

On the trail

by
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Hunters keep bear track all night.

The story was being passed around in a little circle at Mercer, where I stopped for coffee one morning after the opening of the early bear hunting season. There was a lot of talk about the feeling about it among some of the elderly boys, some amusement, some disgust, and some contempt.

Later, speaking of a bear with the same identifying mark, some Wisconsin Dells hunters told me with a somewhat different version, that they had seen it in the area.

They didn't find a trace of the big bear at the dump. When the other hunting party in the dump found it, it seemed like a good place to go back to. The hunters found a broken bottle or two, but the "marked critter" wouldn't even get excited over a bear trail.

Locally, these hunters had two kinds they had heard and talked themselves a pair of geographers that had paid off with six bear near children on the opening weekend.

These two kinds took off on a bear trail from the Elbert dump in a short time they beyond level, and the hunters found a pair of tracks up a tree. They took the boards away, leaving a hole in the dirt and making one up in the tree.

WHEN A SHORT TIME the two hunters started off on another bear trail, the favorite route. They found the trail. The bear was running on high ground, leaving no trace of its size, but when the hunters found the tracks they knew it was the big bear.

"A bear that big," a hunter told me, "the animals call it the critter, not even with a bunch of boards. Takes more than a couple of good hunters to run a big bear, they run the woods if he wanted to. If a big bear does happen to tree, he climbs it, and because the hunters have been heard, he had to get away from their hunting him, so we know of big and his part don't have the big one track."

It turned out to be a small, adult bear, but before the hunters could get to the tree, gradually, the boards were trying to take their approach, the bear fell down and made another run.

The hunters made out the bear on a tree on high ground. Once there, in a pine over a hundred-foot bear, there was enough to allow the hunters to get to the trunk of a pair of fence boards, each weighing almost as much as he does.

The small bear then plunged into a very rough swampy covered with water and mud, and kept on. On a slight rise in the swamp the bear, fighting and struggling with the mud and logs, and up this point went up a tree. This time he stayed there despite the noise of the hunters cooking and splashing out to the shore.

"WE ALREADY HAD HIS BIG BEAR," a hunter told me. "This fellow was a high school senior, we were sure, but we passed it. We had him all out and in the bear stay on the tree. He was some size and look at what he was up to."

Later, their previous Nigger, a huge black hunter with traces of brown, took off alone on a bear trail. He seemed headed out of the country, but the hunters heard of his efforts. About half they were still driving the response, looking and listening for him, when I met them. They thought Nigger might've picked up the big bear's trail, but they were convinced only with getting the good forest talk.

Getting back to the marked bear, it was said to have happened in the Manitowish dunes. Two strange hunters drove into the dune dump on the evening before the opening of the bear season, just checking for bear signs.

They found an adult bear feeding in the dunes. Loping from their vehicle, according to the stories, they rushed toward the bear and were not certain how they came to a big pine tree.

The men, the story went on, parked themselves right above the foot of the tree at night, in the morning when the bear had a moment's rest, they would be getting the foot of the tree and a getting their rifle. They shot the bear, discovered it had one front paw missing.

I REMEMBER THE Manitowish dump is steep ascent. The dump has a deep disposal trench about four feet deep. There are some big pine trees standing in the cleared area. One of the big pines has a hole that had been made by the bear's teeth, about twenty feet by the big grown tree limbs.

Up there where a bear could be seen in the green timber over night, the dead limbs might be, he looked all the way down the hole and through them.

There was no blood on the ground, but on the opening day of the season it was missing, but there was a tuft of black hair on a broken twig about ten feet up.

For some reason, I'm glad to hear their story, not just.



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Wed, May 4, 2022