

# THE KARKHAGNE

ED WOODS

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Woods, forester for Pioneer Forests Inc. and a well respected member of the Salem, Missouri community, is without doubt one of only a few living experts on the Karkhagne. It is said that the only way a Karkhagne can be seen by man is through the bottom of an empty "Old Forester" bottle. Perhaps Ed has seen a few. At any rate, a lot of time and thought has been given to the subject as can be readily read in the following.*

OF ALL THE WILD CREATURES that inhabit this globe, perhaps none has so cleverly and thoroughly escaped public notice as the Karkhagne. Karkhagnes have been with us for a long time as has been demonstrated by the early writings of the first trappers, traders and mountain men. The old time lumberjacks undoubtedly knew of the Karkhagne and had they been able to write, there would have been some exciting experiences handed down for posterity.

That the animal is shy is beyond question. There are rumors that when surprised in some embarrassing positions he will attack without hesitation. However, due to the fact that he wins all arguments and consumes the evidence on the spot, he leaves little opportunity for the details to become known.

So far as can be determined no historian or egg-headed researcher has made a project of assembling all of the little-known facts that have trickled down to us through the years in tales told by lumberjacks, trappers, cow punchers, prospectors, Indians and a very few of the more adventurous foresters who occasionally inhabit the remote back country.

That these facts are fragmentary is well understood when one realizes that few of these persons can read or write. The little we know of this fabulous beast has come down to us by word of mouth, usually told guardedly around campfires or in some secluded corner of a dark saloon. There is a legend that the Crees and the Blackfeet knew a lot about the Karkhagne but will tell it only to a full blood brother during the dark of the moon and then only after four hours in a steam and smoke filled sweat lodge, which is a darn poor place to write. This may account for the smokey flavor of what is written here.

The name of the Karkhagne crops up in the songs and stories of the French Canuck rivermen and Courier-de-bois along with such heroes as Paul Bunyan and Joe Muffraw. It may well have been the Karkhagne who spelled the doom of Paul Bunyan and his logging enterprise by his habit of eating section corners. It has been rumored that it was this lack of section corners with which to limit his cutting that caused Paul to finally give up in disgust and to retire to some back woods haunt to await the next re-survey by the General Land Office. Some say that he still runs a camp six weeks walk below Quebec where the weather is three shirts cold, up where the Little Gimlet emptys into the Big Auger. But others are equally loud in their claim that the camp is on the Stinking Fork of the Big Nasty. It is a known fact that the last time the Blue Ox was seen was



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during the Winter of the Blue Snow when Paul carelessly left him tied to the North Pole while he stepped inside Eskimo Ike's Alcoholic Igloo for a mug of his favorite "Whiskey Blanc." The next morning no sign of the Blue Ox was to be found except some blue blood stains in the snow which was packed with Karkhagne tracks. The Blue Ox must have put up a desperate fight as this is the only known instance of the Karkhagne leaving any tracks. It is known that ordinarily the Karkhagne travels backwards and continually brushes out his tracks with his stiff bristly whiskers which somewhat resemble those of an otter. It is claimed by some that this is because he doesn't give a darn where he's going but just want's to see where he's been. It is well established that the young Karkhagnes are born at least 40 miles from land or water and without hair, brains or teeth. The adults when pursued by some other carnivorous beast are known to completely engulf themselves within the recesses of their own hip pocket and chuckle defiance at their pursuers.

(Excerpts from the book *Karkhagne Country* to be written when I have nothing better to do.)

*"The Old Reliable"*

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