

Tailings. . .

a reflection of the past.

Compiled and arranged

by
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Jay C. Bruce Sr., famous California outdoorsman and adventurer spent 30 years of his colorful life as a California Lion Hunter — several of which he spent in the backwoods of our own Georgetown Divide, making his residence on Bear Creek.

Bruce was born Sept. 20, 1881 to Azelia Van Campen and Albert Olcott Bruce, the second of two sons (Bert being two years and two months older.) He was raised in the Mother Lode between Mariposa and Yosemite Valley at a small settlement known as Clarke's Station. His parents homesteaded 160 acres under adverse conditions and rough times.

At the tender age of nine years, Jay and his older brother were given their first weapons for hunting. Their dad created these "colts" from spare parts left over from his earlier career as a gunsmith (before the wearing of handguns was outlawed in California). They made their own bullets with two-part molds, using thin sheets of lead found lining the wooden crates containing tea imported from China. "With Bert using the 45 caliber and me the lighter 32 caliber, we soon kept the pot well supplied with squirrel fricassee — a delicious dish rivaling mountain quail." The pelts were tanned and sold for 50¢ each.

The first cat to cross young Bruce's path and his first to bag was a lynx cat, taking three bullets to put down. After tanning this, along with their first winter's catch, the two boys made \$15 for their sport while providing meat for the family table.

Another "sport" the boys found both fascinating and profitable was rattlesnake hunting, which brought the thrill, danger and excitement of the hunt even closer to the young boys' heart. Pay for the rattlers ranged from 50¢ per set to as much as \$1 per rattle for the bigger sets and \$1 for each well peeled skin.

"So far our financial gain from my piscatorial exploits had been the money saved on the meat bills," with enough pocket money left over to keep the guns in ammunition. Then in 1894 young Bruce took up trout fishing with great gusto — making \$7.50 on his first fishing venture teaching a "greenhorn" to fish (and catch fish). Using only a willowstick, a few feet of leader and an intentionally "dilapidated" fly — he earned twice the amount to purchase a reel, flies and fishing line from a catalog and set up a money-making venture.

By 1899 he "whipped the trout streams four to eight hours per day and caught some 32,000 trout, weighing some four thousand pounds." If you wonder about Bruce's adding to the extermination of the trout in these creeks — here is what he reasoned: "Only 21 pairs of rainbow trout are needed to replace, by natural reproduction, the 16,000 I took annually. The average two-year-old female spawns about 750 eggs each season."

2 Lion Hunters In Rubicon Area

Jay Bruce and W. Ledshaw, State Lion hunters, are working in the Georgetown district. It is reported that Ledshaw bagged two lions this week.

Ledshaw killed a large male last Monday after following it with his dogs for two days. On Wednesday he killed a female at the head of Rock Creek.

Bruce at present is in the Bushy Springs country in Long Canyon where it is reported that lions are trying to make away with Wm. Maclin's milk goats. Maclin is the fire guard of the Bushy Springs Lookout.

1935

His favorite bait was "of one color — dark brown — most effective everywhere." But soon this profitable pastime was outlawed when commercial trout fishing was banned in 1900.

Many odd jobs were taken up in the next ten years including one in the gold fields paying \$2.25 per ten-hour day, seven days per week.

Marriage came to Bruce in 1910 when he married Katherine Fournier (who he divorced in 1938 after 28 years of marriage). "Mrs. Bruce wanted civilization — hates the country — I couldn't live without the woods."

The first years of their marriage were economically tough. By 1915 they had three children and Bruce bagged his first lion with a bounty earning \$35. From this adventure he became a successful leader of sporting expeditions, stalking such game as deer, bear and trout. By April of the 1918 season, he had bagged five bear, ten lynx cats and ten lions (four in one day). This same year he also captured three nine-day-old lion cubs, which he took to the Yosemite Valley Ranger Station where the kittens were put on exhibition where they helped raise over \$5,000 for the Red Cross (while Bruce kept busy earning \$500 per month as a hunting guide).

