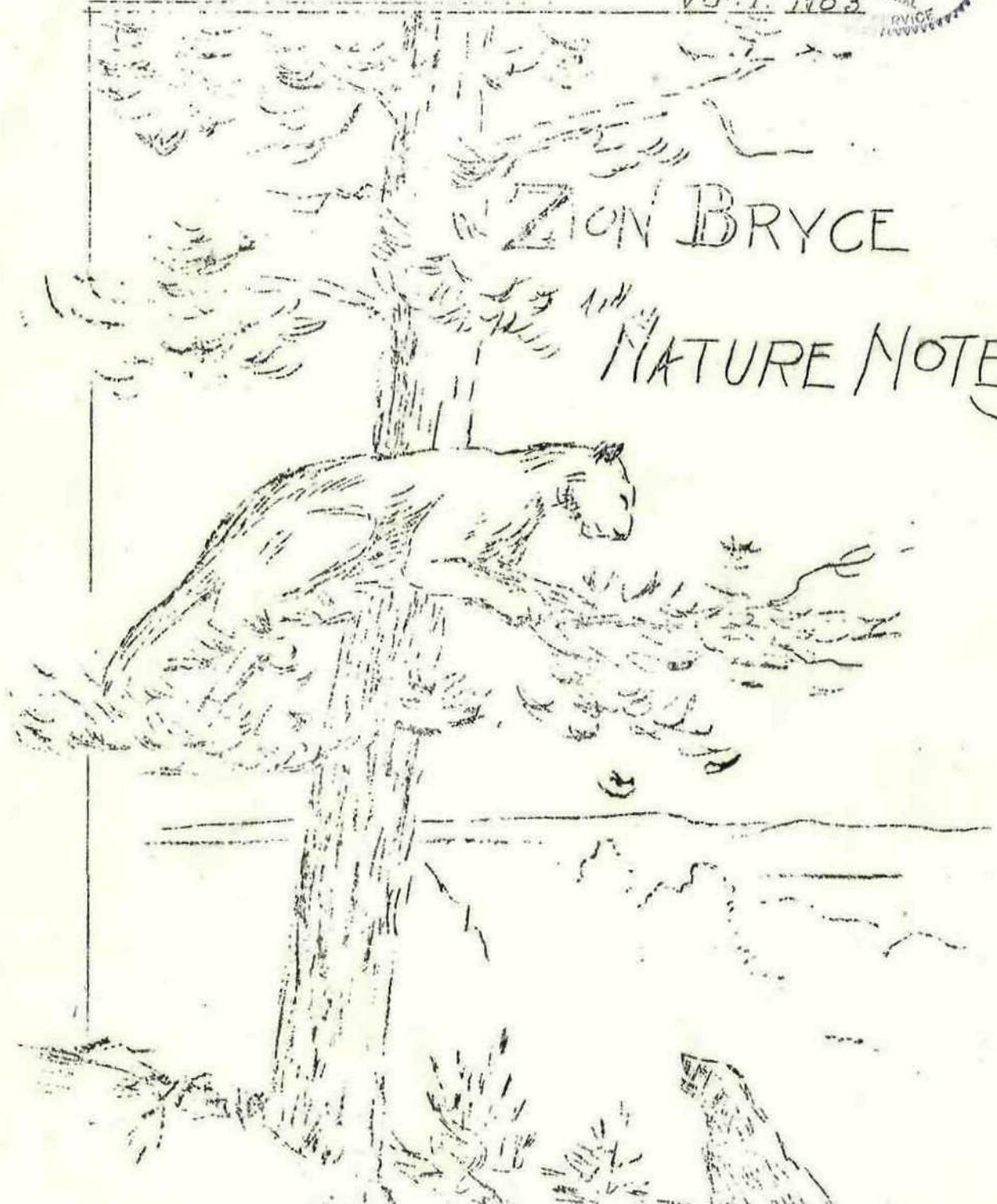


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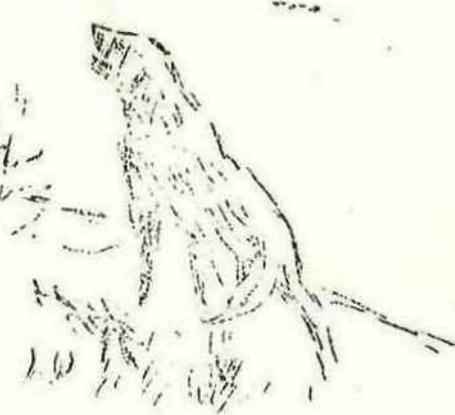
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ZION BRYCE

NATURE NOTES

THE COUGAR



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ZION-BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARKS UTAH

ZION-BRYCE NATURE NOTES

October, 1929

Vol. 1, No. 3.

This is the third of a series of bulletins issued from time to time for the information of those interested in the educational opportunities, the natural history, the scientific features or the scenic beauties of the region. Publications using these notes must give credit to Zion-Bryce Notes and author.

E. T. Secyen
Superintendent.

A. M. Woodbury,
Park Naturalist.

THE COUGAR.

This issue of the Nature Notes is devoted exclusively to the cougar (erstwhile called mountain lion or puma), no doubt, the outstanding agile virile aggressive carnivore of the region. But with all its strength and virility, this aggressive cat appears to be one of the most fearful of animals when pitted against mankind. This two hundred pound fury that can tear down a fourteen hundred pound horse, will climb a tree in haste when pursued by a yelping dog, a satellite of mankind.

It is so secretive and wary, that it is seldom seen by humans, consequently its life history and habits are but poorly known or understood. It is hoped that the interview with "Uncle Jim Owen and the incidents reported by members of the Park force will add something to the understanding of the habits of this (in this region) king of killers.

THE COVER.

The cover design on this issue is taken from a painting made in the field by T. B. Pitman of Boston. Mr. Pitman tramped the country around Zion and Bryce in 1914 with Uncle Jim Owen rounding up cougars. He came back in 1929 and made this picture for Uncle Jim. A former cougar picture by this artist was used by President Roosevelt in his book, "A Book-lover's Holidays in the Open

