

## TRAPPING

By Oliver Cameron  
with Ole Wik

I only remember two things that my father specifically took time to teach me when I was a youngster. I think my dad figured that if I was down to the bare bones, those were things that a fellow could use. You may never need those basic skills, but you will have them to give you confidence should you be caught out.

One was how to make a fire with a bow drill. There are books on the subject. Elmer Kreps's book<sup>1</sup> is one, but there are other sources of information about building a fire that way.

The other was how to make a Figure 4 trap trigger.

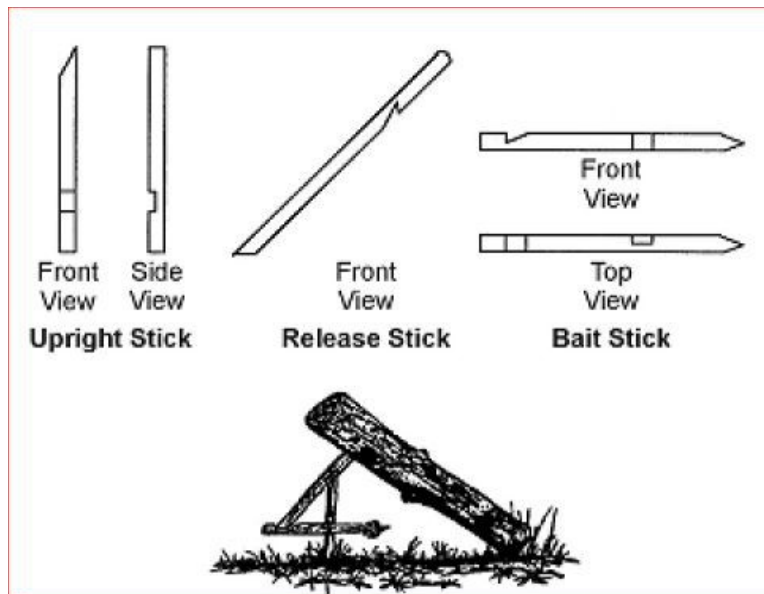
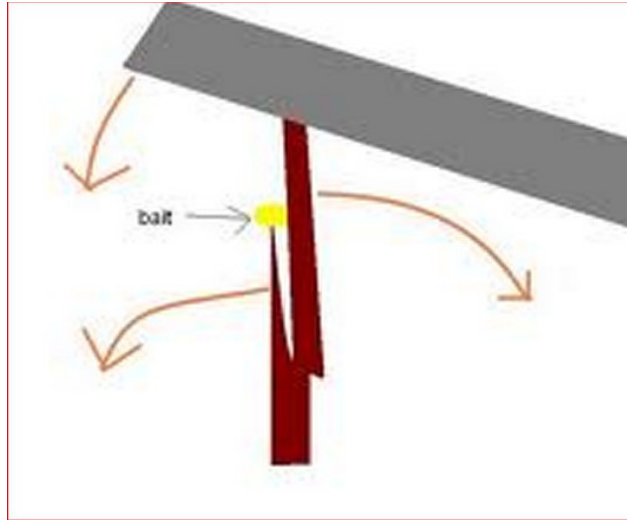


Figure 4 deadfall trap.

Image: <http://wildernessarena.com/food-water-shelter/food-food-water-shelter/food-procurement/animal-food/traps-and-snares>

You have everything you need right there in the forest to make a Figure 4 trap, but it takes an extra arm and hand sometimes to get everything set up just right. There are better ways of making a trap trigger.

The kind of trigger that I like to use isn't in that book. It was used long ago when people used sharp, rough edges to make it.



Oliver's trigger sounds like a version of a promontory peg deadfall trigger.  
Image: <http://www.wilderness-survival.net/forums/showthread.php?6239-Promontory-Peg-Deadfall-Trigger>



Another example of a promontory peg trigger.  
Source: <http://bill-hay.com/GoldenTrout.htm>

Take a round stick, little finger size or a little bigger. The length will depend on your quarry. For a marten or a mink or something like that, it would only be maybe 4" tall, or at the very most, 5".

