

## OUTDOORSUPDATE

OF THE OUTDOORS:

## Tales From A Midwinter Coyotes Hunt

BY GARY HOWEY  
Hartington, Neb.

It was well after noon when we arrived at the Sandhills Motel in Mullen, Neb. (www.gliddencanoerental.com) which would be our headquarters for our first Midwinter predator of 2010.

After unloading our extra gear and changing into our snow camo, we pointed the pickup south out into the Sandhills where we'd look for areas the cattle were using as cattle always attract coyotes.

As we turned off the blacktop, proceeding through the Sandhills, I spotted something working its way across the alfalfa field to our left.

Through our binoculars, we spotted the first coyote of the trip hunting his way through the meadow.

He headed west into the hills, so we tried to figure out how far ahead of it we'd have to be in order to set up and call.

A gate 1/2 mile down the road was the only entry into the field, so we drove in, parked the pickup and proceeded to hike off across the hills looking for a spot suitable for calling.

Calling coyotes is not all that difficult; it all depends on the terrain you're hunting and the number of individuals you need to hide.

In the Sandhills of Nebraska, the majority of the areas you set up in won't have a large expanse of flat land out in front of you, as no matter where you look it's one hill right rolling into another.

After hiking about a 1/2 mile, we finally came to an area where the hills came down into another hay meadow.

In order to make this set work, we needed to find a place where two shooters and a cameraman could blend in and not be spotted by the keen eyes/nose of the coyote.

We set up with the wind coming into us off to our left, the direction the coyote should be coming in from.

Since there was a little snow on the ground, we were all dressed in snow camo, as was our camera.

Our Fox Pro Fury call (www.foxpro.com) would be placed below us along with a fuzzy decoy while Team Outdoorsmen Adventures member Larry Myhre (Sioux City, Iowa) and Andy Glidden (Ainsworth, Neb.) would be stationed on the hill above.

I'd be running the camera on the first set up so I was hunkered down below a Yucca in a small depression above them.

Since we could be separated from quite a distance or out of view of each other, we'd choose to use Midland GXT



Author (left) and Andy Glidden, of Ainsworth, Neb., with one of the several coyotes they took called while hunting the Sandhills near Mullen, Neb.

Radios (www.midlandradio.com) with earpieces, letting the shooters communicate with the cameraman.

Andy started calling with a combination of a coyote howl and dying jackrabbit, he then proceeded to back off to the dying rabbit call and after 20 minutes or so to the hurt coyote pup yelp.

About 10 minutes into the hunt, my radio clicked, indicating that the shooters had spotted something.

Off to my left making its way across the meadow came a lone coyote heading west, as it tried to get downwind to wind what ever was making that mournful sound.

At about 140 yards, Andy barked at the coyote, it stopped dead in his tracks, giving Larry a good broadside shot.

His Howa 1500 barked and the 243 round dropped the coyote like a sack of rocks.

Our first coyote was on the ground as the sunset and at supper that night, plans were laid out for our next day hunt.

Day two started early as most days do when you're calling predators, as it's ideal to be set up before sunrise.

Unfortunately for us, a heavy fog had rolled in along with a fresh dusting of snow. The snow was good as it allowed us to spot coyotes coming in, but it did us little good as the fog only allowed us to

see out to about 30 yards in front of us. There were coyote tracks all around the bales we were propped up against, but not a critter did we see.

Our second set up was different, as the fog had lifted with overcast skies, which would help keep any reflection off our gear to a minimum.

Once again we headed out across the Sandhills, looking for a good location to set up.

The area we chose didn't give us the best view to the right or directly in front of us, but off to the right, in the direction we'd aim the call, there would be a good shooting lane coming in between several hills.

I was on the right flank with my Howa/Axiom Varminter (www.legacysports.com) 243 while Andy, shooting his 22-250 set up slightly above me and off to the left.

Larry, manning the camera was position above and off to the left of Andy.

The call had just started when I suddenly noticed movement 20 yards off to my left.

A pair of coyotes had charged in over the rise, where the female immediately sat down to look the situation over while the larger male continued down over the rise trying to get downwind of us.