The painting was transferred to the stencil by the well known Utah artist L. A. Ramsey who has so kindly stenciled the cover designs up to date. Mr. Ramsey is one of the frequent visitors to both Zion and Bryce and his many canvasses bespeak a keen appreciation of the scenic beauties of our southern Utah parks

UNCLE JIM OWEN ON COUGAR.

By A. M. Woodbury Park Naturalist.

"Uncle" Jim Owen was in Zion. I had not seen him for years so I lost no time in hunting him up. I found him comfortably ensconced in a large rocker in a cabin de luxe near the lodge. We fell to talking about old times when I was a forest Ranger on the Dixie National Forest and he came over to hunt cougar with his dogs. As I intended, the conversation naturally drifted to the subject of cougars and their ways, of which, he is probably as well qualified to speak as any living man.

For twenty years or more, he had hunted cougar throughout southern Utah and the "strip" of Arizona north of the Colorado River. He had, during that time, killed some ~~600~~ 730 cougars, 600 of them were found in the vicinity of the Kaibab Forest and the other 130 in various places around the region including Zion National Park.

The cougar according to Uncle Jim is a very active animal that can kill almost any of the large animals of the region. A 200 pound cougar has been known to kill a big fat range cow and a 1400 pound work mare. He has followed the tracks of hundreds of cougars and read the stories told by the tracks, and in all that time, he had never seen a case where the cougar had missed his prey. A small cougar might sometimes be shaken loose from a large animal as evidenced by a saddle horse all slashed with young cougar scratches, and perhaps a large buck deer might similarly escape from a young inexperienced cougar.

