

I have been an avid hunter for many years, any animal and any method is fine with me, I love the time spent in the woods. I have always been interested in trapping but never felt I could sacrifice the time required to take it up, I knew trapping required a major commitment. Last year my interest peaked when I got to know the local trading post owner Ben, who had a large black bear on display in his store that he had taken while trapping. He told me the story behind it which got me excited and motivated to get the trappers certification required by the State of Maine to get my trapping license. The classes which are done by the Maine Trappers Association are very informative. There is a large emphasis on the protection of Canadian Lynx and what to do if you catch one by mistake. The instructors from the Maine Trappers Association are a very helpful and knowledgeable group who are conservationists and love sharing their skills of the trade.

One of the instructors, Jerry who is a Boone & Crockett record holding bear trapper, had designed his own bear trap made from a 5 gallon bucket, a barn hinge and a rubber bungee cord which was attached to a foot hold snare. After a couple of visits to his shop and quite a bit of conversation I set my first bear trap at the edge of a swamp off a local farmers field that I had scouted and knew held a healthy population of bear.

I baited the trap with pie filling, pie crust and molasses. I also hoisted a bucket with some old smelly fish 15 ft up a tree and hung it on a stout limb for an attractor scent and placed 2 trail cameras at the site which completed my set. I did not set the trap to fire until I was sure a target bear was hitting the site, small boars, sows and cubs were not what I was after. I checked the set and cameras every morning at 7 a.m. for 6 days with no activity other than raccoons and blue jays. The 7<sup>th</sup> day I had a very large boar check out the set. I jokingly named him Jelly Belly because when he walked in on video his belly was swinging back and forth while almost touching the ground! He did not come back for 4 days, I thought I had lost him. The next time he hit the set he was there for 20 days straight between 6:30 and 7 p.m. every night, just after dark. During the next 20 days, Jelly Belly showed me just how smart an old bear can be. He dug up the trap 6 times until I anchored it with 10 pieces of 24" rebar. Then he fired the trap with his nose and destroyed all the parts including chewing the metal hinge like a piece of tin foil. Then he would pull the bungee cord until it fired. He also would reach into the bucket, curl his paw under the trigger and pull it out backwards leaving the snare unable to fire. Unsuccessful to this point, I decided to try an Aldrich Foot Snare, so I abandoned the bucket trap and was confident this would be the answer, I was wrong, twice he stepped over it, one time a raccoon triggered it and the last time I set the trap he stepped on it but it did not catch him. By now it had been 18 days straight of old Jelly Belly showing me up, I was getting frustrated and that morning I just sat there at the set trying to figure out what to do next. After a while I decided to go back to the bucket trap but I had to make some adjustments which would require some welding and replacing the trigger mechanism. I pulled the bucket trap and left his meal in a regular 5 gallon bucket with no strings attached. The morning of day 20, low on confidence I returned with the redesigned bucket trap, set it and left thinking that old bear was just going to get another free meal tonight.

Day 21 started the same as the others since I started trapping. I was wide awake by 3:30 a.m. and unable to go back to sleep. I laid in bed thinking about my drive to the corner of the field, the smell of the cold fall morning, the beautiful view with the sun rising in the east with frost on the trees glimmering and the sound of geese honking high above looking for a place to land their group to feed for breakfast. I get out of my truck, pull on my rubber boots and load my 308 thinking I probably don't need it, but just maybe.....then I walk the trail into the set, it's thick and hard to see everything around the trap. I hesitate with the anticipation of that black figure waiting, but once again I don't see him. Still I'm cautious and I take 3 more silent steps and then ALL HELL breaks loose! The bear lunges in my direction only to be held by the snare that 20 times before had not been set. The snare holds, he is standing with his back to me glaring in my direction. My heart is racing, adrenaline at the level I am addicted to from my many years of hunting. I stay patient and wait until he offers me the shot that will give him the ending he deserves. It is over quick. I admire him from a distance and wait for my courage to come back so I can move to him for a closer look. My thoughts are racing as I look at the bear. Admiring his size, his head and paws are huge. Wondering how old he is, many of his teeth are missing or worn and rounded from old age. I wonder how much this animal has been through to finally be resting here at my feet, his face and ears are battle scarred, no doubt he was king of his woods home for many years. The bear was 412 lb. live weight. I will relive those 21 days every time I look at my trophy bear. It was a bigger challenge than I anticipated. I will never forget Trapping my first Maine Black Bear!

