

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

HITS AND MISSES

Richard L. Pocock

It is a sure thing that the majority of the sportsmen, here at any rate, want a gun license for residents. The letters received last week, made a strong case in favor of it, and there were none printed in opposition to the proposal for the very simple reason that there were none received. In addition to the letters received and published many verbal assurances were received from sportsmen strongly in favor of a gun license for residents, sportsmen, who, though keen and deeply interested in protecting not only the game but the game-hunters, were too modest to go into print. It seems perfectly clear that if there are any who are against it they are of the class of Irishman, who, when asked what his politics were, replied, whatever party might be in power, "I'm ag'in the government."

While on the subject of better game protection, it might once more be urged that the enthusiastic anglers would also welcome some attempt to carry out the provisions of the acts relating to fish protection. It is time a stop was put to the destruction of undersized fish from such rivers as the Cowichan, where, if allowed to, the trout grow to proportions which make them worthy of the skill of the best of anglers. Those who want fish for food can get all they want in the sea without any difficulty, and without any fear of depleting the stock. The Cowichan is a river with a reputation to sustain on two continents; anyone who doubts this has only to keep a watchful eye on the principal sporting papers, and he will soon doubt it no longer. This is a reputation which it is to the interests of the Island to sustain, and with reasonable fish protection it will easily take care of itself.

The goose is a wily bird. Many a time has he filled us with exasperation, and also with a grudging admiration for his williness and skill in eluding and eluding us. There is a young sportsman in town who has been kicking himself at intervals ever since last Sunday. He ran up against the wisest of the old-time honkers resident in British Columbia. It was up Deadman's river where he was out with dog and gun in the hopes of bagging a stray widgeon or mallard, and, as he came rather suddenly round a bend, he found himself within easy range of a wily old goose who was enjoying a siesta on a nice grassy spot on the opposite bank of the stream.

The hunter was taken aback by the suddenness of the encounter, which was so utterly at variance with his experience of the goose tribe that he could hardly credit his senses; still there was the goose, big and unmistakable. Mr. Honker, on the other hand, felt ashamed to be caught napping, but, when he was awake, was very wide awake indeed, and by no means rattled. Mr. Hunter's wits were comparatively slow. He reasoned with himself that that honker should have taken to his wings the instant he made his appearance round the corner; that was undoubtedly the right thing for it to have done, if it were a wild goose, and wouldn't he just have soaked it if it had. Mr. Honker knew this well enough, he knew that he had to deal with a good sportsman, as, if it were otherwise, he would have been plugged sitting before even he had had time to think. Having so far escaped, he reasoned to himself that, if he continued to sit, he would be safe for the time being, and must trust to luck to guide him out of the scrape as developments took place. Mr. Hunter was firmly convinced by this time that he must be a tame grey goose, and was congratulating himself on not having committed a "faux pas" and soaked some farmer's pride. Still it riled him to see that goose sitting there so quietly and apparently unconcerned, and he decided to move it. For this purpose he leant the trusty weapon against a tree and searched for a stone or stick with which to rouse it. Mr. Honker duly noted that Mr. Hunter's search took him some paces from the gun; he waited for the missile and, as the aim was good, he decided that the time had arrived for a discreet retirement, which he effected not with the ungainly barnyard waddle expected by Mr. Hunter, but with the strong, swift aerial flight which the aeroplanists have yet to imitate. He knew to an inch the range of the shotgun and he was well outside it before Mr. Hunter could reach his gun and bring it into play.

P. S.—Any farmer owning domestic geese in that vicinity is warned to put tags on them, as that hunter thinks that honker may come back some day to the same place, and anything he sees there from now on that looks like a goose will be shot first and examined for signs of domesticity afterwards.

