



RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND CARIBOU

By P. T. McGRATH

DRAWING BY CHARLES LEYDHISTON BULL

THE annual midwinter slaughter of caribou along the southern coast of Newfoundland was not so great the past season as in previous years, and alien sportsmen interested in the island will learn of this fact with pleasure. The winter was exceptionally mild, and the marshes did not harden over, so that the coast folk were unable to make their way inland to the forests where the deer find shelter, and what is more to the point, had no secure pathway by which they could transport to the seashore for shipment to St. Johns such deer as they might kill.

Were it not that the most conclusive evidence of the fact exists, I should probably be regarded as a romancer when I state that the mail steamer plying along that coast has frequently brought to St. Johns consignments of five hundred carcasses of caribou; that venison sells for two and three cents a pound in the meat markets of the city; that the charitable societies buy it to distribute among the poor; and that in the fishing hamlets the people salt down the meat for use as a staple article of diet during the ensuing spring. Aye, the carcasses have been shipped to St. Pierre in schooners to be used by the French fishermen in baiting their periwinkle traps on the Grand Banks, and it is not uncommon for caribou meat

to be fed to the dogs. The true hunter who loves the sport, and to whom such doings are a desecration, will gasp with amazement at the details of this indiscriminate deer murder which I am about to chronicle; but it must be pleaded in excuse for the residents that only within the past few years has the island acquired any fame as a hunting resort; that, prior thereto, there was nobody else to shoot the deer, and the inhabitants of the island might as well enjoy the meat, even if there was a waste, as to have the animals multiply without being of benefit to anybody. The fishermen, from time immemorial, had pursued the deer when they listed, and it was nobody's business to interfere as nobody seemed likely to be injured, and certainly nobody expressed any decided concern as to the extent of the battues which were being carried on.

The caribou of Newfoundland are the rangifer or woodland caribou (*Cervus tarandus*), as distinct from the Arctic or moorland caribou, better known as the reindeer. Both are of the same species, being sturdy, strongly built animals presenting the same general characteristics, save that the woodland caribou are larger, heavier, and stronger, and carry finer antlers. Unlike most deer, both male and female are thus equipped, the stags carry-

ing splendid trophies, though the horns of the doe are much inferior. The caribou is supposed to be indigenous to Newfoundland, for the oldest Boethiak (aborigines) relics indicate the existence of the animals. They are in appearance like an Alderney cow, with short legs and broad feet which enable them to rapidly and easily traverse the snow and wet marshes. They weigh from five hundred to seven hundred pounds, stand about four feet six inches high, and afford excellent sport to the still-hunter. They spend the winter in the comparative shelter of the thickly wooded sections inland from the southern seaboard, feeding on the black moss that hangs from the trees. They are more partial to the white moss that grows in profusion in the open marshes, but this is covered with snow during the winter, and Nature enables them to secure a substitute. Their thick coats turn white on the approach of winter, and they herd in great companies in the forest glades. On the return of spring they migrate toward the north, where are to be found the rocky

barrens and extensive marshes which contain the lichens that make these their favorite feeding grounds. Here, in May and June, the females bring forth their young, and the little families proceed farther north among the mountains where the summer is passed. Early in September the velvet on the horns dries and rubs off, and

they polish the antlers clean on the stunted larches. The stags are now in their prime, sleek and fat, and the rutting season begins with October, lasting about three weeks. During that time the stags fight fiercely, and do not hesitate to rush upon the hunters if these are incautious enough to get within their sight. Their great, broad antlers are formidable weapons and the clash of these is heard long distances when the stags are engaged in combat. They use their feet also, their sharp, bony hoofs being capable of delivering a cruel wound. Sometimes their horns become interlocked and both noble animals perish—by starvation, by the fangs of the wolves, or by the swifter mercies of the sportsman's knife. A pair of interlocked antlers is eagerly sought by visitors, and is greatly prized if obtained. The antlers are larger and finer than those of the Canadian caribou, and the venison is also fatter and more juicy. As soon as the early autumnal frosts begin to nip the vegetation the caribou start to graze southward again. The period of their migration depends

mainly on the severity of the season; if the snowfalls begin early the deer will hurry south, but if the weather keeps mild they will linger by the way, consuming the white moss of which they



are so fond. By the time winter sets in they are back in their old haunts in the thickly wooded south,

and the annual drama of their movements has been enacted.

