

Basic Detail Report



Steel

Trap Used to Snare Last Grizzly Bear of Orange County

Date

c. 1901

Primary Maker

S. Newhouse - Oneida Community, N.Y.

Medium

Description

This steel trap tells the story of Old Moccasin John, also known as Little Black Bear (and far more confusingly neither male nor a black bear), the last grizzly bear of Orange County. Before Europeans came to Orange County, grizzlies tended to live at relatively low elevations in the Santa Ana Mountains. It was not until the 1860s that increased settlement in the area pushed the bears deeper and higher into the foothills. Their numbers dwindled to the point that they were assigned individual names. Accounts referencing bears read like feuding families, with bears obnoxiously disrupting some regional agriculture, being accused of killing a lot of livestock when in truth they only rarely ate any meat other than carrion, and severely, impressively even, disrupting honey production. Jim Smith of Holy Jim Canyon fame ran, in addition to other things, a sizable apiary in the canyon of his namesake. Old Moccasin John met a lure that she could not ignore, and one fateful day destroyed 30 hives for the delicious honey they held. It was a crime for which she would be sentenced to death. This bear trap was set for her on a path that she had previously been spotted on. The trap, often described as a mountain lion trap, is in fact an Oneida Newhouse no. 5 Community Bear Trap. It is estimated that by 1900 two-thirds of the global production of bear traps was dominated by Oneida. The no. 5 is a relatively early model that was produced between 1865 and 1888. This particular trap was owned by Andrew Joplin, the son of J. C. Joplin who for thirty years was the County Treasurer of Orange County. The younger Joplin was a rancher and hunter. On the morning of February 26, 1908, Joplin and his posse returned to check the trap and found the whole contraption missing with an obvious trail left in its stead. They stole after Orange County's last grizzly, their party led by dogs who had at this point picked up the bear's scent. Old Moccasin John had made it five miles dragging the heavy steel trap with her the entire way. Bloodied and exhausted, she still fought off the dogs when they tracked her down. However, the dogs bought time for her armed hunters to encircle her, making a retreat impossible. She took two bullets before a shot from Game Warden Ed Adkinson finally ended her struggle. Joplin sent Old Moccasin John's pelt and skull to Washington, D.C., where they eventually made their way to the Smithsonian's natural history collection.

Dimensions

with chain: 34 1/2 × 24 1/4 × 7 3/8 in. (87.6 × 61.6 × 18.7 cm)

