

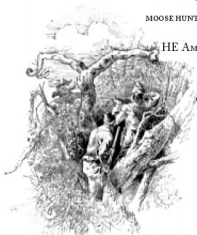
BIG GAME HUNTING IN THE WILD WEST,

BY BRIGADIER-GENERAL RANDOLPH B. MARCY,
U. S. A.

(Author of "Prairie Traveler," "Thirty Years' Army Life on the Border," "Border Reminiscences," etc.)

III.

MOOSE HUNTING EXPERIENCES.



THE AMERICAN MOOSE, OR MOOSE DEER (*Cervus Alces*, Linn.), with a name the origin of which has never been accounted for by naturalists, whose descriptions have come under my observation, although many of them have otherwise been sufficiently elaborate and correct.

I am of the opinion, however, that the appellation of "Moose" is derived from an aboriginal source, as this identical synonym still obtains among the Chippeways on the northern borders, where those animals are most abundant.

As is well known, the moose is the largest species of the entire deer genus, exceeding in proportions any other native ruminant quadruped in America, and when in full maturity and vigor, in the best condition these gigantic mammals, it

is asserted, have been known to attain the enormous weight of 2,000 pounds,* and a reliable gentleman of my acquaintance now living in Hartford, Connecticut, who has for many seasons stalked this particular game and bagged quite a number of large specimens, assured me that he killed a bull moose some years since in Nova Scotia that measured seven feet from the top of the withers to the sole of the foot, which is considerably taller than the elk or any other game animal on this continent.

Fifty years ago the range of the moose, had a vast geographical amplitude, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, entirely across the Continent.

But the expansion of our Western settlements, and the proclivities of our hunting population, has caused a great diminution in this species of game and driven the wary beasts to seek more inaccessible cover in the remote north.

Yet they are still found in Maine, Minnesota, Idaho, Montana, as well as in the unpopulated districts of the Canadian provinces and in British Columbia.

They are quite abundant upon the Yukon River, towards its sources in Alaska, as an exploration of that section by Whimpon in 1867 shows. Between latitudes 65° and 66° North and longitude 146°, he says, "This part of the river abounds in moose."

They have been killed near the Pacific coast a little south of Behring Strait.

In 1843 moose and elk were occasionally met with in the extensive forests west of Lake Huron, where I killed the first elk I ever encountered, and several others were seen by the party on that occasion.

No moose were met with at that time, but tracks were observed, showing they had not entirely disappeared from that section.

I was told by my old Chippeway guide, "Pe-to-wan-quad," who had hunted in this vicinity ever since his boyhood, that during a severe winter, many years before, when the snow was very deep and his family suffering for want of food, he

*The *Encyclopædia of Brockhaus*, Germany's most authoritative publication think 1,100 pounds the maximum weight of a moose, although placing its height at a little over eight feet. [Ed.]

went out alone upon snowshoes into this same country to procure meat, and in a short time came upon the fresh tracks of seven moose, which he followed for three successive days, during which he killed every one of them, besides two black bears that attempted to join him in the chase toward the last of it.

I placed every confidence in this Indian's statement, for he bore an excellent reputation at Port Samia, where he lived. Moreover, he read his Bible every day, would not hunt on Sunday, and appeared to be a conscientious Christian.

After his signal achievement in securing the large supply of meat, he returned to his people, and taking out a party with sleds, hauled it all home, and it sufficed for their subsistence during the remainder of the winter.

The moose is an awkward, clumsy-looking animal, with an uncommonly peculiar head and nose, ending in a mus-

cular, prehensile lip termed "muffle," which they use in collecting food, and this appendage, when cooked, is regarded by hunters as a delicious *bon morceau*.

The mouth is set well back from the lower extremity of the muffle, thus adapting it to their method of browsing upon the tender shoots of deciduous shrubs and trees, which constitute their staple forage the year round. Indeed, I doubt if the peculiar contour of their snouts would enable them to crop grass unless it was very tall.

Some years ago I was so fortunate as to receive an invitation from the friend before mentioned to accompany him in his annual hunting excursion to Nova Scotia during the month of November.

He had previously written to a chief of the Micmac tribe of Indians, whom he knew well, to build a cabin and have everything ready to receive us at a specified time.



MOOSE BROWSING ON THE TENDER SHOOTS OF TREES.

We left Boston on the 21st of November and arrived on time at the railroad station in Athol, where we found ample transportation to carry us with our baggage to the house nearest the hunting grounds, where we were cordially received and entertained by a respectable old Scotch farmer, who informed us that Lord Dunraven had just left his house for New York, after spending a week or so in moose hunting through the neighboring forests, but without any success.

Our Micmac *engagés*, who lived at a small hamlet upon a lake not far from the hunting grounds, appeared early the following morning and escorted us on foot for eight miles to our encampment, where they had erected a comfortable log cabin, the chinks nicely stopped with moss and the bunks filled up with soft and fragrant tips of the balsam fir, which, for elasticity and comfort, would have compared favorably with the most approved modern mattress.

