



COUGAR, OR MOUNTAIN LION—AN-
OTHER VANISHING AMERICAN

*For their sins, both real and imagined, these
native cats are being gradually wiped out.
Only about five thousand remain*

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WRITE YOUR OWN
CAPTIONS

What is the cougar thinking about here while it regards Bill Finley in the nearby tree holding something that whirrs in a black box?

TRAILING *the* MOUNTAIN LION

And, What's More, Making Him Pose for Pictures

by Arthur Newton Pack

Photographs by William L. Finley and the Author

JUST as I came out under that tree and fired at the lion, he screamed and jumped straight at me. I shot him seven times while he was in the air, and if I hadn't had that Luger automatic he'd sure have broken my neck. Another time . . ." and just then an owl hooted. The listeners shivered, but the old owl was undoubtedly wise enough to know the kind of "lyin' hunting" that is done around the rim of a cosy camp fire.

Eastern tourists constitute a serious temptation to the veracity of a "dude wrangler guide". The only lions that such an audience knows about are the kind which a

ONCE more a *Nature Magazine* photographic expedition gets what it goes after. In this article Mr. Pack tells some of the experiences of the recent trip to get pictures of mountain lion—a vanishing species—in their native habitat

well-known hunter and wild animal photographer baits with a zebra tied to the rear axle of his automobile in brightest Africa, or the supposedly bloodthirsty beasts which pursue helpless heroines and capering comedians throughout six reels of film (with roars now thrown in free). And yet there really are wild lions in America. There are mountain lions, cougars, pumas, panthers, painters, catamounts, brown tigers, varmints, Indian

devils, mountain screamers, king-cats, or whatever the story teller chooses to call them. Some of the lion stories are true, but the live material to make stories about is



rapidly disappearing. Where elevated trains shriek and Lions Clubs now meet on the seventeenth floor, real mountain lions once roved. Then all good citizens preached that the only good lion is a dead one. Indeed they not only preached but practised so effectively that there are no

longer mountain lions anywhere in the eastern United States. Today western ranchmen carry on.

Southwest of Safford, Arizona, lies a fine collection of materials left over in the making of the rest of the world, but assembled in a somewhat careless manner. These are the Galiuro Mountains. Perhaps it is this very irregularity and haphazard quality in the scenery of the wilderness that gives it its wonderful charm, but that also has had its effect upon Arizona mules and some few Arizona citizens. We had been commended to a gentleman resident of this country who owned mules and horses. He agreed to transport us into the back country of Rattlesnake Canyon to pursue mountain lions in their natural habitat and take motion pictures of both. We also had Cleve Miller, an experienced lion hunter on Uncle Sam's payroll and four bloodhounds trained to follow no trail but that of a mountain lion. Mere man with all his cleverness can not find a lion when he wants one. Everything looked very bright, and nothing had been overlooked except the vagaries of Arizona mules.

But all was not as rosy as it looked. There followed days of riding the rim rocks; battling our way through the terrible scrub growth of the steep and treacherous hillsides; following trails that ranged from lukewarm to frigid. All to no avail. At last one day when our food supplies were running low Miller declared, "There's more lions in my country than there ever was or will be in this God-forsaken range. A man can ride after his

WHAT ARE THESE MEN FOOLING FOR?

The lion dogs can't understand these antics, least of all not killing the lion they have tracked



A FILM STUDIO IN THE TREE TOPS

Few feet separated Bill Finley, in his tree from the cougar in its—but that's how it is done

dogs without getting into some blind box canyon he can't get out of. There's wild turkeys, too—lots of 'em, and good water. If I had you folks in there I'd sure show a lion where you could get at him."

