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The Hated Rogue of the North—the Wolverine.

Drawing by Charles Livingston Dum

# PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S MISSISSIPPI BEAR HUNT

By LINDSAY DENISON\*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

IN THE margin of so much of the chronicles of the present national administration as have to do with Mr. Roosevelt's recent bear hunt in Mississippi, common opinion has entered the comment that it was a failure. And surely it did seem like a failure when a hunter, who for years, as private citizen or public officer, had made his outings conspicuous by the luck and skill with which he brought down the big animals which were his particular pursuit, went with a special train and a considerable retinue into a land full of bears, only to return without having himself dealt out death to a single half-grown cub—without having burned a grain of powder. But down in the Yazoo delta, in Mississippi, the President's bear hunt will never be remembered as a failure.

"He got three bear," they will tell you in Sharkey County. So at the very outset it is necessary to appreciate fully that the Mississippi bear hunt proper is a communal and not an individual sport, and that the man for whom the hunt is organized is credited with all the killing done by his company and the pack. It was something of a blow to the sense of Southern hospitality—which is no stronger anywhere than in Sharkey County—to find that the President had a vigorous desire to kill a bear himself. It was even more of a blow to find, after this prejudice of the distinguished guest had been discovered, and a bear had been captured at least half-alive to await his pleasure, that he refused, with something very like scorn, to put the finishing bullet into it.

From the moment the President declined to act as executioner for a bear which was tied to a tree and was too much exhausted to stand on its feet, the Mississippi hunters made up their minds that it was almost beyond possi-

bility to meet the peculiar bent of Mr. Roosevelt as a sportsman. They regarded the entire expedition as abnormal; and, for that matter, it was.

Indeed, one of the leading Mississippi newspapers went so far as to announce, on the second day of Mr. Roosevelt's presence in the state, that he and his hosts had "outraged all the ethics of bear hunting" by arbitrary restriction of the membership of the hunting party. It must be acknowledged that this dread charge may have been inspired by the discovery that this particular newspaper's reporter was not to be permitted to follow at the President's heels from dawn to sunset as long as the camp lasted. But fairness compels the admission that the accusation had in it the warp and the woof of truth. The "ethics" of the traditional Yazoo delta bear hunt could hardly be made to conform with that privacy and safety which must hedge about any presidential diversion. Really, it is very difficult for a president to play. One is reminded of a Sunday morning, in the Little Sunflower camp, when the President rode off into the woods alone and without a gun, to rejoice himself with that luxury of solitude which a president enjoys more rarely than any citizen of these United States; he had hardly crossed the ford into the tangle beyond the river, when one of his hosts ordered Holt Collier, the negro guide, to follow and keep him in sight.

"I suppose," the President said afterward to a friend, "that the dear kind folks were afraid something would jump out of the woods and bite me."

The President's first invitation to join a Mississippi bear hunt came from Governor Longino, of Mississippi. He was informed that Governor Heard, of Louisiana, and some twenty or thirty other distinguished statesmen and planters and business men of Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi, would

\*Mr. Denison was one of three special correspondents to accompany the President's party.



The President.

President Roosevelt Fording the Little Sunflower River to Begin the Day's Hunt.

be of the party. With the most cordial desire to become acquainted with these representative southerners, the President could not bring himself to contemplate their invitation approvingly. It is even reported that he compared the prospect of the projected hunt to the leading of a charge of cavalry on a herd of cattle in the stockyards. As has been admitted before, there

wondering how he could go hunting down there without taking a great crowd along, to him came Stuyvesant Fish, president of the Illinois Central Railroad. Mr. Fish knows his railroad from Chicago to New Orleans, as well as the farmer's boy knows the path from the barn to the cow pasture. He knew all about the bear country. He knew bear hunters, and he then and there invited the Presi-



Holt Collier, the Famous Negro Scout, Guide, and Bear Hunter.

are some forms of sport against which Mr. Roosevelt seems to have an unreasoning prejudice.

