



A LION HUNT IN NORTH-WESTERN COLORADO.

By Charles Ashley Hardy.



IT was a glorious day. We rode in Indian file along the summit of the ridge, Patterson leading, then Wallihan and the writer, and finally Billy Wells bringing up the rear, with the hounds.

We had left our cabin at sunrise, and, scrambling up with our horses and dogs over the rim rock, had gained the top of the ridge

when the sun was an hour above the horizon and the mercury at ten degrees below zero. As we wound in and out among the pinions and cedars, that part of our attention which was not taken up in dodging the snow-laden boughs, was occupied in looking for lion tracks in the freshly fallen snow.

We were in the middle of the winter range of the deer, which, shorter legged and less hardy than the elk, retreat into the lower country when the winter snows lie deep over the highlands. On every side were tracks the deer had made in passing from the south side of the ridge, where they make their beds among the thick cedars and pinions, to the bleak northern slopes, where they feed among the dead wood, and lie in the day-time.

Now and then a string of four or five deer, headed by a buck with his antlers thrown well back, would cross in a jog-

trot, perhaps fifty yards in front of us, observing us curiously with their great eyes, but rarely hastening their pace or showing any signs of fear. We saw more than two hundred deer that day.

As we rode down into the bottom of one of the small gulches that led off from the ridge, Patterson stopped and, dismounting, began to scrutinize closely a track in the dry snow.

As if they knew what was in the wind, the dogs, coupled in pairs, began to set up an unearthly clamor, dragging each other about in their eagerness to smell of every imaginary scent.

"Here Hec, you black devil; come, back Speckle; Spot, you will, will you?" yelled Wells, dismounting among the excited hounds and laying about him with his quirt. "What is it, Pat?"

"I reckon it's a lion all right enough," returned Patterson, drawing off his mittens and shifting his six-shooter. "He's a big one, too. Look at those feet. He's gone right up the gulch, and the best thing we can do is to follow him up and let the dogs on him when he jumps."

At the first dip the side gulch made from the main ridge, the trail led into a thicket, where our horses could not follow. So, dismounting, we dropped the reins, and started in afoot. Once inside, the tracks turned and twisted, crossed and recrossed, and it looked as if all the lions of the neighborhood had made the thicket a rendezvous.

"There ought to be a bait here, somewhere," remarked Wells, and on pushing on a little farther we found it—the carcass of a buck, lying mangled and

half eaten at the foot of an overhanging pinion. The snow around was beaten hard, as if by some heavy animal, and bits of frozen flesh and quantities of hair were strewn upon the snow.

But what are those broad, heavy tracks, with claw marks, and leaps between, and the snow lying lightly where it has been thrown but a moment ago?

"He's our lion!" yelled Wells, excitedly. "Pat, get the dogs, and we'll put 'em on right here."

In a moment Patterson returned with the yelping pack, and, as the couplers were unsnapped, the voices opened one by one on the track, making the echoes ring confusedly among the rim rocks, as they led away up the gulch.

No sooner had the last hound disappeared among the pinions than we mounted our horses, and rode along the broad trail of the hounds and their quarry. Behind us were the two shepherd dogs that were reserved for a fight at close quarters.

I have seen and participated in rides after the hounds, both in the East and West, where the only danger was to be apprehended from beneath; but, when one has to watch both ground and air, and to dodge the attacks of a labyrinth of protruding branches, as well as keeping a firm seat, the difference between fox hunting and lion hunting is marked.

We must have ridden three miles, through pinion thickets and over fallen trees, sometimes sliding down slippery slopes, and sometimes getting off and leading where the descent was too precipitous, before we came within hearing of the dogs.

Now and then a long, quavering bay reached our ears, but it was not until we had crossed the last ridge and were riding down into the gulch bottom that the clamor of the dogs broke plainly upon the wintry air; and this time, instead of notes, long drawn out, it sounded quick and sharp, a perfect babel of angry sounds.

"They've got him treed!" shouted Patterson, digging the spurs into his horse, "take him, Tuck and Hec," and, at the wave of his hand, the two shepherds darted forward towards the spot where the hounds were yelping, while we rode after, all spurring save the photographer, who was beating a vig-

orous tattoo with his heels upon the sides of his old yellow horse.

Upon hearing our approach, the dogs redoubled their noise. Before coming within sight of them we dismounted, hobbled our horses, and softly advanced, taking care to keep hidden among the pinions, for fear the lion would jump at sight of us; for, contrary to the general opinion, mountain lions are cowards, and fear man above all things.

Sure enough, there, some thirty feet above ground, bracing himself among the topmost branches of the green cedar, crouched the great cat, complacently eying the dogs beneath, and occasionally giving an angry spit that only made them rage the fiercer.

