

Poachers

One of the National Park Senior Management's great concerns was illegal poaching. The Warden Service was expected to rigorously combat poaching. Post World War II, in the rural area around Prince Albert National Park (PANP), times were tough. Right next door to folks' homes was PANP with its abundance of big game and fur bearing animals. A clandestine hunting or trapping excursion into the park could yield a winter supply of meat or some valuable furs to sell. There were those who took the risk.

The Stakeout

Wardens Ed Sipes, Cliff Millard, Emmet Millard and Frank Jervis (Sturgeon Crossing District)

My older brother Dick attended school at Rapid Bend. The school was about four and a half miles north and west of Sturgeon Crossing. In order to get there, he had to cross the Sturgeon River and there was no bridge. There was, however, a spot where the river broadened and flowed over a gravel bar. The low water level and solid footing made it an easy place to cross on horseback. One day when Dick came home from school, he reported that there was a tent encampment west of the gravel bar. When questioned more closely, he confirmed that there were tents, wagons, and people, but few horses. Suspecting poachers, the wardens made a plan.

Following someone who has a head start is a poor strategy and it is highly unlikely you will ever catch up. Instead a stakeout was planned. Sandwiches were packed, and Thermoses filled. My dad and Cliff Millard set up their stakeout overlooking the area near the gravel bar and Frank Jervis and Emmet Millard set up a similar operation farther south at another spot where the river could be easily crossed.

It was the month of June. The evenings were chilly and damp. The mosquitoes were plentiful and hungry. The men didn't light a fire for fear it would give away their presence. They waited for two days and nights before Dad and Cliff heard men and horses approaching. At the appropriate moment, they revealed themselves, rifles in hand, and took four men into custody. The pack train consisted of nine horses and thirteen butchered elk carcasses.

The confiscated rifles and elk meat were loaded into the Park three quarter ton truck. The horses were hobbled and turned loose. With the four men sitting on top of the meat, Cliff riding shotgun and my dad driving, they set off on the twenty mile trip to Big River.

First stop in Big River was the RCMP cells to jail the four men. Next stop was the Justice of the Peace to file formal charges and, finally, the Locker Plant to inventory the meat as evidence and have it put into frozen storage.

Back at the Park, the confiscated horses were rounded up and herded down to pasture at Sturgeon Crossing.

Later Cliff and my dad would attend Provincial Magistrate's Court in Big River to give their testimony. The four men were found guilty of illegal hunting. The magistrate charged each of them a minimal fine and ordered the return of their confiscated horses and rifles, stating they were essential to the men's livelihood. The meat was donated to the Prince Albert Orphanage.

It was later learned that a nearby First Nation reserve would hold an annual wedding event for all the year's weddings on the same day in June as part of a larger powwow celebration. The hunt was intended to supply meat for the occasion.

A Close Call

Warden Harry Genge

Harry apprehended three men for hunting illegally. It was deep in his district and a long walk out. When they stopped for a break, one of his charges got behind him and knocked him down. The three of them beat him severely, tied him up, and left him. Fortunately the younger of the group (a juvenile) returned and untied him. Harry was able to painfully make his way to safety.

NOTE: This event which took place in the 1950s and other similar occurrences prompted wardens across Canada to request Parks Canada wardens be issued with handguns. That request was not granted until 2009, although some wardens acquired their own weapons and carried them when they felt the need.

Warnings

Wardens Ron Davies and Jack Leader (Rabbit District).

While Ron and Jack were on foot patrol along Rabbit Creek where they suspected illegal trapping, shots were fired in their direction. They took cover and, while they waited, a brush fire was also lit close by. They had to move to get into a position with better radio reception to call for firefighting support. The shots and the deliberate fire were undoubtedly related. Had the shooter intended to harm them, they would have been easy targets. However, the message was clear that their patrol was not appreciated.

Shots Fired

Wardens Ron Davies and Andy Corrigan (Waskesiu District)

Ron and Andy were canoeing down the Waskesiu River towards Montreal Lake when they heard shots from a small caliber rifle. They had no idea if the shots were directed at them. They were carrying a high powered rifle in the canoe and fired a shot of their own. There were no more shots fired.

Making Tracks

Warden Emmet Millard (Rabbit District)

The boundary road ran along the west side of the Park adjacent to the Sturgeon River which marks the west boundary of the Park. When travelling the boundary road, the byword was always "Watch for Tracks" as tracks crossing the dirt road were a possible indicator of someone entering the Park to hunt illegally.

While patrolling near the river, Emmet discovered a pair of stilts leaning against a tree. With considerable ingenuity, someone had attached the lower leg bones and hooves of an elk to the foot of the stilts. This was presumably so the owner could cross the boundary road without leaving tracks that would alert the wardens to his presence.

Icecycle or Icicle?

Warden Emmet Millard (Rabbit District).

While on foot patrol along Rabbit Creek, Emmet discovered the traps and snares of an illegal trapper. It was late fall, the creek was frozen over, and there was no snow. To quietly move through the frozen terrain without making noise and giving himself away was out of the question. Emmet conceived the idea that he could ride quietly down the frozen creek on one of his kids' bicycles. The plan was put in place and soon Emmett was pedalling quietly and swiftly down the ice covered creek. It was going better than even he had imagined until he rounded a bend and faced a stretch of open water. Although he could pedal along quickly, his brakes were useless on the ice. It was a cold, wet walk back to his truck.