

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

WHERE TO GO FOR THE VISITING FISHERMAN

Sooke

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.

The distance to the head of Sooke Harbor by road from Victoria is about sixteen miles, 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.

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 fishing holiday away from city life and yet within easy call of home.

A FEW DAYS WITH THE BLACK BRENT IN B. C.

It was along toward the middle of March that G. met me one day, and after the preliminary exchange of shooting anecdotes, asked me what I thought of a few days' Brent shooting down at Sooke Bay.

G. and I had shot together for several seasons and were not only slaves to the fascinating sport, but there also existed a kind of rivalry between us, and on our many expeditions we each sought surreptitiously to wipe the other's eye if possible.

As it was just about the time of year when the weather is fine and the birds plentiful, I decided to accept the invitation. G. suggested that we should start next day at dawn as we had a twenty-five mile drive before us, so I accordingly set to work making preparations at once, much to the delight of my Irish setter, "Snoozer," who actually stood up on his hind legs with satisfaction when he saw me running a rag through my gun and thrusting sweaters, shells and all the rest of the paraphernalia into the spacious intervals of my shooting bag.

G. called for me punctually next morning as the first roscate hues of the rising sun suffused the sky with a crimson flood, the snow-clad slopes of Mt. Baker. Never shall I forget that morning as we drove off through the crisp morning air, which sent the blood pulsating through the veins—the old horse pulling the miles down in great shape and the dogs running alongside in joyful anticipation.

We soon left the city behind us and were presently jangling along the country road between the stubble, where every once in a while the dogs would flush some conceited old cock pheasant, who would betake himself to the tall timber with much cackling and beating of wings at being so unceremoniously disturbed at his morning meal. However, the season being out, we paid but little attention to their antics.

At the expiration of a three hours' drive we eventually arrived at the old tumble-down homestead at the head of the Inlet, christened "The Grousenest."

Here, after making the old horse comfortable, we proceeded to load the canoe with sacks of hay, blankets, decoys, etc., and were presently on the second and last stage of our journey, which would bring us, after a six-mile paddle, to our destination and scene of operations—a long sand spit stretching across the mouth of the Sooke Inlet.

As we slipped along over the even surface of the Inlet, from time to time we would see strings of Brent flying in search of feeding grounds, and we frequently heard the cackling of others even when we could not see them; great long-necked loons flew boldly over us as if knowing that no powder would be wasted on their oily carcasses; while overhead eagles poised motionless as if suspended from the clouds.

And now we were at the spit, and as we grated on the sand, out sprang the dogs, eager for the fray, and we after them; out came guns, decoys, hay sacks, blankets and the rest of the necessary junk, all of which we quickly installed in the old fisherman's shack which was to serve as a home for the ensuing days. It proved to be a typical old hermit's abode. It had a couple of coal-oil tins where the

stove should have been. This defect, however, was redeemed by a couple of wooden bunks which, when we had spread hay in them, made splendid substitutes for spring beds, and in which we subsequently slept like tops while we were there. After a good square meal we lit our pipe and lounging in our bunks whiled away the time resurrecting reminiscences of shooting trips we had made and shooting them all over again.

With the first blink of daybreak we were up and in our blinds, which were about a hundred yards apart, and made out of driftwood, of which there was a regular layer all along the top of the spit. We had set out the decoys midway between the two blinds and on the inside of the spit, where the water was calm and where it would be a natural place for birds to be feeding. This we considered preferable to setting them outside where any wind produced a slight surf which has a nasty knack of turning the decoys upside down and making them look like dead ones.

For the benefit of those who have never been fortunate enough to participate in a Brent shoot, I might here premise that the success depends almost entirely on the tide. Brent feed on what is commonly known as eel grass—a long green weed which grows up from the bottom. When the tide is low or nearly so the tops of this weed are on the surface. It is at this stage that the Brent are able

G., but alas! it was the same old story. Our guns were in the blinds and there was no time to get them. We stood like a couple of stuck pigs while the black beauties streamed over our very heads with a derisive cackle. I looked at G. and he looked at me, and we then swore solemnly never to leave our blinds again unless armed to the teeth. Meantime the dogs had succeeded in retrieving the wingers and bringing them in. One of them had only the tip of his wing broken, so I put a heavy weight on him and staked him out as a decoy and a great drawing card he made as he swam around at the end of his tether. We kept him in a rack at night, and it was amusing to see how greedily he would devour the eel grass with which he plied him.

