

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

"DOC" SIMMONS AND THE WILD CAT

By Ernest McGaffey

"Got your compass, Doc?" asked one of the guides, as a short, stout figure passed out from the tents, with a double-barrelled shotgun over his shoulder.

"Yep," was the reply.

"Which way are you going today?"

"Over the oak ridges," was the answer; "I saw lots of turkey sign there late yesterday afternoon."

"Well, look out for wild-cats over there," remarked the guide, "they're settin' around in the green briers over there watchin' for rabbits and turkey."

"All right," replied "Doc"; "if I run across one of 'em I'll try and scratch his back for him."

We were camped in the Arkansas wilderness, forty miles from a railroad and in the heart of the White River country. It had been a heart-rending trip through the swamps, and it had taken us two days to pitch camp, cut wood, and get our bearings a little.

Five of us had arranged to take the dogs and "drive" deer that day, and "Doc" Simmons, like all but two of us, a "tenderfoot," was going over to try for turkeys. "Doc" had been taking lessons from an artist in turkey-calling, and by means of scraping a small cedar box on the barrels of his gun, after having previously rubbed a quantity of common chalk on the barrels, he had managed to learn a call that sounded quite natural to the uninitiated, even if it did not fool the turkeys.

But "Doc" had run across a turkey by accident in the brush, the bird having been scared up by the dogs while running a deer, and when it flew right into "Doc" he bowled it over as easy as he would a quail. It was a fine, big gobbler, and filled "Doc's" breast with a desire to get some more of them.

So in about half an hour the camp was deserted by all save the cook, who roamed about among the tents and leisurely made his arrangements for getting supper.

It took us about two hours to start a deer, and when we did, we roused out two of them. The dogs trailed one to the cypress swamps and lost him there, but the other one we turned and drove back towards the ridges and through the cane and old Emory Waite got a shot at him from behind a blue gum stump and killed him clean with a single bullet. By the time we got him dressed and a horse out to bring him into camp through the awful going, it was long past noon. By the time we reached camp it was two o'clock, and we laid around and planned a wildcat hunt with the dogs the next day for the sake of a little variety.

Along about five, when it was getting dark rapidly, we saw "Doc" Simmons coming down the trail, headed for camp. He didn't have any gun with him, but he appeared to be perfectly serene about it. He came up just as nothing had happened, and says, "How soon'll supper be ready?" His clothing was pretty badly torn up, as though he had been wallowing through about a thousand acres of green-brier thickets, and he was a little pale, too.

"What's the matter, Doc?" said Emory; "anything happen to you?" Didn't meet up with a panther, did you?" "No!" says "Doc," and then he laughed. "I got a turkey," says he. "Where is it?" says Ed Morton.

"Tang'ing up out in the brush," says "Doc." "Where's your gun?" says Ed.

"I left that during my tete-a-tete with my friend and contemporary, the wild-cat," says "Doc."

"Sure enough?" says we all, "let's hear." "Well," says the "Doc," it's quite a story. I'll tell you all about it after supper."

"Well, sir, we had supper, and then "Doc" stretches out before the blaze of about a ton of logs and he says, "Are we all here, brethren?"

And then he commences. "I started, out this morning and went straight to the oak ridges, and built me a little sort of 'blind' and crawled in back of it and commenced to listen, and occasionally call for turkeys. Finally I began to get an answer from over to my right, and I kept calling the best I could, but finally I must have let out a fortissimo instead of a pianissimo note, and the turkey quite me cold."

"Forty missino," says one of the guides, "what's that, 'Doc'?"

"It's a buck-snort translated into English," says "Doc."

"Go on, 'Doc,'" says old man Waite. "Well," says "Doc," "at last I heard the sound of about a million turkeys gobbling down in the timber and something must have scared them, for they commenced flying over me by singles, pairs, threes and clouds. I got two shots before they all went past, and killed one turkey. When I started towards where they all had seemed to light, I hung my turkey up by that old cottonwood stump, high up out of reach of anything I guess."

