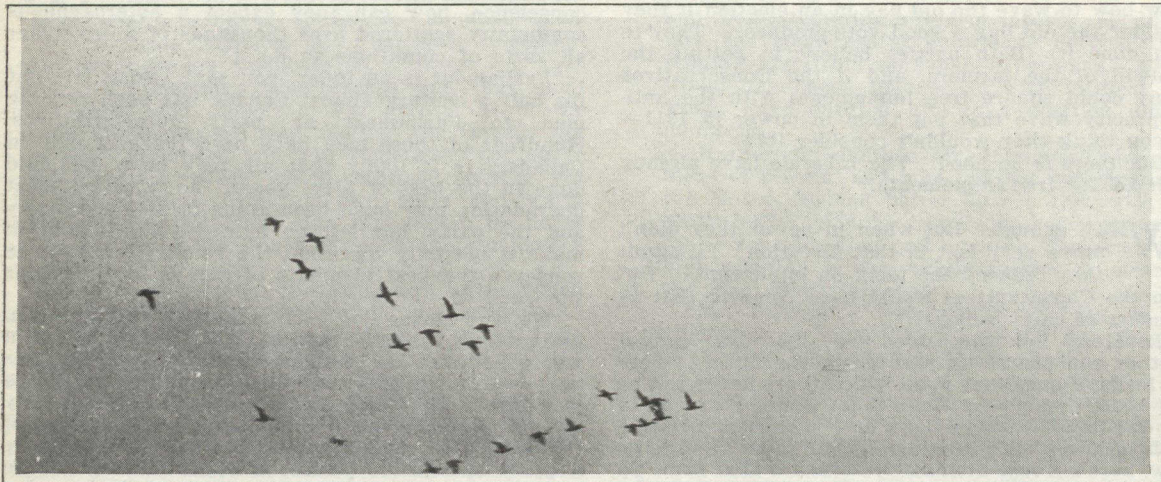


Wild-Fowling with the Kwakiutls

The Most Graphic Off-Hand Delineation of Wild Ducks Ever Made

By BONNYCASTLE DALE

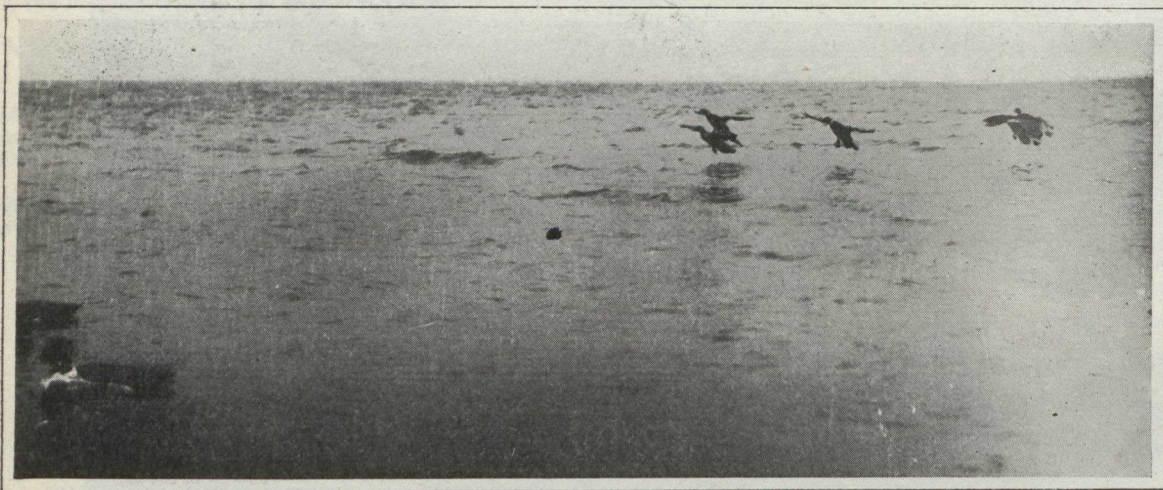
Photographs by the Author



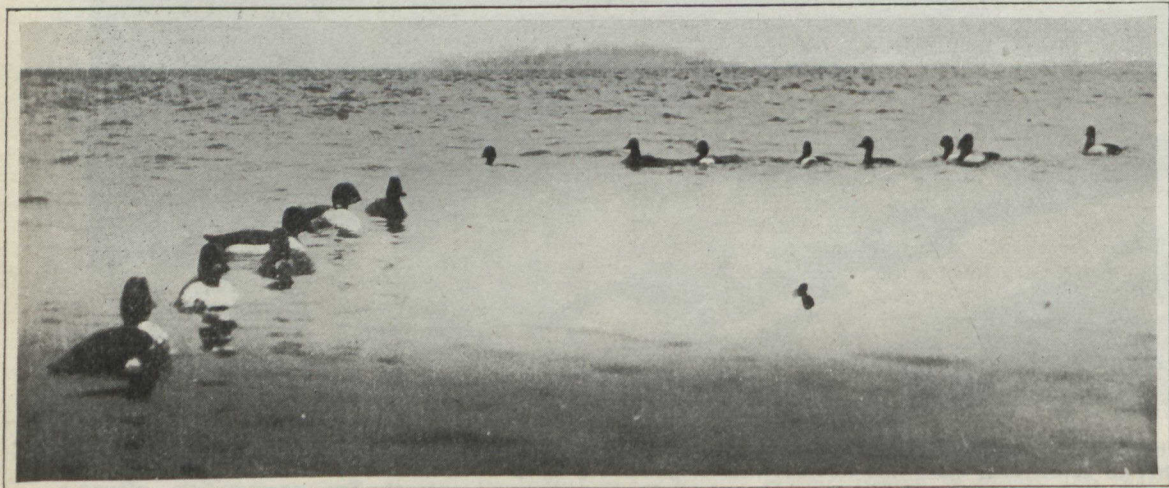
"As darkly pictured on the crimson sky thy figure floats along."



