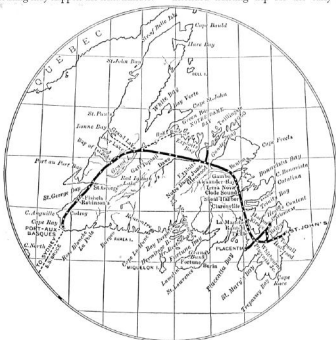


NEWFOUNDLAND CARIBOU

By RICHARD D. WARE

NEWFOUNDLAND and its caribou have become topics of increasing interest to American sportsmen of late years, and with good cause. It really takes but little more time, if any, to arrive at hunting grounds where it may be fairly said that success depends only on the man behind the gun, than it does to get into some, of the supposedly more accessible moose and caribou country in New Brunswick, from which many a good man has returned with a full magazine of cartridges and perhaps an "If" story. The journey can be made entirely by rail, with the exception of the short run from Sidney to Port-aux-Basques, with unusual comfort; and when you have left the train you are on the trail, for in the caribou country something may happen the next minute.

My own experience a year ago is probably the common one. The great impression gained from the sources which were available was that as winter approached there was a great general migration of all the caribou from the northern part of the island, "where they feed and bring forth their young," to the southern part, and that in the spring they went back north again for the laudable purposes mentioned. The cause of these migrations was given as climatic, like the migrations of the birds. It seemed obvious from the authorities that during the summer the beasts were all as far north as they could get, which would mass them in the great peninsula which makes the northern end of the island, and that an intended hunting trip for the early part



The Caribou Country in Newfoundland



Coming in from a Day's Hunting.

of September would have to be planned for that country.

By good fortune, in July, we learned that the friend of a friend was fishing near a station in the southeastern part of the island. This was a chance for something definite, and he was written to. He stated that he saw caribou nearly every day. That seemed impossible, for according to the migration theory there ought not to have been a caribou within three hundred miles of him, and he was cross-examined. He refused to be shaken, and advised us to take his guides and come and see for ourselves. We went, and on September first were on our way due west into the country with "Uncle John," the guide, and his men.

In September, caribou begin to appear in the "leads" in the Howley district, all working toward the south, mostly does, fawns and young stags, at first singly, or in twos and threes. As the season goes on they come in larger companies, as many as twenty or thirty, or even more, together. Some old stags will be with these companies, but they generally lag along behind as yet, as they are heavy and slow moving. This procession to the south-

ward keeps on well through October, and then gradually ceases. This is the time when Howley is in its gory glory. The shooters lie on the points in the lakes and ponds, which interrupt the line of march, and shoot the caribou as they swim by. They patrol Sandy Lake stream in boats, and shoot them as they cross. Back from the water courses they camp, as they did along the railroad track until the recent law was passed prohibiting it, on the leads down which the animals travel, and shoot them from the tent doors. If several parties are camped on the same lead, as is frequently the case, the appearance of a good stag is the signal for a free-for-all sprint across the bog for the first shot, a sociable but hardly ideal method of hunting such noble game. In the spring the animals go back again to the north through the same district. Here is the foundation of the migration theory.

The twelve caribou we saw the first day in our southern hunting grounds exploded it, and we sought for the truth from our guide, philosopher and friend. His statements, borne out as they were by what we were able to observe, show that it is this. There is no general migration of the, cari-

bou in the sense that they all go north at one season of the year, leaving none in the southern parts of the island, and all go south at another season, leaving none in the northern parts. Wherever there are great moss-producing barrens and bogs in the vicinity of woodland, there one will find caribou all through the year, north or south. As these conditions exist over practically the whole island, barring the mountainous west coast, one may put it more definitely, that one will find caribou over the whole island all through the year, the only qualification being that one will find them in the woodland country during one period, and on the barrens and bogs through another.

The young caribou is born in May or June in the woods, where the doe has betaken herself after the manner of most wild creatures when such events are approaching. The instincts and requirements which led to banding together in the open country in the fall have lost their force, and the desire to be alone is the ruling motive, in both sexes. The doe with her fawn has all she can attend to, and wishes not to be disturbed. The stags, and the does as well, begin to grow their new antlers about this time, and their sore heads and tender horns make them sulky and unsocial.

About the last of August the does find their fawns are pretty sturdy youngsters. They can feed themselves and run from danger fairly well, and maternal solicitude consequently abates considerably. They think it would be pleasant to go out into the open country and see other does and their fawns, and things generally, most usual desires in the feminine which need no further exposition. The young stags, whose spike or pronged horns have grown more quickly than the great branches of their elders, are filled with vain desires to exhibit them to some appreciative doe or try them on another stag, and they, too, drift out into the barrens where they can see and be seen, joining the does and fawns which have preceded them. By the tenth of September, and generally a few days earlier, the older stags have stripped the last velvet from their antlers and polished them on the trees. One can almost always tell what the summer environment of a stag has been from the color of his horns. Those that are dark-colored have

been rubbed on spruces or junipers, which have exuded pitch upon them, to which dirt has adhered and been rubbed into the horn. The light-colored antlers have been cleaned on alders or birches, and have absorbed their more liquid, greenish juices. The stags have had their horns literally on their minds all summer, and their purpose dimly begins to dawn on them. They are not yet the truculent beasts they become a few weeks later, for one often sees several old stags together at this season; but they are prepared for the coming frays, and come forth into the open country, where they join those already assembled, as they have picked up each other here and there as they wandered about.

