

BIG GAME HUNTING IN THE WILD WEST.

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VII.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOATS AND SHEEP.



Y far the rarest mammal in America, with the exception of the musk-ox, is, probably, the mountain goat,

Its range is so circumscribed and so difficult of access to the naturalist or hunter, that its peculiarities and habits have been less observed or understood than those of any other game quadruped (excepting the musk-ox upon this continent.

It is herbivorous; selecting its pasturage upon the loftiest and most inaccessible mountain peaks, where, in security, it crops the tender herbage contiguous to the perennial snows, and never descends to the lower valleys unless it be during the severest winter weather, when the deep snows cover its food upon the mountain tops and compels it to seek subsistence by the Indians, and occasionally with considerable slaughter.

in the sheltered valleys, where it is hunted

Rocky Mountain goats are seldom gregarious, but roam in groups of four or five, and are so suspicious and watchful in their proclivities that it is difficult to approach them, unless they happen to be near cover. And, as their pasture-grounds generally border precipitous bluffs, if wounded by the hunter they are very likely to run or fall among rocks or into deep chasms where they are lost or cannot be reached.

Indeed, before hunting them I was assured by a veteran mountaineer that within his experience he had been unable to secure more than about one-tenth of those he had killed.

The range of this mountaineer extends from Northern Montana, through the western part of Oregon and Washington Territory, into Alaska and British Columbia, as far as the head of Mackenzie's River, and, before the Canadian Pacific Railroad was completed that far, they were quite abundant around the head-waters of the Saskatchewan River, in the vicinity of some of the Hudson Bay trading-posts. There are a few of these animals still remaining in the mountains around the head-waters of Sun River, above Fort Shaw, as well as upon the mountains bordering other tributaries of the Missouri, and some can be found near the head of Bitter Root River, where I hunted in 1885.

They are about the size of the domestic goat, and some of their propensities are analogous to those of that animal. They are both addicted to climbing upon rocky localities and are very sure-footed, but in most other respects they are different—in instincts, habits and appearance.

Several distinguished physiologists have classed this goat as belonging to the genus *Capra*; but more recent examinations have induced some naturalists to believe that in all its essential features and affinities it is an antelope, pertaining to the genus *Aplocerus*, which may be a correct scientific classification, but in its habits, features and affinities it differs materially from the prong-horned antelope of our prairies. The goat, for instance, has a much heavier, longer and finer double coating of silky

wool, its horns are permanent and solid, while those of the antelope are deciduous; its figure and the contour of its head and body are as unlike as possible.

The mountain variety have short stocky legs, with feet admirably adapted to their



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alpine habitats, as they are provided with rubber-like soles or pads that are tough and elastic, somewhat like the frogs in horses' hoofs, which do not wear off and become flat, but permanently retain their convexity, which, with the tough, horny, but elastic exterior edge of the hoof, accommodates itself to the irregularities in rocky surfaces, and enables them to grip and hold on to the smoothest and most vertical slopes without slipping or falling.

They have an outer fleece of long, pendent, soft hair, and under this is a short, close coat of a silky texture, which is said to equal in fineness that of the Cashmere goat, and both coverings are as pure white as new-fallen snow, without the slightest intermingling of color.

Their horns are persistent, only about five inches long and one inch in diameter at the base, corrugated about half way from the head, and terminating in a smooth sharp-curved point, the whole coal black.

Although this animal has been known to the Hudson Bay Company's people for two hundred years, yet, in accordance with their exclusive policy of keeping all information concerning affairs within the vast area of their jurisdiction from the knowledge of the rest of the world, they have paid but little attention to natural history or any-

thing else save the acquisition of the enormous profits resulting from their fur traffic, which for one hundred and ten years amounted to one hundred per cent. per annum upon the par value of their stock.

According to Sir John Richardson they did, however (probably with the anticipation of enhancing the value of their assets), shortly after their first trading-post was established upon the Columbia River, send the wool of this goat to an expert for examination, under the direction of the Wernerian Society, of Edinburgh, and it was reported as being of great fineness and superior to that of the domestic sheep, in that it was wholly and uniformly fine, while that of the sheep was various in quality and texture on different parts of the same individual.

