

SURVIVAL HUNTING TECHNIQUES

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL HANDBOOK by Alan Fry. ISBN 0-312-14763-5

pages 166-173. Even though Alan cites hunting of Moose, and is centered in Canadian hunting, his principles apply to all survival hunting. His premise of being forced down over the Canadian bush country, and having to make do, applies to survival scenarios in general.

This paper covers 173-202, presently without the pictures. The entire chapter is good, and needs saving for future use. I will pick up where I left off, in the first paper.

The following sketch (Figure 7:1) shows the target area for the vital-organs shot.

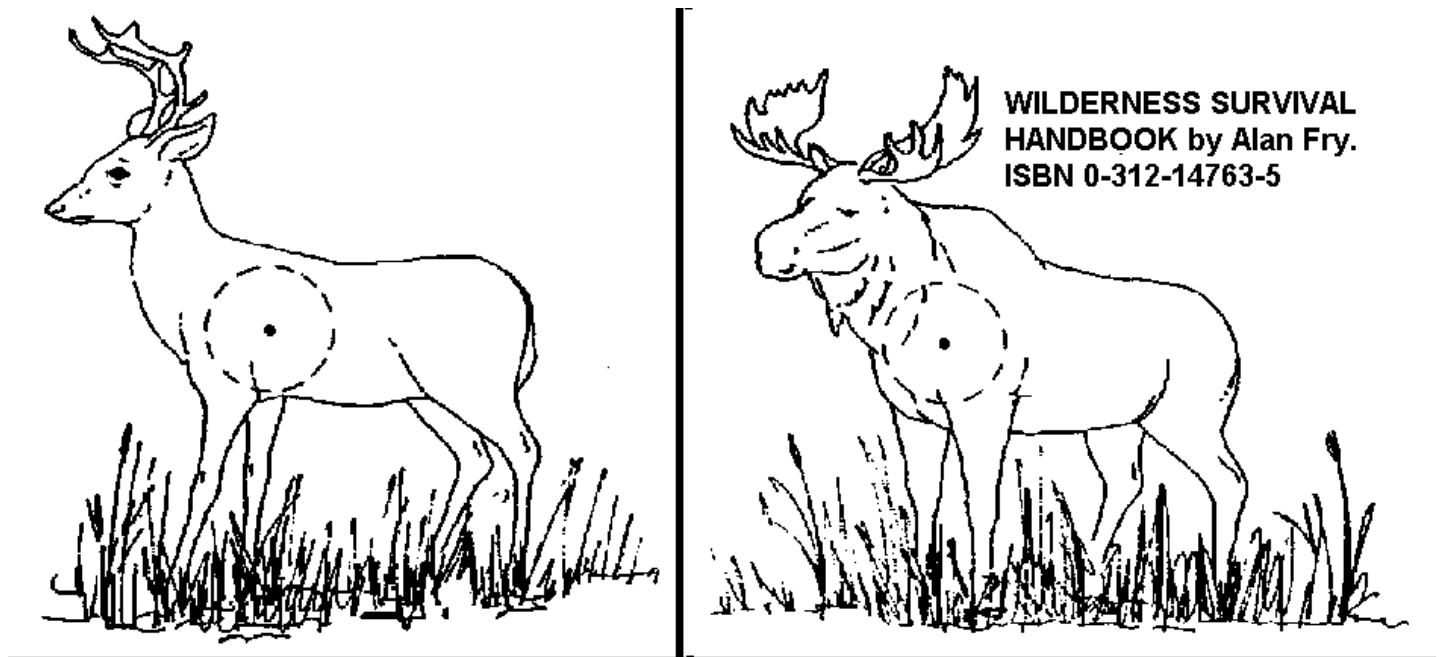


Figure 7. Placement of a vital organs shot

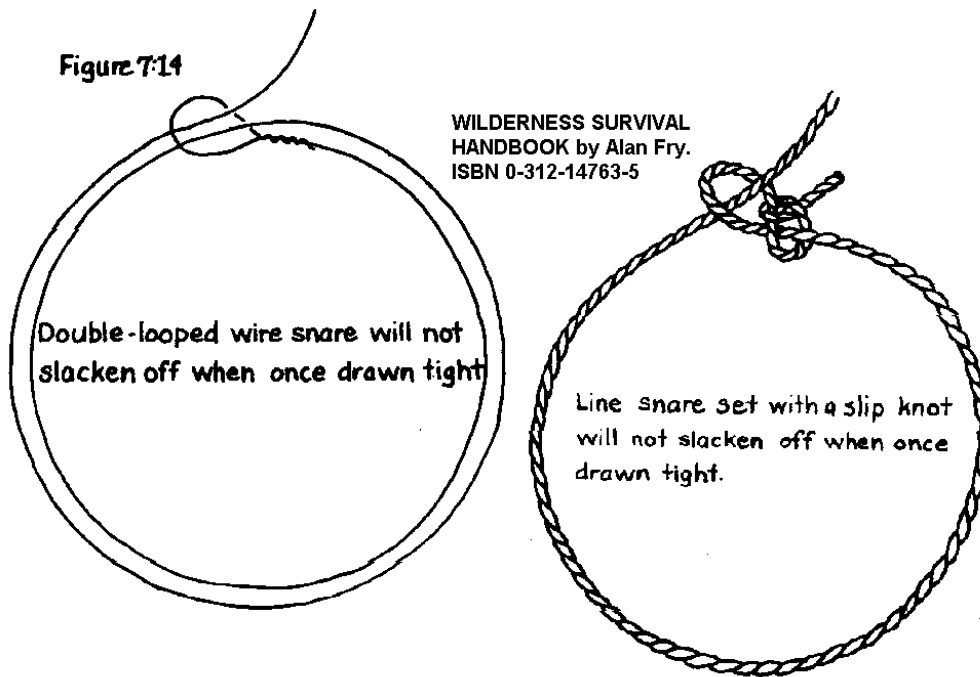
Using Snares and Deadfalls

Snaring is often a more certain way to take an animal than shooting; moreover, snaring of large game is possible, even though it is more usually used to take small game.

Ingenuity is the mainspring of survival, and never more than in the use of the snare. Your stock of ideas is your sleeveful of tricks, and if one doesn't work perhaps another one will. The more you know of the ways of the game and the more accurately you read the sign that the game leaves, the more certain you are to devise just the set to catch what you need for the pot.

At its simplest the snare is a noose of strong line or wire securely anchored and set in such a way that the desired animal will be caught by the neck (occasionally the foot) and either die there or be held until you arrive to kill it. You should always carry snare wire. Snare wire -- and twine as well -- takes up so little weight and space and can be so useful that it should be taken along as a matter of course.

Figure 7:14



There are many variations to the snare and some essential principles in its use which should be considered.

An unbaited snare must be set where it is likely that an animal will pass and in such a way, at the point of the set, that you can judge pretty accurately where the animal's head will go through.

A baited snare differs only in that, by placement of the bait, you will induce the passing animal to put its head through the noose to get at the bait.

A trail in frequent and current use, which is constricted at places by natural growth, offers an ideal place to set a snare. However, where a natural constriction does not occur you can make one.

The burrow entrance of a ground-dwelling animal can be a successful location for a snare. In summer the ground squirrels and marmots are usually the animals most easily taken in assured quantity. In winter, on the other hand, the rabbit is much more vulnerable because its winter trail reveals its location.

You cannot count on catching an animal in every snare, every night (or day as the case may be). If you find you are taking an average of one rabbit for every eight snares set, then you should set forty snares and a few for good measure in order to count on five rabbits for the daily ration.

A description of rabbit-snaring in winter serves as a good primer. (This animal is actually the varying, or snowshoe, hare, but is usually called the rabbit.)

Search in likely locations. Because the rabbit is such an adaptable herbivore his tracks will be found in abundance in a variety of places with a variety of forest covers. (It must also be a favorable time in the population cycle, for at or near its bottom there will be hardly a track to be found for miles in any direction.) There will be definite trails at the edges of thickets, where the stems of young conifers or of willows or alder grow tightly together and some further low growth and old debris help to thicken the ground cover. Each trail is used for many rabbit excursions in the course of the night.

At a naturally constricted place on a trail set a simple wire snare. If necessary, improve the constriction with upright sticks planted in the snow at either side of the set, and also, if no stout low branch of interlodged stout stick is handy for anchoring the snare, install a stick for this purpose.

Figure 7:2 gives an idea of what the snare should look like.

