



Farm News - October

Black, cold, windy, lost. That was probably the farthest thing from her mind when she went out to start her project. "I'd like to move the bison from their old pasture to this new one. Could you check the fence line to make sure there are no trees down?" I had asked. Sounded simple enough and a good project for the new girl from Ireland who had a fondness for hiking.

At 7:30 it was just starting to get dark when I returned to the house. "Where's Frances?" She hadn't returned. I went to check the road she would be walking back on but she wasn't there. Odd. Then I went around the entire fence line calling her name. No one. Back at the house I phoned a neighbour who phoned another neighbour...

Soon there were a dozen of us looking through the black moonless night. "What could have happened?" was the question we all were asking. Bear? Cougar? Not likely since the cows in the area were relaxed and calm. Somewhere out there was Frances. There temperature was zero. The wind was blowing hard. We had searched for hours and were now very, very concerned.

911. Forty minutes later, three RCMP vehicles had arrived along with a search dog. Three hours later, nothing, just a plan for the next day. At 3:30 AM I went to bed, only to lay awake, wondering.

It was still dark when I started searching again. At what point should I call her folks? I have a daughter around the same age. The thought brought tears to my eyes. Frances!! Frances!! Frances!!!!

The rising sun brought back the searchers

but where to begin? Ninety percent of our farm is in it's natural, forested state and we are surrounded by wilderness. "Try driving down the roads again" I told two of her friends and off they went. A short time later they were returning, each with an arm out the window. As they drove closer I could see thumbs up and then a third passenger sitting between them. Frances!

Back at the house, wrapped in a down sleeping bag with a cup of tea. She told us her story. She did go walking down the fence line but had found another fence and decided to follow that one too not knowing it would go on for 12 miles. When darkness came she had found shelter in a building on a well site and wisely decided to stay. Knowing how she got there, she simply walked back in the morning.

"Good to see you Frances!" We kept saying that for days.

Darn coyotes. They snuck in and took away my last Bronze turkey along with two of his white companions. That turkey had been part of the farm for the past two and a half years. Joe the donkey was on guard but he patrolled only three sides of the fence. The coyotes found the other.

Not too often do farmers who raise livestock get a day off. When I try to think back to the last time I was able to take a break from the farm, I realize it was nineteen months ago. A Slow Food conference in Italy? A music festival in Iceland? Could it be possible? Jerry