And so we left the Galiuros, Miller to ride home and meet us at "the old MJ Bar trap on Stray Horse Creek," and we to make a long, round-about trip to Miller's Utopia of game not far north of Safford. Our route took us by horse and automobile around through New Mexico and back into Arizona, over roads almost unbelievable, until we came to the Blue River and at last a low, log building bearing a shabby sign, "Blue P. O." There we left the car, found that we could outfit up the canyon a bit, and at last rode west from the Blue River. In a few hours we came out at a roughly-fenced corral in some woods by the side of the stream we had been following. This stream was the Stray Horse and the corral was the MJ Bar "cattle trap" where Miller was to meet us.

In Arizona a man does not say, "I'll meet you at the cigar counter at ten minutes after three." He says, "I'll get to the MJ Bar trap about Monday and meet up with you there," and whoever arrives first waits. Twenty-four hours after our arrival Miller rode into camp, leading an extra horse to carry his bed. Old Sandy, Blue, Boob and Rosy were with him,—not on any leash, but fastened together in pairs to discourage hunting en route.

Next morning as we were eagerly preparing to start again on a lion hunt, two strange horsemen appeared. Western hospitality dictated that they be asked to "get down and have a cup of coffee." Hodges and Cosper, who had outfitted us, knew the men by name, for everyone in this country naturally knows all of his neighbors within fifty or a hundred miles. They were camped up a side canyon not far away from us and had ridden into the mountains to see how their cattle had fared over the winter and to brand such calves as they could find. Hardly had the appropriate explanations been given when the dogs set up a furious barking and yowling, and



three strange hounds appeared, followed by another horseman. It seemed as if this great wilderness had suddenly become heavily populated. I saw Cosper and Hodges exchange a quick glance, and Miller's face assumed a peculiarly tense expression.

"Hello, Ben," said Cosper. "Get down and have some coffee."

As the new stranger strolled over to the fire and squatted on his heels, the name Ben suddenly clicked in my mind. Ben Black, a rival lion hunter, was also working for the government, and Miller had spoken more than once of Black's encroachments on what our hunter considered his exclusive territory. There was no chance of these two enemies working together, and if the old adage about too many cooks spoiling the broth was true, certainly too many lion hunters would spoil our chances of getting mountain lion pictures.

Conversation in our little circle was polite, but strained. "You hunting lions?" inquired Black.

"Yes," replied Miller. "These folks want me to tree a lion for 'em so they can get some moving pictures." Silence.

After a time Hodges threw his cigarette into the fire. "Where are you figuring on hunting, Ben?"

Black caught the idea. No other words were necessary. "I saw a track over at the head of Neckup last night on my way over, and I kind of figured on following it up with the dogs."

Cosper now joined in. "We are hunting on this side of the Stray Horse today, so I guess we're not likely to meet."

"No, I guess not," replied Black. "That lion track I saw was headed the other way."

For several days the agreement held. We rode each morning with Miller up and down

the mountains through a new kind of brush which tore at our hands and faces and whipped our chaps into a worn and weary appearance. Several times the dogs took the trail of a lion without success.

Each day we rode back to camp early in the afternoon, for the sun was then too hot, and what little scent might have been left in the morning would be gone. It was good to get back to our bubbling creek, fed by the snows which still lingered far back at the nine-thousand- and ten-thousand-foot levels. It was good to feel one's legs and arms and find them all there, and to say, "Well, my horse didn't fall today, although when we pitched off that rim rock after the dogs I don't see how he ever kept on his feet." But the "hunting" and lying we did about the camp fire lost its charm; everyone had told all the lies he ever knew. Time was running against us, and we had no lion.

