

"ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF, WELL TOWARDS THE SUMMIT OF THE MOUNTAIN."

WINTER HUNTING OF GOAT AND SHEEP IN THE ROCKIES

By J. W. Schultz

WHEN viewed from the plains of the eastern slope in winter, the northern Montana Rockies present a most forbidding aspect. Except where patches of timber darken their sides, they loom up cold and white, covered with a mantle of snow many feet in depth, and for days at a time their summits and needle-like peaks are lost in a swirl of gray storm-clouds.

One would naturally think that at this inclement season the sportsman, no matter how enthusiastic, would be content to look at them from the windows of his cosy ranch instead of planning how to invade their snow-bound fastnesses. But autumn after autumn I had traveled among them with a pack-train, and I had come to believe that if certain obstacles could be overcome, a winter hunt might prove a better way in which to secure a head or two of mountain game.

I have tried it, and talk no more to me of pack-trains and the back of a wall-eyed cayuse, ye summers-day hunters! I have experienced all the woes inseparable from their use. Have I not cut trails for them through miles of down timber, brush, and lodge-pole pines standing as thick as hair on a dog's back? Have I not helped yank every animal out of each succeeding mud-hole and bog? Have I not run until my breath was spent, and fallen a thousand times, and skinned my shins, and had my eyes nearly gouged out by the brush, in vain attempts to drive the beasts back into the trail which they never would follow? And haven't I been moved to deep anger at their obstinacy? I am done with them forever! I have found more tractable servants; the snowshoe has taken their place. In my stable hangs a long row of pack-saddles, panniers, swing and lash ropes, and cinchas; I shall give them to my bitterest enemy, and advise him to go on a long mountain hunt with a pack-train.

On each of our winter hunts we

divided our hunt into two parts. First, a few days on the summit of the range for goats, and then a short trip to the mountains of the eastern slope for bighorn. We were accompanied both trips by Jack Monroe and Joe Carney, two of the best guides and mountain men in the West, and to whose untiring efforts our success was in a large measure due.

Leaving the cars at Bear Creek section-house, seven miles west of the summit, inside of an hour we had our packs all arranged, and strapping on our snowshoes walked northeast for three miles, through a low pass, to Oley Creek. The snow was very deep, some seven or eight feet on the level, and from twenty to thirty where it had drifted, but it was so well settled and firm that the bows of our shoes did not sink below the surface. At the end of the pass we descended a long, steep hill into the valley, and turned up it towards the summit of the great range.

We had made barely a quarter of a mile when we came to a yard of elk, but did not molest them, as they were not the kind of game we were after; and, then, no sportsman would take such a mean advantage of them. Their trails from patch to patch of willows were so deep that their backs were nearly on a level with the surface of the snow, as as they could make but little progress should they leave these trails, there was no help for them had we chosen to turn butchers.

Oley Creek valley is very narrow, seldom exceeding two hundred yards in width. On each side of it the mountains rise to a great height, those on the north being generally a succession of bare, rocky ledges rising one on top of another to the very summits, while those on the south side have more gradual slopes and are heavily timbered. Proceeding up the valley for four miles, we came to our old camping ground, a sheltered place under the spreading branches of a mighty fir.



THE FIRST GOAT.

It was barely three hours since we had left the section-house. It had taken us a long summer's day a year or two previous to make the same journey with pack-train. And how contentedly, how easily we had skimmed over the level surface of the snow, which deeply covered the brush and down timber, the bogs, and boulder-strewn stream



TIRED! PASS BETWEEN BEAR CREEK SECTION AND OLNEY CREEK.

we had formerly labored so hard to get our horses through! There can be but one better way than on snowshoes to enjoy a mountain hunt, and that will be when we are provided with aerial ships.

With our one shovel, and snowshoes answering the same purpose, we soon cleared a space upon which to erect our tent, cutting small, dry firs for the ridge and supporting poles. Then we made a bed of balsam boughs two feet thick in the back half of the tent, placed a wagon-sheet on it, laid our sleeping bags on that, all in a row, and folded the sheet back over them. Next we put up our stove, and the camp was complete. I must say a word about the stove; it was a bottomless, flat-folding affair, with three joints of telescoping pipe, presented to us by Mr. W. H. Mullens, of metal boat fame. For its foundation and bottom we built a platform of large, flat rocks, which absorbed great quantities of heat when a fire was going, and gave it out so slowly at night that the tent was always warm and comfortable. Often, before morning, our thermometer out in the brush registered 30° below zero and more, yet water in the bucket inside never froze.

When we arose in the morning, while all was still and pleasant in the valley, a severe wind-storm was raging higher up, concealing the mountains in one vast whirl of flying and drifting snow. Our Eastern friends were much disappointed at the prospect, as there was no use of trying to hunt while the wind blew so fiercely, and they had each hoped to kill a goat that day. We managed, however, to put in the day and evening quite comfortably, cooking and eating half a dozen meals, napping, and planning the morrow's campaign.

