

I adopted a German Short Hair, "Grace" from the pound 6 years ago. This past Christmas, I adopted Grace a partner, "Dooley" who is a mixed up spaniel/English setter and some other stuff. What a great dog! It was Dooley's first run off the leash since moving in with us. I have been going to this trail area south of Butte for years because it is such a "safe pretty place" to exercise the dogs and me. On this trip, there was not enough snow to ski so we took off hiking. On the hike back, we took my usual way of cutting through the trees back down to the creek. Half way down, I noticed a rabbit hanging from a wire between two trees. The dogs caught the scent quick and moved in. They know the command "stay" but the traps were set on each side about three feet from the rabbit. I couldn't see the traps at the time because they were covered with dirt and branches. Grace triggered the first trap but it missed her. Dooley moved in a step and "snap"!! It caught her paw. I have never heard a sound come from a dog like this howling scream. It almost sounded human. I was panicked. Dooley wouldn't let me near his paw. I took a couple hard bites to my hand and had to back off. Grace came over and seemed to calm Dooley enough for me to pry the trap open. Once released, he ran from us but finally agreed to get in the jeep. He wouldn't let me get near his paw for a week. We have some serious trust issues now. His paw seems to be OK now.

I called the Game Warden and took him out to show him the traps. I had no idea trapping was legal in a recreational area. Someone had taken one of the traps and left a nasty note threatening the trapper. I rather enjoyed the note and agreed with it's sentiment. The game warden advised me that it was illegal to touch the traps let alone....steal them. He explained to me that the traps were tagged and the guy was legal. He went on to explain that even if I come upon a trap with an animal suffering, I could not disturb the trap or release the animal. I asked him if I could shoot the poor suffering animal. He replied with a strong "No." He went on to tell me that the trappers are supposed to check their traps every 48 hours. They have no way of verifying that these checks happen.

The game warden called me later that day and informed me that the trapper was a guy who currently works for game and fish. Can ya believe it?? I had this picture in my mind of toothless shot-gun carrying hillbilly!! But who do we have but a state game and fish employee paid by the taxpayers trapping where families hike and recreate year round.

What a twisted world!!

The trail is located about 15 miles south of Butte. You take I-15 south to the Feeley exit. Take a right at the bridge and follow the dirt road west about a mile and a half. Turn right into the Rocky Ridge Trail parking area. At the beginning of the trail there is a small bridge over the stream. The traps were set to the west of the bridge and trail. The guy had at least 4 traps set a month ago. A **Mercy trap**, according to the warden, is designed to hold the leg, not necessarily break it.

Footloose Montana member, Butte
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