By the way, if that hunter had been a little more experienced he would have known that, though unusual, it does sometimes happen that one comes across a single wild goose in this way, whether it is that it is wounded or tired from a long flight, and thus separated from the main body, or possibly suffering from an attack of acute appendicitis from over-eating. Old-time members of the old gun club have probably recollection of a somewhat similar incident in connection with one of the shooting matches which they used to hold. It was long years ago, before the building boom, and the practice was for two teams to be made up and for the members to hunt for the day two and two, one from each team, so as to keep tabs on each other. Each species of game counted so many points. Two of the contestants had been on a long hunt without either having scored any substantial number of

points, and were on their way home through what was then the farm land near Clover Point and the Fairfield estate, when the sim-ultaneously espied a goose sitting on the grass in the same old way by the side of a little rivulet. The member of team A had his gun half-way to his shoulder when he was stopped by the member of team B, who yelled to him not to shoot Mother Goose's tame goose. As a matter of fact, he recognized that it was really well out of range, and, as they came closer, he kept one eye very close indeed on the bird while he chaffed his opponent about the mistake he had nearly made. Closer they came and closer, until the honker took to flight. "Tame goose be d—d!" shouted team A's man. But it was too late; before the words were out of his mouth the other's gun had barked and team B claimed the unmistakable wild goose, which counted top marks and gave them the victory.

The danger of speedy extermination which threatens the Vancouver Island wapiti or "elk" is a subject which has been touched on more than once in this column. Reports frequently reach this office of the scarcity of not only the bulls, but also the calves. The one is a natural corollary of the other. Sportsmen and others, particularly the others, have killed off so many of the bulls that there are not enough left to afford the natural and necessary protection needed by the calves from their natural enemies, the wolves. The wolves know better than to attack the bulls, but, when the cows drop their calves, then it is that they need the protection of the lords of the herd, and, if there are none of these lords to give it, the calves fall an easy prey to the vermin.

A few days ago a Victoria gentleman interested in these matters came into the office with corroborative evidence after a trip up the West Coast. In conversation with two local hunters and guides he had been told by them of the sad state of things, they giving him instances of having seen as many as twenty and more cows in different places and at different times without a single calf amongst them.

Let the hunters leave the elk alone altogether for a term of years over all the Island, and let them tax their skill in hunting the wolves, which are far harder to get, and which make very handsome trophies; every wolf killed helps the good work. Once our elk have vanished, Vancouver Island loses its last claim to be a big game hunter's ground. These are not just hearsay scares, the names of the informants are here, they are men who know what they are talking about and are genuinely interested in the prevention of such a calamity as the extinction of the Vancouver Island "elk."

WITH ROD AND GUN IN NEWFOUND-LAND

H. and I had decided to get off on August 11 for a hunting trip up the river, but it rained hard on that date, also the following day. However, the 13th dawned bright and clear. We got our stores packed aboard our two canoes, then strung them out behind one of the motor launches; H. rocked the flywheel and away we went, steaming down Grand Lake to the mouth of Sandy River, which is about four miles distant from the Bungalow.

There was a big fish on the lake, but on entering the river all was still. We puffed along up stream for about nine miles, seeing several ducks, such as golden eye and black duck, or dusky mallard (Anas obscura). Arriving at the first rapid we drew the motor up on to the shallow and there left her. At this rapid we found a party of Americans busy with the trout; we soon left them behind, and climbed four more rapids. At the fifth we decided to catch some trout for tea, and were not long before we landed eleven nice fish; several grise were rising, but we did not succeed in hooking one.

After crossing Little Deer Lake, a nice sheet of water of about 90 acres, we again entered the river, and ascended Sandy Rapid, and on coming to Sandy Lake found a big sea running, so decided to postpone crossing this large and exposed sheet of water until the wind and waves abated; in the meantime we paddled up a tributary stream, and there did some fishing, but without much success, as we only landed one trout of about 1 lb. weight.

Towards evening the wind dropped a little, and we paddled the five long miles across Sandy Lake, landing at the mouth of Birch Brook. We pitched our tent in a charming and well-sheltered place; here we found poles and pegs all ready chopped, also a considerable quantity of firewood. A camping ground like that, with all the comforts of home, suited H. and I down to the ground, and whilst he cut spruce twigs for the beds I cooked tea, trout being the principal dish of the repast.

Next morning we were awakened at dawn by the whistle of ducks' pinions as they flew over the tent. A yellow shank was uttering its loud note from a sand bar at the mouth of the river, whilst a brood of young mergansers were industriously diving a little farther out in the lake. Except for these sounds everything else was hushed, with the hush which is only found in the depth of the wilds.

