

HUNTING IN THE DEEP SNOW

Details of a Chase After Rocky Mountain Sheep and Goats.

LIVELY WINTER SPORT IN MONTANA

The Foolish Goat and the Wary Sheep - Value of Smokeless Powder Demonstrated - Comfort in a Severe Cold.

A midwinter hunt in the fastnesses of the Rocky mountains would probably not appeal to the general sportsman of the West. Yet, if one knows how to do it, such a trip can be as pleasantly and comfortably made, even if the thermometer does go to forty degrees below zero and the snow is six feet deep, writes a correspondent of the New York Sun from Kipp, Mont. That, at least, is the unanimous opinion of a party of us who made such a hunt last March. We also learned to believe that the hardships of the Klondikers have been overestimated; the cold and snow of that far-off region would have no terrors for us, at least.

Our party was made up of two enthusiastic sportsmen from Troy, N. Y., who came all the way out here in the winter hoping to kill a few goats and sheep. The three others were Jack, Joe and the writer, old and seasoned Montanians. When Mac and George stepped from the Pullman early one morning at Bear Creek side track on the Great Northern railway, we found ourselves waist deep in snow, one would have thought their arduous would cost us considerably. But it didn't; they helped us dig their trunks out of the snow bank into which the baggage man had cast them and take them into the section house. But the sight of two fashionably dressed men wandering about in the snow on the summit of the Rockies had a visible effect on the other passengers of the train, for they all laughed and cheered as they started on. The section house keeper kindly gave us the use of a room and in a little while the new arrivals had changed their fine clothes and white shirts for warm woolen suits and flannel shirts and were ready to strike out into the mountains. Jack, Joe and the writer had gone up several days before and already had camp made on a little stream seven miles north of Bear Creek, and well stored with provisions and bedding. So now we had only to carry out the sleeping bags and extra clothing of our friends.

The Start. We strapped on our snowshoes about 9 o'clock and started for the camp at a leisurely gait, for George had never worn such footwear before, but he took to them like a duck to water, without a fall or mishap. It was not a very cold day, the thermometer being about zero, and there was no wind in the narrow, timbered valley we were traveling through, but up on the mountains which towered above us we could see the snow drifting in blinding clouds. Three miles from Bear Creek we came to the head of the little draw we were following up, then descended a long, steep hill to the creek on which our camp was located four miles above. When we struck this creek there were some old signs of elk. They had made trails in the deep snow as they fed about on the willows and were undoubtedly not far off, but as they had already shed their antlers and would be useless as trophies we did not molest them. In due time we arrived in sight of camp, which was situated under some large pines at the edge of a small prairie. We had shoveled away the snow to put up the tent and had laid out our baggage on the ground, until one stood directly over it. It looked cold and cheerless enough outside, but inside it was quite different; our folding sheet-iron stove gave out a genial heat and kept us warm at all times. The stove had no hot-air flues, but a pipe led from the stove to a layer of stones on which it rested, slowly gave out the heat in the night which had been stored in them during the daytime, so that even on the coldest nights water did not freeze in the buckets. The back half of the tent was our couch; a soft and fragrant bed of balsam hay, two feet thick, had been laid down and on this were spread our blankets and sleeping bags. Although still early when we reached camp, it was blowing too hard on the mountains to think of hunting, so we put in the balance of the day loading around, eating, smoking and reading. We had not forgotten to pack along a lot of novels and periodicals and by the light of a generous supply of candles they helped to while away many a long evening. Our first night in camp was without event, but in the morning George complained that he had slept rather cold. On investigating the matter we found that instead of slipping into his sleeping bag he had merely crowded between it and the thin canvas cover.

Mountain Climbing. Immediately in front of our tent on the north side of the stream rose a very high mountain. It was impossible to climb it right there, for it rose up from the valley in a sheer wall five or six hundred feet high. Further up the valley, however, it was practicable to climb up a steep snowdrift and then work over the top of the cliff from which the mountain again arose in a series of more or less steep benches to its extreme height a mile away. The lower half of the mountain was dotted here and there with clumps of stunted pines, affording shelter and food for the goats we knew lived upon it. This was selected for our hunt that first morning, and we were fairly about by 7 o'clock. In some previous winter the snow had started from the summit of the mountain, and gathering force and volume as it went, had cleared a wide gash down the steep incline clear to the bottom of the valley; huge boulders, turf, brush and trees had been torn from the bottom and the snow piled in a mass at the bottom. We didn't feel quite as safe as we might as we climbed this slide, but hoped that the weather was too cold to allow the snow to lose its grip, and after a half hour's perspiring work we finally reached a point where we could leave it and work to the right among the pine groves and shelves of rock.

