

A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE WITH GRIZZLY BEARS*

By Elmer Frank

MY first savings in life were invested in the 7-L (Seven-H-L) horse ranch, located in the heart of the mountains of Wyoming, my brand numbering about eight hundred head. This was my outfitting point, and thither I would fly at the earliest approach of Indian summer, that indescribably dreamy, restful season, only experienced in its full glory along the base of the main range of the Rockies. On the occasion to which this narrative refers, I was accompanied by six guests, to wit: a United States judge, a captain now in the Philippines, two Omaha lawyers, an ex-Missouri sheriff, a British capitalist, and, to me, the most important of all, a full-fledged Texas cowboy, without whose brave and timely assistance this story would never have been penned.

His name is Clark—Ed. Clark, "Uncle Ned" the "punchers" call him, which would indicate age, although not yet forty, one of those unaccountable misnomers peculiar to the far west. He is far from handsome, resembling in form one of his own gnarled, timber-line scrub cedars, rather than the sturdier growth of the lower altitude pine. His wicked little eyes are black and piercing, and when animated rival the rattler's in their scintillations of viciousness, and yet, God bless him, when, crawling from under a

dying bear, bruised, wounded and faint from loss of blood, I saw that rugged face through the willows not ten yards away, hailing me with words of cheer, it had a halo surrounding it. It was a battle royal, covering 'a period of about twenty minutes, the details of which, as I saw them, will ever remain indelibly stamped on my memory.

Five grizzly bears, weighing not less than six hundred pounds each, surprised in their lair by two men, threw down the gage of battle. The issue was promptly accepted, from necessity, as there was no escape, and the fight was on.

Our camp was pitched in Halleck Canon, at the headwaters of several streams flowing in as many directions, through a broken and mountainous country. Game was in abundance and our party had bagged its quota of elk, deer, antelope and mountain sheep. No bears as yet, although at our nightly campfire comparisons of the day's events, each party had wonderful tales to relate of encountering innumerable trails, fresh beds, mutilated carcasses of game, and other signs, indicating that they were banded together in bunches ranging as high as thirteen. We counted that many fresh trails crossing a mountain meadow, and on this particular morning all of our party except Clark and myself, got an early start, bent on their

*This was so extraordinary a tale that corroboration was sought from two of the members of the party, and is presented herewith.—EDITOR.

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CASPAR WHITNEY, Esq.,
239 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

Dear Sir—

I have your letter of the 25th relating to the story of Elmer D. Frank, of Washington, about his fight with grizzly bears in Halleck Canon, Wyoming. Inasmuch as you do not state the details which you wish me to confirm, I am obliged to say, first: That I sincerely believe Mr. Frank is not misrepresenting the affair to you.

Second: That the truth of the story precludes any temptation to exaggerate.

I believe it was in the fall of '89 when our party was in Wyoming. I remember very distinctly that all of the party except Clark and Frank were out hunting during the day, and returning in the evening, we were told that Frank and Clark had gone out late in the afternoon after grouse. It was twilight when Estabrook and I, who were bathing in the stream a short distance from the camp, were disturbed by the crazy shouts of Elmer and Clark returning to camp. They were the most victory-intoxicated men I ever saw,

notwithstanding Frank was scratched and bitten in several places, though not seriously.

We returned to the camp, and the party gathered and were told the story of the fight with the five grizzlies as Frank has undoubtedly written to you. As I remember, Frank was bitten in one hand, in the arm and in the buttock. We treated the wounds in the best way we could and were somewhat afraid of blood-poisoning. You may be assured we got very little sleep that night and were out early in the morning.

We found the five grizzlies, which had been out open and ejeriscated by Clark and Frank before they returned to camp. We all punched in and skinned the five bears. I should say they were four or five years old. Of course we went through the bushes and had the story repeated over and over to us. The condition of the bushes and the earth was evidence enough of a desperate contest, if anyone had for a moment doubted the story.

You are at liberty to use this letter in any proper way you choose.

I am, very truly yours,
H. J. DAVIS

I wish to confirm in full the foregoing statement of Judge Davis. I have the pelt of the one I helped to skin as a rug.

H. D. ESTABROOK.

destruction, or a fight to a finish if unearthed. I was not feeling well and Clark remained in camp to keep me company. About three o'clock in the afternoon he proposed that we ride out and kill a mess of blue grouse for our hungry companions, and prepare a smothered feast, for them on their home coming. We thereupon saddled up our horses and proceeded about two miles up the canon of a little creek, where a small lake had formed by falling rocks turning the current of the stream. The lake was roiled and the banks were beaten down by the fresh tramping of bears. After a hurried examination Clark exclaimed: "They are here on this creek—the tracks are fresh—we flushed them when we rode up and we're going to make a killin' sure." Here it is necessary to state that the horse I rode that day was a natty, powerfully built cow-horse, swift as an antelope and mettlesome as a Kentucky racer. He was the pick of eight hundred, and when he scented the bears he began to get troublesome. However, we forced him up the creek toward a patch of willows, about seventy-five feet in width, the direction which the bears had taken, Clark leading the way.

