



# HUNTING IN THE ARCTIC

*On the Trail of the Musk Ox in Ellesmere Land*

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Illustrated with Photographs by the Author



## ARTICLE NUMBER THREE

IN an incredibly short time dogs were harnessed to the *komatiks*. Eiseeyou, one other Eskimo, and myself, with dogs at a run, were dashing toward the larger herd of musk ox, while the four remaining Eskimos and their dogs tore away after the smaller herd. A few minutes earlier, tired and ravenously hungry after our strenuous day's work, luscious steaks and sleeping bags tempted us. Now all weariness and hunger were forgotten in the wild excitement of the chase.

As we neared the herd I could see several lying down. They had not yet discovered their danger, but almost immediately the other party began firing, and in an instant the animals were on their feet and charging up the steep mountain side. It is a trick of the musk ox when pursued always to seek the highest available land. Eiseeyou cut all his dogs loose at once, and we followed as rapidly as we could on foot.

In all my experience I had never encountered a rougher, more difficult country in which to hunt than this in Ellesmere Land. Ordinarily, I should have believed these mountain sides, with walls of smooth rock sheathed with a crust of hard ice and snow, quite unscalable. In places they were almost perpendicular. Rarely did they offer a crevice to serve as foot or hand hold, and jutting points and firm-set boulders were too widely scattered to be of much help.

In this his native land the Eskimo has a decided advantage over the white hunter. His lifetime of experience has taught him to scale these ice-clad heights with a nimbleness and ease that are astounding. He is quite fearless, and even the mountain sheep is not his superior as a climber. As if by magic, and with little apparent effort, the two Eskimos flew up the slippery walls, far outstripping me. How they did it I shall never know. Now and again I was forced to cut steps in the ice or I should inevitably have lost my footing and been hurled downward several hundred feet to the rocks beneath. I was astonished even at my own

progress, and when I paused to glance behind me I felt a momentary panic. But there was no turning back and one look down robbed me of any desire to try it.

I had made but half the ascent, exhausted by the tremendous effort, when Eiseeyou, already at the top, was shouting to me, "*Tieitie! Tieitie!*" (Hurry up! Hurry up!) There was no use, however, in attempting to hurry, and I called to him to try to keep the musk ox rounded up a little longer.

As I struggled toward the summit of the ridge I passed some dead and wounded calves that the dogs had overtaken and attacked. Short of breath, nose bleeding from the effect of unusual exertion and high altitude, I finally turned a point of rock and there, twenty yards away, thirteen noble musk ox were at bay. They stood tails together, heads down, in defensive formation. Whenever a dog approached too closely one of them charged and immediately backed again into his place in the ranks.

While I recovered my breath and composure of muscles, I studied their tactics and movements, and made some camera exposures, before beginning to shoot; but I could not delay long for two of the over-venturesome dogs had already been gored to death, another badly wounded, and all were in great danger from the sharp horns of the musk ox.

The round-up, though near the top of the ridge, was still in so steep a place that as my shots took effect and the animals fell, their bodies rolled down into the valley, hundreds of feet below, gaining terrific impetus before they reached the bottom. Thus seven of them were killed, when suddenly and unexpectedly, as though by prearranged plan, the remaining six sprang from the ledge upon which they had made their stand, and were off at a terrific rush along the glassy hillside. My footing was so insecure that it would have been foolhardy for me to have attempted to run.

I handed my rifle to the excited and anxious Eiseeyou, and nimbly as a hare he was after them, keeping his equilibrium in a most marvelous and inexplicable manner. Three of the dogs joined in

the mad, reckless chase, but to my consternation the remainder of the pack turned down into the valley, and presently, powerless to prevent, I saw them tearing like hungry wolves at my hard-earned trophies which had rolled below.

There was nothing to do but follow Eiseeyou at the best speed I dared. Finally I overtook him with the six musk ox again held at bay by the three faithful dogs. Eiseeyou, who had considerably withheld his fire, at once surrendered the rifle to me, and as rapidly as possible I dispatched the remaining animals. One of them required three shots to drop him.

In this connection I may say that wounded musk ox display absolutely no signs of pain. I noted this remarkable fact on several occasions when I placed a ball near the front shoulder, and no indication was given by the animal that it was hurt until several minutes later it fell dead.

These last animals lodged where they fell, and we set about skinning them immediately. Presently the Eskimos that had followed the smaller herd joined us. Among the six trophies secured on the hill—the last ones—were two fine bulls, remarkable specimens. But after a consultation among the men, Eiseeyou informed me that we had made our killing in so inaccessible a position it would be difficult, if not impossible, to get them out.

This was a keen disappointment and I insisted that in some way we must save the heads at least. Finally it was decided that this might be done if they were cut from the skins close to the body, and the skins abandoned, and to my intense gratification, though I regretted the loss of the fine skins, this was done. The Eskimos, of course, took good care that none of the flesh was wasted. They are extremely economical in this respect.

The descent to the valley was even more difficult than the ascent had been. I found it a tedious and dangerous undertaking, and though I finally accomplished it without accident, I was much longer about it than the seemingly reckless Eskimos.

Here to my disappointment I found that nearly all the skins of the first animals killed were ruined.

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The Monarch of the vast Lone Land being dragged to camp; after one of the most exciting and adventurous hunts since the Buffalo days.