

Steve
WILLEY



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

King of the outdoors

Adventures in the wild bring out 'manliness'



During spring break, I had the pleasure of getting back in touch with Mother Nature. Me and a buddy of mine spent half a week at my boss's cabin in Big Lake, Mo.

I've always enjoyed sitting under the stars with a fishing pole in one hand and a Budweiser in the other. Nothing's better than fixing your drawers so the cool lake air blows up one pant leg and eases down the other.

But there were a couple of things I hadn't counted on during this camping trip — like getting left in a small town and surviving a coyote attack.

Now I should probably warn you that the following account of the night in question is "to my best recollection." By that I mean I had consumed roughly 75 beers too many, so things are a little tainted. It was the kind of night where someone claims that you danced nude for visiting Russian chemists, and you have a hard time calling him or her a liar. Dig?

The day started out normal enough — I awoke face down in a bowl of potato salad. I got up fairly early — there was a lake full of fish to catch.

While my friend, Paul, slept comfortably on the bathroom floor, I tiptoed out the back door. It was about 4 p.m. so I didn't have a lot of daylight left. The day before, I had heard rumors of a giant catfish, which if it chose to do so, could swallow a Maytag dryer. I was going to catch it.

I had bought some homemade catfish bait that was guaranteed to not only produce fish but also to keep people at least 75 yards away from you because of the smell. (It seemed to be composed mostly of raw sewage with perhaps a slight pinch of garlic.)

Whatever it was, it didn't work. The only thing I managed to catch in my three hours of fishing was one HELLUVA buzz. By the time the sun descended behind the trees, I already had eaten most of the bait

and was considering what one of the bobbers might taste like.

Realizing that I should pace myself, I made my way back to the cabin and asked Paul what he wanted to do for the night. After a brief discussion, we decided on

visiting the numerous local towns that were dotted around Big Lake.

Our first stop was Rulo, Neb., a few miles northwest of Big Lake. Before entering a tiny saloon, Paul informed me of a murdering cult that used to reside in the town. You've probably heard of them. Needless to say, all it took was one "strange" look from a grizzly man to send me and Paul fleeing for the door. We must have looked like two frightened piglets trying to get through the same hole in the fence.

We hit about five towns that night. The more we drank, the more we decided that every town had a cult whose sole objective in life was to decapitate Paul and me.

Finally we settled at a bar called The Mint in the small town of Forest City. The bar used to be the town's bank before it was remodeled and everyone there was friendly. The town's motto, I was told, was, "If it flows downhill, we'll drink it." As guests, we had to oblige.

What happens next is a little fuzzy. I remember visiting with some girls at a corner table. I don't recall their names, but I remember one of them was capable of drinking a vodka shot through her nostrils.

Apparently that wasn't enough to keep me occupied because I decided it would be in my best interest if I left the bar to "take a nappy-poo" in the woods outside. By the time the temperature dropped several hundred degrees, I was ready to return to the bar. One problem: It was closed and Paul was no where to be found.

Relying on basic, innate survival skills, I immediately began running in circles and shouting, "Oh shit. OH SHIT!" I knew I had to find shelter for the night, so I instinctively headed back into the woods. I remember having this insane plan to weave leaves together with my shoelaces and make a blanket. I was going to build a crude cottage by gnawing through ash trees like a beaver.

Unfortunately, I only managed to collapse on a briar bush. While lying there, I remember hearing the lonely cries of coyotes. I was asleep for a

couple of minutes before I was awakened by the loud rustling of leaves. The noise was moving too fast to be a walrus but too organized to be another drunken guy who got left in town.

Whatever it was, it was getting closer. Fear gripped me. What could it be? How would I escape? Would Paul tape "Jerry Springer" for me tomorrow?

Then the limited moonlight that trickled through the canopy of leaves and branches revealed a creature approaching on all fours. Of course, I, too, was on all fours; that didn't bother me. What scared me was that this dude was growling. Either that or it was riding an invisible Harley.

As it edged closer, my fears were confirmed. Less than 20 feet away, stood a coyote. At least I thought it was, though in my condition it could have just as easily been a barking head of lettuce.

At first I thought, "A WOLF! I'm saved! It will bring me back to its pack and raise me!" But then I realized I was being silly or what psychologists refer to as "thinking like an ass."

As the coyote stood firm and growled, I backed myself against a tree. We looked at each other for what seemed like an eternity but was probably closer to 11 hours. Then, as quickly as it emerged, it leapt into the darkness.

(It is my firm belief that my overpowering stench of catfish bait saved me from the coyote.)

For the rest of the night, I nervously crouched beside a tree. Every time a squirrel would poot or a leaf would fall, I'd freak.

"DIE SATANI!" I'd shriek while heaving pine cones in the direction of the noise.

But as fate would have it, I woke up alive and unscathed. I hitchhiked 15 miles to my cabin and everything turned out OK.

Now that I look back on the adventure, it was really a good time — something I'll remember forever.

Though, I suppose, a picture would have been less life-threatening.

Willey is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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