

CARIBOU TRAILS OF "OLD BALDY"

By DOUGLAS WETMORE CLINCH

IT'S up there waiting for you, and I really think you had better go. 'Tis a glorious country, mountainous if you like, checked from end to end by innumerable trails mapped out by no human brain, and revelling in such magnificent scenery that you must return to derive new meanings for such words, as "great," "wonderful," and "all-sufficing," and, I am afraid, you will never be quite happy till you return again.

And then there's something in a name after all. "Caribou"—say it over, as you stride through deserted October parks, when your after-dinner pipe tastes especially good. Makes you think of "The Night Before Christmas," of bleak November days, wind-swept open country, the snow-guarded lanes of the forest. Yea, more than that, of the blessed activity of the temperate zone which prompts the wanderlust of a northern race and makes you very glad you are a man, which is quite the same thing.

I say it is all-sufficing. Have I not followed a blinking lantern through the shadows of a September dawn. Have I not lain out on many a barren 'neath the hunters' moon and verily gurgled in my delight as the fighting call of an infuriated bull moose mocked the myriad shades of the September gloaming. Have I not carefully picked my way through the shadows of an alder thicket confident of finding my buck. Not waded a laughing "rips" as the sunrise kissed the tops of the mountains. Bent my shoulders to the sternman's paddle as the bouncing canoe joyfully rode the rapids, and crawled contentedly into my leanto after whipping the pool beneath the dam, and yet, till I tracked the wandering woodland caribou through the intense stillness after "Our Lady of the Snows" had cast for the first time her spotless mantle, I had, but a vague idea of the splendour of "The Silent Places."

All day had we been travelling and now gathered round the oil-cloth covered table. Something stamped outside the "dingle." Ah, the pack-horse, and on his back was a 39-point head. Did we ply the "packer" with questions? Maybe, so they had seen plenty of caribou, good heads, too, and I am afraid none of us slept that night. Long towards dawn a squirrel ran over the roof, and that, to the well-versed woodsman, means the best of luck.

With a guide and cook, fore and aft, for twelve miles I swung along. As we stopped for lunch the pack-horse, bearing our outfit, slowly overtook us. In less than another two hours we broke cover and there before us lay our promised land. I think I was ahead when first that incline seemed to fall away from my very feet. Beyond it lay the first real mountain I had ever seen. "That's him there," whispered John Jarvis, my guide, and I knew I stood facing the famous peak known from end to end of the hunters' realm by the cherished name of "Old Baldy." In less than half an hour we had reached camp "Waite," the second on guide Arthur Pringle's, of Stanley Co., N.B., string, had sipped a cup of tea, and struck off for the open.

Hardly had we covered a half-mile when I saw Jack slide his right hand noiselessly towards his pocket. Back from his eyes came the binoculars with a lightning-like movement, in behind a bush we dodged, and there, shaking the rain from out her coat, stood our first caribou. I hate to think of the questions that pell mell came into my mind: "was?"—"where?"—"is?"—"do you think so?" and from bush to bush we slid, and what had been one cow, was now twenty, several young bulls, and one large one. Jack grinned over my shoulder. Did you ever try to calculate a woodman's grin? Try it sometime; it spells success. Did I think I could drop him? "One," "two"—"nine," "ten"—only sixteen points. Just for the fun of the thing, just to show Jack I wasn't nervous, I covered him with the "33"—"surely we ought to get better heads than that before the week is out," murmured my companion. I thought of the 39-point head and I smiled into Jack's reflecting countenance. But we had worked too close. See! they had begun to bunch; and away they went, the big stag in the

rear, their white "flags" and black noses high in the air. Thirty-two in all did we count that afternoon, between four and six o'clock. What fun we had with some of them. How Jack would "call" a young stag half a dozen times. How a herd of youngsters would sight us from a knoll and trot to within a hundred yards to satisfy their curiosity. Till they moved we froze in our tracks for away they'd have gone on the run.

