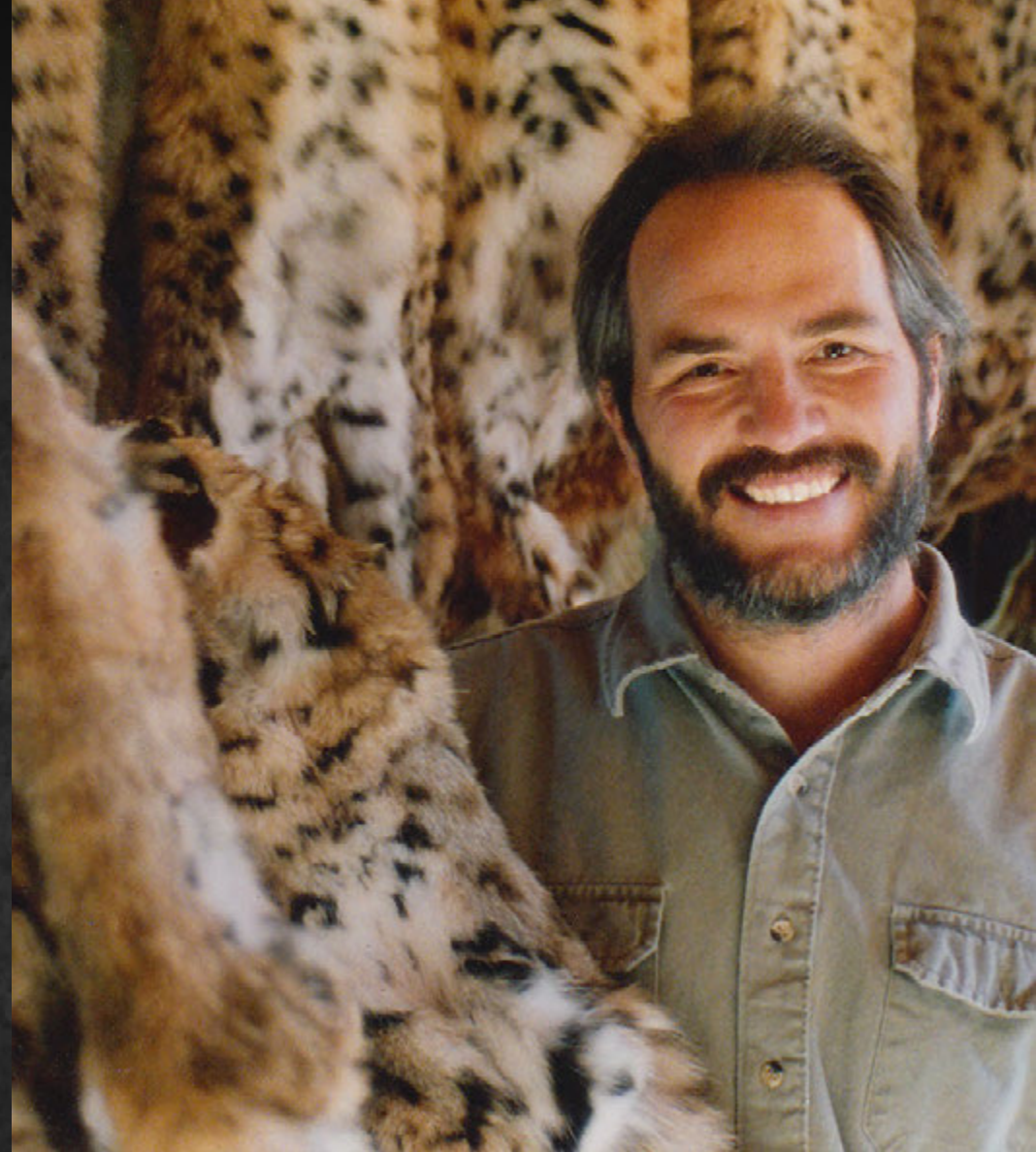


"TRAPPING ISN'T  
SOMETHING YOU DO,  
ITS PART OF  
**WHO YOU ARE.**"

– Ray Milligan



## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO RAY

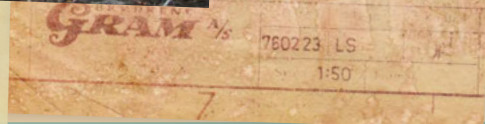
.....  
Stories, Memoirs and Professional Tips from Ray Milligan



Ray & a Rocky Mountain Tom



I grew up in rural Western Pennsylvania, in a place I could walk out my front door, with a gun or bow, a hound or two and start hunting in 100 yards. As a twelve year old, my school bus driver would pick me up in the woods on the way to school and I would cache my gun in a hollow tree. After school, he would drop me off at the same place, so I could hunt my way back home.