Having once more ensconced ourselves in the blinds, we did not have long to wait before three Brent came flying in. They came directly over me at about a thirty-yard range. I stopped one of them with my first but missed with my second. The remaining two seeing the decoys promptly wheeled around and flew right over G., who made a clean right and left. From this on for an hour or so we bagged only a brace and then adjourned to the shack for lunch. Afterwards, we rolled into our bunks and slept for a few hours, well satisfied with our morning's sport.

We took our blinds again at about four p.m., but by this time the tide had risen and

caught, and campaigns are organized to catch them. The campaigners stand not upon the order of their methods, nor will they be influenced in the quiet, out-of-the-way districts, which are their fields of operations by any question of a possible infringement of the new Protection of Animals Act. The worm, dug a fortnight previously, stored until it is tough and durable, is their one and only mainstay; and the venue of their practices is the little feeder of a main stream, where the trout are hungrily looking for some spring food to condition themselves with. A worm is a veritable godsend to these developing trout, and the early fisher knows this. He gets his creel full of fish without effort, without skill, and without breaking the law.

It is true the little, lean trout are not worth catching, or worth eating, but they count up to a goodly number, and the time, according to law, has come to catch them. One may, under a similar plea, kill the tiniest "speaker" on the first of September without infringing the law, but there is, of course, no reason why one should do so; and it is this spirit of staying the hand which in the case of trout fishing enables us to draw a definite line of demarcation between the catcher of fish and the fisherman.

So much for early spring—or late winter—worm fishing. By the middle and end of March trout are better worth catching, although the opinion is happily growing yearly

WHAT'S DOING FOR THE SPORTSMAN?

April—Trout-fishing now open everywhere on the coast.

Shooting season has now closed for everything on the mainland. On Vancouver Island and adjacent islands you may still shoot geese, if you can get them.

Brant geese are plentiful on the shores of Vancouver Island. Decoys are almost an absolute necessity, also a special knowledge of their haunts. Comox and Denman Island, the best known resorts for brant-shooters. Sooke, Sidney, James Island, other well-known resorts. Discovery Island sometimes affords good sport in the migrating season, a little later, while Rocky Point and similar places in the time of migration. Honkers are to be had by the persevering and lucky sportsman, but, except in a few favored localities, the man who gets honkers on the coast certainly earns them and is a friend of fortune.

Grilse, a term used roughly here for immature salmon, are now to be caught in considerable numbers by trolling in salt water—estuaries and inlets. The best known place for this fishing is Saanich Inlet, reached most easily by E. & N. Railway, 17-Mile Post Station. Boats for hire are few and should be arranged for beforehand. Sport depends a good deal on tide, a long run-out in the day generally meaning poor sport. High and flooding tides better than low and ebb.

Tackle used commonly, ordinary trolling tackle, the finer the better for good sport, with any small spoon or minnow, the local favorite now in fashion being a small Stewart spoon.

Spring Salmon are now running and may be caught in similar places with similar tackle; usually it pays to fish rather deep for springs, especially at this time of year. A deadly bait is a herring rigged with a single hook at the tail so as to give it a "wobbling" motion when trailed behind a boat.

N.B.—The "winter" springs give far better sport when hooked than the summer variety, but are not quite so numerous, or if so, not so readily caught.

Saanich Arm, Cowichan Bay and Genoa Bay, some of the best places, being sheltered water, but "springs" are found now round the shores of almost any inlet and near the kelp-beds.

Steelheads now running to the rivers, may be caught with salmon-fly (favorite patterns here, Jock Scott and Silver Doctor); fished deep. Spoons and Devon minnows give good results. Best-known places handy to Victoria—Sooke River, reached by stage; Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers, by E. & N. Railway.

ing of grouse, and the birds were so thick in the air that time after time, in making a cast, his fly got into a grouse instead of a trout." His friend said, "I can go one better than that; for I found a man up at Helmsdale who said there was a loch near there which beat all other lochs." "How might that be?" he was asked, to which he replied that "it might be properly described as three parts fish and one part water."

