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Always The Adventurer...? The Unforgettable Turtle Hunt

By Sissy Overstreet

Boy, was I excited when my friend and co-worker asked me if I'd like to go turtle hunting with him! He is always looking for news ideas, for articles and pictures - ADVENTURES, for crying out loud. How could I pass this trip up? He described the smooth backwaters of the Coosa River and the pat, pat, pat of the mud under your feet as you tracked the turtles. Then he showed me a fascinating (but primitive looking) tool of sorts that you use to search the mud for turtles.

Well, that was it. I was sold. I just had to go out in the sunshine and enjoys the wonders of nature. So I donned a pair of combat fatigues, (after all, I was going into a sort of combat), borrowed hip boots (my friend said their being a bit large was no big deal), kissed my family goodbye and approached this adventure with a high sense of excitement to say the least.

Now, let's just say for the record that I have a hint of impatience and a temper kindled a bit more easily than most. My Southern upbringing with three brothers taught me no limits as a girl and how to brawl with the best of the boys.

Full of confidence, we set out. Equipped with camera, turtle digging tool, and a beautiful, cool, winter day I was ready. The water was low and glistened in the sunlight as we approached the river. I had no doubts that this would be a memory of a life-time. My more seasoned friend was excited about the expansive mud flats, the depth of the water, when the turtles are more likely to be out sunning or buried just under the mud as they happened to be on this day. Once again, his enthusiasm served to encourage me. This river was full of turtles, and tracks were everywhere - finding one was a sure thing.

Standing on the side of the pier, I watched him run with ease across the seemingly endless mud flats which were of great interest to me now. He said he was searching for a good set of tracks to film and would come back for me. Effortlessly he flowed across that vast expanse of peanut butter-like mud unaware of me watching in awe. Even when out of sight I could hear the slight pat, pat, pat of his boots as he raced across the mud. I patiently waited knowing that at last the time would arrive when he would come and take me to THE PLACE... the place where we would seek, hunt and ultimately find THE turtle.

Finally, it was my turn and whole heartedly I stepped off into the creamy smooth "field" of mud not knowing what really lay in store. We skimmed the sides of the bank, close to the trees with a bit of ease. It already seemed pretty taxing for me, but ever the trooper I didn't say a word, YET. Faster he went and I struggled to keep up in boots that were sliding deeper into the mud a lot more than I bargained for.

Then there was the bounty, the loot, the tracks. We were onto a catch. I followed him further into the mud away from the safety of the bank as he patted along and to my surprise found myself not patting but slowing down and actually sinking deeper into the mud. Every once in a while he would turn to see how I was coming along. I'd smile and pull my leg out (though you might imagine...my patience was quickly wearing thin).

So, out of ignorance sprang a move born of desperation. After all I was moving slow and not getting anywhere; I'd just take larger steps. I



only wish my first had been my last. I plunged thigh deep into the murky watery mud that no longer looked like creamy peanut butter and certainly didn't smell like it. Screaming like a brat I demanded that my friend help me and do it quickly. He tried very hard not to laugh at his novice apprentice, but fear of my temper and desperation to help me overcame his inclination to flee as he cautiously attempted to dig my leg out.



Plunging up to his armpits in the mud he finally managed to grab my foot, or at least the part of the boot which long since had ceased to hold my foot. Stubbornly I pulled at the top of the boots and attempted to help him as he pushed and pulled to free me. Just at the very moment he was about to tell me not to do it again, I took an even bigger step and somehow managed to cross my legs at a very wide stance and was fanny deep now (remember I was only wearing hip boots) with nasty river water filling my boots up fast. I screamed; he dug. We would get one leg out only for me to plunge yet deeper into the muck.

Absolutely infuriated at my total dependence on someone lack of control I yelled louder with anger. He laughed; I yelled. Finally the inevitable, the unthinkable, the not possible he had assured me, came to pass as I fell straight backwards into the mud and was stuck there. Afraid I=d clobber him if he got close enough and would kill him if I ever did get out and he hadn=t helped me, he bravely came to my

rescue once again.

Before I could make it back to the bank, a mere 12 feet or so we repeated this scenario more times than I care to remember. Exhausted, frustrated, and mad as could be that there was a guy thing I had failed at miserably, I finally made it onto the bank.

Sad and not amused I sat lonely on the side of the bank pulling my sore feet from the grimy mud and water-filled boots. Slowly giving in to the fact that it would be some time before I reached civilization again I stretched out to rest.

Suddenly, he called out to me, I gave ear. He beckoned; reluctantly I followed. I got to the place I heard him calling me from and low and behold I watched as he took the long metal tool, followed the tracks from bank to water/mud, and at just the right moment slowly and precisely stuck that long metal rod into the mud...first a couple of inches, then about half a foot until he struck the back of the turtle lightly.

Quick as lightning he turned the over to the hooked end and caught the turtle just under the shell, then flipped him up and to the top of the mire moving swiftly to keep out of the turtle's angry snaps at being awakened from his midmorning nap. Taking the rod and holding it parallel to the turtle's mouth left me with no question as to how we would haul our 42 pound bounty to the shore. The turtle snapped onto the rod with that hooked mouth and refused to let go...even after we put him in the back of the pick-up truck.

As we drove away I had to admit that my frustration was quickly diminished by the catch of the day. In fact, I felt quite proud as I turned often to look at this huge creature that lay so staunchly in the back of that truck. He was not unlike I had been only hours earlier and I was amused to watch his anger at being disturbed.

Heading home though, a sense of pride began to well up in me, Paleo Woman In Training, as I thought of my adventure. Never mind the mud, the stench, the dried clumps of mud in my hair...not ONE of my brothers had EVER caught a turtle. And though I had sworn as I lay on my back in that watery muck I'd never ever go turtle hunting again, I secretly smiled within, knowing that I, like the turtle, was hooked.



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