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HUNTING *and* CAMPING IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS

By WM. C. BARTLETT

IN SIX PARTS—PART II

SPRINGING out of our snug nest, everyone set to and by the time I had breakfast ready Bill had the tent down and folded and everything in readiness to load, and the guide was back from watering the horses at the lake. Then, breakfast over, we hitched up and were soon jolting mer-

ily over the gopher hills, the trail to the ferry winding away ahead and a trail of tobacco smoke winding away behind.

Nothing of importance occurred during the first half of the day. Several times one or the other of us left the wagon to try for a mallard, hundreds of which were to be seen on every pond or lake which we passed. We could not get one, however, without killing him on the water, which was worse than not shooting him at all. The lakes were all fringed around the margin with a kind of compact, floating water-moss which covered its surface for a distance of twenty or thirty feet from the shore. The duck when shot, even if there was enough breeze to blow him ashore, would lodge on the outer edge of the moss and there remain, out of reach.

It was along toward 1 o'clock when we again saw signs of habitation. Rounding a curve in the trail, which had been following the north slope of a little valley, lush with tall swamp grass, we passed a modest, every-day, civilized looking hay stack and soon after topping the crest of a low hill came into view of a pretty little ranch house with substantial out-buildings clustering beyond. Green blinds shaded the windows, against which neat lace curtains showed in white relief, and everything betokened prosperity and comfort.

Mr. Deal, the proprietor, being a friend of our guide, the latter proposed that instead of getting our own lunch we stop with Mr. Deal, to this we agreed, with no after regrets: for Mrs. Deal was a superb

cook and prepared for us a dinner complete in every detail, including roast chicken.

Everything around the place was up-to-date. The kitchen was furnished with a large steel range, with all the essentials, and the remainder of the house in accordance, including a fine new piano,

which occupied a corner of the best room. And this, mind you, was forty-two miles from the railroad, and the nearest neighbor lived six miles away.

The Professor now came forward with some of his irrepressible comedy. Before leaving Vermillion he had visited the government land office there and procured several little maps of the country which we would pass through; each one representing a township, six miles square, with each of the thirty-six sections contained therein numbered for the convenience of settlers in locating home steads.

He now procured his maps, and addressing Mr. Deal, inquired what section, township and range the latter was located in. Upon Mr. Deal politely giving him the desired information, the Professor replied in an "I-am-sorry-for-you, tone of voice" that Mr. Deal was mistaken, that the section he had mentioned was located six miles away, on the north side of the river, and showed his map, made out by the agent at Vermillion, to prove it.

Of course the Professor was right, and, of course, without a doubt the agent could not have marked out the map incorrectly. No, never! The Professor was right, as he always was, and he was only doing Mr. Deal a kindness in telling him of

his mistake, of how he had been wasting his time and money, for the last two years, improving a plat of land not belonging to him, six miles away from his own ranch.

Mr. Deal, callous man that he was, did not seem concerned, and, when we last saw him, was winking along lustily behind a huge



"Dam'd if You Ever Saw a Pike," Said the Stranger.

W.C. BARTLETT

team of spotted oxen attached to a prairie breaker, which was rapidly converting the golden, grass covered land into a rich black bed for a first crop of spring wheat.

Shortly after our sumptuous dinner we were on the way again, winding in and out among the low hills, now heavily timbered as we approached the river. Presently coming out on the backbone of a sharp ridge, one side of which fell almost sheer to where a wild rock-bound stream came boiling, foam-crested, from the hills above, we got our first view of the Saskatchewan, and the yellow and purple hills beyond.

Driving on—after a sharp descent toward the river—the trail led out to where the bank fell suddenly to the water's edge, about fifty feet below. Pausing, we produced a couple of stout ropes, and rough-locked both rear wheels of the wagon; then fairly slid the outfit down the almost perpendicular descent and onto a huge flatboat, waiting to receive it.