When I arrived at college in 1968, I walked into my dormitory room to meet my roommate. I looked past him and saw he had a shotgun and a rifle in the corner. The first question I asked was "What gauge and what caliber?" We both had brought two guns to college, and it was ok – no problem! I mention these tales only to show examples of the freedoms lost in my lifetime as I believe they set the tone for my life. Today, I live 65 miles from a stop light in a population density of 3 people per 25 square miles in the Southern Rockies near the New Mexico/Colorado border.

I was fascinated by trapping from an early age. At 3 or 4 years old, I trapped a chipmunk with a Victor rat trap. I was thrilled as I examined every inch of the little creature.



From that single moment, I would evolve through the painstaking steps to become a competent trapper.

In 1974, I headed to Alaska for six months with two lifelong friends. We were all college grads, with no vision or plan. All I had in my heart was wanderlust. My generation's version of Robert Services' "There is a race of men that don't fit in."

After we returned, I began my life as a commercial trapper. I knew then that I wanted to ride the "Freedom Machine" of self-employment, no matter how painful or difficult. I wanted to be free, and I never again worked for another man.



Ray on the Colorado/ New Mexico border in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains - 1984 -



## I like to trap everything.

Right now I like Bobcats best, there is something so special about spotted wild cats. They are secretive, adaptable and independent. Thus, they hold dear the same attributes we as trappers possess.

As far as an animal I don't like to trap, it's beaver, and I have trapped them quite a bit. I just don't care for the endless hours in the fur shed putting them up for market.

One time, years ago at a trapping convention, I was visiting with Charles Dobbin, the legendary trapper. When we were approached by two young trappers from Michigan, they excitedly told us of how they caught 200 beaver through the ice in the U.P. When they walked off Charles turned to me and asked "Do you know what the prerequisite is for a beaver trapper? I didn't know. Charles replied "It is a 48 inch chest and a size 3 hat." I laughed to tears.



High Mountain Catch  
San Juan Mountains - 1983  
Jicarilla Apache Nation

No, I am a coyote man. To me, St. Louis is not the "Gateway to the West." Coyotes are the gateway to accessing private land in the west. Let me explain. Coyotes are by far the cleverest of all the wild animals I have pursued. They make 57 different vocalizations, only two mammals make more sounds of communication. As humans, this is how we judge the intelligence of non-primates.

So, coyotes are smart, cunning and know very quickly when humans go after their hides.

I went twelve years of my physical prime thinking almost every day, about how I could maximize my catch of coyotes. Once I became an efficient coyote trapper, gates began to open. If you can catch coyotes, ranches with related problems let you on their private land. Once you're in, the fox, bobcat, and other furbearers

are yours too. Being a coyote-man opened up lots of locked gates for me. I'm not one that believes in a special magic or mojo, when it comes to trapping coyotes.

During the fur-boom of 1977-1983, it is estimated that 50,000 trappers became long-liners. The general trapping public probably only knew of two or three dozen of these men, as they were the ones that choose to write books/articles and do demos at the conventions.

Once a trapper knows how to do it, then it's only a matter of construction work. How long and hard does one choose to go? Without question, that is how the big catches are made.

As a terrestrial predator trapper, my favorite and most successful set is a hole set. Multiple peephole sets, big holes from badger and prairie dog holes and the standard "Dirt Hole" set.

Predators always investigate holes. Add food, curiosity and/or territorial smells to a very specific location at your set and firmly bed the concealed trap.

— Now you're talking success.



Mixed bag of bobcat & beaver.  
Rocky Mountains - 1985



Yes, I use urine post and flat sets too, but dirt hole sets are utilized 80% of the time. With a dirt hole set, you have many options for baiting and luring, as well as attracting and deterring certain species.

