



HUNTING IN THE ARCTIC

On the Trail of the Musk Ox in Ellesmere Land

By HARRY WHITNEY,

Illustrated with Photographs by the Author



Recently all America has been divided into three parts—Cookites, Pearyites and doubting Thomases. Canada, as the land lying near to the North Pole, has been just as much interested as though either Peary or Cook had been a Canadian. We had feebly hoped to discover the Pole for ourselves. As the people possessing the greatest northern coast line in the world we are perennially interested in the land of the musk ox. The series of articles by Mr. Harry Whitney, beginning in this issue, are intended to emphasise

that interest. Mr. Whitney is an explorer and a sportsman; the first white man to meet both Peary and Cook on their return from the Polar regions. His account of meeting Dr. Cook has a flavour as fresh as Robinson Crusoe. He spent a year in the Arctic, the first man to trail the musk ox in Ellesmere Land. The story, descriptive of his experiences, will appear in six instalments, all copiously illustrated by the borean camera; without exception the finest literature of the north-land since the work of Dr. Nansen.—Editorial Note.

WHEN I sailed for northern Greenland on the *Erik* in the summer of 1908 I had no other expectation than to return home in the autumn. I had no part in the Polar Expedition to which the *Erik* was attached. I was simply a sportsman passenger in search of such shooting as the voyage to Etah might afford. Walrus and other large aquatic game would be certain to offer good sport, and perchance some trophy might be obtained of the musk ox, so coveted by sportsmen because it inhabits only the most inaccessible and remote regions of the Far North.

My ambition to secure musk ox trophies had not been realised when the order came for the *Erik* to turn her prow southward, and though I had hardly dared hope for such good fortune, my disappointment was now so keen that suddenly I resolved to be put ashore for a year's big game hunting under the shadow of the Pole. I expressed my desire to Mr. Robert E. Peary, commander of the expedition, who informed me he was establishing a cache at Etah, and very considerably granted my request to be permitted to remain there and hunt musk ox the following spring. And so it was that the *Erik* steamed away without me, and I took up my life among the Highland Eskimos to brave the rigours of an Arctic winter, with no other object than that of sport.

Supply bases and home camps were established at Etah and Annootok, on the Greenland shore of Smith Sound. Annootok, forty miles north of Etah, is the most northerly Eskimo settlement in the world. Here the hunters of the tribe gather with their families in the autumn, to remain throughout

the winter, that they may take advantage of the abundance of land and sea game to be found in the surrounding region.

This section, too, has a peculiar interest in the history of Polar research. Smith Sound has witnessed the struggles and defeat of many expeditions, and the rocks and cliffs that line its shores on either side, could they but speak, might tell the story of many tragedies. On a very clear day one may see in dim outline Cape Sabine, in Ellesmere Land, rising beyond the ice-choked waters, where so many of Greeley's brave men gave up their lives.

Our camp at Annootok was established in a miniature shack, constructed of packing boxes by Dr. Frederick A. Cook, the explorer. This has been his home during the previous winter. It was here I spent the trying months of the long Arctic night, varying the tedious existence with short sledging journeys, during moonlit periods, in search of reindeer and bears.

These journeys gave us sufficient exercise to preserve a healthful condition of mind and body. No words can adequately describe the awful pall of the Arctic night. It is unreal and terrible. The continued darkness brings with it a fearful stillness, over which seems to brood impending doom—something intangible, indescribable, uncanny. The only sound that ever breaks the quiet is the occasional cracking of a glacier, with the report of mighty thunder, startling and unexpected. Intense and severe as the cold may be, any active man can stand it without serious suffering, for that acts only upon the physical being and can be guarded against; but the prolonged, sunless night has a dire

effect upon the mind, which only exercise and diversion can counteract.

It may be imagined, then, with what thankfulness we greeted the first hint of dawn, when it finally appeared, with its suggestion of the blessed light of day. At length the sun raised his head above the eastern horizon, to instill new life and vigour into our half-torpid minds and bodies. With each return he grew bolder, raising his face higher into the heavens and remaining longer, and then I began to plan my hunting trips for musk ox.

It was at this time my Eskimo friends discovered, one day, three moving figures slowly making their way toward Annootok over the tumbled ice of Smith Sound. We could scarcely be certain at first that they were men, but presently our dogs were harnessed to sledges and we were dashing away to meet them. The few miles that intervened were quickly traversed, and what was my astonishment, as we approached, to find one of the travellers to be a white man, and what my further astonishment when he introduced himself as Dr. Frederick A. Cook, whom we had come to believe had perished in the North. For the first in more than a year Dr. Cook was enabled to converse in his native tongue, for his stalwart young Eskimos spoke no English, and the pleasure he must have felt in meeting a fellow-countryman thus unexpectedly after his long exile can better be imagined than described.

The three men were without provisions, unkempt and much reduced in flesh through privation. We carried them on our *komatiks* to Annootok, and there the Doctor recuperated for his sledging trip to Upernavik, where he was to connect with a steamer



The mysterious Musk Ox, the beast of *Ultimo Thule* making his last stand against the dogs of civilisation

Copyright Photograph by Harry Whitney.