

A Mountain Lion Near Regina

by Frank Brazier, Regina

On Tuesday, July 19, 1960, Pearl Guest telephoned me about a strange bird she had seen the evening before at Bredin Siding in the Boggy Creek Valley some 12 miles northwest of Regina. Spurred on by the hope of seeing a rare bird, Elmer Fox and I drove to Bredin Siding that evening and parked at the railway crossing about 7.30 p.m. It was a fine, bright day. We saw nothing that resembled Pearl's bird, but we walked westward along the track scanning the area hopefully.

Where the railway crosses the creek by a small bridge about a mile from Bredin Siding I noticed the bright tawny coat of an animal about 30 yards downstream on the bank, partially obscured by a bush. My first thought was of a deer, as deer are common enough there, but as I got my glasses on it, it raised its head and I was staring into the face of a large, green-eyed cat which had reached up to investigate a cavity under the lip of the creek bank. Elmer was a few steps ahead of me. "Elmer," I called softly, "a Bobcat!" Together we watched it drop to all fours and move out from behind the bush into full view, in bright sunlight. For at least 30 seconds it

scrutinized us while we scrutinized it, then it turned away and moved calmly down the creek and out of sight beyond a bend. It was then that we noticed the tail—unlike the short upright tail of the Bobcat or Lynx, this was a long tail which drooped as long tails do. We could also see that the ears had no tufts on the tips, so this was no Bobcat or Lynx. I estimated that the cat stood about 20 inches at the shoulder.

Before it moved away I could see through my glasses the dark circles faintly showing on its tawny coat. These would be the fading spots of its baby coat, so the cat could not have been more than a few months old. Although the kittens of the Lynx, Bobcat and Mountain Lion are all variously spotted and striped, the first two quickly lose these marks, according to Sanderson (1950), but Mountain Lion kittens carry traces until six months old. Young (1946) states: "The young are densely spotted and the tail is ringed. These markings gradually disappear as the adult stage is reached; occasionally a few faded spots will be found on half-grown individuals."

We walked over to the spot just vacated by the cat and found one excellent track in the mud which looked about $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches across. The



Diagram of hind-foot track—3" x 3½".



Museum Photo

Cast of cat track near Regina.

following evening Elmer brought Fred Bard, Director of the Museum of Natural History, to the spot to make a cast of the print. A comparison of the track with a Mountain Lion print shows that they are identical except for size. The print of our cat did not resemble Bobcat prints. Elmer taped the distance from the print to the cavity the cat had its nose in when I saw it—six feet!

There is not much doubt that our cat was a young Mountain Lion (*Felis concolor*). This, our largest cat, is known by many names—Mountain Lion, Cougar, Puma. Young presents a good case for the rejection of all but Puma, the name by which it was known to the Incas in the Quechua tongue.

Beck (1958) reports "occasional stragglers" in Saskatchewan. As a straggler, an adult Mountain Lion would not be difficult to account for at Bredin Siding, although this is miles from its normal range. However, our cat was perhaps only a few months old judging by its coat markings, size, and fearlessness, and Young tells us that young Mountain Lions up to two years of age are often found in the company of the mother. Where was this young cat born?

The first definite record of the Mountain Lion in Saskatchewan, according to Young, was the one shot by Harry Wahlgemuth on August 18, 1939, near Kindersley (Cf. **Canadian Field-Naturalist** 56:45, March, 1942). The only specimen in the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History was taken by Joe Fournier at Connell Creek in the Pasquia Hills. In addition, there have been a number of sight records for the province reported to the **Blue Jay** or to the Wildlife Branch of the Department of Natural Resources. Tom Harper tells me that the Branch has reliable recent reports of the Mountain Lion from Assiniboia, just outside the range that Young gives which includes the Saskatchewan "badlands." Tom Harper has also told me that one of the game management officers, Adam Folk of Hudson Bay, has seen tracks of Mountain Lions and the animals themselves in the Pasquia Hills. This is an extremely rough, trackless wilderness between the Carrot River and the Hudson Bay railway—about

2,000 square miles of tangled forest, muskeg and swamp with only winter roads into it. The Indians of the Shoal Lake Indian Reserve to the north also know of the Mountain Lion, according to Mr. Folk.

A letter written to the Museum by Mr. Scofield of Inchkeith on June 25, 1960, tells of a number of lambs being lost over the last two years to an animal larger than a coyote. The lambs "are bitten through the back of the head or through the back in the ribs by an animal that has canine teeth approximately 1½ to 2 inches apart . . . and as many as five at a time have been killed . . . he eats only one . . ." The killing habits so described are like those of the Mountain Lion.

Inchkeith is just north of the Moose Mountain Provincial Park and good cover extends all the way from the Pasquia Hills south to Moose Mountain. Here deer (the bread and butter of the Mountain Lion) are plentiful. Perhaps an occasional big cat works southward (this could account for the Inchkeith killings), thence westerly along the Qu'Appelle Valley. The young Mountain Lion we saw may not, then, have been too far from home.

LITERATURE CITED

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- Clarke, C. H. D. 1942. Cougar in Saskatchewan. *Can. Field-Nat.*, 56:45.
- Sanderson, Ivan T. 1951. How to know the American mammals. Little, Brown and Co., Boston.
- Young, Stanley P. 1946. The puma, mysterious American cat. Part I. American Wildlife Institute, Washington, D.C.

MOUNTAIN LION AT LEADER

by Daisy Myers, Leader

On September 19, 1960, my parents and I were surprised to see a Mountain Lion or Cougar. We were driving slowly on a little-used road up a pasture coulee when it loped from out of the brush on the west side of the road, ran slowly across the road and disappeared into the brush on the other side. This animal was seen on the NE ¼ 29-23-25 W3 about nine miles northeast of Leader.