



Painted for Oerzoo by C. Rungas.

IN THE HEART OF THE ELK COUNTRY.



AN ELK HUNT IN THE ROCKIES.

BY JOSEPH B. DOE, EX-ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR.

HO! for the land of the wapiti! After many years of waiting for an opportunity I was at last westward bound for the heart of the Rocky Mountains, the home of the lordly elk and the fascinating though sometimes too affectionate bear.

I met my friend Wilson in Chicago, and we journeyed westward together to M—. From there we drove to the little town of Bemis, from which we were to start upon the hunt. Having made all necessary arrangements in advance, we experienced no delay, and found our outfit, guide and pack-train waiting for us.

As we filed out of town and started upon our long ride, foremost was our seasoned guide, that famous hunter and old-time Indian fighter, Bill Nelson, better known among his confrères as "Boss of the Road." Beside this leader, we had two packers, a cook, and three general utility men. These, with a friend named Lincoln, Wilson and myself, made up the party.

Each man, of course, rode a horse en route, and, in addition, eight pack-animals accompanied us. It will be seen that with ten men and eighteen animals our train was rather imposing.

We were equipped with hob-nailed shoes, canvas leggings, rubber boots and coats, corduroy and mackinac suits, canvas shooting-coats, buckskin shirts, flannel shirts, light and heavy underwear, thin and woolen socks, sombreros and gloves for clothing. All of this, except

what we wore, with shotgun, rifle and revolver, ammunition, and sundry useful articles, such as toilet-case, towels, matches, fishing-tackle, small box of medicines, etc., each of us had packed in a large canvas bag made like a mail-sack, even to strap and padlock, and very properly called a carry-all. I desire to say a word of commendation for this method of packing a shooting outfit, especially when the same is to be transported on the back of a pack-animal. It will be found that much less damage and far greater comfort, both to one's self and to the animal, will result if the packs be prepared in sacks rather than boxes.

Lincoln carried a 45-90 repeating rifle, revolver and knife. Wilson had a 38-caliber repeater, a double-barrel 12-gauge hammerless shotgun and a 22-caliber rifle (single shot), also a revolver and hunting-knife. I carried a 45-90 repeating rifle, a 12-gauge repeating shotgun, a 38-caliber revolver and a bowie-knife with a ten-inch blade.

In addition to what I have described, we carried, of course, provisions and blankets, or sleeping-bags, for the entire party, and Lincoln, Wilson and myself each had a trout-rod. There were also two small tents, one for Wilson, Lincoln and me, and one in which to store the provisions at night, or whenever in camp.

The most of the party preferred to sleep under the great canopy of heaven, adding the shadow of a pine-tree when practicable.

Starting in the early days of September, we rode to the south and east through a most beautiful country, skirting many imposing mountains, and crossing a number of beautiful streams.

The first night out, we camped at the outlet of Big Stone Lake, and as soon as we dismounted, Wilson and I got our rods and tried fly-fishing. We caught some thirty mountain trout, averaging nearly two pounds each. This was accomplished in about two hours. The beauty of the scene added greatly to our enjoyment. It was just sunset, and the snowy summits of the lofty mountains to the east of the lake showed to fine advantage, while old Mount Thomas, rearing his majestic head against the glowing western sky, turned a dark, rugged and forbidding face toward his distant eastern comrades. The breeze had left us with the sun, and the mirror-like lake made a beautiful contrast to the brilliant tints of the rosy clouds above, while the whiz of a flock of blue-winged teal hastening to the reeds, the whistle of a pair of golden-eyes above our heads, the quavering cry of a loon, with an occasional splash made by a hungry trout, added life, yes, and music to the scene.

