach, but also the way it was made and introduced to the animal. A carefully inserted Big Jake Trap with a custom screen pan cover bedded with grass, that's pretty cool! The attractor, rather than a normal hole in the ground, was a small electrical conduit pipe pounded into the ground slightly angled towards the trap. I thought to myself what a cool set. No dirt, no hole in the ground, coyote's attention above ground level, pure awesomeness! I thought to myself, I've got to meet this guy and see it up close being constructed.

Like a lot of other people, I pick up things much better when



A Zagger routine triple on some drunks, all in Pipe Dream Sets!

I'm visually seeing it done than I do reading about it. Even though the article was done extremely well, with photos and explanation, there's always a few things that you don't see unless you're standing right there looking at the guy doing it. This was no exception! I thought to myself, I guess I'm going to New York!

I had never heard of Mark, but I knew people who had and what I was told consistently was that this guy is a true professional coyote trapper! He is the real deal with 30 plus years' experience in the field playing chess, as I would say, with the most difficult animal to consistently capture in any situation in my opinion. Although Mark majored in wildlife biology, he doesn't look anything like a coyote trapper or for that matter, a trapper at all. This guy is a white collar Vice President of a successful company in New York. Like some kind of coyote superhero, he successfully ends his business by day and transforms into coyote trapper at night and on the weekends. Although he spends a lot of time studying the animal and preparing equipment, he only actually is in the field trapping them for about 16-18 days out of the year. **320 coyotes in the 2014/2015 season alone with his partner, and that was in about 18 days!** He also averages over 125 coyotes annually in his New York three week vacation line. I'd say the guy knows his s***! After many texts messages and emails, my persuasion skills prevailed and Mark gave me the rare privilege to come out to New York to spend a day in the field.

This past October I flew to Syracuse New York where Mark picked me up at the airport. I thought all successful white-collar guys drove Cadillacs or Mercedes. Nope, Mark pulled up in a white GMC with a black coyote on the side of the door. My kind of guy! I

got in the truck and we took off for the bed and breakfast where I had booked a room in Cazenovia, New York, his hometown. Most of the ride there he was on the telephone taking care of some business. I had been traveling a lot over the past weeks and was extremely tired, so I checked into the bed and breakfast and got a couple hours of sleep before Mark picked me up and we went back to his place for a sneak peek at the enormous, very organized shop of a professional coyote trapper.

Mark's shop is a beautifully built rustic northeastern style barn with attached dog kennels and a room for each necessary task. This place was amazing! A skinning and fur preparation room equipped with a customized fur drying system, electric skinning machine, fur tumbler and work bench. The other rooms consisted of baits and lures, trap storage, set making material and his very own disposable stake room! Now get this, it's on top of a specialized dog kennel area for his two coyote hunting trained terriers and of course a large, drive in area for trucks and utility vehicles. I'm a little OCD so I was in heaven!

After talking for a while and watching him remove the wax from the trigger catch areas on his Jake Traps, we headed back to the bed and breakfast and had some dinner. I was fascinated by what I was seeing and hearing, but I was really going to get schooled the next day!

Mark picked me up bright and early at 6 a.m. the next morning in a downpour, what he called typical New York trapping weather, and we took off for the first stop, a small farm just on the edge of town. This is where he would start to explain part of his system of catching what he calls the drunks! Yes, you heard it right, Mark's favorite coyote trapping reference is to "find the bar, catch the drunks!" Unlike

location, location, location, this reference was a lot catchier.

Farm after farm after farm, he explained his system and approach to catching the drunks. Mark wasted no time in grabbing his gear and showing me exactly how he makes

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two of his most deadly sets! Like Mike McMurray 30 years prior, he stressed location. You can't catch them if you're not on top of them. Although these sets were fairly simple, they were very unique in their construction. Allowing me to take pictures, I started clicking them off so that I could remember each and every step of the process in the sets development. Although the construction of the set was unique, some of the tools that he used to construct them we're just as unique. Neither of the two sets required any dirt as the typical trap cover. You could see how bullet proof these sets were and how every aspect of them was crucial to its success. The little things are usually the most important!

He explained a lot of things as we drove from farm to farm consistently showing me locations at each of the properties and why some properties and farms are much better than others. We would get out of the truck and he would show me the location within the location. What he considered a "bar" and what he just considered a good location or travel route. He

**Another Drunk!**

went into great detail about the family group and which coyote you want to catch first and which ones will fall in after. Where to make the majority of your sets on location and where to reserve what he calls the sleeper! He talked to me about human odor, gland lures, metal, baits, and urine and then recapped it all with detailed experienced explanation. The day was absolutely jam packed with information and detailed explanations including thoughtful answers to my many questions.

Before I left the next day, he made me a list of things that I should get and told me to practice making the sets that he showed me in the field. While I thought those would be fairly simple to make since I had watched carefully, absorbing his techniques while he constructed it, I would come to find that one of the sets took me 7 different tries before he finally approved it by text message.

It was truly a fantastic experience from undoubtedly one of the best coyote trappers in North America and Canada. I know what some of you may be thinking right now as you're reading this, "when are you going to tell us how to make those sets and what the tips and tricks were"? If you want to know these things, you will have to go see him personally, as the only way to truly grasp the information and in field experience, is to see and hear from the expert himself. If you love coyote trapping you have to meet this guy, he's a true pro! He is considering doing more organized instruction in the near future, so stay tuned!

Like he told me before I left town, "Bill find the bar, and you'll catch the drunks!" ■



Mark explaining the Sleeper at the Bar!