

Hunting For snowshoe hare habitat



BRAD TRUMBO

UPLAND PURSUITS

Six feet of snow piled atop the Forest Service gate that separated us from our mountain top destination — another 30-minute climb on a summer day. I had snowshoes in the back, but it would have taken the rest of the day to make the hike. Walking to the rig behind me, I peered through the window at friends Doug and Bob.

“What do ya think? Chain up and give it hell?” I asked with a grin.

“You first!” Doug said through a nervous chuckle.

We had talked of chasing snowshoe hares since Christmas, and about a week before the season closed in mid-March, we finally pulled together a late morning hunt. Faced with the wall of snow standing between us and our original plans, “Plan B” took a different approach, leaving the deep forest, circumventing a mountain range and coming into the creek bottom in the next drainage over. Bob didn’t have snowshoes, so we played it safe by staying

low in elevation, but I was skeptical of our hare-finding prospects.

The snow had mostly melted in the creek bottom, save for the toe of the eastern slope which contained the right mix of ferns, ninebark, hawthorn, serviceberry, rose and raspberry, packed tight against a steep hillside that was punctuated with eroded basalt bands and outcrops. I had only hunted the area during grouse season and the dogs had never moved a hare to my knowledge. The likelihood of jumping one was entirely unknown and unexpected by the three of us.

A gated road sliced through the middle of the cover, which made much of the walking and cover inspection easy, but passing the one-hour mark with no hare sign led to complacency. The camera came out and my careful scrutiny of the landscape for the brilliant white furballs became ancillary to the beauty of golden sun streaming through dark timber and loosening the morning’s frosty grip on the forest.

Emerald moss and low-growing bunchgrasses covered crumpling basalt slopes in a smooth blanket beneath the shade of drooping serviceberry and firs. As I marveled over the soft greens and textures



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

A beautiful mountain wetland pool that supported snowshoe hare cover in the form of roses and ferns on the back end.

of early spring, I stepped into the brush to inspect a snowy patch for hare tracks. Starbursts of sunlight glistened through water droplets which had formed on the branches of a downed, decaying hawthorn. The water droplets hung delicately from the most intricate seafoam-tinted lichens I had ever seen. The stunning colors held my attention and camera focus as Doug and Bob move on.

A short distance ahead, Bob stepped into the brush, walking a line through the thicket where raspberry, rose and ferns created a dense ground covering. As I stopped to photograph an intriguing wetland pool, the faint “click” of a gun safety

and quiet profanity drifted back from Bob’s position. Simultaneously, a snow-white hare bounced across the trail directly between Doug and I, who were left staring at one another in disbelief.

The hare slipped neatly into the brush and disappeared from my view with Doug immediately sliding into the cover between firs. I back-tracked to find an opening to flank the hare and parallel Doug, which may have spurred the hare to turn in Doug’s direction. The bark of his Ithaca .410 single-shot was louder than I expected within the tight fir canopy, and with my ears ringing, I spied him emerge from the undergrowth with

the exquisite young hare.

“It took me a moment to figure out why the snow was moving,” Bob said with a laugh as he emerged from the briars and ferns. Had the hare not run between Doug and I, it may have been Bob’s bunny.

We marveled over the silky softness of the hare’s winter coat, and poked fun at its comically large hind feet. A critter well equipped to thrive in deep snow and evade predators like Canada lynx, bobcats and coyotes.

“Your turn to flush ‘em out,” Bob said to Doug, who happily jumped into the next brushy patch.

Doug moved quickly to the toe of the slope to his left and the sudden discharge of his shotgun followed. The second hare sat conspicuously beneath a fir just above head height on the slope as Doug approached, rewarding him for being at the right place and time. This hare was larger and more striking than the first.

The farther we hiked, the better the habitat looked, but to our surprise we encountered no more hares. I found it ironic that we were surprised by not finding hares in the better habitat, given our earlier surprise in finding hares at all. But experienced hunters have a keen sense for knowing

when an area “looks good,” and if only subconsciously, we expect to find to our prey where it belongs.

