

DOGHOUSES

By Oliver Cameron
with Ole Wik

“A person’s got no purpose being out like that if he hasn’t got a dog.” --Oliver Cameron

I had some large dogs. They liked to get down on the ground in the summertime, so I had a couple of big logs, one on top of the other. I used them as a foundation. It was high enough that by digging a little, a dog could get under there and get inside where it was a little cool and mosquito free.

Above that was a box with a flat roof, which served as the main body of the doghouse, and above that was a simple A-frame. That upper section formed an attic where I put hay for the dogs to lie on in the wintertime.

That upper part was thatched. It was somewhat bigger, so that the eaves extended quite a bit beyond the body of the doghouse. Somebody called it a dog palace.



Oliver’s doghouse.
Image courtesy of Heidi Dammann

I could store a few tools under the eaves—something to clean up crap. At one time I had my scythe hanging under there.

Dogs don't always like to be inside—whenever I had a doghouse that a dog could jump up on, they liked to spend some time up on the roof. So I nailed some rough split boards across a couple of poles to make a platform that was just big enough for a dog to lie on. When it rained and the dog yard got muddied up, the dog had a place that was dry and up out of the mud.

If you have a setup like that, you have to make some effort to fasten your chain in such a way that if the dog jumps up on one side, the chain doesn't choke him when he jumps off the other side.

I staked my dogs to fairly large poles driven into the ground. To protect the wood from getting worn out by the ring on the end of the chain as it swung around, I cut a couple of slots in the top of a five gallon can and slid it down over the base of the stake. The ring rode on that.

I had some welding equipment at one point, but never learned how to make a blacksmith weld. I made those rings two other ways.

I made some of them out of 1/4" rod. I heated one end and bent an eye in it. Then I heated the other end, bent it around in a circle, and hooked it through the original eye so that I had two eyes hooked together where the ends of the rod came together.

I didn't have a lot of that kind of rod, so another way I did it was to use a crotch from an alder tree or wherever. The crotch stuck out at a fairly open angle. Out a little ways I put a crosspiece across the ends of the crotch. I'd make a hole in the leg of that "Y" and wire the chain to it. I'd slide that three-cornered opening over a post, and the whole thing could swing around on it.

I think I fastened the crosspiece to the fork with wire. Sometimes nails aren't ideal. Those rings take a beating in that kind of situation. If you have a couple of nails through the ends, they get wet and then dry out, and when the dog yanks, quite often they'll split out. It works better if everything is tied together with wire through a couple of holes.

Did you let your dogs run loose much?¹

When I had several dogs, I didn't, especially before I fenced my garden. After I had the garden fenced, I usually had one dog at a time. That dog was with me most of the time, and it ran loose all the time.

For some reason, porcupines didn't give me much trouble. Some dogs learned to bark at them, but otherwise left them alone. Others never seemed to learn.

My dogs only had problems with them two times. Up on the hill where Dwayne lived, they had quite a bit more trouble.



Oliver with his dogs. Image courtesy of Heidi Dammann

1) This essay stems from a series of telephone conversations that Ole Wik had with Oliver between December 2007 and February 2008. Highlighted text indicates remarks made by Ole.