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Persecuting Predators: Wolves in Montana through the Eyes of Evelyn Cameron

Polowanie na myśliwego: Wilki w Montanie z perspektywy Evelyn Cameron

Abstrakt

Montana w 1907 roku była miejscem, gdzie hodowcy bydła toczyli wojnę przeciw wilkom, a myśliwi opowiadali historie o wilkach wyjętych spod prawa. W tym samym roku pewna mieszkanka pogranicza zdecydowała wychować i oswoić dwa wilcze szczenięta. W czasach, gdy dominowały uprzedzenia wobec drapieżników, Evelyn Cameron próbowała odnaleźć się w świecie zarówno mężczyzn, jak i wilków. Relacje z tych starań zachowały się w pamiętnikach, listach oraz na fotografiach pozostawionych przez Cameron. Artykuł jest próbą prześledzenia historii prześladowań wilka w Montanie w latach 1880–1930, widzianej oczami Evelyn Cameron, oraz ukazania zmiany w postrzeganiu tego gatunku poprzez historię dwóch wilczych szczeniąt imieniem Tussa i Weecharpee.

Słowa kluczowe: wilk, Montana, Evelyn Cameron, fotografia, pogranicze

Охота на хищников: волки в Монтане с точки зрения Эвелин Кэмерон

Абстракт

В 1907 году Монтана была штатом, в котором скотоводы вели войну против волков, а охотники рассказывали истории о волках, нападающих на домашний скот. В том же году одна жительница пограничной зоны решила вырастить и приручить двух волчат. Во времена, когда господствовали предубеждения против хищников, Эвелин Кэмерон пыталась найти себя как в мире мужчин, так и волков. Результаты можно найти в мемуарах, письмах и фотографиях Кэмерон. Статья представляет собой попытку проследить историю преследования волков в Монтане в 1880–1930-е гг. глазами Кэмерон и показать изменения в восприятии этого вида животных на примере истории двух волчат по кличке Тусса и Вичарпи.

Ключевые слова: волк, Монтана, Эвелин Кэмерон, фотография, пограничная зона

Introduction

“By nature a cunning strategist, cruel and brutal following the death of his mate in a trap a few years ago; the big wolf became still more devilish murderous, a killer and an outlaw,”¹ states a newspaper article about Montana’s famous Ghost Wolf, written by Elva Wineman, who chronicled his life for the papers. He was killed in 1930 in Judith Basin County, and believed to be, at the time, the last wolf in Montana.² He was not truly the last, but he was the last known wolf, with a name and story of his own. Wolves were classified as common throughout Montana in the 1800s. What happened to that abundant wolf population in just over a century?

Wolf Wars

Prior to the European settlement in the seventeenth century, North America was a land that belonged to the wolf. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 wolves roamed Montana in 1800. The Lewis and Clark expedition,³ while crossing the state in 1805 and 1806, came across wolves frequently. Fur trappers were not far behind the explorers in coming to this fecund land. Back then, the market relied upon the beaver, but around 1850 the trade shifted its focus to buffalo, deer, and wolf. In just three years, between 1850 and 1853, the American Fur Company shipped over 3,000 wolf pelts from Fort Benton. Later, in the 1860s, the annual number oscillated between 5,000 and 10,000.⁴

As the skin trade developed, Montana’s land—abounding in wolves up to 1885—attracted men who would later become the first wolfers. When the great buffalo herds were being decimated and their bodies strewn across the prairie, wolves that fed on them thrived and their numbers rose. Buffalo hunters killed these large herbivores either for sport or for the animals’ hide and tongue, leaving the rest of the body to rot. Such an abundance of food lured in predators. Soon, they became less wary around the hunters. It was the 1870s when the hunters reported:

¹ Elva Wineman, *Famous White Wolf Lived an Almost Unbelievable Career*, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p15018coll36/id/11295/>.

² Dave Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales: Fourteen Historical Narratives* (Montana: Two Dot, 2011), 84–86.

³ The first exploratory expedition of the American West, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark from May 1804 to September 1806.

⁴ Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales*, 73–76.

