

THE AMAZING LIFE OF ADIRONDACK DICK

A LOOK AT THE TRAPPING LIFE 100 YEARS AGO

BY SCOT H. DAHMS

Richard K. "Dick" Wood made a living from the outdoors by trapping, hunting, fishing, writing and photography. He worked for the Triumph Trap Company from 1917 to 1921. He trapped, hunted and fished all across America and lucky for us, he captured many of his adventures on black & white film. This is an excerpt from "Adirondack Dick: The Illustrated Life of Richard K. 'Dick' Wood."

THE EARLY YEARS

Dick's interest in trapping and the outdoors was fueled by reading several trapping books at a young age including Hill's "Life of Daniel Boone" and Abbott's "Kit Carson." At the age of fourteen, Dick was attracted to trapping due to the high prices paid at the time. Muskrats were bringing \$0.50, opossum \$1, skunk \$5 and mink \$6. His first trap line was along Pond Creek. Dick had problems catching his first animal but finally caught a muskrat. He purchased a pair of hip waders, increased the number of traps he had, and increased his line to ten miles of creek bank with several loops through the bluffs for skunk and possum. Each morning he usually caught a few muskrats and an occasional possum or skunk.

Another trapper named Eli Fox moved into the neighborhood and set out an extended line along both sides of Pond Creek. The trapping area was Eli's by right of first claim, but Eli never bothered Dick's traps. Eli was very kind and showed Dick how to make sets. Eli spent all his time along the creek. His specialty was mink trapping.

Eli boarded near Dick's home, so Dick routinely went to see him after supper. Eli shared his experiences about trapping and hunting, including adventures in the Smoky Mountains. With the rising price of mink, Dick's interest in catching this animal increased. Eli shared that he used mostly blind sets for mink.

With the new knowledge, Dick was sure he would catch a bunch of mink. Unfortunately, he did not catch one until December. He caught it in a spring water set. This catch provided a kick-start to his waning enthusiasm. Instead of going just a quarter or a half a day, Dick planned to set out enough traps to occupy all his time from morning to night.





Eli decided to vacate the territory. Eli willingly showed Dick all his paying sets over a few mornings. Dick gleaned as much information as he could from Eli's fifty years of experience. Eli showed him paths under bridges and over bluffs along with cut-across points of land that were regularly travelled by mink. There were a few sets, which were sure to catch a mink every few days. Dick found tributaries he did not know existed. Eli shared that these tributaries were ideal places to catch mink and raccoon. Eli also shared muskrat feeding places, ponds and sloughs.

To top it off, Eli offered to share his special scent base, fish oil, and lent Dick as many of his traps as he could use. Eli liked under-spring traps because of their compactness and light weight. He used them exclusively. Dick selected twenty-five of Eli's best traps to use.

Later in life, Dick said his favorite furbearer to trap was the mink. I believe this was fostered by Eli's instruction. Dick also

said that the mink in the Holston River area were the slyest and most difficult to catch.

Dick used Eli's best sets on both sides of the creek. The additional territory extended the line by three miles on each end of the original ten miles. Dick checked some traps every other day. He checked the traps next to the settled areas daily to reduce issues with dogs, cows and farm help. With the additional territory, Dick walked twelve to fifteen miles a day.

The number of animals that Dick caught each day increased substantially. He skinned them as he checked his line. He was now catching at least a mink a day with more skunks and raccoon. He stretched all the animals on boards he personally whittled.

By the middle of December, Dick had caught two hundred muskrats. He took all his traps and now focused on land animals including skunk, raccoon and opossum. In the area he trapped, there were several

trees that had been blown over by storms. Usually, the exposed root balls held a family of skunks. He was lucky as every skunk was a star black which were the ones most coveted.

Dick sold his furs before Christmas and placed \$100 of the proceeds in a local bank. He then took a few days off to hunt ducks and rabbits. After the holidays, Dick moved to Sweetwater Creek to locate new trapping ground. He found numerous muskrats and mink not previously disturbed by other trappers. Dick planned to move into a shack and had his equipment moved there. The number of furbearers caught daily on the Pond Creek trap line decreased and there was starting to be some theft of traps and animals, so the change in location was welcomed.

Starting in January of 1910, Dick lived in the shack alone for three months. He slept on a cot and made his own meals. The windows were broken, so he was practically sleeping in the open air. Dick learned that exercise, wholesome food and fresh air are the secrets of good health as he never was sick. This experience would serve him well when he trapped in the Adirondacks.