Its favorite food is the deer and the horse, but will take almost any kind of large animal if its favorite food is not available. Cougars do not generally get down into the range of the antelope and Uncle Jim had never known a cougar to kill one. He was not sure about mountain sheep since he had never known of a case, but did not doubt that a cougar could take one if it were caught unawares. The sheep have a keen sense of smell and even keener sense of sight, and if warned one could easily get out of the way and, if cornered, is capable of fighting.

The cougar is an expert hunter. It usually hides around the ledge of the plateau down under the first rimrock or in other rough rocky places and comes out at night, about twice a week to hunt. It always hunts with the wind thus having the advantage of scent without warning the prey. The feet are lined with such soft pads that it never makes any noise. When approaching quarry, the noise guides the way up the wind to close quarters. Then it creeps up behind a tree or bush or rock and peers around the ledge to locate the animal. When the prey is not looking, it slinks from object to object, its aggressive coloring camouflaging it into its background.

When close enough to its intended victim, it brings all four feet close together preparatory to hurling itself forward with that terrific spring which knocks a deer or smaller animal flat, never to rise again; for the big cat's paw holds the victim down while its fangs tear at its throat searching for the jugular vein to suck out the life blood. It will sometimes (if not yet satisfied) open the abdominal cavity and eat the heart or liver, but it seldom eats anything else. The carcass is usually carried or dragged to some secluded place and covered with trash or leaves, probably on the theory that it may need it later, but it seldom goes back for a second meal.

If the animal is too large to knock over, the cougar usually lights on the back, setting the claws of each forefoot in the sides of the shoulders and the claws of the hind feet on the hips, and with the fangs tears open the back of the neck till the animal falls down helpless. Difficulty is encountered in bringing down a cow this way because of the toughness of the hide. When the fangs will not penetrate the skin, the back teeth are brought into play setting together like a pair of shears forming a cutting edge which slits the skin. With the skin lacerated in this way, the fangs are able to reach the flesh and do their work of stringing the animal.

When a cougar gets into a sheep herd, it usually kills one or two for food, taking the blood and perhaps the heart, liver, or udder, and then wantonly kills several more, apparently for the pleasure of killing. It usually kills ten to twenty, but Uncle Jim remembered one case in which thirty had been slaughtered.

According to Uncle Jim cougars undoubtedly do a lot of damage to range stock. Besides getting into the sheep herds, they bother the cattle and horses, especially the young calves and colts. It is known that no colts can be raised on the range where cougars abound. The presence of domestic stock on the range, however, helps lift the burden ~~the cougar~~ of maintaining the cougar from the native wild game animals.

THE KILLER.

By Ranger Naturalist J. W. Thornton.

The sheep outfit camped for the night on a small plateau supported by volcanic walls from fifty to one hundred feet high. The camp wagon, from its well chosen position on the neck of the plateau, loomed white in the evening sun. Everything, even the pinnacles of Zion with the gorgeous West Temple lifting its red capped dome to dizzy heights as it watched over us from its southward position promised safety.

Night stole on quietly, not even the bleating of an anxious ewe mother for her frisking lamb could be heard. The stillness of a million mountain acres was on the air and the beauty of a flower covered wilderness was everywhere. Sleep, rest, and safety seemed the portion granted to everything.

But the killer was abroad. The peace and quiet but whetted his desire for destruction. He leapt stealthily from rock to rock until he was on the edge of the plateau where slept the herd of ewes and lambs. Then followed a slaughter of innocents. When he had finished his massacre twelve ewes and lambs marked his trail of destruction. He ate only the udder from three of them. The others were untouched, as far as could be observed, and decayed rapidly in the hot June sun. The cougar never returned. He had killed not only to eat, but also to satisfy his killing instinct.

The mountain lion (or cougar) has always been a killer. Other animals often follow in its wake and eat the victims of his murderous activity. Livestock owners hate him and have placed a bounty on his skin. Killing is his specialty and he is wonderfully equipped and trained for his specialized profession.

