

HUNTING AND FISHING, HERE AND ELSEWHERE

THE DANGERS OF THE WOODS

(By Richard L. Pocock.)



O a tenderfoot who has eagerly devoured the advertising literature dealing with the big game of the country, and has taken in as gospel truth all the fancy yarns of dangerous encounters with fabulously enormous wild animals; it is naturally no easy matter to sleep easily on his first experience of camping-out in the woods. It is intelligible that it should appear to him at first sight rather a dangerous and exciting thing to sleep out in the solitude of the primeval forest with nothing stouter than a canvas wall to protect him from the possible onslaught of a sneaking panther or a ferocious grizzly. He finds it difficult to quite believe the assurances of the old-timer that there is nothing to be afraid of when sleeping out in the British Columbia woods, and, not infrequently, if he be of a sporting turn, he will, if convinced, feel quite a little disappointment.

Different specimens, however, of the species tenderfoot take their first introduction to camp life in the woods very differently, though most, I think, if they told the truth, would have to confess to a feeling of nervousness when the shades of night begin to fall, and the sounds of night begin to cast their mysterious spell on the occasion of their first night in the woods. It is to all of us, except the most pachydermatous, an eerie feeling that creeps over us when the ashes are knocked from the pipes and the camp-fire has burnt low, when we have each told our best story, and silence has served to accentuate the solemnity of the darkened forest. Small wonder then, if, to the unaccustomed, after listening perchance to some old hunter's well-told tale of a more or less impossible escapade, there comes a "jumpy" kind of feeling, as he turns in to the blankets, and is expected to follow the example of the older hands, whose snores announce their untroubled slumber almost before he has succeeded in finding the necessary hollow for his hip-bone in the bed of boughs, which, whatever may be said of them in their praise by enthusiasts in sporting papers, are not, at least to his unaccustomed corners, as comfortable as the feather bed he has left at home.

Now it is all very well for the knowing ones to laugh at the timidity, as it seems to them, of the tenderfoot, but it is useless for them to attempt to deny that there are dangers associated with sleeping out in the bush, especially when there is a tenderfoot in the party. I remember one night in particular, which, to put it mildly, was full of incident, and I think that even the most seasoned of the members of the party would not have turned in without some misgivings if he had realized the dangers to which he was about to be exposed that night.

Scene—the bank of the Kootenay river a few miles below Nelson—characters in the tragedy (or comedy according to your point of view)—an old-time miner and trapper experienced in the life of the woods and the wild times of early placer-mining days in the States and Canada, when life was cheap and law and order of the rough-and-ready type; a tenderfoot fresh from the city life armed with a brand new revolver, beautifully nickel-plated, a long and carefully-sharpened hunting knife made by some Swedish artist with a highly ornamented handle and wonderful curved blade, and an absolutely unshakable belief in the numbers and ferocity of the wild beasts frequenting the adjoining hills; third and last character—the narrator of this true and unvarnished account of the happenings of the dreadful night.

The primary object of the expedition was the capture of the rainbows of the river, and we had all been successful to a more or less degree according to our skill and methods during the day, and a fine string was left after the evening meal suspended from the end of the ridge-pole of the tent.

That was probably the chief cause of our worst trouble in the night watches; bears are notoriously fond of fish as well as human beings—so are some other animals—but let me explain how it all happened in due order.

First, however, let me say that, camped a little distance from us was an outfit of prospectors doing their assessment work on a claim of unexampled richness located close to the edge of the river bank. An invitation to join our meal of fresh Kootenay trout was "right into their mitt," to use their own expression, and after supper, when the pipes were going, finding the tenderfoot showed a lively interest in big game, it was right into their mitt also to stuff him up with all kinds of fancy tales of dangerous encounters with the bears and other animals of the district, which his own imagination had already provided as material.

The tales were amusing, and passed the time pleasantly for all hands, but they must have made an impression deeper than was intended on one member of the party; when we turned in that night I noticed that our newly arrived friend carefully stowed his complete armory under the bundle of his clothes which did duty for a pillow, and, in addition, was careful to place within easy reach a small axe; my feeling was one of amusement, but, not wishing to hurt his feelings, I kept silence, merely calling attention to his preparations by nudging the old-timer, who did not seem half so much amused as I was, doubtless because his experience had told him that in the woods the armed tenderfoot was apt to be the most dangerous animal of them all. However, be-

yond a quiet "Be careful, pardner, with that gun of yours," he made no further comment, but rolled up in his blankets and was soon snoring the snore of the untroubled conscience. End of Act One.

