

Brief Comments on a Series of Beaver Dams

by Alma Swain, Saskatoon

In an isolated area in the Prince Albert National Park, between two wooded hills separated by a creek stands a fine piece of engineering. But no man planned it, and no man lent a hand or thought in its construction. Then who were the planners? Who the builders? And what is the structure? They were a small group of beavers, whose intuition and skill could only be exceeded by the best products of our highest schools of learning. There in a perfect woodland setting they built a series of dams, five in all, that together hold back 12 feet of water.

These dams were built by the beavers to ensure for themselves food and shelter through the long, cold Canadian winter; and as a by-product they have provided a sanctuary for countless birds and other animals.

It is hard to visualize the surveying and the planning that must have preceded the actual building of the dams. In the first place it must have been agreed that there was a need for it, then a suitable site had to be chosen, and the nature of the site had to be such that it could not only provide footing for a dam but it must be near the necessary material for its construction; then a labor force had to be assured. Did the beavers hold a conference and discuss all these matters? Then who made the

decisions, and how were the instructions conveyed to the others interested in the project?

The site was well-chosen for at that point on the creek there were a series of drops with level areas in-between. Here they could build a series of five dams whose united strength would be great enough to hold back sufficient dammed-up water in a pond so deep that it would not freeze solid in the winter-time, and where food would be provided in the nearby woods and the bottom of the pond.

Each and every stick has a reason for being there. To measure the depth of one pond I lifted a pole that seemingly was lying useless on the top of the dam. Almost instantly I heard a trickle, and sure enough, the water was escaping through the small depression left by the removal of the pole. It would have been interesting to stay and see just how soon the leak was discovered and with what promptness it was mended. On our next visit, however, everything was again in order.

The beaver is a potential economic asset not only to the farmer, who is delighted with the free gift of a pool on his property, but it is far more so to the Indians and other trappers who depend on the sale of furs for a livelihood, for in the wake of the beaver come many other animals.



Photo by Alma Swain

Beaver lodge showing second dam and third pond.