

THE ART OF BUSH-RANGING.

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THE first and most important item to obtain success in the bush is SILENCE. Whether we wish merely to walk through an English wood, and observe therein the habits and peculiarities of animals, or roam over the less disturbed wilderness of some foreign land in search of game of a more noble description, or if we only desire to see and feel the effect of a forest as it ought to be seen and felt, then silence must be maintained. This silence must not be merely a cessation from loud talking, but it must be a ghost-like quietness, not even a footfall being audible.

Nearly all the creatures that live in forests or woods are very timid; they are ever on the watch for the approach of an enemy, and as, in consequence of the branches and leaves of trees, their extent of vision is limited, they trust more to the sense of hearing than to that of sight. It is quite possible, even in the brightest sunlight, to miss seeing a strange object, even though it be close to you, especially if it remain perfectly quiet; this fact we have proved over and over again. We have frequently sat down in an African forest and remained as still as the stems of the trees near which we were resting. A keen-sighted buck, having scented us, has come quietly through the bush, and, fearful to move, has remained nearly a couple of minutes within twenty yards of us, quite unconscious of our proximity. During this period of watchfulness, its ears were moving in all directions, in order to *hear* where we were, whilst it kept sniffing the air, anxious to discover by the aid of the organs of scent in which direction we were located; the slightest noise, even so much as a louder breath than usual, instantly alarmed it, and caused it to dash away at speed.

A man who has been bred amongst scenes of civilisation is comparatively half-blind when he enters a forest, for he really sees only half of those things which are to be seen. But, although one's eyes may fail, the ears rarely do so; we may not readily perceive objects in the bush, but we rarely

fail to hear everything that is to be heard—at least, if we ourselves are not making a great noise. And so it is with animals: they hear us if we make a noise, and retreat before we see them; and thus a bush teeming with creatures might to a noisy person appear a desert, destitute of game or of any animal possessing interest.

There are few things more offensive to an old bush-ranger than to see an inexperienced hobbledohy in a forest. Such a person goes striding on, cracking dried sticks in his awkward walk, rustling over dead leaves, and, greatest crime of all, probably whistling, or occasionally shouting a snatch of a song; the stem of a tree, too, is probably hit occasionally with a walking-stick, the loud crack sounding far and wide beneath the forest boughs. Should a companion be with him, he speaks to him in a loud and ill-toned key, which may be heard at the distance of a couple of hundred yards. And thus he proceeds through the wood, frightening all the animals away from him, seeing nothing, and learning no more than if he had walked through one of the London parks.

Now it is quite possible for two or more people to walk through a forest and converse, and yet to make no noise about it; and the advantages of these latter proceedings are that we may then see many of the creatures that live in the bush, and observe also their habits.

Not long since, we were staying at a country house in Kent, near which was a small pond surrounded by a bed of osiers. The locality at once seemed to us to be one in which some animals might be found; we, therefore, examined the ground for spoor, and soon found the footprints of moorhen, pheasant, rats, and rabbits. During one very hot afternoon, when we fancied it probable that some creatures might take a fancy to a drink of water, we visited this pond, using in our approach all the arts of bush-ranging. Peeping between the osiers we first saw a magnificent cock-pheasant quietly pecking amongst the grass on the

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banks of the pond; he was quite unconscious of our presence, and was evidently at home. Within a few yards of us, and sitting on a little stump that overhung the stream, was a large black water-rat; he was busily scratching himself and "doing his whiskers." We were so engrossed in observing him, that we at first overlooked another creature that was within a few feet of him. This was a very fine specimen of the common snake, which was slowly and craftily stealing towards the rat. We were anticipating a fine sight—for a fair stand-up fight between a full-grown rat and an able-bodied snake would have been well worth seeing—but, unfortunately, some urchins playing in a field fifty yards off commenced beating the hedges with a stick; the rat, hearing the noise, dived into the water, unaware of its narrow escape. The snake, evidently suspicious of danger, also glided into the water, and made its way amongst the roots of the lilies that abounded in the pond. For a long time the snake remained concealed, but at length it protruded its head about an inch from beneath a flat leaf of the lily, and looked around; in spite of our immovable position, it observed us, and quietly withdrew under water, where it remained concealed as long as we stayed by the pool.

