

## HUNTING THE MOOSE.

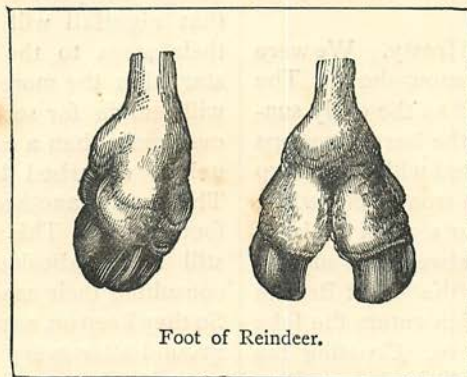


THE Cervidæ is the family name for the elks, reindeer, fallow deer, stags, roebucks, and other ruminants whose horns fall off periodically and are renewed. Their horns increase in size and in the number of antlers till the animal arrives at maturity; and in the decline of life they decrease, till he bears only the single horn of the two-year-old animal. They are widely distributed over the world, Australia and South Africa being the only regions in which they are not found. In the northern regions of the

spread out from the base into a broad palmation, and in mature animals they have been known to weigh fifty-six pounds, and are generally cast off in November. The male often exceeds a large horse in bulk; the females are smaller, and have no horns.

Like the reindeer, its feet are wonderfully adapted to enable it to travel readily over the soft, yielding surface of the snow. Our illustration shows the large space covered by the foot when on the ground in contrast with the foot when raised.

The following lively account of a moose hunt is from the capital American magazine, "St. Nicholas":—



Foot of Reindeer.

United States and British America, we have the moose deer, the most ungraceful in appearance of any of the species; but those blemishes in its structure, like the bunches of the camel, are provisions made by the Author of nature to adapt it to its manner of life. Its long limbs and short neck adapt it for passing through the tangled swamps, and browsing with ease on the twigs of the birch, the maple, and the poplar, that form the chief part of its food. They seldom feed on level ground, but graze from below upwards. The horns of the male

"There were four of us, and we were rather a queer party. There were old Ben Murch, a lumberman and hunter well known in that region; a young Penobscot Indian named Lewis, or, as he was more commonly called, "Lewey;" a young Boston chap named Larkin, but whom we had nicknamed "Larks," and myself. We had gone up from Bangor to the head of Chesuncook Lake, then as now a sort of supply-depôt for the logging-camps.

When I mention that one of our party was an Indian, some may perhaps think

that he was a savage,—one of the blanketed, tomahawking sort. Quite the contrary. Lewey was a very sensible, matter-of-fact young man; dressed like a Christian, and, saving a tendency to extreme brevity, spoke very fair English. Indeed, the fellow was quite a humorist in a certain dry, terse way of his own, and very tolerable company of an evening. Murch and he frequently hunted together, selling the venison at the neighbouring logging-camps. And on the evening preceding the first day of our hunt, February 3, Lewey had come down to the head from his wigwam, or winter camp, on the Cusabaxis. One versed in woodcraft might well wonder how two experienced hunters should happen to take a couple of boys with them on a moose hunt! Well, I suspect that Larks used undue—possibly pecuniary—influence with them. Such things are sometimes done.

Day broke clear and frosty. We were off by sunrise—on snow-shoes. The snow was crisp. And as the early sun-rays fell in through the bare tree-tops the whole air resounded with the sharp snapping of the frozen wood, relaxed by the warmth. An hour's walk took us across the loglands between the supply-dépôt and the river (the West Branch of the Penobscot), which enters the lake at some distance above. Crossing the river on the ice a little below Pine Stream Falls,—so near that we could hear the plunging waters,—we began to ascend the ridgy slopes which lead up among the highlands.

"Now, boys," said Ben, stopping to tighten the strings of his snow-shoes, "the less ye say, and the fewer twigs ye snap the better; for, unless I'm much mistaken," pointing to the cropped branches of a yellow birch, "we shall come upon a yard within a couple of hours. So keep whist. Mind the going. Don't tread on the dry bush. You youngsters may as well keep a few rods behind, and whenever I raise my hand—

so—stop both of you stock-still—don't move till I tell ye."

Thus instructed, we moved cautiously on again. "What does the fellow mean by a 'yard'?" whispered Larks, as we picked our way along behind. And as some others may perchance need a word in explanation, we will try to give it.

Suppose, as is often the case, that late in the fall, just as the snows are coming, a herd of moose—a dozen say, though, generally, not more than three or four—are browsing on the brink of a river, or along the shore of a pond or lake. A snowstorm comes on, and then falls a foot, perhaps. Naturally enough, the moose don't go over as much ground next day after their browse as if the ground were bare. And very likely, too, since it is natural for all creatures to follow beaten paths,—nor are human beings exceptions,—very likely, I say, that nightfall will find them retracing their steps to the place whence they started in the morning. And thus they will remain for several days, not going over more than a mile or two of ground, unless disturbed by wolves or men. Then comes another storm, with another foot of snow. This makes walking about still more laborious. And the moose, consulting their ease, go about still less. So they keep on, narrowing their feeding-ground after every storm, till, when the snow has become four or five or six feet deep, it is nothing unusual to find a herd of from three to a dozen snowed into a yard of from five to thirty acres, with deep beaten paths running through it in every direction, the twigs cropped and bark gnawed from all the trees.