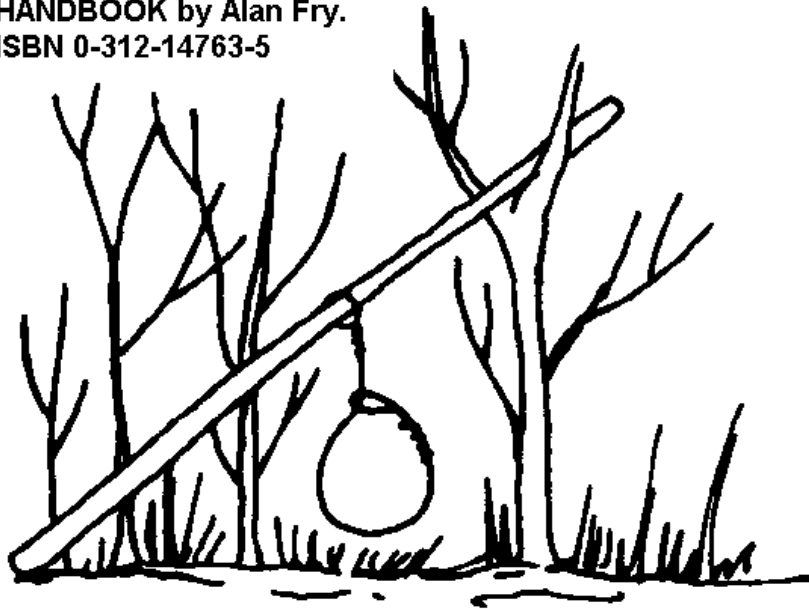
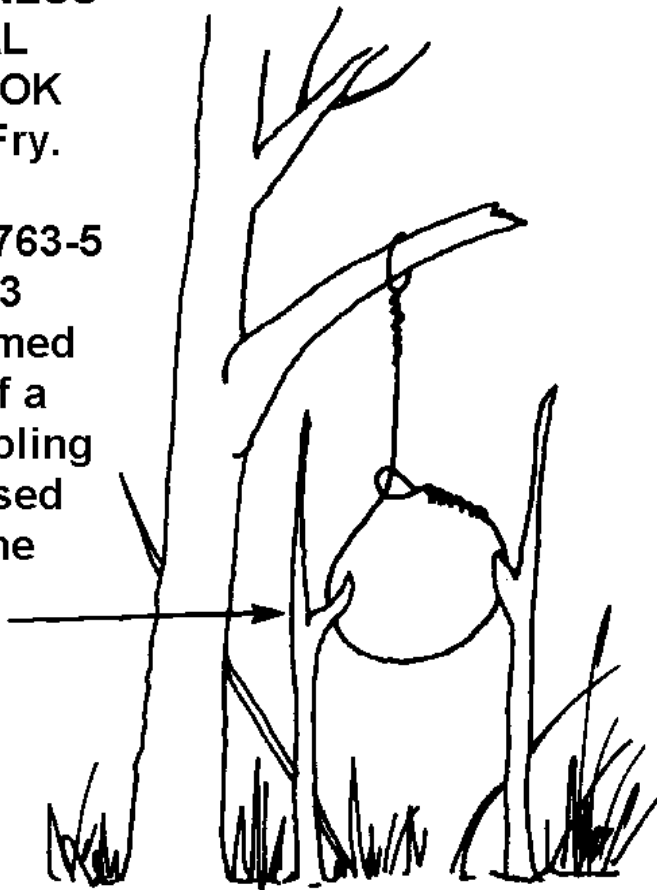


Figure 7:2 A simple snare.

The snare should be about four and a half inches in diameter and about three inches above the surface of the trail. It is best to make it of a soft brass wire which will hold the shape into which it is bent, but if necessary you can make it of cord. If you do you will have to use twigs to hold it in shape (Figure 7:3). The wire stands a lot of twisting before it breaks, an important feature if the rabbit is poorly caught and spins about for some time before it dies.

The rabbit comes in and out of the thicket in its search for food. If you find a deep growth of willow along the edge of a stream, you might conclude that there are plenty of rabbits about but will still not be able to decide exactly where to set the snare.

Figure 7:3
The trimmed
branch of a
small sapling
can be used
to hold the
snare in
shape.



If there is lodgepole pine in the vicinity, cut a young sapling growing out in a nearby small clearing. This tree is preferred because a young pine growing out in the sun will probably be more attractive to rabbits than one growing with difficulty under the canopy of the thicker forest. Lay the sapling a few yards out from some likely-looking gaps in the edge of the willow thicket. Then leave that place alone for two or three nights while you continue to set snares in other naturally occurring sites.

Very probably, when you come back to look at the small pine, you will see rabbit tracks around it in profusion, evidence that needles and bark are being eaten in abundance, manure all over the snow, and a well-packed trail at every likely place for a snare at the edge of the thicket -- a sign of steady traffic. Now you may set snares confidently. Moreover, since this technique has worked once, you should cut some more small pine and start several such feeding stations.

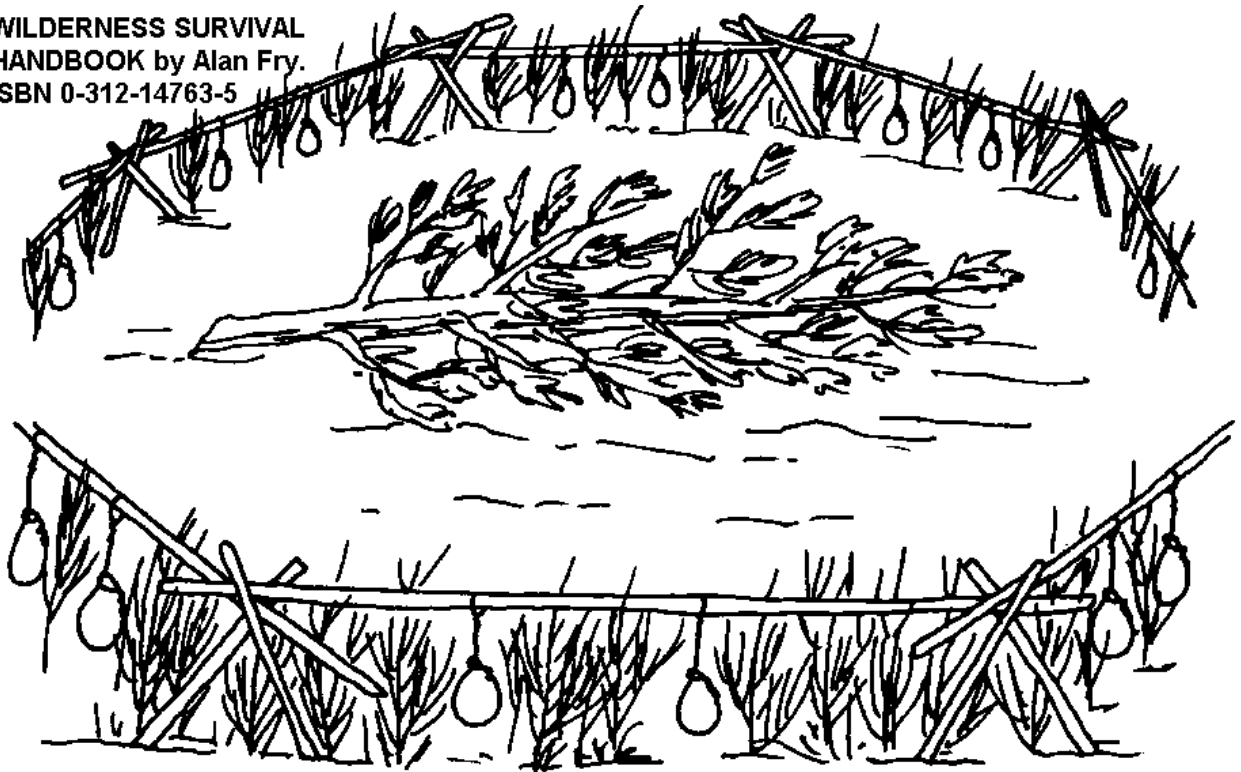


Figure 7:4. The rabbit corral. Favored food species inside a fence with openings left for passage and snare sets.

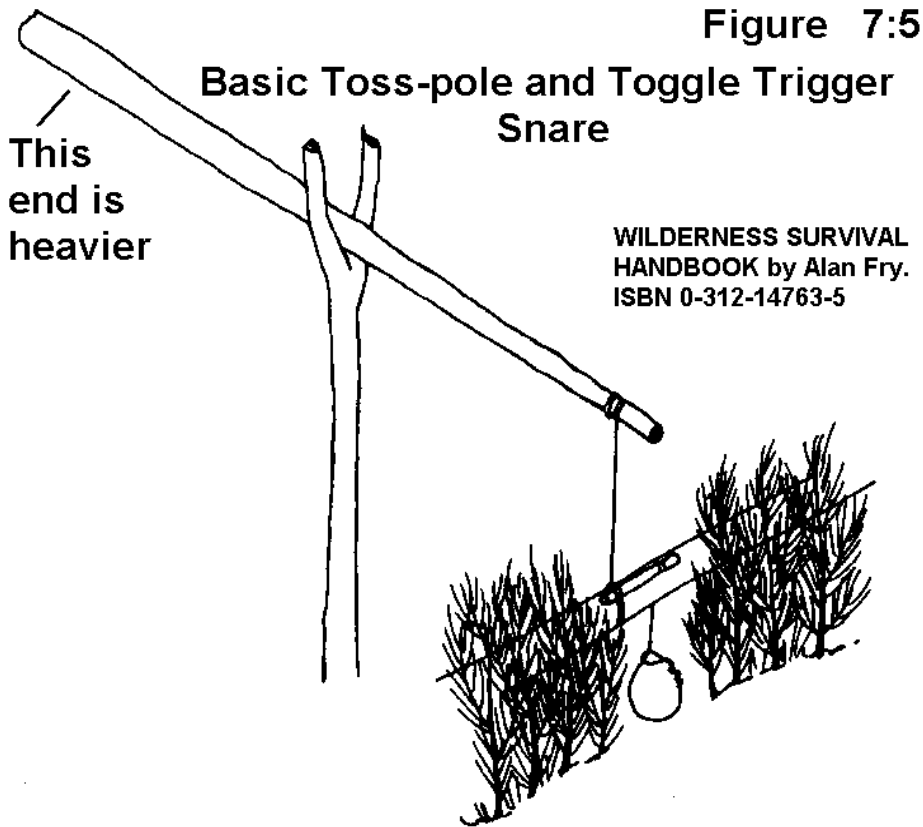
It may happen that you don't find any undergrowth or thickets where the rabbits are obliged to use any one trail repeatedly. Tracks may go everywhere but not often in the same place twice. This might happen in the sort of forest that consists of a mixed stand of lodgepole pine, alpine fir, and the odd Engelmann spruce. In such a case you might resort to a rabbit corral. First, cut a few small pines for bait and pile them on the snow in a likely small clearing. Then build a fence around them as shown in Figure 7:4. Use crossed sticks driven into the snow -- or any other handy method -- to hold up the ends of the horizontal main fence poles which will be the anchoring poles for the snares. These poles should be about ten inches to a foot from the surface of the snow. Then stand spruce or fir branches against the fence to make a solid covering, except for a space every few feet that is just the right size for a rabbit to pass through.

Leave this corral for a few days until the rabbits are coming in number. Then set snares in the spaces, well anchored to the horizontal pole. If you find that you are taking a couple of rabbits a night with a modest little corral, make as many more corrals as you need, perhaps fifty to a hundred yards apart through the wood.

Lodgepole pine appears to be a favored food of rabbits, and so is the bark of many deciduous trees. I have seen young aspen cut down in the Yukon Territory to attract rabbits with great success.