[We] have never seen grey wolves so numerous as now. When we are skinning and cutting up the buffalo they form a circle around us and wait impatiently until we load the meat into the Red River carts. Then as we move away, they rush in to fight over the offal.⁵

This, in turn, made killing the wolves easier. Wolfers baited each buffalo carcass they produced with strychnine, and just one such site could poison dozens of wolves. “It was common thing,” Oscar Brackett stated, “to poison 40 or 50 at one bate.”⁶ Wolf pelts could fetch a nice round sum of \$2,000 to \$3,000 in just a few months, if one killed enough wolves; in those years, each pelt was paid about \$2.50.⁷

Even so, the wolves held on until the coming of the railroads in the 1860s and 1870s. With the railroads came cattle. Stockmen turned their herds loose on the Montanan landscape, unfenced and unprotected. A number of animals would die due to weather conditions while a fraction would fall prey to predators. With the buffalo herds virtually gone, and the domestic beef being readily available, wolves did the only thing that made sense: they switched to livestock. While cattlemen could not control the weather, they could control the wilderness around them. Local bounty systems were set up, and ranchers hired wolfers to deal with the problem. In Montana, a bounty for wolves was passed in 1883,⁸ and it promised \$1 per wolf. It was first repealed just four years later, due to the staggering amount of wolves being turned in for bounty—so many, in fact, that the state could not pay for them. The stockmen, however, would not give up. In 1891, the bounty was reinstated, and the price for a dead wolf doubled to \$2. A decade later, in 1901, the bounty on pups was increased to \$5—the same amount as on adult wolves—resulting in the entire litters being killed in their dens. The state paid \$10 on adult wolves in 1905, but the number of wolves was already low, and the kill tallies reflected the drastic decline in population numbers. Finally, the bounty reached \$15 in 1911.⁹ To round up these sums, additional bounties were often offered, and the pelts sold for profit.¹⁰ In forty years since the system was initiated, the State

⁵ Stanley Paul Young and Edward Alphonso Goldman, *The Wolves of North America: Their History, Life Habits, Economic Status, and Control* (Washington: The American Wildlife Institute, 1944), 216.

⁶ Oscar H. Brackett, reminiscences, 0B4–0B5, MHS, quoted in: Michael D. Wise: *Producing Predators* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 44.

⁷ Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales*, 76.

⁸ Peter Steinhart, *The Company of Wolves* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 36–37.

⁹ John D. Varley, Wayne G. Brewster, Sarah E. Broadbent, and Renee Evanoff, eds., *Wolves for Yellowstone? A Report to the United States Congress*. Vol. 4, *Research and Analysis* (Billings: National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park, 1992), 73.

¹⁰ Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales*, 79–80.

of Montana paid a bounty on over 111,000 wolves.¹¹ In 1933, the wolf was no more and the bounty was repealed.¹²

When the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Biological Survey took over the predator control in 1915, professional hunters and trappers were hired to deal with the wolves.¹³ Moreover, between 1905 and 1916, a law in Montana called for veterinarians to capture wolves, infect them with mange, and turn them loose to infect other wolves, making them eradicate themselves, bit by bit. The ones captured by cowboys were not any more fortunate, as the men roped them between their horses, and rode in opposite directions until the wolves were torn apart. Some had their muzzles wired shut and were then turned loose to starve to death. Still others were doused in gasoline and set on fire.¹⁴ It is hard to imagine that any other animal could elicit such hatred.

Wolfers & Outlaws

Having received such ruthless treatment, the wolves that remained were wary animals that learned to avoid poison and traps. The longer they avoided capture or death, the more their fame grew, along with the hunters' frustration. "Individual wolves grew legendary," wrote Peter Steinhart, "and before the war years were over, wolfers were selling tales of mythical wolves to popular magazines."¹⁵ These stories were heavily anthropomorphized, but, above all, they painted the picture of the wolf as evil incarnate, an indiscriminate bloodthirsty killer. The hunter was, invariably, the hero conquering the wild and slaying the beast. It was more than that, however. It was not man against the wild anymore; it was man against the wolf. Snowdrift, Ghost Wolf, Custer Wolf or Three Toes, each was regarded as an individual. It was personal now.

Three Toes, for example, was described thus: "Happy, care-free, led by the spirits of the wild," the she-wolf and her dog mate, a collie, "played in open sunny places, and then on dark nights trotted through the dusk, slaughtering and gorging in a bacchanalian orgy of blood feast." Her mate, the dog, was "lured away by the mother of killers." After he was poisoned, "there was new hate, new viciousness, new striking back at man in the attacks [she] launched at the cattle on the ranches." When the hunt for the wolf came to a close, the

¹¹ Wise, *Producing Predators*, 33.

