

Mountain Lions in Nevada

Early history indicates that there were very few, if any, mountain lions in the Great Basin at the time of early exploration and settlement. Research by employees of the Nevada Department of Wildlife found only one early reference, wherein the Territorial Enterprise (Virginia City) on June 27, 1867, reported that a "catamount" was killed in the Six Mile Canyon area. The writer stated that "This is the first animal of its kind we have ever heard of in this region" Apparently, there were no lions seen again anywhere in Nevada until sometime in the early 1920's. (See, *Division of Wildlife Comprehensive Mountain Lion Management Plan, 1995*)

Perhaps one of the greatest testimonies in this regard was that which is revealed in the book *Beltran: Basque Sheepman of the American West*. Beltran Paris came to the United States in 1912. Soon after he went to work for the Williams sheep outfit which summered in the Gold Creek and Bruneau areas of northern Elko County and wintered near Frenchman and Gabbs, Nevada. After working for Williams for several years, Beltran went into the sheep business for himself in Butte Valley. Beltran's brother Arnaud also worked for Williams for a number of years, but later went to work for Baker Ranch, and then the Adams and McGill outfit. This meant that both Arnaud and Beltran had spent a good many years in the outdoors, covering vast areas throughout Nevada, yet, neither Beltran nor Arnaud had seen or heard of a lion until the early 1920's

Beltron wrote: "My brother Arnaud was the first to find out about the lions. He was camp tending for Adams and McGill and one morning when they were trailing their sheep south to the desert his herder came and told him eight of his big ewes were dead.

Arnaud thought maybe they ate something bad so he went over there. He saw right away an animal had killed them. Well, bobcats were worth a little money and he kept two number three traps in his camp. He set them around the dead sheep and then told the herder to move his bunch out of there. The next day Arnaud went back and he sure was surprised. There was a great big lion in his traps. He was pretty scared but the lion didn't do anything. They don't want to hurt their foot. Anyway, Arnaud shot that one and skinned it out. His boss was so happy he gave Arnaud a ten-dollar reward. That was the first lion any of us ever saw in this country."

Historical evidence indicates that the great deer herds of the 40's and 50's and 60's were a product of settlement and predator control - and that mountain lions in Nevada are a product of our deer herds.

Interestingly, according to the Division of Wildlife, *Comprehensive Mountain Lion Management Plan (1995)*, in 1994 a male lion that was radio-collared in Idaho moved 250 miles to central Nevada. Certainly, if mountain lions are capable of traveling so far -if there had been an abundance of deer in the Great Basin in the 1800's, there should have been large numbers of mountain lions in the Great Basin as well.