Some rabbits may be lost after they have been caught in the snare, because they twist and break the wire. Sometimes, too, a rabbit will be caught by only a foot or by both hind feet. This points up the fact that, however carefully we make our sets, not all rabbits are caught by the neck, and the ensuing struggle results in loss of both game and precious wire.

The sets may be improved by the use of a toggle and toss-pole. The toggle provides a triggering action, and the toss-pole lifts the snared rabbit up in the air. This method of lifting the captured animal enables you to use cord if wire is in short supply, since once it is off the ground, the rabbit cannot get at



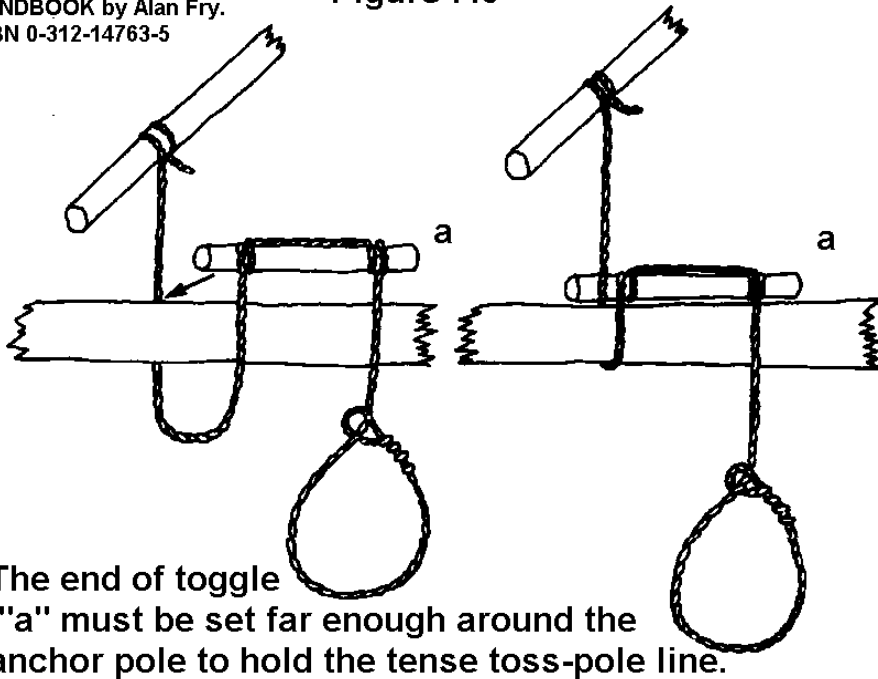
the cord to chew through it. Any method which snatches the prey upward on capture results in far fewer losses.

Figures 7:5 through 7:7 show the essential features of the toggle system. I find that a toggle about four inches long seems right for length, and the main skill is in finding just how far back around the anchor pole you must set the snare end of the toggle to ensure that the other end just safely holds the wrap of the toss-pole line in place and no more.

It takes longer to set out a given number of these toss-pole snares than it does to set simple snares. In a situation of pressing need I recommend getting out a large number of simple snares immediately in the best natural locations available, following up as soon as possible with many toss-pole snares. Do make corrals, as well, if there is any shortage of good natural locations. For one thing corral sets are always easy to locate, whereas simple sets can be very hard to find, especially after an overnight snowfall.

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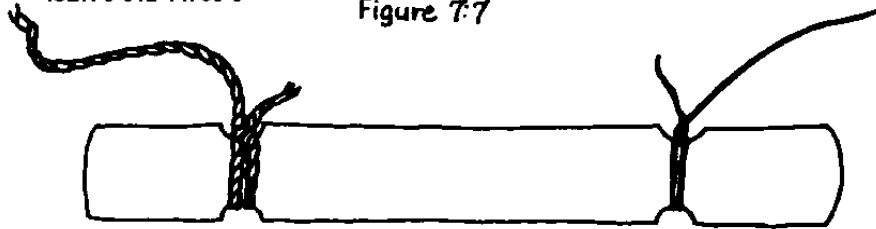
Figure 7:6



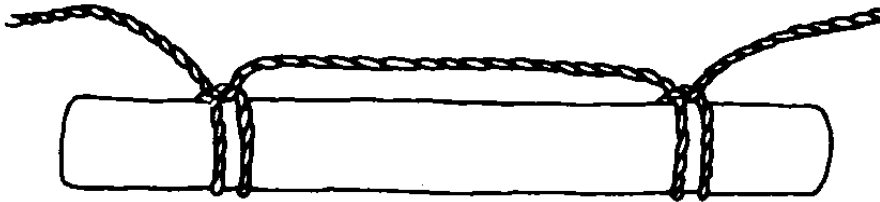
Check your snares every morning; most rabbit movement occurs at dusk, through the night, and at daybreak. And remember, this is a numbers game! Set every snare with all possible care, but at the same time set many, many snares.

There are other methods for triggering a snatch-up action and a few of these are shown in Figures 7:8 through 7:11. Methods requiring a peg to be driven into the ground are obviously not useful when the ground is frozen.

Figure 7:7

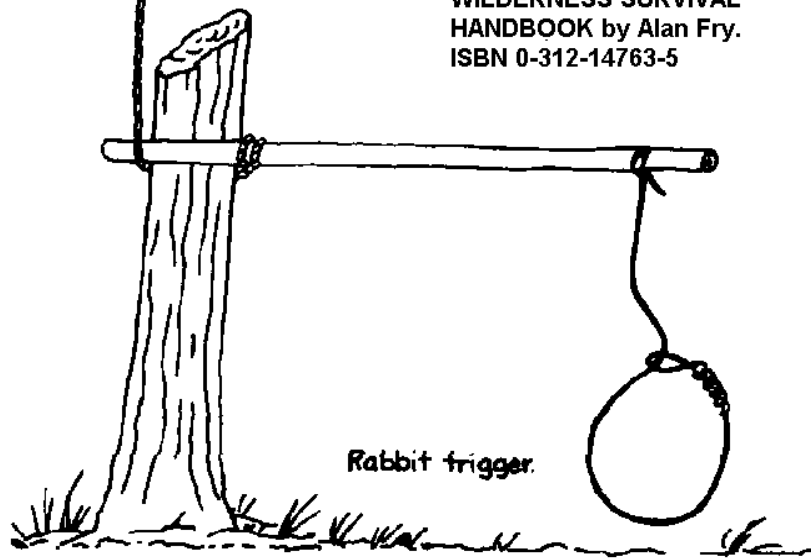
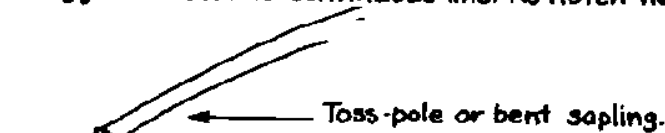


Toggle with cord one end, wire the other. Note notches.



Toggle attached to continuous line. No notch needed.

Toggle attached to continuous line. No notch needed.



Rabbit trigger.

Figure 7:8

Tree squirrels may be taken with wire snares attached to a pole which can either span between two trees or lean from a low branch to the ground. Again it is important to set the pole where you see evidence of squirrels -- or the squirrels themselves. If there is an established run between two trees, set the pole between those trees and a few feet from the ground. Several snares may be set on one pole. The snare diameter should be about two and a half inches, and the wire should be long enough so that the squirrel, when caught, will hang well below the pole. This snare is shown in Figure 7:12.

Ground squirrels are light enough that a sapling, stuck well into the ground and then bent over, will serve to snatch up the snare. Since you don't have an anchor pole you can hold the sapling bent over by a simple hook-and-peg system (Figure 7:13).

Heavier marmots will require a toss-pole balanced over a stout forked stick securely driven into the ground. Generally speaking, a sapling bent over is only good for quite light game, and then not all saplings will straighten up promptly if they have been held over in a bent position for many hours. In cold weather most saplings simply freeze into the bent

position. You will have to discover the limitations of the saplings available to you and use toss-poles where necessary.

Figure 7:9

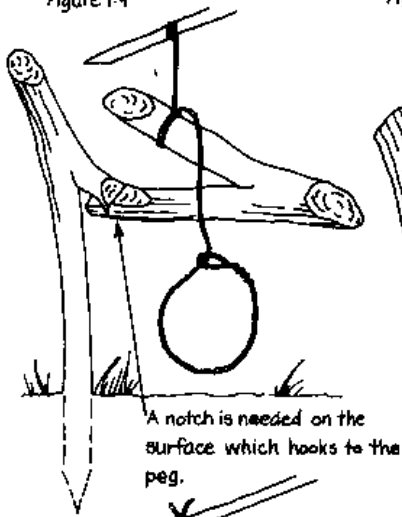
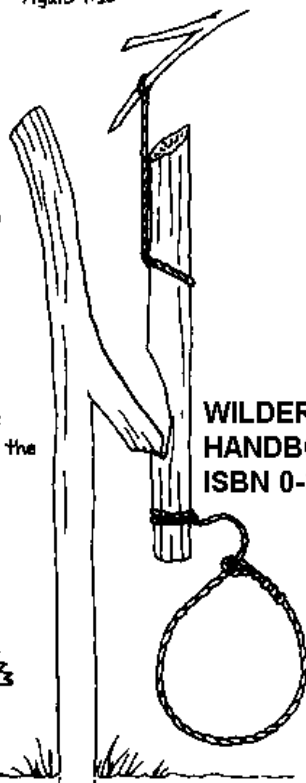


