

The Moose

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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THE moose is the giant of all deer; and many hunters esteem it the noblest of American game. Beyond question there are few trophies more prized than the huge shovel horns of this strange dweller in the cold northland forests. I shot my first moose after making several fruitless hunting trips with this special game in view. The season I finally succeeded it was only after having hunted two or three weeks in vain, among the Bitter Root Mountains, and the ranges lying southeast of them. I began about the first of September



We then dropped on hands and knees, by making a trial with my old hunting friend Willis. We speedily found a country where there were moose, but of the animals themselves we never caught a glimpse.

The moose which lived in isolated, exposed localities were speedily killed or driven away after the incoming settlers; and at the time that we hunted we found no sign of them until we reached the region of continuous forest. Here, in a fortnight's hunting, we found as much sign as we wished, and plenty of it fresh; but the animals themselves we not only never saw, but we never so much as heard. Often after hours of careful still-hunting or cautious tracking, we found the footprints deep in the soft earth, showing where our quarry had wended or heard us, and had noiselessly slipped away from the hunter. I began to think that this moose-hunt, like all my former ones, was doomed to end in failure.

However, a few days later I met a crabbled old trapper named Hank Griffin, who was going after beaver in the mountains, and who told me that if I would come with him he would show me moose. I jumped at the chance, and he proved as good as his word; though for the first two trials my ill luck did not change.

At the time that it finally did change we had at last reached a place where the moose were on favorable ground. A high, marshy valley stretched for several miles between two rows of stony mountains, clad with a forest of rather small fir-trees. This valley was covered with reeds, alders, and rank grass, and studded with little willow-bordered ponds and island-like clumps of spruce and graceful tamaracks.

Having surveyed the ground and found moose sign the preceding afternoon, we were up betimes in the cool morning to begin our hunt. Before sunrise we were posted on a rocky spur of the foot-hills, behind a mask of evergreens; ourselves unseen we overlooked all the valley, and we knew we could see any animal which might be either feeding away from cover or on its journey homeward from its feeding ground to its day-bed.

As it grew lighter we scanned the valley with increasing care and eagerness. The sun rose behind us; and almost as soon as it was up we made out some large beast moving among the dwarf willows beside a little lake half a mile in our front. In a few minutes the thing walked out where the bushes were thinner, and we saw that it was a young bull moose browsing on the willow tops. He had evidently nearly finished his breakfast, and he stood idly for some moments, now and then lazily cropping a mouthful of twig tips. Then he walked off with great strides in a straight line across the marsh, splashing among the wet water-plants, and ploughing through boggy spaces with the indifference begotten of vast strength and legs longer than those of any other animal on this continent.

After a while he reached a spruce island, through which he walked to and fro; but evidently could find there in no resting-place quite to his mind, for he soon left and went on to another

er. Here after a little wandering he chose a point where there was some thick young growth, which hid him from view when he lay down, though not when he stood. After some turning he settled himself in his bed just as a steer would.

He could not have chosen a spot better suited for us. He was nearly at the edge of the morass, the open space between the spruce clump where he was lying and the rocky foot-hills being comparatively dry and not much over a couple of hundred yards broad; while some sixty yards from it, and between it and the hills, was a little hummock, tufted with firs, so as to afford us just the cover we needed. Keeping back from the edge of the morass we were able to walk upright through the forest, until we got the point where he was lying in a line with this little hummock. We then dropped on our hands and knees, and crept over the soft, wet sward, where there was nothing to make a noise.

At last we reached the hummock, and I got into position for a shot, taking a final look at my faithful 45-90 Winchester to see that all was in order. Peering cautiously through the shielding evergreens, I at first could not make out where the moose was lying, until my eye was caught by the motion of his big ears, as he occasionally flapped them lazily forward. Even then I could not see his outline; but I knew where he was, and having pushed my rifle forward on the moss, I snapped a dry twig to make him rise. My veins were thrilling and my heart beating with that eager, fierce excitement, known only to the hunter of big game, and forming one of the keenest and strongest of the many pleasures which with him go to make up "the wild joy of living."

As the sound of the snapping twig smote his ears the moose rose nimbly to his feet, with a lightness on which one would not have reckoned in a beast so heavy of body. He stood broadside to me for a moment, his ungainly head slightly turned, while his ears twitched and his nostrils snuffed the air. Drawing a fine bead against his black hide, behind his shoulder and two thirds of his body's depth below his shaggy withers, I pressed the trigger. He neither flinched nor reeled, but started with his regular ground-covering trot through the spruces; yet I knew he was mine, for the light blood sprang from both of his nostrils, and he fell cying on his side before he had gone thirty rods.

Later in the fall I was again hunting among the lofty ranges which continue towards the southeast the chain of the Bitter Root, between Idaho and Montana. There were but two of us, and we were travelling very light, each having but one pack-pony and the saddle animal he bestrode. We were high among the mountains, and followed no regular trail. Hence our course was often one of extreme difficulty. Occasionally, we took our animals through the forest near timber line, where the slopes were not too steep; again we threaded our way through a line of glades, or skirted the foot-hills, in an open, park country; and now and then we had to cross stretches of tangled mountain forest, making but a few miles a day, at the cost of incredible toil, and accomplishing even this solely by virtue of the wonderful docility and sure-footedness of the ponies, and of my companion's skill with the axe and thorough knowledge of woodcraft.

Late one cold afternoon we came out in a high alpine valley in which there was no sign of any man's having ever been before us. Down its middle ran a clear brook. On each side was a belt of thick spruce forest, covering the lower flanks of the mountains. The trees came down in points and isolated clumps to the brook, the banks of which were thus bordered with open glades, rendering the travelling easy and rapid.