We had not gone more than 200 yards from the slide when we came upon the tracks of six goats, which had evidently passed along there that morning. Just then, too, the wind began to blow and in no time filled up and obliterated the tracks. We determined to go on, however, in the direction the tracks led, but soon had to give it up, as the wind increased in violence and almost blinded us with the snow whirled about. So we retraced our steps to the snowdrift, and, sitting down on our shoes, rapidly gilded down to the bottom and thence to camp. For the next three days it blew incessantly upon the mountains and we were forced to remain in camp. But that was no great hardship, although the hunters from Troy were thirsting for gore. The morning of the fourth day broke cold and clear; there wasn't a cloud in sight and the mountains almost blinded one with their coat of gleaming white. George and Jack determined again to climb the mountain in front of camp, and Mac and Joe were to take the next one beyond. The writer was to pass the day cooking beans and various other staple articles of food which required time and a hot fire. By some oversight our grocer had left out the baking powder and we were obliged to make yeast bread. Think of that, ye housewives, who nurse your yeast with every care! Think of making yeast in a snow bank and the thermometer thirty degrees below.

Sighting the Billy. About 2 o'clock the bread was baked and

glass of thirty-five diameters, and strapping on his snowshoes started out to look along the mountains for goats. Not far above camp a rocky point jutting into the valley afforded a good view of the three nearest mountains. Here he sat down and with a forked stick on which to rest his glass began to scan the nearest one. Almost at its summit a lone billygoat was discovered lying on a point which the wind had swept clear of snow. Below, and more to the right of him, were four more in a group, slowly picking their way along the hillside; these were two nannies and their kids. Still further down, about the center of the mountain, was another billy, a very large one. He was lying on a narrow shelf on which a few stunted pines, and would occasionally reach up and take a bite of the low-growing evergreens. After a careful search no more goats were to be seen on this mountain, nor were there any signs of Mac and Joe, who had started to climb it. Twenty minutes or so were then spent in looking over the next mountain, on which eight goats were seen, all old billys, and each one by himself. Then, on pointing the glass back at the first mountain the writer saw that the old billy lying under the pines was uneasy; he got up out of his bed and was alternately looking down the mountain and then craning his short, thick neck to stare at the rocks above. Below him the mountain was very steep and bare clear to the bottom of the valley, almost half a mile down. But further along a deep water-worn coulee was gashed into the side of it, and the man with the glass concluded that Mac and Joe were in this and trying to get within shot of the goat.

What a queer looking animal a goat is, and what queer ways he has! His body is much the shape of a buffalo, and like the buffalo his head is set right on his shoulders, there being no neck to speak of. The goat, too, has very long hair, which gives him the appearance of wearing fringed trousers and he has a long beard on the chin. But unlike the bison he has a long, narrow, silly, fish-faced head, his hair is snow white and his horns curve back like a scimitar and are slender, sharp and black as polished ebony. Naturalists tell us that they are not goats at all, but true antelopes. Be that as it may, they look like goats and we mountaineers will continue to call them so. Their silly-looking face does not belie them; they are silly. Perched on a narrow shelf a mile or so up in the air, or clinging to a rocky wall where no beast of prey can follow them, they imagine that they are safe, and from the pursuit of man. They cannot, like the big horn or the prairie antelope, learn that a rifle bullet bridges chasms and climbs through space. This billygoat whom the man with the glass was watching had seen Mac and Jim several times where the coulee they were following up was not deep enough to conceal them. He surely felt that he ought to get out there, else why did he occasionally turn and look up the mountain? But that particular shelf and group of pines formed too comfortable a place to leave and while he hesitated Mac's little thirty caliber rifle barked out its summons and all was over. No, not quite. For though his last breath and strength he tried to kick himself off the shelf, whence he would roll and bounce down into the bottom of the valley a mangled and shapeless mass. But the bullet had struck a vital spot and just as he reached the edge he died. Then Mac and Joe came carefully over to him from the coulee, pulled the holes in the hard snow for footholds and at last they reached him and grasping him by the hind legs drew him back to the level of the shelf.