The perfectly silent manner in which we had approached this spot was the sole cause of our having seen as much as we did, and if those near us had been as quiet, we should have seen very much more. To witness occasionally such scenes as this adds interest to the otherwise rather stupid country walk; but they are only to be seen when silence has been the order of the day.

Very lately we were fortunate enough to spend some days in the New Forest, and during our walks in that beautiful district we observed the fresh spoor of some deer. The deer have, unfortunately, been nearly exterminated, and those few which still remain are wild as wild can be; they are ever on the watch, and the slightest sound causes them to dash off at speed. Several friends who knew the forest well asserted that very few, if any, deer still remained, for, frequently as they had passed through the forest, they had never seen a single pair of antlers. A walk with these people was sufficient to explain the cause of their sight

not having been gratified, for the noise they made would have been audible to a deer at the distance of two or three hundred yards. That deer were still in the forest and in tolerable numbers we proved by ocular demonstration, but only when quietness was adopted as the rule.

There is very little occasion to converse much in a forest. At such times the trees, flowers, mosses, and living creatures should be allowed to have their say. The moaning of a low wind, or the roaring of a storm, as it sweeps over the forest giants, is music sweet to the ear of the bush-ranger as is the voice of a maiden to the ears of her lover. If, however, it is necessary to speak to a companion, he should by signal be brought close to us. In a low whisper our communications should be given and received, all unnecessary talking being left until we reach the open country. A series of signals should be adopted, which, in a great measure, will supply the place of words. The raising of a hand is generally understood to mean "stop," or "stand still;" but it should be an invariable rule that, if one person suddenly stops, all those in company with him should do likewise. The waving of a hand towards the ground indicates that there is something there to be looked at, such as spoor, &c. A whistle in the woods is a far safer method of calling attention than by using the voice, for there are a multitude of birds whose whistle-like notes are frequently heard in every forest, and thus a whistle is not out of place in the woods. Any two or three people can adopt a private code of signals; for example, one note slowly whistled might mean "stop;" two notes, "look out;" three, the sign for "game visible;" two notes in a different key, "come here;" and so on, and these might be so practised that at length the person for whom the signals were intended would start at their sound as an old trooper does at the trumpeter's "trot." We have ourselves a private signal whistle which is rather difficult to acquire, but we can by its use bring two or three of our trained friends from out of the densest London crowd, even amidst the many noises there heard.

So much for silence as refers to the mouth. There is, however, another kind of silence requisite—viz., that connected with the feet.

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To walk without making any noise is impossible; but, by due care and practice, we can traverse even a dense wood with very little noise. Walking of this description is, however, a gift. Some people we have seen who never could be taught to walk quietly. As a general rule, flat-footed people cannot walk quietly, whilst those with a high instep and a large hollow under the foot can do so. These are natural advantages and disadvantages which no person can alter; but there are certain principles which may be learned, and by the aid of which much noise may be prevented. The first of the rules connected with walking is *the rate*.

In order to see everything that might be seen, and also to avoid noise, the rate should be very slow and the paces very short. The criterion for speed should be when we are able to at once keep the raised foot in the air, and stand statue-like balanced on one leg. If we should happen to be walking at the rate of two or three miles an hour, we have too much velocity to allow of our doing this. If, again, we happen to walk at all fast, the objects on either side of us alter their relative positions so rapidly that we fail to observe any moving creature, whose movements would otherwise at once have attracted us. Although we may have been looking straight before us, yet a moving object either on our right or left will generally attract our notice if we are standing quite still, or are only moving slowly.