These mountain willows grow in bunches, their branches spreading and interlacing at the tops, thereby making an almost impenetrable thicket. Here our quarry had evidently retreated, and a royal stronghold it was. On the opposite side a perpendicular cliff arose several hundred feet in height, with a ledge about six feet in width paralleling it, and peering about three feet above the tops of the willows. On our side of the creek the canon broadened into a sage-brush flat of about two hundred yards in width, and abutted against the willows, forming an almost perpendicular embankment about twelve feet in height. We were forcing our horses up onto this flat when the above conversation occurred, and Clark finished by excitedly exclaiming: "And by thunder, there they are!"

The brush seemed to be alive with them as they growled and leaped about, and one big fellow stood on his hind legs, with his head and breast towering above the tops of the willows, deliberately surveying us and hailing us with inquisitive grunts.

Clark's horse was a gentle old pack animal and he had no trouble in quickly dismounting and withdrawing his Winchester from its saddle-sling. He took deliberate

aim and fired, old bruin dropping dead in his tracks. During this short period I had succeeded in dismounting and was fighting my horse in a vain endeavor to get my Winchester from the saddle-sling. He reared, plunged and kicked viciously, but I held his bit with one hand and the gun with the other until Clark shot, when he gave a mighty leap into space, broke my hold, sent me rolling into the sage brush and ran off with my gun, Clark's horse closely following. When I regained my feet the commotion was still going on in the brush and another bear got on a rock and stood erect. Clark began to get a little excited and exclaimed: "The woods is full of 'em—Great God! Look at 'em?" I told him to keep his head and blaze away, which he did, wounding this fellow, who dropped off his perch and began to bawl and kick up a great row generally. Immediately three other bears stood on their hind legs, and the wounded one regaining his feet they came for us with growls of rage. This was too much for me, being armed with a knife only and the bears not ten jumps away. I told Clark I was going to quit him and rustle my gun, which I proceeded to do. As soon as I turned tail I ran for the horses, about a hundred and fifty yards away, whose bridle reins had gotten entangled in the sage brush, thus securely holding them. As I ran for dear life I heard the sage brush cracking behind me, but no more shots. I did not dare look around, as I expected Clark was down, and that a bear would grab me every jump, but was intensely relieved when he chirped: "They made it too hot for me—my cartridges ran out—I had to quit 'em." Although he had plenty in his belt, his gun was empty, and he was too closely pressed to reload. Thinking discretion the better part of valor, he had followed me immediately, hence neither of us knows whether the bears in this charge reached the top of the embankment on which we stood. We hastily secured our horses, removed my gun from the sling, filled the chambers with the full quota of cartridges, fastened our lariats to the bridle bits so that we could hold our horses while shooting, and returned to redeem ourselves from the stigma of so hasty and undignified a flight. We rode up and down the willow patch, halloed and threw rocks into it, but no sign of life gave answer. Thinking that, of course, the bears had

taken flight up the canon (and they had to go either up or down to get away), we followed the creek up towards its extreme timber line, beating the brush and exploring every possible hiding place. A hasty examination failed to disclose any trail in that direction, and we at once returned to our battle-ground, about three miles down the creek, feeling sure we would rout them out below that point. On our arrival there we dismounted, went into the brush, dressed the dead bear and dragged him out with our lariats attached to the horns of the saddles.

As before stated, the willows grew in bunches and interlaced at the tops, and I was compelled to walk in a crouching position and at times to crawl on my knees. I could not see ten feet ahead of me, and was thereby greatly handicapped. I had not proceeded twenty yards from the point where Clark left me when I was greeted with a terrible growling and the crackling rush of a heavy body. I fired, and was embraced, it seems to me, almost simultaneously. The bear's mouth was wide open and he towered way above me—I distinctly remember that—and instinctively I ducked my head, knowing that it would be crushed like an egg shell if exposed. For this reason, when we came together, I found my head under his shoulder, and immediately clinched him around the body, holding on for dear life, and calling to Clark as I went down under him. Clark heard my call and began to cautiously work his way toward me. Of course I had no idea of time when in that position, but Clark estimates it to have been five or six minutes before he reached me and fired. He says he forthwith responded to my call, guided by the racket the old bear was making; that he moved slowly and cautiously and at a point not fifteen feet away, caught the first glimpse of us. He crouched down and awaited some time for the bear to expose a spot for a fatal shot, without danger of hitting me. He saw that I was alive and "staying with him." He could not shoot him in the heart for my head was there, nor could he see bruin's head, and he dared not move further for fear of attracting the attention of and bringing the others down on him. Becoming desperate and unable longer to stand the suspense, and the bear's back being now turned toward him, he took deliberate aim and fired, the bullet entering