The hunting season extends from July 15 to February 1, excepting the first twenty days of October, which are barred for the mating period. But, except for the meat, the caribou are not worth shooting until about September 10. Prior to that the herds are too scattered to give one a fair choice of antlers, and these are in the velvet, and, therefore, useless. When the stags have cleaned the velvet off and are reaching their prime is the best period for the hunter, and from September 10 to 30 is about the best time, as the weather is fairly pleasant. The suspense term in October draws a clear line, and from that until the middle of November most of the local hunters (I use the word in its true sense) go

out, though the weather at the last gets too cold for the alien, unless he is an enthusiast or has equipped himself in such a way as to defy in a large measure the climatic discomforts incident to a region so far north and so exposed to the storms of the Atlantic as Newfoundland is.

Presently I shall deal more fully with the visitors' aspects of the sport, but in the meantime I may be permitted to describe how the gross and wanton butchery of the deer by our own people is caused. Newfoundland, which has an area of 42,000 square miles, almost the same as the State of New York, has its entire population settled around its coastline. It being a fishing country its people must reside largely within sight of the sea. The vast interior is, therefore, absolutely unpeopled, and was virtually untraversed until a few years ago, when a railroad was pushed through it, cutting it, so to speak, in two halves. This railway naturally serves to open up the deer country, because the caribou have to cross the track twice a year, when going north in the spring and when returning in the fall; and the hunters operate from the rails in whichever direction they think best.

Early in November, the summer's cod fishing being over, the coast folk hie them to the uplands for a winter's supply of venison. Every resident in the colony has the right to kill three stags and one doe in a year, and when one recalls the rhapsodies of the bygone poets and novelists over the "haunch of venison" and the pleasures of the chase, the prosaic and matter-of-fact way in which the island fisherman goes about the work of procuring a stock of deer meat must help to the conclusion that the romantic side of deer hunting has greatly deteriorated. From early November until Christmas hundreds of "poor settlers" are traversing the barrens, stalking the caribou and salting down and barreling away the flesh for the support of themselves and their families. All through the great northern bays ample stocks of this provender are being secured for the coming five months, when it shares with the all prevailing codfish the duty of

keeping alive the coast folk who are shut off from the outer world by the unpenetrable ice barrier which then





covers the North Atlantic. Newfoundland is probably the only country in the world where venison, salted or fresh, is a staple article of diet for the masses.

The coast folk make their plans with method and deliberation, and regard this expedition as a purely business and economic one. From the harbors where they reside they go in their boats to the rivers and fiords which strike into the interior. When navigation is no longer possible they debark and continue on foot to the deer country. They carry barrels filled with salt and sometimes go in large companies. When the rendezvous is reached they camp. Then they ambush themselves along a promising "lead," or deer track, armed with long, six-foot, muzzle-loading sealing guns, which they charge with about "eight fingers" of coarse gunpowder and "slugs" of lead, fragments of iron or bits of rusty nails, whichever they may have. They fire point blank into a herd of caribou as it passes, and being usually good shots, contrive to kill almost anything they aim at, or to wound it so badly with these dreadful missiles that it soon collapses. Then they skin and cut up the meat, for these men know a little of every trade, and pack it in the barrels with the salt as a preservative. When enough slaughter has been achieved the barrels of meat are slung on carrying sticks which rest, on two men's shoulders and conveyed back to the boats, those not so laden bringing full stores of fresh venison for immediate use. This crusade is pursued generally in the remoter northern areas where the difficulty of obtaining other supplies is greatest. Other parties of fishermen who cannot reach the uplands by boat go by train of late years, in preference to making long marches. They pay freight inward for their barrels of salt and outward for the packed venison. The trains drop them on the various marshes and there they operate just as the others

above described. They camp near the track side, for their unhandy equipment cannot be carried far afield, and they shoot the caribou on the open moors, in full view of the passing trains. Passengers across the country at this season can count hundreds of deer as the engine speeds along, and see the whole drama of this novel hunt unfolded before them. The fishermen ambush the unsuspecting creatures and shoot them, and then the paunching, skinning, and cutting up follows in quick order. The meat is then carried in to the camps where the salt is turned out into little gleaming hillocks and the packing takes place, while great steaks are frizzling before the blazing fires near each birchen "tilt," or shelter, and horns and hides, with here and there a carcass, litter the foreground. The scene is one of animation and cannot be matched anywhere nowadays. Besides the barreled meat every train brings out many carcasses for transit to the homes of the slayers along the seaboard. Magnificent heads and antlers fill the freight vans and later make gun racks in the fisher's cottages or are sold for a trifle to some wandering visitor next season. Splendid hides are also brought home, to be roughly tanned for floor spreads, or





The Newfoundland Camp of F. C. Selous, the Famous African Hunter.

to be used by the poorer folk to sleep on or cover their beds.

