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JAN AND HERB CONN

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ENCOUNTER WITH A COUGAR

by Scott Udall

Last February, while snowshoeing in the Canadian Rockies, I was stalked by and had a face to face encounter with a cougar on a mountain trail. We stayed in close quarters for several minutes, fencing and maneuvering about until I was finally "treed" by the lion. I walked away unscathed and filled with an intense appreciation of this unusual adventure.

But let me tell the story from its beginning.

I live in Banff, Alberta, Canada, on the edge of Banff National Park. This is home for most of the large "noble animals" of North America: the grizzly bear, Rocky Mountain goat, bighorn sheep, wolverine, bobcat and the mountain lion or cougar. The only experience I previously had with the cougar was catching a far-off glimpse of an adult and two kittens while on a hiking excursion in this park last summer. I was fascinated by the agility and grace of these animals, and realized that few outdoorsmen ever see the normally shy and retiring mountain lion.

When the weather is clear I find it intriguing to go out late and view the mountains and woods in the moonlight. Towards sundown, on February 11th, I was snowshoeing alone on a trail several miles outside of the town of Banff. I followed the cross-country ski trail on the iced-over Bow River for two miles and then cut through the woods to pick up the regular summer hiking trail. At the bank of the river, where I first turned off the ski trail, I was puzzled by a trail of odd footprints superimposed on the tracks of the cross-country skiers. However, the impressions were filled with powdery, windblown snow, and this made it impossible for me to recognize the shape of the imprints or even to decide if a person or an animal had made them.

Having reasoned that these imprints were made by a small person, possibly a woman or child, I pressed on and was again puzzled when the tracks left the trail and went into a dense stand of pines.

I gained the regular hiking trail and about one hundred yards further along suddenly had a strange premonition. I turned my head and saw a large mountain lion crouched just 75 feet behind me! The terrifying realization of my de-

fenselessness penetrated my being. But the greater shock was knowing that had I not turned when I did, the lion would have been on me in seconds.

My clumsy snowshoes had me trapped! My first thought was to dash to a small group of trees about 15 feet to my left, but the snowshoes were horrifyingly awkward in the deep snow and I could neither run nor turn sharply. Before I could move, the cougar bounded toward me and stopped short about five feet away. I screamed and made threatening movements to try and frighten him.

At that instant I was in danger of fainting. This was caused by the shock of sudden confrontation. I was certain the lion was going to pounce and instinctively fell backward, keeping my snowshoes between myself and the cougar. It flashed through my mind to play dead, as I knew this is sometimes a last defense used against grizzly bears. I dismissed this idea, as my eyes were on the big cat and his failure to strike gave me hope.

The cat circled, now to the left, now to the right, trying to get at me past my snowshoes, but I circled with him keeping him at bay, all the while shouting at the top of my lungs. His failure to pounce encouraged me further. I managed to remove one snowshoe and poked it directly at his face while unfastening the harness of the other. This maneuvering and circling must have taken two or three minutes.

Now free of my snowshoes, I hurriedly tried to get to my feet, but slipped in the process leaving myself extremely vulnerable -- but again, for some reason, the lion spared me. I quickly recovered and, using one snowshoe as a shield and the other as a sword, traversed 20 feet to a group of three small, bushy pines. While I traversed to these trees the lion paced quickly back and forth looking for a weakness in my defense.

With a pine between us, I continued fencing with the lion. He growled and whipped his long tail quickly back and forth and took swipes at me while I slapped at his face with a snowshoe to keep him at bay. The cougar's growls and offensive maneuvers were much like a domestic cat's except that his growls were much deeper in pitch. Once the cougar's

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First Aid Courses. If you attended one of the courses which the Red Cross scheduled during September, please let me know. If I have not contacted you individually about future courses and interest, I will be in contact with you.

BELAY LEDGE

Roger Birch and Deanna Ballou were married on September 4 at the Washington Cathedral.

If anyone can think of any way to get 75 pages of tables for the new Equipment Bulletin typed up for \$200, please call Don or Betsy Schaefer at 521-5326. Professional outfits want \$5 per page. (It all has to be on the same typewriter.)