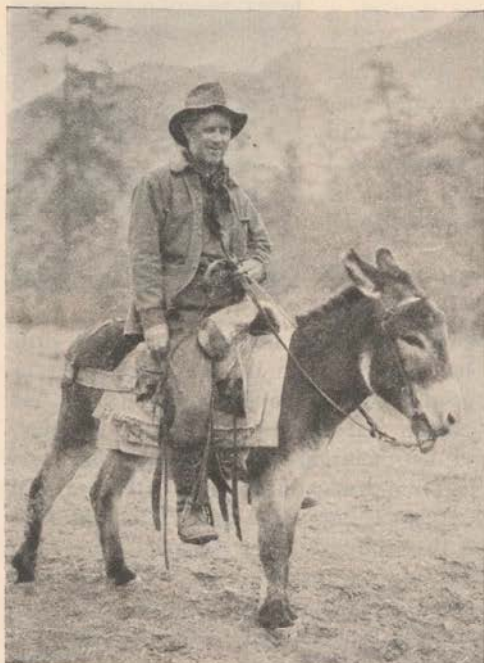
Now came news which, like the fancy or mirage of a cooling spring to the thirsty desert traveler, brought longing and dismay. Hugh Trainor, one of the cow-punchers, rode into camp one evening. "Ben Black got a big lion yesterday," said Hugh. "He was starting for home and I rode along with him for a ways. He struck a trail about half-way to the rim road and killed the lion over on Strawberry Mountain. Too bad you folks weren't there, for the lion was a big fellow and he treed low where he'd have made a good picture."

We sat about the fire and cursed. Cleve Miller was in the dumps. He prided himself on being the best lion hunter in Arizona and, through Ben Black, fate had handed him a blow. He could not even tell more stories of his past prowess. DeWitt Cosper alone seemed hopeful, and long after we sought our own bed rolls under the two fir trees he and Frank Hodges were still talking



TO JUMP OR NOT TO JUMP, WHICH SHALL IT BE?

Above the mountain lion surveys the situation below, while, anxious and expectant, one of the dogs is tense waiting for what may happen next



(Left) WE COULD NOT RESIST PRINTING THIS PICTURE—GUESS WHO

Correct, it is Bill Finley mounted for a stirring gallop over the country-side on his spirited thoroughbred



(Right) ARMORED FOR THE ROUGH COUNTRY WHERE LIVES THE MOUNTAIN LION

Arthur Newton Pack, president of our Association and leader of the expedition, getting ready for the day's ramble

in low tones about the fire. The next morning we awoke to a dead camp. The men had already gone.

Over our breakfast of beans, biscuits, and beef—the three B's of Arizona—we discussed the situation. We knew that if they did find a lion and tree him someone would come back to guide us to the spot. We were tired of that strenuous riding, anyhow. Long ago we had been forced to give up the scheme of using a packmule to carry the motion picture outfit. The mule always got caught in the brush and tried to wipe the cameras off against a tree. Bill Finley is a professional wild animal photographer, and both of us used standard size cameras. We had two hand cameras, however, and these we carried fastened to our saddle horns. In spite of our leather chaps, our knees were black and blue from the banging of the boxes against them. The camera cases were nearly cut to pieces. Mrs. Pack carried our tripod on the horn of her saddle, and she, too, had been nearly wiped off her horse several times, when the case caught in the brush and swung against her.

Suddenly, about two-thirty, we heard the clattering of hoofs, and the three men came splashing up the stream.

"Well, I got a lion for you sure thing this time!" yelled the hunter. "The dogs have got him up a tree clear on the top of Red Mountain!" He swung his leg over the saddle horn and began the narrative.

"Our horses are nearly dead. It sure has been one heart-breakin' ride. That north side of Red Mountain is just one series of rim rock, and cliffs, and it is pretty near impossible for a horse to get up. Those dogs hit a lion trail about daylight, but they lost it later. When DeWitt come up, he suggested that he 'cut sign' on ahead a way, farther up the mountain, where the ground wasn't quite so dry. Well he found another lion track and when I brought the dogs up, they sure recognized it as the track of the same lion. They kept on up the side of

the mountain, lost the trail at another open sunny place, and again we found it for 'em. This time they went clean up to the very top of Red Mountain. My horse fell twice. It was the worst going I ever saw. Then, just over the top of that mountain, those dogs come upon the lion. He must a'been asleep or resting. First thing I knew I seen old Sandy jump the son of a gun out of some brush. He's a big fellow all right, and he was so surprised to find the dogs right on him that he ran only about a hundred yards or so and scrambled up a pine tree. But believe me it sure is some ride from here."

