



The Vaulted Driveway of Live Oak.

AN ISLAND DEER HUNT

By JAMES GILBERT VAN MARTER

DOWN on the coast of Georgia, not very far from the Florida line, is an island, St. Catherine's by name, some twenty-five miles long by five in width, primitive, even primeval, far from the beaten track, a kingdom in itself, devoted to the cult of Venery. The Atlantic Ocean is on one side; vast marshes, deep inlets and navigable tidal streams on the other. Here are no tourists, no cheap sportsmen, no guides, no hotels, but instead a genuine wilderness, where roam countless deer; an island where everything is subordinated to sport. Unlike Jekyll Island, the millionaires' club, unlike any other of the numberless sea islands which dot the coast from Virginia to Florida, it is the property of a single man; one who appreciates and makes the most of his island kingdom. Here the Virginia deer thrive amazingly. Towns and cities are far away, and there are no troublesome neighbors with their dogs.

Arriving there from Savannah one January, I learned from my host that on the island, as elsewhere in the South, deer

stalking is a practical impossibility owing to the luxuriant undergrowth, the danger of stepping on venomous snakes, and the impossibility of creeping up on game where grass, growing knee high, rustles and rattles in such a way that the dullest of animals would have ample warning. Here is no friendly snow to aid the stalker; there are no streams or lakes for silent canoes. It is only with the assistance of hounds and beaters, the latter profoundly versed in the topography of the country, that the wily deer can be brought down. When driven, the deer, ever cunning and resourceful, are too clever to trust to open ground, but cling to the almost impenetrable jungles, where their tactics of doubling, side jumping, and other wary tricks, baffle the cleverest hunters. A rifle is of practically no use; a shotgun, loaded with buckshot and a heavy charge of powder, is used,* even then a miss is far more common than one would suppose. A deer presents no

* The shotgun is always unsportsmanly on deer, no matter what the conditions, and its use cannot be excused on any ground. Our southern friends are far behind in the ethics of the game.—EDITOR.



The Hounds and the Beaters.



Hounds Impatient to be Off.

easy mark for the sportsman when seen in glimpses only, flitting between trees set inconveniently close, flying like the wind. It requires good judgment, a quick eye, alert senses, and a total absence of buck fever to make a kill. To my way of thinking, the long drawn out pleasure of an open stalk in a mountainous country is much to be preferred to the intense momentary excitement of this snap shooting; but, of course, each method has its warm advocates. To one in search of soul-stirring excitement, I recommend this southern deer shooting.

My host further told me that he allows no cultivation of the soil, excepting small garden patches, for fear of disturbing the deer, and because he found that it was injudicious to encourage the settlement of more negroes on the island than were actually necessary for the work, for in the African there is, deep rooted, the making of a poacher. Estimates as to the number of deer on the island are, of course, mere matters of conjecture; but it is safe to say there are between ten and twenty thousand.

The chief hunter, a broad-shouldered, burly negro, with a mouth and teeth which would make the fortune of a minstrel singer, blew his horn, to a chorus of bays from impatient hounds, and, mounting his horse, followed the carriage in which we set forth. This morning the deer drive was to take place in the pine barrens of the northern end of the island.

We drove for an hour through the needle-carpeted forest, horses and wheels scarce breaking the primeval stillness, until, reaching a group of horsemen, we halted hard by an Indian mound, last vestige of a perished race.

The beaters disappeared with the dogs, and the exciting moment was at hand. After much cautioning against shooting beyond certain angles from the stand to which I was apportioned, I was left alone, each stand being placed about one hundred and fifty yards from the other; a safe distance, one would say, though accidents are by no means infrequent, in spite of the distance. The view from where I stood was a charming one, exceptionally open in front—this, I believe, a favor to the novice—and the quarter of an hour which elapsed in silence passed quickly. It was broken, of a sudden, by a succession of

loud yells and followed by a series of short, jerky bays from the hounds and occasional encouraging shouts from the beaters, which came nearer and nearer. Nothing was to be seen, but it was quite evident, even to my untrained ears, that the deer was at hand. Then, for a second, I caught a glimpse of a tawny, flying shape going with great leaps and bounds; a shot followed, then two more, and all was silent. The dogs came close behind, now silent as the beaters, and no sound of triumph was heard; but a horn called us to the first stand, near which the carriage stood, and there I heard the story of a simple miss.

A new "drive" was arranged, and reached in less than a quarter of an hour. Again we were placed with the same minute care; again the wait, a restful period of unbroken silence, save for the sighing of the wind through the tree tops; a sad, sobbing sort of sound, broken suddenly by the distant yelling which proclaimed the jumping of a deer. This time the drive went with a wild rush, passing well to my left; nothing seen, only heard, and ending in a veritable fusillade. Six, perhaps more, shots were fired, followed by a noisy altercation with the hounds, who, poor beasts, would persist in following their prey, owing probably to drops of blood from a wounded animal. Persuaded by a stout whip to obey their masters, the hounds were soon rounded up; the recall was blown on the horn, and we assembled to gaze upon a small buck, sole product of the fusillade. It seemed that eight deer, in one bunch, had passed between two stands, and afforded close but difficult shots; only one had fallen, and that one was hit by both standers. The bucks, at this late season, had already shed their horns, and except to an expert, were indistinguishable from the does. As a rule, the does are not shot;* in fact, only ladies are exempt from a scolding, should they accidentally shoot a doe, so that my feelings can be imagined when at the next stand I was unfortunate enough to bring one down. Under the circumstances, and particularly considering that experts only can tell a doe from a buck at this season, I escaped without reproach, though not without regret. Sam, the burly head

* Rule or no rule, sportsmen never shoot does.—
EDITOR.

beater, insisted upon shaking hands with me, and I nearly laughed in his face when he solemnly said, "Now, how you like me an' the massa's island?" Sam, by the way, was born on this island, a slave; has never been willing to leave it and feels as if he owned it, the massa being a tolerated individual who affords him much sport and a living.

