

# Field Sports at Home and Abroad

## THE "GREEN TROUT" OF PONTCHARTRAIN.

By Ernest McGaffey.

"The fly," the spoon, the minnow, the worm, By river or sounding sea, But a thing I hate is to change my bait, So the 'silver bait' for me."

—Old Ballad.

To begin with, the "green trout" of the south are black bass. Those in Lake Pontchartrain are big mouth black bass. Those in many of the southern mountain streams are, I presume, of the "small mouth" tribe. There is, perhaps, a more piratical elevation of the dorsal fin to those southern bass, a rakish look to them, but they're bass, all right. And as for those in Pontchartrain, well, I know what I know, and this story I'm telling happened to "I,—myself."

A curious old sheet, that lake. Tropical, or nearly so, in its surroundings, for near at hand the gulf rolls, where the fins of sharks cut under, where mullets leap in silvery schools, and the fierce sun beats straight and hot from a brassy heaven. Miles and miles of salt-sweet water in Pontchartrain, thousands of acres of tall flags and marshy cover, hundreds of little knoll like islands, many of them a few feet in diameter, gulls, solitude, silence.

And fish! Many and various; from the "ball-faced" sheepshead to shaddercrabs and singarees. Sharks, dogfish, black bass, alias "green trout" and a host of others. It was in the summer time, and the sun warped the ties of the rumbling little road that smoked and grumbled with a jerkwater train going towards Pontchartrain. Hot! Lord save us, what blistering heat. So hot that the lizards panted and hung their tongues out, and black wasps on the timbers of sizzling culverts curled up like spiders in a frying pan. And we were out for "green trout," the three of us. Nice fellows, those southern boys! They had entertained me royally for two weeks, and were now taking me out for a fishing trip, at my anxious request. They had spared no trouble nor pains to show me that New Orleans was the citadel of hospitality. Why, a stranger with good letters of introduction would have to fight a duel before they would let him spend a cent.

### Ancient Fisherman Points the Way.

When we got to the "jumpoff" place the wheezy old train hesitated a few seconds, and we piled off into a forbidding looking wilderness. A shed, a pole, and a couple of charred planks make shift for the "station." Not a living thing was in sight. Not even a buzzard. We edged down towards the water and there we upended something in the way of a prehistoric Creole fisherman and hunter who certainly had Rip Van Winkle and Methuselah "beat for fair."

"And weedy and old was he."

From him we bought bait for the trout. We also had advice from him, delivered in a most musical patois and with an animation that betokened a flickering still of the Gallic spirit. I wish I could write Creole dialect. He told us to take a boat apiece and scatter in different directions that the trout were feeding now here, now there, "all fair," with a sweep of his long and lean arms. We took his crawfish and his advice. I was introduced into a slim, canoe-like craft after assuring my friends that I could handle a bat and swim well. The station pole was a landmark not possible to lose, so there was no danger of losing one's self. So, with a passing of three boats into the lake in different directions and with the disappearance of "The Ancient Mariner," I found myself alone with my bait and the green waters of Pontchartrain.

Here and there were little knobby islands with a growth of raw marsh grass over them, and around the edge of these places I began to cast and sink the active crawfish bait. For a long time I did this with absolutely no success whatever. Then finally I was rewarded with a strike, and after some little fighting on the part of the fish I ran him close enough to the boat to slip the landing net under him and bring him in. He was a medium sized "trout," or bass, of about two and a half pounds.

Further casting proved futile. I rowed out into more open water, and here I began to catch blue channel catfish of about a pound and a half in weight, lithe, active fish, and the sport was good if one cared to follow it. But I knew my companions would scoff at "cats," so I hardly knew what to do with them.

At last I rowed to where a stiff current was running apparently from the lake to the gulf, and baiting with one of the channel cats on a big hook I cast in the water. In about a minute there was an awful jerk at my bait, a swift running away with the same, and as I "checked" the hook into whatever was carrying off my bait there was a regular steam engine rush, and away went six feet of my line, hook, catfish, and all. I put on another hook, "catfished up," and I tried it again. Same result. In this way I lost seven big hooks, about thirty-five or forty feet of line, and all my blue channel "cats." It was exciting, and must have amused the sharks, alligator gars, or monster dogfish that carried my bait away. I might as well have thought of reeling in a "wildcat locomotive."