But the invitation set him to reading over again Wade Hampton's chronicles of Mississippi black bear chasing. From them he gathered that there was still, fairly close at hand, an opportunity to enlarge his experience in hunting big game. While he was still

dent to enjoy a bear hunt without political complications, and without becoming one of an invading army in the swamps. The President accepted gladly. Mr. Fish wrote to Mr. John M. Parker, of New Orleans, a cotton factor, whom he knew had hunted in the delta. Mr. Parker wrote to E. C. Mangum, of Sharkey County, who owns and manages four cotton plantations on the edge



The Presidential Hunting Camp on the Little Sunflower.

of the bear cane brakes. Mr. Mangum wrote to Holt Collier, the negro guide, former Confederate scout and a marked character through all the delta; to Major George Helm, to Hugh Foote, and to Leroy Percy, all crack shots and all familiar with jungle hunting, as every planter and Mississippi gentleman must be. Mr. Fish wrote to Judge Dickinson, the general solicitor of the railroad. Mr. Roosevelt, asked to invite a guest, sent for John McIlhenny, a young man of New Orleans, who had been under his command in Cuba. It was, of course, understood that the Secretary to the President, Mr. Cortelyou, and the President's surgeon, Dr. Lung, should accompany him. It will be seen, therefore, that with the sincerest desire in the world to keep down the membership of the party, there were already ten white men in it. What would have been the number if there had been forty hosts, most of them men whose political situation was such that they could not afford to alienate a friend by declining to issue an extra invitation, would require a census expert to determine.

Of course, the President cannot stir from Washington without a following of stenographers, for his own emergencies, and federal guards and press reporters. Only one stenographer went down to Mississippi, and he was left at the railroad to receive despatches at the telegraph station. As no anarchists or lunatics inhabit the Sunflower wildernesses, the federal guards likewise remained at the railroad. The number of reporters had been officially cut down to three, representing the three news agencies, which, between them, supply news to every newspaper in the world, and these three were furnished with passes to the camp, but necessarily made their headquarters at the telegraph station. The absence of the President in the woods makes it possible for wicked and malicious persons to make money in Wall Street by circulating false information of startling importance unless rumor is forestalled by the knowledge that the press associations are as closely in touch with the President as anybody can be, and will send out the first news concerning anything that he does and anything that may happen to him.

But against all the rest of the world, the road between Smedes' plantation and the Little Sunflower camp was guarded by negroes armed with repeating rifles. These pickets

were armed not only with guns, but with "white man's orders," which made the guns more than empty threats. This was demonstrated. A young man of Vicksburg contemptuously facing the muzzle of one of these rifles on the outskirts of the camp, remarked meaningly that it was a new thing in Sharkey County for a negro to presume to raise so much as his little finger against a white man.

"Dass all right," stammered black Wallace, trembling with a peril which he knew right well was not a whit less than that of the young man in front of him, "but I done got mah ordahs fum white folks."

And the young man turned in his tracks, went back to Vicksburg, and wrote of "outraged ethics."

They told us at first that we would come to a horrible end, if we attempted to follow the trail to the camp without a guide. They told us painful stories of men lost in the jungle, with nothing but lizards and snails to eat and bayou water to drink. It was, to be sure, hardly as plainly a traveled road as Broadway, but we were unable to discover any reason why one wide enough awake to see a blazed tree a hundred feet ahead should ever lose himself on it. The road from the Smedes siding ran for four miles through Smedes and Kelso plantations; wide stretches of cotton-fields once picked over, but now white again with the opening of late maturing bolls. Back of the fields were the gaunt tracts of "deadened" timber, which defined the planter's next step into the frontier between swamp and cultivated land. Along the road, in the middle of the fields, and back in the "deadenings," were the white-washed cabins of the negroes. Now and then a black woman appeared at a cabin door. There were no men in sight, either about the houses or in the fields at work. They were all over at Smedes, standing along the siding, regarding the President's special train with awestruck eyes. Leaving the plantations, the road wound through four miles of open forest, carpeted with a brier tangle knee high, which made travel anywhere out of the trodden trail almost impossible. Here all the trunks were much darker in color for fifteen feet from the ground than they were above, showing the effect of the annual flood, which about Smedes is referred to only as the "Yazoo baocwater." Explaining the marks on the trees, Jim, the guide, waxed eloquent in de-

scribing the prowess of a Mr. Hamilton, who used to hunt bears through these woods in boats in the backwater season.

Then came Coon Bayou, a four-mile-long mud gully, where the flood water caught and lay stagnant through all the summer and fall, attracting bear and deer and raccoons. A deer went trotting back into the bushes as we slid down the slimy incline into the bed of the bayou. A flock of mallard ducks rose with a roar of wings and a flash of white, fifty feet beyond. Scrambling up the other side, we were in the real delta swamp. Briers and creepers were knit together between tree trunks and saplings, so that it seemed as though a sickle or a scythe must have been necessary for one who would leave the trail. There were banks of brier tangle twenty and thirty feet high, and from fifty feet to an eighth of a mile in length, looming up in the forests on either side. Time and again there were places where the trail had been out with axes, like a tunnel, through the jungle. In another mile we were in the camp.

