

After another aggressive shake, ears flapping, collar rattling, Oona leaned down, put the side of her snout in the skiff of snow coating the icy ground, then used her back legs to push herself around in a counter clockwise circle. That done, she repeated the process in a clockwise direction, producing a pleasurable groan originating deep in her throat all the while. She stood and rolled once more, shook her head, then looked up, apparently confident that all the frigid pond water picked up in her surprise dunking was gone from her coat.

"You done?" I asked, wondering why, given her Labrador and poodle coat, so thick, curly, warm, and waterproof, needed to be free of every single water droplet, and how dogs discovered the water-absorbing properties of snow.

When my stubborn sled dog, Chimo, first exhibited this behaviour, I concluded that it was probably bred into her bones. After her demise, my haywire border collie, Pawsome, whose ancestors wouldn't have seen that much snow, did the same thing. I started to wonder if all dogs, for that matter, just figure out how to dry themselves off in winter.

We set out once more.

A couple of moose can lay down a lot of tracks within the narrow confines of a river's backchannels. There were a lot in these channels, most of them frozen hard, indicating they had been set down a day

earlier.

We continued in an upstream direction. The channel split. There were tracks pointing up both branches. I looked carefully at both spoor trails and concluded that they had likely been made by the same pair of animals, a cow and a bull, or a large bull and a smaller one.

As I examined the western fork, I spotted some large prints I hadn't seen at first glance because weren't as deeply inset as the others because they were fresh. These had been impressed into the snow only hours before.

I whistled. After a few seconds, I heard the rattle of brush and Oona ran out of the woods into the channel.

"This way," I commanded.

She ran past me, then stopped abruptly and drilled down on the newly incised tracks, then moved quickly past those and dropped her head to snuffle the ground again. Moments later she raised her head, and looked straight ahead as if she'd seen something. Her black nostrils twitched as she inhaled an airborne scent.



SKEENA ANGLER
ROB BROWN

Poachers

in my jacket for my bear-banger, found it, and clipped it to the right front pocket of my jacket.

"Heel. It's a wolf," I said, more as confirmation to myself than as information for my dog.

She looked at me and remained close as we followed her distant cousin's tracks up the channel toward the tangle of logs wedged into its uppermost end.

Oona walked along atop the snow. I sank down half a metre with each step. When this began to take its toll, I made my way up the bank and into the woods. Under the

Strange, I thought, before walking over to see what was so compelling as to draw her away from the aroma of a recently passed moose.

I looked down upon tracks easily twice the size of Oona's. What would a big dog be doing here alone?

No, these were prints weren't canine. They were lupine. They meandered up the channel in the same direction as the moose prints. And, they were fresh.

I whistled for Oona again. When she was by my side, I fumbled about

old trees the snow was negligible. I moved quickly through the withered foliage.

The log jam, its prime constituents a trio of old cottonwoods, was substantial. They're amazing things, these giant plugs, filtering river in high water and providing secure and gentle habitat to the juvenile fish that lie behind them, but they are not easy to get over, and we had to get over this one to continue stalking the predator and its prey.

The task was slow and arduous and slippery, for me. When we gained the far side we were met with a snowy expanse. The river was visible, deceptively near. I looked in the other direction and spotted what appeared to be a structure perched awkwardly in the trees.

There were no tracks anywhere. The moose and his pursuer had obviously headed into the woods. Intrigued, I made my way to the tree fort. As I neared it I saw that it was covered in spray painted expletives. Was it a shooting platform, a drinking and doping hideaway for kids, or both?

It was getting late. I followed old ATV tracks back to the logging road. On its far side I noticed some moose hide. We crossed the road for a closer look. There was a gravel pit. Oona ran into it, starting a coronation of eagles that lifted off with great beating of wings.

On the ground was the source of their interest, the carcass of a recently butchered moose.