After this I rowed about "from pillar to post" in the awful heat, diligently trying to

locate the "trout." They were there, I knew by the one I had caught, if by nothing else. At last I got a couple more by the side of a little island and began to "chirk up" a little. But some hours passed after this and I did not get a solitary strike, so I made up what was left of my mind that I would set sail for the landing and let it go at that. But for some reason or other I lost my bearings and could not locate that infernal totem pole of the station, and I ran into this channel and that channel, and that little bayou and curve of alluring water, and it was late in the afternoon before I got my bearings perfectly over the tall swampy growth. And as I was cautiously making as near a "bee-line" as possible for our starting place I sighted through a network of rushes and dark grass to the right of my course the unmistakable outlines of a "fish box," snugly tucked away in a dark, particularly dark corner.

### Finds Treasure Trove of Bass.

Pushing the prow of my craft into this cloister, I approached the box and, opening the locked lid, looked down into the interior. And what a sight was there, my countrymen! Big bass and medium sized bass, and occasionally a little bass. Bass by the dozens, bass unadorned and undefiled. Bass like mother used to make. Many bass.

It was a beautiful and touching sight. After making absolutely certain that there was no one around with a medieval firearm ready to pour a charge of shot into me from some sequestered nook in the bushes, I got out my trusty landing net and began to fish for green trout. I did not get all big ones, but I skipped the little ones. I averaged about three and one-half pounds to all the bass I was skilful enough to "land," and after "reeling in" fourteen I concluded I had enough. It was a beautiful string and enough to gladden the heart of a true angler. I then closed the box for a space and got out a small notebook from my pocket, and with a pencil, squatting down on the seat of the boat, I indited the following appreciatory epistle to my unknown benefactor, afterwards putting a \$5 greenback in the book and tying the book securely to the top of the box:

Dear Sir and Brother: In passing through your charming little bayou I was attracted by the animated condition of your fishbox. It has rarely been my fortune to encounter a more pleasing sight, especially as I had been practically "skunked" in my day's fishing for the elusive green trout of southern waters. By the aid of my trusty landing net I succeeded in hypotheating, appropriating, and otherwise converting to my own use fourteen of the said trout, presumably captured at one time by yourself. For the same I herewith tender the sum of \$5 lawful money of the United States, trusting that this may extenuate the crime for which I now stand self-convicted. I am a northern man, and appeal to your hospitality. This purchase, though irregular, will I trust, meet with your hearty approval.

### A BROTHER ANGLER.

I found the boys at the landing, and they had met with only fair luck. They congratulated me on my string. The ancient creole told us he had "plentee trout in his box in ze byoo," if we would only buy some. We waved him aside haughtily. Especially me. The boys said he had offered to sell them green trout at 5 cents a pound. I wonder if he fell dead when he knuckled that five dollar bill?

### THE PASSING OF THE BIG-HORN

To be rare, wary, and difficult of access are among the conditions which give an animal a high sporting value, and any four-legged creature, yclept big-game, that is so unlucky as to possess these qualities in a marked degree is sure to be diligently pursued, without regard to its commercial worth, or artistic effect. When, however, in addition to fulfilling all of these requirements, an animal has the misfortune to be distinguished by delicate flesh, unsurpassed in flavor by any other mild meat, and a head of singular beauty, the popularity of that animal is assured, and its fate is then regulated solely by the sum of its natural means of defence, plus the degree of protection which wisely-framed and carefully-administered game laws are able to afford it.

Such an animal is the big-horn sheep of North America, once so abundant and so bold in the mountain districts of the West, now of a wariness to tax the skill of the most experienced hunter, and so dwindled in numbers that its extinction (except in national and private parks) is a question of a few years, if a comparatively insignificant stock still left in the mountains prove to be insufficient to meet the levies made on it by disease, natural enemies, man, and those devitalizing influences as inimical to animal as to Indian stamina, which an encompassing civilization exerts primarily on all wild natures. To nullify as far as possible these adverse conditions and influences, energetic steps have from time to time been taken by the various game authorities to render yet more effective the stringent protective measures which were already in force, and plans are making for the creation of additional reserves, where the big-horn, in common with all other wilderness hauntings, may be secure from human molestation and the encroachment of civilization; but, in spite of all endeavors, the big-horn has continued

to show a steady decrease from decade to decade.

Statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the total number of these sheep now existing in the West is considerably less than it was ten years ago. Apparent local increases on the strength of which hopeful estimates have been made, are often deceptive, in that they are, to a great extent, the result of shifting and in-crowding, rather than of natural increase. Undoubtedly in certain favored sections the rate of natural increase is slightly higher than the present death-rate, but, taking the ranges as a whole, a quinquennial census would indubitably show such a progressive decline in the big-horn population as to leave little ground for hope that they can hold their own as objects of sport, except in a few exceptionally favorable localities, such as lie just outside the limits of a central sanctuary of perpetual reserve. Here, if adequately safeguarded, not only by law but by local sentiment, without which corollary wilderness game regulations are of slight avail, they may linger for many years to gratify man's sporting instinct, and to develop in him all of those admirable qualities of mind and body which the pursuit of an agile and wary animal in rough and inaccessible country engenders.

At present, of all North American game animals, the big-horn makes the heaviest demands on the hardihood, endurance and skill of the hunter. Inhabiting, as it now principally does, some of the wildest and roughest mountain ranges of the globe, its capture can be effected only by those in whom the rugged elements of life linger not far below the surface veneer of civilization. I do not know what inspired the maxim that we grow by striving, but the big-horn certainly might have done so. Its rarity, extreme wariness, keenness of nose and vision, and extraordinary agility, combined with the remote and inaccessible character of its present habitat, make it the fitting quarry only of those who regard repeated defeats but as stepping-stones to ultimate success. I do not find myself in complete agreement with Mr. Roosevelt's enthusiastic belief in the value of big-game shooting as an adjunct of the qualities of good citizenship, for the elemental hunting instinct is essentially antagonistic to those qualities, and its development, beyond a point quickly reached, is distinctly prejudicial; but any man, with a taste for hunting, who feels in himself the softening effect of a bed of rose leaves and the slackening of moral fibre, evidenced by hypersensitiveness to failure, would certainly find in the quest of the big-horn that tonic and teaching which would in the course of a few weeks make him a more efficient citizen.

That the big-horn, in spite of the serious thinning of its ranks, is not in imminent danger of extinction, is proved by the following figures. Obviously, census estimates of wild animals must be largely guess-work, and as such they carry no real authority; but, even so, estimates by shrewd observers, thoroughly conversant with the game conditions of their respective districts, are not without value. In Wyoming, once the most famous big-horn country in America, and still productive of the finest heads, there are now about 1,000 sheep, unequally distributed through the most remote and inaccessible mountain ranges, notably along the headwaters of the Big Horn, Green, Yellowstone, and Gros Ventre rivers. Only about fifty or sixty rams are killed annually by hunters; yet it may be said that mountain sheep in this state have remained stationary for several years. In the early eighties an epidemic carried off a large number, and although no sickness on a large scale has been reported since then, the animals have not been able to improve their position. As cougars and eagles are not, in my opinion, very destructive to the big-horn in Wyoming (certainly not to the extent of checking the natural increase of 1,000 head) we can only presume that these sheep are not so productive as should be the case. But if this is so, it is strange that no deterioration has been observed in the horn development of the rams, for it is characteristic of the genus *Ovis* that the fluctuations of horn growth and progeny are sympathetic. Some of the largest heads ever secured in Wyoming, the country of massive horns, were obtained in 1908 and 1909, a fact which seems to suggest that the procreative defect lies mainly in the ewes, which are, perhaps, more susceptible to devitalizing conditions than the males.

