

OUT ON THE RANGE

Crazy Mountain Critters

The cast of animals that surround my family's Montana ranch.

Words and paintings by Ivanie Grosfield Finsvik.

These days, it's a short stroll for a wolf to meander from Yellowstone back to Sweet Grass County. A note in the centennial history of my family ranch that's located there makes mention of a wolf encounter my grandfather A.M. Grosfield had in the 1920s:

"Wolves are a problem near the mountains on the ranch. A.M. almost taken by them when he checks on a sick calf and three wolves in a pack move in and surround him. He grabs a fence post for protection and slowly backs to his nervous horse and they get away."

In 1895, Big Timber, the county seat, was the largest producer of wool in the United States, shipping more than five million pounds a year. Since the successful wolf-recovery program in Yellowstone National Park, it's not uncommon to open the *Big Timber Pioneer* to see a photo of a Pyrenees dog bloodied by his fight with a wolf while protecting a flock of sheep or to read of other livestock attacks.

This region also has its share of other predators: black bears, mountain lions, and in the Crazy Mountains that hover above the ranch, wolverines. Well, there are a few varmints too: badgers, woodchucks, skunks and the like. Moose, elk, deer and wild turkeys are also at home in the "Crazies."

I never lacked for "models" while I lived there, and I accumulated a vast library of resource photos for future paintings. It was a fabulous place for a wildlife artist to make her home. ■

Pastel artist Ivanie Grosfield Finsvik is now living in Santa Barbara, Calif. Check www.ivaniefinsvik.com.



"Catch of the Day"

If only wolf diets consisted exclusively of fish instead of livestock, what a benefit for ranchers (though fishermen might object)! As a wildlife artist, I paint lots of predators. My paintings of wolves are the only ones I think twice about showing to my rancher friends.



"Come Bye"

Come Bye is the traditional command for moving sheep in a clockwise direction. It's a true privilege to be around these hard workers. Our border collie, Boots, was always an eager and faithful partner.

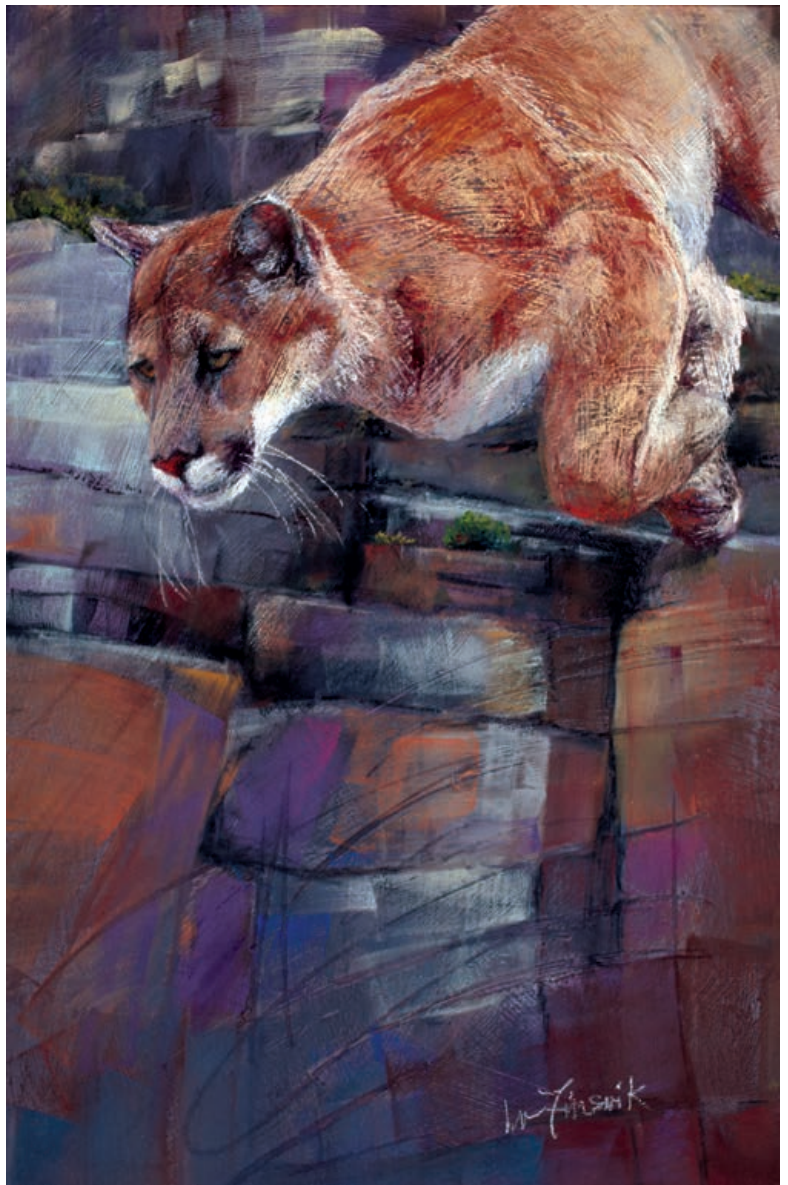


"Here Comes Trouble"

Badgers are cranky individuals that move like a graceful wave through the grass. They are built for power digging. The burrows they make to sleep in or to find prey for their next meal create hazards for horses and their riders. However, to their credit, they are also an important predator of rattlesnakes!

"High Dive"

Rather than focusing my attention only on my feet as I followed the path along Big Timber Creek, I learned to scan the trees overhead for a mountain lion. Experiences taught me they frequent the treetops, a vantage point from which they await dinner in the form of a deer coming in for a sip of water or...perhaps...a walker.



"How Much Wood?"

The woodchuck is also known as a groundhog or whistle pig. As I passed by this young sentry, he indeed whistled his alarm to his compatriots. The title of the painting comes from the tongue-twister, "How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?"