

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

FROM AN ICELAND NOTE-BOOK

We had good cause to congratulate ourselves on having had a long experience of camping before visiting Iceland, particularly in the matter of tents and on our possession of one of the true gipsy type. With any other sort of tent we should have been unable to withstand the rigors of even the summer climate here with its continuous rain. Indeed, it is doubtful whether any canvas tent will long survive rough usage on pack ponies, not to speak of some of the storms we experienced, which would have blown bell tents out of the ground, while even hurricanes passed over our modest little gipsy tents, leaving them none the worse.

Quite as important as good tents, for those who want to go far afield in Iceland, are good ponies. We were to make our headquarters at Skagastrand, which is an eighty-mile ride from Reykjavik, our port of debarkation; so, through the intermediary of our host, Pieter Christophersen, we had acquired at Skagastrand two good riding ponies and the necessary pack animal.

All Iceland saddle ponies are pacers, and there is no occasion to rise in the stirrups when riding. The pack ponies, on the other hand, are mostly and do not pace, and are considered by the natives to be worth only one-third as much as riding ponies. We were assured that our "hestur" were two of the best riding ponies in the island, and after two or three days' trial we were satisfied with and bought them for £10 apiece, saddles and bridles thrown in. They were sure-footed, cow-hocked little animals of 13 hands, but with poor shoulders, requiring cruppers to the saddles. We christened them "Anskaat" and "Anskilur," two words, frequently made use of by Icelanders when in their cups, of which we did not then know the meaning. The pronunciation of the second name should present no difficulty to anyone who has traveled much in North Wales, and can pronounce the full name of the parish Angelys usually called Llanfair P.G.

Of course, we had the usual untoward incidents with our little beasts, and were from time to time tempted to try and do better; as, for example, when, on the morning of our starting from Christophersen's farm for our fishing camp on the Storri Borg river, Anskaat objected to the rattle of the tin cooping utensils which he carried, and charged the wall bounding the tun, or inclosed land round the Boer, without attempting to rise, resulting in the rider, his gun, pots, and pans flying over the ditch in all directions, while Anskaat lay doubled up below. Beyond a large breach in the tun wall no damage resulted.

One of these moments of temptation was at the annual Storri Borg pony fair, to which all the farmers of the district bring their ponies—mostly two or three year olds—in order that the dealer's agent may choose beasts for shipment to Scotland, where they are put to work in the coal mines. There is a big crowd of men and a bigger crowd of ponies, none of which had ever been handled, all being as wild as hawks. Some of the colts fought like demons, rearing and striking with their forelegs, biting and kicking, but, having no shoes on, did little damage. The men had no easy task in bringing up a youngster for the agent to examine, and, when one was finally chosen, the deal came to a conclusion by the men having to carry him bodily out of the herd. To this they were evidently well accustomed, and never failed to cut and carry out the most unruly colt. Prices ranged from £2 to £3 10s., or thereabouts and after the bargain was struck the pony was marked by clipping a strip of hair across his shoulder with a pair of scissors. The horse fair lasts several days, and the ponies purchased are driven all the way to Reykjavik for shipment. Two ponies in particular, much urged upon us, took our fancy; one a very pretty cream with black muzzle, and another a bright bay with black points, and for a moment it went hard with Anskaat and our farmer friends, however, they strongly advised us to have nothing to do with them, and when we came to examine the ponies more closely we found that horse-dealing is much the same all the world over, neither of them being sound.

Storri Borg or Great Fort, the nearest habitation to our river camp, takes its name from an interesting earthwork or extinct volcano, with walls of basaltic formation, about 12 ft. high, and in true perpendicular inside and out, situated about three miles from our camp. The lip of the crater is broken on one side, forming an entrance a few feet wide, through which runs a small stream from a spring in the centre. Although this "fort" is the highest point for some considerable area, the stream never fails, and even runs stronger during the winter when the whole country is ice-bound. Inside is a perfectly level green sward of about two acres in extent, and altogether the inclosure must have formed an ideal natural fortress or refuge for the Northerners with their women and children when attacked by their neighbors from the South. There was a litter of silver foxes in the "fort," but we never succeeded in getting a view of either the old ones or their cubs.