The first authentic account we had of the mountain goat was furnished by Lewis and Clarke, after their return from their wonderful exploratory journey to the Pacific Ocean, in 1804-5. They reported that the animal was found in many mountain localities, but in greater numbers upon the Pacific coast ranges passing the Columbia between the falls and the rapids.

The goat is doubtless the most fearless mammalian climber of the mountains.

Audubon says of him: "He wanders over the most precipitous rocks, and springs with great activity from crag to crag, feeding on the grasses, plants and mosses of the mountain sides, and seldom or never descends to the luxuriant valleys, like the Big Horn.

"He indeed resembles the wild goat of Europe, and is very difficult to procure. Now and then the hunter, after fatiguing and hazardous efforts, may reach a spot from whence his rifle will send a ball into the unsuspecting goat. Then he rises from his hands and knees, and taking deadly aim pulls the trigger, and at the crack of his rifle he sees the goat, in expiring struggles, reach the verge of a dizzy height and roll over and over, and disappear in a cloud of dust into the yawning abyss beneath, where a day's journey around the gorge would hardly suffice to bring an active man to where the bruised quarry lies."

For several years I heard so much about the difficulties of finding and stalking the rare and wary mountain goat, that my ambition was incited to attempt adding one of these animals to my stock of trophies, and I resolved to take advantage of the



STALKING THE MOUNTAIN GOAT.

first favorable opportunity that presented for gratifying this fervent aspiration.

In 1885, two friends, who were ardent sportsmen and had hunted with me several seasons in the Rocky Mountains, joined me, and about the first of September we left New York for Montana, *via* St. Paul and the Northern Pacific Railroad, and after crossing the "Great Continental Divide" above Helena, stopped at Missoula, a thriving town of about 2,500 people, near which there, is a garrisoned post called Fort Missoula.

We were received here most kindly by the officers, who did all in their power to make our stay pleasant, and gave us all the information and assistance they could to aid us in our contemplated excursion into the mountains, and one of the officers, Lieutenant Thompson, a capital hunter and a most agreeable gentleman, was kind enough to offer to join our little party.

After enjoying the hospitality of the officers at that most delightful post, and making all preparations for a comfortable mountain excursion, we started out from the fort and traveled for two days up the Bitter Root Valley, which was quite densely settled by farmers, who produced abundant crops. When we reached a point where the mountains approached near the river and presented some quite lofty ranges

and peaks, the summits of which were capped with perpetual snow, we pitched our tents upon the river bank near the base of the mountains, on the summits of which our guide (a very respectable citizen of Missoula) informed us we would be tolerably certain to find goats and other large game.

The Bitter Root River at our camp was about eighty yards wide, with clear cold water, which issued from the adjacent snowy mountains and flowed with a swift current over a rocky bed that looked so favorable for trout that two of the party took out their tackle and proceeded to the rapids, from whence they returned in a short time with their creels filled with beautiful speckled trout of a large size, which had risen to their flies with most gratifying avidity and afforded a substantial addition to our larder.

The following morning we forded the river and drove to the outlet of a large cañon, in which we were to make our first efforts to find the mountain goats.

Our packing equipage was all overhauled and put in order that night, and early the next morning, after several of our unbroken broncos had balked, kicked and "bucked" for some time and not succeeding in extricating themselves from the tightly girthed *apponaboes*, had by suspending then their

antics and beginning to graze, signified their willingness to give up the contest and go ahead, we started out, leaving a proper guard with the wagons.

Our route through the cañon led us over an exceedingly rough, rocky and tortuous Indian trail, along near the banks of a rapid, clear stream, which was shut in on both sides by elevated mountains, rising nearly vertically from their bases to an altitude of many hundred feet, some of them capped with perpetual snow, and it was near these white-caps that the guide expected to find the goats, but we did not discover any during the first day.

We bivouacked that night in the gorge, and the following morning continued on

espied, near the summit of a very lofty mountain, three goats that were grazing along near the snow-line, but they soon moved off from us over the crest of the sierra, and as their position was so difficult of access, in consequence of the abrupt intervening slope of the mountain, we did not think it worth while to attempt the ascent.

Once after this we saw two others, which two gentlemen of the party, going in different directions, undertook to reach by resorting to zigzag courses in scaling the steep acclivities.

