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NOTES FROM ALL OVER



Devon, England

At Large

A GIANT BEAVER IS ON THE LOOSE
IN GREAT BRITAIN.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GRAHAM ROUMIEU

ONE WINTER MORNING, a hiker in the southwest of England following the peaceful River Tamar came upon a tree stump bearing huge toothmarks, as though someone with an adz had scooped the wood out of it. Farther along the path, he found a stand of trees with chunks of bark stripped away. "I thought it was a crazed lumberjack," the hiker, a local man, says. "It looked mechanical."

After some investigation, it was discovered that the "lumberjack" was a 95-pound male beaver, which is strange for two reasons. First, although the toothy

rodents were once hunted in England for their meat, soft undercoat and scent glands, they disappeared from the isles more than 400 years ago. Second, that's one big beaver.

So how did it end up here, on the Tamar? And how did it become the size of a St. Bernard?

Enter an environmentalist named Derek Gow, one of just a handful of licensed owners of European beaver in England. For years, Gow had kept three of them in a field enclosed by an electric fence, but as Dewsnap soon learned, after a rainstorm shorted out the fence in the fall of 2008, all three of them escaped. Within days Gow had caught two, but the third beaver—the behemoth—remained at large, so to speak.

The big beaver's escape created an overnight sensation throughout the hinterlands of Devon. Residents were worried that he was dangerous, that he'd lay waste to groves of trees.

Gow has tracked the beaver as he's traveled to the River Tavy, near Tavistock, 15 miles from his original base.

"He's tough, but he's harmless," says Gow. "Just doing what beavers do: living off wild herbs and grasses. I'll get him. Don't you worry about that." —ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG HALL