

HUNTING THE ELK BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT



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ONE day Merrifield and I went out together and had a rather exciting chase after some bull elk. The previous evening, toward sunset, I had seen three bulls trotting off across an open glade toward a great stretch of forest and broken ground, up near the foot of the rocky peaks. Next morning early we started off to hunt through this country. The walking was hard work, especially up and down the steep cliffs, covered with slippery pine needles; or among the wind-

sank deeply; as a consequence, I was all out of breath and my hand so unsteady that I missed my first shot.

Elk, however, do not vanish with the instantaneous rapidity of frightened deer, and these three trotted off in a direction quartering to us. I doubt if I ever went through more violent exertion than in the next ten minutes. We raced after them at full speed, opening fire; I wounded all three, but none of the wounds were immediately disabling. They trotted on and we panted afterwards, slipping on the wet earth, pitching headlong over charred stumps, leaping on dead logs that broke beneath our weight, more than once measuring our full-length on the ground, halting and firing whenever we got a chance. At last one bull fell; we passed him by after the others which were still running up-hill. The sweat streamed into my eyes and made furrows in the sooty mud that covered my face, from having fallen full length down on the burnt earth; I sobbed for breath as I tottered at a shambling trot after them, as nearly done out as could well be. At this moment they turned down-hill. It was a great relief; a man who is too done up to go a steep up-hill can still run fast enough down; with a last spurt I closed in near enough to fire again; one elk fell; the other went off at a walk. We passed the second elk and I kept on alone after the third, not able to go at more than a slow trot myself, and too much winded to dare risk a shot at any distance. He got out of the burnt patch, going into some thick timber in a deep ravine; I closed pretty well, and rushed after him into a thicket of young evergreens. Hardly was I in when there was a scramble and bounce among them and I caught a glimpse of a yellow body moving out to one side; I ran out toward the edge and fired through the twigs at the moving beast. Down it went, but when I ran up, to my disgust I found that I had jumped and killed, in my haste, a black-tail deer, which must have been already roused by the passage of the wounded elk. I at once took up the trail of the latter again, but after a little while the blood grew less, and ceased, and I lost the track; nor could I find it, hunt as hard as I might. The poor beast could not have gone five hundred yards; yet we never found the carcass.

Then I walked slowly back past the deer I had slain by so curious a mischance, to the elk. The first one shot down was already dead. The second was only wounded, though it could not rise. When it saw us coming it sought to hide from us by laying its neck flat on the ground, but when we came up close it raised its head and looked proudly at us, the heavy mane bristling up on the neck, while its eyes glared and its teeth grated together. I felt really sorry to kill it. Though these were both well-known elks, their antlers, of ten points, were small, twisted, and ill-shaped; a fact hardly worth preserving, except to call to mind a chase in which during a few minutes I did as much downright hard work as it has often fallen to my lot to do. The burnt earth had blackened our faces and hands till we looked like negroes.

The finest bull, with the best head that I got, was killed in the midst of very beautiful and grand surroundings. We had been hunting through a great pine wood which ran up to the edge of a broad canyon-like valley, bounded by sheer walls of rock. There were fresh tracks of elk about, and we had been advancing up wind with even more than our usual caution when, on stepping out into a patch of open ground, near the edge of the cliff, we came upon a great bull, beating and thrashing his antlers against a young tree, about eighty yards off. He stopped and faced us for a second, his mighty antlers thrown in the air, as he held his head aloft. Behind him towered the tall and sombre pines, while at his feet the jutting crags overhung the deep chasm below, that stretched off between high walls of barren and snow-streaked rocks, the evergreens clinging to their sides, while along the bottom the rapid torrent gathered in places into black and sullen mountain lakes. As the bull turned to run I struck him just behind the shoulder; he reeled to the death-blow, but staggered gamely on a few rods into the forest before sinking to the ground, with my second bullet through his lungs.

Two or three days later than this I killed another bull, nearly as large, in the same patch of woods in which I had slain the first. A bear had been feeding on the carcass of the latter, and, after a vain effort to find his den, we determined to beat through the woods and try to start him up. Accordingly, Merrifield, the teamster, and myself took parallel courses some three hundred yards apart, and started at one end to walk through to the other. I doubt if the teamster much wished to meet a bear alone (while nothing would have given Merrifield more hearty and unaffected enjoyment than to have encountered an entire family, and he

gradually edged in pretty close to me. Where the woods became pretty open I saw him suddenly lift his rifle and fire, and immediately afterwards a splendid bull elk trotted past in front of me, evidently untouched, the teamster having missed. The elk ran to the other side of two trees that stood close together some seventy yards off, and stopped for a moment to look round. Kneeling down I fired at the only part of his body I could see between the two trees, and sent a bullet into his flank. Away he went, and I after, running in my moccasins over the moss and pine needles for all there was in me. If a wounded elk gets fairly started he will go at a measured trot for many hours, and even if mortally hurt may run twenty miles before falling; while at the same time he does not start off at full speed, and will often give an active hunter a chance for another shot as he turns and changes his course preparatory to taking a straight line. So I raced along after the elk at my very best speed for a few hundred feet, and then got another shot as he went across a little glade, injuring his hip somewhat. This made it all right for me, and another hundred yards' burst took me up to where I was able to put a ball in a fatal spot, and the grand old fellow sank down and fell over on his side.