ANGLERS' VICISSITUDES

An element of risk is admittedly a concomitant of sport of nearly all kinds. It may, of course, be reasonably contended that the quarry runs more risk than the pursuer; but, none the less, the latter cannot escape a certain share whether he be after big game or engaged in the "peaceful" recreation of angling. What fisherman, whether in fresh water or salt, who has any considerable period to look back upon, cannot recall exciting if not really dangerous moments in the pursuit of his favorite hobby, moments that have impressed themselves indelibly on his memory? On one occasion it might have been the high margin of a trout stream that the previous winter floods have undermined; he has spotted a good fish on the rise, and the cast is an awkward one, necessitating his getting close up to the edge of the bank, which at this spot overhangs the water some 8 feet below.

It was only last season that frequent attempts in the same spot to take a similar good fish, if not indeed the same one as now, went unrewarded; and his keenness on this occasion is proportionately enhanced. But l'homme propose pour, at the very moment when he is in position for a cast, the ground gives way beneath him, he is suddenly within an ace of immersion in the deep hole below, and it is only the friendly root of a trusty oak that saves him from something worse than wet feet, and enables him to climb back to safety, with a pious resolution to let that spot alone for the future.

On the banks of two of the best-known salmon rivers in the west country are small granite columns marking the spots where salmon fishers have made their last cast; one ill-judged step in the bed of the stream, and c'est le dernier pas qui coute. The man with the rod as he looks on one of these for the first time will possibly put his rod aside, fill his pipe again, and reflect for a moment "Lest we forget."

Enthusiasm in sport will on occasion override judgment. "I'll chance it!" you say to yourself. Well, very often the thing comes off, and you may or may not have bagged a good specimen; but sometimes—well, the small granite column comes to mind.—Henry A. Dawson.



Sooke River, celebrated for its large sea-trout.

to obtain it, and it is therefore advisable to be on the feeding ground and ready for them any time after the tide begins to ebb. As soon as the tide turns and rising begins to put them off their feed, they are usually off to their roosting grounds, which may be anywhere within a radius of five or ten miles.

We had not been long sitting in our blinds when, straining my eyes over the Straits I thought I could faintly discern a dark line against the horizon. I called to G., who picked them up with his glasses and declared them to be either surf-scooters or Brent, and also informed me that they were coming low with full speed ahead—as they loomed up closer, we recognized them for what they were—black Brent—and coming dead on at a low elevation. As they neared the spit, they saw the decoys and executed a couple of snipe-like swoops which brought them still lower and then—over they came, cackling and chattering midway between the two blinds. It was a moment to be remembered. I stood up in my blind and as they passed abreast of me, the rising sun glinting on their sleek bodies and shining necks, I fired a quick-right and left into them with my twelve-bore, and quickly seizing my eight, I managed to take toll once more out of their ranks before they were out of range.

Jumping out of our blinds we ran down to the water's edge and found that we had bagged eight out of the bunch, including the wingers that the dogs were bravely doing their best to capture. Not bad for the first crack out of the box, so to speak, and a happy augury for further sport to come.

As we were in the act of gathering up the birds something impelled me to glance backwards over my shoulder and to my horror I saw another band coming in over the spit and bang over our heads. I started a warning to

the birds were off their feed, so we had nothing to do but amuse ourselves by throwing stones at the myriads of salt water ducks that were fighting out to sea for the night.

Of a sudden we heard a tremendous roar up the Inlet, and looking to see the cause of it, discovered that our friends the eagles had started a vast gaggle of Brent and they were coming straight out over us as fast as their wings would carry them. They were too high for the twelve-bore, but I grabbed the eight and as they came over, let them have it with BB, and had the satisfaction of pulling down a brace out of the clouds. This ended the day's shooting, and we once more wended our way to the shack and proudly strung up ten brace of birds as the result of the first day. The days that followed were a repetition of the first day with slight variations such as rounding up wingers with the aid of the canoe and dogs, to say nothing of rounding up occasional decoys which every now and then broke loose and drifted away with the wind.

G. and I arrived back in town in great fettle after our enjoyable outing, and once more ready to do battle with the world till the next honk! honk! of the black Brent should lure us away.—J. P. Bell in Rod and Gun.

MARCH TROUT FISHING

Some go out to fish in March, and they are of two distinct divisions—those who go out for trout, and those who go out for sport. A lengthy experience warrants the assertion that members of the former section would go out in January and February if they were permitted by conservancy and association rules to do so. The objective is trout; and the method of catching them is not fettered by social regulations or any little niceties of taste. The time has come, according to law, for trout to be

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