

A. O. Rinehart: Diary of a Dying Trapper

A trapper's body was found in a cabin in Manitoba by two trappers. Along with the body, a diary was found in the cabin. The diary recorded the trapper's solitary and courageous fight against disease, hunger and cold.

In August 1919, A. O. Rinehart of Duluth, Minnesota left The Pas, Manitoba with the Adolphson brothers. They were traveling to the "barren lands". Waldo Rinehart, who had promised to accompany him, withdrew at the last moment. Rinehart parted from the other trappers at Churchill River and continued alone to North Indian Lake. At the lake, he built a cabin and set out a trap line.

Everything went well until November when he became sick with swelling in his legs. Rinehart did not know what the ailment was. Since he could not define it, he was not able to treat it. Rinehart was unable to walk the 200 miles to the nearest trading post. If he tried, Rinehart feared he would be killed by wolves which were following the great herds of caribou.

While he still had strength to do so, Rinehart drug half of his supplies into the shack. He cut cords of firewood and piled it in all available space in the cabin. Rinehart was preparing for the worst.

In January, Rinehart was barely able to feed himself and keep the fire going. He struggled through January, February and March. In the beginning of April, Rinehart knew he was going to die. He gave up hope that anyone would find him in time.

Rinehart started writing his last messages. He wrote a letter, dated April 1920 to Waldo Rinehart of Shawano, Wisconsin. Rinehart could not help letting his bitterness creep forth.

"For your special benefit, I shall explain the situation in which I find myself at the present time. Having corresponded with you while over-

sees, and your apparent one desire being to see the north country, why, of course, I made the foolish promise to come north upon your return.

"Upon your return home, I notified you of my intention and left for northern Canada, after spending considerable time and money. I had decided that from The Pas north was as good a country as would be to your liking, and was on



the point of notifying you to meet me there when I received your letter stating plainly but firmly that you were not going to join me on any trip.

"Having spent considerable time and money and having secured part of an outfit, and being both disappointed and provoked at the dirty trick you had played upon me, I decided to continue the trip alone. Everything went well until about November 1, when I began to be troubled with pains in my legs. My condition continued to grow gradually worse, and since January 1

have been unable to take proper care of myself.

"At the present time, it is with the greatest difficulty that I am able to get snow so as to have something to drink. My supply of wood, which I have in the cabin, is getting very low, and it is a physical impossibility for me to cut any. Some days the pain in my legs is so great that I am unable to get up and build fire and do any cooking, and must spend most of my time rolled up in the blankets to keep warm.

"I had a fellow at Duluth that wanted to come north with me, but having promised to take you for a partner, you - you dirty, lying little skunk - quit me when I was depending on you.

"If someone does not come along, and that very soon, and take care of me and help me out of here, it will be only a matter of a short time when I shall need no help of any kind. Thanks for your kindness of the past, which I shall remember to the last."

Directions for mailing the letter were found in a note in a biscuit tin, which hung down from the rafters of the cabin, directly in front of the door, on the inside. "Whoever opens this will find in it a letter, upon the back of which you will find an address. Send the letter to that address.

"My condition is such that I will last but a few days longer. The disease which started in my

legs is gradually working up in my body. My lungs are affected and the action of my heart is becoming irregular. When I was coming up into this country, nearly everyone told me I would see lots of Indians, and if I became sick or got injured, I would be able to get someone to take me out. Since August 22, 1919, I have seen no one.

"If I could have got out, I should have left here for the outside in the early part of the winter. But here I am, here it seems I must remain."

Close to Rinehart's bed, where he

had dropped it, a diary of his last days was found. In the margin, he had written down the days to the end of April indicating, perhaps, the span of life which he estimated still remained. Rinehart miscalculated, as the last entry was on April 9.

On April 1, an entry of seven words states the temperature was -5, the wind was from the north blowing 20 miles per hour, the sky was cloudy and that he baked bread. On the following day, he wrote that it was -10, the wind was from the northwest at 20 miles per hour, and the sky was cloudy. On Saturday, Rinehart wrote that it was -10, the wind was from the northwest at 40 miles per hour, and the sky was cloudy. On Sunday, he knew the end was near for after noting the temperature was still -10 below, the wind was from the northwest and it was snowing. He also added "Baked and a hard time I had of it. I am getting weak fast."

On Monday, Rinehart wrote that it was -10 and still snowing. On Tuesday, he wrote "My condition is worse." The entry on Wednesday, April 7, was "No better yet. Just a little weaker." On the same day, he wrote another note, which was found lying on the floor near his body.

"I doubt if I will be able to make many more entries in my diary. The disease which started with pains in my legs, has progressed until now my legs are much above their normal size. Very black and in some places, they have a yellow color.

"The joints do not seem to be affected. It seems mostly in the cords or muscles. They are considerably drawn up and as I cannot straighten them, I must get about on my toes, with the aid of a couple of sticks and at the expense of much pain. I become easily exhausted and must rest often.

"I am beginning to feel sore at the edge of the short ribs. The disease is working up. When it reaches the region of the heart, my earthly troubles will be over and I shall not be sorry." The last entry was on Thursday, April 9, 1920. Rinehart wrote "No Better."

Rinehart's body was found in Oc-

tober 1920 by S. P. McClenaghan. McClenaghan said that Rinehart scorned suicide. To make sure he kept his resolve not to end his life, Rinehart had broken the mechanisms of his revolvers and rifles.

References

Keeps Diary as He Dies: Duluth Trapper Leaves Record of Months Alone in Frozen North. The New York Times. February 16, 1921.

How It Feels to Watch Approach of Certain Death: Told in Diary as Trapper Slowly Expires. Sunday Magazine. St. Louis Post-Dispatch. March 27, 1921.

If anyone has information contrary to what I have written here, I encourage them to respond via email, phone, regular mail or in the magazine.

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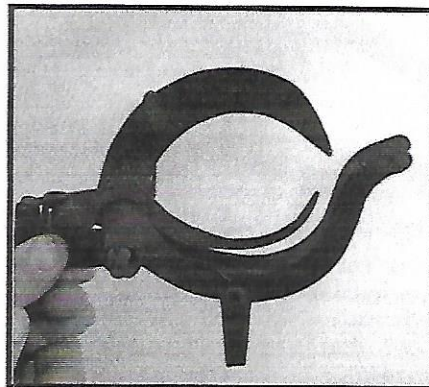
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WHO MADE THIS TRAP AND WHEN?



Tim Moore of Ulster, PA has brought this trap to several meets looking for information. If you have information on it please contact Tim at 570-247-2292