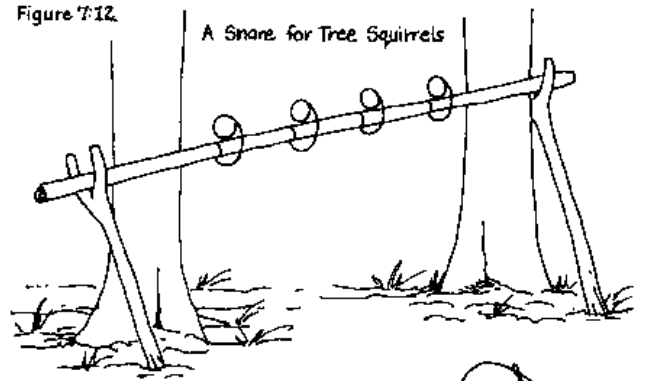
Figure 7:10



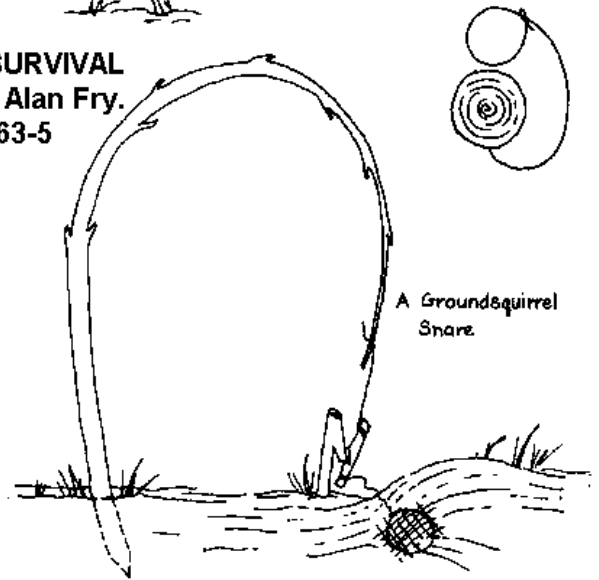
The pressure of the toss-pole keeps the knot pressed against the bottom of the anchor pole.

Figure 7:11

Figure 7:12



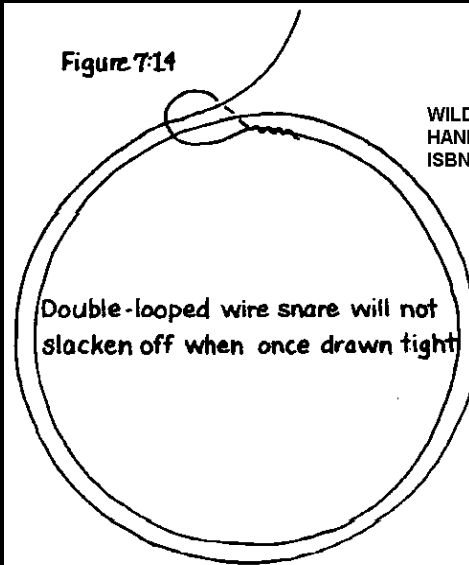
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Wire which can be salvaged from a downed aircraft makes good snares. Particularly for predators and beaver, the snares made from wire should be double-looped so that when they tighten they will not again slacken. In a single-loop snare the line goes through the eye once, then directly wherever it is secured. In a double-loop it must go around the loop formation a second time and through the eye a second time.

Also for any game larger than rabbits, the snares made from line of whatever weight should be set with a slip knot in the eye which will close up as the snare tightens to prevent the snare slacking off should the animal pause in his struggles; see Figure

Figure 7:14



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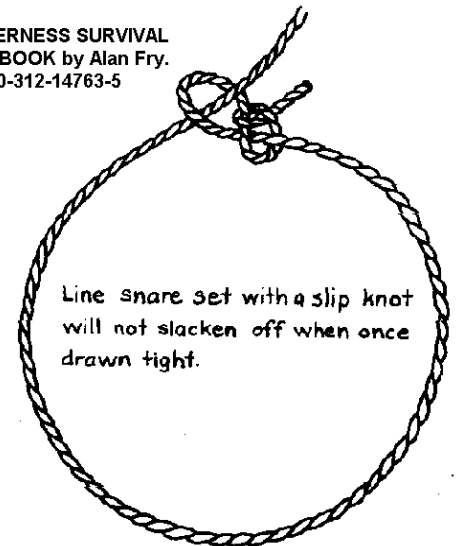


Figure 7:15

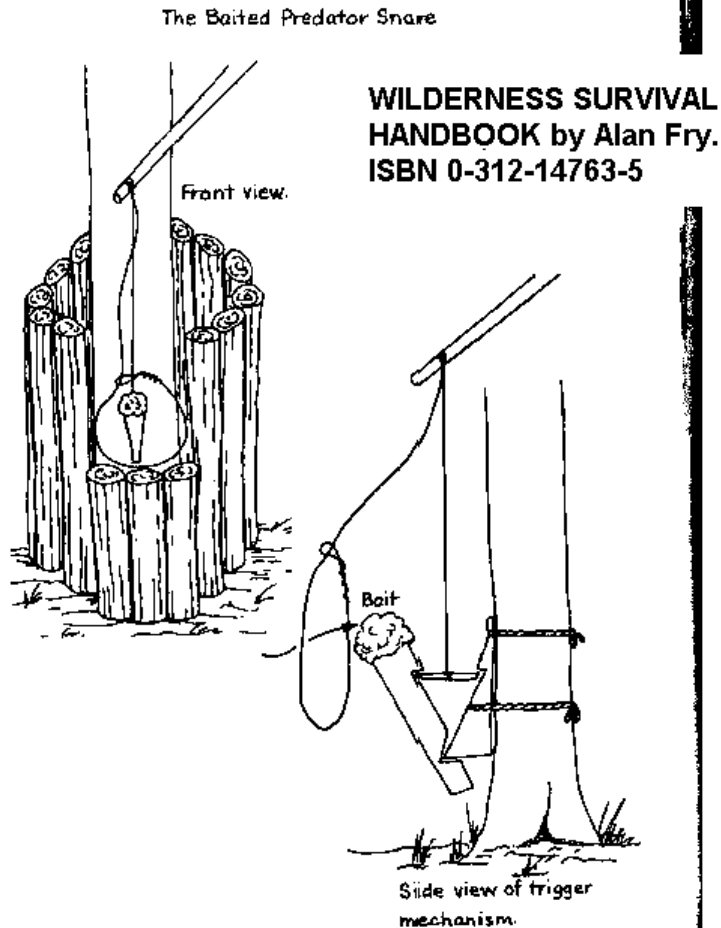


Figure 7:16

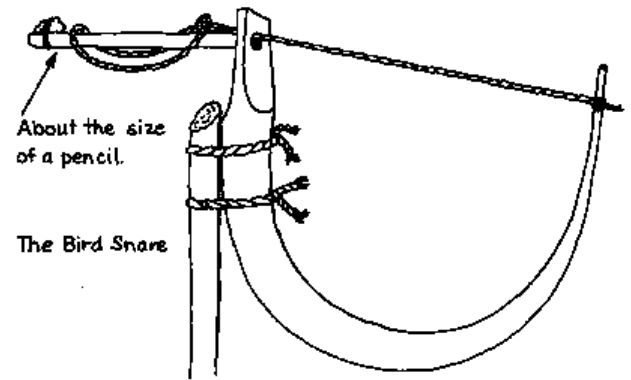
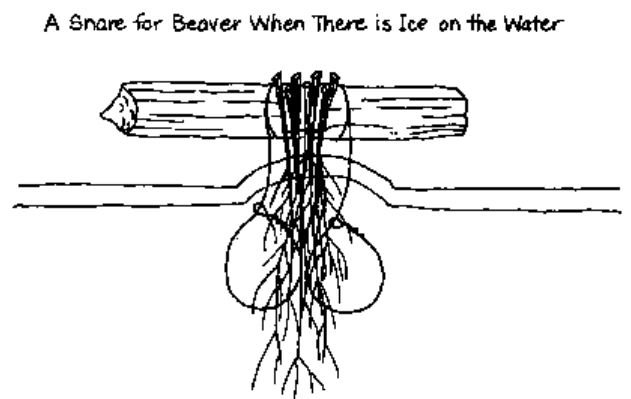


Figure 7:17



7:14.

Many of the predator species such as the lynx and the members of the weasel family may be taken in a baited snare. The lynx particularly is good eating and affords considerable meat. Rabbit offal is a source of bait. Figure 7:15 gives you a front and side view of a baited snare. Make sure that the enclosure around the bait is high enough that the animal must go through the entrance where the snare is set, and also so that birds don't get at the bait. Adjust the size of the set according to what animal you intend to capture.

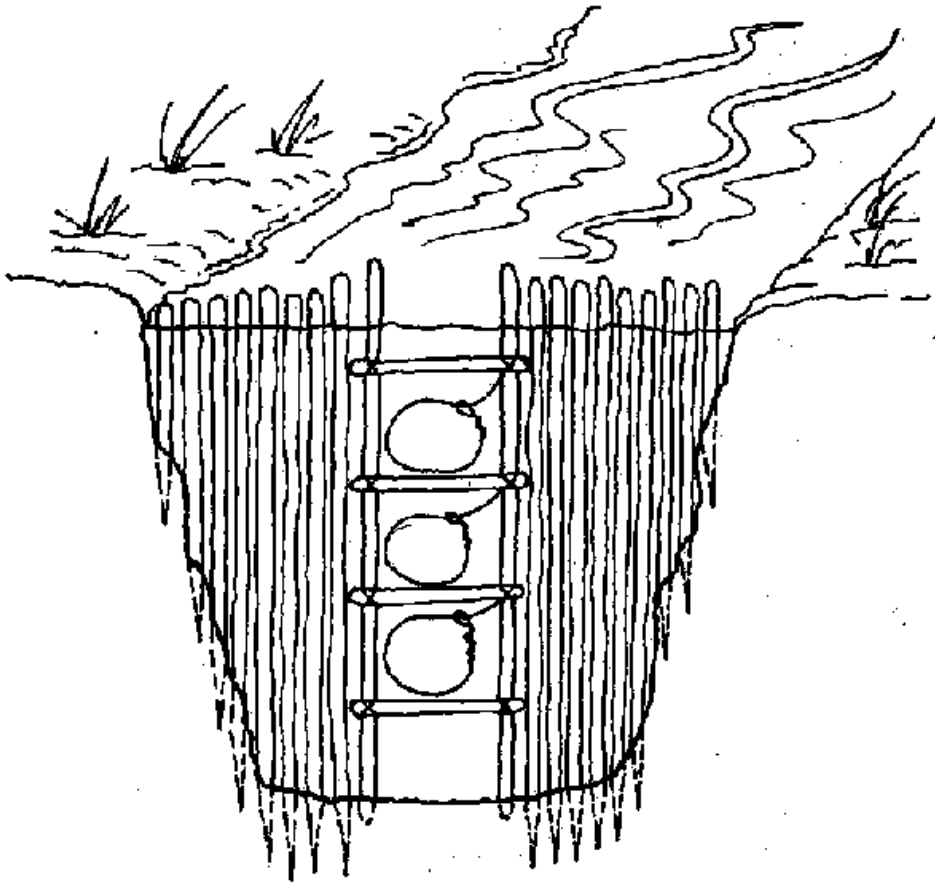
A variety of small birds often gather about a camp, and in a situation where you are pressed for food, you must see them either as food or as a source of bait for fishing or for the baited predator snare. The bird snare takes practice to adjust so that it sets and works, but you will manage this with patience. Figure 7:16 will get you started.