When we looked at their horses, we believed it. Miller and Cosper both thought that we might more easily get up to where the lion was by starting up Stray Horse Creek and going west until we hit a side ridge which ran toward the peak of Red Mountain. We held a council of war as to what to do. If it should take three hours to get up to the lion, very little daylight would remain for pictures, but we had waited three weeks to get a chance for pictures and simply couldn't afford to miss this one. The only alternative was to spend the night under the tree. The mountain was nearly nine thousand feet high, and it would be bitter cold. The country was so rough that no bedding could go with us. Blankets or no blankets, food or no food, up Stray Horse Creek we started.

It was a long, tough ride before we at last stumbled down to the tree, where, forty feet above us on a sturdy limb, crouched the lion. He was a big fellow, sure enough, about the size and color of a circus lion, but without the mane. The cougar's face, too, was different,—more like that of a cat. The long tail, without noticeable tuft, hung down and twitched slowly from side to side as the creature eyed us and snarled at the barking dogs.

The older dogs, Sandy and Blue, could not understand why their quarry should





**TWO VIEWS OF OUR
FRIEND AND MOVIE
STAR ON LOCATION**

*At the left a survey of the
situation below is under
way and at the right a de-
cision has been reached to
come down and change
trees*



be kept so long in the tree. They leaped upon their master; begged and besought him to kill the lion and be done with it. Old Sandy even refused to drink. He simply sat at the base of the tree and looked up.

About the base of the tree we built a crackling fire, and collected great piles of wood to keep it going. Then Miller and Cospier set out for camp, hoping to get in before dark. In the morning they would return with food and water. Frank Hodges clearly did not like the idea of the strange vigil, but he stayed on. Darkness slowly came. The canyons below us were already dissolving into gloom, and the last rays of light gilded the mountain top above us. A cold breeze stole in from the main range of the White Mountains to the west. We hugged the blaze. As the flames leaped up, our lion climbed a little higher in the tree. He did not seem to be excited about it, but settled himself on a limb. The dogs gradually realized that we were looking after the lion and finally condescended to lie down and doze.

It is all very well to talk about sleeping about a camp fire without blankets, but in the high mountains in April the word sleep is—well, just try it! We sat and shifted positions and tried to keep up our spirits. Even the thought that up there in the darkness forty feet above our heads lay a large mountain lion was secondary to warmth. Once or twice Finley snored, and surely we all dozed, to awake and shiver. Somewhere not far away a great horned owl hooted.

At last, over behind the opposite ridge, the stars began to grow dim. Morning was coming, but in the mountains this is the coldest time of all. We threw more wood on the fire and hugged it closer still. At last sunrise came. Now able to see my way, I climbed a little way up the steep slope from the tree, reveling in the warmth of surplus effort. I turned to look at the tree top. "He's still there!" I shouted. Mrs. Pack came scrambling up to see for herself. The great cat lay sprawled out

on the limb, with one forepaw doubled beneath him and one forefoot and one hind foot hanging down. He raised his head and looked at us in a rather bored manner, as much as to say, "Those darned human beings are still there. Won't they ever go away?" At my shout, however, two of the younger dogs began to bark. The lion turned his head to look at them, and snarled, whereupon the other dogs joined in the chorus.

It was after eight when the other men appeared with water, and we made ourselves hot coffee and ate a little dry bread and jam. We had hardly finished when there was a great shouting, yipping, and barking above us, and down the ridge rode Hugh Trainor, his partner, and the rival hunter, Ben Black, with his dogs. They had heard that Miller had a lion treed, and in true Arizona style had followed the tracks of the horses to the spot.