Hanging Around

Bull Run, Va.
Aug. 14-15, 1971

Fred Kitchel, Trip Leader
Bill Thomas
Bettie Boeker

John Canganero
Mike Bromley
Jim Donovan

Bettie, Bill and I arrived Saturday afternoon and spent the rest of the day looking for level, snake-free places to camp. We encountered no snakes, but the ants were able to take up the slack.) The evening sky was clear and star-filled. The lights from the farms below completed the peaceful scene. About midnight, after we had finished our discussions and sacked out, the mood was changed; a group of locals arrived on top of the cliffs, and there ensued for several hours some intense female giggling. Someone was having a good time, and the rest of us were entertained as well.

Sunday was hot and fairly muggy. We started climbing early and were joined by John, Mike and Jim about mid-morning. We made several good climbs before the rocks began to get hot. Too bad there's no water there.

TRAINING COMMITTEE REPORT, by Dave Templeton
Carderock Training, September 12

Stations were set up and training was about to start at the cliffs when the rain god let fly (iconoclasm has its hazards). A fast move was made to the pavilion where John Christian demonstrated knot techniques, demonstrated middleman technique on the sides of the pavilion, Ed Goodman demonstrated basic knot techniques, Mike Bromley demonstrated prussik technique, and Dave Templeton demonstrated climbing techniques. Beginners were:

Pat Lane	Bill McKay	Kitty Valaer
Joe Wagner	Johanna Guccione	Scott Twentymann
Anne Huguenard	Doug Chandler	Susan Spierer
Jane Spierer	Valery Walker	

Instructors were John Christian, Ed Goodman, Mike Bromley, June Lehman, Janet Gladfelter, Beth Waldow and Dave Templeton.

September 15th lecture -- If I was unable to contact you to let you know this lecture had been cancelled, I apologize for the necessity for the late cancellation.

Scheduled Training -- Training at Carderock will continue on October 3rd. The monthly lecture will be held at the clubhouse at 7:00 p.m. on October 20th.

THIS IS A BIG HOLE IN UP ROPE.

EVERYBODY'S CONTRIBUTIONS WERE TOO LONG-WINDED. ANYBODY GOT ANY SHORT, SWEET TIDBITS? WE ARE ALWAYS HAPPY -- ECSTATIC EVEN -- TO GET INPUT.

Well, at least there was a lot of suspense and adventure this month.

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Once the immediate horror had left me, I was inspired and exhilarated by my unique adventure. I have the rest of my life to wonder why I was singled out for such an extraordinary experience with one of the magnificent creatures of wild America.

The mountain lion is one of the truly free beings of this existence. There are not many places left where a man can go snowshoeing and get chased up a tree by a mountain lion.

Up Rope

UP ROPE is the Newsletter of the PATC Mountaineering Section, founded by Jan and Herb Conn in 1944. Publication is on the last Wednesday of each calendar month at PATC Headquarters. Deadline for submitted material is the next to last Wednesday of the month preceding an issue. Material for inclusion, comments or questions on editorial policy should be directed to EDITOR, UP ROPE, c/o PATC, 1718 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Subscription rates are \$1.50 per year for PATC Mountaineering Section members and \$2.50 per year for non-members. The additional dollar may be credited towards membership dues. New subscriptions and address changes should be sent to Business Manager, UP ROPE, etc.

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fury was aroused when I dealt him a sharp blow to the face. He struck at me with reflexes so incredibly fast I was aware of his strike only afterward.

In desperation, I threw one snowshoe to the side hoping he would be satisfied with chewing it, but he wasn't interested. I was only three or four feet from the cougar and could see his ears folded back and fangs displayed in chilling array.

Now the lion seemed a bit bewildered and I regained a little confidence. However, he was positioned so close to the three trees I had no chance to climb one of them. I then noticed a larger pine 15 feet to my rear and backed up to it, still in close quarters with the cat. Holding my remaining snowshoe, I turned my back on the lion, leaped into the tree's branches and climbed quickly to the top.

This tree was about 25 feet high and had closely spaced, bushy limbs -- a difficult tree for a lion that size to climb, so I was confident he would not follow me. With my snowshoe I would have a chance of keeping him at bay if he made the attempt.

Once I was safely at the top of my tree, I had time to admire this fine animal. He was an unusually large cougar. He must have weighed 180 to 200 pounds, and was about 7½ to 8 feet in length. The lion was tawny brown in color and his underbelly had a creamy white appearance. His thick tail was dark brown, while his ears were light brown in front and dark brown in back.