The hike back to the truck was less about hunting and more about savoring the moment and setting. We rode the high of a beautiful mountain morning, good company, a successful hunt, and the increasingly high sun angle tickling our natural senses to the fact that we were on the forefront of spring. Lighthearted conversation included the possible meals the hares would serve Doug and his lady Angela later that evening, and tentative plans were made for hunting the last Sunday of the season.

As we parted ways to return to our individual realities, I took a moment to give thanks for the camaraderie, a new hunting experience, and the public lands that made it possible. I left my pursuits of furry small game in my Appalachian youth, but this morning reinvigorated my interest in the challenge and delectable table fare of hunting Blue Mountain hares.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

BMCC:

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teammate to all around him.”

The BMCC women had three players earn NWAC East honors.

Jaelyn Brainard was named to the second team, while McKeeley Tonkin and Jaden Chavez were named to the All-Defensive Team.

The honors are the first for a BMCC women’s basketball player since Savannah Heugly in 2015-16.

“It was a pleasure to coach Jaelyn, McKeeley and Jaden this year,” BMCC women’s basketball coach Adam Driver said in a news release. “These awards are well-deserved due to all the hard work they put in during the season.”

Brainard averaged 14.9 points and five rebounds a game for the Timberwolves.

NWAC EAST WOMEN

Player of the Year: Brie Holecsek, so., Walla Walla

Freshman of the Year: Loy Waid, Wenatchee Valley

Defensive Player of the Year: Kortney Trappett, so., Walla Walla

Coach of the Year: Bobbi Hazeltine, Walla Walla

First Team: Maddie Godwin, so. Wenatchee Valley; Loy Waid, fr., Wenatchee Valley; Maddie Gebers, fr. Spokane; Lizzy Perry, so., Spokane; Kortney Trappett, so., Walla Walla.

Second Team: Jaelyn Brainard, fr., Blue Mountain; Maunayia Harrigfeld, so., Treasure Valley, Katie Fleming, fr., Wenatchee Valley; Ambra Hacker, fr., Big Bend; Makayla DeBry, so., Walla Walla.

All-Defensive Team: Maunayia Harrigfeld, so., Treasure Valley; Dejah Wilson, so. Spokane; McKeeley Tonkin, fr., Blue Mountain; Monica Miller, fr., Wenatchee Valley; Jaden Chavez, fr., Blue Mountain.

McKeeley finished the season averaging 3.6 rebounds and 1.8 steals a game, while Chavez averaged 3.6 rebounds and 1.8 steals.

“Jaelyn was an immediate contributor on both ends of the floor and finished top-12 in the conference for points per

game,” Driver said. “McKeeley is one of the toughest players we have had in our program and set a record for charges taken in a season. Jaden is one of the best on-ball defenders in the conference and consistently made it tough on opposing point guards.”

Shrine:

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tions. White caught 15 passes for 390 yards and four touchdowns.

Burnette, a lineman, earned first-team BMC honors for the Tigers on both sides of the ball. In eight games, he had 58 tackles and eight quarterback sacks.

“We picked the Hisler kid,” Davis said. “We hear about these kids, but we never get to see them play. It proved last year with Jayden (Wilson from Heppner), he played with the top talent in Oregon at the Les Schwab Bowl. Tip of the hat to Greg Grant and his program.”

Davis said he also likes the diversity on the team, which features no more than two players from each team.

“I’m excited to coach kids who might not get the recog-

HISTORY LESSON

The East-West game was organized in 1952 by a group of Shriners in Union and Umatilla counties. They wanted the game, which was to take place in Pendleton, to be for players from the then “B” schools. Four ranchers in the Pendleton area personally guaranteed to underwrite the renewal of the game. For the first 20 years, the game was played at the

Round-Up Arena in Pendleton. In 1960, the middle size schools came in, and in 1973, the game was moved to Baker City.