After the caribou have run the gauntlet of this slaughter zone they make their way south without further disturbance, until they reach the south coast forests. Here they are safe until after New Year, when they are subjected to still more murderous battues, which have not even the excuse that they are undertaken to provide food for those who engage therein. This south coast deer hunt is a regular industry, like the catching of cod or the canning of lobsters. The settlers are fitted out for it by their merchants just as they are for the other pursuits named. The outfits consist of advances of requisites for the hunters' families, the deer killed being turned over to the merchant on the close of the hunt to offset the advances received. The settlers and their growing boys form large parties as soon as the winter sets in severely, and, traveling across the frozen marshes, penetrate into the thick woods where the deer are bestowed at that time. They surround a herd, shoot down all they can, and then prepare the quarry for shipment. The heads and lower limbs are cut off and a compact, easily handled article is thus se-

cured. When eviscerated the carcass speedily freezes solid and the product of the hunt is then loaded on dog teams and hauled out to the coast, where the outfitters ship the meat to St. Johns, there to be sold in the open market for what it will fetch. In January, 1900, the mail steamer, which picks up the consignments in the various harbors as she makes her fortnightly trips, brought 411 and 575 carcasses in two shipments. They are thrown ashore and piled up in great heaps on the wharves, where the kodaker promptly snaps them, and as they are carted to the stores of the several consignees they are un-

ceremoniously dumped off the sleds into the snow piles which cumber the streets during the winter season. Here they remain until sold, being cut up with saws, so completely frozen are they, and it is not uncommon to see a row of carcasses stood on end in the snow like hitching posts as an advertisement of the dealer's stock.

Choice cuts of venison can be bought in St. Johns in midwinter for five cents a pound and "the run of the board" for two or three cents, about one-sixth the price of beef. As the close season approaches, when it is illegal to have the meat in hand for sale, the charitable societies purchase the unsold stock for about a cent a pound or less, and distribute it among their patients. If the weather turns mild much of the venison rots and has to be destroyed, and even under the most favorable conditions the margin of profit in the business is very small. When the cost of outfit, freight, cartage, auctions, and commission is taken out of the sales very little remains, and there is good ground for believing that if the government intervened and prohibited this butchery altogether, few, if any, of those who now engage in it would suffer any loss. It is estimated that

between the deer killed by the northern fishermen for meat in November and those killed by the southern settlers in February for sale, about three thousand are slain in all, and this slaughter could be reduced to one thousand by wiser legislation without injuring anybody concerned. So ruthless was the destruction in Fortune Bay three years ago that an enterprising and unscrupulous trader purchased two hundred carcasses which were unsold at the close season's entry, shipped them to St. Pierre in a schooner, and sold them to the French fishermen to bait their shell fish baskets on the Grand Banks. But the outraged majesty of the law vindicated itself in this instance, the export of venison being forbidden, and he was fined \$400.

These facts will serve to indicate to the alien sportsman what the possibilities of caribou hunting are in this island. If he decides to try his fortune he should make his plans well in advance. The best time is from September to November. The island can be reached from New York by steamer to St. Johns, or by rail to North Sydney, Cape Breton. The non-resident hunter must procure a license, belonging to one of three classes:

1. Good for four weeks, permitting holder to kill two stags and one doe, and costing \$40

2. Good for six weeks, permitting holder to kill three stags and one doe, and costing \$60
 3. Good for eight weeks, permitting holder to kill five stags and two does, and costing 80
- Non-resident guides or helpers must have a license, which costs 20

These licenses may be had from any magistrate, justice, or warden in the island, and the licensee must make oath that he will not violate or permit the violation of the game laws; that he will endeavor to remove such meat as he may not use, and have it brought into same settlement; that he will not permit his hired helpers to kill any caribou unless these are to count as part of his license; and that at the close of his term he will return his license with a true endorsement thereon of the number of caribou killed by him and his party, and that they have complied with the provisions of the Deer Act to the best of his knowledge and belief, if the fact be so. It is forbidden to hunt caribou with dogs or with any weapon except firearms, or to set traps or snares to the same end. Caribou meat must be buried if it cannot be used or conveyed to a settlement, but a licensee is permitted to take away from the colony the antlers, heads, and skins of the deer he may shoot under his license, on



In the Caribou Country.



