

Sierran Encounter

At the very last second he glimpsed the deer, swerving and braking just enough to avoid catastrophe.

"Jesus H. Christ! he muttered, his whitened knuckles still clamped on the wheel.

"Perfect way to start-off a vacation, an accident kills us all, and leaves another dead deer on the road."

As the doe's tail disappeared into the trees on the edge of the rutted, one lane fire trail, Ross glanced into the back seat to see if his sudden braking had awakened the kids.

They slept on soundly, undisturbed.

"Great" he thought, smiling faintly as he shook his head.

"At two-o'clock this morning they'll be wide awake and excited, scaring each other and wanting to explore the woods" he mumbled softly, thinking aloud.

Both Jon and Rod had slept since they'd passed through Placerville, not even waking when the old Volare had turned off and bumped onto this twenty-two mile gravel jeep-trail.

As the sun disappeared over the ridge to the west of the trio, the old sedan bounced and jounced it's way onward and up the pot-hole ravaged road. Without thinking, Ross had switched the headlights on a ways back, and now the beginnings of the approaching night were being cut-through by the twin lamps. Sensing that the end of his journey was near, Ross slowed the car, and began looking for the nearly obscured turn-off, marked only by a large sequoia with a splash of white paint on it's trunk.

"There it is" he grumbled, barely catching the bright splotch out of the corner of his eye.

The old car's power-steering protested as he swung into the scrub-covered and almost completely overgrown parking spot.

When Ross had planned this trip, two months ago, he'd figured on having to contend with other people, even at this remote campsite. When he'd last visited the campground, some twelve years past, he'd been disappointed to discover the little parking spot full of cars.

But it looked tonight like it hadn't seen a car in years. Realizing the three of them were probably the only humans within twenty miles or so, he was thankful that he'd prepared accordingly, bringing plenty of food, water, and all of the camping equipment he owned, or could borrow.

He shut off the engine, noting the two hundred and fourteen miles they had driven from home, and quietly got out and opened the trunk of the dust-covered vehicle. Quickly unloading the car, he set-up the small dome tent that the three of them would be living in for the next few days.

After stowing and securing all of their gear, he crept back to the car and woke the boys, surprised when they sleepily trudged to the tent, whining softly, and crawled into their sleeping bags.

"Maybe they need this as much as I do" he mused.

He loaded the trunk with all of their bear-attracting food and secured the campsite. Hoping a mid-nite bathroom call by the kids wouldn't be necessary, he relieved himself in the nearby bushes, then stripped and crawled into his own sleeping bag.

With his own worries temporarily blanked out by exhaustion, he dozed off, amidst the gentle chirping of the crickets.

Two-and-a-half miles away, and an hour earlier, a lumbering creature stooped to drink from the rustling brook.

His keen ears picked out a strange rumbling noise coming from across the canyon, and he

stiffened suddenly.

He quickly ducked into the thick brush, instinctively grabbing his shoulder, the scarred site of an old injury long since healed.

Fear coursed through his veins as he remembered the last time he had heard that sound.

It was the ape-things!

He'd seen them only once before, and it'd cost him a painful wound in the shoulder.

Fearfully, he recalled his run-in with the small, hairless things.

He'd been foraging for berries at sunrise when he heard a strange growling sound coming from the nearby thicket. Cautiously watching behind a large rock at the edge of the strange dirt path, he was surprised to see a little bald ape-thing with bright skins on its body.

It was trying to look down a strange shiny stick-metal, and it seemed to be friendly, because it was standing still and not growling.

Behind the ape-thing stood a big bright hut that was shaking and growling, making the noise that he'd heard when he was looking for berries.

He lowered his head and put his long arms out in front of him to show the ape-thing that he was not attacking, but then suddenly the shiny stick-metal made a loud noise and he'd felt a great, burning pain in his upper arm.

With a roar of pain and surprise, he jumped into the thicket and ran, hearing the strange ape-talk of the things as they tried to follow him.

He'd hurried back to his mate, grunting a warning to her, and they both had scrambled up and away to their winter cave, never hearing or smelling the awful creatures again.

Until now.

Suddenly, the great creature heard another strange sound, like a small storm-noise.