According to Shriners International, the game is the largest fundraiser in Oregon for the Shriners Hospital, and is considered the second largest athletic moneymaker for Shriners Hospitals in North America. The game has raised nearly \$3 million over the years.

“Gabe deserves it. He proved himself at the 5A level. He is a ball hawk.”

Joining Davis on the East coaching staff are Kenzie Hansell from Weston-McEwen and Steve Stebbins, South Umpqua. Davis coached the South to Les Schwab Bowl victories in 2019 and 2021.

“Kenzie is a 2A coach who understands who these kids are,” Davis said. “Kenzie is one of my good friends and I’m excited to coach with him. I’m excited to represent Eastern Oregon.”

The East beat the West last year 34-6, and leads the series 34-31-3. There were no games in 1969 and 2019.

Porter:

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Kevin also holds the school record in the javelin (179-8), the 110 hurdles (14.8) and the 300 hurdles (38.9).

Tim has the top marks in the long jump (23-6), triple jump (45-5) and was a member of the 4x100 relay team (44.7) as a freshman, while grandpa Charlie has the record in the pole vault (11-0), which the school no longer offers.

Porter’s mom, Whitney (nee Wagner), also played volleyball, basketball and ran track for the Grizzlies. She is

a member of the school-record 4x100 relay team (51.5), and the 4x400 relay team (4:15.9).

A well-rounded athlete

When Porter was at Pendleton High, he ran cross-country, played basketball, swam and did track. It was on the track that he excelled.

“In high school, I was training to be a decathlete in college, so I did a lot of different events — 100, 200, 300 hurdles, 400, long jump, triple jump and threw the javelin,” he said. “In college it was far more specialized. By the time I graduated, I ran the 100, 200, 400, 4x100 and 4x400.”

During his last indoor season before the COVID-19

pandemic hit, his 4x400 relay team won the Great Northwest Athletic Conference title.

“The day before our first outdoor meet (in 2020), our coach called and said we weren’t having a season,” he said. “I couldn’t believe it. I had been training for months.”

Since he graduated last spring from CWU, Porter has been working the family farm with his dad.

“I’m just trying to decide if that’s what I want to do,” he said of farming. “I have an anthropology degree. I specialized in archeology (people, not dinosaurs).”

Until then, he will add to the family legacy with the Griswold track team.

ON THE SLATE

SATURDAY, MARCH 19

Prep baseball

Stanfield/Echo at White Salmon (2), 1 p.m.

Prep softball

Hermiston vs. Central Valley, at Richland, 2:30 p.m.
Hermiston vs. Sandpoint, at Richland, 4:30 p.m.

Track and field

Hermiston at Richland Jamboree, 11 a.m.

College baseball

Clark at Blue Mountain (2), noon

College softball

North Idaho at Blue Mountain (2), noon

SUNDAY, MARCH 20

College baseball

Clark at Blue Mountain (2), 11 a.m. Monday, March 21

Prep baseball

RL Tournament at Pendleton, TBD
Weston-McEwen at Riverside, 11 a.m.
Weston-McEwen vs. Sherman, at Riverside, 2 p.m.
Sherman at Riverside, 4 p.m.
Pilot Rock vs. Umpqua Valley Christian, UVC Spring Break Tour-

namment, 5:30 p.m.

Prep softball

Weston-McEwen at Riverside, 11 a.m.
Vernonia at Heppner/Lone (2), 1 p.m.
Weston-McEwen vs. Knappa, at Riverside, 1:30 p.m.
Pendleton vs. Centennial, Hawks Invitational, 2 p.m.
Pendleton v. Central Catholic, Hawks Invitational, TBD
Knappa at Riverside, 4 p.m.

Prep golf

Hermiston at MCC pod, Veterans Memorial Golf Course, noon

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