The chief, John Logan, who was assigned to me as hunting guide, was quite well informed and spoke English intelligibly. One of the others was to accompany my friend as his guide, and the third to act as camp guard, cook and general *factotum*, but neither of the two last could speak any language save the vernacular dialect of their aboriginal tribe.

They were by no means taciturn or reserved, like our prairie Indians; and when seated around our cabin fire in the evening smoking their pipes, seemed to enjoy our jokes, as communicated to them through Logan, most heartily.

They were especially interested in my descriptions of the habits and peculiarities, of their western brethren of the plains, and one evening, after speaking of those Indians, I mentioned a circumstance which amused them exceedingly.

It was a little incident wherein Sir Wm. Johnson, then agent of the English Government for the Indians upon the Mohawk River, once received a visit from a large band of his wards, during which the chief took occasion to mention that on the previous night he had a most extraordinary dream, which he thought it his duty to lay before his "Great Father" for his consideration, if agreeable to him.

"Certainly," replied the complaisant nobleman; "I shall be delighted to hear it."

The chief thereupon declared that he was confidently assured during his dream

that his friend Sir William was desirous of making him the present of a beautiful pair of white horses then standing in the stable.

This was quite perplexing to Sir William, as these were his best horses, and he could not well dispense with their services. Still, as he did not, in view of the somewhat questionable loyalty of those people at that particular juncture, wish to incur the risk of a refusal, replied:

"I am delighted at having the opportunity of making so valuable a present to the great Chief of the Mohawks; they are yours, my friend."

Accordingly they took the horses and went away, but did not make their appearance at the Agency again for a good while; and when they did come and had shaken hands all around and interchanged the customary Indian greetings, Sir William asked the chief how he liked the horses, and whether they came up to his anticipations, and on being assured he was highly pleased with them, Sir William added, that it afforded him sincere gratification to inform the chief that he himself had recently paid a visit to the dreamland, where he was informed that his friend, the Great Chief of all the Mohawks, in return for the horses, was desirous of making him a present of all the valley upon the Mohawk River for about 100 miles.

The chief seemed astonished at this unexpected announcement and remained silent for a few minutes, then, after consulting with his followers, he replied—

"Very well, father; as you received your information while in the land of dreams, I suppose you must take the land. I think, however, we had better not visit that country again and not dream any more."

All of this was interpreted by Logan to his companions, who fully comprehended and enjoyed the successful consummation of the stratagem. But to convey a full appreciation of the sequel to the narrative, I will state that I had with me a very fine and beautiful Navajoe blanket of brilliant, gay colors, which I had previously shown to the Indians, and which they admired vastly.

After the conclusion of my story, our cook made a remark in the Micmac tongue which caused the others to scream with laughter, and when pressed for an explanation of the joke, Logan said—

"That mischievous cook, he say he b'lieve he'll dream to-night the General



“WITH ITS LONG UNGRAINLY HEAD ELEVATED TO ITS HIGHEST ALTITUDE LOOKING OVER THE BRUSH DIRECTLY AT ME.”

gave him his Navajoe blanket," which renewed the laughter more vociferously than before.

During our sojourn with these Indians, and while engaged in hunting, Logan gave me many useful items concerning the habits and peculiarities of the moose and the best methods of stalking them, wherewith "he was perfectly familiar, having hunted them from boyhood and killed a great number.

He regarded them as the, most wary, timorous and vigilant animals in existence, and their senses of sight, hearing and smelling so astonishingly acute, that it was almost impossible to approach them within rifle range, excepting under the most favorable combinations of circumstances.

The following requisites he considered absolutely indispensable:

For winter stalking, while the snow is from four to six inches deep, the dress of the hunter should be made of a heavy, light-colored woolen fabric, with wool socks and stout, soft moccasins, as ordinary leather foot-gear makes too much noise in passing through brush or hard snow.

There must be no frozen crust upon the snow and the harder the wind blows the better, as this tends to prevent the sound of the hunter's footsteps from reaching the sensitive ears of the animal, and for the same reason, the stalker should invariably move against or across the wind, as his prospects of success would be exceedingly precarious should he hunt with the wind, when the keen smelling and hearing faculties of the animal would, in all probability, apprise him of danger long before the hunter came in sight.

The moose is not only wonderfully alert in detecting the proximity of hunters, but he seems to be instinctively endowed with the faculty of discriminating between the sounds produced by the hunters' movements and those made by the elements, or other natural causes, such as the loud cracking or falling of branches from trees, which give him no alarm, whereas the breaking of a small twig by the step of a man will sometimes startle the way beast so as to cause him to run for miles at his utmost speed.

We waited in our comfortable cabin for several days before all the essential conditions for successful stalking were favorable. But at length our aspirations were rewarded by a perfectly auspicious day,

which we eagerly availed ourselves of, and putting on our hunting equipment, were soon ready for action, my friend and his guide entering the woods to the north, while Logan and I started in an opposite direction, he in advance, and I, treading in his footsteps, close behind.

In this order we proceeded on very slowly and cautiously through the heavy forest, over great fallen logs and through dense thickets and boggy swamps for several hours, during which we saw occasional moose signs, but none of them fresh, which fact the guide determined by examining the tracks and excrement left upon the snow, as well as the abrasions and cuts of the twigs where the animals had been browsing.