The important point is to make the perch stick and the trigger hole just the same size, and bevel the end of the perch stick slightly. Then the tension of the snare line will just keep the perch stick in place until a bird lands. Also, you can make your hole directly in an upright sapling that has been cut off and flattened, and tie a weight to the tension end of the snare line rather than use a bent spring stick.

It is also possible to snare beaver. When ice is on the beaver pond you can set snares through a hole in the ice (Figure 7:17). Stay entirely away from the lodge but set near feeding locations. Cut a hole in the ice and put fresh willow branches into the water, anchoring the butts securely to a dry log on the ice.

Put two or three snares in the water beside the willow branches and anchor these as well. The beaver will come to cut off the willow branches and while at work will become fouled in the snares.

Cross-Section of an Underwater Snare for Beaver



Beaver can be taken in an underwater set (Figure 7:18) during open water and when the ice is not too thick to manage the set. Choose the nearest point upstream of their dam, where the current is slow but the stream is not too wide or deep to work in. The snares should be about eight inches in diameter.

As I suggested earlier, big game, too, may be taken in snares. At one time or another, the Indian people of the bush country caught virtually all large game in snares. Indians in the Yukon Territory made superb rawhide ropes with which they snared moose. Unfortunately, although the odd such rope survives, the practice itself has been given up, and no wildlife management authority in North America would allow you (or me)

to try it on an experimental basis. Nonetheless, we know it can be done, and in case of urgent need you can turn to it, if you must, to preserve life.

The principles remain the same. You must find a well-used trail, in current use. In some types of forest cover, the game does not use well-defined trails on a consistent basis; in others the trails are regularly used and you may predict the passage of an animal every night or two with confidence.

You will of course need strong line. Polypropylene or nylon rope are as likely as any to be on board an aircraft and have enormous strength for their weight. I would set for mule or whitetail deer with a three-eighths-inch rope, and for moose with a half-inch rope and be quite confident about the rope being suitable.

If the signs are favorable, look for the naturally constricted places in the path where the snare may be set. The diameter and the height of the noose will be determined by what animal you hope to take. Remember that animals do not carry their heads as high while they walk as you may think from seeing them in an alert attitude. Most game that you sight sees you, and the head is up to search the wind, the ears are out, and the body is gathered for instant flight. Deer in undisturbed travel may have their heads centered about two and a half feet from the ground. A snare two feet in diameter and about eighteen inches from the ground at bottom will be about right, save for snaring a buck with exceptional antlers.

Large-Animal Snare

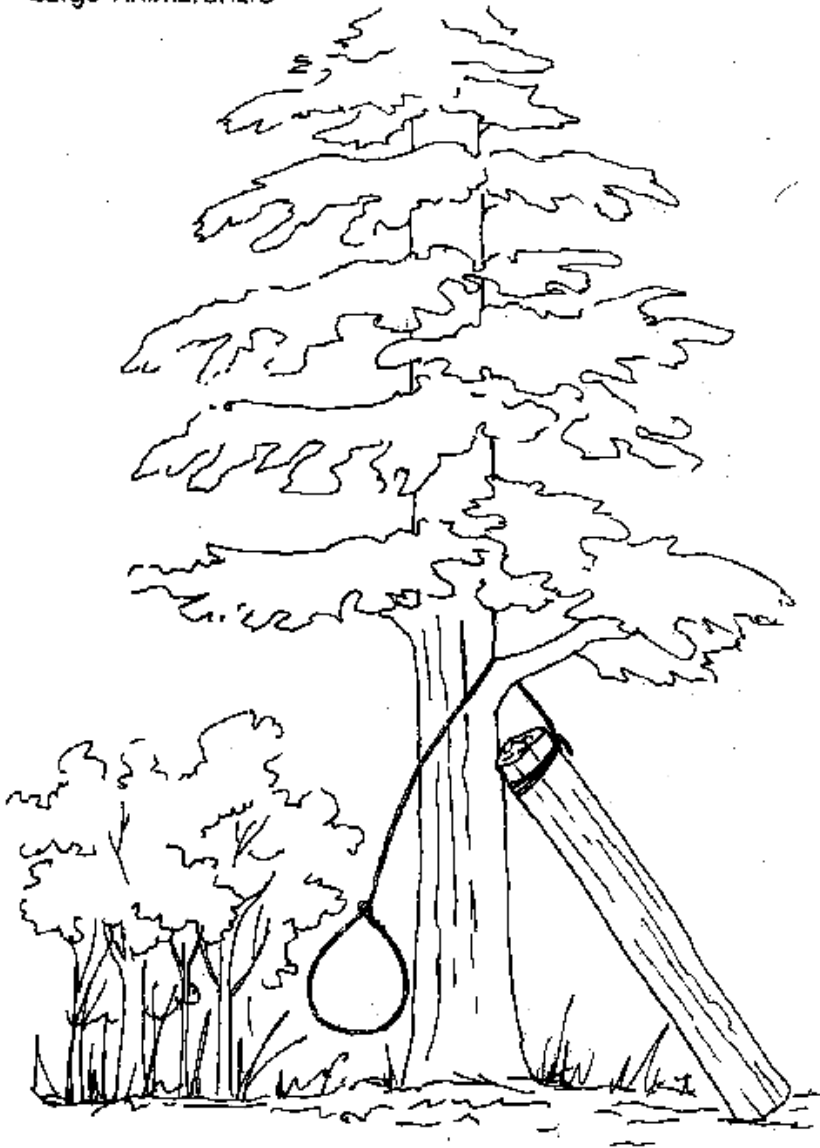


Figure 7:19

An excellent technique is to set the snare where an animal must duck slightly to go under an overhead obstruction. You can set the snare immediately below the obstruction and be certain that the animal's head will be well directed.

Figure 7:19 will give you the basic idea for this kind of snare. The leaning log is important. It should be as heavy a log as you can manage and should be propped against the tree with as little secure purchase as possible so that the initial struggles of the animal dislodge it readily. Also you must do a thorough job of disguising the snare loop with brush.

Particularly with deer, but also with most other large game, your best chance of success comes at night. Therefore you must visit every such snare first thing in the morning to minimize the time between the death of an animal and dressing out. Cavity contents left in, particularly in mild weather, can sour the meat in a very short time. You must do all you can to avoid this.

The deadfall is another in the inventory of devices for capturing game. At one time Indian people made much use of this device too for taking game, particularly during the early years of the

fur trade, but it is difficult now to obtain accurate details on its successful use as it has been replaced everywhere by the steel trap and in most jurisdictions is now illegal.

As with any device for capturing game, the deadfall must be triggered when the animal is in the vulnerable position and must be dependable in its action. Generally speaking, the simpler the mechanism, the more reliable the result.

Because of its illegality, I have not taken game with the deadfall, but I have constructed and tested the action of many, and have no doubt of the potential usefulness of a well-made deadfall in practical application.

It seems to me prudent to make any deadfall with a ground log as well as a fall log, and to provide guide stakes for the fall log to ensure the accuracy of the drop. In the style which I describe here, the fall log is raised at one end and descends in a scissor action onto the log below, trapping the animal between in order to injure and hold it, if not kill it outright.

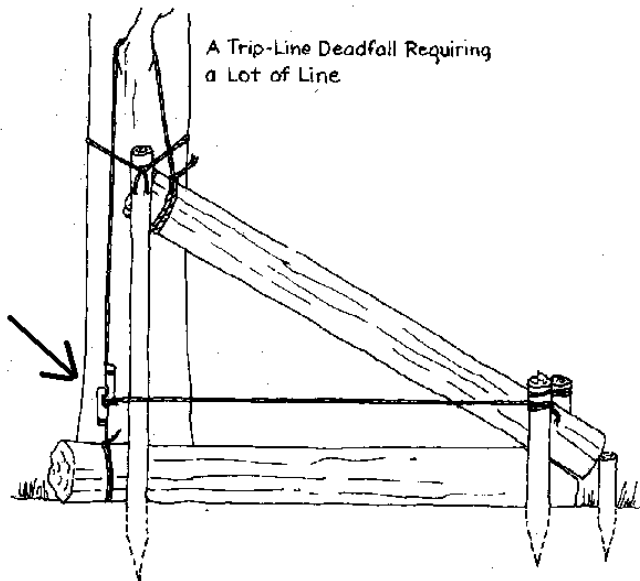
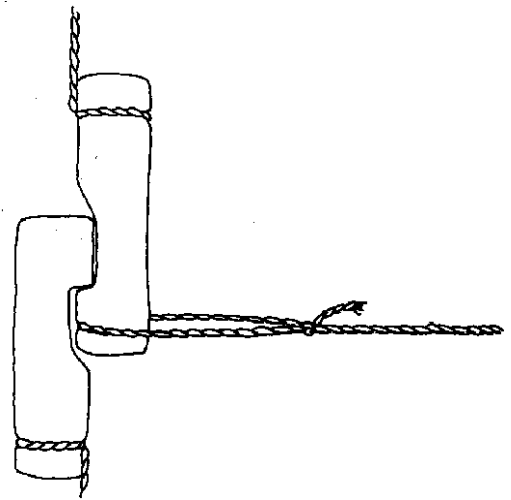


Figure 7:20



The deadfall may be triggered by a trip line or by disturbance of bait. Since small herbivorous animals are best taken with snares and very large game such as bears or moose are best shot, the deadfall is most useful in trapping the small- to medium-sized predators and the smaller ungulates such as mule and whitetail deer. Bait will be the practical method of bringing any predator into the deadfall. Deer may be taken by setting a trip-line deadfall on a well-used trail, carefully camouflaging enough of the structure so that it appears as no more than a natural interference along the way.

