

At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends
by Dwight D. Eisenhower

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“My hero was a man named Bob Davis. He had long been a traveler, a fisherman, hunter, and guide. He was also a bachelor, a philosopher, and, to me, a great teacher. Bob, about six feet tall, a little stooped, quiet and gentle, was in his fifties when I knew him, roughly from age eight to sixteen. He never seemed to be annoyed when I went along on expeditions to the Smoky Hill River. . . .

He taught me how to use a flat boat, with one paddle—to keep the paddle on one side and feather. I learned how to set and anchor a net, with the opening downstream. He was full of questions, his favorite method of teaching. ‘In the woods, it’s raining. How do you find north?’ (The moss on the trees tends to be on the northern side. This won’t always work but if you look at enough moss and enough trees, it’s apt to give you direction.) ‘Bub, how do you catch a muskrat?’ (You go and look for his slides, then put your trap on a short chain so he’ll drown.) ‘Do you use bait?’ (No) ‘Meat?’ (No) ‘How do you catch a mink?’ (You look for a secluded place and put out a skinned muskrat with a stake through the body, near the trap, etc. etc.)

We spent weekends together on the river, with my mother’s blessing. One thing he taught me, without sanction, was the rudiments of poker.”