The next day was cold and clear, the mountains looming up on all sides with dazzling brightness. After an early breakfast Jack and G. started to climb the mountain directly north of camp, while M. and Carney went up the valley to hunt the next one beyond. It was my day to cook, but about noon, having everything in shape, I started out with my telescope, a powerful glass of thirty-five diameters, to have a look at the country.

There was a bare crag jutting out from the hillside just above camp, affording a good view of the mountains on the opposite side of the valley, the southern faces of them, where the goats remain in winter. Having arrived at the top, I made a seat of the snowshoes, adjusted the glass, and began to look for goats and some signs of my companions. There was the trail of Jack and G., where they had climbed a long, open gash in the mountain side, the result of a snowslide in years gone by. Their shoeprints were visible clear to the upper end of it, and then were hidden by a projecting ledge.

On the east end of this mountain there were three goats, a nanny, a yearling, and a kid, leisurely crossing a narrow ridge which the wind had swept bare of snow. Turning the glass on the next mountain east, a large billy-goat came into the field at once. He was sitting on the edge of a cliff well towards the summit of the mountain. Yes, sitting down on his haunches just as a dog or cat does! The goat is the only ruminant which assumes such a posture, and he certainly presents a most ludicrous figure when he does it. Having no neck to speak of, his head seems to have been shrunk to the body, his buffalo-like hump and long, coarse mane rising even above the slender and scimitar-like horns. The expression of his countenance—if the term may be used—is one of silly vacuity; the narrow forehead is dished, the muzzle long and coarse, and on his chin he wears a patriarchal beard simply absurd. Another peculiarity is that his fore legs are covered to the knees with a growth of very long and fluffy hair.

As I continued to study the outlines of this particular ungainly beast he arose and walked to the back of the ledge, and then returned and seemed to stare at something below him and to his left. Dropping the glass in that direction, M. and Carney appeared, crossing a long and very steep incline, where the snow was so hard that they had removed their webs and were punching holes with their gunstocks to secure footholds.

Not far ahead of them the incline ended against a series of cut walls and ledges, and on a narrow shelf, below which there was a sheer fall of several

hundred feet, I discovered another billy, a very large old fellow, comfortably sprawled out beneath a stunted and spreading pine. Occasionally he would reach up and nip a mouthful of needles from the overhanging boughs, chewing it with as much relish apparently as if 'twas the choicest of green and tender grasses. Throughout the winter the leaves of the evergreens—the pine, fir, spruce, and juniper—seem to be the goats' only food.

Owing to the convexity of the incline the hunters were crossing, this billy was all unconscious of the danger approaching him; but the other one, several hun-



FISHING THROUGH THE ICE
AT TWO MEDICINE LAKE.

dred yards higher up the mountain, was getting rather uneasy, walking back and forth on the ledge, and stamping his fore feet, as if uncertain what to do. Finally, with one last foolish stare at the men below, he left the cliff and climbed up over the summit of the mountain. He didn't run; a goat has to be very badly scared to do that, and when he does strike such an unusual gait, he lumbers off about as swiftly and gracefully as a fat old cow.

M. had now approached within fifty yards of the goat, and was preparing to shoot; the animal had raised up on its fore legs and was looking at him, when he brought the gun to his shoulder, and a

second later I saw the beast collapse, give one convulsive kick, and slide down to the very edge of the cliff, where it lay quite still. The little 30-30 Winchester had done good work, as usual. I saw no smoke, heard no report.

The goat lay in such a position that it was an extremely perilous task to get to him, as the ledge had a steep slope from where he had lain to the verge of it where he had fortunately stopped. But Carney was equal to the occasion. I held my breath, though, as I watched him slowly descend, cutting footholds as he went, for a single misstep would have taken him down over the high, beetling



MIDDLE TWO MEDICINE LAKE.

cliff. At last he reached the animal, fastened his rope to its head, and then as carefully ascending to where M. stood, they dragged the animal up and out on the incline. Even that was not a very safe place, for had they slipped, they would have gone sliding down over the hard snow for five hundred yards or more to the foot of the mountain.

In an hour or so M. and Carney returned to camp with the head and skin of the big billy-goat, well pleased with their success. A little later the others came in, very tired, and cursing guns and gun-makers generally. After a long and difficult climb they had managed to get within fifty feet of a fine billy, and G. had pulled the trigger on every one of his ten cartridges, but not one of them would explode. Finally, after the goat had

calmly climbed up to the next ledge, and sat down to stupidly gaze at them again they examined the rifle, and found that the point of the firing pin was broken off. It was a new weapon, had been tested and resighted in New York only a week previously, and had then been in perfect order.

The next morning M. declared that he was more than satisfied with the trophy he had secured, and would hunt goats no more that season; so G. took his rifle, and with Jack went up to where they had left the goat the day before. They were back in camp at three o'clock with its head and hide. We packed up then and there, and shortly after nightfall arrived at Bear Creek section-house, well pleased with our goat hunt.

At one o'clock the next morning the east-bound Overland Flyer stopped on a stretch of bare, bleak prairie at the edge of the foothills, and let us off. It was bitterly cold, and a keen west wind was blowing, as it ever does on these plains in winter. But we didn't mind that; having got our duffle out of the baggage-car, we crawled into our sleeping bags, and rested well until daylight. One of the party said that four or five freight trains passed by during the night, but the rest of us heard them not.

