

Eskimo Hunter, Wolverine, Wolves Story Reprinted

UNITED STATES SENATE
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D. C. 20510
March 14, 1968

Mr. Howard Rock
Editor
Tundra Times
P.O. Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska

Dear Howard:

Just the other day I was talking with some people about the wolverine. And in order to give them a better education concerning this wonderful animal, I turned to my files to excerpt the Congressional Record for August 16, 1965 in which there was reprinted the story you wrote about the Eskimo hunter, the wolves and the wolverine on July 29. I read it over again and I think it is one of the best stories I have read in all my life and that means a good many stories. Even before this was printed I had come to the conclusion that we ought not to exterminate the wolverine in Alaska or anywhere else, and we ought to remove the bounty on this great animal, and therefore it was all the more discouraging to read just the other day that one house of the legislature had failed by a tie vote to wipe out this bounty. As I recall, it was Senator Lowell Thomas' bill which sought to do this. He has been talking a lot of good sense down at Juneau this year about so-called predators.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,
E. L. Bartlett

cc: Senator Lowell Thomas

WOLVERINE STANDS ITS GROUND

Mr. BARTLETT, Mr. President, we have all heard of the wolverine, known as one of the fiercest creatures inhabiting the northern latitudes. We have heard of his great strength despite his small size, his courage and we have heard, too, that many men consider him a predator who should be wiped off the face of the earth. Some men do not feel that way; they feel that the wolverine, limited in numbers, fighting a losing battle against human encroachment on his territory, is a marvelous creature that should not be shot at sight, should be left alone in most instances so that he can reproduce his kind and so that there always will be wolverines instead of merely books about a vanished animal.

However all of that may be, we do not hear too much about the wolverine. Even more seldom do we read about it. Now we can, for Howard Rock, editor and publisher of the Tundra Times published at Fairbanks, Alaska, has in the Times for July 26 written a thrilling account of how a wolverine stood his ground against four wolves. Speaking for myself, this is one of the best wildlife stories I have ever read and I ask unanimous consent to make it a part of my remarks now so that others may have the pleasure of reading Howard Rock's story:

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

(From the Fairbanks (Alaska) Tundra Times, July 26, 1965)

ARCTIC SURVIVAL: WOLVERINE KILLS CARIBOU, DEFENDS IT AGAINST PACK OF FOUR WOLVES

(By HOWARD ROCK)

Uyatoma walked up a low ridge. He had been hunting caribou about five miles from his family's camp at the fishing grounds at Kukpak River. The camp was some 35 river miles up from the village of Tikiqag (Point Hope).

As he was about to reach the crest, he noticed a movement that surprised him from the corner of his eye to the left. He looked quickly to see what it was. What he saw made the hair on the nape of his neck stand on end and a shiver trickled down his spine causing goosebumps to appear on his body.

He ducked quickly to make sure he was not seen. He looked around to find a place where he could conceal himself. He saw a rock formation to his right. He backtracked, keeping himself as low as possible by ducking his body.

He took an arrow and carefully placed it on his bow for instant use if he had to. He made a curving turn and approached the rock formation from below making sure to be very quiet. He tiptoed to it. He was pleased that the rock was craggy and it would make a perfect place to hide.

He also felt fortunate the wind was blowing from the east, the direction he was going when he came upon the scene. It was a stiff wind and it had muffled the sounds of his footsteps.

He edged himself to the rock and looked through an aperture. It was a perfect vantage point from which to watch the drama that was about to unfold slightly below him and not 30 yards away. There was even a place for him to sit comfortably without exposing himself.

RISES EARLY

Uyatoma had risen early that morning to go hunting. His wife Amasuk had complained the night before that she was tired of eating ptarmigan and squirrel meat that had been their diet for many days.

"Uyatoma, we have been eating ptarmigan and squirrel meat for a long time now and it would be good to have some caribou meat for a change. We also need the skins for parkas for the coming winter," Amasuk had said.

When the hunter started, he went in the westerly direction across valleys and hills. The wind had already been blowing from the east. He hoped that he might be able to head off some caribou heading east against the wind which that animal always seemed to do from whichever direction the wind might blow.

He saw a few of them a long distance to the northeast. They were heading east from the direction of Cape Lisburne to the north. He looked to the west but there was no caribou to be seen in that direction.

Ptarmigan was plentiful along the way and Uyatoma flushed many of them. He didn't want to load himself down while traveling away from his camp. He would get a few on the way back.

FORBIDDING CLOUDS

Uyatoma walked on. The velocity of the east wind increased and the clouds swelled into huge dark masses ahead of him.

"If the wind shifts to the south, it will rain," he thought.

He thought of turning back but a low ridge ahead intrigued him.