November of 1918, Bruce was officially asked to become a State Lion Hunter. Using data compiled on 2,500 lions taken in California between November 1, 1907 and January 1, 1919, on which the state paid bounty money for and collected information per each lion, Bruce was able to

Jay Bruce Called

map out the habitats of the state's "Cougar Country."

Six thoroughly trained hunting dogs and 43 cougars marked 1927 as Bruce's biggest and best year. Of these 43 lions, five were taken half grown and smaller, alive, to be sold at zoos. While Bruce was State Lion Hunter his job brought him into the backwoods of the Georgetown Divide several times. He also made his residence for a time at Bear Creek, only miles from Georgetown.

"1928 started off successfully. For one thing, I had along with my eldest son, Jay Jr., 15 years old, whose job it was to operate a motion picture camera, with the idea of finishing a movie of lion hunting, one that I had been working on since 1925. The 27th of June came as any other day. Then something happened I had been half expecting and fearing since I started hunting lions, something which had nearly happened many times.



While out hunting deer in 1940, Vern Quiggle came across this female mountain lion who had just felled a buck. The surprised female was found in a thicket behind Butchers' Corral above Georgetown. She began to eyeball Vern's dog too menacing for comfort — one clean shot through the neck brought her down.

Courtesy Sonny Presba

Sincerely
 COUGAR KILLER
 Jay Bruce

"After laying for three weeks in a hospital bed, with both eyes bandaged between treatments, I was allowed to go home. However, I was not allowed to go hunting again until October 1. From that day on, for the next 20 years, I knew that I would be taking the risk of suffering a miserable lingering death, everytime I went hunting alone, and this was most of the time, since nearly all my lion hunting was done by myself and in lonely, rugged areas."

Jay Bruce published a book of his memoirs in 1953 called "Cougar Killer". Summing up his life in the wilds he said, "Looking back over the years of my life, I cannot help but marvel at my good fortune. I think of my childhood days, beset by almost incredible hardships, yet happy withal because of the closeness to nature. I recall the thrills of forking rattlers for cash, hooking trout to order, hunting all kinds of wild game to put meat on the table. I realize now, after having gone through similar experiences, how much the pioneers suffered to make America the great nation it is today. I am grateful indeed for the many friendships I made."

"I review the hundreds and hundreds of hunts — each different and yet basically alike — unfolding an orderly pattern of life with each new experience, until a clear picture of wildlife emerged in all its beauty and intricacy. I marvel that I survived the hazards with no more than a crippled hand, one lost eye and innumerable close calls. I find it difficult to believe that a human body could have spent over three score and ten years in the wilds, climbing up and down an incredible number of miles of rough terrain, often under the most adverse conditions."

"Yes, I marvel at my good fortune and feverently thank the fates for the opportunity to spend my life in the primeval forest among nature's wild creatures. I commiserate with those who, seeking to do the same, find that civilization is inexorably causing that opportunity to disappear."



Jay C. Bruce Jr. and Sr. on Main Street, Georgetown after bagging two mountain lions they tracked down in the woods of the Divide. As state lion hunter, Bruce...



Marion Hennes, Al Lawson and his little boy show off a monstrous mountain lion killed near Georgetown.

Courtesy Ken Schell

December, 1934

TRAPPER GETS BIG LIONESS

*Charles Jones Bags
Animal on Small
Trap Line*

It isn't necessary to move to the Hudson Bay Country to get a thrill out of trapping, at least that was Charles Jones' experience last week. Jones has a trap line near Balderston's Station for small animals such as foxes, and the other day as he examined the line he found a medium-sized mountain lioness in one of the small traps. His approach frightened her and she leaped free of the trap and bounded into the brush. Jones followed her trail, when suddenly he turned and there sat Mrs. Lion just a few feet in back of him. Armed with only a .22 rifle, he calmly took careful aim and killed her with one shot through the head. With a \$30 bounty for a lioness, the thrill wasn't exactly without its compensation. However, Mrs. Wm. Gerard's son Charles is no doubt carrying a larger rifle this week as he walks his trap line.