I believe this the more satisfactory explanation of a moose-yard, though many so-called naturalists will tell you that the moose *select* their yard before the snows come,—that they are in this matter "governed by instinct." All of which you may safely believe the moment they satisfactorily define that word, *instinct*.

Now, if a hunter can steal up unobserved, or rather unheard, within rifle-shot of one of these yards, why, he stands a good chance of securing one of the herd, at least. But the difficulty is to approach unperceived. For there is no keener-eared animal under the sun than a moose. They will often hear or smell a man half a mile, and that, too, where there is no perceptible breeze. The only chance of surprising a yard is when there's a stiff breeze from it; and then it is a pretty ticklish job, and but rarely done.

A little farther on, we saw where a cluster of hazel-bushes had been bitten off; and soon a shrubby pine, with all its lower branches stripped of their tassels. These were indications of a yard not many miles off. The moose had been here, but later snows had covered the track.

We walked with as little noise as possible. It was rather blind work, though; for the thick, mixed growth made it impossible to see more than six or eight rods ahead. Presently we came to a clump of moose-wood shrubs browsed off as before, with a faint trail under the more recent snows leading away to the left. Among this Lewey and Ben picked their way softly, followed at some distance by Larks and myself.

We had gained the summit of a high ridge, and were now descending into the valley beyond. The shrubs along the trail had nearly all been cropped—all save the spruce; moose never touch spruce boughs.

"Don't you ever use hounds to hunt them with?" Larks inquired.

"Not often," replied Ben. "Some do, but we don't. We have better luck without dogs than with them. A moose isn't like a fox. A fox will run round and round from hill to hill; but a moose keeps straight ahead. We've found that our best way is to keep steady after them till they get tired enough to let us get up within shooting distance."

Lewey then told us that he once followed one a fortnight before getting near enough to shoot him. But when there is a crust upon five feet of snow, the moose, going through to the ground at every plunge, can't hold out over twenty-four hours, if followed rapidly.

All this time we were going forward as fast as we could walk. For the first six or eight miles the moose seemed to have run at full speed, scattering the snow and clearing the brush with prodigious bounds. In some places they had thrown out with their hoofs the old dried leaves, deep buried since autumn.

About three o'clock in the afternoon we crossed the former path of a tornado, which, in its terrific course through the forest, had torn down nearly all the trees along a clearly-defined belt,—only a few rods in width, but stretching away east and west as far as we could see. The prostrate trunks lay piled across each other in the wildest confusion. Over these the moose had bounded in a manner almost incredible; running without the least apparent regard for the snow-buried logs, and making a bee-line across the windfalls. One leap especially astonished us. Three large basswoods had fallen in a rick, the topmost lying fully seven feet above the surface of the snow, which lay from four to five feet all about them. This formidable abattis one of the moose had cleared at a jump, landing among the logs nearly a rod beyond.

The short February afternoon rapidly waned. A "snow-bank" had risen in the south-west.

"Another snow-storm by to-morrow," said Ben.

It was growing dusk. Presently the forest lightened ahead, and in a few minutes we came out on a broad white expanse stretching away to the northward.

"Lake Cauquomgomac," remarked Lewey. Then, looking through his hands, "Yonder they go!"

Straining our eyes in the deepening twilight, we could just make out some dark objects far out on the lake, one—two—three, yes, three of them. They were three or four miles from the shore, and making directly towards a small island situated near the upper end of the lake. When chased, moose will frequently run off to an island, or a high hill, which commands a good outlook of the country around.

"They'll haul up at that island to breathe," said Ben. "Spend the night there, like enough, if they don't catch sight of us on the lake."

"Couldn't we work up to them after dark?" I hazarded.

"Not without first getting *their* consent," said Ben, laughing. Then, turning to Lewey, "What's to be done?"

"Two of us stay here—two of us go round lake—above island," replied Lewey. "Head off moose."

"And so scare them from the island and then shoot at them from an ambush?" questioned Ben. Lewey nodded.

"Not to-night, I hope," said Larks, upon whom our long day's tramp was beginning to tell.

Ben turned to look at him. "No, not to-night, I guess," said he at length. Then to Lewey, "We'll camp here, I reckon," with a nod of his head towards Larks and myself. Lewey assented, merely muttering, "No fire; not make fire on shore; go back."

Back we accordingly went to a little ravine in the woods, a number of rods from the lake. By this time it had grown very dark; but collecting brush as best we could, and breaking off slivers and bark from an old hemlock trunk, we soon had a crackling blaze.