"Well, I was coming along to where the turkeys had all lit, and I got down to the green brier patches. I wormed my way through about a mile of 'em, but can't raise any turkeys. I sat down and tried the 'call,' but nary a turkey. Then I made up my mind to come back to camp and pick up my turkey on the way. There was a little snow on the ground, and a smear, and every once in a while I'd come across one of those big old logs that was hard to climb over and far to go around, and the wading through the briers was awful tough besides. At last I came to a long old log that was running the way I was headed, and I made up my mind I'd 'ride her.' So I climbed up on

top, and as I was coming along down towards the end I saw a thick bunch of green-briers at the other end. Says I to myself, I'll jump that hurdle, and I took a little flying start and up I went over the briers."

"Now, it's a little singular, but when I came down I lit square straddle of the biggest wild-cat in Arkansaw. Yes, sir! I was in the saddle for sure, and I squashed him right down to the ground. I wasn't exactly scared, you might say, but I was a trifle confused. This old cat spit and clawed out from under me and I know he was almost frightened out of his senses. The effect on me was what the scientists call 'optical illusion.' Ever see these cages with a squirrel going around in 'em? Well, I thought the world was going around at the rate of a million revolutions a minute and that I was going around with it in a sort of cage, with eleven wild-cats on top of me to keep me company."

That's the reason I came away without my gun. That's the reason I didn't hunt up my turkey. That's the reason I hustled for camp. I wanted the sight of human faces and the touch of human sympathy. What I wanted to do was to get away from there and forget all that maze of fur and teeth and yellow eye-balls, and thrashing around there in the green-brier, and that pungent smell of scared wild-cat.

"And that's the reason, I reckon, that my clothes seem to be ripped up a little across the seams. I don't know what's the best record for traveling through green-briers on a direct line, and I haven't measured the distance from here to where me and the wild-cat got introduced to each other, but I want to say that my time must have been something terrific. I sailed over the logs like a quail, and I went through the green-briers like a rabbit through an orange hedge."

"I thought if I lingered the wild-cat might have robbed me of my watch and other valuables, I guess, for I never stopped to dicker about the gun at all. And now when I come to size it up, that varmint was as badly scared—I mean confused, as I was. I remember he went over the log like a charge of buckshot the minute he could squirm loose, but the optical illusion on me was strong at that time, and I thought I had lit right in the middle of a wild-cat convention."

"Who'll go out with me in the morning and help me find my gun?" says "Doc." "I will," says old Emory.

THE WET-FLY ANGLER IN AUGUST

August, being the height of summer, is usually a month of hot, dry weather. Consequently streams are invariably low at that period; the trout are shy and most difficult of approach, and light creels are the order of the day. At this time there seems but little encouragement for the angler to brave the scorching sun day after day, in the forlorn hope of placing a brace or two of trout to his credit. Rather is he inclined to hang up the well-loved fly-rod until the first floods of early autumn shall refresh the stagnant pools, and bring a short lease of renewed vigor to the trout ere the season closes.

The fortunate angler who is able to pick and choose the time of his going for a holiday in Troutland, would most certainly decide upon a slightly more propitious time than the month of withering sun and dwindling streams. There are, however, hundreds of ardent fly-fishers who must perforce take their annual vacation when they can, and the hot August days will often find this enthusiast persevering with undaunted spirit.

Whether or no he will have his trout-fishing, for the glamor of summertime is strong upon him, and the call of the trout holds him in pleasant bondage; and so he will be found in the delightful brookside ways eagerly afoot with rod and line and reel—a willing medium to the hypnotic influence of drowsy days.

The August fly-fisher, if he is wise, will betake himself to the dashing streams that foam and fret down the hillsides. Here he may come to terms with the bonnie fish that lurk beneath the darkling eddies nestling under the scrubby willows; for these hard-fighting little brook-trout are not averse to sampling his small Waterhen Bloa or neatly tied coch-y-bondhu (both excellent patterns for the small moorland streams), if presented to them in a right and proper manner.