In Colorado, where mountain sheep are entirely protected, it is estimated that they now number between 3,000 and 5,000 head, scattered over the mountain ranges in bands of from forty to fifty. There is a large band in Grand County, near Sulphur Springs, and another big bunch in Estes Park; but the bulk of the sheep are high up in the mountains, where few hunters care to pursue them. Some well-informed authorities believe that they are increasing in numbers; others regard this view as too optimistic. Probably "stationary" best describes the situation in this state, as also in Montana, which claims to have more big-horns to a given area than any other big-horn country. Mr. Avare, chief game warden for the state, places the figures at 10,000, but this estimate seems to me to be too hopeful. There are only a very few wild sheep remaining in the Bad Lands between the Missouri and the Yellowstone, but fair-sized bands may be found in the bitter Root Range near the western boundary of Montana, the Wise River Range in Beaverhead County, the Big Belt Mountains in Meagher County, the Gallatin Range in

Gallatin County, the Tobacco and the Dedison Ranges in Madison County, the Highland Range in Silver Bow County, and the Kootenai Range in Flathead County. These sheep fall somewhat below the Wyoming standard of excellence, but they appear to be rather more prolific, and I am inclined to believe that they will outlast the sheep of the other big-horn states of the Union.

For British Columbia no useful figures are available. Practically exterminated in the Similkameen and Okanagan districts, formerly the wild sheep country, and in Chilcotin becoming very scarce, the big-horn may still be found in fair numbers in the Rockies of the East Kootenay—where the largest and best heads are obtained on British soil—and on other suitable ranges up to the fifty-second parallel. Above this latitude the big-horn disappears, its place in the northern portions of the province being taken by the three allied varieties, Stone's, Dall's and Fannin's, with which this article has no concern. Bunches of big-horn, aggregating two hundred head, may be seen during a week's trip by a man who knows where to look for them, but on many ranges where they once roamed in abundance there is now none to be found. Of the stock remaining, it seems to me that the proportion of ewes to rams is exceptionally large, a rather singular circumstance in view of the fact that the Indians, who prefer ewe meat, have been killing ewes by the hundred, their hunting camps often presenting the appearance of Golgothas. Possibly, nature, which is the case of a race past the apex of its racial curve, automatically increases the proportion of females, is making a last attempt to perpetuate the big-horn in British Columbia. Many competent observers, having in mind the habits of these southern sheep and the conditions under which they live, believe that the numerical superiority of the ewes is more apparent than real, and that such excess as exists is largely accountable to the sportsman's practice of killing the most virile males, whereby the delicate prenatal balance of sex is disturbed; but in refutation of this hypothesis I may cite the case of moose in New Brunswick, where these semi-fabulous deer, hard-hunted as they are in the male line, show no deviation from their normal birthrate.

In the preceding paragraph the case of the big-horn has been likened by implication to that of an ancient people. The big-horn is not, however, geologically speaking, of remote origin, the sheep group being, it would seem, rather more modern than the oxen, none of its fossil remains having been found prior to the merge of the Pliocene and the Pleistocene periods. On the score of antiquity, therefore (even were it not abundantly proved that the physical condition of the species were never higher), we can advance no theory of senescence, such as some favor, which explains in a satisfactory manner why these animals should disappear at a rate in excess of what we may regard as the decrease justified by obvious conditions. We are thus forced to conclude that some subtle influence is at work limiting the procreative powers of the big-horn very much, perhaps, as the productivity of some primitive races has been observed to be affected adversely by contact with civilization. This conclusion is, no doubt, somewhat academic, and as such it must be offensive to outdoor minds; but it appears to be sanctioned by the absence of adequate practical explanations of the threatened extinction of the big-horn. Whether the stamina of the species will suffice to carry any considerable number of them safely through the danger-zone between natural wildness and semi-domestication is a moot point; but in any event they will lose a measure of those subtle elements of wildness which now characterize them, for although an animal living in proximity to civilization, and brought in frequent contact with the evidences of man, may, and does, gain in cunning, wariness, and sagacity, it inevitably loses a certain delicacy of wild instinct, which is more akin to the shyness of the untamed maid than to the worldly-wise caution of the maffron. In the case of an animal like the big-horn, which symbolizes the lure of the West for sportsmen, the loss of this "bloom" will be especially regrettable.