The size of the deadfall is in relation to the size of the animal you hope to capture. For deer, this means you will need the heaviest log two people can contrive to manage with lines and levers; for predators such as lynx and coyotes, I would use as heavy a log as I could manage alone.

Opinion varies as to how well animals can sense a trap and thus avoid capture. Many trappers go to considerable lengths to camouflage human scent and the physical outlines of the set trap. In a survival situation you won't be able to do much about scent, but certainly with brush and twigs and ground trash you can do a good job of hiding the main outlines of your Deadfalls and your snares.

Given the persistence of the small predators in getting into my winter meat cache, I have no doubt about the practicality of inducing them into a baited deadfall. One winter I lost quite a few pounds of moose meat to a mink before I even discovered what creature was getting into the cache; on another occasion a weasel came into my lodge by the light of my evening lamp to contest with me the possession of the meat I had brought in from the cache for the next day's stew-pot. Members of the weasel family may not be your first choice for the entre, but in a survival situation every animal is a potential meal.

Various Deadfalls are illustrated in the order in which I will deal with them. Figure 7:20 is a trip-line deadfall requiring rather a lot of line. You choose a tree which is right beside the trail and make sure that the crotch of the branch over which the line must pass is well smoothed out for free passage of the line.

Do some trials with the trigger mechanism. The notch faces which bear on each other are critical to the sensitivity of the mechanism; by altering the angle of these faces you can go from a connection which no amount of pressure will trip to a connection that won't hold at all. My trials suggest that the bearing surface of the notch should be just a shade

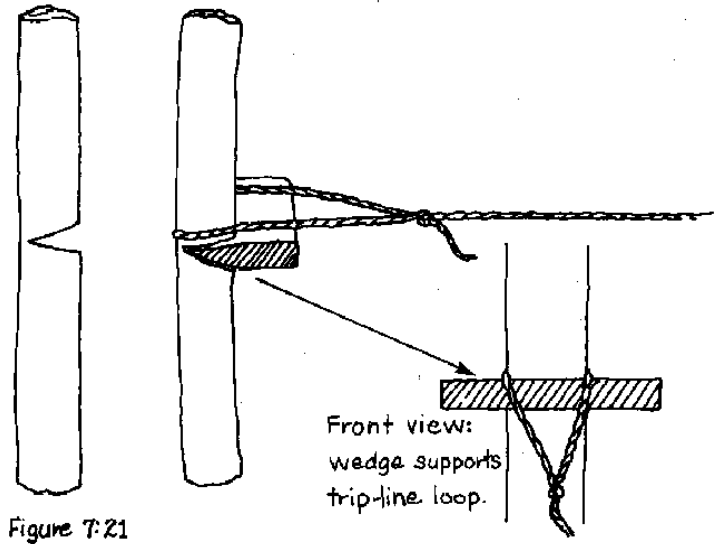
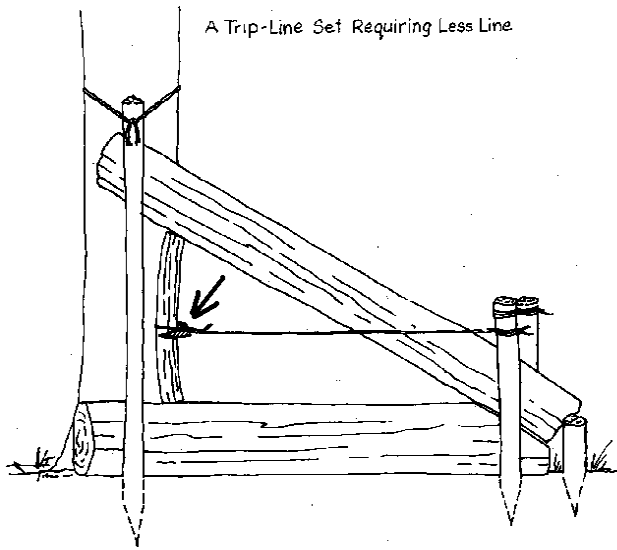


Figure 7:21

Front view:
wedge supports
trip-line loop.

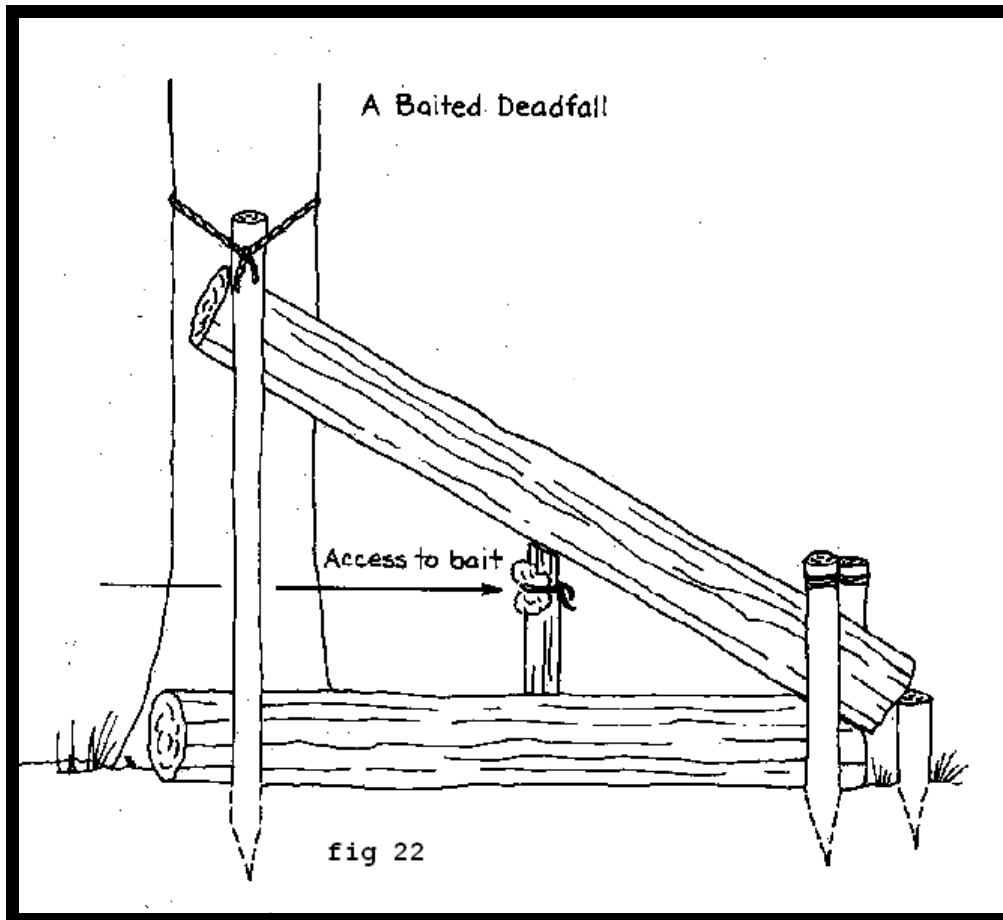


fig 22

more open than at right angles to the center line of the stick from which the trigger is made. There will be sufficient friction to hold the two halves of the trigger together in the set, yet they will release on very little pressure from the trip line.

Figure 7:21 illustrates a trip-line set requiring less line than the previous set. I refer to this as the broken-knee set. The trick here is to cut the notch in the support stick so far through that only a thin strip at the back still holds and then to support it in place with a wedge that is precisely thick enough that only enough of a bend backward from the trip line to keep the stick upright is achieved. Very little

pressure on the trip line is then necessary to bring the knee forward to the point of sudden collapse.

This deadfall may also be set with bait. Tie the bait securely to the support stick just above the notch and wedge. Brush in all around the set, leaving access only at the end farthest from the baited support stick, which is placed toward the ground end of the fall log. This will ensure that the animal will be standing on the ground log while tugging at the bait.

Figure 7:22 illustrates a baited deadfall with a minimum requirement for line. The key to success here is the bevel on the top end of the support stick to which the bait is tied. You should use logs with some rough bark, and you should set the support stick back into the set almost but not quite to the point of balance of the fall log. The support stick can be made to hold when leaning slightly forward at the top and with the bevel cut to conform to the angle of the fall log. In order to hold, the stick will bear the weight of the fall log mainly toward the peak of the bevel. Very little tugging at the bait, which is tied securely to the support stick near the top, will produce a quick collapse. You can test the set with a long string tied to the top of the support stick. Stand in front of the set and pull in the direction from which the animal would approach the set. You will soon find the particular adjustment which on the one hand holds the log up yet on the other permits sudden collapse with only a moderate tug on the bait.