Act two opened with fireworks! Now fireworks are all very well and enjoyable at the right time and place, but when they are produced from the muzzle of a .38 Smith and Wesson in the hands of an inexperienced shot at the dead of night in a ten by twelve tent occupied by three full-sized men, and supposed also an unknown animal of ferocious and man-eating propensities, they are apt to be disturbing to the soundest of sleepers gifted with the most unshakable of nerves. This shortly was what happened; three rapid shots and frantic shouts to strike a light startled us from sleep. The natural impulse was to lie low and avoid the flying bullets, but the shouts to strike a light quick were answered by a stern, sharp order from the old-timer to "put that gun up and keep quiet"; a match was struck and a candle lit to disclose to the general relief that the tent was occupied by ourselves, and that no one was wounded, but a very excited man was sitting up among the blankets with the gun still grasped firmly and pointed in an exceedingly dangerous direction, protesting vigorously that there was a big white animal which had been in the tent and must be near at hand.

The noise had roused our neighbors, the prospectors, and they came over shouting out to us not to shoot and anxiously enquiring what was the matter. One of them kicked the dying embers of the fire together, which burst into a flame, but no big white animal was to be seen, and the best way out of the affair seemed to be a good laugh. The man behind the gun was not to be persuaded, however, that his fears were the result of imagination or bad dreams and he was positive that a big white animal had been actually inside the tent. While he was protesting this vigorously for about the twentieth time my glance happened to fall on our neighbors' canine friend, a fine big light-colored collie—the mystery was solved, the collie had evidently been foraging in the night, and, being of a friendly disposition, had decided to pay us a visit, which might, but luckily did not, have disastrous consequences.

Our friend took very good-naturedly a hearty laugh at his expense, and we all turned in again, expecting to finish our slumbers without further disturbance. The dog was tied to the tent-post, and the tenderfoot, feeling somewhat ashamed, was persuaded by the chaffing remarks of the rest to put away his gun in his dunnage bag, and accept their assurance that there was really no possible need for it.

End of Act Two.

The foregoing happenings would seem to be sufficiently startling to ensure a commonplace ending for the night, but the stars in their courses warred against us on that occasion. Having been so rudely awakened, it was some time before I could compose myself to sleep, while every now and then a loud guffaw would come down to my ears from the neighboring tent as the humor of the occurrence broke in afresh on the mind of one of the amateur Munchausen of the evening before. It was getting well on towards morning when at last I fell into a light slumber, from which I woke to be conscious of something moving in the tent and emitting a curious sort of sniffing sound. "Hullo," I thought, "here is our big white friend again," and I raised myself on my elbow to listen; the old-timer was breathing steadily, but from the tenderfoot I could hear no sound. Yes, there was evidently something alive and moving in the tent and decidedly snuffy in the nose.

It did not seem to me that it could be a dog, and suspecting a wood-rat of such small deer, I lay still and continued to listen, hoping that it would not wake the hero of the last act and cause another scene, when I felt something cross my legs in his direction. My fond hopes that he was asleep and would not be awakened were rudely and instantaneously dispelled. He had evidently been listening as intently as myself, and, as the animal crossed me, and he felt it on him, with a wild shout he hit out at it with the aforesaid bowie knife, exhibit No. 2, and struck his object fair and square, and then the climax! The intruder was a wild animal of a sort that even the bravest of old hunters shrinks to come to close quarters with, and we were in a small tent with it in total darkness and with the flap tight tied you may be sure this time.

No doubt it was the smell of the fish hanging up which had attracted it, and brought it in the eagerness of its search into our tent and on to our sleeping forms. Bears, as I said, are notoriously fond of fish and will go a long way to get it; some other animals are equally fond of it—this was one of them!

Most of my readers will probably have guessed by this time the identity of the beast, but if there are any who have not—well, were you ever skunked?

MY SHIKARIS

We read a great deal of the doings of sportsmen in pursuit of big game, but it is to be feared that the shikaris, to whom success must be largely due, are not generally given sufficient prominence in narratives of this nature. In many cases, particularly in tiger hunting and in shooting in Kashmir, everything except the actual shooting of the game is done by the native shikaris. This has not been the method of the present writer, whose aim has always been to do as much as possible

himself; but in many instances the sportsman who has a tiger driven under the tree where he is sitting, rifle in hand, has had nothing to do with the process of bringing the animal there, while the hunter in Kashmir frequently has all his stalking done for him and is "personally conducted" within range of his game. And in arranging the details of the hunt, in seeking for tigers, in examining the "kills," in organizing the beat, and in the beat itself the unarmed shikari has generally to face far greater dangers than the sportsman, while surely the beaters must be brave who, armed only with a hatchet or a stick, enter the jungle to drive the fiercest of wild beasts from his lair.