You cut a notch halfway through the stick, turn it over, and cut a notch halfway through from the other side, but separated a bit. Then you split the two sticks apart between the notches and whittle the split sides flat. Those flat sides will be in contact when the trigger is put together.

One of the halves becomes the foundation stick. It will stand on a little chip or rock so that the weight of deadfall won't push it down into the ground. The shoulder of the notch will be up maybe 2" above the ground, or even less—1-1/2".

The bottom end of the upper stick sets on the shoulder of the foundation stick. At the upper end it is beveled toward the foundation stick. That tip will be positioned toward the inside of the deadfall, where the weight will cause it to buckle easily.

The bevel at the tip of the upper stick doesn't have a real sharp, because you've got quite a bit of weight resting on it. You need enough bearing surface on the inside of the stick to hold the weight up.

Next you make a small bait stick that runs back in under the deadfall. You cut a notch in it just wide enough to fit over the other two sticks to hold them together. You can whittle that stick so that it just hooks a little bit, to where it doesn't take much to trigger it.

When the weight is in place and the bait stick is tripped, both of the main sticks will buckle outward, and the deadfall won't fall on them. All you have underneath is the little slender bait stick that tied them together. You don't want much underneath the weight when it's tripped, except the animal.

You can cut the notch in the end of the bait stick so that it's not perpendicular to the stick, so that the bait is up a little bit and the animal has to pull on it or work on it to get the bait loose.



Promontory Peg deadfall bait stick connection. Source:

[http://www.trapperman.com/forum/ubbthreads.php/topics/2931173/1/siberian\\_trappers\\_film](http://www.trapperman.com/forum/ubbthreads.php/topics/2931173/1/siberian_trappers_film)

The bevels would form a shed roof peak when unweighted. When the weight is in place, your bait stick is holding them together or almost together at the bottom. If you're using a fall log, it's got to be under far enough that the log will set on it. With a rock, it has to be as close to the outside edge as possible.

The reason for the first stick to be tapered is so that there is no flat surface supporting the deadfall. It will instead be kicked out. That is mostly important if you're using a rock instead of a log. The nice thing about this trap is that you can set all the three pieces together and hold them with one hand, and then lift your log up and set it in place with the other hand.

You want the bait stick to be back under quite a ways, and you put it down fairly low. The animal can come in from either side. But if you're going to make a little frame so that the animal has to go in between the logs to get back in there, you want the deadfall to be far enough back so that the chest of the animal is far enough back in.

Instead of using a rock or chip under the end of the first stick, you can use a bed log for the falling log to fall onto. You put down the bed log, maybe a piece 3' long. Then you cut another log that will lie on top of that.

If you need to, you can drive a couple of stakes on each side of the logs to ensure that you can lift up the fall log and have it come down square on the underneath one. When you get that setup just right, you then lean another heavy log perpendicularly on the upper end of the fall log to add more crushing weight.

The point of having the bait stick back an enclosure of upright sticks or whatever is to ensure that the animal can't come in from the top or from the side, but has to come in under the deadfall to get at the bait. Ordinarily the bait is far enough in that the animal at least has his feet on the base log, or inside of it. The ideal is to have his chest caught.

If it's going to snow, you put some branches over the top so it won't get around the trigger, even if a big snowfall buries the whole works.

You could make half a dozen of these traps in the time it took for me to describe it!

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Sometimes I make box traps. I usually use a piece of hardware cloth across one end. Then I'll hinge the board that's on top of the box, and nailed to that will be the end of the trap that falls down and closes the box.



Commercial wire box trap, hinged at the top of the door.