I knew it would be a matter of seconds

before the game was over, so I had no time to use the radio to let Larry know the coyote had come in.

As slowly as possible, I attempted to move my bipod and rifle in the direction of the coyote perched just a few feet in front of me; it was not to be, as at that short of a distance, a high power scope just doesn't cut it.

As I slid to the left, the female suddenly realized that the snow pile directly in front of her was not what it seemed to be, bolting over the crest as my 22-250 round flew harmlessly over her head.

The shot startled Larry & Andy at which time, the male who was sneaking in on the decoy made a mad dash for safety, heading west, attempting to put as much distance between himself and the gunfire.

Andy, unaware of the coyote that had been perched in front of me thought the coyote beating feet west was one I'd missed, quickly dropped to the prone position trying to get a bead on the fleeing predator.

At 320 yards, as the fleeing coyote crested the hill he caught it in his scope and fired.

After a brief "conversation" thanking me for alerting the cameraman on the radio, I explained that there were two coyotes and how a shotgun, which was left in the pickup, would have worked best in this situation.

"That was my story and I was sticking to it!"

After Andy had fired, it sounded as if Andy's bullet may have hit home, so he headed out to see where the coyote had gone while Larry and I headed back to retrieve my pickup.

Heading west with the pickup searching for Andy, he called on the radio, indicating that he'd found the tracks and a couple of spots where it tumbled and a small amount of blood so he was going to track it.

A minute or two later, he called back as he'd found the coyote, giving us a good start for the second day, a day that would work out well for us.

We set up several more times, calling in another coyote, giving us a total four coyotes called in and three on the ground.

Around 2 p.m., we decided to head down along the Dismal River to see what we might call there later that day.

But that's a whole different story, which will go into next week.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the producer/host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series that can be seen Saturday at 6:30 am & Sunday at 7:00 am on KTTM/KTTW-TV (Fox) Sioux Falls/Huron, SD. For more information on the outdoors, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

## Michelangelo Painted A Ceiling, Well...Buddy Makes Ice Fishing Roads

BY BRAD DOKKEN  
(c) 2010, Grand Forks Herald  
(Grand Forks, N.D.)

WASKISH, Minn. — The cloud of white whooshing like a snow-and-ice tornado across the horizon of Upper Red Lake brought to mind the image of the Tasmanian Devil cartoon character.

Or maybe Pig-Pen, the unkempt kid of "Peanuts" comic strip fame who's perennially surrounded by a cloud of dust.

They're common sights in winter on Upper Red, these white clouds. But here on the northern shore of Minnesota's largest inland lake, the whirling walls of snow and ice usually mean one thing:

There's a Hillman or a Petrowske nearby.

Driving a plow truck. It could be Buddy Hillman, 43, whose family has owned the Hillman's bait shop and general store in Waskish since the early 1940s. Or Kelly Petrowske, 54, whose grandfather homesteaded on the north shore of Upper Red in 1921 and who has made his living on or along the big lake most of his life. Or Petrowske's son, Jonny, 35, who left a sales job in the Twin Cities a few years back to come home to Upper Red.

They're not the only ones plowing roads on the lake, this trio, but few have been at the game longer. And no one, Kelly Petrowske says, takes their plowing more seriously than Buddy Hillman, the unofficial captain of this team who approaches making an ice road the way an artist might approach a canvas.

"This is his passion," Petrowske said. "He just loves it. Michelangelo painted a ceiling — Buddy makes ice fishing roads."

Hillman highway The Sistine Chapel, in this case, is an ice road that begins just across state Highway 72 from the Hillman Store in Waskish and continues west about nine miles to the boundary of the Red Lake Indian Reservation.

The ice road's in the same place every winter, and it's every bit as wide as a two-lane highway. If it's not snowing or blowing too

hard, Hillman says, you can see the light from the store seven miles out on the lake.

Besides plowing ice roads and charging a \$10 daily fee for access, Hillman rents 13 "sleeper" ice houses to anglers who come mostly for walleyes; the Petrowskes rent eight of the overnight houses. In that sense, they're competitors. But when it comes to plowing, they're partners who work together to maintain some 25 miles of ice roads that allow anglers to reach some of the most remote spots on Upper Red's north shore.