The river end of the boat was now turned slightly up stream; by the use of a large pilot-wheel (amid ship) on the port gunwale, which was attached to an overhead cable with rolling carriage. A plank was dropped broadside to the stream on the upper side of the boat and the swift current forced us across.

The old half-breed who had charge of the ferry was at one time in the pay and power of the notorious Hudsons Bay Company, and had traveled the surrounding country for thousands of miles in quest of furs, while a veritable slave of this powerful concern.

He told us that he had seen the governing factor of a Hudsons Bay post shoot a comrade down because he failed to bring in the required amount of furs, and that the only pay they received for the terrible hardships and privations they were compelled to undergo was dried buffalo meat, a quart of flour per week, ammunition to kill, more fur, and perhaps a cheap Hudson Bay musket. In pay for the gun they were compelled to turn over to the company's factor enough beaver pelts, piled one on top of the other, to reach to the old muzzle loader's bayonet. This, he said, was only one of the many atrocious outrages perpetrated upon the simple, ignorant people who toiled in the employ of these self-styled "Gentlemen Traders", who constituted the Hudsons Bay Company.

The river, here, was about 200 yards wide and very swift; in fact, it is on account of the swift rush of the current that the stream received from the Cree tribe of Da-co-ta Indians, the name it bears, which means, "River of swift running water." The water was clear and the pebbly bottoms showed plainly at a depth of several feet. Once in a while the shadow of a darting gold-eye or pickerel, with which the river abounded, was seen swiftly zig-zagging through the cool depth as the boat slowly made way across the stream.

At last the bow grated on the gravel beach, the forward apron was lowered, and the horses, dancing with fear, were urged off and started on the sharp pull up the steep bank.

Everybody walked on behind the wagon, except the Professor, who had discovered a man fishing in the swift water above the landing and broke away through the bushes to interview him.

He was soon in a heated argument with the stranger as to what kind of fish it was the latter had caught and hitched to a stake in the edge of the water. The Professor said it was a pike, and he could prove it by the thousands like it he had caught in the Detroit River. The stranger declared vehemently that it was a gold-eye, and he damned if the Professor had ever seen a pike. And thus it was still going on when we drove out of sight over the crest of the bank, leaving the Professor to overtake us later, overheated from running, and wearing an agitated look.

The trail now turned to the northeast through a semi-flat country, with now and then a peculiar looking hill extending into a sharp ridge, springing from the surrounding plain. The ground was thickly strewn with round boulders, hardly any two alike in color, and all showing by their smooth and polished surface the action of the great ice avalanche which had brought them down from the distant North during the glacial period. Long, flat, marshy lakes occasionally sprang into view, and the dark, towering spruce forest—a sure sign of the moose country—was becoming more and more in evidence as we neared the long purple ridge of high land, which loomed up on the horizon away off to the northeast and marked the moose mountains, Long Lake, and the end of the trip.

No game had been sighted since crossing the river, with the exception of a brace of mallard, which got out of the reeds as we were fording Dog Rump Creek, and flew away with much excited quacking, as mallards are wont to do; and it began to look as it would be bacon for supper, until rounding a curve in the trail, a fine flock of grouse was seen running along the ground ahead of the horses and scuttling into the long grass to one side.

I sprang out of the wagon for a shot, when the Professor whipped out his rifle and began hanging away at one he had sighted, and the grouse taking offense flushed out of range and flew away out across the prairie and settled in the swamp grass and willow thickets bordering an extensive muskeg.

I paused, in disgust with the Professor, who kept on in pursuit, with the avowed intention of shooting the heads off of the whole flock. The grouse, however, refused to stand out in the open; but persisted in hiding in the tall grass, until they were about to be stepped on when one by one they would get out with a startling roar of wings and fly away cackling, leaving the mighty Professor with his murderous designs, to stand staring and wondering why he hadn't seen them before they flew. So, it was bacon for supper, after all.