Not a loud word had been spoken by either of us since we left camp, but when we reached the feeding grounds, and the signs began to freshen a little, Logan looked more cheerful and quietly whispered in my ear that he hoped soon to find a fresh "moose yard," where we might be tolerably certain of seeing game.

By a "yard" he meant a place where food was plenty and where one or more moose usually remained until the food was consumed.

After this cheering intelligence I was more hopeful, and sure enough, we had gone but a short distance further when we struck a promising spot, where numerous old tracks interlaced and crossed each other in every direction, and this the guide pronounced to be a yard.

We soon after this hit upon the fresh track of a large cow moose, which we took and followed in its sinuous meanderings through the thickets for about half an hour, attentively scrutinizing every cluster of bushes where the animal might be lying down or concealed, and carefully placing every footstep where it would break no twigs and alarm the game. Thus we went on until at last, to my inexpressible delight, Logan came to a sudden halt and anxiously beckoned to me, pointing directly to the front, where I instantly espied a mighty black object that seemed to me quite as big as the elephant Jumbo, standing broadside toward me only about eight yards off, with its long, ungainly head elevated to its highest altitude, looking over the brush directly at me.

As this was the first animal of that description I had ever encountered in the wilderness, I might have been considerably



HEAD OF BULL MOOSE.

perturbed; very likely I was, but I do not remember having any decided symptoms of the "buck ague" just then, yet I must confess I experienced about that time a slight touch of the "shakes," but it was no "great shakes" anyway; nevertheless, I hurriedly raised my rifle, and taking as accurate aim as the "trembles" permitted, fired, and fortunately planted a large bullet into the body of the monster which brought her to the ground, and believing she was "done for," I ran forward to take a look at the strange beast, when to my

surprise, up she jumped, and started to run, but after another shot she reeled and staggered for a moment, then tumbled heels over head to the ground dead.

My last shot was a wild one, made while running and somewhat blown, with a light English express rifle, which recoiled awfully and had but little precision at best, but in this instance, it secured the quarry, the ball cutting the wind-pipe as squarely and smoothly across the thorax as if done with a sharp butcher's knife.

After disemboweling and skinning the

cow (which was fully as large as a good-sized horse), and leaving a handkerchief upon the meat to keep off carnivorous quadrupedal poachers, we cut out a large piece of tenderloin for our mess, and jubilantly returned to camp, where we found my companion, who had been even more successful than I, in that he had shot a large cow and a yearling bull moose.

Yet, in consideration of my being a neophyte, while he was a veteran in the sport, I was content with my achievement, and we feasted that night on delicious moose steaks, which to my taste surpassed in flavor any venison I had ever before eaten.

The next day we remained in camp, as the snow had frozen too much during the night for good hunting, and after waiting several days for better weather, with an ardent desire to add the head of a bull moose to my stock of trophies, and seeing no prospect of an immediate change, I concluded, after expressing the one I had killed to a taxidermist at Halifax, to return home, leaving my companion in the woods, where he remained nearly a week longer, without a day favorable for hunting.

The head of this moose artistically set up at Halifax, is now among my collection of trophies at Orange, where, upon one occasion during a visit of a friend and his wife, they were taken by a lady of the family into the trophy room, and after looking at other specimens of interest they espied the moose-head, which seemed to puzzle the gentleman considerably.

After intently scrutinizing it from different points of view, he asked from what animal it was taken. To which his amiable lady, who was not averse to the perpetration of an occasional innocent joke, and had seen the head before, after casting a sly wink at her friend, responded as follows: "That animal, my dear, is the head of a favorite donkey of the General's which died upon his hands, and he chose this as a lasting method of perpetuating a

souvenir of the faithful animal's services."

The gentleman seemed amazed at such an anomalous whim, and as he walked away with an air of supreme disgust, remarked in a subdued tone, "Well, well, I did not think it possible Marcy could be such a—fool."

In concluding this sketch, I take occasion to remark for the information of any one of our people who may desire to hunt in Nova Scotia, that unless he pays twenty dollars (I think it is thirty dollars now) to the authorities for the privilege of going into their woods, and hires teams to carry off to the settlements all the meat he does not consume, he subjects himself to a severe penalty, and I believe a similar practice obtains in most of the other Canadian provinces.

This did not strike me as being a very liberal international reciprocity for the favors many Englishmen have for years received from our authorities in the way of free escorts, guides and transportation into our most favorable hunting grounds, where they have often remained for months engaged in slaughtering thousands of buffalo, elk, deer and other large game, for the exclusive purpose of taking away their heads, and abandoning the carcasses to rot upon the ground.

I have from time to time met such parties, in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah, one of which (of two men only) had then killed elk sufficient to fill a large room with their heads and antlers, and they were just about starting out for another extensive butchery.

I also, some years ago, met a titled Englishman "Sir George Gore," who was returning from an excursion into the Rocky Mountains, where with an immense hunting outfit of men and animals, he had remained about two years, during which he was reported to have killed about forty grizzly bears and 2,500 buffaloes, besides elk and other game.

(The series to be continued.)