One of them succeeded in getting a shot and killed his goat, but it rolled down the mountain over the rough and jagged rocks so far that when he found it, after a long



OUR PARTY IN CAMP WATCHES OUT ASCENT.

up the stream for several miles, when we heard an elk call in advance of us, and two of the party hurried on, and in a few minutes we heard two shots, which on reaching the place we ascertained were fired by the men ahead, who had killed a large bull elk; and this was the only large game we met with that day.

On the following morning, however, we

search, the body was so much mutilated that he did not think it worth preserving.

In returning to our permanent camp the next day, as I passed by the place where we had hung the elk meat, I saw upon the tree a pine-martin, which I shot; and as this was the first time I had ever met with one of these animals in the woods I was very glad to place it among my trophies.

We returned to camp after a hard ride the following day, not at all satisfied with the result of our extremely laborious excursion.

After this we moved our permanent camp to the outlet of another very long cañon, in which our guide was of the opinion we might be more successful than we had been in the other.

Mr. B——, one of our companions, was not well enough to make another rough jaunt at this time, but Dr. Seward, of Grange, N. J., and myself resolved to try the new cañon, and after getting our packs in proper order we set out with the guide and two soldiers up the tortuous windings of a narrow defile similar to that in the other cañon, but the ground more broken and difficult to traverse.

After about five miles we arrived near a small lake, where we saw some elk tracks, tolerably fresh, and stopped to lunch.

Shortly afterwards two country boys rode up, one about eighteen and the other probably fourteen years old. It appeared they had come out for a hunt, and seeing our tracks had followed on to join our party. They were bright, hardy fellows, armed with magazine rifles, and mounted upon good ponies.

As they came up the eldest boy said to me, "Where are you fellers going?" I replied: "We fellers are about making an excursion into these Alpine sierras for the purpose of bagging a few of those wary quadrupeds, the American chamois. Permit me to ask where you fellers are bound; are you also out on a sporting excursion?" To which the youngest made the abbreviated response of "You bet, ole pop!"

We did not invite them to join our party, but they continued on with us all the afternoon, and when we stopped to encamp for the night they also made their fire near us.

We had been in camp but a few minutes when our attention was drawn to three white spots near the summit of a lofty mountain spur directly in front of our camping-place, and on looking at them with a glass we discovered they were three white mountain goats, quietly grazing near the snow. Whereupon I resolved to make the attempt of reaching them, although it was then near sundown, and they were at least 2,000 feet above us. Accordingly, I directed the guide to leave his rifle behind and go with me, and in five minutes we were ascending the base of the acclivity, through trees and brush, toward the white

spots, and after we had made about one-third the distance they appeared more like live animals, and shortly afterwards we could see them plainly walking around while feeding.

When we reached the timber line we were about half-way up to them, but from this line the face of the mountain was bare and rocky, with here and there a few fissures or broken inequalities affording some little cover, but the slopes were so abrupt and smooth that we could not walk while standing upon our feet, and were obliged to crawl along upon our hands and knees. This method of stalking we found not only tardy but extremely irksome, as we were so much exposed that we had to carry our heads and bodies as near as possible to the rocks, in order to screen ourselves from the goats.

Besides, the altitude of our position was then so great that I found it difficult to breathe the attenuated atmosphere unless we moved very slow and halted often to relieve our breathing.

We continued on, however, until at length the goats seemed to have finished their suppers and laid themselves down upon the rocks for a *siesta*, after which we were not so much exposed to their observation, and in a few minutes, by cautious crawling, we succeeded in getting within moderate rifle range, I in advance and the guide directly behind me; but too much out of breath at that instant to hold my rifle steadily, I motioned the guide to keep quiet until I had recovered a little, when, taking deliberate aim at the most distant one that had likely got the wind of us and was running away, I fired, but shot over him.

I then turned the other barrel upon the next and shot it through the body, and quickly reloading shot the third; both the last staggered for a moment, then tumbled over and rolled down the mountain out of sight. The guide, at the last shot, slapped me on the shoulder, with the exclamation of "Hurrah for you, General!" Indeed I think he was fully as much if not more gratified at my success than I was myself.

We then took the trail of the two wounded goats, which were when shot some distance apart, and followed them down the mountain by the blood for about 200 yards, where we found them lying as evenly side by side as if they had been placed there by hand.

