

SPECIAL: PINPOINTING ONTARIO'S BLACK CRAPPIE

Ontario OUT OF DOORS



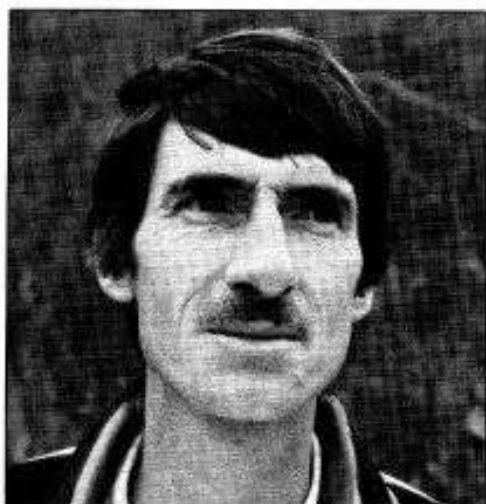
CANADA'S
VERY OWN
HUNTING
DOG
OUR SAD
CARIBOU
SAGA

5 CURES FOR MUSKIE MANIA

- LAKE OF THE WOODS
- WABIGOON LAKE
- LAKE ST. CLAIR

- PLUS TWO
- DEADLY TRICKS





Wayne Adair

Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever



*Although he has been all but forgotten, Harry (Henry) Albert Patterson Smith, from about 1900 to 1923, may have been one of the most flamboyant characters that Nova Scotia ever produced. Not only was he high sheriff of Digby County, president of the Nova Scotia guides' association, a noted ornithologist, an accomplished salmon fisherman, a writer on hunting and fishing for both *Forest and Stream* and *Rod and Gun* magazines, but he also may have been one of the first men to*



Historic snapshot of one of the first of the Nova Scotia duck-tolling dogs with (Harry) Henry Albert Patterson Smith, below, who bred, hunted with and wrote about these dogs.





Wayne Adair Photo

Ontario OUT OF DOORS — June 1983

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promote and develop the Nova Scotia duck tolling retriever. Maybe now, thanks to his 90-year-old son, Clifford Smith of Toronto, who last spring showed me a number of his father's original unedited manuscripts, Ontario OUT OF DOORS can help give this man the recognition he deserves as a pioneer Canadian outdoor writer and dog breeder. Of the 13 manuscripts, four dealt with Nova Scotia tolling dogs and one in particular, written about 1916, is so good that from this point on I am going to stand aside and let H.A.P. Smith have another chance at promoting his beloved tollers.

With nose as true as the pointers, with sight as keen as the greyhounds, with endurance as great as the foxhounds, with courage equaling the bulldogs, with disposition as playful as the spaniels, with coat as dense as the otters, and with love for his master more fervent than that of any other living thing, and his colour is fox-red from the end of his nose to the tip of his bushy tail, save a white dash on his broad chest, and in some specimens a white blaze in the face. His weight about 50 pounds (bitches 40). His height at the shoulder 20 inches, wide sculled with moderately large pendant ears. The above is a fair description of the tolling dog, whose equal as a duck dog the writer has yet to meet. He has all the traits of his progenitor—the Labrador retriever, with the added ability to attract or tote his game.

It no doubt will be news to many

Nova Scotia Duck-Tolling Retriever



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that the "playing" of the tolling do near the water will attract the wild duck. In Nova Scotia our best gam ducks are blacks and scaup, and bot birds will toll to the antics of this dog.

The bufflehead and merganser ducks will also toll, but the goldeneye will jump into the air at the sight of him, as if a gun was discharged in their midst. Sea ducks and coot seem to take no notice of the dog. The idea developed since the fox has been known for many years to possess the power to attract wildfowl by reason of its colour and movement along the shore, and many a fat black duck has paid the penalty of this curiosity.

It was my privilege and delight to see a fox at work on one occasion. We were moose hunting near the "Boundary Road" in Nova Scotia and, as our canoe turned a bend in the Coufaug River, I saw four black ducks. Wondering why they did not fly at sight of us, I glanced ahead and there on top of a flat rock which projected into the water, lay a fox with his nose between his paws. Every second or so he would raise his brush and give it a flip from side to side. The ducks swam towards him, intently watching that white-tipped tail. Just then my hunting companion, coming down the river in the canoe behind us, caught sight of the fox, shot at it. I have always felt without our intervention, that fox would have carried away one of those four birds, a victim of curiosity.

If you are a dog man, the first time you see a tolling dog, your attention will be at once arrested. Therefore let us suppose that you meet the writer with a pair of tollers at heel and after looking critically at them you remark, (as hundreds have done before).



"What kind of dogs are those? Chesapeake bays, or what?" If time is no object, the answer will probably be, they are tolling dogs, and when the explanation is complete your questions will come thick and fast. But we will suppose you are a duck shooter and are also sceptical and want to be shown and it is finally agreed that we repair to where we know black ducks congregate.

"If you touch him now you will feel him trembling with excitement."

It is not yet daylight when we reach our "blind" on the edge of the sandy shore of the St. Mary's Bay. This blind is composed of three or four old lobster pots, which have been cast ashore in the surf, and a few old roots of trees, the whole covered with dried sea weed, and just large enough to conveniently hide us and the dog.

Our dog is curled up tight, his nose covered by his fox-like tail, and he is the only one of the three of us comfortably warm. But just listen to those black ducks as their trembling quack reaches us from out there in the bay. Buff hears them, too, and quick as lightning his ears prick as he raises his head. If you touch him now, you will feel him trembling with suppressed excitement.