While observing the cougar I noticed that darkness was descending faster by the minute. I continued to yell for help but knew no one was within miles. I had now been "treed" for three or four minutes. The lion made one attempt to pursue me up the tree but the closely spaced branches stopped his progress. After this he lost interest and hesitantly walked off into the woods, stopping once or twice to throw a glance in my direction.

When the lion disappeared into the woods only 50 feet from my tree I realized that it was almost dark. But there was a fair amount of moonlight so I decided to make a run for it. I descended the tree and recovered my other snowshoe. Seeing a mountain lion in every hollow, I walked the several miles back to town through knee-deep snow.

Two days later, my friend Rick Kolstad and I went back to the scene where we were able to reconstruct the action. We tracked the lion and saw that he had been closing in on me for about two hundred yards before I first saw him. His footprints revealed that he was bounding through the snow in twenty-foot leaps as he sought to sneak up behind me. His tracks measured five inches in width and four and an eighth inches in length.

After discussing my adventure with friends, I read everything about the cougar I could lay my hands on. I also talked with wildlife experts in Banff about this exciting animal. The more I learned, the more it was clear to me that "my cougar" had behaved very abnormally. I also realized that I had had an adventure that perhaps no other living person has ever experienced.

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On our continent, cougars now live in sizeable numbers only in the remote country of the western and southwestern states and in parts of Alberta and British Columbia. The

cougar once had the widest distribution of any mammal in the Western Hemisphere and possibly the world. Their habitat (except when winter forces them to lower elevations) is the most rugged, inaccessible, wilderness terrain. They are literally "high country animals."

Normally mountain lions are the most secretive of all the large North American animals. They are rarely observed and then only at great distances. Dr. Maurice Hornocker, of the University of British Columbia (who has probably studied cougar behavior more than any other scientist) reports that during a six-year study he "rarely got more than a glimpse of a free roving lion."

Mountain lions are loners. They take extreme measures to avoid others of their species. Mother lions separate from their kittens as soon as they have received enough training to survive alone -- about two years. Each lion has a definite territory that is his or hers and, except for mating, they stay strictly within these territories. Because of the characteristic mobility of these beasts, scientists have to study them in winter when they can be tracked and treed by hounds and captured by using tranquilizer guns.

I have not read or heard of a single instance where a cougar actually attacked a human being. Dr. Hornocker, after six years' experience in capturing these animals, reports: "On several occasions, when cornered in bluffs or on a cliff, they lashed out at the pressing dogs, but never did they attempt to reach us, although we were within striking distance several times."

Lions hunt as much, or more, in the day than they do at night. Their diet consists of snowshoe hares, squirrels, mice, wood rats, raccoons and coyotes as well as deer and elk. In winter, Dr. Hornocker shows that lions are forced to rely mainly on deer and elk. He believes a mature lion kills one deer every 10 to 14 days for subsistence in winter-time. Their courage in attack and brute strength enable them to fell and kill an elk after only a brief struggle.

Now that I know these facts, I look back on my encounter with a cougar as an incredible happening. Why did I have a premonition and suddenly turn around? Why did this particular lion disobey his strong instincts by stalking a man? Why, once we were in close quarters and the lion saw I was helpless, did he not make a killing strike? These are questions that keep running through my mind.

Those who know these wild animals tell me this cougar was probably either sick, rabid perhaps, or extremely hungry. I am inclined to believe the latter theory. "My cougar" did not behave oddly or appear to be ill. However, he was lean and hungry looking. We had crossed paths after a month-long period of subzero cold and heavy snowfall. These conditions could have prevented him from finding and killing his regular prey. He may have been sufficiently starved to stalk me -- but not so desperate that he was willing to try for a kill once our contest began.

I realize now that the circumstance that probably saved my life was the premonition that caused me to pause and look over my shoulder. (A few moments before actually seeing the lion there ran through my mind the story I once read concerning a bear stalking a snowshoeing hunter. This was a departure from my previous line of thought. The odd tracks I saw earlier must have registered in my subconscious and brought this story to mind.)

Lions use stealth and a sudden savage attack to kill their victims. When their "first strike" fails, Dr. Hornocker believes they usually break off and rarely chase their prey. Perhaps it was my failure to panic and my shouts and self-defense maneuverings that confused my antagonist and caused him not to make a lethal attack.