¹² Barry H. Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Scribner, 1990), 183.

¹³ Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales*, 81.

¹⁴ Steinhart, *The Company of Wolves*, 37.

¹⁵ Steinhart, *The Company of Wolves*, 38.

trapper saw “keen wolf teeth, bloodthirsty, ready to snap the veins in the throat of man.” Then, as any other wolf, she was killed mercilessly.¹⁶

Another renegade, the Ghost Wolf, was a white animal that was commonly believed to be the last wolf in Montana:

Aviators want to seek him out with a plane. Men with dogs want to try their skill. A band of Indians has asked permission to come and look for him. A novelist wanted to put him into his newest novel.¹⁷

With a bounty of \$400 on his head, the Ghost Wolf could not hope to escape death for long. Or so it seemed. In fact, the hunt for the wolf went on for fifteen years. Finally, on May 8, 1930, Al E. Close has accomplished what others could not: he killed the legendary white wolf, reportedly eighteen years old at the time:

And do you know, I almost didn't shoot. It was the hardest thing I think I ever did. There was a perfect shot, the grandest old devil. [...] I thought swiftly that these were the hills over which he had hunted. I knew that it was the cruel nature of the wilderness—the fight for the survival of the fittest—that made him into the ferocious hunter that he was. I thought of all the men who had hunted him, of how his fame had gone out all over the country, and I almost didn't shoot. Swiftly these things passed through my mind as I stood there with my rifle aimed, finger on the trigger. Then luckily I came to my senses in time and let the bullet fly fairly into the face of the old criminal.¹⁸

The story was always the same: the hunter pursued his wolf relentlessly, but when he finally caught him, he expressed deep, heartfelt regret for the intelligent creature. And then, he pulled the trigger anyway. The Ghost Wolf is now on display in Stanford, a snarling tourist attraction.

He is often confused with Snowdrift—a similarly white wolf that roamed Montanan landscapes in the 1920s. The descriptions of his outlawry were no less colorful:

If Snowdrift [...] had lived in the Black Forest of Germany a few hundred years ago, it would have gone down in legend as one of the most famous wolves of that section, with supernatural powers. During the past years, this wolf is credited with having killed cattle worth more than \$30,000.¹⁹

¹⁶ Stanley Paul Young, *The Last of the Loners* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 87–100.

¹⁷ Elva Wineman, “White Wolf of Montana is Master Strategist,” *Denver Post*, March 16, 1930.

¹⁸ Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales*, 85–86.

¹⁹ “Famous Wolf of Highwoods Dead,” *Independent-Observer* (Conrad, Montana), June 7, 1923, 3.

His mate, Lady Snowdrift, was killed in her den soon after her pups were taken by ranchers. Two of the pups became famous: Lady Silver and Trixie, who were trained to become Hollywood stars and were then immortalized in movies.²⁰

Evelyn Cameron's Frontier

Just as Elva Wineman wrote articles about the last wolf in Montana for *The Denver Post* and *Great Falls Tribune*, so did a certain frontierswoman immortalize a pair of wolves in her diaries and photographs. Evelyn Cameron, born Evelyn J. Flower in 1868 in England, lived her early years in privilege. She turned her back on this life in 1889, when she left to marry Ewen Cameron, fourteen years her senior who offered no financial security. Their honeymoon trip led them to Montana, to hunt big game. They were not the only settlers from Great Britain to whom the eastern Montana's unbounded land beckoned. Ewen saw it as an opportunity to start a business of raising and selling polo ponies. When they did not fare well on their first ranch, they moved to another, near a railroad town, and named it the Eve Ranch. Evelyn trained the horses herself, and did not shy away from other jobs the ranch demanded, traditionally from men—be it roping and branding cattle or breaking wild horses. Still, the business proved unsuccessful, prompting Cameron to resort to other ways to make a living. She sold vegetables from her garden and took in boarders, one of whom would introduce her to photography. Evelyn purchased her first camera in 1894, and began to study photography in her free time. Usually, as the ranch made her busy from dawn to dusk, she studied and worked on her negatives during the night.

Nineteenth century was not a prime time for photographers on the frontier, and women photographers especially were something of a novelty. But this did not deter Evelyn. To keep up with the bills, she shifted to photography, charging \$3 for a dozen photographs, or 25 cents for each. Her photographic endeavors focused on cowboys, shepherds, homesteaders and wolfers. But she was equally fascinated by the Western landscape and its wilderness. She showed a special interest in all things tame and wild: on her ranch, she kept horses, antelope, hawks, partridges, bears, dogs, cats, coyotes and, perhaps most peculiar of all, wolves.²¹

²⁰ Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales*, 83.

