

SOOKE HARBOR, B. C.

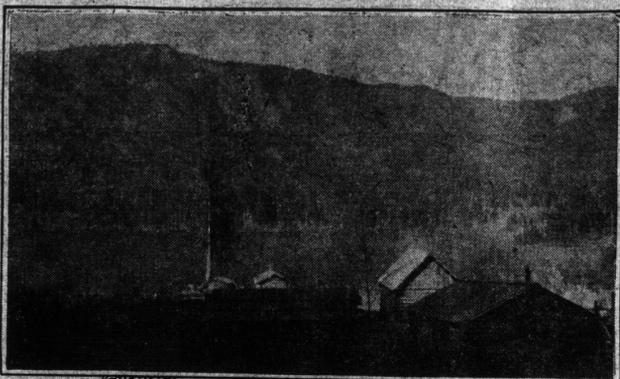
A GOOD PLACE FOR ALL-ROUND SPORT



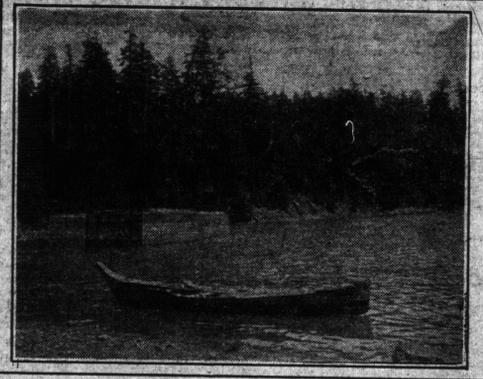
A Western Shooting Lodge

BY RICHARD L. FOCKOCK

SOOKE LAKE



A Bay at Sooke



Lobster Cages at Sooke Harbor

IF I were asked by anyone to recommend them a place to go to, not too far from town and yet right out in the country, where they could enjoy a day or two, or a month or two equally well, of healthy outdoor life with a sufficiency of all-round sport in the hunting and fishing seasons, I know of no place that I should be so inclined to mention right off the reel as Sooke Harbor.

Possibly I am prejudiced, as some of my very best days on Vancouver Island have been spent in that district and I have had some of the best of sport there with both rod and gun. After an absence from the country of a few years I was told that it was no good my going down there any longer expecting to get any shooting, as the game had been practically exterminated; being however, obstinate and rather inclined to disbelieve general rumors concerning the game-bearing possibilities of any country, I persisted in re-visiting the scenes of my former triumphs, and really must assert that I found very little difference; the deer were there, the fish were there, the grouse were there, the blue grouse not perhaps quite so plentiful as in former years, but the willow grouse at the right time just as plentiful as before, and also just as quick on the wing and as difficult to hit, as they darted from a thicket or dropped like bullets down the side of a steep bluff when started by the dog from their resting place on a little ledge or rocks or under some stunted fir with its roots drawing a scanty nourishment, from a narrow crack in the solid rock.

The quail are as numerous as ever, indeed I think more so, and afford the very best of sport to a man with plenty of physical endurance to enable him to get through a long day in a fairly stiff country, where the hills are apt to be steep and the rocks hard, and where ever and anon, unless he knows the country very well, and can pick his way with great accuracy he will have to fight his way through a patch of salal and cedar scrub that will be apt to try the patience of a tenderfoot. The value of the quail to the sportsmen of the island is apt, I think to be underestimated; I consider them to be a most valuable asset indeed to the sport-loving public of the coast. The man who can show a big bag of quail has a good deal more to be proud of than the man who comes back to town after the opening days of the season loaded down with a number of young blue grouse. The skill required to make a bag of blues in a country where they are fairly plentiful is not by any means the highest known to users of the shotgun, though the most sporting bird to shoot that we have hereabouts in my opinion, and that of a good many other sportsmen that I know, is the willow grouse, to use the name by which this bird is best known among local sportsmen; that is of course, in country where they can be fairly got at to shoot on the wing; there are districts in British Columbia where it is practically impossible to get any wing shooting at these birds at all in spite of the fact that they are fairly numerous, but here their habits seem different to what they are in other districts and the country is more suited to allow of shooting them on the wing, and also they do not seem to be quite so apt to tree at the slightest provocation, as I have generally found them to do on the mainland coast and in the Kootenays. Sooke harbor is one of the best districts I have ever been in for willow grouse in the right season, mark well, in the right season, as I have generally made my best bag of these birds when the majority of hunters have seemed to have transferred their attention entirely from the grouse tribe to the pheasants and the waterfowl in November and December. Early in the shooting season the bag will contain many more blues than willows, which stick closely to the deep thickets that the hot perspiring sportsman tries to steer clear of, but wait a bit till the leaves have fallen and there is a bite of winter in the air; then climb up above the lowering land and keep a close lookout as you come to the little mossy knolls and rocky hills, and, if you have a quick eye and as quick a hand, you will make a good bag of these birds, the best to shoot and almost the best to eat of any of our game birds. I say almost, as to my way of thinking the mountain quail carries off first honors for delicacy of flavor and general toothsome, though it has to yield first place to the willow grouse for sport. The man who goes to the hills round the sides and upper end of Sooke harbor in the late fall in search of willow grouse and returns