The first of my shikaris was Muhammad Mir, of Bandipura, who, nearly twenty years ago, initiated me in the sport of big game hunting in the mountains of Kashmir. Previous to this my only experience of big game was in an abortive expedition after orial in the Jhelum Salt Range, under the guidance of Yakub Khan, shikari of Peshawar. Muhammad Mir was a fine shikari, who knew well the habits of the wild beasts, principally red bears, of which we were in pursuit, and under his instructions I was soon able to stalk without his assistance.

The best of all shikaris was the old Bhil, Bhima, by whose skill and cunning many tigers were brought to bag. Never was there a man with such a remarkable eye for country. He lived in a small hamlet on the bank of the Pein Gunga, where he cultivated his land, and it was whispered, was not entirely innocent of dacoity. Most of these village shikaris are of little use beyond the neighborhood of their own dwelling places, and are lost in new country. But even in unknown ground Bhima took in the situation with unerring eye, and invariably knew which way to drive a tiger.

Bhima was inclined to be lazy and it was difficult to make him undertake the examination of a fresh tract of country. But once a tiger had been marked down his advice was invaluable in the posting of the stops and the arrangement of the beat, and a tiger marked down by him was as good as dead. He was, like all great men, masterful and greatly feared by all his subordinates in camp, and he had a great liking for rum and rupees. Some accused him (behind his back) of cowardice, and said that his heart turned to water when a tiger roared in the drive. Certainly he did on one occasion—and small blame to him—disappear in a retrograde direction when I was following on the good tracks of a wounded tiger in heavy jungle. He wished to leave it until next day, and was perhaps wiser than his master. But I have seen him come stalking up the nullah all alone, driving in front of him a tiger with a flourish of his spear and a string of oburgations, as though it were a sheep. Bhima used to humor his tigers and bring them along gradually, so that they seldom galloped in the beat. He succumbed to plague some years ago, and no better shikari ever went to the happy hunting grounds.

Then there was old Indru, the Gond, who had never seen a white man in all the seventy years of his life when I found him living the simple life, like the wild beasts which inhabited the solitudes of the forest where he dwelt. He was a black and wrinkled old man, carrying a long matchlock, with which he had done much execution, generally lurking over the water holes, to shoot the animals as they came down to drink. He was too old and decrepit for hard work, but had great influence among the younger shikaris in the districts over which he ranged. Many years before he had been wounded in an encounter with a bison, and bore the scar on his side. Strangely enough, he was killed by a bison two years after I met him, when following up the animal which he had wounded.

Kanha was another of my followers, a man of substance, who lived some twenty miles from Bhima. He owned a considerable amount of land about his village, the precincts of which he had not left until his love of the chase induced him to join my camp and accompany me on a distant excursion. He was a good and trusty servant, who on our second expedition discovered a place where four or five tigers were always to be found, and where I killed three in two days one year and three more the next. But on my second visit Kanha did not accompany me, for he had already passed away—poisoned, it was said, by some of his relatives, who coveted his landed property. Such was the popular story of this sordid village tragedy, and there was no reason to disbelieve it.

I have met with and employed many other village shikaris in the course of my wanderings. There was Kamaji, killed by a panther at the same place where I was myself severely wounded by one of these animals a year later, and Kamaji, who accompanied me on two very successful expeditions, during which he assisted at the death of twenty-five tigers. For hard work he had no equal, although he was not as wise and skilful as Bhima. His tigers usually galloped, while Bhima's generally walked, and some of them escaped, when Kamaji, being sensitive, used to weep bitterly. But he was a man worthy of all admiration—brave, honest, and truthful, and now that Bhima is gone I could wish for no better shikari to accompany me on my next expedition. He still resides in his hamlet on the bank of the Pein Gunga, surely the most detectable spot on earth, where the spotted deer call at morn and at the setting of the sun, and the tigers prowling nightly on the margin of the stream.