"I might see some caribou resting beyond it," he said aloud. "Amasuk was right. It would be good to have some caribou meat for a change."

The hunter was not optimistic about getting a caribou that day. He made up his mind that he would turn back after looking over the country beyond the low rise if he didn't see any animals.

He walked up the incline. The footing was good and hard. It was a rocky surface with a covering of moss. Since it was the middle of August, there were some moss flowers in bloom. The velocity of the wind increased as he neared the crest and he leaned against it.

WOLVES AND THEIR PREY

Uyatoma became alert as the country became visible beyond the ridge. He noticed a movement to his left which stopped him cold. The animal moved but a little but it was enough for him to notice. It was a wolf.

He made a momentary glance in the direction the wolf was looking. He saw three more. In the center of

them was a wolverine circling around what appeared to be a dead caribou.

Uyatoma ducked and stealthily backtracked. The animals didn't appear to notice him. He made a half circle away from them and silently tip-toed to the rock formation to the right of him. He drew an arrow and adjusted it to his bow for instant use.

As he set himself on a ledge of the rock, the hunter looked through a crevice. From this perfect vantage point he nervously settled to watch the impending battle—a deadly drama was about to unfold!

As he watched, a series of chills ran down his spine. The scene seemed deadlier than he realized. It was strangely silent—an ugly scene. The wolves slinked in what seemed to be carefully gauged movements. They were edging closer and closer to the wolverine.

Each of the wolves bared its fangs from time to time without sound. They seemed to be perfectly coordinated to the deadly task they were about to undertake. They kept baring their fangs, heads lowered—their ears pinned down against the back of their skulls. For all the hunter could tell, the wolves were evenly spaced and of equal distance to the perimeter of ground circled by the wolverine.

THE PREY

The wolverine kept circling the caribou carcass in ambling motions characteristic of its pudgy, short-legged body. His head moved from side to side in swift vigilance of the deadly enemies around him. He kept his wicked fangs bared much of the time. He looked pitifully small against the large gray wolves.

As he watched, Uyatoma concluded that the fate of the wolverine was a foregone conclusion. It was just a matter of time. How could a small animal like him ever hope to pit its small body, although powerful to be sure, against the great bulk of the savage wolves?

The hunter was amazed at the show of courage of the small animal. He was not about to cower away leaving the caribou he had claimed for himself. He had apparently killed it himself because of the apparent savagery of the attack. The throat of the caribou had all but been torn away.

THE TIGHTENING CIRCLE

Spellbound and with tingling expectancy, Uyatoma watched the ever-tightening circle of wolves around the hapless and courageous wolverine. It seemed to him that it was a maneuver designed to unnerve the doughty little animal.

The maneuver was deadly, calculated—that showed a latent and lethal ferocity. Uyatoma felt a pang of pity for the wolverine. Should he intervene? He decided against it. The animals were working themselves into a pitch of fury and if he revealed himself, there was a good chance that they would turn on him.

The wolverine no longer circled around the dead caribou. He settled on the side where the dead animal's legs lay sprawled. Each of the wolves were now about fifteen feet from the object of their prey. They began to emit low, threatening growls, not all at once but by staggered turns. This forced the wolverine to turn its body in different directions in quick succession.

Still the wolves edged forward shrinking the deadly ring. Suddenly, one of them, apparently the leader, snarled wickedly, baring its fangs. The others followed, again in staggered turns. The wolverine sprang around swiftly with hissing growls—fangs bared.

The series of snarls increased. The wolves were apparently trying to confuse their prey that was beginning to spin around to his left and right by turns. He was expecting attack from any quarter any moment.

THE DEADLY SCENE

Uyatoma watched in dreadful fascination. The scene below him was a deadly one where each animal would ask no quarter nor would it expect any. At least one of them would be dead. The hunter no longer doubted in his mind that one of the dead would be the wolverine.

"Amasuk makoa tuqtuqneagil munna qaveoraq!" ("These wolves will surely kill the little wolverine!") Uyatoma thought.

The snarls of the wolves continued. They began to make fainting moves toward the wolverine. Uyatoma was amazed at the little animal. He seemed to be aware of each faint. He showed

great agility and he seemed ready to meet each one. What if the wolves attacked all at once in a mass of collective fury? What chance has he got?

THE ATTACK

Even as he wondered, one of the wolves attacked a split second before the others! The wolverine met it in a surprising and unorthodox manner. The little animal ducked and appeared to go under the wolf. At that instant, there was a sickening, grinding snap of bone! In a lightning-fast counter, the wolverine had gone for the left hind leg of the attacker and closed his powerful jaws on the thigh and bone.

