

HUNTING AND FISHING IN THE ALTAI MOUNTAINS

WHERE BIG GAME IS PLENTIFUL AND UNPROTECTED

By Chester Wells Purington

NO living species of elk attains to such a size, or possesses so great a spread of antlers, as that found in the Altai mountains of Siberia and northern Mongolia. During the course of a hunting trip in southern Siberia in the summer of 1900, I paid visits at the houses of many prominent Siberians, and almost without exception, magnificent sets of antlers formed a conspicuous feature in their decoration. I carefully measured several sets of antlers, and found that, while several or them measured between six and seven feet from tip to tip, a spread of seven, or even eight feet was considered nothing extraordinary. Hunting the elk,

or "maral" as it is called, is the favorite sport of the Siberian landed proprietors, and right royal is the welcome they extend to a guest during the season—September and the early part of October.

The Mongol Tartars, a semi-wild people inhabiting the mountain country on the border between Siberia and Mongolia, are very familiar with the habits of the maral, and are consequently almost invariably employed by the Siberian noblemen as guides. They resemble very much the North American Indians in facial appearance, and possess an equal amount of ability in trail-finding and general woodcraft. The Tartar horses are used almost alto-



A TARTAR HUNTER.

gether in hunting, as they are sure of foot in the difficult passes of the Altai mountains. The regular price for hiring the services of a guide is fifty-two cents, or one Russian rouble a day. The same price is asked for each horse of a pack-train, whether there be few or many horses. It is a custom for the head Tartar to supply the outfit with one man for each three or four horses taken, the only charge for the service being the condition that the employer furnish the men with dried black bread.

Reared as they are in a country abounding in game the Siberians are excellent shots, and possess armories of the most improved makes of rifles and shotguns. Mr. C. I. Ivanitsky, a gentleman owning large estates and mines on the border of the Altai, kindly allowed our party, during the course of a visit at his place, to inspect his collection of firearms, and it is, without exception, one of the finest collections it has been my lot to see, containing several famous pieces of English and Belgian work-



AS WE JOURNEYED TO THE ALTAI MOUNTAINS.

The Tartars are very clever in calling elk, for which purpose they fashion a long slender horn of wood, much the shape and size of a clarinet, and fancifully carved with considerable skill. No reed or other sound contrivance is fixed in the horn, but the elk call is imitated to perfection by the drawing in of the breath through the horn. The Tartars do much hunting on their own account, and are invariably armed on their trips through the mountains; their weapons being generally muzzle-loading rifles of antique pattern.

manship, of which no duplicates exist. Mr. Ivanitsky also exhibited, with becoming modesty, silver and gold cups and other prizes, both for marksmanship and pigeon-shooting, awarded him not only at Russian meets, but in some of the most important contests held in the cities of western Europe.

Bear-hunting is perhaps a more favorite sport with Siberian sportsmen than that of calling elk. The Siberian brown bear is much larger than any bear in the United States except the grizzly. The large one shown in the photograph measured nine

feet six inches in length. Bears are very numerous along the Yenesei River, and as the peasants do not hunt them to any extent they become very bold, and annoy the farmers by carrying off sheep and cattle from the fields bordering the river. They are shy of men, and in order to hunt them systematic preparations must be made, and a trip of several days' duration undertaken.

Among the Tartar and Siberian peasant

from its pointed end. The manner of using this weapon, after the bear has received the single charge from the rifle of the hunter, is as follows. The hunter places his foot firmly in advance on the ground, rests the unshod end of the spear against it, waits for the enraged and wounded bear to charge, and watching his opportunity, impales him, so to speak, by shoving the dagger down his throat. The bear, thus rendered helpless, is soon put to death.