²¹ Judy Alter, *Extraordinary Women of the American West* (New York: Children's Press 1989), 129–132.

The Last Stand of the Wolves

It was a cold and cloudy day in September, 1893. The sun shone little, and rain disturbed the peaceful afternoon briefly. Her brother, Alec, was away, Ewen out in the pasture with the horses. Evelyn stood alone, watching two big wolves, one nearly white. She would not see any more signs of wolves until November 10, when she inspected an antelope Ewen had shot two days earlier. The carcass lay under the hill, no more than a backbone and legs left. She thought that wolves must have torn into the flesh, and told her husband so on her way back. The animals skulked by a spring during the night, their paws treading on soft mud. The next day was cloudless but cold, the wolf tracks now frozen. Evelyn passed them, lots of them, and rode on through the badlands. The next evening, while outside, she could hear the wolves' "deep howl in [the] distance."²²

Upon coming to Montana, Evelyn described seeing "big wolves," some "almost white," many of them eluding capture. Such descriptions bring to mind the famous outlaw wolves. Back then, wolves were still common enough for one to make money from trapping them. Evelyn's brother would set the traps and engage in lively discussions with her husband about baits for the predators. Alec thought he could "make a fortune killing wolves."²³ Evelyn was familiar with the practices of running down wolves and roping them, and of poisoning wolf pups in their dens. She watched wolves being skinned and admired the pelts. She photographed wolfers with dead wolves across their saddles. The Camerons had hunted and trapped wolves themselves, and Evelyn described some of those hunts in her diaries. She enjoyed chatting with the wolfers, listening to wolf hunting stories and telling some of her own. And yet, Evelyn did not seem to harbor any hate toward the predators. Wolves were simply a part of the hardships of the ranching life.

On August 27, 1894, the Camerons were invited to witness young wolves being roped on a neighboring ranch. Four of them were already roped, the remaining six to be a part of the show. Ewen promised they would go. The smoke from prairie fires hung in the air when the Camerons left early the next day to join in on the hunt. One of the four roped wolves was already shot dead, but the party was still on the lookout for the mother wolf and her five remaining pups. They followed the tracks down the river, but did not find the wolves. Back

²² Evelyn J. Cameron, *1893 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 12 November 1893, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/956>.

²³ Evelyn J. Cameron, *1893 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 1 March 1893, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/824>.

at the ranch, all four pups roped the previous day were already skinned, their pelts hanging apart from their naked bodies.²⁴

In 1895, Evelyn noted: “All sheepmen get their dogs poisoned, the bounty of \$3.00 having made wolfers put poison everywhere.”²⁵ She was trying to sell a dog pup, knowing that people frequently lost their dogs in this war against the wolf. Evelyn described cattle, horses, and deer being shot specifically to bait them with poison. The Camerons’ wolver had his own dog poisoned on such a site intended for wolves. On October 22, 1898, Evelyn wrote that “Men came & chatted about wolves [...] An outfit on this side was given orders to kill every wolf sighted, or kill the horses in trying to do so. They have run down & killed 100 wolves so far!”²⁶ As the wolf eradication program was gaining momentum, a curious circumstance would lead Evelyn from hunting wolves to caring for them.

Pets or Pests?

It was April 10, 1907, and Evelyn noted how windy the day was, with little rain early on. After completing her usual chores, Evelyn went to the calf barn to help Ewen make perches for an eagle that had just been captured. Then, they went to their hired wolver, Richard Brown, to inquire about the bird. But he would not bring the eagle until the next day—for now, he was busy with wolf pups. He had just killed six of them, left one in the den to lure in their mother, and brought the two that were still alive back to his tent. They were a month old. Ewen bought them for \$10—the price of the bounty the state would pay on two dead pups—and the couple “took them home” and “put [them] in bunkroom in [a] box.” But they were restless. Evelyn “had to get up to the wolves in night” because “they got out of their box.”²⁷

It was bright and cloudy when the sun finally rose. Even though the pups had only one night to adapt to their new surroundings, Evelyn showed them to two men who came to visit the Camerons. Soon, the pups would attract even more attention. In fact, Evelyn proudly showed them to anyone who was

²⁴ Cameron, 1894 *Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 27 August 1894, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/1141>.