One of the hounds was so carried away by the sight of his inveterate enemy, that, in his frenzy and aided by the thickly spreading limbs, he had succeeded in climbing two-thirds of the way up the tree. But, even as we looked, he lost his precarious foothold, and fell to the ground amid a shower of bark and needles.

"Now, Wallihan," said Wells, to the photographer, "hurry up and get a picture. He won't stay there long, now we're here."

The camera was unstrapped, a plate holder inserted, and Wallihan moved noiselessly forward, while we stood anxiously awaiting the click of the shutter. In a few minutes he returned as noiselessly as he went.

"I got a magnificent picture," he exclaimed, his face wreathed in smiles. "He wasn't more than forty feet away, and looking right at me. Now, you fellows drive him out, and I'll take him again as he jumps."

The tree that the lion was in stood on a steep hill-side, and as we circled about to approach it from above, Wallihan took his stand on the lower side and focussed his camera on a clear spot where, in all probability, the lion would land. When he gave the word, we came into full view, and opened the bombardment with sticks and stones.

"Look out, Wallihan, he's on the move!" shouted Wells, as the huge cat, aroused by the shower of missiles, uneasily shifted his position and gazed anxiously down.

"There he goes!" and, as he spoke, the long, yellow mass shot out from the green branches, and landed full twenty yards down the gulch-side. The dogs, nonplussed for an instant by the suddenness of the move, broke into a clamorous uproar, and took after the lion, which had nearly a hundred yards start and was making huge leaps along the top of the ridge we were on. It was not long before they caught up with him, for the lion, although covering some nine or ten yards in each leap, had to stop and gather himself for every spring. Finally, he was forced to stop and bay his pursuers on the little point of rock in which the ridge terminated.

He stood them off, as we could ascertain from the noise, until we rode up; then, preferring a leap of thirty feet to the gulch below to running the gauntlet of his new enemies, he vanished over the edge of the rim rock to our unbounded astonishment.

The dogs, thus thwarted a second time, ran wildly about in their frantic endeavors to find a way over the edge to the gulch bottom. We thrust our way through the cedars to obtain a view of the chase, and arrived in time to see the two shepherds, which had outstripped the pack, walking on either side of the lion up the opposite ascent, neither offering the slightest molestation to his majesty, who nonchalantly stepped towards a convenient cedar, leaped into the lowermost branch, and climbed to the top, amid a terrific rending of bark, as the hounds reached the spot.

"Well, by heaven," exclaimed Patterson, "I'd 'er never believed that of Tuck. Clean bluffed out, that's the only word for it."

"Nor I of Hec," responded Wells.

"And, as for me," remarked Wallihan, "I'd given a year of my life to have gotten a picture of them."

"Now, Wallihan, we'll fetch him out of that tree and give you a chance for a scrap picture," continued Wells. "Get down there below the dogs, take your camera in your hand, and be ready. Pat, take his jaw, and I'll take his foreleg. We can't have him kill any more dogs than necessary. Are you ready? One—two—three."

At the crack, a roar that chilled my

blood broke upon the air, and the huge beast, with a toss of his head and a wild clutch at the limbs above, went crashing down through the branches.

No sooner had he touched the ground than the dogs closed in on him, and then began a battle royal. With indescribable rage the lion struck right and left, his claws wide extended, and his jaws set in a bloody grin.

The gulch side was very steep at this point, and, as the fight raged, the combatants rolled and slid, amid a perfect cloud of flying snow, while the bloody trail behind gave evidence that harm was being done to, at least, our side.

When we reached the bottom the dogs were still at him. The shepherd, "Tuck," had a hold on one ear, and, shake and strike as he would, the lion could not free himself. The hounds, taking advantage of this fact, attacked him from every side in spite of the ugly cuts the claws on his one good fore-paw were making.

Finally, with a last effort, the lion shook his head free from Tuck's grip, and catching a dog with his claws, drew him down to him and buried his teeth in his neck.

"Shoot him, H—," yelled Patterson to me, as I stood on the outskirts of the fight, awaiting vainly a chance for a shot. "Shoot him, quick, or he'll kill Mike!" Scattering the hounds as I ran in, I drew my six-shooter and fired two shots through the lion's shoulders. With a gasp, he dropped the dog and staggered to his feet, but a third shot finished him, and he rolled over dead.

The dogs, much to my surprise, were not seriously hurt, with the exception of Mike, who had a badly chewed shoulder and a severe rip across his nose.

Before we skinned the lion, we took his measurements which were as follows: Length, seven feet, five inches; height at shoulder, thirty-one inches; girths at chest, belly and flank, respectively, thirty-three inches, thirty-six inches, twenty-five inches; neck, eighteen inches in circumference, and girth of fore-arm, thirteen inches. He weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds.

We took off his tawny hide and packed it behind my saddle, and then rode eight miles to the cabin and a steaming supper of venison.