Soon after starting up this valley we entered a beaver meadow of considerable size. It was covered with lush, rank grass, and the stream wound through it rather sluggishly in long curves, which were fringed by a thick growth of dwarfed willows. In one or two places it broadened into small ponds, bearing a few lily-pads. This meadow had been all tramped up by moose. Trails led hither and thither through the grass, the willow twigs were cropped off, and the muddy banks of the little black ponds were indented by hoof-marks. Evidently most of the lilies had been plucked. The footprints were unmistakable; a moose's foot is longer and slimmer than a caribou's, while on the other hand it is much larger than an elk's, and a longer oval in shape.

Most of the sign was old, this high alpine meadow, surrounded by snow mountains, having clearly been a favorite resort for moose in the summer; but some enormous, fresh tracks told that one or more old bulls were still frequenting the place.

The light was already fading, and, of course, we did not wish to camp where we were, because we would then certainly scare the moose. Accordingly we pushed up the valley for another mile, through an open forest, the ground being quite free from un-

derbrush and dead timber, and covered with a carpet of thick moss, in which the feet sank noiselessly. Then we came to another beaver meadow, which offered fine feed for the ponies. On its edge we hastily pitched camp, just at dusk. We tased down the packs in a dry grave, close to the brook, and turned the three ponies loose in the meadow, hobbling the little mare that carried the bell. The ground was smooth. We threw a cross-pole from one to the other of two young spruces, which happened to stand handily, and from it stretched and pegged out a piece of canvas, which we were using as a shelter tent. Beneath this we spread our bedding, laying under it the canvas sheets in which it had been wrapped. There was still bread left over from yesterday's baking, and in a few moments the kettle was boiling, and the frying-pan sizzling, while one of us skinned and cut into suitable pieces two grouse we had knocked over on our march. For fear of frightening the moose we built but a small fire, and went to bed soon after supper, being both tired and cold. Fortunately, what little breeze there was blew up the valley.

At dawn I was awake, and crawled out of my buffalo bag, shivering and yawning. My companion still slumbered heavily. White frost covered whatever had been left outside. The cold was sharp, and I hurriedly slipped a pair of stout moccasins on my feet, drew on my gloves and cap, and started through the ghostly woods for the meadow where we had seen the moose sign. The tufts of grass were stiff with frost; black ice skimmed the edges and quiet places of the little brook.

I walked slowly, it being difficult not to make a noise by cracking sticks or brushing against trees, in the gloom; but the forest was so open that it favored me. When I reached the edge of the beaver meadow it was light enough to shoot, though the front sight still glimmered indistinctly. Streaks of cold red showed that the sun would rise soon.

Before leaving the shelter of the last spruces I halted to listen; and almost immediately heard a curious splashing sound from the middle of the meadow, where the brook broadened into small willow-bordered pools. I knew at once that a moose was in one of these pools, wading about and pulling up the water-lilies by seizing their slippery stems in his lips, plunging his head deep under water to do so. The moose love to feed in this way in the hot months, when they spend all the time they can in the water, feeding or lying down; nor do they altogether abandon the habit even when the



His vast bulk loomed black.

weather is so cold that icicles form in their shaggy coats.

Crouching, I stole noiselessly along the edge of the willow-thicket. The stream twisted through it from side to side in zigzags, so that every few rods I got a glimpse down a lane of black water. In a minute I heard a slight splashing near me; and on passing the next point of bushes, I saw the shadowy outline of the moose's hindquarters, standing in a bend of the water. In a moment he walked onwards, disappearing. I ran forward a couple of rods, and then turned in among the willows, to reach the brook where it again bent back towards me. The splashing in the water, and the rustling of the moose's body against the frozen twigs, drowned the little noise made by my moccasined feet.

I strode out on the bank at the lower end of a long narrow pool of water, dark and half frozen. In this pool, raft way down and facing me, but a score of yards off, stood the mighty marsh beast, strange and uncouth in look as some monster surviving over from the Pliocene. His vast bulk loomed black and vague in the dim gray dawn; his huge antlers stood out sharply; columns of steam rose from his nostrils. For several seconds he fronted me motionless; then he began to turn, slowly, and as if he had a stiff neck. When quarter way round I fired into his shoulder; whereat he reared and bounded on the bank with great leap, vanishing in the willows. Through these I heard him crash like a whirlwind for a dozen rods; then down he fell, and when I reached the spot he had ceased to struggle. The ball had gone through his heart.

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COURT PROCLAMATION.—WHEREAS—The Hon. HARRY A. HALL, President Judge and the Hon. JOHN McDONALD and Geo. J. LABAR, Associate Judges of Courts of Oyer and Terminer and General Jail Delivery, Quarter Sessions of the Peace, Orphans' Court and Court of Common Pleas for the county of Cameron have issued their precept bearing date the 18th day of July A. D. 1908, and to me directed for holding Court of Oyer and Terminer, General Jail Delivery, Quarter Sessions of the Peace, Orphans' Court, and Court of Common Pleas in the Borough of Emporium, Pa., on Monday, the 12th day of Oct. 1908, at 10 o'clock, a. m. and to continue one week.

Notice is hereby given to the Coroners, Justices of the Peace and Constables within the county, that they be then and there in their proper persons, at 10 o'clock, a. m., of said day, with their rolls, records, inquisitions, examinations, and other remembrances, to do those things which to their offices appertain to be done. And those who are bound by their recognizance to prosecute against them as will be just.

Dated at Emporium, Pa., June 12, 1908, and in the 132d year of the Independence of the United States of America.

J. D. SWOPE, Sheriff.

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