

And as I reached the bottom of each ridge it seemed to me I could not struggle to the top, even though a thousand musk-oxen awaited my coming. I was in a dripping perspiration, and had dropped my capote and cartridge-belt, after thrusting half a dozen cartridges into my trousers pockets, and my nine-pound 45.90 weighed thirty. I hardly knew whether I was going up ridges or down ridges. Everything waltzed about me. I ran on and on in a sort of stupor, until, as I got to the top of a little ridge, I saw two musk-oxen about a hundred yards ahead of and running easily though directly from me. And then the blood surged through my veins, the mist cleared from my eyes, and the rocks stopped whirling about me, for there, within range, was my quarry. I swung my rifle into position and dropped on my knee for surer aim. Heavens! my hand shook so the front sight travelled all over the horizon, and my heart thumped against my side as though it would burst.

For a moment I rested to get my breath—and the musk-oxen were still going from me—and then—another attempt—the fore sight for an instant held true—another second's breathing—a quick aim—and I pressed the trigger. What a feeling of exultation as I saw my quarry stagger and then drop! I was dizzy with delight. I gave vent to a yell, which, together with the report of my rifle, sent the other musk-ox into a wild gallop. It turned sharply to the left and went over a ridge, with me following on a run, all the while endeavoring to throw another cartridge into my rifle barrel. But the excessive cold, aided by my excitement, handicapped the mechanism, and the shell jammed.

By the time I had sent the cartridge home, running meanwhile, I got over the ridge, and was just drawing a bead on the galloping musk-ox, when two shots in quick succession turned it staggering, and as it dropped I sent a bullet where it would do the most good—just as Echeena and one dog came running down from a ridge opposite. So that I and Echeena had the honor of scoring the first and second musk-ox. Then I went back over the ridge to look at the one I had brought down. It was a cow. The sex was a disappointment, to be sure, and I should not take this head that had cost me so much to secure; but nothing could dull the joy of having, after a tramp of (about)

twelve hundred miles, killed the most inaccessible beast in the whole wide world.

After I had made sure the musk-cow was really dead, I started again and to the north, hoping I might get on the track of the other two or some other stragglers from the main herd. Probably I went several miles farther, buoyed up by the excitement of my success, but saw the tracks of no living thing.

The sun was setting as I turned around to go back to my musk-cow, where I supposed the Indians would bring up sledges and camp, and I had walked some time when I realized that, other than going south, I had not the remotest idea in what precise direction I was travelling, or just where that musk-cow lay. I could not afford to waste any time or lose myself, for I had no capote, and the wind I was now facing had frozen my perspiration-soaked shirts as stiff and hard as boards. So I turned about and puzzled out my always half and sometimes wholly obliterated snow-shoe tracks back to my fallen quarry, where I arrived about nine o'clock, to find, sure enough, the lodge pitched and the Indians feasting on raw and half-frozen musk-ox fat.

Gnawing a piece of this fat, and hardly able to crawl with the cold and fatigue, I followed back my tracks from here until I found my capote and belt. It was nearly midnight before Seco, badly frozen, turned up to report the killing of two musk-oxen, and we had tea (for the little fire is never kindled until all are in, because the tea would freeze in a very few minutes after making). Several of the men were snow-blind, and what with their groans, the fighting of the dogs over the frozen musk-cow, my ice-coated shirts, to thaw which there was not warmth enough in my body, and a 67° below zero temperature, the night of our first musk-ox killing was memorable.

I had now killed this most inaccessible of all game, and therefore attained the prime object of my trip to the Barren Grounds.

We continued north another week, having other hunting adventures; and when we finally turned southward, had penetrated two days beyond the arctic circle. We made our way back on snowshoes to Great Slave Lake, where I left the party, and by canoe pushed on to the frontier, reaching Edmonton June 12th.