Besides the shikaris who have been named, a number of jungle men have joined my camp on various occasions. Each year when at the

beginning of the hot weather, my tents were pitched on the bank of the Pein Gunga, these faithful followers flocked to the standard, bringing news of the tigers which inhabited the forest in the neighborhood of their homes. It always seems to me that sportsmen are prone to ascribe too much of their success to their own prowess and too little to the skill and labor of their shikaris and the courage of the beaters. Personally, I am very conscious that a great deal of such success as has been my lot was due to the efforts of my faithful followers. However much one may do personally, it is impossible to range in a few days a tract of country for a distance of some ten miles round one's camp. I have found wild Gonds living among animals, scarcely more wild, in the depths of the forest. They knew well all the tigers and their idiosyncrasies, and could point out their haunts and the most likely spots in which to look for them. Sometimes these men were very shy and secretive, but information was elicited and their assistance given when their confidence had been obtained by kind and liberal treatment.

In the Deccan the Brinjaras are among the best of shikaris, and they are plucky and trustworthy in beating for dangerous game. They are themselves fine hunters, and, armed with spears and accompanied by their dogs of famous breed, they run down their game. Few carry firearms, but they are wonderfully expert at knocking over hares and even birds on the wing with sticks and stones. The haunts of the great predaeous beasts are frequently known to them owing to the depredations committed by these animals on their flocks and herds. In beating for tigers I have always been glad to get a Brinjara naik and his following, and I recollect how one great tiger, trying to break out of the beat, rushed up the hillside, scattering the beaters; but a Brinjara naik, seeing that the tiger would escape, led his band in a charge against the beast, and, uttering fierce shouts, drove him grumbling down the hill, where Bhima brought him up to the waiting sportsman.

In most of the country over which I have wandered the trackers are not good, and tracking appeared to have been little studied by my shikaris. But at Jaum, some twenty miles from Hingoli, there were some wonderfully good trackers of the Ahnd tribe. The village of Jaum stands on a slight eminence beside a gently flowing rivulet. In the hot weather the rivulet dries up, or may contain here and there a pool of water, while the surrounding country is then almost an arid waste—a range of low, stony hills, sparsely scattered with boulders and bushes and scarred by deep ravines, where bears, pigs, and panthers find rest and shade from the heat of the scorching sun. In these hills there were always a few panthers and bears to be found with the aid of the Ahnd trackers, who would trace the velvet-footed panther to its lair, and follow up nocturnal bruin even over the hardest ground, where the displacement of a stone or the scratch of a claw was sufficient to indicate to them the direction taken by the game. Among them old Mahadu, who had an ancient flint-lock, could almost detect a footprint on solid rock, and on one occasion he tracked down for me a panther and bear, which were both shot one morning.

I have kept to the last the more civilized shikaris, who were in permanent employment. There was old Nathu, grown garrulous with advancing years, and too fond of relating the doings of himself and his master, with the addition of many imaginative embellishments. Better in pursuit of small than of big game, Nathu was no less a mighty hunter. Fearing nothing, I have seen him face the charge of a wounded and infuriated tigress without flinching, standing to receive it with a stick as his only weapon, and he would rush up to a wounded and dying tiger or panther and belabor it with tongue and stick. Simple minded, and honest and truthful in all his dealings with his master, ready to carry cheerfully through the long hot day's work the burden of his sixty years, Nathu was a great addition to the camp in point both of utility and gaiety, and his tongue could be heard wagging far into the night when loosened by rum after a tiger had been slain, when he related how, single-handed, he faced the ferocious animal, and drove it towards his master as though it had been a sheep.

The most faithful and admirable of all was perhaps little Chunder, the gentlest and most attractive of beings, and possessed of rare honesty and intelligence. His were no great deeds of prowess, but he contributed to the success of expeditions as much as any. He was a trustworthy man to send out to explore the country beforehand, to conciliate the inhabitants, and to bring back intelligence that could be relied upon, and no one could have a more faithful attendant. On one occasion he and Nathu stopped in the line of a swarm of angry bees we had disturbed, and, as I subsequently learnt, covered my retreat at the expense of their own persons, drawing off the bees to attack themselves.

In situations of danger, too, one's soldier orderlies can always be trusted to play a manly part. My orderly, Shaikh Karim, seized by a tiger, which left him severely wounded, called out to me not to mind him, but to go on after the tiger, and on another occasion he faced and killed a tigress that was charging the line of beaters. Another soldier, Gopal Singh, when I was seized and borne to the ground by a panther, rushed up to it and beat it over the head with my gun. Such instances might be multiplied, and this comradeship and the life in camp in pursuit of game engenders close, friendly relations between master and man, ir-

respective of color, or race, or creed.

I only hope that, when the time comes for me to depart for the happy hunting grounds, those who have gone before will be there to meet me with news of the sport to be had, and that those who follow after will join the camp on the bank of the Stygian stream.—The Field.