When you set for coyote, it is best to use a backing to put your dirt hole against, this way he doesn't become too spooky when



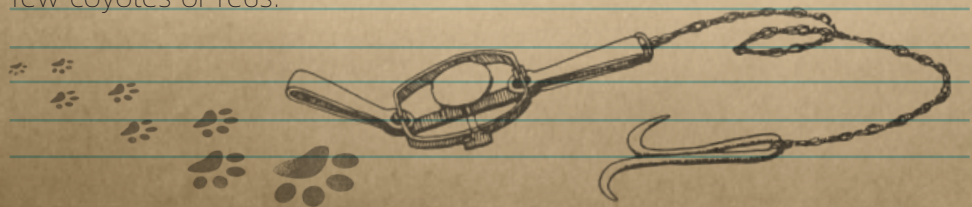
Chama Valley New Mexico  
- 2013 -

approaching your set. Add some minor subtleties such as making the trap bed slightly lower than the surrounding ground, then some well-placed indiscreet natural object to funnel the coyote (without him knowing) add a small stone or pebble, so he steps right on that 2 inch circle!

After mid-January most of the coyote and red fox have

broken off many of their guard hairs and are worth little to a fur buyer. But the bobcat and gray fox still are valuable commodities. When you construct your dirt holes for 'cats and grays, you make your dirt holes species specific. Since reds and coyotes don't usually like to be squeezed into tight quarters when approaching a set, use this to your advantage.

Make your 'cat and gray dirt hole sets underneath tight cover, like a cedar tree or thick brush like a plum thicket. Force them over your pan, with lots of blockage to the sides, and even stepping sticks. Now your late winter dirt holes are specific to your target animals, and will catch a few coyotes or reds.



The best season? That kind of depends on whether you're talking number of pelts or dollars. I was fortunate to have several perfect storm seasons. The two most memorable were the seasons of 1979-80 and 1982-83.

These seasons were exceptional in the fact that everything went my way. I never got weathered out, nothing broke down (not the vehicle or me), and everywhere I travelled the predators were at the peak of their population cycle.

I was living in Kansas in those days and started trapping in mid-September in the northern states. Usually Montana, Wyoming or the Dakotas, with red fox as the target animal.

By late October, I was back on my home line in Kansas where I had written permission to trap on 205 farms/ranches. My target animals were a mixed bag of coyote, coon and bobcat. After Thanksgiving I would take another road trip in search of prime fur only returning home for Christmas. After the holidays, I would head to Texas or New Mexico for a month in pursuit of coyote. Then back to Kansas to thaw out the furs and begin the process of preparing 600 or so pelts for market.

Timing is everything and the 1979-80 seasons had it. With money short, and the market hot, I sold a 47 day catch for over \$27,000. To put the money in perspective to today's dollar, you could buy a nice brick home with a full basement for \$25,000 at the time. The remainder of the season went well too, and dollar-wise it was probably my best season.

The 1982-83 season was one of a 32 year old trapper in his full prime with all the tools and a driven purpose. It was my best season for total animals, trapped and snared. The season started in New Mexico, then to Kansas and finished up in Texas, resulting in my personal best season catches for coyote (365), bobcats (43) and raccoon (262). The barn photo on the inside front cover of this book shows 61 days of trapping from that magical season.

The fur market crashed in December of 1982. Determined, I packed up my furs and hit the road to find the best prices. After a few days in South Dakota at M&M Furs, and Minnesota, I headed to Iowa. There I spent two and a half days at Ludy Sheda's fur house. It was a wild place, with lots of fur buyers and trappers coming and going. Two days later, I took \$19,000 for my furs, even though just 12 months earlier the same amount and quality would have fetched \$35,000 or more! Still, it was a wonderful season as I got to live simple and be a free trapper, I'm smiling as I write this. 😊



I have sold my own line of lures, urine and baits to the public since 1978. The mail order/catalog evolved to a full line of trapping supplies. Today I'm back to selling mostly lures, bait, books, DVDs and urines by catalog and online.

In 1979, Chuck Spearman, founder of *The Trapper Magazine*, urged me to put out a catalog. So, Colleen and I drove up to Sutton, Nebraska and got our first catalog put together.

I had been writing some articles for *The Trapper* and he wanted to reciprocate. He printed and bulk mailed 50,000 + catalogs, all on a promise that I would pay him back when I could. Chuck got paid in a few weeks and our mail order business was off and running. This great opportunity occurred just by happenstance, and it was my big break – a game changer.