Another operator who rents houses along the north shore also helps out with the plowing. "We've got a lot of roads, so without them guys, it would be tough," Hillman said.

Ice time As he is every day throughout the winter, Hillman's on the ice clearing snow from the edges of the road on this January afternoon. His mode of transport is a rusty 1988 Ford F-350 diesel with an imposing-looking V-plow mounted to the front.

What it lacks in looks, the old 1-ton truck makes up for in power. Besides, Hillman says, an old truck is easier to fix. That's a plus, because plowing an ice road is hard on equipment. Trucks break down. Sometimes, they even break through the ice. Hillman has a fleet of four V-plows and a straight blade and "a bunch of others" he keeps around for parts, and most are 1984 or older.

"Everybody gives me (grief) about these old trucks, but they're the only ones that hold up," he said. Kelly Petrowske, who drives a Dodge Ram 2500 diesel that's considerably newer than any of Hillman's trucks, can't help but chuckle when he talks about the aging fleet.

"Buddy does more with nothing than anyone I've ever seen," Petrowske said. "He plowed two years in a truck that didn't have a floor."

Hillman's old F-350 has a floor but an electric fan mounted in the cab appears to be the closest thing it has to a defroster.



Snow and ice fly off the blade of Buddy Hillman's V-plow as he widens an ice road on January 19, 2010, on Upper Red Lake near Waskish, Minn.

Rumbling across the lake on some sixth sense that allows him to see through a windshield that's mostly covered with snow and slush, Hillman gives a visitor a crash course (maybe "quick course" would be a better phrase) on the finer points of building an ice road.

There's more to it, he says, than plowing a long road out on the lake and gradually making it wider. Instead, Hillman says, he starts by plowing a road its full width — at least 150 feet — and gradually making it longer.

All of the snow goes to one side because the weight causes snow banks to pressure the ice and sink, which in turn makes the road more prone to flooding. Keeping the snow bank on one side also makes it easier for anglers to get off the road and access fishing spots away from the plowing.

It's slow going, Hillman said, and it often takes him a full day to make a single mile of road.

"Last year, I kept track, and it took me 132 miles to make one mile of road," Hillman said.

Lots of changes There've been a lot of changes on Upper Red since the Hillmans and Petrowskes started plowing

roads on the lake more than 30 years ago. Walleye populations crashed in the mid-1990s, and the fishermen quit coming.

Waskish turned into a ghost town, and for several years, there were no ice roads. Hillman made ends meet by laying flooring in the Twin Cities.

Then, about 10 years ago, a small group of local anglers hit the ice fishing equivalent of the mother lode — a huge population of slab crappies that had filled the void after the walleye collapse. Almost overnight, Waskish went from bust to boom and anglers — and ice fishing roads — were everywhere.

The crappie boom has run its course, but the walleyes are back. There's a lot less traffic today than there was during the height of the boom, but anglers visiting Upper Red don't lack for access options.

Not even Lake of the Woods, which has about a half-dozen plowed roads, offers as many access choices as Upper Red.

"I bet there are over 15 roads on the lake now," Hillman said, "12 for sure."

Job hazards Hillman says he's had trucks break through the ice nine times,

but only once did he get wet — in January 2006, when he got a quick ride all the way to the bottom of the lake in 14 feet of water.

"It was just like a bunch of ice cubes," Hillman said. "Sometimes, it's just bad ice. It gets your attention."

Petrowske's wife, Patsy, happened to be driving on the lake not far from Hillman at the time.

"She came running up, and Buddy popped right up out of the hole," Kelly Petrowske recalls with a laugh. "She asked him, 'Where's your truck?'"

With the help of Petrowske and some others, Hillman got the sunken truck out of the lake and even got it running again.

Later that winter, Hillman came out one morning to find a snorkel mounted to his truck along with two magnetic signs reading, "Buddy's Underwater Crappie Tours."

Petrowske admits he might have had something to do with that.