AN EVENING WITH THE "POLISHED BOYS"

What are "Polished boys?" is the question the reader will naturally ask. Allow me to explain. "Polished boys" is my boatman's definition of about a dozen old and wary trout which frequent the stretch of river where it is my fortune and sometimes my misfortune to spend most of my angling hours. For a trout to earn this title he must be fished by all fishermen with dry, wet, and garden fly, and successfully resist their wiles; he must leave the paths of virtue and start hunting, or, as my boatman puts it, "caroosin' round"; he must rise at all times, and be able to discriminate unerringly between the artificial and the natural. He is the hotel keeper's friend; to him are sent the novices and newcomers. They spend evenings beside his humble abode, returning at dusk to the cheery parlor with tales of a rounded back, great fins, glistening, golden sides spotted with red; but, alas! with an empty net. Yet, as everyone knows, there are occasions when the strongest fort may be carried and when the most vigilant garrison may be off their guard. This was one of these occasions. The river had been dead low, but the recent rains had raised it a couple of inches, and, although there was a certain amount of flax water in it, there was not enough to put the fish off their feed. I arrived at four o'clock, and found my trusty boatman, Willie, waiting me with a cheery smile on his bronzed countenance.

An angry north breeze makes dry fly fishing out of the question, so we spend a couple of hours spooning for mythical salmon—as slow a proceeding as one could possibly imagine. "I cud hear the snore o' one o' them reels," mutters Willie; but no "snore" comes, and we give it up in disgust, fetch out the trout rods, dry and wet fly, when, lo and behold! the wind begins to fall, and the angry waves assume an oily appearance. "There's the old one!" cries Willie in some excitement, and, sure enough, on a break in the water, right in the big waves, is seen rising our old friend the chief of the "polished boys."

I think I could float the fly over him, but Willie expresses some doubt, and is of opinion that an attack with the wet fly in the curl would more likely lead to success. Anyhow, I take the dry fly rod, and at the third try get the fly over him nicely. A golden form shoots from the water and literally pounces on the floater. Whiz! goes the feel, and ten yards are stripped off in no time. After a ding-dong fight the net is slipped under him, and out he comes, a beauty of two and a half pounds. "Man," says Willie, "I thought the eyes wud bounce out o' my hied when I seen him playin' rowl at it." From which remarks it may be inferred that Willie is an Irishman. Another trout rises a little lower down. We back the boat and I make the cast; a tiny ring, scarcely to be seen in the ruffled surface of the water, and the fly disappears. Strike—whiz! and the net is again required for a well-made trout of one and a half pounds. We hook and lose a nice fish, and then another of one pound joins his fellows in the bow of the boat.

Now we are hailed from the bank by a local fisherman and boatman of very conservative ideas, and a scoffer at the cult of the dry fly. "Good evening—good evening, sir! Yer makin' a clearance the night. What fly is it on, yer honor?" "The dry fly," I return, and hear him mutter in his beard, "Ay, the dry fly; them an' their dry fly. To h—! with it! No decent castin'! wap, wap, wap, wap all the time!" "Boys, but he's the spilet boy this mornin'!" says Willie. The trout here for some reason stop feeding, and we go down the river in search of a rising fish. We find him, make the cast, and get another one and a quarter pound; but away down on the lower ford we find one of our old friends doing his duty manfully, and snapping in the flies as they come. It is nearly dark, but I drop my fly, as well as I can. Slap! "Yer in him!" yells Willie. There is a wild flurry, which lasts ten or fifteen seconds, on the top of the water, the fly comes back, and away goes a good three-pounder.

And in this last incident lies the reason of this screed. When the trout felt the hook he came up to the top of the water, and stayed there with his head down stream lashing at the cast with his tail. I kept a firm hold on him, with the aforementioned result. Should I have slacked, to try and get him to go down? Perhaps some of your expert dry fly fishing readers would give me the benefit of their opinion on this point. We return to the hotel in a jubilant frame of mind with four trout, weighing six pounds. Willie jeers at the other boatmen, and I go to sleep, at peace with all the world.—Port-na-kim, in The Field.

The audacity of some British Columbia bears is unequalled if we are to place implicit faith in a Revelstoke despatch. It is stated that while standing on the railway platform, James A. McDonald, chief engineer for a contracting firm on a big tunnel, saw a bear come out of the bush and carry off the eight year old son of William Lines, a locomotive engineer. The animal dragged the child off and it was only after a strenuous fight that the man managed to rescue the boy who was seriously injured. The bear managed to make its escape into the mountains.—Rod and Gun,