The next day we had a longer and much rougher ride, and, indeed, our progress for six days might well be described in the same language, for a longer distance and a rougher path is a summary of each day's Journey. We were after elk, however, and determined, if possible, to get to those lofty plateaus in the heart of the mountains where alone we expected to find them in any considerable number. So we rode over mountains, into cañons and among fallen timber, through the roughest country we had ever seen, at one time climbing the side of a mountain so steep that even a sure-footed cayuse could not always keep his footing, and, by the way, that means pretty steep, and, immediately upon reaching the summit, commencing a descent in many cases so nearly perpendicular that no one cared to ride, but each one, followed by his faithful steed, slid down as best he could. We followed trails on the mountain side made only by wild animals, passing safely along numerous places were a single slip or misstep would have resulted in a tumble of hundreds of feet, with jagged rocks wait-

ing below to receive us. Again, we rode through fallen timber on less precipitous ground, where the prostrate pine and spruce made such effective obstructions in our path that often several miles of riding meant perhaps but one of progress.

On the sixth day we reached a lonely but beautiful water called Springer Lake. Here we rested two days and did some fishing. We were very successful. We varied the bill of fare with willow grouse and wild duck. Having thoroughly rested both ourselves and our animals, we again took the trail for the elk country.

In one of the passes through the mountains we came across a strange thing, namely, two streams of water running parallel with each other, but in opposite directions. The sources of these two streams were near together, and yet it is literally true that for some little distance one of the streams runs easterly, while the other's course is toward the west, the waters of one finally resting in the Pacific Ocean and those of the other in the Atlantic.

The next day, as we were carefully creeping along the side of a very steep mountain, we saw old "Boss of the Road" stoop suddenly and raise that warning hand. Quickly dismounting, Wilson and I crept forward to ascertain the cause of Nelson's movements. Taking a cautious look over a natural breastwork of rock, a most beautiful sight met our eyes. About twenty elk were right before us, the nearest not fifty yards away. Some of the cows were lying down; the others, with two or three calves and one yearling bull, were quietly grazing, while an old bull, the master of the band, stood a little to one side, with head erect and antlers shining in the sun, sniffing the air, and evidently acting as a sentinel and guardian of the others.

As it was nearly evening, we pushed on and camped that night on Serpentine Creek, and the next day started out to look for elk. Nelson and I, after a long tramp, returned to camp empty-handed, having seen nothing more startling than a great profusion of tracks. These, however, were quite enough to keep our hopes alive. Soon we saw Lincoln and Wilson coming up the valley, and the field-glass showed that they were carrying something

which they had not taken with them in the morning. Their burden proved to be the heart and liver of a bull elk which Nelson had shot some two miles from camp.

Early next morning Wilson, with the aid of a pack-horse and two of the men, brought in the antlers, the two ivory teeth from the upper jaw, the skin of the head and neck, and the hind quarters of the magnificent animal, and right glad were we to enjoy a diet of fresh meat. We found the meat of this particular elk to be excellent in quality, tender, juicy and very fat, although I must confess that for some reason it seemed very much better than any we afterward tried.

The next day, September 10th, it rained hard, and, although I spent most of the day looking for elk, I was again unsuccessful and returned with nothing except those common rewards of a hunter's toil, a wet skin and a ferocious appetite. The next day we moved further to the south and stopped at a beautiful spot on Brimstone Creek, a small branch of the Serpentine.

Here we made a more permanent camp and resumed our hunting. Nelson and I were again unfortunate, and although we found plenty of fresh tracks saw no elk until late in the afternoon, but at last, when almost discouraged and thoroughly tired, we heard that peculiar shrill whistle of the bull.

Creeping through the timber at Nelson's heels, I at last came within sight of a tremendous old bull. At least, Nelson said he was there and even pointed to the spot, but at first I could not make him out. Finally he moved his head, and as the sun glistened on his magnificent antlers I could see the head, but no more, excepting a small portion of his other extremity. He was standing behind a large tree. He was too far away for any good prospect of a disabling shot, and so we lay and watched him for some time, knowing, from his attitude of watchfulness and almost alarm, that the least noise or movement would probably send him bounding away.

Becoming very tired of my position, and hoping to get a better view, I silently rose to my feet. Hardly had I done so when, directly in front and not more than twenty yards away, a fine cow elk walked out of the bushes. I

stood motionless and at first she did not see me, but something alarming, probably some slight scent wafted to her delicate nostrils, made her pause, and, with head and ears erect, she looked in wide-eyed wonderment at me. Of course, I could have shot her, but I wanted horns, not merely meat. So, after sufficiently inspecting the invader of her domain, she gave one sniff and, whirling, bounded away, followed at once by the old bull. He was, however, cunning enough to keep himself well hidden by the trees, so that an opportunity for a shot was not afforded.