Out of Reach. The next hunting day—the wind again kept us in camp for a time—all hands went up the valley past Hough's mountain to another one opposite the Rising Wolf, keeping well in the timber and out of sight of the hills. Nine large rams were finally sighted, feeding along the shell rock quite low down, but there seemed to be no possible way of approaching them undiscovered. The whole day was spent in watching them, in the hope that they would move on to some other place where we could get within range of them. Where they were the wind had swept the mountain side bare of snow and they seemed to have made up their minds to stay right there on the grass thus exposed. About 4 o'clock we were obliged to leave them and to reach camp before dark. That evening George declared that he would leave the hand of rams to Mac and hunt goats only; so for the next three days Mac and Joe went every morning after the rams and each night came back to camp with them. They saw the game each day and once Mac crept within 300 yards of them, but the wind was blowing so hard he decided not to risk a shot at that distance. On the fourth day, however, the rams were found higher up on the mountain and there was a chance to get close to them. He managed to slip a place nearly half a mile wide could first be crossed. This Mac succeeded in doing by lying down and snaking himself along through the snow, a few inches at a time, and it took nearly five hours to do it. After passing the open place he reached a little grove of pines and from there the sheep were only 200 yards distant. At the crack of his gun one of them fell and the others, after looking in vain for the point whence the shot came—he was shooting smokeless powder—rushed directly toward him and he fired three more of them as they came. Each one of them was an old and perfect specimen of its kind and the massive horns measured from fifteen to sixteen and one-half inches in diameter at the base.

It was a happy hour in camp that night, for George had also managed to slip a hand, killing two of the largest of them. It was no small task to get the heavy heads and meat of these magnificent animals into camp, but the job was finally accomplished and George, deciding to postpone his goat hunt, the ranchman came one day with his team and hauled us back to civilization. A recent letter from our friends, dated at Camp Black, says they are suffering from cold and insufficient bedding and that they wish I would join them with my camping outfit and teach the soldiers how to be comfortable.

Wary Game. It was nearly 6 o'clock when Mac and Joe, who were tired, and I, who was not, and Joe was, too. They brought in the skin and head of the goat and a little of the meat, but needless to say none of it was ever cooked. The flesh of an old billy, especially in winter—well, it isn't good. Half an hour after the first arrivals George and I, who were the largest, and I, who was the toughest disgusted. They had sighted seven different goats early in the morning and started after an old billy which was feeding about on a ledge almost at the top of the mountain. The other ones were nearer and easier to get at, but they wanted him, as the coulee was the largest, and I, who was the steepest and dangerous and in many places they had to dig holes in the hard snow to obtain footholds, where a single misstep would have been certain death on the rocks far below. The goat had often been in plain sight of them and they were obliged to stop at such times until he should disappear again at the back part of the ledge. It was thus very late when they at last got to the foot of the ledge, and, crawling up on it, George found himself within twenty feet of the animal. The goat was lying down under a spreading pine. He took a careful aim at the animal and when he pulled the trigger the hammer clicked on the firing pin and that was all. Then the goat got up and started to lope off and the hunter successively tried every cartridge in the magazine, but none of them would explode. After the goat was gone he examined the gun and found that the point of the firing pin was broken off. It was a new rifle fresh from the factory and was supposed to be perfect. How exasperating this was can be imagined by any hunter. Think of traveling 2500 miles to kill a goat and then, when within twenty feet of it, after a hard and dangerous climb, finding your rifle will not shoot! Words cannot do such a situation justice.

After dinner that evening it was decided to move camp to the other side of the range. We would return to Bear Creek then take the train to the foothills and pack in to Two Medicine Lake, where sheep were plenty and goats were also to be found. A firing pin for George's gun could be borrowed of the section house men and the hunt go on. We had planned to go to Two Medicine anyhow, for sheep, after first hunting goats at our present camp. It was hard work to pack everything out to the railroad at one trip, but we did it, Jack and Joe carrying about 150 pounds each, the writer 100 and Mac and George each seventy-five pounds. The train did not arrive until 2 o'clock in the morning and an hour and a half later we left at Elk sidetrack and crawled into our sleeping bags and slept until daylight by our baggage piled up on the right of way. We then went over to the house of a nearby rancher and got our breakfast and engaged him to take us to the lake with his team and sleigh. 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