The rippling stream is an untainted and invigorating source of pleasure these summer days; and the angler's heart is thrilled as he listens to its sweet river-music, that rises and falls like some fairy symphony hidden deep in the green umbrage of a rocky dell. In the whole of Nature there is nothing quite so soothing as the calm solitudes and wide, free spaces of the great, silent hills and the heather-clad moorland. Indeed, what better exchange from the busy, care-laden life of the vast city can a man desire than the blissful quietude of the summer moor? And whether he be sportsman with gun in hand searching for the wild red grouse that unsuspectingly awaits his coming and calls across the blue-grey distances in fancied security, or the fisherman with rod and reel cunningly stalking the plucky trout, the cares and worries of the work-a-day world will fall from him without effort.

In the long glorious days "when summer sleeps in the valley and all the fields are still" and the hot, August hours go slowly by, the wet-fly angler will be found, armed with a light fly, greenheart or split cane, and the very finest of fine tackle (nothing but gossamer-

like tackle and the smallest of flies will deceive the wily brook-trout), assiduously whipping the brook that tumbles in a noisy chorus down the heather-clad slopes of the purple hills, gurgling and swishing in a very ecstasy of delight around the huge boulders that are indiscriminately strewn along its sinuous course. The creel slung across his broad back is of very light workmanship, small and neat like the rest of his outfit. And in this matter he shows very wise judgment, for the brook-fisher's equipment must be as light as possible. He will find much walking and climbing to do, and it is no joke clambering about the rugged, slippery, water-polished rocks of a mountain stream. Leg-weary he will be ere the shades of twilight call a halt to his operations; therefore it behoves him to give more than a passing thought to the lightness of his outfit, for pounds avoirdupois is a consideration on hot August days. His cast consists of only two very small flies mounted on web-like gut. A blue upright as point-fly and a small coch-y-bondhu as dropper. The walk alone on a fresh, gleamy morning along the picturesque stream is well worth traveling for. Cloud and sunshine cast exquisite coloring upon the vivid stretch of moorland with its patches of emerald mosses and light green ferns, sprinkled amongst the royal purple of the ubiquitous heather. Under the influence of the morning sun is to be seen an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colors—violet, sea-green, tender browns, and turquoise-blues mingling and dispersing continually as the masses of white cumuli chase each other across the summer sky, giving a beautiful and wonderful effect to the sombre hills. The charm of the moorland is indescribable.

Like all true followers of the immortal Izaak, the brook-fisher is out early, long before the sun's warm rays have kissed up all the pearly dewdrops that scintillate upon the stunted bracken in point of liquid fire.

The querulous cry of a plover and the calling of the bonnie moor-birds are the only sounds that break the intense quietude, save the murmuring of the brook. And this is as it should be; for peace is necessary to the angler. He cautiously approaches up-stream, and his gossamer-like cast glints in the sunlight as he throws his small flies upon the strong current, or in this nook or that quiet pool. He confines his operations to all the likely runs and lies—here where the stream pauses under the overhanging turf; there where it circles behind yon huge, moss-covered boulder or at the foot of that miniature cascade. And likely places are many, for it is a sparkling, vivacious stream that hastens down the vale to join forces with the deep, placid river far below; sometimes rushing headlong through a narrow ravine, hissing and foaming over scattered rocks or widening out into deep, broad pools, sweeping over a stretch of shallow or curving round upon itself in a series of sudden bends. In places the water hides beneath tall grasses and trailing bushes, and along the course of the brook the vegetation crowds down to the life-giving water. Leaf and branch, plant and grass, pollard, ash, and willow—all congregate by the margin; and summer birds twitter amongst the willow-stoles—for they, too, love the brookside.

The fisherman searches each nook and bay with his flies, fishing upstream as much as possible (though in places he violates the sacred rule and allows his flies to float downstream over some otherwise unassailable stronghold), taking advantage of all possible cover; for if he is unwary and shows himself the trout will quickly surry away and hide under the green flags in midstream.

