

Of moose and man



By Nate Smelle

WHILE SITTING IN THE sand on the shore of Wolf Lake on a recent camping excursion I decided to go for a little drive to see if I could put myself in a better position to watch the sunset. Turning back onto the logging road near where I was camped I remembered a small beaver pond not too far away where I knew I could get a better angle on the setting sun. Making it to my perch just in time to capture the sky changing colour, I sat there with my feet up watching the show until almost all of the light had vanished. Content with the perfection of my timing I got back in my car and headed back to camp.

Down the hill and around the corner and then suddenly I was forced to slam on the brakes. Standing in the middle of the dark sand and gravel road was the largest bull moose I had ever seen. From the bottom of his hoofs to the tips of his antlers he must have been two and a half times the height of my car. I got out of my vehicle to get a better look at the massive animal, but when I closed my car door he put his head down and walked off onto the shoulder. Getting back in my car I crept forward so that I would not alarm the creature as I drove past. As I pulled up beside the bull all of a sudden he jumped from the ditch back onto the road. I honked my horn, but he didn't seem to understand what I meant by it. I crept towards him flashing my lights. He misread this signal as well. Putting his head down he began swaying his antlers back and forth as he walked towards me. I nudged forward and honked. He stopped. Then all of a sudden he started towards me again but a little quicker. I kicked the car into reverse and gunned it backwards as fast as I could. Backing up the hill I could see the giant bull had stopped pursuing me. He was off to the side of the road again so here was my chance. This bull wasn't having it though. As soon as I started to roll back in his direction he jumped back on the road and again started waving his enormous antlers back and forth.

There I was I was caught up in a game of chicken with a moose.

Competing for the rights to the road for about 20 minutes I finally threw in the towel and turned around. Forced to take the 40-minute detour back to camp I arrived back to my site just before midnight. Sparking up the fire again I sat there in its heat, still in awe with the immensity of the animal, but more so with its incredible ability to survive on such a minimal diet throughout the worst of our weather. Living on a diet consisting mainly of leaves, twigs, tubers, fruit and berries these formidable forest dwellers are able to build up their strength enough to endure the many winter nights ahead of us where the mercury will dip below minus 30 degrees. It truly amazes me to see such creatures up close in their semi-wild domain as they go about their routine.

Any one who has tried to photograph wildlife knows that most of the time in the field you spend listening to the birds keeping you company while you wait. On the other hand, sometimes the wildlife comes to you. Driving along Hwy 28, a couple of days later on my way to the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council meeting I noticed something substantial crossing the road up ahead. Approaching the scene I could see that it was a mature snapping turtle out for an evening autumn stroll. ?A snapping turtle in October?? I said to myself scratching my beard. A rare sighting indeed. Showing the photo to one of my fellow stewardship council members, Paul Gelok, who is also a fish and wildlife biologist, confirmed from the ancient animal's size that he believed she was well over 100-years-old. If she could only speak English I thought to myself, surely her story of survival would be one worth listening to. My friend the moose was certainly sending me a message with those antlers of his though. Also, I could read enough between the

lines from his swaying and snorting that this was his road, and that he wasn't moving until he was ready. Likewise with the snapper, there was no way she was going to change her plans of crossing the highway because of some silly human standing over her with a camera.