

## HUNTING THE MUSK-OX IN THE FAR NORTH

One of the most interesting animals of the far north of Canada is the musk-ox, and Mr. Tyrrell, in his new book, "Across the Sub-Arctic of Canada," devotes a chapter to the hunting of these animals. In general appearance they look rather like huge, horned sheep, but in size resemble the ox, or, more nearly, the buffalo. They are found generally in herds of twenty or thirty. In prehistoric times the musk-ox occupied a very wide area of the earth's surface, both in Europe, Asia and America, but now his range is limited to the northern parts of Canada and Greenland. "From personal observation," says Mr. Tyrrell, "I have found the southern boundary of the musk-ox habitat to-day to be Hudson Straits and Bay, Chesterfield Inlet, the Thelon River, Clinton-Golden and Aylmer Lakes, whereas in the time of Samuel Hearne, one hundred and fifty years ago, we have his assertion that musk-oxen frequented the vicinity of Fort Churchill, four hundred miles south of their present haunts."

The author tells of his first musk-ox hunt as follows:

It was 11 p. m. one glorious sub-arctic night in summer. . . . In perfect silence our canoe was drawn ashore at the base of the bluff, and, having marked our ground as we approached, my companion and I selected a little gully or waterway on the side of the bluff as the best place for our ascent. The Indians, who were unarmed, crept behind close on our heels, evidently courting the protection of the rifles. The hill being high and steep, we were all pretty badly winded before the summit was reached, so a halt was made to recover breath and nerve, for by this time suspense and nervous expectation were keyed up to a pretty high pitch. A few minutes' pause, however, greatly relieved the situation, and, having examined our rifles, we cautiously crept the remaining distance until, our eyes coming level with the brow of the hill, we found ourselves suddenly within full view of nine huge, dark, shaggy forms, which, of course, we knew to be musk-oxen. They were all within comparatively close range, not more than one hundred yards distant. It is quite impossible for me to describe the thrill of admiration and excitement which now possessed us, but in an instant we selected the two nearest bulls and pulled. Both staggered, but to our surprise neither fell, so without stirring we pulled and pulled again before they fell.

The remaining seven animals, apparently not having located us, were thrown into a state of frenzy and rushed back and forth in a state of wild disorder. Having despatched the first two victims, we turned our rifles upon the next two most dangerous-looking brutes and brought one to earth, but the other, having located us, and with blood streaming from a wound in his side, led the band in a furious charge straight for our position. Nor did we easily evade their blood-thirsty onslaught, but, springing from concealment to our feet, we met them with three deadly volleys. This so demoralized the band that only one young ox got away unharmed. The remaining eight were either killed or wounded. In the heat of the encounter we had forgotten our Indians, but they had thought of themselves and had kept close behind us. They were now set to work to skin and save the best meat of the slain oxen, whilst we proceeded to despatch the wounded. This was by no means an easy task. One old bull (most of the band were males) refused to fall until he had received six mortal wounds, three of which I found from my own subsequent examination passed through his heart, leaving it completely shattered. Others which had run for some distance, were pursued until the huge forms were stretched upon the ground, only the one having escaped.

While the Indians were busily engaged in skinning the oxen, I, with my companion, returned to the camp, and though the hour was now mid-

night, ordered an immediate move to the scene of the slaughter, so that all might engage in the work of skinning, cutting and curing as much as possible of the meat.

While several of the party were busying themselves with the arrangements of our new camp, they were suddenly startled by the horse below of a musk-ox almost at their ears. The young bull, which we had allowed to escape, had returned in search of his comrades, and had given forceful vent to his feelings just at the moment when he was turning a sharp angle of the bluff within a few feet of a tent occupied by two of my companions. Not having been in the tent I can only imagine the expressions depicted upon their faces, but the musk-ox, finding himself in such unexpected company, galloped past the camp and out on to a long, narrow, bare point extending into the lake. Seeing now an opportunity for sport, and preferring it to further slaughter, Mr. F. and I armed ourselves with cameras, and calling out all hands, we arranged ourselves in a line across the base of the point and proceeded to advance upon the enemy, thinking that he would likely take to the water, and that we might there effect his capture by means of a lasso. We were not long left in doubt as to the outcome of the project, nor were we permitted to push our enemy to the extreme, for, sizing up his position and evidently not wishing to take chances in the lake, he wheeled about and faced our line. For a moment, with lowered head and with fury glaring from his protruding eye-balls, he stood at bay, and then like a rocket sped straight for the centre of our line, where stood Mr. F. with his camera.

A less ferocious-looking object approaching in so precipitate a manner would have been sufficient to cause most individuals to take to the woods, had there been any available, but not so with my friend, who posed like a target until at fifteen feet he snapped the flying charger and sprang to one side only in time to preserve his anatomy. Our project had failed, so far as effecting the capture of the musk-ox was concerned, for he was now gone, but it had proved a huge success as a source of entertainment, nor was the play yet ended. Stimulated by the excitement of the last encounter, Percy—and another member of the party—secured their rifles and set off in pursuit of the ox, which exhibited an inclination to return to the place where he had lost his comrades. Several rifle shots were heard in the distance, and after a short time Percy's companion returned. Other shots were again heard in closer proximity and quick succession, and upon descending the bluff I witnessed one of the most entertaining episodes I have ever seen. There on the farther side of the hill were Percy and the musk-ox in hot chase of each other around a huge boulder, the former calling excitedly for someone to bring him more cartridges. Believing my friend to be in no great danger, I instead ran for my camera, hoping to procure a snapshot of the scene, which I did, though imperfectly, for the hour of the night was now 1.30.

As I approached the combatants, what impressed itself most vividly upon my memory was hearing Percy exclaim, "Get out, you brute!" at the same time bringing his empty rifle with a crash across his adversary's adamant head, certainly doing no damage, unless to the rifle.

Others of the party who were less interested in photography than I responded promptly to Percy's appeal for assistance, and immediately upon the accomplishment of my object his was also effected, and the night's sport was ended, at the cost of the lives of nine noble animals.

I might add that, although many other opportunities of working similar destruction were afforded me during the continuance of my journey, no recurrence was perpetrated or permitted, knowing that I had already overstepped the bounds of true sportsmanship.

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