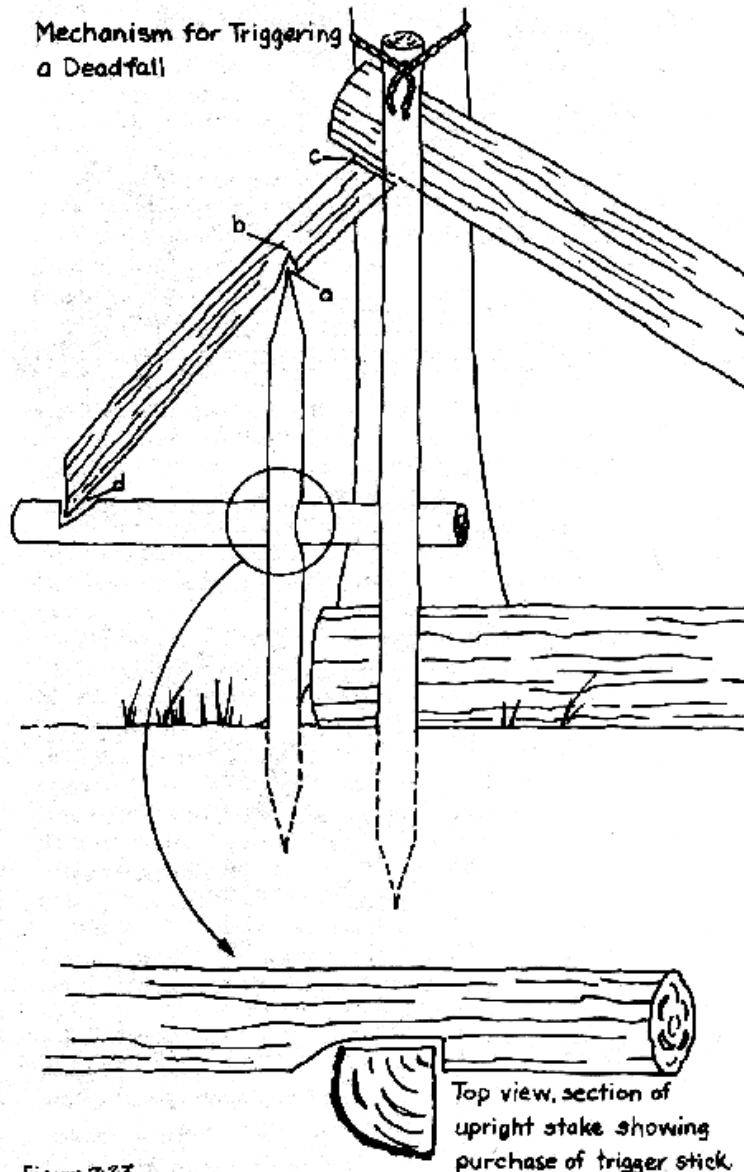


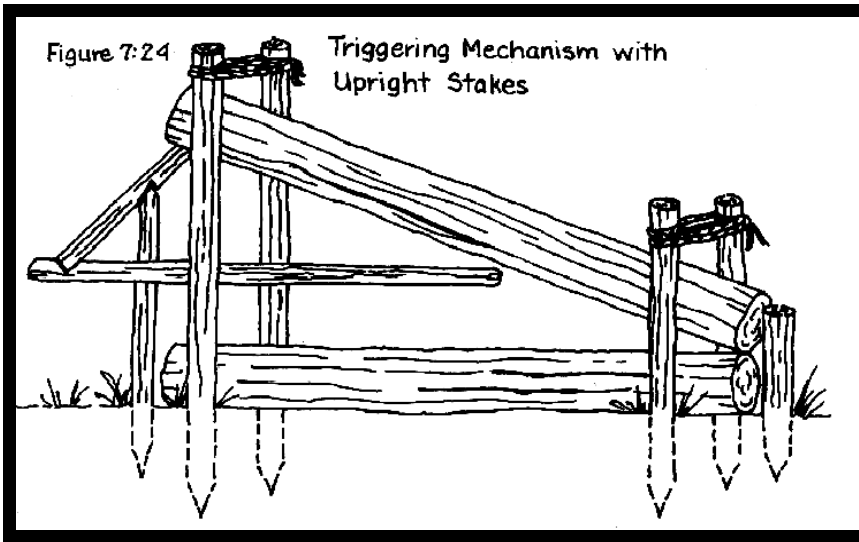
Figure 7:23

Now, with any baited deadfall you must complete the set by fencing up around the whole structure in such a way that the only opening left ensures access to the bait from the effective direction in this case from the front end. Dead sticks, pieces of bark, and brush leaned against the fall log will do the job, but be careful that nothing will interfere with the drop.

Figure 7:23 illustrates an important mechanism for triggering a deadfall. It is important because, with a little practice, you can build it quickly, it is reliable, and it requires no line apart from the little you would need to secure the bait. Also it can be used with a trip stick instead of a trip line, and this could be critical for capturing a deer when you are short of line.

It is easier to set the mechanism on the end of the fall log than on the side, but both are possible. In a side set you may need an upright stake to prevent side-sway and premature triggering of the mechanism; see Figure 7:24.

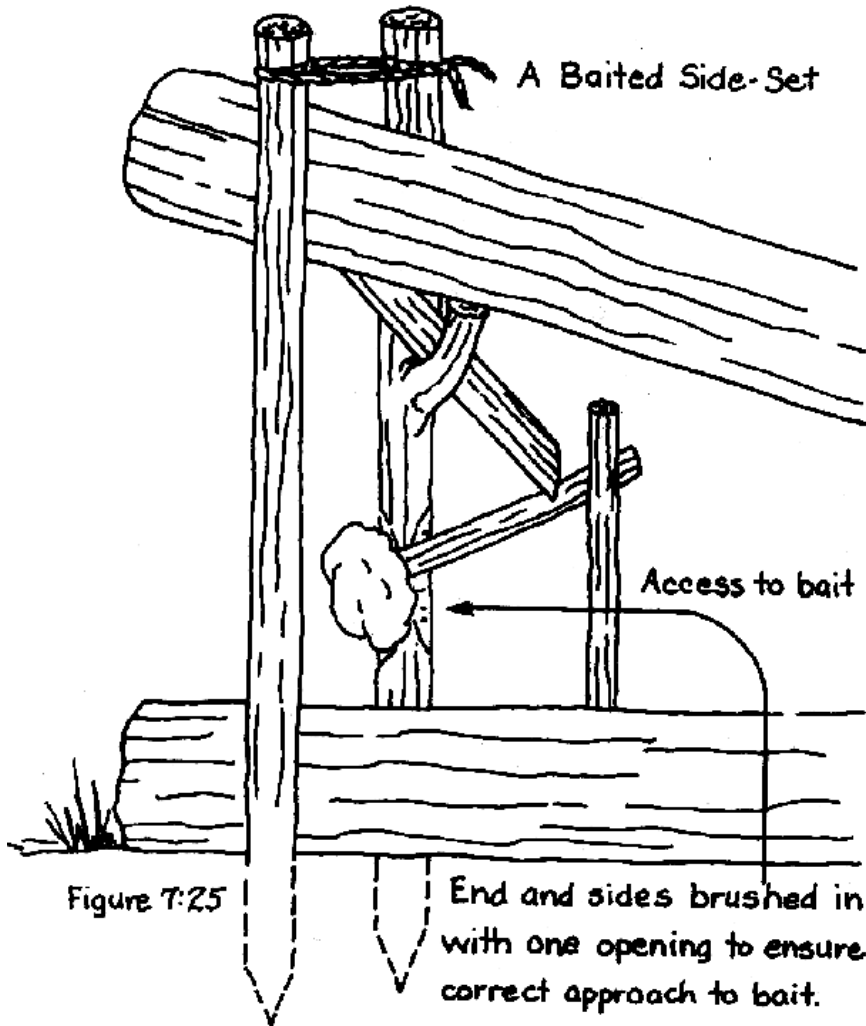
It is important to have the main upright stake in the mechanism close to the end or side of the fall log to ensure a clean action. I set this stake as close to the fall log as is possible without



interfering with the drop.

Look at Figure 7:23 again. The top of the upright stake "a" is shaped with a sharp knife into a wedge, the edge of which should be precisely horizontal to the ground when the stake is upright. The supporting lever is then notched accurately at a right angle "b", and with this lever then set firmly onto the wedged top of the stake one can mark with accuracy the bevel "c" wanted at the top end to hold the fall log, and at the bottom end "d" to fit the notch in the trigger stick.

If you set this mechanism as a trip stick, use a light, dry stem for the trip stick and support the far end of it with a light forked twig (though this latter step is not always necessary). It seems that the mechanism will trip better from one direction of strike than the angle of the fall log. In order to hold, the stick will bear the weight of the fall log mainly toward the peak of the bevel. Very little tugging at the bait, which is tied securely to the support stick near the top, will produce a quick collapse. You can test the set with a long string tied to the top of the support stick. Stand in front of the set and pull in the direction from which the animal would approach the set. You will soon find the particular adjustment which on the one hand holds the log up yet on the other permits sudden collapse with only a moderate tug on the bait.



system on the end or on the side, it is critical to cover with brush around the set, with an opening left at one side toward the back. The objective is to have the animal standing full length on the ground log when tugging at the bait.

Now the mechanism in the Deadfalls in Figures 7:23 to 7:25 is perhaps at its most useful as a trail set for deer, with a trip stick when you are short on line. You will need a large version of the set, well camouflaged and with the light, dry trip-stick set high enough that the deer will likely disturb it. Remember that deer are clean stepping animals and, given line for it, I would use a snare for deer ahead of a deadfall.