A lunch in the woods, the air as balmy

new sensations, beautiful views and pleasant thoughts.

The next hunt is worth recording, not only because the scenery of the southern end of the island is so totally different from that of the northern end, but because it does not often happen that one has a chance of killing deer on an ocean beach.

We started late again, of course, for the climate makes one lazy; the day ahead of



On the Beach After the Successful Drive.

and deliciously soft as one could wish for, was followed by a pleasant ride through forests of pine; then some open spaces, little prairies now, but before the Civil War cotton fields of a prosperous plantation. Later still we rode through a park-like country dotted with giant oaks, singly or in clumps, affording sylvan views of enchanting beauty, closing with the magnificent live-oak avenue leading up to the house, a fitting finale to a day fraught with

of us promised to be a long one, with twenty-five miles to cover, several stops for drives, and a visit to the old south end settlement. The road across the island carried us through a lovely region of park country; southern oak covered with moss, standing in glades, reminding one of English scenery but for the moss and occasional palmettos. After awhile the woodland scenery changed, becoming more mixed, all sort of hardwood trees



The Old "Tabby" Slave Houses.

appearing, and shrubs, also pines of all kinds.

A five-mile ride brought us to the sea-beach. To my surprise, it was decided to have a drive here; the idea of shooting deer on a sea-beach had never occurred to me, and it promised something novel. It was explained that the bucks, after shedding their horns, often leave their accustomed haunts, as if ashamed of their nakedness, and retire to out-of-the-way places. On the ocean side of St. Catherine's are to be found two or three small islands, called "hammocks," covered with a nearly impenetrable growth of scrub vegetation, consisting mostly of palmettos. The largest of these hammocks is connected at low tide with the main island by a broad beach and offers no avenue of escape to the deer who are unfortunate enough to seek refuge thereon. True, sometimes, but not often, they take to the water, and by hard swimming escape to the more distant islets.

Nothing could be more picturesque and unusual than standing upon the sand dunes, the foaming surf upon one hand and a waving line of marsh, backed by palmettos, on the other; whilst the long reach of white beach stretched in front and behind for miles. The novelty of the situation, as well as the beauty of the sur-

roundings, quite made me forget the time which had elapsed since the hounds and drivers had trotted away. And then far away I caught the sound of a hound's bay, faintly intermingled with the murmuring of the surf, but even to my untrained ear quite unmistakable. The sounds came closer and closer; the standers stood at the ready with tingling, tense nerves. Minutes passed, the baying became fainter instead of louder, until it was apparent that the deer had doubled on the hounds and was once more lurking in the fastness of the hammock jungle. It takes a clever and nery deer to try such tactics on the open sand beach, therefore we anxiously waited for the result of the second search. Ten long minutes elapsed, when again we heard the faintest of distant bays borne down to us upon a gentle breeze; this time, however, the approach was swifter, a long straight run down the beach, with plenty of time to see the flying, tawny form which made nearly straight for the spot where I stood. It was going a tremendous pace, keeping far ahead of the dogs, coming with leaps and bounds. A quick glance down the barrel, a touch of the trigger, and to my surprise the buck rolled over and over, a clean kill.

I had little time to inspect my quarry, for



Dick Bringing in the Deer Shot on the Beach.

a warning shout from the other standers reminded me that there was something strange in the non-appearance of the dogs; hardly had I regained my place when the baying of hounds was clearly wafted to us, and down the beach came another stag, closely pursued by the dogs, though evidently well able to take care of himself. The leaping form bounded straight for my hiding place, and, the fates having ordained that I should have luck, I made another good shot, which, while it did not bring the deer down at once, would soon have proved fatal. As the deer still ran, the stander on my left took a shot, which, by breaking a leg, caused the buck to drop not far from the edge of a dense thicket. The dogs, coming close behind, were only kept off the animal by very hard work, and we all were glad when the negro drivers came up on their horses to take charge of the unruly beasts. I noticed a raccoon hanging from the pommel of a saddle, and a delighted negro, with the broadest of smiles, told how the dogs had treed him while trailing the deer.

The carriage having come up, and the tide being low, it was decided to keep along the ocean beach. Great flocks of ducks, floating serenely just out of gunshot upon the placid surface of the sea, aggravated the youngsters in the party into shooting blindly and ineffectually with their rifles.

The whole day was one long round of surprises, beautiful views, mingled with unexpected pauses to allow for some more deer shooting, or occasional stops in which to give the negroes a chance to kill another coon. After exploring the southern end and lurching in a grassy field dotted with graceful palmettos, we turned our heads homeward, passing first through a marshy region dotted with hammocks, veritable haunts of deer, and, I regret to add, of snakes; thence, climbing up on high ground, we traveled what had once been cultivated land in the golden days, now overgrown, but still very pretty; and finally reached the ruins of the old south end plantation house and the adjacent slave houses.