From most of the farmers living within a wide radius of Borg we received pressing invitations from time to time to visit them for luck-shooting, and made several excursions with ponies and guns, staying the night at a farm, if too far away to ride back the same day. The accommodation at some of these places was bad, not to say lively, and the food so coarse and uninviting, that we decided to refuse all invitations from distant farms, as we did not wish to take our tents and be bothered with pack ponies. Coffee we could always count on getting good at every farm, though

it was a trifle over-roasted to English taste. When staying at a farm, cups of coffee and some small cakes were always brought to us by the farmer's wife or daughter before we got up in the morning, a delicate little attention much appreciated. The Icelanders are certainly not the most good-natured and hospitable people, but the men have one objectionable habit—they always want to embrace on meeting, and, after a little experience of their bearded, snuff-begrimed countenances, we made a point of fleeing precipitately whenever this symptom showed itself. Very few of them smoke, but they are all inveterate snuff-takers, and, holding their heads back, literally pour the snuff into their nostrils from their capacious snuff-horns.

We noticed outside every farm a large boulder set in the ground, with a flat top and a small sledge-hammer beside it, and for some time were unable to conjecture what the purpose of this primitive anvil could be, until one day we saw two women at work, one holding a stockfish on the stone while the other pounded it with the sledge-hammer. Before this process began the fish was of much the same consistency as a deal board, but after a good hammering for half an hour or so it could be doubled up with slight difficulty. These stockfish have great "staying" qualities. That is to say, starting the day with a quid of stockfish in your mouth and a strong pair of jaws, you may succeed in masticating it by the evening, provided the disintegrating process with the anvil and sledge-hammer had been first properly performed.

We received regular supplies of white bread from the farm, and, though we lived almost entirely on fish, we were able to vary the menu occasionally with golden plovers and ducks of various kinds. Of these, the best, from the gastronomic point of view, was the harlequin, and down the river past our camp. One morning my friend, clad only in his shirt, saw a bunch of harlequin flying down stream, picked up his gun, and dropped a right and left into the water. One fell dead, but the other, a drake, was only winged, and the sportsman, who was admirably costumed for wading, put his gun down and started in pursuit. I was engaged in retrieving the dead duck, and did not witness the chase, and my friend, returning half an hour later, told me that the drake was an expert diver and veritable fish, and had led him over the roughest and stoniest part of the river bed, till his feet were so cut that he had to give up the chase. By that time he had reached the opposite bank, some distance up river, and in order to protect his feet on the return journey, had bound them with hay bands made from coarse grass. The drake had come off before he was halfway across, and he had to continue the journey without protection for his lacinated feet. All our spare time in camp was occupied in skinning and curing the skins of the various birds we shot, and we brought home a fair collection of the following species, now well known to naturalists:

The harlequin duck, which is in Europe exclusively confined to Iceland, and breeds there, as well as in Greenland and in the northern parts of North America. The fully grown males (called in America "old lords") are extremely handsome birds, with plumage of spots, stripes and bands in true harlequin fashion. The females (called "jennies") are of a sober brown color all over, without any of the variegated coloring of the "old lord." The adult bird is sooty black, but frequently some are seen with white breasts. I shot one of each kind. It is an inveterate poacher, devours eggs and young chicks of ptarmigan, and prefers to do its fishing by deputy, chasing and scaring small pullets and terns until they disgorge the contents of their crops, when the skua swoops down and catches the fish in the air before it reaches the water. We found some red-throated divers or loons on a small lake, but as they kept to the middle of the water out of range and refused to be driven we were able to get a specimen only by hiding ourselves and making our small spaniel trot up and down the shore of the lake until the natural curiosity of the loons brought them within shot. The great northern diver breeds in Iceland, and we saw a good many on the lakes at Borg, but did not get a shot at one. We frequently saw the great black-backed gull on the Lava River, and on one occasion were able to gaff a grise which we saw struck by a gull on a shallow. They are remarkably handsome birds, the dark purple back and wings contrasting well with the snowy whiteness of the rest of their plumage.