Disconsolately we returned to camp. Wilson and Lincoln had not yet come in, and as it grew dark we looked for them with some anxiety. When it became apparent that they were not coming that night, I said to Nelson, "What do you think has happened? Shall we go and look for them?"

"Probably they have been caught by the darkness too far from camp," he replied, "and have been obliged to cam down until daylight. Anyhow, it would be of no kind of use for us to try to look for them in the dark, for we could not see their trail."

The truth and good sense of this remark were so apparent that reluctantly we went to bed, though, for one, I slept but little, imagining all sorts of accidents to have befallen the little party. They did not get in until the next morning, being compelled by the darkness to stay up in the mountains all night, without bedding or shelter and with nothing to eat except some elk liver, which they roasted upon sticks before a fire. This was far from hardship to them, however, as each of them had killed a two-year-old bull elk.

I was much relieved upon seeing them file into camp just as we were getting ready to organize a searching party.

The following day "Coyote Pete" wandered into our camp, a type of the fast-disappearing race of old-time trappers. Nelson knew him well and introduced us. He was an old man with a long gray beard and the usual mountaineer dress, though rather more dirty, if possible, than is usual. He bestrade a cayuse, carried his rifle across the pommel of his saddle, and had a thoroughly acclimated pipe in his mouth. Behind him, also astride of a rather dejected-looking horse, rode "Running Fawn," a

very good sample of a young Shoshone squaw. She was equipped with buckskin moccasins and leggins, short skirt and a sort of jacket of heavy blue cloth, with a broad-brimmed brown hat, looking suspiciously like the campaign hat of a United States soldier, with a repeating rifle under her right leg and an ugly-looking hunting knife in her belt, which fairly glistened with cartridges. The fresh hide of a large silver-tipped grizzly bear was strapped to her saddle.

About this time I began to see that my disposition and reputation would suffer permanently unless I very soon killed an elk, so, after the departure of "Coyote Pete" and "Running Fawn," I said to Nelson, "Suppose you and I go further up into the mountains, where the

wearily looking for a good place, or any place, near a stream, to camp. I, for one, was feeling most dejected and gloomy, and certainly, if one could judge by appearances, the others, even the horses, were in no better mood, when suddenly we heard right ahead, though apparently at a considerable distance, the shrill whistle of an elk. We were too tired, wet and stiff from our long ride to dismount unless the chances for game were very favorable, and so, after a brief consultation, concluded to find a camping place, at least, before trying to hunt.

We rode along a little further, when, without the slightest warning, out of the brush in front and to our right sprang a bull elk; and, catching sight of us, he leaped across the trail and with



THE ONLY TENTS WE CARRIED.

elk seem to feed, and stay there for two or three days, if necessary," mentally saying to myself, "I will stay there until I get an elk, if it takes a month." "Possibly that might be a good plan," said he. Accordingly, on the morning of September 13th, we started early, taking along one of the men, named Johnson, and two pack-horses. We carried our blankets, but no tent, and only a very limited supply of provisions.

We had not gone far when it began to rain, and continued to rain nearly all day. We pushed on, however, over ridges and into cañons, always getting higher and higher, until we had made about fifteen miles to the west and north of Camp Supply, as we called the temporary home we had left.

Not very long before dark we were

mighty bounds and strides tore down the mountain side. Almost instinctively, when the elk first leaped into view I slid from my horse, and, seizing my rifle, tried to pull it from its leather sheath, but, of course, it stuck. A more vicious tug wrenched it free, however, and, whirling to the left, I took a snap shot at the flying animal just as he disappeared in the bushes.