Dick was checking a hundred traps a day and was up at first light everyday. He quit trapping land animals the first of February. He then trapped muskrats for two months and caught his first otter at a nearby pond. It brought \$12. Dick started pulling his traps on the first of April. His largest catch of the season was made on the day he was leaving. He resolved to return to the Sweetwater and Pond Creek areas the next year, but he never trapped them again.

Dick's parents greeted him as though he had been gone for years. The local trappers were impressed with his large catch and asked what type of lure he was using. When Dick told them he used blind sets, the other trappers thought he was trying to hide what lure he was using.

Dick sold his furs and received over \$200. The question was what would be purchased with it. He wanted a motorcycle but knew there would not be enough left after he bought his summer fishing supplies and traps for next season.

Dick's parents saw his trapping ability but could not see spending so much money on "foolishness." They discouraged trapping and, believed if he went down that road, he would "grow up in ignorance." His father had offered to pay for Dick to go to advanced schooling. Dick had no interest in a scholastic career and told his former school mates in the "free school" goodbye. His old schoolmates would give him a pitying smile and wondered if Dick was "off" in the head.



DREAM JOB

In November of 1916, Dick trapped muskrats on the Holston River. He set six, #1 sized traps. The next day, he had three muskrats and three muskrat feet from escapees. Dick figured either he needed to get some #1 ½ size traps or work on a losing basis.

Dick happened to be looking through the *Fur News* that evening and saw an advertisement for the Triumph Trap Company. He ordered six traps in various sizes in-

cluding three High Grip traps. He set them the day after their arrival and ended up having better luck. Dick wrote the article with the above information after he had been hired by the Triumph Trap Company. It was the first article where he included Triumph traps in the message. It would not be the last.

In April of 1917, Dick won a photo contest promoted by the Triumph Trap Company. He did not know he won until he received the \$50 check in the mail.

The contest was advertised in outdoor magazines including *Fur News* and *Hunter Trader Trapper*, but the results were only reported in *Hunter Trader Trapper*. All photographs were submitted to the managing editor of *Hunter Trader Trapper* who impartially judged each entry on its merits based on how well it conformed to the contest conditions and showed the appearance of a natural catch.

Triumph extended an invitation for Dick to visit them in Oneida. The company provided a \$50 expense check. He traveled by train to the interview. When he left New York Central Station, Dick paid the extra fare for a parlor coach with a bar. He took along a steamer trunk packed with all his belongings. It made an impression and he was hired.

The visit resulted in him joining the company's advertising department as a copywriter, photographer and field specialist. This provided him an opportunity to travel throughout the United States including the Maryland marshlands, the Adirondacks, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. His duties were to test new traps, report on their efficiency, photograph trappers and fur catches, and furnish any material suitable for publicity and catalog use.

Winning this contest was the biggest event in his young career and provided a launching point into the outdoor writing and photography field. He wrote numerous articles and brochures for Triumph including "Trapping Tricks," "Gripping the Dollars" and "Modern Trapping Methods."

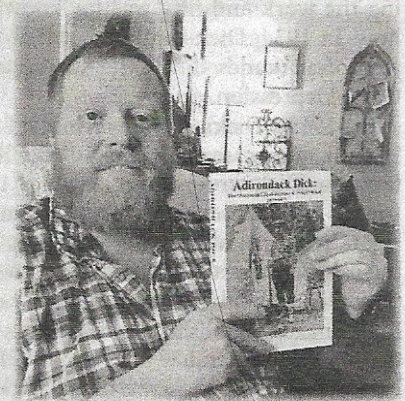
During his time with Triumph, Dick met Raymond Smiley Spears. This meeting was the beginning of a mentoring relationship between Raymond and Dick. Although Raymond was the mentor, he

ADIRONDACK DICK: THE ILLUSTRATED LIFE OF RICHARD K. "DICK" WOOD

Dick was a do-it-all outdoorsman. Besides trapping, he fly-fished for trout; hunted waterfowl, small game, deer and bear. He wrote articles for at least 77 different magazines including *Hunter Trader Trapper*, *Fur News* and *Outdoor World*, *Sports Afield*, *Field and Stream*, *Fur Fish Game*, *National Sportsman* and *Hunting & Fishing*. These articles covered topics including trapping, hunting, fishing, camping, photography plus many others. He also wrote at least three books. Dick was involved in the creation of the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

In this book there are 373 vintage black and white photographs taken by Dick with many either never seen by the public or published years ago and forgotten. The photographs are from 1915 to the 1970s. Also, 300 of Dick's articles are referenced and the titles are in chronological list so readers can follow his progression as a writer. There are over 400 references in all. The book is 386 pages long.