We soon had breakfast under way, then to strike camp and stow the gear into the canoes was the work of but a few minutes. Then we began the ascent of Birch Brook, a pretty stream winding its way through marsh, forest, and ponds. After going up stream for about a mile, we decided that it would be as well to get a salmon for the pot, so I stopped at a likely looking bit of water, whilst H. went on

round a bend to another good place. The telescopic steel rod was soon adjusted, and about the fifth cast a nice little salmon fastened on to the silver doctor, and after several good runs and leaps I succeeded in gaffing it. Knowing what my partner and I are capable of consuming in the way of fresh salmon, I thought it advisable to get yet another fish, and very soon hooked a lively grise, which gave considerable fun before he came to the gaff.

After this I paddled along to my friend, and found that he had landed three nice salmon and lost another. One end of the pool on which he was fishing was shallow, and there we could see dozens of salmon lying on the gravelly bottom; every now and again one of them would fling itself out of the water to drop back with a loud splash.

We again paddled on, winding our way through a thick forest of birch, spruce, and pine, standing up dead and grey, having been stricken some years ago by the fire fiend. After passing through this the river widens out into the first seal pond; this is dotted with islands, and a goodly array of rocks how above the water. A narrow channel divides the first seal pond from the second. We chased a young great northern diver in this pond, for some time, but these expert divers are not often caught, and this one was no exception to the rule.

On entering the river again we had swift water to paddle against for some distance. Salmon were rising ahead of us all the time, but we did not halt until we arrived at Tea Pond Steady; here the river quietsens down for several hundred yards, and is a grand place for salmon and big trout. After getting our rods out H. soon hooked a largish fish, which after a few rushes and jumps broke away. Just before he lost it I hooked one, and after a short fight landed it; then H. got another, which also came to hand, I lost two more fish, and H. landed a 3 lb. trout, a beautifully shaped cock fish.

We again embarked, and after paddling through Tea Pond entered the first Birch Lake. Birch Lakes run approximately east and west, and consist of three lakes about eighteen miles long by one mile wide; they are situated in a magnificent valley, the hills on either side rising from the water's edge, the slopes being clad with pine, spruce, fir, larch, and birch. No lumbermen have ever disturbed this solitude.

The wind being fresh, enjoying the scenery and sunshine; in fact, I was sorry when we eventually came to the end of the lakes. Here we pitched camp at the mouth of Sheffield Brook. We had a glorious feed of salmon; after which, whilst H. fished at the mouth of the brook, I salted the ones we had caught on the way up. H. landed one grise and five trout, the latter averaging 2 lb. each.

Next day was hot and sunny, but a stiff west wind was blowing; we spread our blankets on the shingle out of the wind and basked in the sun, keeping a sharp look-out along the shores of the lake all the time in hopes of seeing bear or caribou, and during the afternoon H. spotted a young stag walking along the water's edge over on the other side of the lake. We put off in a canoe, but before we got near he took to the woods, and we saw him no more. The wind dropped about 6 p.m., so we packed up and started back along the lake, and had not gone far when some geese honked off in the distance; we ceased paddling and waited. In a few seconds three geese come over the trees and were close over H. before they noticed him. Making the best of this error on their part he pulled down a right and left; the third bird, giving me a long chance, was winged by a B.B. shot and flopped into the lake, where after a good chase we managed to catch him. It was dark by the time we reached the foot of Mount Seemore, and we had some difficulty in locating the camping place, but found it eventually, and after getting things fixed we had a grand banquet by the light of a roaring camp fire; we turned into our sleeping bags feeling at peace with all the world, and knew nothing more until dawn unclosed our eyes. Owls may have glared at us sleeping there; but we reck'd not of them; we were, as H. says, "using the sleep which is only to be found in the silent places."

We woke to view a gorgeous sunrise, which painted the hilltops a beautiful pink; an early rising osprey was wheeling on powerful pinions over the mirror-like lake, whilst a great northern diver woke the echoes with his weird chuckling laugh.