empty-handed can blame his dog or his gun or his own poor skill, but cannot blame the country for the lack of birds, and can always rely on seeing a good number of quail of both varieties, and, if he cares for the hard labor inseparable from deer-shooting, he should be able to indulge in this peculiarity to his heart's content. The first three days that I hunted in this district last year, I could have shot a deer each time, but as I did so the first time, my thirst for this kind of blood was assuaged long before, I had brought the meat to the larder, and on subsequent occasions I was quite content to let the chance of slaughter go by.

So much for the sort of sport that can be had on land, except to mention that there is always a chance, though not a very frequent one, of running across a black bear or an occasional panther, though down towards Otter point and the sheep ranches is a more likely country for these latter.

For the "wet-bobs" there is plenty of sport both on and in the water; about December, or earlier if there is any rough weather, the ducks begin to come in, and when they come it is not by twos and threes by any means. Sooke spit is famous for the sport it affords with ducks and it is one of the best places on the southern end of the island for brant. There are three little bays along the shore of the harbor separated from the main sheet of water each by a narrow neck. By landing at the entrance of any one of these bays and sending the boat inside to "scare up" the fowl, there will be ample opportunity to heat the barrels, and there will be no tedious waiting. On a rough day all that is necessary is to land and take up one's position at the entrance of the bay and fire one shot, and then you can blaze away until your ammunition is exhausted, and, if some of the birds killed are fishy, they need not be wasted, as the Indians of the vicinity rather prefer a fish flavor to their wild fowl course; as they say the white man likes to eat fish and the white man likes to eat ducks, so does the Indian, but the white man does not like his ducks to taste of fish, which is very inconsistent of him, the Indian is more sensible; he likes the flavor of salmon at any time even when he is eating duck.

As for trout, the Sooke river is famous for the size of the sea trout that run up it, but like all the other rivers of the coast it depends for its stock of fish on the runs from the sea, so that the angler who may be so unfortunate as to just miss a run must not put down all the residents of the district as disciples of Ananias when they tell him of the numerous monsters that have been caught just before his arrival; unless his luck is very bad indeed he will probably make the acquaintance of some of them with a little perseverance.

The creek at the head of the harbor yields hundreds of succulent little trout every year, while, as to salmon-trotting, the water just outside the entrance to the harbor can hardly be beaten anywhere on the coast. Fishing with a handline for the purpose of providing a farmer friend with a supply of fish to salt for the winter, I have caught as many as twenty-two salmon in an hour-and-a-half, fish that would average about nine pounds in weight.

Being some miles from the railroad the country round the head of Sooke harbor does not come in for such a severe raking-over as some of the other districts further from town by the army of Sunday sportsmen, and, as stated above, still holds a very fair amount of all kinds of small game, and, even without this recommendation, would always be a most charming resort for the Nature-lover with a week or two to spare in the woods and on the water.

and the roads are good, though a trifle hilly in places; it is a trip that can be made on a bicycle in about two hours and a half without undue scorching, and affords a delightful drive behind a good horse or in an automobile. By sea to the mouth of the harbor is about twenty miles, more or less, but it is well to study the tide-table before starting, as the tidal current from Race rocks on is a swift one and the set of the tide will make a very considerable difference in one's rate of progression. All the way after reaching the Race is excellent trolling water, and, if a sharp lookout is kept the deer can often be spotted feeding close to the water's edge.

Sooke harbor itself is a magnificent sheet of enclosed water and will afford endless delight to the man who loves to loaf a little in a boat or canoe. The scenery is relieved from monotonous majesty by the green fields of the farms dotted along its shores, and take it all in all, Sooke harbor is about as nice a place as one could wish for to spend a holiday away from city life and yet within easy call of home.