When walking in places where dead twigs or branches are scattered about, it is necessary to avoid treading on them, as the snapping of a branch is at once a sound of alarm. Thus, although tufts of grass form usually very safe and quiet stepping-places, yet they must be examined before the foot is placed on them. Thus the bush-ranger should examine first the ground before him, and then the bush around, and so on.

We have mentioned how the eye at once is attracted by a moving object, so that, in order to avoid being seen, the bush-ranger should not swing his arms about, or twist a stick in his hand, or wear any garment which might flutter in the wind, as such things at once catch the eye; and it must be remembered that animals of large size usually carry their heads low, and thus see better than a man, because close to the

ground there are fewer branches than there are high up.

When branches or other impediments cross our path, we should, if possible, stoop and creep under them, taking care in rising not to knock against them. If a branch has to be moved on one side in order that we may pass, we should do this with the hand instead of pushing past it, for then the leaves rubbing against the shoulders invariably cause considerable noise.

In order to obtain a good view all around, especially if the forest or wood be dense, we should now and then squat down, looking for some time in each direction, in order to catch sight of any moving object that might happen to be in that part. When two people are together, it is a very good plan for one to advance some twenty or thirty paces, to halt and stoop down, whilst the other passes him by about the same distance and does likewise. Thus each one is at some time or another on the look-out, and is more likely to see everything that is to be seen.

When the paths or tracks allow of it, we should invariably enter a wood on the down wind side, and walk up wind. The trees, however, to a great extent, prevent the wind from blowing freely and directly beneath them, and thus eddies are of frequent occurrence. If, however, we are anxious to know from which direction the wind is coming, we can ascertain by crushing up a small piece of dry soil, so as to form dust, and then throwing this in the air; or wet the finger and hold it up, when the coldest side shows whence the wind is blowing.

Every person ought to be able to find his way out of a wood after he has found his way into it. To be able at all times to find your way in a thoroughly wild forest, where no roads or paths exist, is almost a matter of instinct; but this is a sense to be acquired by practice, and cultivated by thought and observation. When the sun is visible, we should never enter a forest without remarking how we were walking as regarded the sun—whether the sun was before, behind, to the right, or left; then, making a small allowance for the sun's change of position during our journey, we could always retrace our steps when we wished to do so, or make a short detour and recross our old trail. When we adopt this plan we steer by "direc-

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tions." We know that we are going in the right direction, and cannot, therefore, be very far wrong. We have often entered a strange forest, in which no paths existed save those made by elephants and buffaloes, have walked over some ten miles, returned, and come out of the bush within a hundred yards of the spot at which we entered it; and during the whole day have never twice gone over the same ground. This we accomplished merely by observing the direction in which we walked as regarded the sun, and the various distances that had been passed over.

When the sun is not seen, the direction of the wind may serve to guide us; but as this may change, it is not entirely to be trusted. The run of streams or the slope of ground may then help us, but these require some previous knowledge of the locality to enable us to derive the full advantage from them; but as it is a very easy thing to lose one's-self in a forest, and the event generally occurs when we "never even dreamed of such a thing," we should always bear in mind its possibility, and then by observation endeavour to avoid so disagreeable a contingency.

The science of spooring, or discovering by the trees where animals have been, is one of the accomplishments of a bush-ranger. Every animal that does not possess wings must leave traces wherever it goes. These consist of footprints, dung, marks on trees, and other signs which at once indicate to the experienced that game is near. We will give one or two examples of the application of this science.

We were once stalking in the African bush in search of bush buck, accompanied by an experienced Zulu Kaffir. Suddenly our companion stopped, and pointed towards the stem of a tree. We looked at this stem, and then observed certain scratches on the bark. The tree was an old one, and its upper part was covered with a mass of ivy-like creepers.

"A leopard is up there, I think," said the Kaffir; "see the marks of his claws on the tree."