While Nelson and Johnson were re-organizing our little train and catching my horse, I rushed down to see if I could discover any signs of blood upon the leaves or grass, which would indicate that I had not missed. The little bright red spots so eagerly sought for were soon discovered; and, after trailing the wounded animal by fresh hoof-prints and drops of blood about one



WE STARTED IN THE EARLY DAYS OF SEPTEMBER.

hundred yards, imagine my delight when I discovered him stone-dead. He was a beautiful two-year-old and, strange to say, with his horns still in the velvet. He was shot clear through from the loin up through the lungs. I stood proudly gazing at him until Nelson came up. After that worthy had glanced at the game with the proper degree of indifference, he turned to me and said, "That's good. I didn't suppose you could git off your horse in time to shoot. I didn't know as you would think o' shootin' anyhow."

With this glowing tribute to my prowess and presence of mind, I was

well content for that night, and, after dining on elk steak, slept more peacefully, although we were without shelter, and it rained nearly all night.

Of course we took the skin of head and neck and the beautiful horns. We wrapped the latter carefully with grass and leaves and a piece of burlap, to prevent rubbing, and packed them on one of the horses. We also secured two long fillets of delicious meat, one from each side of the backbone.

The next day we rode seven miles further into and up the mountain. We heard elk whistling very frequently during the day, and in the forenoon I



"COYOTE PETE" AND "RUNNING FAWN."

tried to stalk a band which seemed to be just ahead. But the animals seemed to tantalize and play hide-and-seek with me, for one and then another would show himself or herself for a moment, just out of reasonable shooting distance, and then slowly disappear over a ridge or into the woods. After vainly climbing after them for about two hours, I found the altitude too trying to heart and lungs, and, inasmuch as I could not get near the game, turned back and joined the others.

In the afternoon Nelson and I tried it again. After climbing in pursuit of the elusive whistle until thoroughly exhausted, I was lagging in the rear when Nelson turned and motioned quietly for me to come forward. On reaching his side and peering through the foliage of a small spruce behind which he was crouching, I saw a fine bull elk standing broadside toward us in a little glade about one hundred yards away. After admiring him and that crowning glory of spreading antlers for a few seconds, and incidentally recovering breath, I was about raising my rifle when either his keen scent or hearing caught the alarm and he darted away. I took a hurried aim, but failed to hit, and away he went crashing down the mountain. We followed slowly on his trail and I was wishing I had not been quite so deliberate, when suddenly a shot rang out from where we had left Johnson with the horses, and we anathematized that ambitious young attendant for recklessly shooting at squirrels or "fool hens" right in the heart of the elk country. Upon reaching the horses, however, we made ample apology to our faithful squire, for it appeared that the elk which I had so carelessly allowed to escape had circled around the mountain and come running by Johnson within fifty yards. A well-aimed shot had laid the monarch low, and there he lay before us in all the majesty of his "ten points."

That night we camped on the side of Rattlesnake Peak, and, according to Nelson's estimate, some ten or eleven thousand feet above the sea.

Before daybreak next morning I was awakened by some noise, and listening, heard a heavy step not far away and in the bushes back of my head. With the idea that one of the horses had broken his lariat or pulled his picket-pin, I rose up, thinking I might see him,

dark as it was, when out of the bushes came a huge ungainly shape, and my heart gave a tremendous leap as I recognized, stumbling along within fifteen feet of me, the unmistakable outline of a huge bear. I grasped the rifle lying by my side, partly raised it, and then thought, "If I shall fail to disable him with the first shot, which will almost certainly be the case, how much time shall I have in which to repeat the dose often enough to keep him from breakfasting on us?" As it was too dark to take any accurate aim, I lowered the rifle and reluctantly watched bruin disappear in the bushes. From the size of his tracks in the soft ground, Nelson decided in the morning that my early visitor was either a cinnamon or a silver-tip bear.

It had become apparent that our provisions would not last more than two or three days more, so it was determined that after caring for the two elk scalps we had procured Nelson should take them with the antlers to our camp on Brimstone Creek, returning with some additional supplies. This programme was carried out, and after breakfast I started alone up the steep side of Rattlesnake Peak. I hunted faithfully nearly all day without success. Man times I heard the shrill whistle we had learned to know so well, just on the other side of some rocky ride or just beyond a belt of trees, but after creeping laboriously to a point where a good view could be obtained of the supposed location of the game, no sign of elk could be seen except fresh hoof-prints, indicating by the wide distance between them their maker's hasty departure.