It is useless waiting for a well-defined "rise," so he throws his flies in every likely spot, in the heartfelt hope that a trout is waiting there. He is keenly on the alert, for these little trout come at the fly with a quick dart and the angler is sure to miss a few bites no matter how careful and expeditious he is. The difficulties presented by the growths upon the banks, and the obstacles in the stream such as sharp-edged boulders and rocks with razor-like edges, add but a zest to his sport. He sticks closely to his well-tried methods, never leaving untried any promising spot. He is strict in keeping himself invisible. He uses the smallest of flies, for these small trout have but diminutive mouths, and he is quick in striking (he can hardly be too sharp, by the way) and, above all, he has the very finest of gut casts—which he tests before using. Keeping these necessary maxims in the forefront of his mind, he succeeds in placing a few trout in his creel ere nightfall. And there are "red-letter" days even in August, when a rain-storm has passed over the parched earth and given to the trout-brook that brownish tint the angler so much likes to see, and has refreshed the stagnant pools. Then his pulses leap joyously to the whirling music of the reel—the sweetest song to angler's heart—and his light rod responds nobly to the repeated calls upon it.

In these all too rare days his most ambitious dreams are realized.

And the fish themselves are worthy of his skill, for small though the finny inhabitants of such streams must necessarily be, they are usually thickset fish, strong and plucky, with fighting qualities unparalleled in things so pretty and dainty. Moreover, they fry well and are toothsome even to the most whimsical of epicures.

And so the wet-fly angler returns each year to the merry hillside streams, to the calm solitudes of the purple-clad moorland, and the unutterable peace he finds there. And during

the long, dark days of the close season he will retain pleasurable memories of those delightful August days, spent in pursuit of the "crimson-dappled" trout.—Arthur Sharp in Baily's.

AN ENGLISH OPINION OF THE AUTOMATIC

Another attempt has been made to popularize the repeating, or automatic, shotgun in this country, but judging from the very rare appearance of that class of weapon in the field, hardly anyone at present seems to have the courage to adopt it. The fact of the matter is that the occasions for employing a gun of this description would seem to be few and far between in the British Isles. It might be useful for partridge-driving sometimes, and it might come in handy for covert-shooting when birds were rising in prodigious quantities, but even then there would be very few occasions when the repeating weapon could be used to greater advantage than a pair or three ordinary double-barrels.

The number of men who find even a pair of guns necessary is distinctly limited, and not one gunner in five hundred attends enough "big days" to make it worth his while to have a set of three guns. Even those of us who have been where birds were thickest know well enough that it is only half a dozen times or so in the best day that one could get four or five shots off in such quick succession that it would have been useful to have something quicker than the present type of gun. What is more, very quick shooting, such as must be made if the repeating shotgun is to show its superiority over the double-barrel, is only possible with a certain number of individuals, for there is a difference between the rapid shooting that "comes off" and that which does not. For the majority of men, if they are to do themselves justice, the double-barrel, as at present used, is quick enough.

On the score of expense the repeating shotgun at present on the market has something to be said in its favor. It is cheaper to have one gun that will do the work of two or three than to have two or three separate weapons. But to those who shoot with a pair or set of guns, expense is not usually a great consideration, and these men are not the kind that would care to be seen in the field with a multiple shotgun. Whether it will outlive the prejudice that at present exists against its adoption remains to be seen, but at present your English gunner plainly does not want the repeater. It may be mere fancy on his part to regard it as a rather unorthodox sort of contrivance, but he is quite right when he says that it is not a handsome weapon.

If the British gun-maker were to take the making of this class of gun properly in hand, it may be that he would be able to turn out something a deal more elegant than the foreign gun now on the market, but there would be great difficulties in accomplishing this. The very principle is against it, and we are now so used to elegance in our shooting outfit, that it would be a long time before we could get used to anything departing from the pleasing lines of the double-barrel. How, too, is the matter of balance to be got over? The repeating shotgun may be a perfectly well-balanced weapon when it is empty, but what is it like when loaded? And if it should still preserve its balance after being fully-charged, what will it be like when half the contents of the magazine are disposed of? We all know how difficult it is to make good and quick shooting with an ill-balanced double-barrel; how much more difficult then it would be to perform efficiently with the repeater. It is never safe to prophesy, but it looks as if it would be a very long time before the conservative ideas of the British gunner were brought around to an implicit faith in the so-called automatic shotgun.—East Sussex in Baily's.