And what chance, it may be asked, in view of the somewhat depressing showing of this article, does the sportsman have of securing one or more of these highly-prized animals? In the first place, it may be said that the big-horn is now everywhere so scarce that success depends in four-fifths proportion on the hunter himself. Assuming that he is strong enough for rough work, that he has ample time, and, most important of all, that he possesses the means to engage a thoroughly competent guide, he can enter the mountains of almost any sheep district with the practical assurance of success. But there is no royal road to sheep hunting (except that the expense is truly imperial), and other things being equal, the more difficult the trail, the greater the reward, not only as regards numbers but intrinsic merit. The bands on the more accessible ranges have been looked over so often that only mediocre rams remain, but in remote localities really excellent trophies can be secured at the expense of persistent effort. Of course, luck is a considerable element of success in all big-game shooting, and especially so in the case of the big-horn, but luck is rarely more than the handmaid of hard work, and the man who is either unwilling or unable to make a prolonged physical effort is likely to return from an expedition, even in the finest sheep country, firmly convinced by ocular evidence that the big-horn is a myth—



## Sportsman's Calendar

### NOVEMBER

In Season—Cock Pheasants, Quail, Grouse, Deer, Ducks, Geese, Snipe.  
Trout Fishing Closes November 15th.

an immortal figment of those who make a princely wage by luring innocent sportsmen into the wilds in pursuit of an ignis fatuus. At present Wyoming, in spite of the comparatively small numbers of her sheep, affords the surest hunting for these magnificent sporting animals, the ranges reached from Cody offering, perhaps, the greatest advantages. A grand series of twenty-six rams, secured in the past five years by Ned Frost, the famous Cody angler, "U. S. 11" or "U. S. 11" was the maximum measurement for each season rising from year to year. So long as a series of sheep-heads like this can be secured through the instrumentality of one guide, even though he be an exceptionally successful hunter, no serious sportsman, if he but have a modicum of luck, need despair of placing a good specimen of *Ovis montana* to his credit.—Lincoln Wilbar in Baily's.

### CANADIAN HATCHERY LARGEST IN THE WORLD

The replenishing of Canadian rivers with the commercial varieties of fish is the care of the Fisheries Department of the Canadian Government, and is carried out by an excellent series of hatcheries established throughout the country, at points both on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and on the Great Lakes. The largest of these—indeed the largest of its kind in the world—is the hatchery at Harrison Lake drained by the Fraser river, in British Columbia, which deals exclusively with the hatching of salmon, and where there are always ten million fish in the building, seven million sockeye salmon eggs and fry, the fish principally used for canning purposes, and three million spring salmon. The building is 220ft. long and 40ft. wide. It contains 160 hatching troughs, each averaging 90,000 fish. During September and October traps and nets are set in the neighborhood of tributaries of the Fraser river to secure the salmon as near spawning time as possible. When the fish are discovered to be "ripe," the eggs of the female are expressed into a pan, and the fertilizing "milt" of the male thoroughly mixed with them. The eggs are then carried to the hatchery and placed in troughs set in flowing water. When the fish are ready to be liberated they are placed in a specially constructed semi-submerged boat. This is towed to a chosen spot, and when in proper position is allowed to sink below the water.

### BUFFALOES ON MELVILLE ISLAND, NORTH AUSTRALIA

A London firm of solicitors has just issued a prospectus for the sale of a long lease of Melville Island, situated off the northern coast of Australia, near Port Darwin, and noted for its herds of introduced Indian buffaloes. The number of these animals is estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 head, and the number of calves born yearly at about 3,000. Of the former about 2,000 head are killed annually for the sake of their horns and hides alone, the meat and bones, for want of proper facilities, being absolutely wasted. In view of a proposal recently made that, in order to respect the prejudices of the Hindu community, beef for the English army in India should be procured outside the country, the buffaloes on Melville Island, which has an area of 2,400 square miles, would form a basis for commencing such an experiment. The supply of meat might be increased to almost any extent by introducing into Melville Island ordinary cattle from the mainland, where they can be purchased for about £1 per head.

The death occurred at Bexhill of the Maharajah of Cooch-Behar, the most noted sportsman in India. The Asian once justly described him as "a first-rate shot, a keen skier, an enthusiastic Turfite, a crack polo player, an adept at rackets and lawn tennis, and at indoor games, such as whist and billiards, hard to beat." From his own records of big-game shooting, published two years ago, he had then to his credit 365 tigers, 311 leopards, 438 buffalo, and 207 rhinoceros. A generous and enthusiastic patron of the turf, his Australian thoroughbred Highborn won him the Viceroy's Cup two years in succession, and in the Calcutta Christmas cricket, aided and always did Cooch-Behar credit, aided and coached as it usually was by two first-class professionals, whom the Maharajah invited out for the winter.