I don't think I rubbed my eyes that second



The author, D. W. Clinch, with field-glasses, watching a feeding Caribou Bull and Cow on a distant side hill.

morning. I've too good an imagination. Jack left us for the day, and Abe, most casual of guides, tracked me mountainwards. What glorious travelling it was. Ankle-deep moss, brown trails, mountain air, cool shadows, sun-bathed open country. Here we would come on a feeding cow. Suddenly the "rasping" of pines would denote startled breakfasts. Leisurely would we pause as the glasses roamed the hillside. Uphill and down,



A Bull Caribou shot near the Miramichi River, by a prominent New York Artist.

through stunted growths, grassy meadows, over moss-covered deadfalls and bubbling brooks, then up the hillside once more. How I longed for a Graflex camera. Within thirty yards would I creep of a feeding herd, whose antlered leader could boast of but twelve, though even, points. How

the "call" mystified some roving youngster, ousted from some wandering herd. What fun I had with Abe when the Thermos burnt his lips. How good the pipe tasted as he basked in the cool pines' shadow! Then campward we swung and tried the further country. How we crouched, ran, and crouched again, as the prongs of a stag were silhouetted against the blue horizon. How he threw up his moistened nose and trotted to within thirty yards as Abe pressed the bark to his lips. Then the shadows lengthened, the bracing air turned cool, and the turns of the trail unwound rapidly.

'Twas the third day now and Jack and I met the first wind as it swept up the gully. Forty-three caribou had I seen and still no head to suit. A dozen more that day were added to the number. None did we shoot for none did suit and somehow I am very glad. It was the afternoon when finally we reached our Mecca, the summit of South Bald Mountain. Somehow, there is something about the mountains which makes the city seem very far away, almost far enough to stay. There was not a breath of wind and the day was very fine and clear, more like a July afternoon than anything I can remember. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing but one vast panorama of rolling forest slopes covered with Princess Pine. Here and there a yellow heath would be contrasted against the green background, or a pent-up beaver-pond glittered in the October sunshine, for we were now at the headwaters of the South Branch of the Nepisiguit and the North Branch of the Sevogle.

Perhaps the outside world would not understand but to those who carry the most tiny streak of pioneer blood such names as the Sevogle, Miramichi, Nepisiguit, Serpentine, Gulquac, Mamozekel, etc., possess in their very pronouncing, a particular satisfying significance. They savour of priceless smooth-bores, fringed buckskins, and other phantoms of a past, which from their pinacles of hero-worship beckon struggling mankind to the Happy Hunting Grounds, and mankind wants to go, and can't. Maybe Jack's of the outside world, for he gently hinted the many miles to be covered and I regretfully picked up my rifle and camera. Several more caribou did we count that day, totalling in all, fifty-seven. In fact, all during my trip not an hour passed without seeing game.

In such a country there's a district for every day. On the fourth we hunted some new country and it was only after considerable thinking that I left a good stag pass by. Long towards noon it began to snow and by two o'clock we knew winter was on the way. One twelve-point stag almost fed on top of us, much to our amusement, and then, as the herds leave the open in dirty weather, we skirted the greenwoods before giving it up for the day.

There is about caribou shooting a delicious uncertainty quite unequalled by any shooting in the East. When, where, and why, a lone stag or a whole herd will unceremoniously appear is quite as unanswerable as it is beyond description. And these kept appearing.

All night the snow fell and shortly after daylight we took up the trail for the open for none of the sixty-seven caribou inspected had borne the desired growth of antler. But that day, though we counted twenty-nine more, we really enjoyed it without firing a single shot. Away on the hillside

would a mouse-coloured body move against the sky line, and be contrasted with the spotless carpet. And around that "away" we would circle. Perhaps the circle was half a mile and how delightful it was to mark your game and then figure on his travelling during that same half mile. Once we saw a scrap. How the old bull would chase some aspiring youngster! How two youthful leaders would casually kneel and shove till one gave way! How the minutes flew as we watched them! How we would leave a herd for a couple of hours and then stalk it again simply because it had moved or the interval swelled its numbers. How we would sometimes intercept the gathering clan, and, rolling in the snow, allow them to feed well nigh on top of us! Really, the actual shooting bears but a small part in such all-sufficing sport.

But still there remained a country we hadn't travelled and only four miles away. Packing over this distance we stalked the greenwoods for as yet the blizzard held sway.

Of all my memories of the forest at all seasons of the year none is so pleasant as the recollections of the few minutes which elapsed after the sighting of the drifting herd from which I finally picked my head. The caribou make so little noise as with