²⁵ Cameron, 1895 *Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 1 May 1895, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/1312>.

²⁶ Cameron, 1898 *Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 22 October 1898, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/2097>.

²⁷ Cameron, 1907 *Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 11 April 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3905>.

curious enough to come and see them. Having showcased them on their first day of forced captivity, Evelyn dutifully fed the wolves “bits of mutton [and] milk.”²⁸ Over the next days, Ewen provided fresh meat from his kills for the pups. It seemed as though the wolves were to become the new family pets. Evelyn named the female Tussa, after a captive wolf in Llewelyn Lloyd’s *Field Sports of the North of Europe*. Tussa’s brother became Weecharpee, which in Sioux means “starlight.”²⁹

Evelyn photographed Tussa and Weecharpee just a week after the purchase: “Got camera at 10:00, & took an exposure of ranch snow-clad landscape from [southeast], & one closer. [Ewen] snapped. I holding wolflings in foreground.”³⁰ Later that April, the Camerons would leave “for the south hills to take photos of the wee wolves. [Ewen] carried them.”³¹ Evelyn would bemoan the weather if it was not sunny enough to photograph them: “Out & tried to get a photo of wolves up on the hill. Too dull, & they so restless, didn’t expose.”³² Perhaps the pups, like children, were not the best objects to photograph, but Evelyn would not give up: “I took camera, [Ewen] the pups at 11:00 & we went to the south hill. They are very difficult to take with Volute, but I got 6 exposures. [Ewen] gets out of patience which still further complicates.” All six negatives turned out good.³³ What she was really looking forward to, however, was capturing the pups with local women. In late May, she “took 7 exposures of Jetta & wolves.”³⁴ The pups in her photographs are held firm but gentle; whereas the people holding them are posing, the wolves always try to get away.

Acquiring the pups seems to have piqued Cameron’s interest in wolves. On April 14, she went to see the wolfer, who promised to lead her to a wolf den for her to photograph. However, Brown had a job on another ranch that day, and so Evelyn went looking for the den alone: “I took Lionel’s camera and went to hill where Monty says wolf reared litter last summer.” After a few hours spent on searching and waiting out a storm, Evelyn turned back home: “Porcupine

²⁸ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 11 April 1907.

²⁹ Evelyn J. Cameron, letter to Betty, 1907, MC 226, box 1, folder 2, Evelyn J. Cameron and Ewen S. Cameron Papers, MHS, quoted in: Donna M. Lucey, “The Intimate Vision of Evelyn Cameron,” *Geo*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1983), 78.

³⁰ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 17 April 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3907>.

³¹ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 29 April 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3910>.

³² Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 9 May 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3913>.

³³ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 14 May 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3914>.

³⁴ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 19 May 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3916>.

[and] mountain rat dens [were] all I saw.”³⁵ She was, however, equally eager to photograph the wolfer at his work, mounted on his horse with a dead wolf swung across its flanks. She finally managed to photograph a wolf’s den a few weeks later.

In her diaries, Cameron described the daily joys and struggles concerning Tussa and Weecharpee. She was careful to always feed them—with meat, milk, porridge or rice—and would not let them out for long or at all if she thought it was too cold for them. By the end of April, she seemed quite enamored of the pups: “They are such sweeties & drink together without trying to get into their pan anymore.”³⁶ In a letter to her niece Betty, she wrote: “I would go in the evening to the creek and sometimes when I called they would plunge into the water and swim across to me so full of delight.”³⁷ By June, the wolves followed her around. “Weecharpee played with me. He is a very smart pup.”³⁸ In fact, the most vivid descriptions of the wolves come from Evelyn’s accounts of playing with them: “[Ewen] & I were playing with the pups when a buggy arrived with Daly, Mr & Mrs Roberts in it. Great time catching Tussa, who ran across the plough.”³⁹ An entry from the end of May is particularly endearing: “So funny to see black [...] kitten play with pups. She is boss, & they run from her.”⁴⁰ Soon, however, Evelyn began chaining the wolves.