Toward evening, however, patience and perseverance were rewarded. Coming suddenly to the summit of a ridge of rock I saw the graceful forms of five elk rapidly moving toward the valley below. Quickly the Winchester sprang to the shoulder! I took hasty aim at one sleek brown side and blazed away. The smoke obscured the view for an instant, and when the game could again be seen I fired a second time at the same animal, as I supposed, and saw it plunge heavily to the ground. Running rapidly past a tree, which now covered the flying elk, I dropped on one knee, and at the crack of the deadly rifle another elk went down on his knees and then, falling over on one side, lay

quite still. On taking an inventory I found that I killed with each shot, and three of the noble beauties lay stretched before me. But, alas! two of them were cows. I was really sorry, but the suddenness of the call upon the judgment, the mistaken idea that I had missed the first shot, together with the eagerness caused by previous bad luck, must be my explanation and excuse.

For a day or two we remained in camp most of the time, going out each morning and evening to look for bear. The carcasses of the elk we had shot made most valuable bear-baits, and we felt confident that it was merely a question of time before bruin would find the meat after it began to get into that unsavory state which would enable him to smell it a mile or two away. The baits were, however, very high up in the mountains, and the air was rarefied and rather cold.

On the 16th of September I had an experience worth relating. I was sleeping with feet toward the east, and on waking in the morning observed that, while it was quite light, the sun had not yet shown itself to the denizens of our little valley. I rose up on my elbow and looked at the horses, which were picketed in the meadow near by. Both of them, instead of being busy feeding, as I expected, were standing facing the west, looking intently up the meadow, with heads thrown upward, ears pointed forward and showing every symptom of strong curiosity. I immediately determined to ascertain what they were looking at, for I thought it might be the bear which had made us a visit a few nights before.

Crawling out of the blankets, I took my rifle and started to investigate. I had taken but a few steps when I saw a cow elk quietly walking out into the meadow. It was this which had attracted the attention of the horses. Surmising that a bull might be following not far behind, I did not even wait to pull on my shoes, but just as I was, in somewhat striking *deshabille*, crept a little nearer, up to a small pine-tree. From behind this screen I had a good view of the meadow and soon saw a second cow emerge from the trees and follow the first, then a calf, and then the old bull himself, and how stately and altogether magnificent he looked! By this time, however, my sportsman's

blood was roused. He had a fine pair of antlers, and although a good distance away (175 yards, as I afterward found), since I could get no nearer, I determined to try a shot.

Taking careful aim at his shoulder as he walked along, I pressed the trigger. Immediately after the explosion, he plunged upon his knees, but, recovering himself, followed the rest of the family into the woods at full speed, I was so excited that, just as I was, I ran to the place where he had been when I fired. I found the marks of his hoofs in the wet grass and the place where he fell on his knees, and—yes, some tiny spots of blood.

Coming to a realizing sense of the fact that I was not in suitable costume for the tracking of wounded elk, I returned to our camp-fire to find Johnson hardly yet awake to what had been going on. I soon enlightened him, however, and then said: "Now, we will dress and have breakfast, and then proceed to track that elk, and we will get him if it takes all day" (more faintly) "unless we lose his trail. We will have all the better chance if we wait until after breakfast, because, if he is badly hurt and we do not follow him at once, he will be apt to lie down somewhere near by and we will not have so far to go."

"Right you are," said Johnson, and at once proceeded to get breakfast, after which we watered the horses, rolled up our bedding, took guns and knives and also the trail. This was practically my first attempt to trail a wounded elk. By being careful never to leave one spot of blood until one of us had discovered another, we succeeded in keeping on the right trail, and in making slow but sure progress. After proceeding in this way, bent over, intently studying the ground for several hundred yards, I was startled by a tremendous plunge in front of us, and there was the bull struggling to get upon his feet. A bullet through his heart finished him.

Very quickly we were both engaged in cutting off the horns and skinning the head of this beautiful specimen. While the antlers were not so very large, having only ten points, they were perfect in grace and symmetry.

On the 18th of September we returned to Camp Supply, on the Brimstone, and hunted no more for large game, except upon one day after bear.