The Iceland falcon, one of the four species of gyrfalcon recognized by ornithologists, nests in Iceland. I surprised one of these birds by coming suddenly on it round a rock, and with a long shot managed to wing it. It was in immature plumage, and when I came up it threw itself on its back and struck at me with its formidable talons, screaming loudly all the time. The two old birds were soaring overhead at a tremendous height, and, in the hope that the screaming of the young bird would bring them down to see what was wrong, I vainly hid under a rock for some time. These old birds appeared to be as white as the snowy owl, but, of course, I could only see their breasts and under parts, and at a very great height above me. The young birds are brown on the back, wing coverts, and tail, and their feathers are edged with white. The Slavonian, or horned grebe, breeds in Iceland. We saw a number of these, and added several specimens to our collection. At first we took them to be red-necked grebes, but when we showed the skins to an ornithological friend he came to the conclusion that they were slavonian grebes, as the red-necked grebe does not breed in Ice-

land, and is longer by 3 in. than the former, being 13 in. in length, against the 10 in. of the horned grebe. I saw several numbers of Arctic tern on the seashore. Like the common kind, they circled so close round us as nearly to knock our hats off. The red-necked phalaropes are essentially fresh-water birds, and were very plentiful in the north; but these and the terns were of so confiding a disposition that we could not harden our hearts to shoot any of the larger lakes, mostly whoopets, which breed in Iceland. Whimbrels breed in the nest, and are plentiful. They are pugnacious in the nesting season, and will drive off such birds as Richardson's skua and even the ravens, which abound all over Iceland. The eider-duck are very numerous in all the fjords; they are protected all the year round. We frequently hunted for ptarmigan shooting, and making a more extended search for other birds, but we found ptarmigan so scarce and backward, owing to the cold and late spring, that a return to England in time for partridges seemed more desirable.

We saw very few flowers in Iceland, but of those we noticed round Borg the commonest was the mountain avens (*Dryas octopetala*), a beautiful overgreen trailing plant, with pure white flowers, and mythically named "nymphs of the oaks" on account of the resemblance of its leaves to those of the oak tree. I brought some seed of this home, and have the plants growing on my rocky, where they thrive in dry, sunny positions. We also came across gentians of several kinds; large breaks of *Gentiana verna*, growing only 3 in. high on sunny banks, formed sheets of deep blue. We saw only a few colonies of Iceland poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*), in shades of yellow, orange, and white, and among other plants, some of them were not then in bloom, we noticed the grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*), butterwort or bog violet (*Pinguicula*), rockfoils or saxifrage (*Saxifraga*), thrift, or sea pink (*Armeria*), wild thyme (*Thymus serpyllifolium*), whilow grass (*Drava*), willow herb (*Epilobium*), hawkweed (*Hieracium*), cinquefoil (*Potentilla*), catchfly (*Silene*), horsetail (*Equisetum*), and some varieties of dwarf willows growing in marshy places.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

In the autumn, when the ground and the rivers become frozen, the gold miner, by his sluice boxes, cleans his gold dust, and leaves the lonely gulches for the busy town. Some take the last steamer and leave Alaska, some turn to other occupation and some spend the long winter in idleness, hibernating like the bear, sucking on the fat accumulated during the summer.

I had three mail routes from the government and decided to run the east one myself. From Teller to Igloo, 60 miles, and return, requiring time not to exceed two days each way, was the schedule. I decided to use reindeer, instead of dogs, to give them a trial, for they had never before been used for this purpose. Securing two splendid animals from the Mission, I would leave at 7 a.m., and the fleet-footed, high-spirited deer would carry me and the mail through deep snow over lakes, desolate tundra, storm-swept valleys, up the ice-bound river and sloughs to Igloo before 8 p.m., covering the sixty miles in one day. Then I would stake them out on a hillside, where they would shovel the snow with their antlers, and feed the moss with their wide-spreading hoofs, feeding and resting all night, and by the morning we would start on our homeward way.

Twenty-five miles of the way was excellent hunting ground; rifle and shotgun bay always ready on the sleigh and I would usually get sufficient game to keep well supplied with fresh meat. The reindeer are fine to go hunting with; they will not disturb the game, can easily be turned aside and left feeding, while if you should come along with a string of dogs and a flock of ptarmigan should rise, dogs, sleigh and mail sacks would try to follow the birds through the air!

One morning, seeing a red fox some 500 yards away, I turned the deer aside, took my 30-40 loaded with steel bullets, and crawled up. The country was sparsely covered with willows, and I could not get nearer than 150 yards. The fox was busily scratching and did not notice me, so, sitting down behind a bush, I took careful aim and then fired. He made a high jump and ran. When I was just about to pull the trigger and hazard a shot on the run, he fell over dead. I picked him up, and going to where he had been scratching, I kicked out of the snow a trap. His chain was fast somewhere in the frozen ground, and when spring was broken. The thought struck me: "What if someone should see you now, they would think you had stolen a fox out of a trap, unless you could prove that the trap was broken, the fox was loose and had run ten yards before he died."