While the days on the ranch usually consisted of chores and hard work, Evelyn feeding the wolves and cleaning after them, some events stood out. On July 27, Evelyn noted that Ewen “berated Weecharpee for chasing calves on other side of creek (perhaps playing?).”⁴¹ The wolves were already outgrowing their adorable puppy stage, and were fast becoming the wild creatures that the Camerons were so used to hunting. But it was not only the Camerons who participated in the wolf extermination in Montana. Just three days after the incident with Weecharpee, Evelyn reported: “[Ewen] [...] met a drummer who asked for a gun to shoot our wolves with.”⁴² While the Camerons themselves did not seem ridden with hatred toward the wolf as a species, they nevertheless

³⁵ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 14 April 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3906>.

³⁶ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 30 April 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3910>.

³⁷ Cameron, letter to Betty, quoted in: Lucey, “The Intimate Vision of Evelyn Cameron,” 78.

³⁸ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 19 June 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3924>.

³⁹ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 5 May 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3912>.

⁴⁰ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 30 May 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3918>.

⁴¹ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 27 July 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3934>.

⁴² Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 13 August 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3936>.

saw it as a pest. Evelyn often described horses and cattle being attacked and wounded by the predators. And yet, as weeks went by, it is easy to notice how she grew attached to Tussa and Weecharpee. On August 10, she wrote: “wolves 5 months old today.”⁴³ Although raised by human hands, the pups were still wild animals, and they were still wolves. They belonged to the non-human nation that was being hunted to near-extinction right in the Camerons’ backyard. Evelyn would partake in both worlds in the few months she shared with Tussa and Weecharpee. But their time together would not last.

On July 13, Ewen “wrote to Bostwick of Coney Island asking \$50, for wolves, FOB.”⁴⁴ By the end of August, they were gone. “I miss wolves,” Evelyn would later write.⁴⁵ Ewen sent the pups to an amusement park in Coney Island, as he thought that Evelyn would not be able to control them any longer.⁴⁶ The amusement park, Dreamland, was opened in 1904, and closed when it burned down in 1911. Tussa and Weecharpee most likely ended up in “Bostwick’s Animal Show” and perished in the fire along with sixty other animals:

They kept the lions, pumas, bears, wolves, leopards, hyena and antelopes on a steady parade around the oval. [...] It was 3:10 A.M. when the Dreamland Tower, which had been burning for thirty minutes like a candle above a fiery hell, came down in a spectacular fiery crash. Luckily the cables for the high-wire bicycle show on the seaward side stopped the tower from falling onto the nearby animal arena. However, the frightened animals there began to fight savagely as the arena itself began to burn. The keepers began to flee while Ferrari, in vain, ordered them back to shoot as many animals as possible to save them from a burning death. He too had to flee from the flames after firing just a few shots.⁴⁷

When the Camerons bought the pups, they initially intended to raise them as pets and train them. Evelyn wanted to make them pose for her photographs with women. Indeed, a piece of the wild subdued by a gentle touch on a young woman’s lap, captured on a photograph—the idea proved irresistible. “When two months old,” Ewen wrote about his wife’s attempts, “their innocent appearance constantly tempted lady visitors to try and caress them, but the ungracious reception accorded to these overtures soon repelled the most enthusiastic lover

⁴³ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 10 August 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3992>.

⁴⁴ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 13 July 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3931>.

⁴⁵ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 31 August 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3942>.

⁴⁶ Donna M. Lucey, “Evelyn Cameron: Pioneer Photographer and Diarist,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 42–55.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Stanton, *Coney Island – Dreamland Fire 1911*, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://www.westland.net/coneyisland/articles/dreamlandfire.htm>.

of animals.⁴⁸ Evelyn Cameron's photography focused on people and their daily lives, but also on the nature surrounding her, on landscapes she came to respect and love. Her wolves, as evidenced by the photographs, did not belong in her human world.

In the book that inspired Evelyn to name her wolf "Tussa," wolves are described as "destructive beasts of prey." There is also an account of two captive wolves, not unlike Cameron's own:

I reared up two young wolves until they were full grown. They were male and female. The latter became so tame that she played with me, and licked my hands, and I had her often with me in the sledge in winter. Once when I was absent, she got loose from the chain she was bound with, and was away three days. When I returned home, I went out on a hill and called, 'Where is my Tussa?' as she was named, when she immediately came home, and fondled with me like the most friendly dog. She could not bear other people; but the dog, on the contrary, was friendly with others, but not with me, from the moment when he once seized a hen, and I whipped him with a courier whip. As they were well-treated, they became very large, and had fine skins, when they were shot in the month of January.⁴⁹

On August 21, Evelyn described a very similar event with Tussa:

Found Tussa's collar had come unbuckled this morning early, & she had lighted out for hills. We got in at 12:00. Had dinner. The barber came to say lady looking for us. Found Sophie Kempton had seen Tussa near her house. We rode out there & found her in brush at the back of Coil's house. So pleased to see us. Led her back to barn.⁵⁰

And similar experience still with Weecharpee, dated June 20:

Wolves tore flour sacks open in the pantry. Chewed leather handle off slop pail, & picket rope, letting Toad loose. [...] I played & petted pups by creek. Tussa tore my hair down. Put up sticks & was hoeing when E came to tell me the flour incident. I held Weecharpee & thrashed with whip. He messed over kitchen floor in consequence. Cleaned that up.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ewen Cameron, "The Wolf in Montana," unpublished manuscript, MC 226, box 6, folder 15, Evelyn J. Cameron and Ewen S. Cameron Papers, MHS, 9–11, quoted in: Wise, *Producing Predators*, 135.

⁴⁹ Llewelyn Lloyd, *Field Sports of the North of Europe* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1885), 302.

⁵⁰ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 21 August 1907, November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3939>.

⁵¹ Cameron, *1907 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 20 June 1907, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/3925>.

Just as with the wolves in Lloyd's book, Evelyn's pups became a commodity and eventually were sold to an amusement park to continue their caged existence. Usually, when wolves are raised as pets, they become too much of a responsibility for the owners as they mature, and then they are killed, turned loose, sold or abandoned.⁵²

Narratives of Absence

Evelyn Cameron did not mention going on any more wolf hunts after her brief experience with Tussa and Weecharpee. It was most likely because the wolves in Montana were scarce by then, but perhaps she did not want to kill wolves anymore after she had personally raised two of them. In the photographs, Evelyn looks delighted to be close to the wolves, and it is clear that she derived the pleasure from interacting with them on a daily basis. Cameron found her connection to the wilderness through the wolves and the other captive animals she held on the ranch. The wolves, however, would not surrender to human ownership.

Between 1893 and 1900, Evelyn mentions a lot of wolves—she has seen them and hunted them. But, in a telltale manner, as Evelyn's diaries progress, mentions of wolves become less and less frequent: there are scarcely any after 1900 and until 1907, when the Camerons had bought the two wolf pups. There are only several mentions in 1909. In 1912 and 1915, it was just wolf tracks on the road and nothing else. Where wolves once were plentiful, now they are scarce or none. From 1916 to 1927 there is nothing still. In the last diary from 1928, she wrote that "a timber wolf was seen,"⁵³ making it perhaps one of the last loners, and the manner in which it was mentioned brings to mind an almost mystical aura surrounding the sighting; after all, wolves were all but gone by then. In the eyes of Evelyn Cameron, Tussa and Weecharpee truly were among the last of the wolves in Montana. She died in 1928, several months after the timber wolf sighting.

⁵² Steinhart, *The Company of Wolves*, 296–319.

⁵³ Cameron, *1928 Diary of Evelyn Cameron*. 4 March 1928, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/8481>.

The Comeback Wolves

Untold numbers of wolves were killed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Renee Askins noted that “[t]he first wave of wolf killing took place in the 1870s. Historical records indicate a take of 100,000 wolves a year between 1870 and 1877 in the state of Montana alone.”⁵⁴ According to Catherine Eshter-Felston, “[n]o one knows exactly how many wolves were killed [in the United States] between 1860 and 1900, but some sources estimate the number at one million. Other sources say two million.”⁵⁵ In 1973, The Endangered Species Act was passed and wolves, labeled as endangered, gained federal protection. They would not be back until the 1980s, when the first wolves trickled from Canadian wilderness into Montana, where they were shot immediately. Some managed to survive. It was not further still, until 1995, that wolves were officially back, when the Yellowstone wolf reintroduction took place. Even then, the story seemed to have come a full circle. In the same year, in Montana no less, Chad McKittrick shot one of the reintroduced wolves. However, Number Ten, as he was named, was not another anonymous wolf. He was a collared animal, with a story of his own, and his killing enraged the public.⁵⁶ For one famous wolf there are countless others, unnamed and unknown, who find their deaths on the other side of the barrel.

