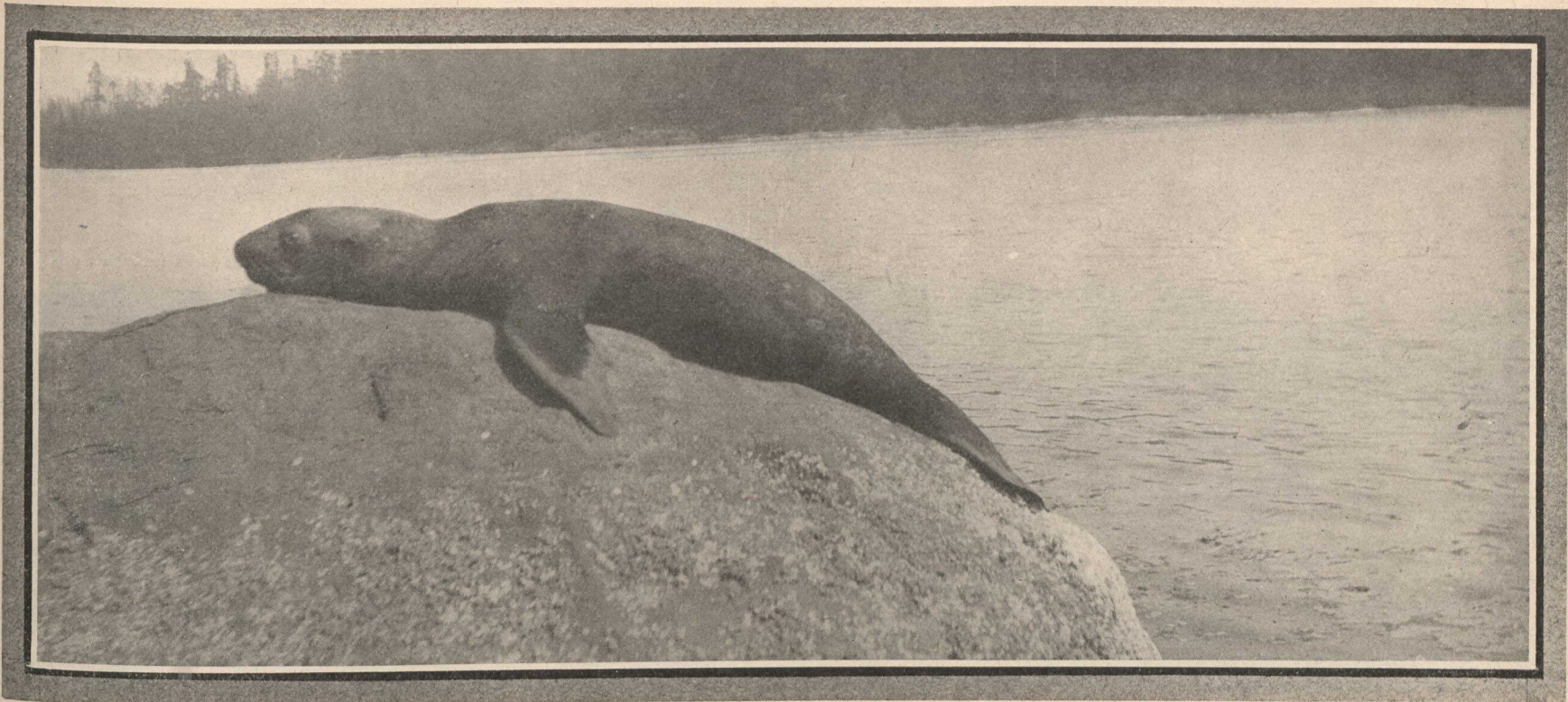




Huge Sea Lion of the Puget Sound.

Photographs by the Author.

MY ASSISTANT'S NATURAL HISTORY

A Camera Study of the Sea Lion

By BONNYCASTLE DALE.