By the first of October practically all the caribou have left the wooded country for the open, where the conditions for natural selection for the reproduction of the species are most favorable. The breeding season continues through October, with battles royal between the great stags for supremacy over the different herds, during which the younger stags avail themselves of all the opportunities which the contests of their elders make possible. Their duties to their race being accomplished, the beasts lay down their arms—or, to put it less metaphorically, their horns drop off—and settle down to more harmonious conditions for winter on the barrens, for here they find the deep gray reindeer moss which makes their favorite food supply, now that the woods have ceased producing. The winter winds blowing over the great expanses keep the snow from covering the moss too deep for the animals to get at it by pawing, a condition which is greatly helped by the fact that the first snow freezes into ice when it falls on the wet bog, making a glassy surface which prevents much drifting. They spend the winter wandering about looking for thin places to feed in, with an occasional meal of the black moss on the spruces when some fierce storm drives them to take shelter in the woods. The snow finally melts away, and the trees begin to leaf out again with the spring. One beast after another leaves the herd, goes back to some familiar haunt in the woodland and begins another cycle in its existence.

Of the caribou we saw on the first day,

eleven out of the twelve were does and fawns, not over three together. The one stag was a small one, by himself. All of them were feeding by the edge of the woods.

On September 3 we traveled most of the day through wooded country on the way to some new barrens, and started several does with fawns in the thick of it. When we finally reached the barrens, a single doe at the edge of the woods was the only sign of caribou for miles.

The next day nine were seen in the same

were counted that day. During the rest of our stay we saw an average of twenty-five caribou every day we hunted, with a good proportion of old stags among them. On September 11 we counted over fifty. From seeing no old stags at the beginning, it became so that we were able to pick our game. It is certain that the old stags are the last to leave the woods.

Our hunting ground was a long wide valley between two heavily wooded ridges, stretching away westward into the interior, and our camp was at the eastern end of it.



Our Camp in the Southern Hunting Grounds.

locality—does, fawns and one spike horn. On the fifth the first old stag was shot in a strip of woods, still in velvet, and this one and another with him were the only large stags of the twenty-seven caribou that were seen.

During the morning of the sixth we saw the first real herd, well out on the barren, a company of sixteen, does and fawns and two old stags, and in the afternoon came upon a trio of old stags traveling together. These three were out of velvet, as were all the stags we saw afterward. The does stay in velvet much longer. Thirty-three

Nearly every day caribou would be seen coming from the wooded country to the eastward, up through the valley. None came by from the opposite direction. One would have said from the conditions in our vicinity that there was a general migration of the animals from east to west, but on one trip a dozen miles or so to the westward we found the general line of travel to be toward the east. The fact was that our valley was the assembling ground for the caribou from the woodlands on all sides of us. Our guide had killed them there in former years in every

month from October to April. We could see another great valley far in the distance beyond our northern ridge, where he had done the same thing. That was another assembling ground for the animals which spent the summer in the woods which surrounded it. One of our men said that he had recently gone ashore from a fishing vessel to a barren near the Straits of Belle Isle, and had found it strewn with innumerable caribou horns. As they do not shed their horns much before December, there must have been caribou at that north-

road through the Gafftopsail region as well. These barrens are the local place of assembly for the animals which do not have other barrens nearer their Summer quarters. Those approaching from the south and east make no great showing, as they come in from a great circumference and have the whole wide country in which to travel. Those coming from the north follow along the northern slope of the mountains and converge through these valleys into this narrow space running due north and south between the lakes and



A Newfoundland Lake—Bordered by Wooded Caribou Country.

ern part of the island well into the winter. The so-called migrations amount to nothing more than the assembling of the caribou from all directions on the barren grounds which may be nearest their summer quarters, where they can find an ample food supply, and their subsequent dispersion to the woods in the spring.

The conditions at Howley are entirely consistent with this conclusion. The country lying north of Red Indian Lake, east of Grand Lake, and south of the railroad, is a great expanse of moss-covered barrens, extending north of the rail-

road and the bay, which act as natural barriers. If they wander to the east, the bay turns them back. If they strike the lakes or river, they follow along their shores instead of swimming them, as their course has the same direction as their own. Hemmed in, they assemble more rapidly.

There are half a dozen water-ways accessible from the railroad in the eastern part of the island which lead into country which is practically untouched. The hunting would be honest and sportman by stalking instead of mere killing in the water and on the runways.