Crawling out of sleeping bags at daylight, we ran over a little hill and down to the cabin of a settler, whom we aroused and induced to cook breakfast, and then haul our outfit to the head of Two Medicine Lake, some five miles northwest of his ranch. We arrived there at three o'clock, and had everything in shape before dark.

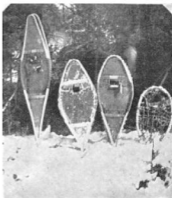
This north fork of the Two Medicine has its source in some basins far back in the mountains, and is fed by the everlasting ice and snow which lies on the flanks of the main range. There are three beautiful lakes on its course through the mountains, and our camp was situated on the lower one. On both sides of us the mountains were rather low, sloping, and easily climbed, and their sides and summits were covered with patches of short grass, which the wind kept bare of snow. It is this grass which attracts the bighorn from their summer range farther back in the mountains, and here

they remain from November until late in May, until after the young are born, when they once more return to the higher and more inaccessible peaks.

For three days after we pitched camp here there was such a severe storm in the mountains that we did not attempt to climb them. But there were other things to do to keep us busy; the lake teems with trout, and we kept the table well supplied with them by fishing through holes cut in the ice. A most unsportsmanlike proceeding, 'tis true, but excusable, as our commissary was running low, and 'twas fish or starve. Then there were grouse, ruffed, blue, and Franklins, and we managed to secure a number of them by diligently tramping through the thick pines and willows.

At last, one morning the sun arose in a cloudless sky; G. had luckily borrowed a rifle from the old settler, and after a hasty breakfast we started out, Jack and G. up the valley, the rest of us towards the first mountain northwest of camp. After going a mile or two, we saw fresh tracks along its side and summit, and with our glasses counted twenty-three sheep, but none were the kind we were looking for—old rams. So, instead of climbing it, we kept well down in the timber until we had passed its upper end, where a wide, sloping basin separates it from the next mountain beyond.

We were just rounding a point of reef rock, and fortunately still in the timber, when we sighted a band of eleven sheep on the farther side of the basin, and pretty high up. Bringing the glasses to bear on them, we found that they were rams, all but two of them carrying immense horns. We saw, too, that there was no possible way of getting within five hundred yards of them. Well, we sat there in the pines all day, hoping that they would come down the hill or move to some place where they could be approached; but they didn't do any such thing, remaining on a bare grass patch not two hundred yards square. They were, as ever, extremely restless, alternately feeding and lying down every few minutes, but never forgetting to keep a sharp lookout on the heights above them and in the valley below. We stayed watching them as long as we possibly



OUR SNOWSHOES.

could, and then sneaked away unobserved. We found G. and Jack at camp, and the evening meal awaiting us. They had been up the valley as far as the middle lake and had seen a number of sheep, but no rams.

The next morning M. asked G. to go with him after the eleven rams, but the latter refused. "It's your bunch," he said, "and one man can approach them more easily than two. Never mind me;



IN CAMP AT TWO MEDICINE LAKE.

Jack and I will try to find some up above the next lake."

That was quite sportsmanlike and proper; but, alas! how many men I have known who called themselves sportsmen who would have rushed out to that ram patch without an invitation, and spoiled every one's sport.



VERILY, PATIENCE HATH ITS REWARD!"

For six consecutive days M. and Carney started out at daylight and tried to get within range of those eleven rams, but something always interfered with their plans; either the wind was wrong, or the band was in an inaccessible place, or a blizzard came up, or a band of ewes were between them and the coveted prizes. In the meantime C. succeeded in killing a fine ram, and it was lucky that he did, for we had nothing but a little flour left in the commissary.

On the morning of the seventh day we breakfasted on meat straight, washed

down with cold water, which Carney declared was a sign of good luck; and so it proved to be. Arrived at their lookout place, the hunters found that the rams had moved around to the right side of the basin, and that by keeping behind a low rock-reef it might be possible to get within three hundred yards of them. M. essayed it, leaving Carney in the pines. There was an open space of five hundred yards to be crossed before the reef would shut off a view of him, and it took three long hours of crawling and sliding through the snow to do it. When the sheep had their heads down, feeding, he moved on, and when they looked up he laid still, often remaining in the latter position so long that he got thoroughly chilled.

At last the reef arose between them, and he walked quickly up to its base, rested a moment, and peered around the end; then up went the rifle to his shoulder and he fired at the uppermost ram. The bullet hit him, for he was seen to flinch, and then, bunching up, the whole band came pell-mell down the mountain straight by where M. stood behind the rock. Now was his opportunity come, indeed; as they rushed by him, he fired four shots, and, one after another, four fine rams keeled over in the snow within a space of thirty yards. "Verily, patience hath its reward!"

So ended our second winter's hunt, and we all agreed that the only easy way to get at sheep and goats is on snowshoes. We have also proved, to our own satisfaction at least, that there is no hardship in camping out in the coldest weather. The Klondike has no terrors for us now.