ALL along the inhospitable coast line of Cape Flattery, along with the high cliffs and jagged reef shores of Vancouver Island, in the Gulf of Georgia, in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, in the more sheltered Puget Sound you can see this big brownish animal plunging and splashing; the true Sea Lion with the stiff, bony feelers, that the Chinese use for tooth-picks, standing out like a bristling moustache.

My assistant Fritz, boylike, felt slighted, because, although I had often pictured him as helping in the work of arranging and dissecting my subjects, he never had had a free hand in the taking of the notes and in forming the picture groups, so, as a strike seemed to stare me in the face, I let him have his own way.

"Sir," he burst out, "I have ridden bronchos and mules, and we always rode the colts we catch on the ranch. Yes, and I've been on a few pigs and calves. So, the proper way to picture this beast," and he gave the prostrate Sea Lion a gentle kick, "would be for me to ride it, so get the camera ready." I obeyed.

"Note!" He imitated me to the life. When my hands are soiled with the dissecting, he inscribes the notes. "It has twenty-one semi-transparent feelers on each side of the jaw. Also note that the eye is large and staring-looking and seal brown in colour. I bet he's seen some odd things with those two brown peepers. Do you remember the one we saw in the Straits that took the head off the salmon as clean as a knife? Oh, I must have a look at the teeth," and he pried the stiff jaw

open. "Large, irregular. Never uses tooth powder by the yellow colour. Insiders (the lad meant incisors) long and sharp, four small front teeth and both jaws chuck full of molars. But, say! They are all sharp. Golly! no wonder he can nip half a dozen salmon's heads off in as many minutes. Are you ready? Well, give me that rope. Now —when I get nicely settled—GO!"—and I snapped the big machine and show you how Fritz looks on his odd steed.

We admired the close brown coat of hair that covered the body, the huge hind and fore-flippers. "Look!" burst out Fritz. "Why, he's got toe-nails on his hind feet. See!" Each of the finger-like divisions of the flippers had assuredly a strong nail or claw sticking out through the leathery substance.

"Kindly observe the short stubby tail, plentifully covered with short, brown hair, and I think we will find, on closer observation, that it is well filled with fatty layers over and about the bones." Here the merry lad paused and looked so solemn a young naturalist that I was forced to laugh loud and long.

"As we were reading in those notes on the Coast Indians about their having this great fat beast as a totem I think it would be well for my readers,"—here he paused and rolled from off his deep sea horse—"if I were to form a group showing the native Indian in his costume and head-dress with his totem beside him." And off the merry lad scampered up the bank to borrow a Nootka head-dress from my kind neighbour. Back he ran, book and head-dress and lad a stumbling, plunging mass.

Assuming a student pose, he opened the Indian history and read: "The dancer being clothed in his blanket, with the great-eyed mask on his head, approaches his canoe, pretending not to see his totem that lies waiting on the sand beside him,—Go!" again the machine clanged—"suddenly turns and seats himself beside or in front of his totem, then seizing the head in his hands he sings, Qaqaam, Qaqa, Qaqa — are you ready? Go!" I took this picture and ran over and seized the book. The audacious lad had, improvised the entire history, and not so far wrong either, excepting that he sang the Raven Song in place of a chant to the Sea Lion.

The mask is correctly called the Nootka mask, and the position chosen in walking up the beach was copied from an old illustration, a sketch, showing a young chief returning from his canoe after landing from a four-days' sojourn in the forest, where he bathed and rubbed himself with hemlock branches and sought diligently for the spirit of his totem, the Sea Lion, that he might get a new name and compose a new dance, and later return and perform it. This is part of the initiation ceremonies in the making of the young man into a chief and member of the far-reaching secret societies of these Indians.

Now the lad was busily sharpening a pencil. "Note!" he suddenly cried. I was minus both notebook and pencil! "How like a boy?" he calmly remarked. "Always playing when you should be attending the business upon which we are engaged. I should estimate that this is a female, from



Fritz in the Indian Ceremony.

Fritz and his Totem.

Fritz and his Sea Lion Steed.