A COUGAR CORNERED.

By Walter Ruzsch Park Supervisor.

Have I had any cougar experiences? I'll say I have. Years ago there were cougars in the Canyon here till we cleaned 'em out. We were out tracking one day when I ran right into one up there on the bench between the museum and the

and the lodge (long before they were built). It raced down the hill on the other side with me shooting at him all the way, but I didnt get him.

Another day we tracked one up the slope on to the bench above the Lodge. His tracks went into a bunch of big boulders and didnt come out so we knew he was in there. We went in after him but couldnt find him. There was a place where loose boulders piled on top of one another made a sort of cave. Down in this cave when we mooved around very much or made a racket, we could hear the cougar growl, but we couldnt tell where the sound came from. We hunted for half a day trying to locate him. We throw rocks into all the holes and cracks trying to scare him out. It was rather spooky in there hearing him growl and having him cornered without knowing just where he was located.

Down in the bottom of the cave was a small opening just about large enough for the cougar to crawl through and leading to parts unknown. Finally one of the fellows raked up enough courage to go down and investigate. As he poked his head through the hole, he received the fright of his life. The cougar reached out with his paw and tore the hat from his head. He backed out leaving the cougar in possession of his head-piece. Believe me, we were up against it. We know where the cougar was but couldnt get at him.

More rock throwing. Finally I threw one that knocked a corner off the boulder so we could see him through a little hole. One of the fellows got down poked the gun through the hole and shot him. He made a terrific racket, but he didn't come out of his corner. After he quieted down, it was a long while before anyone raked up courage enough to go down into the place to see if he was dead. They found him stretched out still and stiff. And we had to pull him out of that little hole in the bottom. The bloodstains of that cougar are still there on that boulder where we shot him.

I WAS GONE TOO.

By Ranger Naturalist J. W. Thornton.

It was July and the Grand Valley Mountains were green again, and beautiful. We had not been able to locate a gray two year old horse that was rather a favorite with my father because of the splendid promise that he held as a colt. So I was sent into the mountains with my friend to see if any trace of the tramp could be found. Following us everywhere was a spotted dog that was the inseparable companion of my friend. He was an enthusiastic fellow and seemed to enjoy the canyons and forests and the mountain silences and companionship fully as well as we boys. We rode up the winding trails shaded by aspens into the glorious pines that have a way of whispering things to a boys soul. We sauntered and loitered and did many things other than look for the strayed colt.

"Listen" said my friend. We pulled our horses to a full stop and could hear the dog barking with great gusto up the mountain side. We rode to the edge of the dense forest of aspens that covered the steep approach to the point where the dog was frantically barking. Tying our horses to a tree we made up the hill with my friend in the lead. Soon I arrived under the big yellow pine where I could see the dog on the upper side. I looked for my friend but he was gone. I next raised my head and gazed into the branches of the tree and I was gone too.

About ten feet above me sat a mountain lion (cougar) on one of the branches. He was intently watching the dog and had seen neither of us. When I arrived at my horse my friend was already mounted. We rode around the hill where we could get a good look at the beast. He was a full grown lion and reminded me very much of the female African lion that I had seen at the circus. He sat there evidently in perfect security until he spied us. Then the innate fear of man rose in him and he turned and leaped from the tree fully twenty feet out into the scrub oak and was lost. He disappeared without making any noise. So quick and noiseless had been his disappearance that we wondered if we had really seen him but the remembrance of the hair raising on my head as I looked up into that tree was convincing evidence of the reality of what had happened. An old trapper told me later that I could have remained under the tree with safety, as the lion is a great coward and avoids contact with man if there is a possible way of escape. But in my boyish imagination I could see myself devoured a morsel at a time.

FACE TO FACE WITH COUGARS.

By Donald J. Jolley Chief Park Ranger.