RESULT OF OUR HUNT FOR THE BROWN BEAR OF THE ALTAI

hunters it is customary to use, in addition to a rifle, an auxiliary weapon in hunting the bear. This consists of a pole, made of a stout sapling, about eight feet in length, and three inches in diameter. To the end of this is firmly bound with raw-hide thongs, a double-bladed dagger, eighteen inches in length, and four in breadth. This is made of the finest Ural steel, and possesses a cross-piece, also of steel, thirteen inches

The mountain sheep, so highly prized as a game animal on the Western Continent, is perhaps the noblest of the animals which the Altai has to offer the sportsman. It is also, curiously enough, unprotected, and yet found in greater plenty than any of the other large animals, except possibly the bear. The sheep are found for the most part along the high ridge which forms the boundary between Siberia and China, and

are especially numerous in the valleys at the head of the river Ooss, one of the tributaries of the Yenesei, near the Mongolian border. Mr. E. Demidoff, in a recently published book entitled *After Wild Sheep in the Altai and Mongolia*, gives the dimensions of one pair of horns obtained by him as fifty-two inches along the curve, nineteen inches girth, and thirty-nine inches from tip to tip.* I was not fortunate enough to get into the part of the country inhabited by the big mountain sheep, but succeeded in getting a photograph of a pair, which had recently been brought into the town of Mirusinsk.

A practically virgin field for tiger hunters remains in the southern Altai, more especially in Mongolia, and also in Manchuria. The Siberian tiger, as he is called, is occasionally found as far north as the borders of the Amoor River. These animals are fully the equal of the Bengal tiger in size and strength,† and more formidable adversaries on account of the heavy coat of fur which they carry. While the skin of the Bengal tiger offers practically no resistance to a rifle-bullet, that of the Siberian and Manchurian tiger is as thick and tough as that of a bear. In Manchuria the tigers are said to be exceedingly aggressive, and are known to attack villages when driven with hunger.

Game of the smaller sorts, such as beaver, sable, hares, otter, etc., and wild birds, including the blackcock, pheasant, wild turkey, grouse, partridge, and a bird not known in America, called a "rapchik," is exceedingly common in Siberia. Many species of ducks, including vast quantities of canvasbacks; and wild geese are to be seen along the Yenesei River and its tributaries, literally in clouds. So plenty are game birds of every sort that during the fall and winter all hotels and railway dining-cars and restaurants are bountifully supplied with them, so that the traveler, if he so wishes, feasts on a continual round of game, at a cost which is ridiculously low.

The fish known as the grayling, rather

uncommon‡ in the United States, but well known in England as a game fish, is a denizen of all Siberian mountain streams. This fish ranges from the size of a minnow up to four pounds in weight, and during the summer takes the fly readily. Good sport may be had in almost any of the countless valleys of the Altai mountain region, excepting where the streams come directly from the melting snows, and are too cold for the fish.

A game fish, which, so far as I know, is unknown in America, runs in the northern waters of the Yenesei River, and does not inhabit the smaller streams. This is the "timain," a gigantic species of salmon, which is known to take a fly or live bait. When properly hunted this fish will rival the tarpon for sport. Timain have been taken, in nets, weighing ten Russian pounds, or three hundred and sixty pounds. Strange to say, the Siberians of the leisure class, although devoted to hunting, are almost unacquainted with the sport of fishing as known to us. Therefore it is only through the Englishmen or Americans who penetrate the country that these northern game fish become known. For the fisherman who is willing to go to the expense and necessary trouble, it is doubtful if the waters of the world can offer a more noble antagonist than this fish.

Regulations regarding the hunting of game in Siberia are exceedingly few, except in the parks of the Altai, which are the private property of the Russian Emperor. As the territory so defined is but a small portion of the vast area of southern Siberia, there is plenty of room for those who wish to hunt elk in any of its haunts. In regard to the hosts of mountain sheep, mountain goats, reindeer, deer, bear, and caribou which roam the vast forests and steppes, there is not, so far as I know, a single restriction placed on the hunting of them. One almost regrets the building of the great railway which brings this hitherto primitive country within a few days' easy journey of London.

* The record head of the *Ovis amoenus*, as this great sheep is scientifically called, shot on the same trip by Mr. St. George Littledale, measured length 63 inches; girth, 19½ inches; from tip to tip, 41½ inches. The record Marco Polo's sheep (*Ovis poli*) is, length, 75 inches; girth, 16; tip to tip, 54½. The record Big Horn (*Ovis amoenus*) is, length 42½; girth, 16¼; tip to tip, 25¼.—Enros.

† They are, however, neither so agile nor so aggressive as the southern tiger.—Enros.

‡ And growing more so daily.—Enros.