



Above: Katie, Coda and Abbie pulling a fire pit. Ken Tingo is driving Abbie on the right, and Jim Boyle is on the far side driving the team.



Jim Boyle with his mules, Katie and Coda

ICE TRAVEL

By Jim Boyle

I am a mason contractor in Hayward, Wisconsin, and I was commissioned to build two BBQ - fire pits for two picnic islands. Due to an early freeze; I ended up building them in my shop with plans of taking them out onto the islands with a skidster. When I finished building them and was ready to move them to the islands, we had an unseasonably warm February thaw, so the ice became very unsafe to haul these 4,500-pound fire pits with a skidster to the islands.

This is a shallow lake with many underwater springs. Due to the weather conditions we (Jim Boyle, Ken Tingo, and Ben Bauer), were going to pull them out to the islands with snowmobiles. All the snow melted except for a small amount of crusty snow in the bay, so the lake was just a sheet of glare ice, making it impossible

to use snowmobiles.

On Thursday morning, February 17th, Ken called me in wanting to know if I was still thinking of putting those BBQ pits out on the islands, and said that all the snow melted on the lakes and there was two inches of standing water. I told him we were going to go to plan M (mules). He said, "You got to be kidding!"

I said, "No, we are going to use mules, come on over Thursday night and we are going to go out and bore some holes and check the ice to make sure there is enough ice to float those mules and BBQ pits." I built a steel skid plate for the BBQ pits to ride on so we could drag them out to the islands. We were going to have to hand winch them into place.

So, late Thursday afternoon, we drilled test holes to both islands, and there was a

minimum of twenty-four inches of ice, which was plenty for a team of mules and the fire pits.

On Friday, I sharp shod all three of my mules (Coda, Katie and Abbie). I have had Coda and Katie since they were two years old, and I trained them to drive. We use them for pack mules on wilderness camping trips and we use them for saddle mules as well. I picked up Abbie as a five year old, and trained her to drive last winter; I also used her on riding trips last summer in the Big Horn Mountains and the Black Hills. Abbie was only driven single up until Saturday when she was put on a three-up hitch with Coda and Katie. Due to the icy, crusty snow in the bay we had to use a three-up hitch to pull the BBQ pits to the glare ice because two mules couldn't get enough traction in the crusty

snow to pull those 4,500-pound pits.

Once we were on the glare ice, we used Coda and Katie as a team, to skid the BBQ pits to the picnic islands. The lake was very noisy as the sunlight shining on the lake was causing the ice to crack, groan and moan. If anyone has ever been on the lake in the wintertime you will know what kind of sounds I am talking about. The steel plate skid that I built made an awful amount of noise on the ice as well! Ken told me that it was unbelievable how much trust my mules had in me to walk out onto glare ice on a lake that was making that much noise. I was driving them with open headstalls and rope-nosed hack-amores.

When the skid would come to the little bumps in the ice, it would just shave it right off. Due to the weight of the BBQ pits, I kept it behind the mules with a fifteen-foot chain, just to spread our weight out. I usually don't pull things that far behind a team, and I have never done anything like this before with this team of mules. This was the first time they had ever been on a lake. This is a real testament to mules; they were all business, and did an absolutely perfect job! I used skid horses for years, and never in my wildest dreams would I put a team of horses to work like this with absolutely no prior experience. Even Abbie did an excellent job for what little experience she had of driving, (two months worth of driving single) then to be able to put her in a three-



Approaching the island with one of the fire pits

up hitch in these kind of conditions.

Once we got the fire pits to the islands we had to hand winch them across the dirt onto the old fire pit pads that were already on the islands. This we did by driving picket stakes into the ice and using hand winches to winch them onto the pads. Being that they were on a steel plate, they pulled fairly easily. The first skid was approximately a quarter mile, with a three-up hitch, across the crusty ice and snow to the glare ice.

Then we used a team to pull it approx-

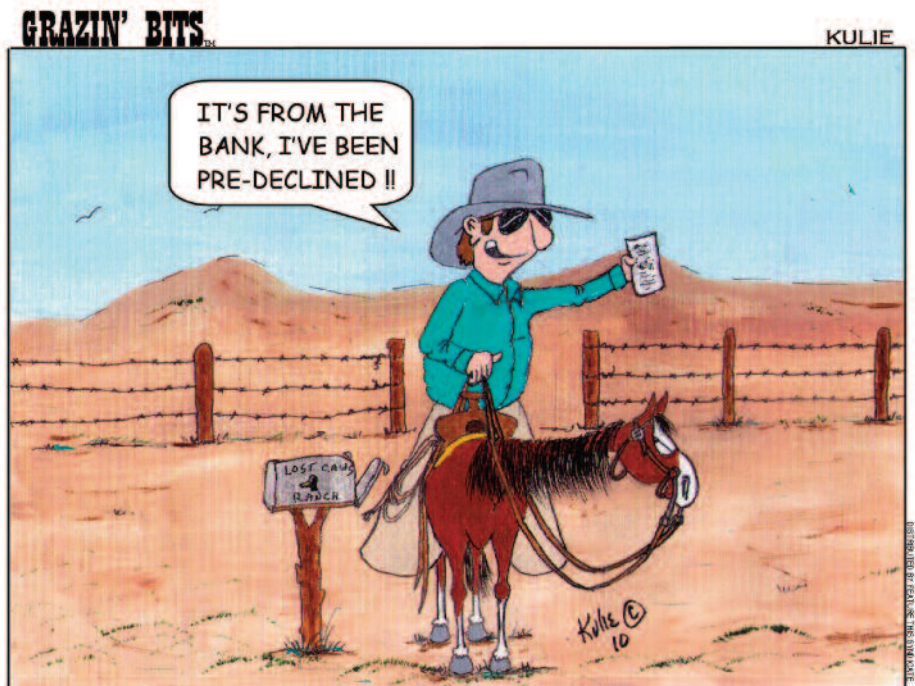
imately one mile to the island. On the second skid, we used a three-up hitch for about a quarter mile and then a team to pull it approximately a half a mile to the other picnic island. It took us most of the day. We started at 10:00 a.m. and we finished up around 3:30 p.m.

I use my mules all winter, driving them on skids and bobsleds, buggies and wagons in the spring, trail riding and packing all spring and summer and on hunting and camping trips in the fall.



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Above: Ken Tingo, Jim Boyle and Ben Bauer



Above, Ben Bauer and Jim Boyle hooking on to one of the fire pits.

Below: Heading across the ice with one of the fire pits