Trapping tempered the best qualities of my character. On the line, I became a self-reliant, independent man, without the hardships of being a long-liner; the steel of my being would have never been forged so strong. Once I started to get the "Big Picture" of what it was going to take to make it as a professional trapper, I dove in whole hog, started writing, and I always carried a tape recorder on the line talking to it every day. I told the tape about the animal's behavior, dealing with mud, snow, frozen ground and anything else noteworthy.

While tending to a booth at the trapping conventions I found my greatest resource in other real trappers. Guys would come up to my booth and tell me their methods and share their observations. This sharing of knowledge and ideas always got my wheels turning.



Navajo Indian Reservation  
- 1984 -

I wrote four instructional trapping booklets; Coyote Fever in 1979, Complete Cooner in 1980, Fox Trapping Across America in 1985, and On the Prowl for Bobcats 1988. In 2012, I brought out my first instructional DVD, Coyote Fever – The DVD and in 2014, I released two additional DVD's, On the Prowl for Bobcats and Fox Trapping Across America.

Over the years, I came up with a few original innovative ideas, but most of it was a collaborative concoction of a "think tank" of my own wits and the input of other trappers. I believe my greatest contribution to the trapping fraternity has been my no-nonsense approach to the art. Separating the wheat from the chaff so to speak and doing the job efficiently without unnecessary effort. My articles, books and DVD's always emphasize the old adage of the KISS method, "Keep It Simple Stupid." I am always pleased when a trapper who has been having trouble catching fur, buys one of my books and gets instant results. That is a satisfying reward for me. In my long-lining days of the 70's and 80's I always tried to help other trappers. I wrote letters and notes to a thousand or more aspiring trappers annually.



Besides being a teacher, I always work to serve as an ambassador for trapping. In the 70's I served as the President of the Kansas Furharvesters, then as the liaison to the Game and Fish commission for the New Mexico Trappers Association. I have given back to the trapping and conservation financially too. In the past, I've donated an elk hunt worth \$6,500 to the New Mexico trappers to raffle off. Over the past decades I have donated over a hundred thousand dollars in elk hunts and contributions to S.C.I, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wild Sheep Foundation, Eastern FNAWS, Grand Slam Club and NTA.

The two main things that motivated me as a self-employed man? That's easy, fear of failing and passion. Fortunately, I am naturally self-motivated and I am fueled by passion and when that wanes, the fear kicks in. Being independent was always my goal. I am the descendent of generations of self-employed people. (Maybe we are all just unemployable). I have a passion for trapping. I can go hard for 100 days in multiple states and be totally spent, but awaken at 3:00 am, thinking about that dang coyote! The lifestyle, meeting the challenges, the notoriety, the financial success, all that is just a bi-product of passion, coupled with good timing AKA, luck.

When the fur market crashed in the mid-80's, my dream job as a long-liner evaporated. I knew I had to work in the woods. So I looked around and outfitting was a logical choice. It also presented a chance to share experiences with other like minded individuals. Currently, my day job is serving as President of Milligan Brand Outfitting, Inc. (according to the title on the letterhead.) Our 30th season will begin in August 2016! In the past, The Brand, as my outfit is known, was an international entity. We had operations in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, as well as New Zealand and Africa. Today, The Brand works exclusively here in Unit 4 of New Mexico. Our elk hunting now operates only on private land, where we have taken over 300 clients annually for over two decades.

If I look back at my trapping life, there are three main periods when others influenced me greatly. In my early long-lining days, Garold Weiland of South Dakota was my hero. We wrote letters, talked on the phone and I even stopped by his home on occasion while traveling from one state to the next. Garold's advice and encouragement was inspiring and I can never thank him enough for the mentoring and friendship.

Several years back, I was guiding/hosting a rifle bull elk hunt for Cabela's television show. At the summer production meeting in Sydney, the guys suggested we do a side bar to the hunt, by having me run a 25 trap line. At the time I hadn't trapped in earnest for almost 20 years. Several friends and family asked if I was going to practice. Questioning me like I had forgot how to do something that had dominated my life for a decade and a half. I smiled at my concerned friends and said "No."

What I had not realized was that my guides and friends from up here in Chama, never knew me as a trapper. I had trained my kids and several of their friends, always having a gambrel hanging in the yard to teach folks how to skin, but I hadn't long-lined since we lived in Santa Fe. So I set out a couple dozen traps and we went trapping and elk hunting. The catch was super and diverse. In five days I caught 20 coyotes, 15 red fox, some coon, a couple of bobcats and a bear. Now my guides and clients were getting excited. After each morning hunt we would run the traps and then I would go to one of my camps to skin. By the end of the week, five truck were following us on the line and as many as 20 guys would watch me skin.