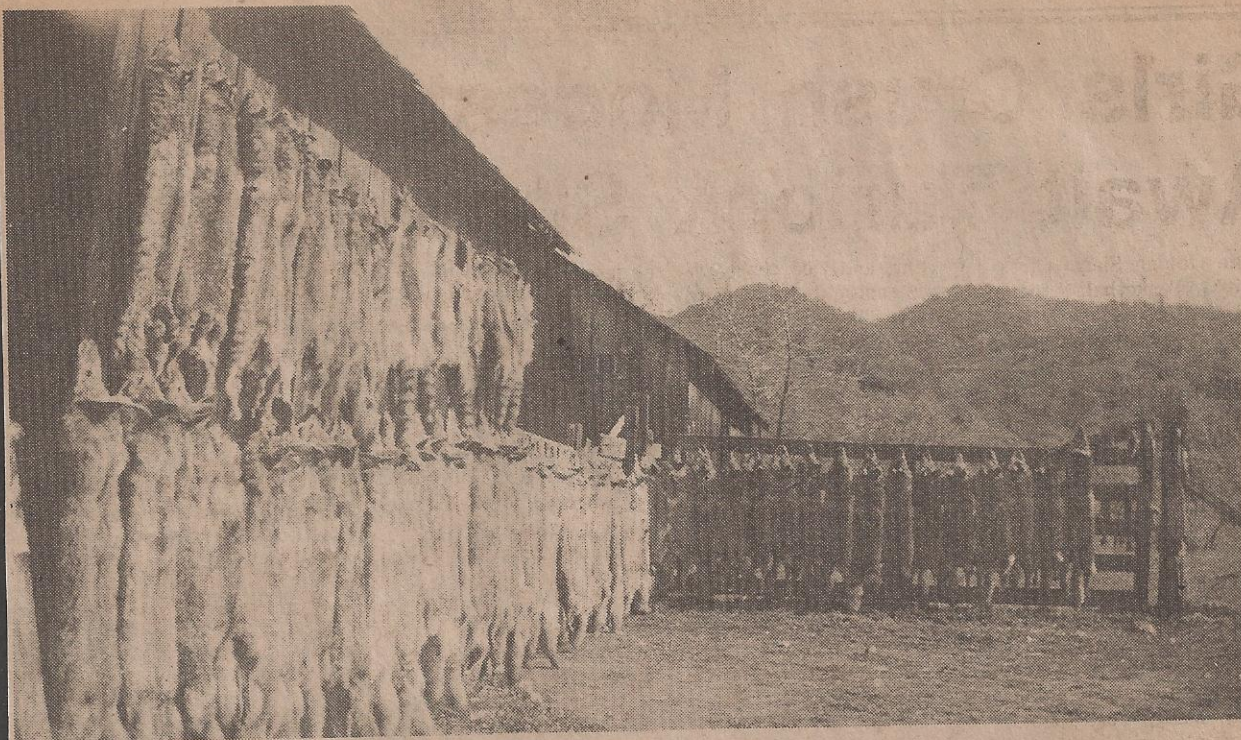
Tony Lemos of Northside is shown with a stag in velvet, taken while hunting above Georgetown in the early 1930's.

courtesy Bud Ganow

June, 1884

— Considerable excitement was created among our nimrods during the early part of the week over the shooting and wounding of a monster California lion in the woods southeast of town by our watch-maker Clarence Hotchkiss, in company with Frank Shepherd. This lion has been seen a number of times during the past two years, at one time confronting a person in the road near town, and afterward his capture sought by tracking in the snow. Well, the boys returned and reported what they had seen and wounded; the news spread like a prairie fire; a company of the best shots in town with several pointers, setters, bull dogs and curs, set out early the next day to capture the king of wild beasts. Blood was found, and for a while the capture seemed a dead certainty. After a fruitless hunt the boys all returned. That evening while a crowd were gathered beneath the sign of the big watch talking over the probable condition and whereabouts of Hotchkiss' game, one of the Irish boys came in from the ranch and said some one had shot his big yellow dog through and through.