While patrolling the east boundary during the hunting season in the fall of 1928, cougar tracks were reported on Deer Trap Mountain. We took the morning of October 31 1928 to investigate. Going from Big Troughs toward the head of Hidden Canyon, we found many tracks and followed them along the trail. We had not gone far when Dalton spied an old cougar and three young ones about 150 yards ahead. They soon disappeared and while following their tracks, we found unmistakable signs of a deer-kill.

We stopped to examine the tracks and pieced the story together as follows: A buck deer had been walking along the ridge above the cliff. The cougar had been hiding in the scrub timber awaiting the approach of prey. Evidently the deer got the scent of the cougar, for it started to run. As it went by, the cougar pounced upon it and a mighty struggle ensued; the ground was all trampled and covered with blood.

The cougar must have been the victor for no deer tracks left the area. The deer was evidently picked up, thrown over the back and carried off without dragging, leaving a trail of gore along the way. Half a mile away we found the carcass carefully concealed under some oak brush, camouflaged by a cover of dead leaves. Careful examination showed the throat cut, but no part taken. Near by, a doe was also found concealed in the same manner.

Riding on along the trail about 25 yards, we jumped a cougar which made off through the brush. Dalton dismounted, threw me his reins and grabbed the gun. As he went up through the brush, another cougar, evidently watching him, came slinking out of the brush right toward me and the horses, evidently not seeing us. It frightened Dalton's horse so that he reared up in the air, whirled, and lit with his forefeet on my horses back one on each side of me, and, as he hit me with his head, we all went down in a heap. I crawled out of the melee and the horses got up. By this time the cougar had disappeared in the brush.

Dalton emptied his gun at close range without results, and returning we found that there were three cougars in the brush which skirted a small shelf with cliffs above and below. We had only the six-shooter left and with that we tried to rout the wily cats. Two slipped away. We followed the third along the brush to the end of the shelf when it slipped up the rocks and disappeared as Dalton emptied the six-shooter at it in vain.

COVARDICE OR INTELLIGENCE ? .

By E. T. Scoyen, Park Superintendent.

Wild animals are frequently called cowards. In lectures, conversations, and written articles, various members of our wild life family are often described by this opprobrious epithet. Even artists, through the magic of their brush, may convey by a picture the feeling that an animal pictured is a craven. The conspicuous examples among our animals are the cougar, wolf, and, his cousin, the coyote. The latter, especially, has long carried this brand. In cheap stories of western life the hard riding hero always refers to the villain as, "That sneakin' coyote" ? while, among the Navajo Indians, it is a fighting word when applied to ones person.

I have always felt resentment when I hear humans condemn any animal to carry the shameful appellation of coward. No animal is a coward; but in each surges the all-powerful emotion for self preservation. Any animal has too much intelligence to stand by and invite self destruction; a trait which many humans could have used to great advantage. In the lower animal kingdom each animal understands the technique of the hand-to-hand fight, and, within reasonable limits, is willing to take his chances with any creature on his chosen battlefield. However, man is something different. He possesses some mysterious means for destroying an animal long before he reaches the limits of the primitive battle field, and he is consequently to be feared above all others. We have chosen the three animals above as outstanding examples of cowardice only because they exhibit the greatest intelligence in avoiding man and his long range rifle.

Place yourself in the position of the cougar, for instance. You are alone in a great wilderness area and know that men and dogs are hunting you and will kill you without mercy on sight. You have no weapons except those God gave you at birth, and do not understand the mechanics of those used by the hunters. I am quite certain that you would soon deserve being called slinking or sneaking in your habits, although resenting being called a coward, preferring to think you were smart instead.

The cougar is a killer. More than this he is a wanton destroyer of living things. He is the "game-hog" of the animal kingdom. For him I have the same contempt I have for the human member of this clan. Both should be punished, and death is the only penalty possible for the cougar. However, when it comes to protecting himself, this great cat is remarkably intelligent, and should not be dubbed a coward because he has adopted methods which are peculiarly suited to his needs.