No sportsman can ever feel much keener pleasure and self-satisfaction than when, after a successful stalk and good shot, he walks up to a grand elk lying dead in the cool shade of the great evergreens, and looks at the massive and yet finely moulded form, and at the mighty antlers which are to serve in the future as the trophy and proof of his successful skill. Still, hunting the elk on the mountains is as noble a kind of sport as can well be imagined; there is nothing more pleasant and enjoyable, and at the same time it demands that the hunter shall bring into play many manly qualities. There have been few days of my hunting life that were so full of unalloyed happiness as were those spent on the Big Horn range. From morning till night I was on foot, in cool, bracing air, now moving silently through the vast, melancholy pine forests, now treading the brink of high, rocky precipices, always amid the most grand and beautiful scenery; and always after as noble and lordly game as is to be found in the Western world.

Since writing the above I killed an elk near my ranch; probably the last of his race that will ever be found in our neighborhood. It was just before the fall round-up. An old hunter, who was under some obligation to me, told me that he had shot a cow elk and had seen the tracks of one or two others not more than twenty-five miles off, in a place where the cattle rarely wandered. Such a chance was not to be neglected and, on the first free day, one of my Elk-horn foremen, Will Dow by name, and myself, took our hunting horses and started off, accompanied by the ranch wagon, in the direction of the probable haunts of the doomed deer. Towards nightfall we struck a deep spring pool, near by the remains of an old Indian encampment. It was at the head of a great basin, several miles across, in which we believed the game to lie. The wagon was halted and we pitched camp; there was plenty of dead wood, and soon the venison steaks were broiling over the coals raked from beneath the crackling cottonwood logs, while in the narrow valley the ponies grazed almost within the circle of the flickering fire-light. It was in the cool and pleasant month of September; and long after going to bed we lay awake under the blankets watching the stars that on clear nights always shine with such intense brightness over the lonely Western plains.

We were up and off by the gray of the morning. It was a beautiful hunt-

ing day; the sundogs hung in the red dawn; the wind hardly stirred over the crisp grass; and though the sky was cloudless yet the weather had that queer, smoky, hazy look that it is most apt to take on during the time of the Indian summer. From a high spur of the table-land we looked out far and wide over a great stretch of broken country, the brown of whose hills and valleys was varied everywhere by patches of dull red and vivid yellow, tokens that the trees were already putting on the dress with which they

greet the mortal ripening of the year. The deep and narrow but smooth ravines running up towards the edges of the plateaus were heavily wooded, the bright green tree-tops rising to a height they rarely reach in the barren plains-country; and the rocky sides of the sheer gorges were clad with a thick growth of dwarfed cedars, while here and there the trailing Virginia creepers burned crimson among their sombre masses.

We hunted stealthily up-wind, across the line of the heavily timbered coulees. We soon saw traces of our quarry; old tracks at first, then the fresh footprints of a single elk—a bull, judging by the size—which had come down to drink at a mirey alkal pool, its feet slipping so as to leave the marks of the false hoofs in the soft soil. We hunted with painstaking and noiseless care for many hours; at last as I led old Manitou up to look over the edge of a narrow ravine, there was a crash and movement in the timber below me, and immediately afterwards I caught a glimpse of a great bull elk trotting up through the young trees as he gallantly breasted the steep hill-side opposite. When clear of the woods, and directly across the valley from me, he stopped and turned half round, throwing his head in the air to gaze for a moment at the intruder. My bullet struck too far back, but, nevertheless, made a deadly wound, and the elk went over the crest of the hill at a wild, plunging gallop. We followed the bloody trail for a quarter of a mile, and found him dead in a thicket. Though of large size, he yet had but small antlers, with few points.



A Deceptive Attitude.

A scene that was more than farcical, declares M. A. P., occurred in the house of commons last season. Two of the most respectable members of the house were seen with their coats off and with a staid old policeman standing between them. They two had been downstairs to wash their hands and by some mischance had changed coats. They went into the house together. One of them, putting his hand into his coat pocket, pulled out an old brier pipe of very strong flavor. It was not his. He looked at the coat, also that of his neighbor, and, turning to his friend, said:

"Excuse me, but I think you have put on my coat."

"I beg your pardon. I have done nothing of the kind."

"I think," replied the other member, "this is your pipe, and if you put your hand into the right hand pocket of the coat you are wearing you will find a cigar case."

"Dear me!" was the reply. "You certainly are right. What shall we do?"

"We cannot change in the house," observed the first member. "Let us go into the division lobby."

Here is where the policeman came in. Seeing the two facing each other and at the same time taking off their coats, the policeman feared the worst. He rushed up and, placing a hand on the shoulder of each, said:

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Soon the venison steaks were broiling.

falls, where the rows of dead trees lay piled up across one another in the wildest confusion. We saw nothing until we came to a large patch of burnt ground, where we at once found the soft, black soil marked up by elk hoofs; nor had we penetrated into it more than a few hundred yards before we came to tracks made but a few minutes before, and almost instantly afterward saw three bull elk, probably those I had seen on the preceding day. We had been running briskly up-hill through the soft, heavy loam, in which our feet made no noise, but slipped and

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