After disemboweling and hanging them up in a tree we hurried down to the camp,

where we fortunately arrived just at dusk. If we had been much later we would have found it difficult to descend the abrupt, slippery mountain after dark.

The Doctor and soldiers had, with their glasses, watched all our movements, even to the hanging the carcasses upon the tree.

Early the next morning the soldiers and the oldest boy hunter climbed up and brought the sheep into camp, and their heads and skins are now in my trophy-room at Orange.

We ate some of the meat, but did not find it very palatable—nothing like as savory as the flesh of the mountain sheep or antelope.

In one of the reports upon explorations for the Pacific Railroad it is stated that the white goat of the Rocky Mountains is, in all essential features and affinities, a true

antelope, having little in common with animals of the type of the domestic goat beyond what belongs to all ruminants of its family. Their jet-black, polished horns, upon both sexes, are small, short and uncinated, like those of their diminutive brethren of the Alps, the chamois, which, in fact, seem to connect the genus with the American antelope.

Major Long, in a communication to the Philadelphia Agricultural Society, said: "The mountain goat inhabits that portion of the Rocky Mountains between the 48th and 68th parallels of latitude."

Godman, in his natural history, says: "They are found in great numbers about the head-waters of the North Fork of the Columbia, also near the sources of the Marias, or Muddy, and on the Saskatchewan and Athabasca rivers."

Five distinct species of wild sheep have been recognized by naturalists as having their habitats within the different lofty mountain ranges of the world, namely: the Argali (*Ovis ammon*, Linn.), of Asia; the Corsican Moufflon (*Ovis musimon*, Pal.); the African variety (*Ovis tragelaphus*, Cuv.); the Burreth (*Ovis burreth*) of the upper Himalayas, and the American Big Horn, or Rocky Mountain Sheep, sometimes called the "Cimmeron" (*Ovis montana*, Cuv.), which is indigenous exclusively to our continent.

In this paper I only propose to present facts concerning the habits and peculiarities of the last-named species, with which my extended practical experience has made me thoroughly acquainted.

In view, however, of the coincident fact that the Argali of Siberia seems to approximate more nearly to the American Big Horn than any other foreign species, a brief notice of some of the most prominent characteristics of that animal appear important in this connection.

It is described by naturalists as being a conspicuously majestic and beautiful animal, nearly as large as an ox, with horns four feet in length and nineteen inches in circumference at the base, and other proportions of corresponding magnitude and symmetry.

Its strength, agility and fleetness are said to be astonishing for so large an animal.

Its feeding grounds are near the summits of the loftiest mountain ranges, and when disturbed it makes for the most broken and inaccessible crags, over which it skips

with marvelous ease and celerity, where the hunter finds great difficulty in following it.

It is very true these characteristic traits assimilate very closely with those of the American Big Horn, but the latter animals do not always ascend to the tops of the higher mountains for their pasturage, as has been represented. Indeed, they generally graze in lower locations, as I will presently show.

The color of the adult ram is in the autumn a dark, rich brown, while that of the ewe is a lighter rufous grey, both sexes having a white disk upon the rump.



THE AMERICAN BIG HORN, OR ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHEEP.

Horns are common to both male and female; they are transversely corrugated, and supported upon osseous piths or bases of exceeding tenacity and hardness, which gives them great strength for their butting encounters, and when they strike together in their fierce battles the sharp sonorous detonations can be heard for great distances.

Some have supposed that the bruises often found upon the front of the horns of the rams were caused by the animals jumping down the walls of cañons and alighting upon the horns instead of upon their feet. But I am confident this is erroneous, as, besides my own observations, I have questioned many old mountaineers upon this subject, and they all concurred in the opinion that there was no foundation for such a belief. Moreover, they said the Indians, who are the most acute observers of the habits and peculiarities of animals, had never witnessed any such magical achievements in lofty tumbling as that mentioned, but they were in perfect accord that the battered horns were the results of their fierce battles during the rutting seasons.

An average pair of horns upon a full-grown ram will weigh from 15 to 20 pounds, and measure from 12 to 14 inches around the base. I have several such in my collection, but I have one pair which surpass in dimensions any I ever saw, and measure $17\frac{7}{8}$ inches in circumference where they come out of the head.