IN NEAR-BY WOODS AND WATERS

I have not heard of very much doing lately by local sportsmen, the weather has been a little too warm for very successful fly-fishing in the day time, though some good fish have been taken, notably in Sooke river, by anglers who were able to fish in the late evening. The grasshopper season is in full swing now, which it is whispered accounts for the recent demise of some beauties from Cowichan.

Two sportsmen, who gave the fish a rest for a while and took out their shotguns, are reported to have made great bags of wild pigeon at Koksilah and to have found the birds give good sporting shots. Fifty-six to two guns should be good enough.

Everyone that I have spoken to is pleased that the government has closed the grouse season until October, and most seem confident that it will have a good effect in staying the too rapid extermination of the much-prized "blue." It may be advisable to open the deer season as usual in September in the interests of the farmers, who are entitled to the utmost consideration from all sportsmen, seeing the cheerful and hospitable way in which as a rule they treat any sportsman visiting their districts, and, if they want deer to be shot in September there should be no objection; but it would be an excellent thing if they could see their way to make it illegal to hunt with shotguns during September. Deer are easy enough to shoot with a rifle in all conscience, and the boys and youths who will probably go in search of them with shotguns would then be spared the temptation of letting fly at one of those shots that one always sees when one has not got a shotgun or the birds are out of season. It would also tend to diminish the number of poor brutes which get away with a more or less heavy percentage of a twelve-bore's charge of shot buried in their flesh. It is positively revolting to hear sometimes the accounts of "sports" who have "let him have it with both barrels" but have come home with nothing to show, and with no remorse for the most un-sportsmanlike act of wounding with only a very meagre chance of killing.

After seeing the army of hunters which swept the country between Goldstream and Shawnigan last season in search of grouse, it is simply marvelous to see how many birds there are in this district again this year. It goes to show that, if only the blues are given a fair show, there will be good shooting for many years to come.

This would be an excellent district in which to make a game sanctuary if it could be done. The grouse breed there in great numbers and a stretch of a mile or two bounded by the railway on one side and the shore of Saanich Arm on the other could be very easily watched and patrolled by a game warden and would serve as an excellent preserve and breeding ground to serve the surrounding neighborhood.

There has been some discussion going on lately among those interested more than a little in seeing our trout protected to the utmost by allegations that the salmon traps are responsible for the destruction of large numbers of these fish. Sea trout attain a size fully equal to the average sockeye, and when a small mesh is used in the purse or net which is used to lift the catch of the trap it inevitably follows that large numbers of under-sized fish must be destroyed, particularly when, as is stated, on the lift being made, there is no chance of returning any fish to the water alive, they being invariably killed by their own struggles in the crush. The question has been brought into prominence by the action of professional fishermen, who allege that the trap-owners honor the law of a weekly close season more in the breach than the observance; in making their complaint the question of the destruction of trout came up, and it certainly does seem a great shame, if what is alleged is true, that there is no way of preventing these up-to-date commercial methods of salmon capture from wreaking havoc among the trout, which should by all means possible be preserved for purposes of sport. It is up to the government which licenses traps to do all in their power to see that the laws relating to the use of them should be rigidly adhered to, in every particular.

To bring fish home in good condition in the hot-weather try wrapping them up singly in wet flannel, this is a wrinkle worth knowing. When distributing them among your friends the straw envelopes used for covering bottles will be found a neat and satisfactory way of packing them, to every fish an envelope and to the big ones two each.

"Rod and Gun" for August will be found to contain quite a lot of special interest to the British Columbia sportsmen, there being several good articles dealing with sport in this part of the Dominion. An enthusiastic cyclist tells of a tour a wheel through British Columbia, not the mountainous districts but the well understood. A typical little sample of British Columbia scenery is described and illustrated in a short article entitled "A Fine British Columbia Falls," to wit, Wilson creek falls near New Denver; while "The Delights of Fishing in the Kootenay, B. C." recalls many an excellent day spent on these most delightful and well-stocked waters. The writer is anonymous, but he has done his work well, and given an excellent and truthful account of the sport that can be obtained among the glorious Kootenays as I can vouch for from personal experience.

All hunters who know these animals will be interested in reading the account of the birth of the first Rocky Mountain goat ever bred in captivity. This animal is one of great interest to naturalists, and, although very common in parts of B. C. has always been found difficult to keep alive in captivity. The London Zoo had only one of the species when last I was there, and I remember a hunter friend of the Squamish valley making great efforts to procure one of the opposite sex to sell the Zoo; he succeeded in capturing several, but they all died except one up to the time that I last saw him; what happened to that one I never heard.