After breakfast we decided to climb up Mount Seemore, and from that elevated position get a general idea of the surrounding country. Seemore is steep, but forest fires have cleared off the timber and made the ascent quite easy, and we were soon on the highest point enjoying a magnificent view over miles and miles of wild country. Away to the southwest lay Grand Lake, looking huge and silvery, backed by its fringe of hills; to the west was Sandy Lake, less huge but very beautiful; to the east was the sea in Notre Dame Bay, whilst the country in our immediate vicinity was dotted with smaller lakes, marshes, hills, and forest. On a rocky peak not more than half a mile away from us was a doe caribou standing out bold and distinct against the clear sky. Near to us was a beautiful little lake full of limpid water, through which the rocks at the bottom could be clearly seen, although they were fully 15 ft. below the surface, numbers of small trout were swimming about. We put up two good strong broods of grouse from a patch of stunted spruce growing close to the edge of the lake.

It was about 1 p.m. when we got back to camp. After eating lunch we packed up and started down stream again, and had just entered the second Birch Lake when H. spotted a caribou coming along the shore towards us. We drew close in and waited; the caribou was walking just in the shallow water, and was making considerable noise splashing along with its large hoofs. I noticed that it held its nose right on the surface of the water, and the motion of its feet splashed it every time it took a step. I fancy caribou are in the habit of doing this in order to prevent in a measure the green-eyed caribou fly from getting into their nostrils. The animal came up to within 30 yards of us, when H. made the surrounding woods and hills roar and echo to the boom of the 45.90 Winchester; the caribou simply curled up dead on the spot. It did not take long to skin and joint the beast, and we were soon under way again, and paddled on to Tea Pond Steady, where we landed and pitched camp for the night. Whilst H. cooked tea I gathered about a gallon of fruit; blueberries, dewberries, and Indian pears were growing in profusion, and we had a grand dessert to follow a sumptuous meal of salmon and wild goose. Several ducks and mergansers went humming past as we were sitting there, and tracks howed where a bear had been berry picking since we were here last. After tea we fished just in front of the tent, getting two salmon and a large trout.

The following morning we packed up and started home. On our way down the river we halted, and whilst H. fished I opened some freshwater muscles in hopes of finding a valuable pearl, but only got one poor specimen. During this short halt H. landed three salmon. We got as far as Little Deer Lake that evening, where we camped, and from there to the motor boat next morning did not take long, as we had the rapids to help us on our way. Once on board the motor, with the engine puffing away, the banks of the river seemed to fairly slide past, and we arrived at the Bungalow safe and sound, with a bountiful supply of fish, flesh, and fowl.—J. R. Whitaker, in Field.

CAPERCAILLIE IN A RUSSIAN FOREST

Although the idea of shooting birds during the breeding season was repugnant to me, I accepted an invitation to spend the month of April in a Russian forest for the purpose of shooting capercaillie. Having arrived at the town which was nearest to the shooting, we found ourselves obliged to travel the last thirty miles upon rough ponies, for the roads were impassable for vehicles of any kind, even sledges being unable to get through the compound of mud, slush, and snow which formed what was called the road. Mile after mile we crawled along, the track seeming to get worse as we penetrated into the heart of the forest, the jolting of the ponies becoming at last almost unbearable, as they floundered painfully along. At length, just as I had begun to think I could stand it no longer, we sighted the shooting box, hidden away in a dense clump of pine trees. Having reached our destination, I insisted upon at least one night of unbroken sleep to make up for the horrors of the route, but it was decided that upon the second night we should make our first excursion after capercaillie, which were said to abound there, for the nights were, as our host said, perfect for the sport, being neither moonlight nor yet pitch-black, nor were they too cold.

Accordingly upon the following evening we started, with two wild-looking keepers, for the part of the forest where a nightly "tok", or tournament, of the birds was held, and where we had to take up our positions before eleven o'clock, since the birds would begin their challenging at the first streak of dawn. After several hours' struggling we reached a small open space, where a huge fire had been pre-erected, round which we settled ourselves to get in an hour or two of sleep before the start was made.