the bear's hip, plowing its way just outside the ribs and lodging in the neck. There was a terrific crashing of brush, growling, and bawling all around me. Whichever way I looked I could see bears either dancing around on their hind legs or rushing to and fro. My bear would raise up with me, shake me like a rat and chuck me down again, threatening to loosen every joint in my body, but I realized that my only hope was to hold on. Suddenly I felt his teeth tearing at my hip, the only spot of my anatomy he could reach with his mouth, which he severely wounded, and literally tore my trousers and part of my chaps (heavy calfskin overalls) from me. Had it not been for the latter he would have made short work of my leg then and there.

I was in desperate straits and had about given up hope, thinking Clark had deserted me. The infamy of this act seemed horrible to me, and a wild desire to live long enough to murder him overcame me. I took fresh heart, held on tighter, and thought of my knife in a scabbard at my left side. I let go my right grip, worked my hand between old grizzly and my body and reached my knife, which, to my horror was tied in the scabbard with a buckskin string, used to keep it from jolting out when I was in the saddle. I labored hard to untie—to break it, but old bruin did not propose to have it that way. He let go my hip and seized my hand, crunching through and through it. I never expected to see it again. In my dire distress I thought, nothing of it—it was only a hand, did I not have another one still left me? Just then, to my indescribable joy, I heard the sharp report of a Winchester not twenty feet away. It was Clark. Clark, the heroic Texan, now my savior, whom but a moment ago I thought a cowardly cur, and for whom I had murder in my heart. I quickly struggled to my feet, seized my gun, and just in time to see poor Clark go down under the now doubly enraged and wounded bear, it striking wickedly at him with its paw, hitting his gun and sending it spinning in the air. True to the hunter's tradition he played 'possum in an admirable manner. He saw me get on my feet, so he said, and thought I would kill the bear before it hurt him very badly, hence he lay perfectly still. But in this he was doomed to disappointment. My gun was full of sand; it refused to work. I threw down the lever and was

working the sand out of it as rapidly as possible. I saw my task was useless, the magazine refused to give up its cartridges. It was an awful moment of suspense. I forgot myself and thought only of poor Clark. One wrench on the lever and it sprang back into place, but no cartridge came with it. I could only work with my left hand, and the third finger of my right, but I quickly snatched a cartridge from my belt, and was thrusting it into the barrel, when another bear leaped on top of me from God knows where, I am sure I don't. I went down all in a heap under the crushing weight, and poor Clark's heart almost ceased beating when he heard me call, "Here comes another one—I can't help you—he's got me again." I don't believe this bear hurt me in the least, unless it was my left arm, which had several tusk holes in it, and was pinched until it was black from wrist to elbow the next morning, but I have no recollection when it was done. He had evidently been wounded by one of our shots, for he tore up the ground and chewed at the willows all the time he was over me, almost burying both of us in dirt and broken sticks. Presently there was another roar and crash and tophet broke loose again, which evidently attracted my bear away from me, as he left me as suddenly as he had attacked. I was nearly used up, but I had life enough left to regain a sitting position and get hold of my gun once more, when Clark's bear, seeing me move, left him and came for me. I verily believe I made the last effort I was capable of at that time, and just as he was coming down on me, I poked my Winchester blindly against him and pulled the trigger. He fell dead with his head on my breast, knocking the breath out of me, and I went to sleep. My nap must have been a short one, for I was awakened by Clark calling to me, "Stay with 'em, Elmer, I've got my gun; you hit that d—l, I saw him fall. Give him another." I opened my eyes, looking into those of the dead bear on top of me. He didn't look a bit dead, and it was a few moments before I could persuade myself to make an effort to move, and when I did so it was as gingerly as one would walk on eggs, fearing he would suddenly awaken and make up for lost time. With considerable pain and labor, however, I finally succeeded in extricating myself, and bare-headed, bare-legged, with

blood and sand smeared and plastered over me from head to foot, torn, bleeding and sore, I dragged myself toward Clark, who had retreated to and mounted the stone ledge on the outer side of the brush. I had nearly reached him. He was standing on the ledge waiting to help me up. He asked me if I were much hurt. I told him I thought I was all chewed to a sausage, but that I was indebted to him for my existence; that his was a brave, generous and manly act, and in short, "You are every inch a man." He extended his hand to me, saying, "Put it there and the same right back at you." But I did not get close enough to "put it there," for here came the remaining three bears on another furious charge. We fought them off three or four times, blazing away as they would leap over the brush toward us, before I succeeded in reaching the ledge. The smoke of our guns seemed to bewilder them, for after a volley, they would jump up into it, bite and spat at it with their paws, and then retreat to their den, which we then discovered was within a few feet of where they had me "in chancery."