A hunter's knapsack is not quite so ornamental as a soldier's, but handier, I think. It consists of a large, deep pocket in, or rather *on*, the back of his hunting-frock. In these we had packed away two days' rations of beef and corn-drake, and now we proceeded, after

taking off our snow-shoes and loosening our belts, to make a thorough dinner, moistening the same with snow-water, melted in the palms of our hands.

This over with, we broke off great armfuls of fir boughs, and spreading them on the snow, lay down with our feet to the fire—to sleep. How the flickering blaze lighted up that savage little glen, with its dark, wild trees, as we lay there looking up, with cold noses and colder fingers! while from the lake came those fearful sounds,—said to precede a storm,—the moaning and roaring of the ice; a phenomenon common enough to frozen waters, yet always startling, and especially so by night.

In spite of these sounds, we fell asleep,—to shiver through a frigid delirium of chilly dreams and visions of gigantic moose. A pull at my coat-sleeve roused me; it was Lewey. The fire had gone out; all was dark.

"Get up," said he in a whisper. "You go with me. No need to wake Larks. I've talked with Ben. You and I go round lake; head off moose."

I understood, and scrambled up; but I was covered with snow, and felt cold soft touches in my face; it was snowing heavily. Off in the east the dim pallor of a stormy morning had begun to show faintly. With numb fingers we tugged at the frozen straps of our snow-shoes; then shouldering our guns, started northward. The light snow cracked and creaked under our feet,—dull and monotonous sounds,—as we plodded on, on, blindly as far as I was concerned. Lewey led; it was as much as I could do to keep from bumping against the tree trunks. But it gradually grew light. We were skirting the lake, keeping back from the shore.

After going on for several miles as it seemed to me, the mixed growth changed to a still heavier one of black spruce. Beneath the dark, shaggy tops all was quiet; but overhead the wind drove; and now and then the snowy

gusts sifted down through the thick boughs. Out on the lake the storm howled.

By nine o'clock we had got round to the northern end, or head of the lake, and could just discern, through the driving flakes, the outline of the island a mile below. If the moose had left it, they had probably come across to the woods at about this place. Still keeping in the forest, we examined the shore for nearly half a mile; there were no tracks. It was fair to conclude that they were still below us,—at the island. Nothing now remained to us but to wait for a chance to shoot them.

"Watch here," said Lewey, pointing to the upturned root of an old windfall. "Hide here—make gun sure—put on new cap—aim straight."

With this advice Lewey left me and went on some dozen or fifteen rods, where he took his stand in a similar manner. Resting my gun through a chink in the root, I began my vigils. An hour passed. The storm still raged fiercely. Ben was giving us plenty of time. But, keeping my eyes fixed on the island, I waited for the earliest appearance of the moose. Suddenly the faint report of a gun came on the snow-laden blast; Lark's rifle, I felt sure. And the next moment three dark objects darted out from the island and came straight towards us. How swiftly they approached, growing larger every moment, till the great unwieldy forms were close upon us! Now for it!

Setting my teeth, I aimed at the foremost,—he was now within fifty yards,—and fired! Almost at the same instant another report rang out. The moose fell headlong into the snow. There was a great snorting and crashing through the brush; the other two swept past me like the wind, and on into the forest. The wounded moose, too, had bounded to his feet, and with a hideous whine he came floundering heavily on. In my excitement I had jumped up from my

hiding-place, shouting and brandishing my gun.

"Run! Run for your life!" shouted Lewey. "Get among spruces!" The moose had already caught sight of me, and came rushing up the bank with a great gnashing and grinding of its teeth. No time for bravado! I dropped my gun and ran—as fast as a fellow can on snow-shoes—back into the woods. A clump of low, dense spruces were growing near. I made for them,—the moose after me,—and, diving in amid the thick, prickly branches, went down on my hands and knees and scrambled aside under the boughs, spider-like. The moose crushed into the thicket, snorting and thrashing about not ten feet from where I lay.

"Lie flat!" yelled Lewey's voice from somewhere outside. "Don't stir!"

*Bang!* followed by another crash and a noise of struggling. I crawled out and saw Lewey standing near, with the smoke still curling from his gun.

"Much hurt?" exclaimed he, seeing me on all fours.

"Not a scratch!" cried I, jumping up.

A Yankee would have laughed at me heartily. Lewey merely remarked, "He most have you," and turned to look at the moose, which we found dead.

In the course of half an hour Ben and Lark came up. The moose was then skinned, and cut in pieces. The storm still continuing, it was decided to give up the hunt and rest content with what we had got. Kindling a fire, we broiled some excellent moose-steaks, off which we made a hearty dinner.

A moose-sled was constructed,—a rude sled of poles and withes, with broad runners. About half the meat— a weight of some four hundred pounds —was packed upon this, to be taken back with us. The other half was buried in the snow, to be taken away at another time. Thus buried it will at once freeze, and keep sweet till the snow melts in the spring.