FIELD NOTES

(By Richard L. Pocock)

Up to the time of writing the powers who say when we may and when we may not shoot the wily game bird have not made any pronouncement as to the opening of the shooting season on Vancouver Island. It appears to have slipped their memory that there is such a place on the map, as they have, late but at last, pronounced the edict for the mainland, but have not yet decided when it will be most convenient for them to take the first crack at the game of Vancouver Island; meanwhile irresponsible surmises have been floating round varying from the First of September to the First of October. It was quite unnecessary to have put off the decision as to the opening date for this Island so long, as all those who are familiar with the condition of the birds here could have decided long ago the most suitable date for opening, and, as there was dissatisfaction last year expressed by not a few responsible sportsmen with the best interests of the game and the country at heart, it seems a pity that they were not allowed an opportunity this year to express their views on such an important question.

The annual summer run of big spring salmon has arrived at the mouth of the Cowichan river, and many fine fish landed last week there, several over thirty pounds in weight being recorded. To get these big springs, it is essential to make an early rise, as they do not seem to feed at all except just



The Otter
By Sir E. Landseer

Sportsman's Calendar

AUGUST

The Salmon-troller's Month.
Spring Salmon and Cohoes all over the Coast.
One of the best months for Trout of the season.

after daybreak for an hour or two. Half-past four is not too early to be on the water, and from then to about eight o'clock there is every chance of getting good sport; in fact you will be very unlucky if you do not kill at least one or two of the big boys. They do not fight for their size like a coho, but they will give you lots of fun for your money on light tackle. There are a few odd cohoes in the bay, but it is early for them as yet, the big run not being expected for a week or two.

Wild pigeons are plentiful just now on the Koksilah flats, bags of between twenty to thirty a gun having been made there recently.

It is a good thing to see any attempt being made to get the Government to bestir themselves in the matter of better fish protection; there are lots of other live grievances besides the use by Japs of young trout and other fish for live bait for commercial fishing in Saanich Arm. By the way, I think there must be a mistake in saying they are doing this in Cowichan Bay from enquiries made there. I frequently fish there myself, and have never yet seen a Jap nearer there than Sunsum Narrows, and the residents, from whom I enquired, have not heard of or seen them in Cowichan Bay.

The use of the word "commercial" seems to be the only hope of getting influential interest taken in the inland fishery protection question, and, unfortunately, it is impossible to use it in connection with the trout fisheries; but it would be a blessing if we could get a few game fish wardens who were empowered to interfere with parties who openly fish with salmon roe, and others, who, instead of returning undersized fish as carefully as possible to their native element to grow bigger for another day, openly put them in their undersized creels and boast of the numbers of them they have slaughtered.

Judging from reports received from various districts, the young birds are well advanced this year and even more plentiful than last year, with more to the covey or brood. Pheasants are reported plentiful from all Is and points where they are established from which I have heard, and the opinion is freely expressed that they should be open in all the home districts, and that it would do more good than harm to allow hens to be shot for at least a week or two.

It seems a pity that we cannot get rid of the market hunter. He was all right ten or a dozen years ago when few guns were in the woods, but now that our population is growing by leaps and bounds and every man and boy takes to the woods in the shooting season, the man who must have game ought not to have to buy it; if he does, the day is bound to come when there will be practically none for him to buy, as the two greatest enemies to game in any country are the man who shoots out of season and the man who shoots for the market.

It seems anomalous to allow market hunting on the mainland when it is, thanks to the efforts of keen sportsmen, illegal on the Island. In these days of swift gasoline boats, it is too easy for the mainland poacher to run over to our Island coast, where deer are very easily obtained as yet, and take them over to the mainland markets.

This season we say good-bye to the automatic shotgun, for which relief much thanks.

THE SONG OF LIFE

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow may be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while you may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

—Robert Herrick