Throwing the carcass on the sleigh, I raced along to make up for lost time and reach Teller before dark. At noon I stopped for lunch at a little village of four mud houses, Eskimos, Eskimo Eddy or Kaffinik received always a toll for being at home and having coffee and the contents of my lunch box ready. I requested him to skin the fox while I was eating.

He called my attention to one fore paw which showed signs of a trap, and asked me where I got the fox. I felt stung at the question, but told him the exact circumstances. He said he knew Ablowaluk had traps in the vicinity described by me. Despite my explanations I fancied the native had already convicted me on circumstantial evidence.

The beautiful skin was dry and I had

thought no more about it, when, one day, Ablowaluk came to my house and asked me if I had taken a fox out of my trap. Indignantly I replied I was no thief, stealing foxes out of traps! He shook his head and insisted: "Him trap how I had shot the fox, how the fox had run over ten yards before dropping dead; that he could not have been in a trap that a broken trap had lain where he had evidently been scratching for bait that had been strewn around a long time before. Near it was an old fishing camp and the old trap was left behind from it. He shook his head again to my foxy explanations and stretching his hand toward the skin, demanded: "Him my skin." I reasoned that if I would give him the skin I would acknowledge my guilt and lose all prestige and reputation amongst the natives, for it is a heinous crime to rob a trap, so I remained firm. Ablowaluk kept shaking his head, and left.

Then he sent Spoon, who spoke good English, and begged for the skin. I was disgusted and would have given him the pelt and a good deal more, if with good grace I could have pulled out of the scrape. I thoroughly expounded the matter to Spoon. He fully understood and pretended to sincerely believe me, and I knew he only feigned belief. All the evidence pointed plainly to my guilt, and I felt as guilty as if I had stolen the skin, yet I would not give up, and Spoon had to leave without it.

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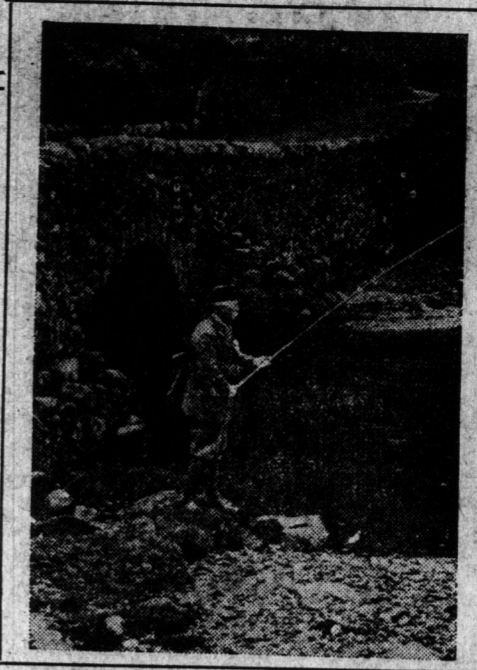
WILD GOOSE SHOOTING IN CANADA

Probably the best known and most widely distributed of all the wild geese in Canada and the northern districts of the United States is the so-called Canada goose. It is a very handsome bird, and may be easily distinguished from other species of wild geese by its black neck and a white collar. Its arrival in the spring is welcomed, as it is a sure sign that the long winter is nearly over. Its loud "honking" can be heard long before the V-shaped line is seen on the horizon, and the noise is deafening as the flock passes overhead. One bird leads the way, and the others follow their leader. Their breeding ground stretches north from Labrador and British Columbia. May and June are the nesting months, and six eggs would be an average number for a nest.

The birds usually come south early in October, and hang about the bays and creeks as long as they can find open water, waiting till the ice drives them further south. Their winter quarters are the bays and marshes of the southern United States. It has even been stated they fly south as far as Patagonia. Probably this is an exaggeration, though an isolated case or two may have occurred. On their long journeys so many shots are fired at them that the geese have learnt to exercise the greatest vigilance. For this reason they are very difficult to approach. In fact, it is almost impossible to get near them, and the only way is to watch their coming and going and to shoot them as they are flying.

Happening to be in the Province of Quebec last autumn, I went to the Bay of Chaleur, the Atlantic seaboard, where I was told the Canada geese usually came during October. They had arrived in large numbers and were swimming about in one of the inlets of the bay, but it was impossible to get near them. By observing their movements for several days, however, I found that regularly at high tide they flew inland to a large lake, the reason for this being, no doubt, that they were driven off their feeding ground on the mud banks, and their nearly always seemed to take the same course, returning at low tide and varying their flight a very little.