It was a simple enough camp. Four A tents in a row, on the edge of the slope down to the river; a big shelter tent for the negroes, back in the edge of the clearing; piles of fodder and bedding for the mules and horses tethered in a wide semi-circle between the two; in the middle of the open space a great cypress log, against which the camp-fire was built, and a bench burdened with water-pails and tin washbasins; at the end of the row of white men's tents another bench, the dining-table, just too high for a man to eat from in comfort if sitting, and just too low for one who would eat standing, and the cooking shanty; dogs everywhere, followed about by negroes armed with blacksnake whips, and shouting protests about the uttermost impossibility of teaching any four-footed creature the deference due to the President of the United States.

The river itself, on the bank of which stood the camp, is a fast-flowing, mud-banked stream. The water is quite clear, and, according to report, is full of small-mouthed bass, which it pleases the Sharkey County citizens to call "trout." The feverish anxiety of everybody in camp to make a bear face the President, however, was so intense that no one had any time for serious attention to fishing. Across the river was a jungle like that which hedged about the camp on the civili-

zation side, and extending for several miles over to the main Sunflower River. Into this jungle Holt Collier started his dogs.

They were a pack without monotony. Old Remus, who has been on his last hunt as often as Patti has made farewell tours, was a gaunt and clean limbed, if decrepit, beast, with a foxhound's body and a bloodhound's head. Then, there were more or less pure-blooded foxhounds, plain "yaller dogs" of the conglomerate and unlimited variety that hangs about every negro cabin and one lone "fice dog." One never sees "fice dogs" at a dog show, somehow, but the breed is plainly enough defined in the South, and is maintained with some purity. It is more like the Yorkshire terrier in conformation than any other breed; the color is usually a careless mixture of black, gray, and tawny yellow in varying proportions. There are invariably long, piratical whiskers hanging over the lower jaw, and if there was ever a fice dog of decent temper, his name has not been embalmed in tradition. That there was but one fice dog in Holt Collier's pack was a serious deficiency, because the bear hunter relies upon the fice to harry the bear and bite his flanks, and run away to bite again as soon as the bear has turned his head. Jocko, Holt's fice, was a valiant little scoundrel, but not equal to the emergency that confronted him the first time the pack came up with a bear. He fell, sorely wounded, in the conflict and was brought back to camp a helpless invalid. Thereafter none of the fights between dogs and bear were long enough sustained to allow the hunters time to catch up. Had there been ten more, or even five more, dogs like Jocko, there would have been no such opportunity as there has been for funny editorials.

But that was a great fight while it lasted; that fight with the first bear. The dogs had found his trail early in the morning, and had chased him four miles down the Little Sunflower and four miles back. It was a warm day, and the pace was fast. The bear was very, very tired. Because the bear was so far ahead of the dogs, and the President was not used to cane-brake riding, he was taken, against his protest that he wanted to ride with the dogs, to a spot past which Major Helm and Mr. Foote told him the bear must surely run. They waited there all the morning and late into the afternoon, while the tooting of the horns of Holt Collier and Mr. Parker, and the yapping and

baying of the pack died out of hearing. Now and then they heard it again, but never apparently approaching them. At last they came back to lunch. When they had been gone from the spot two hours or more, though, the bear did return. It was a sorry return. He was wearied nearly to death, and was looking for a water hole. Behind him, in front of him, all around him, was the angry and frantic pack. Spurring his horse almost over him was Holt Collier, shouting and cursing.

"Gwan, you fool bear!" he yelled, "Gwan up a tree. Gwan up a tree, or I'll kick you up one!"

Now and then the grim, bearded, black face would be turned to Mr. Parker, who was riding close behind, and indignantly complain:

"Mr. Parker, sah, can't you please, sah, come forward an' tell dis yer bear in polite language dat he'll have some regyard for our feelin's and dat he is desired to get up a tree whilst we all goes and gets de Colonel?"

But the bear lacked all the instincts of true southern hospitality, and kept straight on to his water hole. He fairly fell into it when he found it. The dogs piled on top of him, Jocko first. There was a flashing confusion of black, hairy fore feet beating them off—of white teeth snapping here and there at the squirming mass; squeals of wrath and pain from the dogs were lifted in a deafening chorus. Then the bear rose straight up on his hind legs and stood waist deep in the water. In the grasp of his mighty fore legs he had a curly yellow cur that was Holt Collier's especial pet.

"Leggo mah dog, bear!" howled Holt, leaping from his saddle, rifle in hand. Bear and dog fell back into the muddy pool. Holt could not shoot without the risk of killing two or more of the pack, as well as the bear. He clubbed the rifle and leaped into the battle.

