

## Scary Animal Encounters

[This excerpt is taken from a June / July, 2005 Newsletter Article titled, 'Scary Animal Encounters'; this part of the story concerns a scary animal encounter at the Putman Cabin and makes mention of the one break-in the cabin has experienced]

Late February, 1983— I was spending 13 nights at the TATC cabin (alone for the first eleven).

Sadly, when I'd first arrived, I found someone had used a crow bar to pry open and break one of the heavy oak security shutters; they'd apparently spent the night inside, helping themselves to some food stored there. They scattered the dirty dishes everywhere, including outside, and made a general, all around mess of the place.

As bad and upsetting and stupid as it was, it could've been, of course, much worse.

I spent my first day and a half just cleaning the place up.

Thirteen days at the cabin—a dream come true! Besides hiking, relaxing, and reading, I also spent quite a bit of time working (the cabin then was still very much a work in progress), mostly shoveling dirt from the back embankment into the cabin, trying to raise the level up (to where the work crews could then put in the first floor the cabin was to have—concrete with tree rounds embedded in it).

My car was at a nearby overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The road was closed because of snow and ice, and the ranger that had been nice enough to unlock the gate and let me drive in said he wouldn't unlock it to let me back out-- I'd have to wait til the snow melted and the road was reopened to the public at large. That was ok by me—I was on a very extended leave of absence from work and had nowhere to be but where I was.

Still, late in the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> day, with my food stocks running low, I was happy to spy a couple of cars on the Parkway—it meant the road was open and I could slip into Waynesboro for re-supply. I closed up the cabin, put on my cleanest dirty shirt and jeans, and off I went.

It was dark when I got back to the cabin. I had food for a few more days, and had brought along some Kentucky Fried Chicken for dinner that night.

It'd been, I figured, 12 or 13 days since the break in, but I approached the cabin that night innocent and unsuspecting. Everything seemed normal and natural. Quiet.

I unlocked the side door and went in. Before retreating upstairs to eat my still warm meal, I got the idea to leave both downstairs doors open—to let the breeze blow thru and, even if in a miniscule way, dry out the wet, clay-like soil I'd shoveled into the cabin the last few days (at this time there were no bunks or benches, no table or cabinets downstairs—only the cook stove and a few large storage cans. There were, as yet, no bunks upstairs either). I opened the front door and then quickly went upstairs to sit on my sleeping bag, lean against the stone wall, and eat my dinner in the dark.

It may sound cold, austere, and lonely, but to me it was heaven.

Then, so soon, it was heaven, interrupted.

Again, this is the thing, how immediate and unexpected was the fright, the sound, the sudden intruder in my midst. I'd only been back inside the cabin, at the most, 3 minutes. I'd been up in the loft only a minute, just long enough to sit down, open the box, and take that first mouth watering bit of food.

Then I heard it—downstairs, the heavy frying pans that hung from hooks about 3 feet above the cook stove, 6 and a half feet above floor level.....the pans suddenly began to clang against one another!

*WHAT IN THE WORLD?* I thought. Quick as a flash I was on my feet and heading

down the ladder; I was ready to defend the cabin—no flashlight, no weapon of any kind except righteous anger. Man or beast, I was equally ready. Or unready.

Half way down the steps I saw, by the wan light coming in thru the side door, an animal go streaking headlong out of the cabin. As stealthy as the night, as patient as a burglar, I recognized the striped tail, the peculiar way it ran—it was a raccoon.

What timing, what planning.... It must have been out there waiting for me to return and open the doors, just waiting for the chance to come in, climb atop the cook stove, stand on it its hind legs, and sniff at the fry pans that hung above, full of food smells.

How incredible! How unnerving!!

I closed the cabin doors and went back upstairs to my dinner.

But I tell you, they're out there, **these animals**, full of cunning and guile, just waiting for the smallest opening, the slightest inattention, the merest opportunity.... to angle in and, innocently enough, **scare the bejeebers out of us!**

[The following June (1983) we found marks on one of the shutters at the back of the cabin, indicating that someone (possibly the same people) had tried to break in there. They failed, and did no real damage to the shutter (the shutter broken in Feb. had been promptly fixed). Other than toilet paper from the outhouse being thrown into the spring, and several instances over the years of ATV's being ridden onto our land from below, there has been no further vandalism.]