I gave up trying to get near them in a canoe, and spent several days on a sandy promontory, on which there was a narrow belt of fir trees. The geese had to cross this promontory in order to reach the bay at the back where their feeding ground was, so I stationed myself behind the fir trees and waited for them to fly over. As a rule they flew high to clear the trees. Sometimes, of course, they were quite out of shot, or were too far either to the right or left, but several guns could have commanded the situation thoroughly. It seems that these geese invariably fly straight ahead, and you can tell to a certain extent what their rise, by watching them through a field glass and noticing in what direction their heads are pointing. This gives anyone behind a belt of trees a better chance, as he cannot well be seen, but at the same time can see the birds, cover a good deal of ground, and judge roughly where they are likely to cross. I was using an ordinary 12 bore, and at first tried them with No. 3 shot, but found this had little effect, and it only seemed to rattle on their wings. I then tried them with buckshot, and met with more success, on one occasion being lucky enough to bring down a nice right and



Sportsman's Calendar

AUGUST

The Salmon-Trollers' Month—Spring Salmon and Cohoes all over the Coast. One of the best months for stream-fishing for Trout.

left as they were flying over the tops of the fir trees.

Besides these geese, large flocks of black duck sometimes flew in from the sea and gave very pretty sport. The black duck and the redhead are the two best ducks in Canada for eating, and they afforded a welcome addition to our larder. My best bag for one day was six geese and a good many duck. I had no scales with me, but am sure the weight of these geese averaged between 12 lb. and 15 lb. apiece. Although I had the assistance of a man, the load seemed a heavy one when returning in the evening to the farmhouse where I was staying.

Every morning I was paddled round the shores of the lake. A canoe is much better for this purpose than a boat, as you can glide along without the slightest noise and get right on to duck. There were a number of small islands, which enabled one to get shelter, and by crossing the island to get well within range before the birds realized the danger.

The flight shooting just before sundown gave the prettiest form of sport. The geese would now begin to come in from the sea, and the black duck in large flocks would circle round the shores of the lake, giving excellent sporting shots, as both the duck and geese flew high and fast. No doubt an 8 bore would be better than an ordinary 12 bore, but I found the latter gave fairly good results, using No. 3 shot for the duck. There was time to slip in a couple of BB cartridges when the geese were heard approaching in the distance.

Towards the middle of November the lake showed signs of freezing up. It would soon have become impossible to use boat or canoe, and might have taken a considerable time before the ice would carry one to the mainland, so we decided to leave. The sense of freedom and lack of restrictions add greatly to the pleasure of all forms of sport in Canada. Though many cross the Atlantic for moose and caribou, at present few seem to go for duck and goose shooting. Those who have not opportunities of getting good sport in England would find that no more enjoyable holiday could be spent than a trip in Canada after ducks and wild geese during the late autumn. It would be possible to combine a moose hunting trip and goose shooting by reaching Canada in September, in time for the "calling season," which is undoubtedly the easiest time to get Moose. This would not interfere in any way with the goose and duck shooting, which does not begin till October.—A. E. B.

During our stay another District Commissioner, Mr. Piggott, came over on a short visit; it was he who, the preceding year, while at Veri, had been obliged to undertake the crusade against the rhinos, because, quite unprovoked, they had killed various natives. He told us that at the same time a man-eating leopard made its appearance, and killed seven children. It did not attack at night, but in the daytime, its victims being the little boys who were watching the flocks of goats; sometimes it took a boy and sometimes a goat. Two old men killed it with spears on the occasion of its taking the last victim. It was a big male, very old, much emaciated, and the teeth worn to stumps. Horne told us that a month or two before our arrival at Meru a leopard had begun a career of woman-killing. It killed one woman by a bite in the throat, and ate the body. It sprang on and badly wounded another, but was driven off in time to save her life. This was probably the leopard where it had committed its ravages; it was an old male, but very thin, with worn teeth. In these cases the reason for the beast's action was plain; in each instance a big, savage male had found his powers failing, and had been driven to prey on the females and young of the most helpless of animals. But another attack, of which Piggott told us, was an old male, who was sitting chief, with two or three followers, was sitting on the head and hand, without biting him, and as instantly disappeared. Piggott attended to the wounded man.—Roosevelt.