Taking up a piece of broken branch, the Kaffir threw it into the mass of tangled vegetation that covered the upper part of the tree, when instantly, with a bound that

was perfectly beautiful to see, a fine leopard sprang from his concealment, some twenty feet above the ground, and dashed through the bush. He disappeared like a flash of light, not even giving time for a snap shot.

We ascended the tree, and found the lair, in which were the horns and many bones of buck and other creatures, monkeys' tails being very numerous. This creature was discovered merely in consequence of a few scratches on the bark of a tree—a sign that would probably have been overlooked by a novice.

On another occasion, when hunting on the plains near the Quathlamba mountains, we were informed by a Hottentot companion that we must "look out," or else our horses might be stolen by bushmen, who would come down in the night. This suspicion on his part arose in consequence of his having seen the footprints of a single bushman, which showed that the man had come to a commanding position from which he could view our camp, had there stayed for some time, and had again gone off to the mountains where his people lived. The bushman had been spying at about midday, and so the Hottentot drew his conclusions.

A careful watch was kept during the night, and fortunate it was that this precaution was taken, for soon after dark there was an alarm from our watchman and watch-dogs, and the spoor on the following day showed that bushmen had been within a hundred yards of us during the night.

In the New Forest we once obtained a view of a fine deer in consequence of having our attention called to a small holly-tree, the lower leaves of which had been eaten off. Deer are very fond of browsing on hollies, and the freshness of the spoor indicated that the deer must have been near the tree within a very few minutes. Taking the direction indicated by the footprints, we peeped cautiously over some rising ground, and saw the cunning old buck within seventy yards, quite unaware that he was observed, and had been outwitted in consequence of his holly-loving tendency having been noticed.

It will be evident from what we have already written that there is plenty of occupation for the eyes, if we really intend to become "experts," in the bush or forest. We must look all round us—at the ground

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over which we are walking, at the trees, and even over our heads, and thus we must walk slowly in order to be successful.

The dress for the bush is an important matter. It should be of a sombre neutral tint hue, with very little variety of colour about it, so as not to attract the eyes too much; and it should be of stout material, so that the thorns do not readily tear it.

We have not spoken, nor do we purpose speaking, of the weapons to be employed in the bush, for these are not necessary in order that we should become bush-rangers. In England, "shooting" is not obtainable by everybody; but there are scarcely any localities near which there are no woods, and a walk in the woods may be dull and unprofitable, or amusing and instructive, just as we pay attention to or neglect certain very simple matters. The same care and art that will enable us in Africa or India to see in their native state elephants, lions, antelopes, leopards, boa-constrictors, porcupines, &c., will, in England, give us an opportunity of viewing, under the same conditions, foxes, badgers, wild deer, otters, snakes, hedgehogs, weasels, and other creatures not usually seen by the average observer, although, perhaps, these creatures may abound in the vicinity.

In a large and much-frequented wood in Kent, we were once witness to a contest between a weasel and a rabbit, the affair "coming off" within twenty feet of us. In

the same wood we saw a tough "set-to" between a couple of moles, and we succeeded in capturing one of the combatants; and on many other occasions we have seen somewhat rare occurrences, merely by putting into practice those "arts" to which we have here referred. None of these, we are confident, would have been seen by the mere noisy walker.

When we know how to make the most out of a walk in a wood, a stroll in a lane, or a ramble through fields, we are never in that desolate and miserable state completely expressed by the remark, "Whatever shall we do to amuse ourselves?" It is not, then, "What shall we do?" but "How shall we find time to do all that there is to be done?" For, if the weather be bright or dull, dry or wet, there is always some fun to be obtained in the country, or preparations to be made for the coming fine weather, when certainly out-door amusement is more inviting than when rain prevails. Thus, even in England, a knowledge of bush-ranging is profitable and interesting; but in India, Africa, America, Canada, or Australia, it becomes almost a necessity, for on it one may have to depend, not only for food, but for one's very safety and existence; and as none of us can tell where our lot may lead us, we may at any time be called upon to display a knowledge of bush-craft.