During the planning of this trapline, my good friend and sometimes guide Peter LaScala was always talking trapping. He, more than any other influence, showed me the way to love trapping again. His enthusiasm and encouragement were so inspiring that I have been re-committed to line ever since. Pete and I hunt, fish and trap together a lot, but now the "trapping-life" dominates our thoughts most often. Thanks Pete.



*The Fur Shed - 2013*





Navajo River Basin - San Juan Mountains - 2014

Through it all one man was my friend, cohort and advisor. Tim Caven of Minnesota Trapline Product. Tim and I met when we both were in our 20's, and we liked each other instantly. Our initial common bond was the fact that we had both just gone to our local banks in search of \$1,000 loans. Both of us were firmly refused. Lending money to trappers was unheard of in those days. We still laugh

about that conversation we had over 35 years ago. Over the years Tim and I have been there for each other through everything from celebrations to tragedy. Tim has been a real friend and business partner with straight honest criticism when appropriate. We have also extended each other significant dollars of credit without ever having any written paper. When I think of all the great people in my life, Tim Caven is in my upper echelon. As a bonus of our friendship, I got to be with his daughter Erin and son Rob on their first elk kills (and Tim, too).

Parker Dozier laid out the 30 year cycle of the American economy for me many years ago. Since at least 1830, when the real mountain men headed west in search of beaver, our economy has cycled. Basically it is a 25 year "boom" followed by a 5 year "bust". During the

bust years our dollar is weak thus making American fur cheap when purchased with foreign currencies. During the economic recession periods since 1830-35 through today, fur harvesters enjoy high prices for their pelts, but on average only for 5 years out of every 30 years.

Let's put the money part of the equation on the back burner and deal with the real challenges and exhilaration of enticing a wild animal to step on a 2" circle, walk through a 10" cable loop or swim through a 10" square! If you've ever done any of these things and been driven to tears of joy, screamed with happiness at the top of your lungs, or had a grin on your face all day I know where you're coming from. I have had all these emotions multiple times on my lines and it feels so good. Trapping is full of simple pleasures, simple milestones and simple successes. I remember my first fox from over 45 years ago. Take in every aspect of your experiences, adding a new bird to your life list, figuring out that beaver preferred a certain species of willow over the other varieties along the river your trapping on, or how all the raccoons disappeared from the creeks and river for the opening of coon season in Kansas. The opening date just happened to coincide with the ripening of the wild fruits and nuts. Being opportunistic omnivores the raccoons headed to the ridges and east facing slopes for wild grapes and acorns. I must admit, I didn't figure out what was going on for a couple of years but once I did, my coon catch rose significantly.

Figuring out the natural scheme of things, dedicating yourself to catching that wariest of coyotes, or a fox that is wreaking havoc in your neighbour's hen house, is the real privilege of working outdoors.

What's so cool, is that trapping teaches success, self-esteem and promotes a sense of worthiness. You need to learn about adapting the tool (trap), sometimes re-manufacturing it to make it better, then the formulation of baits and lures, catching the animals, skinning, fleshing and stretching the pelts. After that, you market. It's so clear to me that a complete trapper, must make all A's and B's in these basic understandings to succeed. A person with these skills evolves as a complete person in the realm of business too. All this because they have learned how a business profile works from start to finish. I personally feel that my trapping experiences in my 20's were the simplest, most self-fulfilling learning experiences of my life as I became self-reliant. I believe that the only ingredient a beginning or neophyte trapper needs is passion!





Everything else will fall in place. I vividly remember when the "light" went on for me. I was a complete trapper (and man) and I recognized that it was my time. All this while spending day after day in my 20's, working alone. It didn't matter that no one else knew – I knew. Several times I worked so long and hard, that mentally and physically I was done. That is when it happens. My truck turns into Luke Skywalker's hovercraft. I float above the rough road, riding a cloud of self-satisfaction in what I can only explain as an out-of-body experience. I hope every person gets to take that extraordinary ride of passion.

Ray



Record book antelope - Rio Grande River  
August - 2015

To all the friends I've made along the way,  
To my wife and children,  
To my mentors,  
To the BRAND Men,

You have helped make my dream possible.

**THANK YOU**

Ray