It was necessary to get the lion to change his position for pictures so a shower of small stones was tried. The lion snarled, and although the missiles could not hurt him at that height, he decided that it was no place for a self-respecting animal and proceeded forthwith to come down. He came down head first, spiraling about the tree for the best foothold. My camera was mounted on a tripod on the steep slope, where I could get a good picture of his actions. Finley was well placed at an opening in the brush. This combination worked excellently, for the lion came out on the bare trunk, about twenty-five feet from the ground. Suddenly, and without any warning, he leaped clear in one magnificent jump. His long body, with tail straight out, described an arc right in front of Finley's camera, and he hit the ground close to one of the dogs, a good thirty or forty feet away from the base of the tree.

At the first movement of the lion the dogs had set up a howling and barking, and as the tawny body launched itself through space we all began to shout with



excitement. The lion landed with a thud, but safely and cat-like on all four feet. Before the dogs could recover from surprise he was off through the thick oak brush. I tried to follow his progress with my camera, but the brush was too thick. Swinging the lens around in advance of the lion's probable path, I sighted the great cat making up another tree. I pushed the lever. Not one of the dogs reached him, and he scrambled up cat-like, but with a

spiral motion about the trunk, until he was once more among the limbs and could climb with their aid. Up to the very top of the tree. We all hurried with our cameras, as rapidly as we could over the rough ground. All seven dogs were barking furiously and jumping about the trunk of this tree, another pine about fifty feet high.

About twenty feet away was virtually a twin tree. Marvelous luck! Bill Finley called to one of the cowboys to throw his rope over a limb. With this aid he began to climb; reached the first good limb and hauled up the camera.

Our guides and the cowboys looked aghast. They could not climb, and, truth to tell, they were more or less afraid of the lion. Finley worked his way up, hauling the camera after him. As Bill climbed so did the lion. At last both the great cat and Finley were seated opposite each other on the last strong branches. There were nineteen feet between them. Finley pointed his camera at the lion. The lion laid back his ears and snarled.

Bill was in his element and perfectly happy. "What shall I do if he jumps on me?" He called down.

"Throw the camera at him."

"Do some heavy jumping yourself."

"Change places with him."

The lion kept on snarling. The camera began to buzz. I worked around the



A ROUGH COUNTRY—THIS COUGAR LAND

The members of the expedition hit the trail with the guides on the movie mountain lion hunt

he could toward Bill. Below we held our breaths. I had at last found a fairly good set-up and stood poised with my hand on the release lever, determined, that, inasmuch as I could not help Finley, I was going to get a splendid picture of his rapid demise. But the lion had not much bluff in him, and no fight at all. Such is the way with our American mountain lion. He can do a lot of damage if he wants to, but he makes it his business to avoid a fight unless absolutely necessary. The lion lay down again and licked his chops.

Finley climbed to the very top of the tree and leaned out as far as possible. He pointed his camera and pushed the lever. Nothing happened. The film was jammed. Climbing part way down he called for a changing bag, and, balanced in a fork of the tree, both hands in the light-proof bag, fixed the jam.

The men were getting restless. It was noon, and we were hungry and thirsty. Finley called down that he

wanted to get the lion yawning. No luck, and finally he came down to suggest we get the lion to move again. With both cameras set up at points of vantage, we again hurled rocks at the lion. He merely snarled, but apparently he had made up his mind that there was no use in coming down. Miller said that it was unusual for a lion to jump out of a tree more than once or twice.

Now, we knew that that lion had



IN CAMP AFTER A THREE-COURSE MEAL

Beans, bacon and bread below the belt, then comes the business of washing the dishes

"If he jumps over a tree you jump to his"

caught a deer, to which he was certainly entitled. We had no evidence that he had killed any calves recently, and besides, he had performed splendidly for the movies. Mrs. Pack suggested that we return to camp with the dogs and allow the lion to escape. Finley and I were strongly of the same mind. Cleve Miller, however, had been loaned to us by the U. S. Department of Agriculture as their crack lion hunter, and the idea of deliberately permitting a lion to escape appealed to him as so unique that he was willing to do so. He only asked that we pay him the money he could not then honestly claim from Uncle Sam. But there were two cowboys present who owned cattle in that part of the country, and a rival lion hunter whose record would be improved by this lion. Even if we departed, it was more than likely that Ben Black would stay around, kill that lion sooner or later, and win the credit for it. Miller was distinctly worried, and there was a tension in the atmosphere. I looked at Finley and he nodded. "All right, shoot him," I said. It was an easy shot for Miller.

