



# Trapping... Like Christmas Every Day

**By Steven Bridges**

Remember the excitement leading up to Christmas as child? It was always hard to go to sleep the night before Christmas because I was wondering what gifts would be under the tree in the morning. Will it be the new bike or the swing set I asked Santa for at the mall? And my parents never had to drag me out of bed on Christmas morning. I shot out of the covers and sprinted to the tree for a quick look. Then, I had to roust my parents out of their slumber to get to the opening of presents.

We lose that anticipatory feeling as we get older and have kids of our own. Christmas is less about the gifts we get and more about staying up late and putting a !@#%&^\* bicycle and swing set together. And yes, it is usually well below freezing and the instructions in the box are only in Korean.

I have at last found a way to capture the feeling of Christmas morning as an adult... trapping! I began trapping for the first time last fall on our family ranch in northeast Mills County. My trapping started simply as a practical ranch job, like fixing fencing or hauling hay. I know, it doesn't sound very Christmasy yet... just wait!

We were losing baby lambs and kid goats to predators at the ranch. So, I thought I'd help out the overworked County Government Predator Control Trapper by setting a few traps of my own. I got online and read a little about the basics of snaring and trapping for predator control. I bought a dozen snares the next morning at Mills County General Store. I now was a trapper!

With a little tie wire and the dozen snares, I headed out the ranch. I drove around the pasture containing the sheep looking for "slides" which are holes under the fence where predators crawl under to get from pasture to pasture. The large, obvious slides

already had snares placed by the Government Trapper. But, I found many smaller slides without snares. I began wiring my snares into these smaller slides.

We keep our fences in good repair at the ranch, which forces the predators to make slides under then fence rather than finding a hole in the fence. So, I found plenty of smaller slides into which I placed snares. I used up my dozen snares before I had made it around that first 50 acre sheep pasture. I thought to myself, "Let's see if this works before I buy any more snares."

I went about my other chores at the ranch, but my thoughts turned back to my snares. Would I catch anything? If I caught something, what would it be, a coyote, a bobcat or a skunk?

The questions kept coming into my head as I finished my chores and headed home. After dinner and putting the kids to bed, I laid under the covers trying to go to sleep myself. My mind kept drifting back to my line of snares. Did I set the snares right? Will any predators use the slides tonight? Which snare has the best chance of catching something. I thought, "This is like the Night Before Christmas!"

I finally dozed off sometime after 1:00 am. I should have slept in a little after my trouble getting to sleep the night before. But, I was up at 6:00 am wide awake wondering what if I trapped anything in my snares.

I got dressed and made a hurried cup of coffee. The coffee maker seemed especially slow. Even after waiting on the coffee, I was out the door in record time. It wasn't gifts under the tree, it was that thought of predators under the fence that had my anticipation soaring.

Like the coffeemaker, my drive to the ranch took what seemed like a lot longer than usual. But at long last, I made it inside the ranch entrance. I drove along the sheep pasture fence



**Steven Bridges with one of the 21 coyotes he trapped in northeast Mills County over the winter.**

with my driver side window toward the fence. I felt my heart going a little faster as I drove up to my first snare... Nothing. My second and third snares were equally devoid of any sign of activity.

A little dejected, I came up a little hill toward my fourth snare. I didn't remember exactly where the slide containing my snare was along the fence line. All of a sudden, a huge bundle of fury, fur and teeth erupted just outside my truck window.

A big male coyote, caught in my snare had waited in the slide under the fence until I drove right up next to him. When my face was ten feet from the slide, he lunged up at me snarling and growling. This was the adult version of a Christmas present. Little kid

gifts don't fight back! And, kids rarely drop four letter words when they get their gifts. I had just dropped plenty of four letter words on my way to the floorboard in the passenger side of the truck.

It took me a few seconds to regain my composure and grab my .22 rifle from the back seat. Meanwhile, I could see the coyote every few seconds pop up in the driver side window lunging back and forth against the snare. How well did I wire that snare up yesterday? Not good enough was the answer.

I chuckled a little at myself as I got out of the truck on the passenger side. I hadn't read about the common practice of trappers getting out of their vehicles from the passenger side. But I'm sure it's there somewhere. I'm sure all trappers also carry clean underwear, because I needed it right about then!

The dispatching of the coyote was anticlimactic. A five yard shot at tethered animal is less than sporting. It is the scouting for sign, placing of traps with care and especially the waiting that makes up the allure of trapping. And not unlike hunting, trapping is not about making the shot, it is about everything leading up to the shot.

I went on to catch three raccoons and a skunk in addition to the coyote. Also on that first day, trapping caught me!

When my six year-old son Flint and his cousin Luke saw my first haul of a coyote and three coons (I didn't bring the skunk home), they both wanted to go trapping with me.

At first trapping seemed a little morbid for kids. But the more I thought about it, the more the idea made more sense. The kids didn't have to sit still or be quiet, two of the hardest things for kids to accomplish when hunting.

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