SHOOTING SEASON WILL OPEN OCTOBER 1

Appended is a copy of the proclamation in the Gazette by which the opening of the shooting season is postponed until October 1. Sportsmen should note that not only grouse are included in its provisions, but also ducks of all kinds and geese.

[L.S.] GORDON HUNTER, Administrator.

CANADA, PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

EDWARD the SEVENTH, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India.

To all to whom these presents shall come.—Greeting.

A PROCLAMATION.

Whereas by section 6 of the "Game Protection Act, 1898," as re-enacted by section 19 of the "Game Protection Act Amendment Act, 1905," it is enacted that it shall be lawful for the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, by Proclamation to be published in two successive issues of the British Columbia Gazette, to declare a close season for the birds mentioned in Schedule B to the "Game Protection Act, 1898," or any amendment thereof, and also geese, in any portion of the Province, and for any period of time; and

Whereas Our Administrator, by and with the advice of His Executive Council, has been pleased to direct, by an Order in Council in that behalf, a close season on Vancouver Island and the Islands adjacent thereto for duck of all kinds, grouse of all kinds, and geese, between the 31st day of August, 1898, and the 30th day of September, 1908, inclusive.

Now Know Ye, therefore, that in pursuance thereof, We do hereby proclaim a close season on Vancouver Island and the Islands adjacent thereto for duck of all kinds, grouse of all kinds, and geese, between the 31st day of August, 1908, and the 30th day of September, 1908, inclusive.

In Testimony Whereof, We have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent and the Great Seal of the said Province to be hereunto affixed.

Witness the Honourable Gordon Hunter, Administrator of Our said Province of British Columbia, in Our City of Victoria, in Our said Province, this 23rd day of July, in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and eight, and in the eighth year of Our Reign.

By Command. HENRY ESSON YOUNG, Provincial Secretary.

AFTER BIG HORN IN THE ROCKIES

I was certainly anxious and excited, especially when they halted three hundred and fifty yards distant, and I saw they were all rams. I counted twenty of them. They were led by a kingly old monster who sprang upon a large rock, sniffed the air uneasily and looked behind him.

I was in a quandary. I had a beautiful muzzle rest on a limb, was seated with an elbow resting upon each knee, and was pretty certain I could hit that ram, but if I missed a standing shot it was certain I could not make a running shot afterward at that distance. I decided to wait and was rewarded by seeing the leader spring down and come directly toward me at a trot, followed pell-mell by the rest of the band. My heart fairly leaped into my throat as I shifted the rifle from the limb and waited for the time to fire. Nearer and nearer they came, gradually slackening their pace to a walk. Now was my time, and just as I shifted my rifle toward them a puff of wind wafted the scent of the Indians below to the leader, who sprang into the air as though shot and started off at a gallop. My first shot, fired hastily, kicked up the dust under him, and followed by the entire band he disappeared in the thick pines before I could even eject the empty shell. I sprang up and rushed around the pines to where the open slope stretched below me, just in time to see the band stop three hundred and fifty yards distant and look back before their plunge into the gulch below. My last chance had come. Steadying myself as best I could, I held the gold bead on the shoulder of the leader and pressed the trigger. Instantly the sheep disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened up and swallowed them. Half dazed by the suddenness of it all, I ran forward to the ledge half blinded by the wind in my face, and there lay the grand old leader on his side, his eyes already glazed with death, his magnificent horns, fourteen and one-half inches, and more than a full circle, making me realize my hunt for the finest trophy our country has to offer was over, and I was satisfied.—Forest and Stream.

MAMMOTH AND BISON IN ALASKA

A collecting expedition despatched last year by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington to Alaska has resulted in the discovery of some very fine remains of the mammoth and of the gigantic extinct bison, several of which have been placed in the U. S. National Museum. The largest bison head obtained, which belongs to the species (or race) known as Bos crassicornis, has a maximum horn span of 46in. (exclusive of the sheaths), while in a second head, referred to as B. allenii, in which the horn sheaths are retained, the span is 45in. As the horns are more curved in the second than in the first of these specimens, it is probable that those of the former are really the longer. The maximum horn width in the modern American bison is only 35in., or about three-quarters that of its extinct forerunners.—The Field.