You can order a copy by sending a money order, cashier's check or certified check for \$36.65 (\$30 plus either \$6.65 for priority shipping or \$3.12 for Media Mail shipping). Or buy a copy on eBay. Search for "Adirondack Dick" in All Categories or look for user "scotthetrapper." You can contact the author at Scot H. Dahms, 2270 W Willow Lane, Peru, Indiana 46970. Email: ranger1971@comcast.net.



still learned from Dick. For instance, Raymond said he learned to remove human odor from traps utilizing a method he learned from Dick. Dick buried traps in black muck of a marsh or spring for several weeks prior to trapping season. The traps came out of the muck coated with a dark color. The only smell left on the traps was a mucky smell that did not frighten animals.

CURE FOR BANKING HOURS

On December 26, 1917, Dick married Beulah Graham in Daisy, Tennessee. At the time, Dick was residing in Oneida and Beulah in North Chattanooga. Dick and Beulah departed for Hiltons, Virginia early in the morning on December 29.

On January 2, 1918, Dick was able to get some fox photos at his Uncle Gaines' farm to use in Triumph literature. The photograph of the grey fox would be used in numerous Triumph Trap Company advertisements and brochures.

On January 8, Dick returned to his job at the Triumph Trap Factory. He worked on routine office tasks. He noted he was keeping banking hours.

On February 6, Dick commented that he got into work at 9:15 am and was still keeping banking hours. He said he expected to turn a new leaf in the morning.

Dick did turn a new leaf as he headed for Big Moose Lake in the Adirondacks. He arrived in zero-degree weather with five feet of snow on the ground. Dick made the acquaintance of a French-Canadian trapper named Robert Wall. Robert agreed to trap with Dick using Dick's equipment except he would provide his own gun and snowshoes.

Dick had two weeks of provisions and intended to stay in the woods for that amount of time. They loaded a toboggan and started in the general direction of the Sisters Lakes. Later they trapped down the Moose River to the south of Big Moose station travelling to Minnehaha and then took the train back. They looked for fisher, fox, mink, and bobcat.

In the fall, Robert had constructed a hunting camp on the shore of a small pond near Sisters Lakes. Dick commented that there was no wood in camp except for him, but he was too green to burn. The next day, they cut two weeks of wood.

Robert set out a line of traps around the Sisters Lakes for fox and mink. Weasel tracks were everywhere and they caught a dozen around their camp. Dick even shot one feeding on discarded table scraps. Dick put a line around camp and through a swamp for weasel and mink.

For bait, Robert caught suckers through the ice on the pond and rabbits caught



in the traps. Once they had enough bait, Dick and Robert made an overnight trip. Both started for Big Moose and took the train south until they arrived at the Moose River flag station. They set traps as they



S.P. Rankin Basswood Fur Stretchers

Check out our products and "like" us on Facebook:
Basswood Fur Stretchers S.P. Rankin

Contact info: S.P. Rankin, 38 Moes Durrell Rd, Lexington Twp., ME 04961 # (207)-628-4503



Solid		Mink	\$2.75
Bobcat	\$9.00	Muskrat	\$2.75
Coon		Otter	
LG	\$6.50	Med	\$8.00
XL	\$7.00	LG	\$9.50
Jumbo	\$8.50	Skunk	\$4.50
Coyote		Weasel	
Small	\$8.00	Sm	\$ 5.50
Med	\$11.00	Med	\$ 7.75
LG	\$13.00	LG	\$11.00
Fisher		Wedges	
Female	\$5.00	Otter	\$1.00
Male	\$7.50	Fox, Coon	\$ 7.75
Fox	\$7.00	Mink/Muskrat	\$ 5.50
Grey Fox	\$6.00	Adjustable Coyote	\$9.50
Marten	\$2.75	Adjustable Fox	\$7.50

Order Now! Save Money!

Free Delivery & 10% Off our already, low prices, if delivered to the following conventions:

PA, NY, Bethel, MTA

Handcrafted Quality for stretchers made to auction house specifications.

100% Maine Basswood-Satisfaction Guaranteed