



Mighty Thor: Trap Line Dog

By Steven Bridges
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Dog owners love to teach their pets to sit, roll over, and shake hands. Yes, I have taught my dog Thor a lot of those tricks too. But I never guessed that in return, Thor would teach me a lot about trapping.

In full disclosure, I didn't come up with the idea of using a dog on the trap line... far from it. But I have read many other trappers' accounts of using their dogs on their trap lines, and I just happen to now have a dog.

I don't have a dog bred over many generations to maximize my trap line effectiveness. My dog is a male black Labrador Retriever named Thor. He is now two years old. He started out as my bird hunting and family dog. But over the last year I have seen what he can do for my trapping. Now Thor is my trapping dog first, followed by my bird hunting and family dog.

There are many reasons to have a trap line dog, not the least of which is company. True, there have been lots of times I have taken friends and family along with me to check my trap line. It is important to share the love of trapping with the outside world. Friends and family are glad to go out checking the line when it is 65 degrees on a beautiful fall day. But don't ask them when it is 25 degrees and sleeting.

Unlike people, Thor always looks forward to loading up in the truck. I never have to ask him twice. He never says it is too cold



Pictured is Steven Bridges with his trap line dog, Thor, and their coyote.

or wet. He doesn't even mind the questionable smells that emanate from under the seats of my old ranch truck. He doesn't care what I paid for gas or how little I get for my furs. Thor is always positive, even when I talk politics with him.

My neighbors and I run lots of sheep and goats in Mills County, located in Central Texas. I trap almost all year on my own ranch and neighboring ranches for predator damage control. Coyotes eat sheep all year in every season, in good weather and bad. So most days will find me checking traps or scouting for new locations, and Thor is with me almost every time. He sits proudly by me, always happy and positive.

Many people are a little scared of catching their pet in a trap. Luckily, Thor hasn't gotten caught

in my choice of coyote trap, the K9 Extreme. I have often thought about letting him get snapped. I'm pretty sure that would fix any future issue with him checking out my sets. But in the end, I just don't have the heart to stand there and watch it happen. So I have taken Clint Locklear's advice. I yell "Danger!" anytime I see him get a whiff of a set. So far, this has helped avert any Thor catches.

I trap mostly using drags. I use drags for several reasons. First, Mills County seems to be one solid rock. Stakes bend, or simply won't go more than six inches into the ground in lots of places. And don't even try to pound a disposable stake into our hard ground. I have a half dozen bent disposable stake drivers and the tennis elbow to prove it.

Second, I like to keep my sets

working. Coyotes in sheep country get mighty paranoid, so catch circles are no good for coyote set remakes. But once an animal gets pinched on a drag, he will run for cover, leaving my set relatively undisturbed and ready for my remake.

And, Thor has proven to be a pretty good drag/animal tracker, so I rarely have to search for a caught animal for long. I happen to like the thrill of finding an animal that has left the scene of the crime. It is like Christmas morning on every catch. I never know what we have until Thor and I get in the brush and look. Yes, Thor often trails the animal into the brush only to find a coon sitting there... but sometimes it is a big bobcat or a sheep killing coyote. That is when it is Merry Christmas to us!

A trap line dog has another great advantage, his nose for sign. On control jobs, I always like to set on sign. And the best sign I know of is poop. I'm always looking for poop as I drive along two track ranch roads. It used to be that our coyotes would poop right on the beat down dirt of the tire rut. When I saw the poop, I'd pull over and make some sets.

However, I think the constant pressure put on coyotes over the last 100 years in our sheep and goat country has made our coyotes a little extra cautious with their pooping. I don't find much coyote poop out in the open in road ruts nearly as often as in years past.

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