Evening was now approaching and as we wished to get into camp before dark, we hurried on, and after losing the trail once or twice, caught the glimmer of water to the south, which proved to be southern half of Long Lake. After driving on a short distance we came out to where the dim trail disappeared over a steep descent, and there, far below, stretching away north farther than the eye could reach, looking like a polished mirror set deep down between and reflecting the forest clad hills, was Long Lake.

The wagon was again rough-locked, for the long steep descent, and we wound zig-zag down through the dense growth of poplar, willow and balm trees, which covered the slope, and overhanging the trail that was new and lately made, as was evidenced by the yet green trees and bushes that had been cut to make it, and were piled along the way.

Arriving at the bottom of the slope we found that the lake here narrowed to a small creek (easily fordable) which connected the lake above with the one now out of sight to the south and accounted for the trail at this point. After inspecting the place of crossing, which looked muskeggy, we decided to cross and select a camp on the opposite shore, where the ground was more open, and we would be more accessible to the promising looking game country to the north.

Crossing the creek we passed through a strip of heavy timber in which the stumps of the trees cut away to make the trail had been left so high that several times the ex of the wagon would not pass over and we were compelled to chop them away before continuing.

Signs of big game were now everywhere in evidence; where the animals had passed

to and from water, and it began to look as if we had made no mistake in our location of a game country.

Getting through the heavy timber at last we pulled up a short slope; then turning north, we drove a short distance and selecting a flat bench, overlooking the lake, we came to a halt on our future camp site. The wagon was then unloaded and the guide paid, upon which he immediately started back over the home trail. By the time the sun had disappeared behind the silent, wooded hills, across the lake, our tent was up and the appetizing odor of bacon and coffee pervaded the still evening air.

Darkness soon closes down and as its concealing mantle enveloped the wooded solitude, the wild things came forth and entered their protest against the unseemly invasion of their native haunts. A black fox squallied his cat calls from the poplar thicket on the bluff above, like a displeased gallery god expressing contempt for a bad play. A great timber wolf mouthed his bell-like notes as he surveyed the scene from a point of vantage on the forest clad hills across the lake. The wild duck chuckled and gossiped together as they flew unseen overhead, and now and then the stealthy crack of a dry twig told where an inquisitive lynx, or shy coyote, prowled in the adjoining wood for a closer view.

Thus, with the sounds of the untamed life of the wilderness sounding far and near, and lulled by the soft lap of tiny waves on the beach below, mingled with the whispered song of the south wind as it stooped to caress, then away again, we turned in on our bed of blankets and slept as only one can sleep who sees things as they should be, and is content.

A PHEASANT HUNT

One beautiful November morning, the warm sun shining brightly from a perfect sky, the robins and blue birds sending forth their melodious notes from the edge of the woods and the chipmunk scampering hither and thither, while the wood hammer knocked and hammered away on an old stub, the writer strolling placidly along enjoying these surroundings provided by mother nature, is at last awakened to the fact that he has started out to hunt pheasants by the glistening crystals of snow falling about him. The two pointers accompanying the hunter, were perhaps, more eager as they were about a mile in advance. Arriving at a field between two patches of woods, near which pheasant tracks were visible, the pointers had discovered this also and were cold trailing at a very rapid pace, in an instant both dogs came to a point, the hunter looking up into a haw tree spied a large cock pheasant and lifting the trusty Stevens to a pretty fair sight, bang! and the bird hit the ground. Both dogs retrieved nicely and were off again cold trailing at a pretty rapid gait. Another sudden stop in front of a large tree, lying on the ground, and two more fine pheasants make a lofty flight, again the Stevens is raised and likewise the two birds meet the fate of former. Tucked snugly away in the hunter's coat are three fine pheasants and with a self-satisfied smile, "the kind that won't come off" and one that is visible on the face of the lucky hunter, the writer turned his steps homeward in the highest state of bliss imaginable.

I love the wild, the charming wild,
The woods, fields and stream
I want to be a nature's child,
To wander in the wilds and dream
The city parks are great and fair;
The palaces are large and grand,
But with the wilds they can ne'er compare;
With gardens planted by nature's hand.
Johnny Crutcher.

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