The victim yowled with pain and twisted violently in the air and fell down hard on the front quarters of one of the attacking wolves, confusing it. The wounded wolf's leg hung loosely—grotesquely—blood squirting from it in a series of jets.

The little brown and cream haired animal took advantage instantly and snapped its jaws on the small of the back of the momentarily confused animal and twisted its grip wickedly. The vicious attack apparently did a great damage because the wolf tried to flee all but dragging its hind quarters.

The two remaining wolves made a savage attack on the wolverine, momentarily knocking him off balance. The little animal regained his footing while one wolf gripped him on the neck. The other one went for his flanks.

The powerful little carnivore, apparently worrying about his flanks, made a quick twisting motion. An instant later, his heavily muscled right foreleg whipped and caught the wolf at his flanks on the shoulder with his sharp nails and paw. An exposed flesh suddenly appeared as the skin flapped down from the wound.

The injured wolf backed away limping but the one at his neck held on tenaciously—wickedly! The wolverine was in trouble. He made a series of quick motions and suddenly, there was a terrible crunch of bones. The little animal had caught his remaining attacker by the knee of its right foot and crushed it with his powerful jaws.

The wolf let out a howling scream as it released its hold on the wolverine. This is what the latter wanted. He turned aggressor in an instant and snapped his powerful jaws on the neck of his enemy partly from under and side.

THE ENRAGED WOLVERINE

Working for a leverage, the enraged wolverine braced himself and made a pulling and twisting motion. The body of the huge wolf whipped partly in the air. Its neck snapped and it fell dead—its head in a gruesome and unnatural position.

THE CARNAGE

The little animal had emerged victorious against what seemed impossible odds. He looked around and then made a circle surveying the carnage and the evidence of it he had created. The terrible death-dealing leak remained in his eyes. He bared his fangs from time to time as he emitted half hissing growls. There was froth at the corners of his mouth.

Except for his murderous eyes and wicked fangs, the wolverine looked anything but a lethal killer to Uyatoma. He ambled along clumsily as if he didn't possess any agility and strength. It was all there along with one of the most powerful jaws possessed by any animal.

The wolverine was apparently trying to locate the trail left by the wolf that had left the scene of the fray dragging its hind quarters. He seemed to have picked up the scent and proceeded to trail it.

"AYIYAA!" shouted Uyatoma. "Little wolverine, you have done quite enough. I will kill that wolf for you!"

As he shouted, the hunter revealed himself above the rock formation. The animal saw him instantly and bristled, baring his fangs. Man was another sort of an enemy and the wolverine instinctively withdrew and ambled away.

Uyatoma walked around the rock and began to pursue the wounded wolf. When he came upon it, he shot an arrow through its heart. He didn't bother to go after the one with a severed artery on its hind leg. It had gone over a low rise and disappeared.

"If he hasn't bled to death by now, he will in a short time," Uyatoma voiced his thought.

The one with the shoulder wound

had run away with a bad limp and it was nowhere to be seen.

HEALTHY CARIBOU

Uyatoma went back to the dead caribou and the wolf. He was surprised that it was a yearling bull and a healthy one except for a recent injury to the right eye. It had been torn into uselessness. It had probably suffered an unexpected accident and fell behind a hard when the wolves apparently took pursuit.

The wolverine might have been in a lucky position and beaten the wolves to the attack. Uyatoma concluded that it had attacked the caribou from the blind side and this unexpected incident had created the deadly drama which the hunter witnessed in spellbound fascination.

The man skinned the caribou and cut out choice pieces of meat and wrapped them in the skin.

The wolverine had taken a position at a distance just beyond effective arrow range from the man. Uyatoma could have shot the animal if he wished because it had been within perfect range.

He didn't however, because he had come to admire the little animal's invincible courage under what seemed to be the most deadly and impossible odds. The wolverine was licking its wounds and watching Uyatoma as he worked around the carcass.

The hunter cut out a piece of caribou meat and walked part way toward the animal.

"Uvah, qaveoraq, tutumik neqoraqin!" ("Here, little wolverine, eat a piece of caribou meat!") he shouted. He threw the morsel toward the fierce little carnivore. As the hunter returned to the carcass, the animal edged toward the piece of meat and ate it.

THE WINDFALL

As he finished skinning the dead wolf, Uyatoma turned to the wolverine and shouted, "Little wolverine, now you can have all the caribou meat you want!"

He skinned the wolf he had shot through the heart and then followed the bloody trail of the third one. He found it about a quarter of a mile where it had bled to death.

As he skinned it, Uyatoma observed, "These were young grown wolves and they were reckless. The one that got away will never forget the terrible lesson he learned today."

As he started home with the load of caribou meat and skin and three wolf pelts, Uyatoma chuckled:

"Amasuk will never believe me when I tell her how I got these animals."

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