By the time we had gathered and packed our cameras Miller had the lion about skinned. "Hey!" he shouted, "Don't you want to take some of this mountain lion meat back to camp. It's good eating." I had heard before that mountain lion meat tasted like lean pork, but had never tried it. So I gathered up the steak Miller had cut off before feeding the dogs. With it in one hand and my camera in the other, I started up the mountain.

I was sorry our lion was dead, for he made upon the motion picture film a record which may before long become part of the history of a species practically extinct. I could not deny that this largest American cat is destructive. That he feeds equally upon deer and cattle, where cattle are available, is well known. He will destroy horses, burros, and even goats. Ernest Seton estimates that there may be as many as 5,000 cougars all together remaining in the United States. If each cougar kills \$1,000 worth of other animals each year (counting deer which are protected for the benefit of the sportsman and often at the expense of the farmer whose crops the deer may eat) then the annual bill of damage chargeable against the cougar's account is \$5,000,000. However, I recalled that it has been reliably estimated that domestic cats in New York State alone destroy 3,500,000 birds annually. The same United States Biological Survey

which hires men to exterminate mountain lions estimates the value to the farmer of insect and weed-seed eating birds at \$1.00 each per year. Apparently, therefore, taking the entire country instead of just New York State, domestic cats are responsible for a loss many times greater than that attributed to the cougars. A few cranks might like to exterminate domestic cats also.

The cougar, because of his taste for deer, is relentlessly pursued by hired professionals, even in most of our western National Parks where game is supposed to roam unmolested. In the Kaibab Forest of northern Arizona the nation has had one example of what over-protection of deer may bring about. When deer multiply without check, the question of food supply becomes serious for them. They gnaw the bark of trees and eat young seedlings, with consequent damage to the forest. Even then many slowly starve to death. Is it not better to permit the natural enemies of deer to take their toll and keep the herds within bounds?

If one grants that deer should be protected so that sportsmen can have the pleasure of shooting them, then why not apply the same rule to the mountain lion? A few of the big-game hunters who go to Africa after lions there might be encouraged to concentrate a little effort on the American lion. President Roosevelt hunted American mountain lions as well as African lions, and wrote most interestingly concerning his adventures, but since that time comparatively few sportsmen have tried it. The shooting of a cougar in a tree is, of course, ridiculously easy and anything but a sporting proposition. The difficulty and danger (for of such stuff is real sportsmanship supposed to be made) lies in the pursuit, the rough riding, and in the wildness and beauty of those mountain fastnesses where a few of these creatures dwell.

The United States Government does not consider mountain lions as game, but merely as creatures so contemptible that professional hunters are hired at five dollars a day and sent out to do away with them. The government uses tax money for this purpose; but the government, through the same Department of Agriculture, does not actually send men to kill the beetles on my fruit trees. It only tells me how I may kill them. As I climbed the mountain with that piece of lion meat in my hand, I wondered whether the American people are giving a square deal to their only native lion.

The National Flower Poll

With a total of more than a million votes cast in NATURE MAGAZINE'S National Flower Poll, the tabulators were confronted with a last-minute deluge of votes at the time of going to press with this issue. It was, therefore, impossible to make a complete and adequate final report on the Poll. This will be done in the March issue, when a tabulation of the vote for the entire country and by individual States will be made, as well as a report on the progress and general aspects of this vote, which has stimulated so much flower interest East, West, North and South.