And now the east begins to pale, and objects become discernible. Those old stake butts out there, standing up through the sand, look like a flock of geese, while in the grey light the bridge, spanning the North Creek, looms up like a church spire. We hear the winnow of wings as ducks fly from the salt creeks, where they have spent the night, and as they join their companions in the bay in front of us, create quite a commotion among them.

Presently, we see a black line on the glossy surface of the water, which slowly develops into a flock of 20 birds or more. The tide is almost up to our blind this morning, and everything seems to favour us. The ducks are now in plain sight. Some of them know the danger zone of this shore from years of constant gunning. About 200 yards away they flap their wings and prean

their feathers as the rising sun begins to warm them.

Now I guess we will "show the dog". Reaching into the back pocket of my hunting coat, I pull out a hard rubber ball. Buff has watched my every movement: watch the pupils of his eyes dilate as he sees the ball. Did you ever see such concentration as he watches that sphere of rubber, next to his master? One bounce of it upon the kitchen floor will lure him from the finest dish of roast beef scraps and gravy. I can divine your thoughts without much study now. You are thinking "what a shame to scare those ducks" and that perhaps they may come on shore later on as the tide begins to fall, and you can't help feeling certain that every duck will "jump" as soon as they see the dog. But wait, you watch the ducks, and whatever you do don't shoot until I give the word. It is the ruination of a tolling dog to shoot over him while he is outside the blind. If you do so, the dog will soon want the first chance himself, and when the birds come close, it will plunge in after them, without waiting for the gun.

I toss the ball and away goes Buff. Picking it up he saunters back, and drops it in my hand. Out again goes the ball, and dog. I watch your face. Through the "peek hole" in the sea weed you study the birds.

Every duck looks intently at the dog, and as the ball falls in among some dead sea weed, causing him to use his nose to find it, his busy tail works and wiggles above the beach grass. A dozen birds turn and swim for shore, their necks, a second ago stretched so long, now disappear as they fold them in, and with soft "meaup-duip-meaup" they swim towards us. Buff plays beautifully, returning with the ball even faster than he romps after it. Now, as the dog comes toward us again, the hot scent of black ducks smites his nostrils, and stopping with up-raised paw, he looks towards them. But a chirp brings him back to us.

See him tremble as we push up the safeties of our guns, and here are the birds right against us, though not well bunched, being strung out across our front. They are only 35 yards or so away when Buff drops the ball into my open palm for the last time, and I whisper, down.

See that old chap stretch his neck and swim up and down looking with the keenest of all eyes for the dog, and now up go all heads and turn slowly from us, the birds swim together, with their heads turned sideways looking over their shoulders at the blind. I nod and

two pairs of 12-bore barrels poke out above the fringe of sea weed of the blind. As we raise to shoot, Buff peeks over the blind beside me with a whimper and stiffened sinews waiting the report. Both shots snap out as one and into the air seven terrified birds spring straight up, three of their number falling to our second barrels.



Tolling dog with ducks he helped to bag, in age-yellowed snapshot.

There are two cripples.

Buff by this time has almost reached the nearest drifting victims. Watch him swim! There is only one breed of dog could catch him now, and that is the tolling dog. No need to tell him to retrieve, dropping his bird on the sand he plunges in again, and again, until the eighth and last duck is safely recovered.

Last winter I feared I had lost Buff. Shooting from this very blind, I wing-broke a black duck, and giving chase, the dog swam after his bird right out to sea beyond my anxious sight. The tide had turned, and I ran along the shore with frantic haste trying to locate a boat away along past Red Head—there you see two miles below us — at last I gave it up and sorrowfully returned to fetch my gun, left behind in the blind. My dog's few little imperfections were all forgotten, and every cross word spoken to it was regretted, but to my utter surprise and joy upon reaching the blind, there lay the game little dog with the duck beside him.

The distance he swam by conserva-

tive estimation, through the ice-cold water, must have exceeded three miles, and he seemed none the worse for it.

And now let me tell you that ducks will not toll to windward. They will come to the dog across wind, or as you have just seen, from the windwards, and also when there is no wind. Black ducks toll with their heads drawn down; scaup with heads up, and necks stuck out; buffleheads on their tails almost; and all the mergansers with heads erect and necks straight up. Perhaps the tolling dog is most deadly when shooting ducks before they leave the lakes in the fall, and when the birds are young.

The history of the tolling dog, from all I can gather, is as follows: In the late 1860s James Allen of Yarmouth, N.S., secured from the captain of a corn-laden schooner, a female flat-coated English retriever, colour dark red, weight about 50 pounds. Mr. Allen had her bred with a Labrador dog, which was a fine retriever; the first litter of pups made very large dogs, even larger than their parents, and were splendid duck dogs. Several of these bitches were bred to a brown cocker spaniel, imported into Nova Scotia from Massachusetts. These dogs have been bred through Yarmouth County, particularly at Little River and Comaues Hill, and the majority of them are a reddish brown colour. Later on, a cross of the Irish Setter was introduced. Occasionally, a black pup appears, and of course, makes just as good a retriever and water dog as his red brothers, but is not so valuable, because he cannot be used as a toller.

I am so fortunate as to own a dog and two bitches, and shall try to perpetuate the breed. This grand dog should be carefully bred and given a class at the dog shows, for it certainly is in a class all its own, on account of his tolling ability.

Since these ideal little hunting dogs originated in and around the Little River District of Nova Scotia, and thus are part of thier country's heritage, I would appreciate it if all those who might have information on the hunting or breeding of these dogs get in touch with Ray Stephens of the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club, at 87 Thomas St., Oshawa, or myself, as we would like to trace the history of these dogs back to Mr. Smith or other early breeders. Sometime in the future, with the information from the four manuscripts dealing with tollers, and with what Ray and I can dig up, I am hoping to write an updated history of this breed.