Image source: <http://www.how-to-hunt-rabbit.com/images/rabbittrapopen.jpg>

I try to make the box of a suitable size for whatever I am catching. It's better if they can't turn around in there. I can make a hole in the top of the trap, pretty close to the end

where the screen is, and put a trigger up through that hole so that it can't pull all the way through.

Then I have a frame that goes over the top of the trap with a stick. There's a loop on the end of the trap. The other end is under a notch in the trigger stick. If the rabbit bumps anything or tries to pull the bait out, it closes the trap behind it.

The trap now has live rabbit inside. I can usually maneuver a piece of fairly stiff wire around so I can poke it through its heart or stab it some way to kill it.

**How did you learn to make box traps?**

I don't remember. My dad probably showed me how.

**Do you use them often?**

No. They're too much trouble to make and move around. The main time I used them was when I was a kid. We had rabbits, and if some got loose, that's how I caught them so I could put them back in their cages.

Rabbits are kind of gentle animals. They aren't too pushy. There is a different kind of a box trap that I made one time to catch a marten. It had gotten into my cache and had spoiled some things. I fixed the cache and didn't think he could get up in there, but somehow he managed to get in again.

I decided I would have to get rid of the thing even though it was out of season and the fur wasn't prime, so I made a box trap. It was maybe 4-1/2 or 5" wide, and a little taller.

I doubled over some pieces of wire into the shape of long staples, and ran them through some holes that I had drilled into a stick of wood. Then I mounted the stick at the top of the opening by driving a nail through the sides of the trap into each end. The stick acted as a pivot, and the ends of the staples rested on the inside of the floor to form a gate.

At the back end of the box, I drilled holes in top and bottom and both sides and just wove a screen with half inch holes in it. I could have used hardware cloth, but I didn't have any.

The gate leaned at an angle when it was closed, with the bottom farther into the trap and the tips of the wires crowding against the floor. It was light enough that if it was propped on a little twig or something and was held a little bit open, the marten would have more of an incentive to start in.

I put some bait in there, but I can't remember what I used. It might have been a piece of beaver meat or something like that. A marten is not like a rabbit. When there's something it wants, it goes for it.

As the marten pushed its way into the trap, it lifted the gate up, and once it got all the way inside, the gate dropped down at an angle behind him. Since he couldn't turn around, he'd have no way of raising the gate and getting out.

You have to be careful to make this kind of trap long enough. With the first trap I made, the marten went in part way, felt the prongs of those staples on his back, and backed out, even though they must have been pressing down a little on him.

Another problem with that first trap was that it was too low. If the animal went partway in and raised the gate so that it was almost lying on his back, I can see how he could back out pretty easy.

I made another trap that was quite a bit longer, and sharpened the ends of the staples. That time I caught the marten, during the night. It probably smelled the bait.

**Were the staples intended to stab animal as it backed out?**

Not really. The gate was supposed to fall back down after the animal went inside. But the staples were lying at a pretty good angle on his back, and if he got in there and tried to back out, they probably would pierce him.

Although I didn't try it, I think that I could have used a stick of wood to make a tip-up trigger in the end of the trap.

**What kind of wire did you use for staples?**

I think I used coat hanger wire. It had to be fairly stiff.

**That was the spacing of the wires?**

I think they were about 1 or 1-1/4" apart.

**Was that your original design?**

No. I'd seen it in some book or magazine or something.

**Could you have used a wooden gate?**

Yes, a flat board or something, not too heavy. There you would probably have to make sure that it was propped up to start with.

When I put that first piece of wood in, I used a larger nail and made the hole in each side of the trap, and when I put the gate in, I used a smaller gate through the hole into the pivot stick so that the stick would pivot freely.

I could have made a deadfall to catch that marten, but it was inconvenient, and it wouldn't have been nearly so versatile. Also, that box trap didn't take up much room in the cache when it was standing on end, and if I ever needed it again, it was there.

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1) E.H. Kreps. Woodcraft (Columbus: A.R. Harding, 1978), 47-50.

2) 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.