A Trail Set Suitable for Beaver

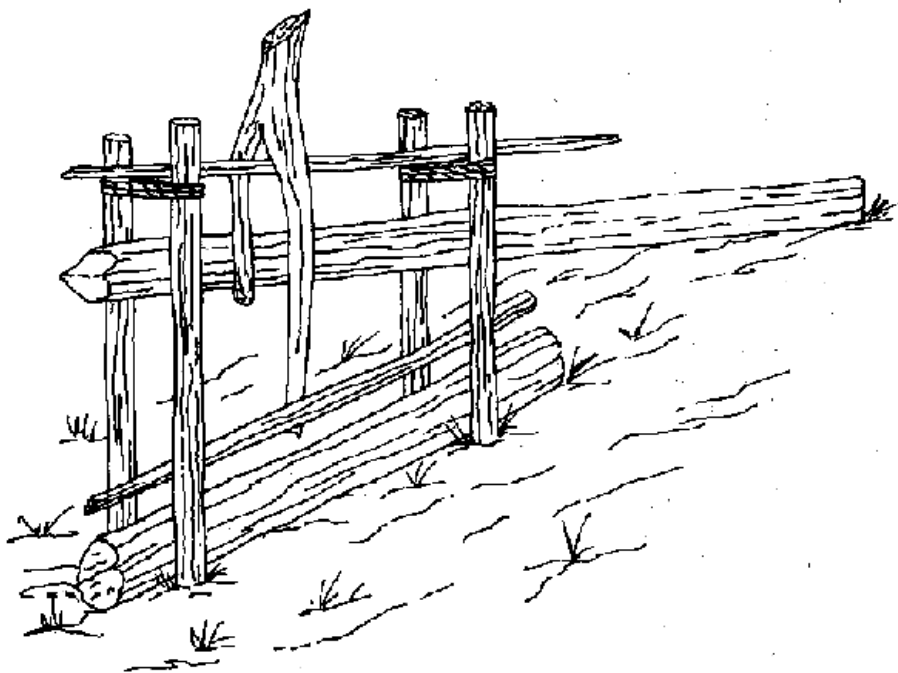
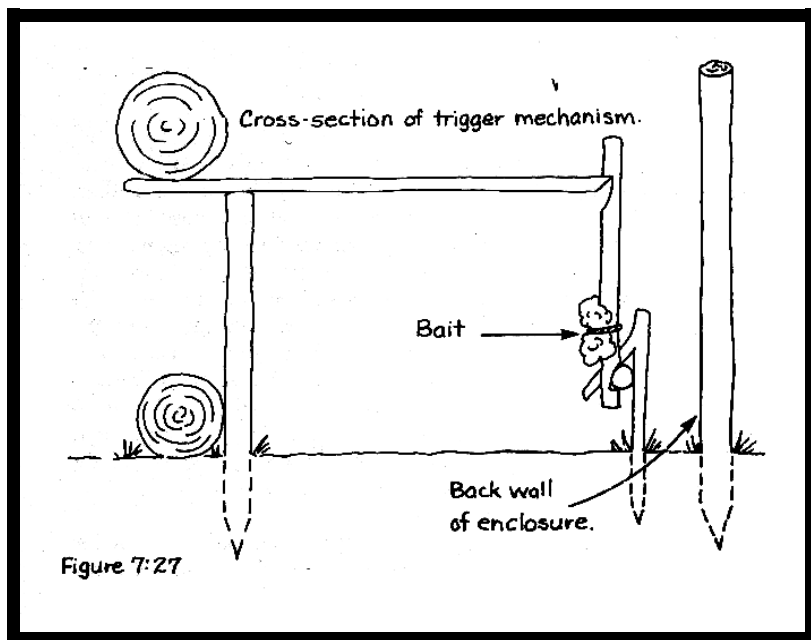
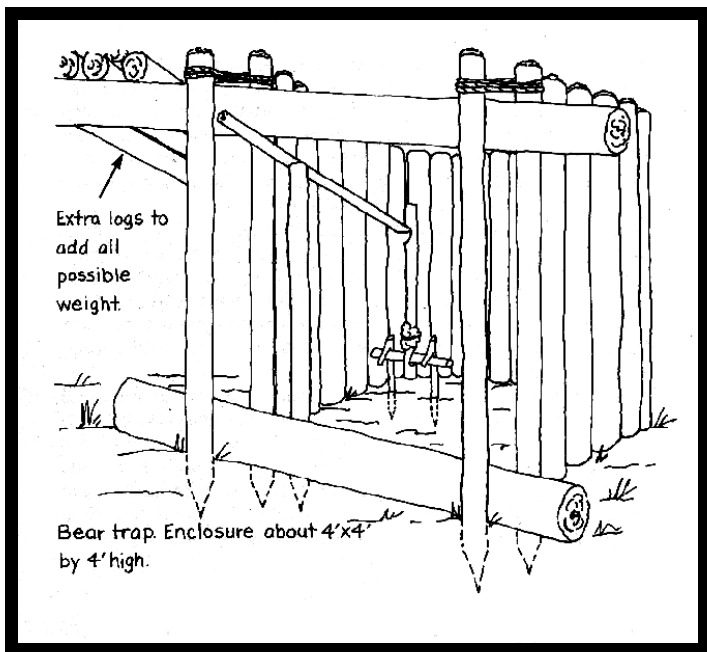


Figure 7:26

This mechanism is a little slow in getting the collapse underway and for a baited deadfall I would choose the broken-knee set or the beveled support stick with the bait securely tied to the stick in both cases.

Figure 7:26 shows a trail set that is good for beaver, but not likely to work for clean-stepping animals such as deer. It is probably one of the best trail sets, easily assembled and rapid in collapse. The forked sapling selected for the trigger mechanism must be very strong, as only the force of the fork pressing the fall log against the upright keeps the log in place. The longer stem of the fork must be just barely caught by the trip stick so that the least downward



disturbance of the trip stick will release everything. This deadfall is ideal for a well-used beaver trail leading from the stream bank to where the beaver are cutting feed.

Figure 7:27 shows an effective bear trap. If a bear is coming around camp to threaten the safety of your food supply, you must try to add him to the larder. If you have no rifle, this trap is your best alternative. It will take time to build and the fall log must be so heavy that you will need to use levers and blocks of wood to raise it. After the fall log is set on the trigger mechanism, you add the additional leaning logs for greater weight.

You will see in the sketches that much use is made of stakes driven into the ground. Obviously, in the winter months when the ground is frozen this presents problems. A partial solution is to make sets where trees are available a convenient distance apart. The requirement for stakes is reduced and if you position such stakes as you do need, and then pack snow around their bases thoroughly with your feet as well as tamp a little with the end of your axe handle, you will find that half an hour later they are quite firm due to the re-freezing of the disturbed snow.

Once more I urge practice. While it is not legal to set out a deadfall with the intent to capture game, there is nothing to prevent you from constructing Deadfalls and testing the trigger mechanisms, provided you disassemble everything when you are done. It is only through this trial-and-error process that you will discover the techniques which make for both a secure set and a sudden and certain collapse.

The next sketch (Figure 7:28) illustrates a useful trap for small game. It works particularly well with grouse. Some sort of bait such as bread crumbs or seeds must be placed so as to lead up to and inside the trap. The creature enters easily by pushing through the bars, but cannot readily escape as the bottom ends of the bars are against the inside of the bottom horizontal piece. It will take time and patience to build the trap, but grouse may be taken repeatedly in the same trap.

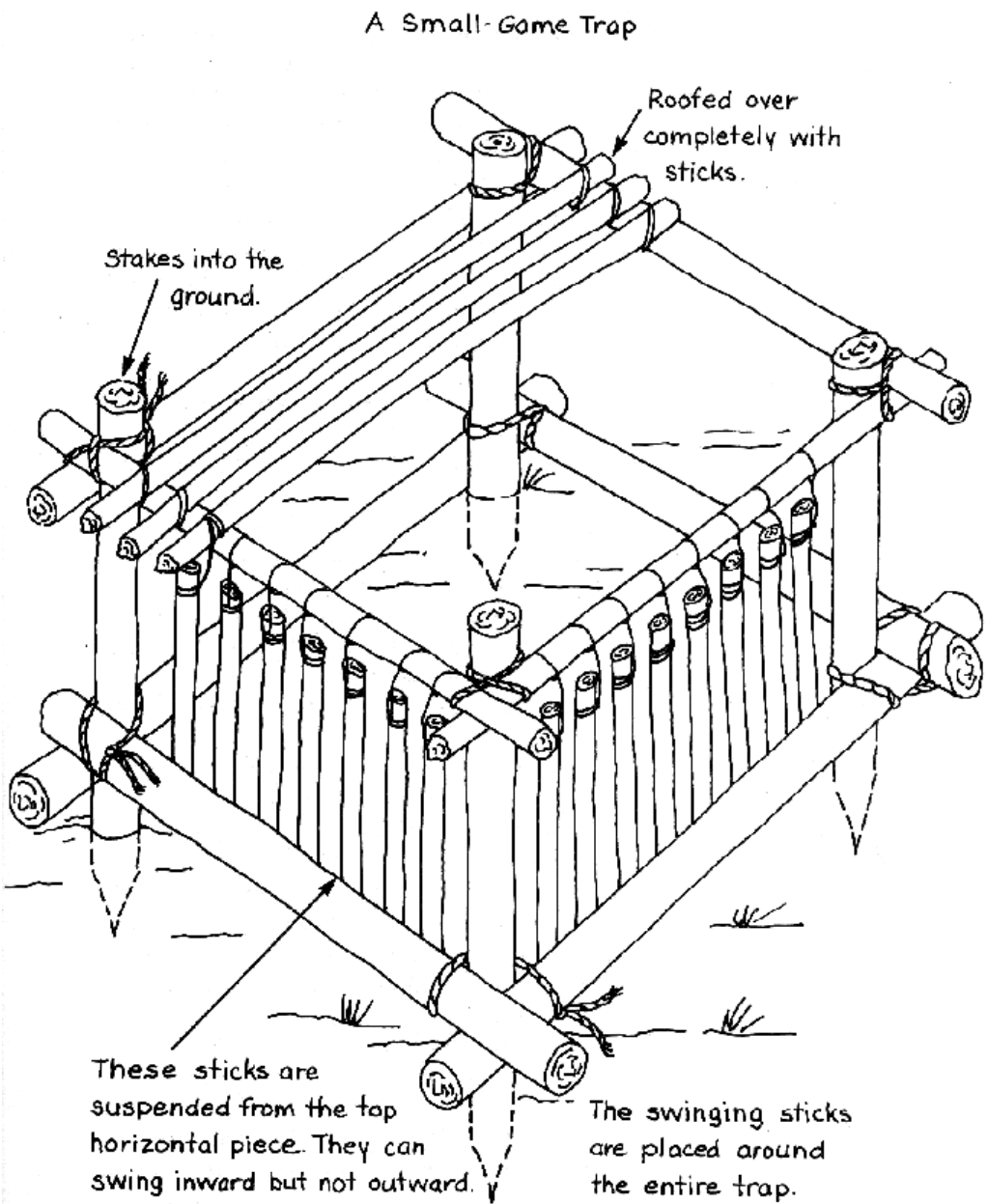


Figure 7:28