I was told by a friend that an Englishman in Wyoming had offered \$500 for a pair of mountain sheep horns that would measure 18 inches. I think he was safe in offering this extravagant premium, as the only pair of horns I have ever known of that size were many years ago brought by Captain Stansbury, of the U. S. Engineers, from the Rocky Mountains, and as the animal is hunted so much nowadays, I do not believe any such giant appendages will ever again be found.

There has been some diversity of opinion concerning the habits of these animals among writers who perhaps have not had opportunities for observing their peculiarities within their native ranges. For example, several have represented them as resorting to and procuring their sustenance exclusively from near the summits of the loftiest mountain sierras, and that rarely, unless driven by severe winter storms, do they resort to lower localities.

This, however, is not in accordance with

my experience deduced from close observation during eight seasons hunting within favorable localities, where I saw large numbers, under the most auspicious circumstances for studying their habits, and I seldom found them near the tops of elevated mountains; on the contrary, they were generally near the lower rocky cañons, and grazed upon the adjacent slopes and valleys, but considerably beneath the altitudes of the higher peaks.

They are, like their domestic namesakes, decidedly gregarious, and when they have not been disturbed by the hunter, or by carnivorous quadrupeds, it is not uncommon to find ten or fifteen together; and occasionally I have seen much larger flocks, composed of rams, ewes and lambs, and this during the September and October months.

They are persistently local in their proclivities, and after having been scattered by shots, or by fright, will soon return to their customary grazing grounds.

We hunted them in one locality on Sheep Creek, Wyoming, during several different seasons, and never but once failed to find them within a mile of the same place.

In one herd I counted twenty-nine, led off by two large rams; and at another time I am confident I saw a flock of from eighty to one hundred, but I was so situated that I was unable to count them accurately.

When this large flock was first discovered I was upon a low spur of the Casper mountain range, with a companion whose keen eyesight enabled him to see upon the side of an opposite hill, about two miles distant, what he took to be a flock of Big Horns lying under a rocky ledge, and with the aid of our field-glass we could distinguish them plainly. As they had the wind of us we were obliged to make a very wide circuit to get upon the lee side of them, which, by smartly galloping our horses, we soon accomplished without disturbing the sheep.

Then tying our horses securely out of sight, we cautiously approached toward the game under cover of a rocky projection, and as we came near, we took off our caps and softly crept up and cast our eyes over the crest of the crag, expecting to find the sheep where we last saw them. But instead of this they had disappeared, probably having heard us, or taken the wind from us, and run around the hill; and as their tracks indicated this, we hurried

back to our horses, mounted, and galloped around upon the opposite side of the hill, hoping we might head them off as they came around; and when we reached a narrow defile, where we thought it probable



"AND I AFTER HIM AS FAST AS MY HORSE COULD RUN."

fired together, at which the terrified flock jumped up, and not seeing where the shots came from, became confused and ran around in different directions, giving us good opportunities to make several other running shots which were effective; and when at last they ran out of range they left with us five of their number stretched out upon the ground before us.

Although this was during the rutting season, the flock embraced rams, ewes and lambs. The following season we shot seven more near the same ground.

At another time, our guide, Little Bat, after looking carefully in all directions from the crest of a high bluff bordering a deep, precipitous cañon, informed us that he saw one sheep lying down under a tree upon the slope of an adjacent gorge. I directed the glass to the spot and could discern the tree, but not the sheep, which he saw with the naked eye.

As these gorges were for the most part impassable for horses, we were, in order to reach the position of the sheep, compelled to traverse two or three miles around to head the one we were upon, which took us entirely out of sight of the sheep we were after, but our admirable guide led us direct to a spot overlooking the position of the wary Big Horn, and we secured him without difficulty. After which we started for camp, but had not gone far when another sheep leaped upon a high rock overhanging a deep cañon, and with its head raised to its highest limit, seemed to look me directly in the face and challenge me for an encounter. My shot knocked him

they might attempt to pass, we dismounted, and leaving our horses, walked noiselessly forward until we discovered the heads of the large flock of at least eighty mountain sheep, lying quietly down among the rocks about 150 yards off, whereupon we instantly dropped upon our hands and knees and crept cautiously forward until we secured a good position behind the rocks. Then, taking deliberate aim, we

over the rock, and he rolled several hundred feet into the bottom of the cañon, where he managed to get upon his feet again, but a second shot finished him, and we were about to move on again toward camp when twelve or fifteen more sheep made their appearance at the bottom of the gorge, out of which we shot five more, that fell among holes in the rocks, where we were unable to find them all. As we were, while firing, some six or eight hundred feet directly over the sheep, which obliged us to draw an almost vertical line of sight upon them, they did not at first discover us, and ran around in the utmost confusion and bewilderment, which afforded several easy shots before they became conscious of our presence above them.