After what seemed to me only a few minutes' rest we were roused, and had to set forth. How the keepers found their way in the blackness of the night I cannot imagine; but they went slowly forward, through puddles of half-melted snow and deep mud, along the tracks towards a part of the forest where the tournaments took place. All the way they were evidently listening intently, and at last, before I could detect the faintest streak of dawn, one of the keepers touched my arm. I listened intently, at first I could hear nothing, but eventually I heard the faint "tok" of the male capercaillie in the distance, which sounded like two pieces of wood being struck together, and almost immediately afterwards this was repeated. The bird which uttered the sound was perched upon the upper branch of a tall pine tree, and was challenging, and presently an answering challenge was heard. The Finn who accompanied us signed to me to follow, and I proceeded accordingly. When a capercaillie has challenged several times, his tail spreads out fanwise, he lowers his wings and head, moving the latter from side to side, during which moment he utters a trill like that of a linnets, and it is during this utterance that one is able to surprise the bird, for during those few moments a rush of blood to his head renders him temporarily deaf and blind. It is at such time that the advance is made, but must not be continued for an instant after the trill is ended, or the bird will take alarm. We advanced, therefore, cautiously step by step, never more than nine or ten paces being made at a time, and sometimes it was necessary to remain for some minutes half frozen in a deep, snowy pool waiting for the next trill to begin; but at last patience was rewarded, and right above me, as I stood under the tall pine, I



The Sportsman's Calendar

FEBRUARY

Sports for the Month—For the angler: Grilse and Spring Salmon. For the shooter: Ducks and Geese.

In Season—Ducks, geese, brant, snipe; grilse, salmon, steelheads in tidal water.

February 28 the last day of the season for shooting ducks or snipe; also the last day on which it is lawful to sell wild geese.

could see a black patch, which I knew was the capercaillie. I fired at once, and down he came tumbling to the ground.

At first I thought that the sound of the loud report would startle the rest of the birds, but it was not so. From tree after tree came the sounds of capercaillie challenging each other, for this "tok" was a specially good one, and the birds abounded here. I went from tree to tree in the faint dawn, always advancing in the same way, guided by the Finn, who could find his way between the trees and amongst the dense undergrowth, where we knew the hens were hiding and listening to the males above.

Before daylight came we had secured several fine birds, and then I would shoot no more. It was pleasure enough to watch these fine birds as the light began to fall upon their glossy plumage, which shone gold and green under its rays; indeed, in their native haunts and in all the glory of their spring plumage they look very different from the birds which present so draggled an appearance when hanging outside a poulterer's stall.

As the light in the forest became stronger the birds became more wary. The trill was not so often uttered, and their senses became more acute; indeed, when they take alarm it is difficult to find them again, for they retire to the densest covert, and are seen no more. In Russia, where they abound, they thrive and multiply in the trackless pine forests, and their numbers are only to be kept down by shooting the old cocks in the springtime.

Only once did I surprise a number of these birds in the daytime, and this was during autumn. I was wandering over one of their favorite feeding grounds when I came across what must have been two covets of them, and as they rose with an immense whirring and flapping of wings the air seemed filled with them.

The "tok" we witnessed must have been an unusually large one, for after it had well begun the drumming was incessant, and the sound proceeded from several trees at once; indeed, in the forests of Northern Russia shooting might take place night after night without causing any sensible diminution of their numbers. Nor would it be difficult to secure a heavy bag upon a favorable night, if one were willing to endure intense cold and some discomfort.—W. L. Fuxley in Field.

REFUSED TO ANSWER

A colored woman in an American city presented herself the other day in an Equal Suffrage state at the place of registration to qualify for the casting of her vote at the next municipal election.

"With what political party do you affiliate?" inquired the clerk of the unaccustomed applicant, using the prescribed formula.

The dusky "lady" blushed, all coyness and confusion. "Is I 'bleeged to answer that there question?"

"Certainly; the law requires it." "Then," retreating in dismay, "I don't believe I'll vote, case I'd hate to have to mention the party's name. He's one of the nicest gent'muns in town."

THE OPEN ROAD

The road is open, the year is new;
The sun is in its place on high;
There's work for hopeful men to do,
There still are honors for the few,
And standards to be measured by;
The highest peaks remain
Untrodden still;
For heart and brain
And strength and skill
The best rewards are waiting yet;
The sweetest songs are still unsung;
The open road is wide ahead,
The past, with its mildewed regret,
Is dead—
The year is young.