Despite the occasional misadventure and practical joke, Hillman admits there's nothing he likes more than making a good ice road. Even if it means long days and late-night forays onto the ice to rescue a fisherman who's gotten lost on the lake or broken down.

The job, he says, certainly beats laying flooring and living in the Twin Cities.

"I love it," he said. "It isn't always a money maker, I can tell you that for sure."

Hillman pauses several seconds when asked about the attraction.

"I don't know," he says. "It's not a bad office."

## OUTDOOR REPORT

Scheels Walleye

University Visits

Sioux Falls March 6

SIoux FALLS — On Saturday, March 6, professional angler Johnnie Candle will present an all new Walleye University in Sioux Falls.

The seminar will be held at the Westmall Theatres, located at 2101 West 41st Street in Sioux Falls. It begins at 8:30 a.m. and will run until 5 p.m. Every person in attendance will receive a package that includes a printed version of Walleye University and a \$10 gift card from Scheels.

Candle is coming off a great season that highlights a 15-year career as a professional fisherman. Last season, he placed fourth overall in the MWC Western Division and qualified for the World Walleye Championship, as well as the National Team Championship.

The 8-hour class will deal with fine points of jig fishing, live bait rigging, spinners and crank baits all before lunch. After a lunch break, marine electronics and targeting trophy walleye will be discussed. The day will end with talk of what's new and exciting in walleye catching tackle.

Walleye University was first introduced in Bismarck, N.D., during the spring of 2000. Since that first year, the seminar has been presented to hundreds of walleye anglers in eight different states. Stops in 2010 include Omaha, Neb.; St. Cloud, Minn.; Mankato, Minn.; Fargo, N.D.; Billings, Mont. and Rapid City.

Those interested are asked to pre-register as seating is limited. Register at Scheels Customer Service in Sioux Falls or by calling 605-334-7767.

## Fishing For Art

BROOKLYN CENTER, MINN. — Wildlife Forever is pleased to announce the completion of the new "Fish On!" State-Fish Art Contest, CD ROM Lesson Plans. Free copies are available to home-schoolers, teachers, and anyone interested in youth aquatic conservation education.

The free CD "Fish On!" highlights the Wildlife Forever State-Fish Art™ Contest showcasing unique lesson plan activities, art work, and the opportunity to win prizes and national recognition while learning about state fish species, aquatic habitats, and conservation. The State-Fish Art Contest uses art to children's imagination while teaching aquatic resource stewardship.

The contest is open to all students in grades 4 through 12. Winning artists from each state in grade categories, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12 will be invited to attend the national Expo to receive prizes, trophies and recognition.

Entries must be postmarked by March 31. Winners are announced in May.

To enter, young artists must create illustrations of their chosen state fish. A short written composition on its behavior, habitat, and conservation needs is also required.

The state fish in South Dakota is the walleye.

Visit the State-Fish Art Web site at www.StateFishArt.com to request a free CD copy and learn more about the contest.

## Great Snowmobile

Conditions Exist

Across State

PIERRE — It's been an excellent year for snow in South Dakota, and snowmobilers are taking full advantage while it lasts.

Eastern South Dakota has had abundant snow since Christmas.

"It's very rare for eastern South Dakota to maintain such great trail conditions for so long," says Ryan Raynor, state Game, Fish and Parks Department trail program specialist. "From Redfield to Sisseton and down to Beresford, snowmobile enthusiasts have had plenty of opportunities to enjoy South Dakota's prairie."

Snow conditions in the Black Hills are improving after a recent warm spell, he said.

"Trails were excellent after the holidays, when more than four feet of snow covered the 350-mile trail system," Raynor said. "We had a few weeks where many trails had minimal coverage due to warm weather, but colder temperatures and additional snowfall have improved trail conditions just in time for the President's Day weekend."

Trail conditions are available on Twitter. Follow the eastern trail conditions at www.twitter.com/SDsnowEast and the Black Hills conditions at www.twitter.com/SDsnowBHills.

For more information about snowmobile trails in South Dakota, contact Ryan Raynor at 605-773-6671.

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