After the last charge they seemed content to lay quiet, so Clark walked up the ledge about fifteen yards to try and peer into the den. He called to me that he could see the entrance, and to look out, as he would throw a stone into it, and as he threw, I fired. We were answered by a howl, and two bears came straight at me. Two lucky shots from my rifle finished them, and they died in each other's arms at my feet near the foot of the ledge. Clark was wild with delight. He was sure there was only one more, and that badly wounded, as he was making the canon ring and echo to his wails of pain; so we procured our whisky bottle (always carried in the Rocky Mountains for snake bites, you know[?]), and washed my wounds, tearing our handkerchiefs and the tails of our shirts into bandages, to do the best piece of dressing possible under the circumstances. The balance of the whisky, it is needless to state, was used to wash the dust from our throats and revive our drooping spirits. We then deliberately sat down for the first time since the battle began, and discussed how we should dispose of the remaining bear, who was still as noisy as ever. Clark proposed to set fire to the brush and burn him out; but it would not do to thus destroy

our precious pelts, and besides, my only hat within a hundred miles, and no other procurable, was under one of them. Dusk was on us and we must act quickly, whereupon we determined to assault the den. We arrived within twenty or thirty feet of our quarry, when a gust of wind blowing down the canon parted the willows and disclosed the old fellow lying on his stomach with his head on his forepaws, as if resting. I sent a bullet quickly to his heart and quieted him forever. It was now almost dark; and after dressing our game we struck out for camp, which we reached about nine o'clock. Our companions had all returned and we, of course, were the heroes of that night's campfire, and of the "smother of grouse" which was never smothered.

In all the encounter Clark was fortunate enough not to receive a scratch, and this

fact should be explained, if susceptible of an explanation. Old hunters say that a badly wounded grizzly will seize and hold onto the first object within reach, and expend its remaining strength in a desperate endeavor to rend it to atoms. I have seen this fact verified in at least a half a dozen instances. When the bear, on being wounded, sprang off me in its leap for Clark, it grabbed a mouth full of willows, and was crunching at them while over him, and he quietly playing 'possum. This might explain why the second bear did not make mincemeat of me, as both of them died with their mouths full of brush.

I make this statement for what it is worth, anticipating sceptical mental inquiries upon this part of my story, and for the additional reason that it is information of sufficient value for the hunter to remember.

BITS OF WOODCRAFT

THE AUTUMN CAMP

By Horace Kephart

TO those who camp in autumn a good fire is the prime necessity of comfort.

Green logs should be used, instead of dry, because they last longer. The best woods for an all-night fire are hickory (especially shellbark), sugar maple, black birch, yellow birch, red birch, box elder, pecan, dogwood, hornbeam, and any of the oaks excepting red, willow and water oak. Soft woods burn too freely, and leave no durable coals. Chestnut snaps and crackles, sending sparks and embers in every direction, and so do hemlock, sassafras, dry cedar, and spruce.

Some woods are almost incombustible when green: such as aspen, buckeye, red cedar, sour gum, laurel, poplar, sassafras, sorrel, sycamore, tamarack, and tupelo. Backlogs of buckeye, butternut, sour gum, sycamore, or tupelo are preferable, because they last so long, and, when once glowing, send out a moderate but steady heat.

For a quick-cooking fire use dry hardwood. It should, as a rule, be taken from standing trees, stumps, and stubs, for wood

picked up from the ground is apt to, be soggy or decayed, and will make more of a smudge than a fire. If you want long-lived coals for roasting or baking, split some green hickory (shellbark splits easiest and burns best) to uniform pieces about half the thickness of common stove-wood, and pile it cob-house fashion. Then it will all burn down at the same time, leaving hard coals that will give out strong and uniform heat, without flame or smoke. Good kindling is procured by splitting the firm, dry wood from an old stump, or from dead but sound twigs plucked from standing trees, or from dead shoots. In a heavy rain it is hard to start a fire, unless you know how. Dry punk can be found under the excrescences of the bark of beech, sugar maple, or yellow birch trees, or in dead pines; and if there are any fat pine-knots about you are in no trouble. But in a deciduous forest the simplest way is first to collect plenty of dead twigs and branches from standing trees, assort it according to thickness at the prospective fireplace, then