His delicate nose picked up the almost-forgotten stench of the feared ape-creatures, ever so faintly.

With a loud grunt, he turned and shambled back upstream to his den-hut, frightfully peering up at the darkening skies.

Directly across the narrow canyon, and five hundred feet above the sleeping man and his two boys, the wildcat's eyes opened, and his stomach growled.

He slowly stretched, as all cats do, and one by one his stiffened muscles sprang to life.

Immediately hungry, he sniffed about his lair, poking his nose into and through the pile of rabbit and squirrel remains.

Finding nothing worth gnawing, he raised his sensitive nose to the air, testing for any sign of prey.

His nose only told him one thing-horrible man-things were nearby!

The hair on his back arched, and he growled softly.

He hated man, whose noise hurt his ears, and mere presence ruined the hunting.

When man was near, most of the rabbits stayed in their dens, and the squirrels rarely scurried on the ground.

Man's awful smell drove the forest creatures into hiding.

After he'd gone, he left strange things behind to ruin the forest.

With an angry yowl, the mountain lion padded down to the streamlet to drink and hunt.

As both the campers and the yeti slept, the bobcat crept ever closer to the human's camp.

Sniffing the night air for direction, the great feline slinked down the hillside, quiet and unseen in the near pitch-black stillness.

As he padded within sight of the camp, his olfactory senses picked up another scent, the very familiar skunk smell. A previous tangle with another skunk immediately rang out in his memory, and he turned away quickly, not wishing to have his sensitive nose burned by the skunk's defensive stink-spray.

A sudden thrashing in the thicket startled him, and brought all of his hunting instincts to bear. His excellent night-vision, combined with an acute sense of smell told him that he'd just flushed a jack-rabbit from its sleeping place.

He sprung into action, crashing after the unfortunate creature and easily bringing it down.

He mercifully snapped its neck.

Purring contentedly, he picked up his prey and loped back towards his lair.

Ross's eyes snapped open as a loud crash in the nearby brush startled him from his deep slumber. Listening intently, he thought he could make out the sound of a large animal heading away from the campsite.

"Probably a bear, or large fox" he mumbled, not too alarmed.

Whatever it was, it had left the area.

"I'll check it out in the morning" he thought as he sleepily rolled over.

After a quick glance reassured him that the two boys were undisturbed, he slowly slipped back into a deep slumber, lulled by the sound of the nearby stream.

As the wildcat padded up the trail towards its den, the first glimmerings of dawn began their play upon the horizon. Dropping its kill by the fast running water, the cat was unaware that it was being watched.

The bigfoot's keen sense of smell had alerted him to the cat's nearness, and now that he was awake he sensed the smell of a recent kill.

He knew the death-smell all-too-well, and it reminded him of his mate. She had been killed in a fight with a large brown bear, and afterwards he had mourned by the still body until he realized she wasn't going to awake.

He had taken her up to the holy place, where they both had spent many moons watching the night-suns make their winking shapes, and covered her still warm body with rocks and branches to hide her from the other hungry creatures.

Remembering this, a tear ran down his cheek, for he missed her deeply.

He struggled out of his den.

As he pulled himself out of his hiding place, the bobcat was surprised and angered by this sudden intruder.

With a snarl, he grabbed his meal and bounded off to his lair.

Forty-five minutes later, Ross awoke, stumbled out of the tent, and met the early sun that was peeking over the crest of the ridge.

He grabbed a large saucepan and a soup-ladle, and crashed them together to wake the kids.

"Rise and shine! Rise and shine! You might get breakfast if you're up on time!" he shouted, pleased at his impromptu performance.

The boys, startled awake by their father's ridiculous wake-up call, groaned in unison as they wearily clambered out of the tent.

"Come on dudes, we're going down to the creek to wash up" he informed them.

"Yeah-Dad" Jon groused.

"Okay-Dudette" was Rod's smart-aleck reply.

As the boy's and their father made their way down the hillside, the huge but gentle creature was patiently fishing with his hands. Using a skill that had been passed down from generation to generation, he was reaching underneath each large rock overhang along the edge of the stream's path, feeling for the soft undersides of the trout that were hiding there. Each time he felt a fish, he gently started stroking the animal's belly, hypnotizing it, until the fish drifted out from under the ledge. Then, with a lightning-fast yank, he pulled the surprised creature out of the water, tossing it on the bank. A dozen fish lay gasping along the stream's edge, glistening in the bright morning sun.