At another time, while we were taking our lunch upon Sheep Creek, with our horses grazing around us, we suddenly heard a rattling in the rocks above us, and

mounting our horses, we took their trail and picked up four sheep that we had wounded, but they did not drop until they were some distance.

We each packed one of the animals upon our horses and returned to the lunching place, quite well satisfied with the achievement. But as I pulled off the one from my horse the docile old beast turned and kicked me several feet, knocking me over violently, but fortunately did not hurt me seriously. He seemed much frightened at the appearance of the sheep as it was taken from his back.

One day, while hunting sheep in the Casper Mountains, I had the pleasure of witnessing a most striking illustration of the wonderful fleetness, sureness of foot, and muscular powers of that animal.

As I was riding slowly along over the crest of a cañon, I discovered a sheep directly in front of me, standing upon a



THE DOCILE OLD BRUTE TURNED AND KICKED ME.

soon a small flock of mountain sheep that had taken alarm at something, came rushing over the bluffs, and crossing the creek about 100 yards below us, came in sight as they ascended the hill upon the opposite side.

We seized our rifles and fired several times before they were out of range. Then

rock part-way down the gorge. I fired at him from my horse, and from his appearance supposed I had wounded him, but soon discovered my mistake, as he immediately started off at full speed over the hills, and I after him as fast as my horse could run. But he gained upon me, and turned into the cañon, taking the vertical

slope diagonally down until he landed upon the upper edge of an immense smooth-faced rock, where I expected him to drop every instant, but instead of this the momentum acquired by his rapid flight carried him over the rock with lightning velocity, and when he reached the lower side I felt certain he would fall, still believing him severely wounded; but, making an astonishing upward leap, he landed upon another smooth rock, over which he slid in the same rapid manner as before, and thus he continued on until I lost sight of him.

It was certainly one of the most beautiful and intensely interesting exhibitions of animal strength and agility it had ever been my fortune to behold, and I enjoyed it exceedingly. Moreover, this was corroborative evidence of the opinion I had before entertained, that the flight of the Big Horn as he scaled the rocky gorges of his native habitat was sufficient to baffle all pursuit by man or horse.

The first well-authenticated mention made by any writer on this animal was by Father Picola, the first Catholic missionary to California, as early as 1797. He said "they were a kind of deer with a sheep-like head, about as large as a calf one or two years old."

He adds, "I have eaten of these beasts; their flesh is very tender and delicious."

This animal was for a long time supposed to be identical with the Siberian Argali.

The eminent naturalist Baron Cuvier regarded it the same as the *Ovis ammon*, and in many respects their habits are closely analogous. He was of opinion that

the Argali crossed Behring's Straits upon the ice, from which species originated the American Big Horn variety, so generally distributed over our territory.

Audubon does not concur in this, as he says our animal is considerably the largest; whereas other writers represent the Argali as being nearly as large as an ox, with horns four feet in length, which is much larger than any Big Horn found in this country: so that if Cuvier's theory is correct, the Argali must have degenerated considerably in our climate.

Mackenzie says, that during his long sojourning and explorations in the northern part of British America he heard the species spoken of by the Indians as "white buffaloes," and Lewis and Clarke say that at one time during their protracted expedition in 1804, when provisions were scarce on the head-waters of the Missouri, they saw plenty of wild sheep, but found them too wild for successful hunting.

Now the "white buffaloes" alluded to by Mackenzie could not have been mountain sheep, as this species is dark brown. But there is another species, the mountain goat, which is perfectly white, and is to this day more abundant in that section of country about the head-waters of the Saskatchewan and Mackenzie rivers, where Mackenzie spent a long time, and which were doubtless the animals referred to by the Indians.

Those spoken of by Lewis and Clarke may have been the mountain sheep or the mountain goat, as both varieties are still inhabiting the head-waters of the Missouri, where they passed and wintered.