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CLIMBER'S CALENDAR

<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Leader</u>
Oct. 3	Carderock for Training	Dave Templeton (933-2174)
Oct. 9-11	Shawangunks, N.Y.	June Lehman (522-0105)
Oct. 13	Meeting, PATC Hq. 8:00 p.m.	
Oct. 17	Bull Run, Va.	Don Schaefer (521-5326)
Oct. 20	Training Lecture, PATC Hq., 7:00 p.m.	
Oct. 23-25	Seneca Rock, W.Va.	Chuck Sproull (894-4463)
Oct. 30-31	Wolf Gap, W. Va.	Tom McCrumm (527-6272)
Nov. 7	Annapolis Rocks/ Black Rocks, Md.	Sallie Greenwood (683-5091)
Nov. 10	Meeting, PATC Hq. 8:00 p.m.	

Carderock, Md.

From the Beltway take the Carderock exit (15). Go 1 mile and bear right at sign, go left over overpass, turn right after passing under canal, and park in the last lot. The rocks are 100 yards past the comfort station.

Shawangunks, N.Y.

North on the Beltway (405) to Colesville exit, Rt. 29 N, to 70 N East, to the Baltimore Beltway (695). Go left on 695 toward Towson, and at Exit 24, go west on Interstate 83, the Timonium-York exit. In exactly 70 miles (one hr. 10 min.) take Rt. 81 to Allentown. (Do not take 78N to Allentown). 86 miles later, or one hour and 17 minutes later, turn onto Rt. 80, the Stroudsburg-Bloomsbury exit. Drive 46 miles to 209 N. (Note: 80 and 209 join at Stroudsburg). Avoid 209S and 209 Business, which peel off to the left. Take Exit 52, to Milford, exactly one hour after you got onto Rt. 80. 37 miles later turn onto the new Rt. 84 and drive 40 miles (45 minutes) to the last exit, Exit 5. Turn left onto 208 N to

New Paltz and prepare for the slowest hour of the entire trip. After 14 miles turn left onto 44-55 and wind your way about 7 miles to the Brauhaus "T" intersection and continue past the hairpin turn about a mile, to Trapp Road. Turn right and go about one mile, crossing two bridges, to poorly-marked Coxing Camp, on the right after the second bridge.

Bull Run Mountain, Va.

From the Beltway take I 66 (exit 9) west to Gainesville. Bear right onto Va. 55. About 1/3 mile past the junction with U.S. 15, bear right (note Skyline Cavern sign) onto a secondary road. In about 3 miles, turn left at a T-intersection where the road becomes dirt. The road becomes paved again at the city line. Shortly thereafter, pass Col. Hugh Socks house and park at the base of a steep jeep road on the left. Hike up the jeep road into an old quarry. Just before reaching an old steam shovel, pick up a white-blazed trail which runs along the right side of the quarry. Just before paralleling a second old steam shovel, the trail heads right into the woods. The rocks are about a mile up the trail 200 yards past a good view partially blocked by a 10' high boulder.

Seneca Rocks, W. Va.

From beltway take I 66 to Gainesville and bear right onto Va. 55 to Moorefield, W. Va. Turn left on U.S. 220 to Petersburg, where one turns right onto W. Va. 4 & 28. Go 22 miles to Mouth of Seneca. After crossing bridge over N. Fork, turn left onto dirt road. Go 1/4 miles to parking lot by river. Cross bridge and follow trail left to Rocks.

Wolf Gap, W. Va.

From beltway take I 66 to Gainesville and bear right on Va. 55 through Front Royal and on to Strasburg. Go south on U.S. 11. At south end of Woodstock, turn right on Va. 42. At sign for Columbia Furnace, turn right and get on secondary road 717. Follow signs to parking area at top of ridge.

Annapolis Rocks/Black Rocks, Md.

From the Beltway take I 70S north past Frederick to U.S. 40. Go west on 40 to top of South Mountain, park at roadside park on the left, across from gas station. Cross road, ascend bank to trail by fence paralleling road. After 100 yards, turn right and follow trail up hill 2 miles to Annapolis Rocks sign. Rocks are 100 yards to left.

Now 14 Gt Falls, MD Don .. Dec 8. Buzzards Rocks, W.Va
20-21 Clarks Gap SALLY
15-28 Connelley TOM MCCRUMM
L. Gorge

Up Rope

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