The Woodland Caribou is Larger and Darker Than the Arctic Caribou, and Has Heavier Antlers.

Photograph by courtesy of Mr. James S. Watson, who made the exposure.

making oath that they are not being exported as articles of commerce and paying a fee of fifty cents. The act is framed with the idea of affording every facility to visiting sportsmen, while at the same time providing such safeguards as will prevent abuses in the pursuit of this noble pastime by pot hunters and others.

The visiting sportsman will probably have some trouble in securing guides unless he arranges for them beforehand, through the good offices of the Ministry of Marine and Fisheries at St. Johns. Competent guides are not numerous, as until recent years any large invasion by alien hunters was unknown. But the demand is providing a supply of second-class men at any rate, and as most of the hunters do their stalking within a few miles of the railway the most expert assistance is not necessary. Any reliable man who combines the quality of woodsman and cook will suit for such conditions, but for hunting in remoter regions a good guide is essential. The rate of pay for ordinary guides is \$1.50 to \$2.50; for helpers, \$1 a day. If one is venturing into lake regions a canoe is needed. It can be got for about \$15, or hired for 50 cents a day, all damages to be made good. The former will be found the cheaper alternative. A tent is necessary in any case, and it is best brought along by the visitor, the lighter the better. The same applies to a portable cook stove and equipment. As to the hunter's outfit, it is difficult to advise, as tastes differ so greatly. Some hunters use the rubber boots common among the Gloucester fishermen. Others prefer the sealskin boots which the Newfoundland fishermen use at the icefields. Others pin their faith to high goloshes, because of their warmth. Waterproof footwear of some kind is essential, and a goodly supply of heavy woolen socks should not be overlooked. These can be obtained of excellent quality in the island, if a guide is engaged beforehand, for the village women knit them excellently. Sleeping bags are convenient, as they can be utilized for packing the impedimenta. Rubber mattresses or cushions are desirable and spreads of the same serve many useful purposes. The guides, where the country permits, will speedily throw together a shack or wigwam of boughs for themselves, which not infrequently are more comfort-

able than tents, as they retain the warmth better. These men are content with rough food—pork, biscuit, oleo, and molasses—which is their usual diet; the sportsmen from abroad will consult their own preferences in this respect. I might descant at considerable length upon the splendid sport which alien hunters annually enjoy in this island, but it may perhaps be preferable that I should cite the testimony of other witnesses. Admiral Sir William Kennedy, known as "the Nimrod of the British Navy," in one of his books unburdens himself thus:

"In my opinion Newfoundland is the finest sporting country it has ever been my lot to enjoy. I have fished in every river, crossed the island from East to West, and hunted in every part of it, and not only is there deer stalking but very fair grouse shooting and also salmon and sea trout fishing. But the sport par excellence is with the rifle, hunting the caribou or woodland reindeer. The animal is a finer beast than the Norwegian reindeer and carries more massive antlers. The sport I enjoyed on these occasions would fill a volume, but I have not space to relate it here."

Dr. S. T. Davis, of Lancaster, Pa., who hunted here a few years ago and published a book descriptive of his experiences, states in it that during a twenty days' trip on the White Hills, inland from Halls Bay, his party saw over nine hundred deer, by actual count; and the marsh which was the scene of their operations was not of very large extent. The author of the book brought down a splendid stag, whose weight was not less than six hundred pounds and which yielded him "the largest and most perfect woodland caribou head in America, basing this opinion on specimens carefully examined wherever an opportunity was offered, including those at the Sportsmen's Exhibition recently held in Madison Square Garden, New York." Some of the dimensions of these magnificent antlers were as follows: Length of horns, from hair to tip, 42 inches; spread, from tip to tip, 32 inches; points, 47; circumference of entire rack, 11 feet 9 inches. With this trophy he might well be a proud man! His book also details the circumstances attending the killing of the other prizes they brought down. For instance; under one day's

hunting we find the record that two of the party "in forty-five minutes had killed four deer and sighted fifty-one."