"Leggo mah dog!" he shouted again, and swung the stock of his gun through an arc that landed at the base of the bear's skull, and twisted the steel frame of the stock. The bear let go of the dog; but it was too late; the dog was dead. The bear, too, seemed to lack further interest in the proceedings; but he was not dead, and Holt tied a rope about him and dragged him up the edge of the pool and tied him to a tree. Five or six disabled dogs, including

Jocko, were helped ashore. Then Holt sent a negro boy, who had come trailing after, running to camp to "tell the Colonel we done got de bear at bay an' are a' waitin' for him."

The close of the tragedy is now historic. Every newspaper reader knows how the President stopped short when he saw what was expected of him, and between laughter and indignation requested Mr. Parker to end the victim's life with a hunting knife. The President's hosts were very much chagrined.

"Why, sir," said one of them to me afterward, "if I'd had the slightest idea he was going to feel that way about it, sir, I'd 'a' had those ropes cut off that bear long before he came in sight."

After this unhappy experience the President begged in vain to be allowed to ride with those who were following the hounds. It wouldn't do, the old hunters told him. It wasn't the way. If he really wanted to meet a bear, while the bear was still enjoying complete energy and fighting capacity, he must put himself in the hands of one who could tell by experience which way the bear was going to run, and so head the beast off. For four days this plan was tried. The guide invariably guessed wrong. There were terrific rides through briars and tangles—rides which covered the face and hands with scratches, and almost dragged one from the saddle at every jump of the horse; there were, nervous waits in the gloom of the woods, when the bear seemed to be coming straight to destruction. But every bear went the other way in the end. One cub, to be sure, was run down and killed by the dogs; another was chased nearly ten miles and killed by Tom McDougall, one of Mr. Mangum's clerks, when there were but three dogs left in the pursuing pack, and not another man within six miles. The others ran until they were safely away, for there were no Jockoes to stop them.

But even though he did not bring back a bearskin punctured with a bullet hole from his 30-30, and even though he had never a chance to bring the butt of the gun to his shoulder, Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Fish, and those who accompanied them into the swamp, came out much richer than they went in. Aside from the complete freedom from official cares, and indeed, from a knowledge of what was going on in the rest of the world—that stenographer at Smedes was a most wise and valuable young man, and what little



filtered through him went to Mr. Cortelyou and not to the President—there remained the memory of the long talks around the camp-fire at night, when Collier, sitting apart, as he felt that a dependent should, but speaking simply and fearlessly, as became one who knew, despite his color, he was no less of a man than any of the officials or planters or lawyers or brokers about him, told the wonderful story of his life as a "white man's negro"—how at white men's bidding he had killed white men and had gone unscathed; how he had met Union soldiers in hand-to-hand conflict; how he fought off a band of vigilantes that had planned to take his life without just cause. The homely figure of Swint Pope, cook and justice of the peace stands out as he came to the dinner-table wiping his hands and asking Mr. Fish to excuse him for a moment while he went to the outposts and signed some papers which had been brought out to him from civilization, explaining: "They's some appeal bonds in some cases I decided against yo' railroad, suh." There was the memory of Swint's cooking, sweet potatoes fairly candied with their own sweetness, and pork gravies and turkey hashes, whose odors, floating through the wilderness, were a more certain recall signal to the hunters than all the horns ever taken from cows' heads. There was the instructive picture of Holt Collier and of some of the white men, too, dipping their horns into the water hole where the first bear had

died, and drinking their full of a purée of bear and dog and mud, all held in solution in water that had been standing for at least eight months. A northern bred man would have found such a dose a deadly sure summons to swamp fever. Then there was the wonderful privilege of meeting these gentlemen, typical of the modern South, with all the courtesy and consideration of the old days, and all the shrewdness and the positive progression of the now. It will be long, indeed, before any of the party forgets the frank conversations that passed up and down the line as they rode through the cool of the early morning, down bridle paths walled with hanging green, each man balancing a rifle on his hip, and the dogs ranging through the briers underfoot.

The President's bear hunt was a great success, even though it was a very different success from that which he may have anticipated when he accepted Mr. Fish's invitation. And Mr. Roosevelt was sufficiently initiated into the nature of Yazoo Delta hunting to declare that, before he is three years older, he will go back to the Little Sunflower, and, with Holt Collier as his only guide, will chase bears until he comes up with one and kills it, running free before the dogs. And then, he has declared, he will invite all his hosts of this last fall's hunt to come join him and be his guests, and, to the full bent of their kind hearts, protect him from dangers and hardships that he does not want to escape.

