

The Daily Astorian

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ASTORIA, OREGON, FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 1888.

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THE HUNT.

The Wild Denizens of the Great Northwest Disappearing.

Graphic Description of the Habits and Mode of Hunting Wild Animals—Character of the Men who Engage in the Business.

"The wholesale butchery of large game in the Rocky mountain regions, which has been engaged in by a good sized army of men for the past fifteen years, is about to be stopped," said civil engineer, George Philers, of the Northwestern Pacific construction corps, "and the reason it is to cease is that the races of animals against which this ruthless crusade has been carried on, from buffalo to antelope, are nearly annihilated. It may be said that the buffalo are virtually extinct, for of the enormous herd whose tread once made the plains tremble as they marched, it is doubtful if there are 2,000 left, and they corralled by a skin speculator, who will slaughter them as he sees profit in so doing.

"I spent eight years in Minnesota, Montana and Wyoming, and during these years not less than 20,000 elk, mule deer and antelope were killed annually in these regions alone. Elk, which formerly ranged from the middle states to the Pacific coast, are now never found east of the Missouri river. Twenty-five years ago they were still abundant in Kansas and Nebraska, but the rapid advance of civilization in these states drove them into the dense and as yet uninhabitable portions of Minnesota and the northern territories. If they had been doomed to extinction by the natural progress of civilization, or the effects of legitimate hunting in those regions, they would have been certain of a long life tenure; but the wholesale slaughter in all seasons of these animals, which began to be a systematic business in 1872, has resulted in so thinning out their ranks that the sportsman must now seek this noble game in the most remote parts of even the comparatively unfrequented regions to which the war upon them has forced the remnants of the race to fly. Not only has the elk been made the victim of this indiscriminate and organized raid, but the mule deer and antelope have been pursued in the same manner. Begun in 1872 by a party of Fort Benton traders, who conceived the idea of making the skins of these animals an important item in the commerce of the plains and mountains, the business rapidly increased in proportions year after year, and hunting parties, fitted out to perfection for the prosecution of their destructive work, spread through the country named and gave no mercy. The industry of collecting elk, mule deer and antelope skins reached the culminating point of destructiveness in 1879, and since then has been decreasing annually in importance because of the rapid disappearance of material upon which to work, but against the remnant of these three races of the noblest game animals on the American continent the war is still persistently waged, and it must be but a matter of a year or two when they will be practically extinct. Provisions of law, which are strict in prohibiting the killing of the game as it is being killed, are virtually useless, for it would take a standing army of 10,000 men to stand guard around the haunts of the doomed animals and protect them from the butchers.

"Elk travel in herds, and to the legitimate hunter there is no more noble and exciting sport than elk hunting. When not hindered by deep snow they make their way through the very worst of the bad lands of the regions they inhabit. Mounted on a fleet bronco, the hunter is frequently led a chase for many miles before he is able to capture his wary game. The natural gait of the elk is a graceful swinging trot, and as long as they maintain that they never tire. It is one great object of the hunter to follow his game so closely on his pony as to break his trot into a gallop. If the hunter succeeds in his object, he follows on with the certainty that the game is his, for the gallop, being an unnatural gait for the elk, soon tires the animal and he begins to lag be-

hind. Once broken from his trot into the run, he does not seem to be able to fall back into his natural gait again, the hunter is able to get in easy range and the elk soon falls a victim to his rifle. An elk in good condition will weigh from 300 to 500 pounds, and no member of the deer family has such delicate and finely flavored flesh.

"The range of the mule deer before he fell under the ban of the game butchers was from Idaho to Oregon. The mule deer is shyer than the elk and seeks the higher portions of the Bad Lands. Quick of eye and scent, they are better able to elude the hunter, and the sportsman finds that he needs all of his best skill and cunning in bagging a mule deer. The elk, once fired at or on hearing the sound of a gun, will immediately run, and once chased will not stop until he crosses running water, although the run may be many miles before that is reached. The mule deer, on the other hand, has his regular runs, like the cunning red deer of the east, and may be hunted throughout the season in the locality where one is started.

"The shyness and fleet-footedness of the antelope are well known to hunters and its chase is given an additional zest on that account. All sorts of stratagems are adopted by hunters to get a shot at one. The coursing of antelope with greyhounds is probably one of the most exciting of all legitimate wild sport. General Standley, when he was stationed among the Rockies, had a greyhound that was famous all through that region for his wonderful success in coursing antelope. This was the standard recreation of all the army officers in the west when I was out there. I do not believe any of them would have hesitated to turn his whole force against a party of skin hunters, if occasion offered, as the war on the antelope began to come home to their individual interest and pleasure.

"The greatest destruction of these three game animals is carried on by the hide hunters during the season of deep snow, and during the breeding season, when it is an easy matter to take them. In April the cow elk leave the bulls to themselves and retire to the thickets and close timber. I have known a single hide hunter to kill in one month, in the snow, and that in the month of April, thirty-five cow elk. This man was of a large party who were hunting in the same neighborhood, and there was no reason to suppose that each one of them was not fully as successful as the one mentioned; in fact, it was known that the party butchered nearly 500 cow elk that month. Each one of those cows would have brought forth a calf in the course of a few weeks, being in ambush for that purpose. These men were but a small proportion of the men operating in that region, and thousands of elk, unable to escape or offer resistance, were slaughtered there that month. The mule deer and antelope are killed after the same manner. When an animal is killed, whether elk, deer or antelope, the skin is stripped from the body and the carcass left lying in the snow. I have seen hundreds of elk along the Yellowstone. The hide hunters are equipped with repeating rifles, and even when the snow does not aid them in their butchery, they are able to kill from six to twelve elk in a herd before it gets out of range.

"All the hide hunters I came in contact with were the roughest kind of characters, and first-rate people to let alone. I have been told that the traders employ the worst and most reckless men they can obtain for this lawless gathering of hides. They are paid \$3 apiece for elk skins and \$2 for mule deer and antelope skins. It was these same Fort Benton people who fostered the persistent and wholesale raids on the buffalo in that region, and at last exterminated them. One year while I was in the Yellowstone country they killed 25,000 buffalo between the headwaters of the Little Missouri and the Yellowstone. I would advise any sportsman who desires to have a shot at an elk, a mule deer or an antelope, to go out west now. He will not find them as accessible nor as certain of being found as they were five years ago, but a good hunter will be

able to find some and have fine sport. But if he waits another year or so, he might as well stay at home and take his sport with possible red deer nearer home. He will never see an elk or any of his kin, although he may hunt the great northwest over inch by inch."

Peace on Earth

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- Men's Fine Wool Buckskin Tint Undershirts or Drawers.
- Men's Fancy Stripe Wool Gray and White Undershirts or Drawers.
- Men's Fancy Stripe Wool Scarlet and White Undershirts or Drawers.
- Men's Coude Wool Mottled Undershirts or Drawers.

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