— It will be seen by notice that the Cal's W. & M. Co. intends to prosecute all parties caught bathing in their reservoirs within the town site. We hope that if the Company fails to prosecute the next offense, the people who buy this water for domestic purposes will prosecute the company for a negligence of duty. Let every citizen discourage this nuisance of bathing in the town reservoirs, and that no favoritism be shown to anybody's boys.



One month's bounty killed by Al Lawson on the Divide. This photo shows over 50 coyote pelts, seven raccoons and eight bobcat hides.

Courtesy Ken Schabel

"We were chasing a big male cougar through dense thickets and hazel and manzanita with three dogs, Ranger, Bruce and Pete, worrying the quarry around and around us in this jungle, when my left eye was roughly jabbed by a sharp-ended stalk. The shock was so severe that I fell backward in a sitting position. Just then the dogs began barking around a big cedar tree. By now I could catch glimpses of the cougar standing on a limb 50 feet above the ground "treed" several 100 feet down the Rubicon River slope. My son, seeing what had occurred, took my hand and

their leashes, trying to get free. Soon the boy yelled, saying that the lion was up a big fir tree. "Don't shoot until I get there," I ordered.

"By this time I could hold my uninjured right eye open long enough to take aim. I took the revolver and handed the leashes over to my son. The big cougar looked sick, with blood oozing out from a bullet wound through the middle of his body. Standing directly beneath him I took aim up at a spot between his forelegs, pressed the trigger. Down he came again, sprang to his feet and took off like a streak downhill toward the Rubicon River a half mile below. Now we let go of Pete, the silent trailer, successor to Eli. A few minutes later he began barking "freed" close to the river. Somehow, I got down there and finished the lion with a bullet through the heart.

"While skinning him we found that my first bullet had struck a little to one side and passed upward between the cat's shoulder and chest. Skinning that cat, even with the aid of my son was an endless job. After it was done, the boy took the hide and started ahead, while I took my time climbing a mile up the steep river hill. On reaching the rim I found the hide hanging on an oak limb at the end of a road where Jay Jr. was to meet me with the car. There I sat for nearly two hours while the boy walked five miles to where the car had been left when we found the lion tracks at daybreak this morning, got the car and drove back to me.

"We were camped near Uncle Tom's Cabin, a stopping place on one of the immigrant roads crossing the Sierra Nevada Summit. At once the proprietress, Mrs. Archie (Irma) Lawyer, kindly gave up her room and bed to me. I spent the next three days laying in a darkened room with boric acid solution dripping on a pad covering the torn cornea of my left eye. Although I was convinced from the first that the vision was totally destroyed, I did not want to go home before making sure. Thus, it was three days later that I reached San Francisco and was sent to a hospital under the provision of the State Compensation Act.

Bear Creek Home

led me stumbling over rough ground to where the dogs were barking. By now I could catch glimpses of the cougar standing on a limb 50 feet above the ground. If the boy made a bad shot it might cost the life of a dog, so I insisted that he put leashes on them so I could hold them from rushing into battle with the cougar if the latter fell out wounded too badly to get to and climb another tree.

While I held the three dogs Jay Jr. took aim and fired. The cat sprang into space, came down, sprang to his feet and took off downhill with a young hound, Dukell, baying madly in pursuit for some 200 yards. Then suddenly he ceased baying. Telling the boy to run down there in case the cat was wounded and down, I followed slowly, trying to watch my step between fluttering eyelids, as the frantic dogs tugged violently and thrashed around at the end of