"Just as my small camera clicked they rose with a deafening roar."



Four red-breasted mergansers just changing from water to air.



Seven male bluebills and two plain brown females close to the decoys on the left.

*"Vainly the fowler's eye might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As darkly pictured on the crimson sky, thy figure floats along."*

—Bryant.

WE had just disembarked from a regular "wallower," one of those amiable craft that have the knack of pitching and rolling at one and the same time. In this calm bay off the Kwak'waka village beach the turbulent Straits of Juan de Fuca were forgotten. Three high-prowed coast canoes carried our much divided camp outfit ashore. Ahead the sun was pitching to the western sea, and over the tall firs along this Vancouver Island bay sped a flock of bluebills (greater scaup), so far off, so safe, so alluring did this swiftly-flying flock appear that I involuntarily quoted aloud the lines from Bryant's exquisite poem—"Vainly the fowler's eye might mark thy distant flight."

"Iktah mika mamook?" ejaculated Kumtuks, my self-appointed guide and councillor. "What do you want me to do?" he asked. I could not tell him I was quoting poetry at the ducks, lest he might think I was preparing for the winter ceremonial of his people and was likely to be a rival chief (these coast men wander in the woods for several days making up a song they will sing when they are going through the trial by heat around the great fires in the big Potlatch House).

Soon our canoes slid ashore in the low surf and Fritz and I found ourselves the possessors of the well-built Potlatch House, where the great gift feast of these rude people take place. In this huge structure, with its wide platforms about the walls and its great earth floor for the fires, we pitched and tossed through our first night's sleep ashore. We could not forget that quaintly modelled steamer we came up the Pacific in—she carefully inserted her ancient frame in every wrinkle and hollow of its disturbed surface.

"Klahowya" — "good-morning" — called Kumtuks into that vast, dim hall. We smilingly refused his proffered breakfast of boiled tentacles of the so-called "Devil Fish," pilot bread and very loud whale oil, and soaked, dried salmon. I found out later that he had been extra extravagant in pouring the rich but rancid whale-oil on the fish, but we stuck to bacon and a bit of dry bread, and feasted magnificently.

"Canim to-ke-tie hy-ak," he called later—"canoe pretty quick"—is what he really said, and we came forth by the great door of cedar-split slabs, laden with guns and ammunition, boxes and cameras, to find that early as it was, the sun was just rising. All the inhabitants of this far western cove had bathed in the cold October waters—all intermingled, without knowledge of evil or of shame—before we two representatives of the much vaunted civilization had emerged from our Hudson Bay blankets.

LAST night's calm had been but the precursor of a wind and the surf was starting to roll heavily on the beach by the time the two big, high-prowed canoes were ready for launching. Stripped to the hips we ran them into the water, leaped aboard—white and brown in a fine frenzy of rivalry—over the yielding gunwales twinkled legs of every shade. Fritz was burned a real good lasting colour. He might have joined this tribe without fear of discovery; and to tell the truth I was tanned in more places than usually falls to the lot of the hard-working duck shooter. As soon as we had passed over the three sets of surf swells the lad and I unpacked our guns and the cameras and opened our eyes to the very widest to enjoy this novel scene.

What do you think, fellow duck shooters, to having a few whales rise up and cavort about your canoes—big though the craft were they seemed insignificant beside these huge mammals—and to have the wind rising when you knew full well that distant Japan was the shore it blew from. Riding the long, green swells, fairly spinning in the white smother of the crests, the two twenty-foot cedar canoes leaped gloriously on over the score of unstable miles that separated us from the little sheltered bay where the wild fowl lived undisturbed. Soon—ahead of a great, menacing roller—we swept about the end of a shell-white spit and beheld the ideal of all my dreams, calm water and myriad ducks.

We took possession of an ancient shack, built by some wandering beach-comber, while the Indians made covers of cedar boughs and branches for the two canoes. Into these arks of fragrant green Fritz and I entered, one Indian and one white man to each canoe; and off along the duck-crowded tideway we crept. Behind, the native rowed with extremely short oars—even the splash concealed by the over-arching cedars. We approached a great mass of ducks that were feeding with the tide, several thousand in the flock. Just as my small camera clicked they rose with a deafening roar and I pictured them a-wing with the focal plane. For miles along the narrow fiord red-head and canvas-back, big and little blue-