Wolves were delisted from The Endangered Species Act in 2008. Today, the season on Montana’s wolves is open. One site offering wolf hunting trips states boldly:

Montana wolf hunting is like no other adventure. There is nothing more symbolic of wilderness than wolves. And nothing more moving than hearing wolves howl. Since Montana opened the wolf hunt, we have been studying, tracking, and interacting with them and loving every minute of it. They are truly an awesome creature. Make no mistake, wolves are also the most difficult trophy to hunt in the lower 48 states. Knowing that keeps us sharp and wanting to learn more. This is a hunting adventure you’ll never forget! [...] If you’re here for a deer/elk hunt, we encourage you to buy a wolf tag over the counter. This way, if you run into a wolf while during your trophy whitetail hunt or while climbing the ridge looking for elk, you can take a shot.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Renee Askins, *Shadow Mountain: A Memoir of Wolves, a Woman, and the Wild* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 30.

⁵⁵ Catherine Feher-Elston, *Wolfsong: A Natural and Fabulous History of Wolves* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2004), 143.

⁵⁶ Thomas McNamee, *The Killing of Wolf Number Ten* (Westport: Prospecta Press, 2014).

⁵⁷ “Montana Wolf Hunting,” Linehan Outfitting Company, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://fishmontana.com/montana-hunting-trips/guided-wolf-hunts-montana>.

Although the state of Montana prohibits bounties, a set of proposed new bills started a heated debate. The bills “would allow reimbursements for costs related to trapping wolves” and “add a discounted wolf license to the resident sportsman combination license package,” all to boost elk numbers the hunters can then kill. Marc Cooke, the founder of Wolves of the Rockies, opposed the bill, arguing that there is more elk in Montana now than before the reintroduction: “These people just want to kill more wolves and they want to have a scapegoat to blame for not getting an elk.” A representative of Montana Audubon, Amy Seaman, said that “[i]t crosses an ethical line.” Paul Fielder, a member of Montana Trappers Association, on the other hand, calls it “a pest control service.”⁵⁸ Numbers for 2017–2018 hunting season total 17,212 licenses sold for \$380,261, with 254 wolves killed. In 2018–2019 season, over 300 wolves were killed. The wolf population in the state is estimated at about 800. Hunting and trapping is allowed with the only limit being that a minimum of 150 wolves remains in Montana.⁵⁹ It is all numbers, and although they may be shocking to some, they bear no real meaning. It is only when we hear or read the stories of individual animals that we feel empathy for them. Among the seven hundred thousand killed in just seven years, it is the Ghost Wolf and Snowdrift, the named outlaw wolves, the last of their kind, that live on and grab our attention, that tell the story of their unnamed and forgotten kin. Among the millions, it is Tussa and Weecharpee’s story that makes us care. These stories would not have been told were it not for the ones who wrote them down or passed them on. Evelyn Cameron’s diaries and photographs are but a glimpse into the changing landscape and the evolving relationship between settlers and nature. Perhaps it is time to look back into the individual wolf stories that mark the turns in animal-human history. It is those narratives, after all, that create and change the landscapes, both imaginary and real, and affect our understanding and relationship with nature. Decades of such stories have shaped the American public. What followed was an awareness, and a newfound recognition of the wolf’s rightful place in the landscape. If its disappearance marked the end of an era, its comeback opened a new chapter in the saga of the American West: one in which animals are allowed to live alongside man. But the country is still divided when it comes to its predators. Although wolves have a great many people on their side—considerably more than they had a century ago—the hunting practices continue. Wolves are being killed both legally and illegally, to protect livestock, for a trophy or out of spite. Sometimes, the voiced opposition of those who wish to see the wolves protected is loud enough to be heard. Small battles for the wolf are being won and lost, but they are fought largely by the general public, whose comments and votes decide the fate of the wolf. Not all of them

⁵⁸ Rob Chaney, *Montana Wolf Payout Bill Called Unethical*, accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2019/feb/11/montana-wolf-payout-bill-called-unethical/>.

⁵⁹ Chaney, *Montana Wolf Payout Bill Called Unethical*.

live in the wolf country, nor did they all see a wolf in the wild; their sympathies for the wild canids often come not from experiencing them in nature, but from the media, the books and the television. This, of course, extends the reach of the wolf issue beyond the United States. As with the Yellowstone reintroduction, the whole world is watching. While the scientists, conservationists, ranchers and hunters continue to go back and forth in the wolf debate, the wolves live and die as they have in the last century—except now, they have an audience, and it is their lives, not deaths, that are celebrated.

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