Suddenly, the bigfoot's sixth sense warned him that danger was near, and he leapt for cover behind a huge boulder resting at the creek's edge. He smelt the ape-smell, and the sharp odor of the bobcat.

The mountain lion had just finished his meal of fresh jackrabbit when the tantalizing odor of fish drove him to seek it out. He squirmed out of his den and trotted downhill to find it, his stomach growling. As he neared the brook, the fish-smell grew stronger, but not strong enough to drown out the hated man-smell. He hesitated, but the pull of the fish was too strong. He bounded down the hillside, then jumped up and crouched on top of a large rock, not noticing the motionless creature hidden just below him.

Ross and the boys noisily made their way upstream to the deep pool that was just ahead. Ross wondered if the pool was deep enough for a swim, then remembered that the water wasn't much more than melted ice. However, the boys, unconcerned about dumb things like water temperature, splashed and jumped at the water's edge, just ahead of their father. "This is great Dad!" Rod shouted as he tried to splash his older brother. "Chill out-dude" Jon retorted, as he tried to push Rod into the freezing water.

The yeti quietly tried to squeeze closer into the crack in the large boulder. He could see the three ape-things coming, and a pang of fear shot through his body.

The bobcat flattened itself against the great rock's surface, waiting for the small man-thing to come near the prized fish. He licked his chops, and waited for the chance to spring onto the unsuspecting boy. Suddenly Rod shouted. "Look at the fish! How the heck did they get out of the water?" Both Jon and Ross looked up, and amazed, they slowly walked towards Rod and the fish.

Instantly, the bobcat sprang down from its perch, landing directly between Rod and the fish. Its hair was standing straight up on its back, and it yowled savagely at the terrified boy. "D-D-Dad! It's gonna to get me! Help!" was all the petrified boy could manage. Ross was terrified, and his mind went blank. Jon, acting quickly and instinctively, grabbed a fist-sized rock and hurled it at the slaving wildcat. It hit the creature squarely in the hindquarters, but the cat merely backed up a step and continued

it's frightening scream. Ross looked down at the kitchen equipment in his hands and started banging them together to distract the dangerous animal. Jon was frantically trying to grab another rock and keep his eyes on the cat.

Without warning, the bobcat hissed and crouched, preparing to spring upon the fear-stricken boy. With its ears laid back and its muscles tensed, Ross knew that his son was about to be attacked.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ross saw a streaking hulk coming towards the killer and his prey. As the astonished trio watched, the huge creature swept up and grabbed the surprised cat by the scruff of its neck and flung the bobcat completely across the stream. It landed in the thick brush on the far side, screaming furiously, and scrambled away with its tail between its legs. As Ross turned back to look at his sons, he met the steady stare of the towering fur-covered bigfoot. Both Rod and Jon returned to his side, and the three of them gaped at the huge creature.

The yeti looked at the ape things fearfully, but he stood his ground and made no move towards them. Remembering long ago, he slowly lowered his head and put his long arms palm down upon the ground.

Ross and the boys looked at each other, and then without knowing why, lowered their heads and placed their hands on the ground. The forest was silent, except for the beating of four separate hearts. A few seconds passed, and then Ross slowly raised his head. The giant creature did the same, then slowly walked over to the still-breathing pile of fish. He grabbed three of them and cautiously approached the three humans. He held the fish out to them and slowly nodded his massive head. Amazed, the man and two boys accepted the offering, then stood up straight to regard the creature. Ross held out the saucepan and ladle, nodding as the yeti timidly grasped the return gifts. The creature examined the strange things he had received, then with a satisfied grunt, turned and walked away, glancing back once before he vanished into the deep pine trees.

The three campers turned and headed back towards their camp, the boys chattering excitedly about their encounter with the fabled bigfoot. Ross was grinning from ear to ear, because he was sure he had seen a smile in the yeti's last glance.

Lance Parker

Note: This story may be distributed freely, but please do not use for your own profit !!!!