As a further illustration of the ease with which the "hunting" is done, I might cite the experience of a party of six young men from St. Johns, who took a week's trip to the uplands last September. They chose Howley Station, on the Topsails Ridge, one of the best deer parks in the island, and located at a miner's shack two miles from the station, but right on the line of railway. Caribou were abundant, crossing in droves of hundreds each day.

They might have killed their quantum the first day out, but refrained as they were seeking good antlers. They would walk along the track and sit on the sleepers until the deer came by and then would bowl them over. The leader instructed the others not to shoot, if it could be avoided, until the animals were actually crossing the rails as to down them then obviated the necessity of carrying the meat a long distance, for they borrowed a trolley from the stationmaster and by means of it could transport their day's kill to camp each night with the minimum of toil. Sometimes the deer would become alarmed at a passing engine, and show a reluctance to cross the track. Then the party would stalk them. On one occasion W— and M— were together when W— in drawing on a caribou found that his cartridge had jammed. M—, who had killed one deer, handed him his gun and took the other. W— continued his stalk and M— was about to begin breaking up his prize when a splendid doe made toward him. Her left hind leg was broken by an explosive bullet (they all carried explosive rifles), but she was making good time with the three legs when she saw him.

In her surprise she fell back on her haunches and he rushed up with the stock of the gun raised to brain her. Suddenly remembering that the stock was weak and fearing to break it, he changed his grip and struck her with the butt of the piece below the horns as she tried to rise. Then he dropped his gun, drew his knife, and dodging her forehoofs, which were menacing him as he closed, stabbed her to the heart twice and she tumbled over lifeless in the marsh, proving to be a very fine animal, one of the best killed by the party during the whole time they were on the grounds.

The next day M— shot a young stag and, although when it was cut up the heart was found to have been blown to minute particles by the explosive bullet, the animal ran forty yards from where it was struck before it fell. As the party were returning home a herd of caribou was overhauled by the train, then going about twenty miles an hour. The deer, alarmed,

deflected and ran along parallel with the train about two hundred yards distant. One of the hunters hastily loaded his rifle and, taking position on the steps of a car, fired at the best caribou in the group and brought it down. The conductor stopped the train, the carcass was got aboard, and the journey was resumed, the incident being no surprise to the local passengers, though aliens would regard it as rather strange in connection with an express train.

One of the Standard Oil magnates, who owns a hunting lodge in one of the remoter sections, has it located at the base of some high trees in the upper branches of one of which he has constructed a shade or



lookout. In this eyrie a guide is constantly stationed to watch for the passing of caribou, for the place commands one of the best leads in the region. When the guide sights a herd he presses an electric button, which actuates a bell in the lodge below and summons the owner to the lookout. There, with his glasses, he surveys the herd, and if it evidences the possession of a likely head he descends and proceeds to stalk it. Otherwise he returns to his pipe and book in the lodge while the guide watches for another promising specimen. Other wealthy Americans have practically pre-empted territory which hunters not so generously dowered cannot afford the expense of reaching, but in spite of this there is ample opportunity and excellent vantage ground for all who are likely to visit us for some years to come.

Most of these are true hunters, who would scorn to do an unsportsmanlike act, but some who lack these essentials have brought discredit on all by their actions last season and the year before. They shot more than their quantum of caribou, cut off the heads, and left the carcasses unburied and destroyed several promising sections, because the pollution of the air from the rotting bodies drove the live deer in other directions. An effort was made to locate the more glaring offenders, but it failed, as guides are loth to give evidence against those who employ them, but more

stringent enactments are now contemplated to prevent a continuance of this abuse. Yet this is nothing to the harm done by the residents of Newfoundland, who not only kill great numbers, but wound so many more with their slugs and cruel missiles.

The most competent observers maintain that if the present needless and unbridled butchery of the caribou is not speedily checked the extermination of the animals is only a matter of a few years. To husband it as a great game preserve needs more stringent legislation, a better organized system of guides and wardens, and the prohibition of the widespread butchery which is now carried on.

Meanwhile, the American hunter who comes among us is assured of a hearty welcome and satisfying sport. The chief drawback to the island is its lack of hotels. St. Johns possesses two or three mediocre ones, but none meriting the name as it is understood in the United States. The Reeds, who operate the railway, are projecting one on modern lines, but it certainly will not be built this year though it may be ready for occupancy in the fall of 1903. In the interior there is a sportsman's hotel, termed the "Log Cabin," and in the different hamlets along the west coast it is always possible to find clean and comfortable lodgings and well cooked simple fare.

