



# AMONG THE HIGH HILLS

By Theodore Roosevelt

[No man living better exemplifies the truth that healthful out-of-door activity gives strength and nerve for moral and intellectual courage than does Governor Theodore Roosevelt. The following story of his hunting days, before war and politics laid their claims upon him, aptly preaches the "recreation gospel" upon which The Outlook's Recreation Number is founded. We reprint it from Mr. Roosevelt's book, "The Wilderness Hunter,"<sup>1</sup> by special permission of the publishers, Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons, of New York City, by whose courtesy also the picture on the second page following is here reproduced.—THE EDITORS.]

**D**URING the summer of 1886 I hunted chiefly to keep the ranch in meat. It was a very pleasant summer; although it was followed by the worst winter we ever witnessed on the plains. I was much at the ranch, where I had a good deal of writing to do; but every week or two I left, to ride among the line camps, or spend a few days on any round-up which happened to be in the neighborhood.

These days of vigorous work among the cattle were themselves full of pleasure. At dawn we were in the saddle, the morning air cool in our faces; the red sunrise saw us loping across the grassy reaches of prairie land, or climbing in single file among the rugged buttes. All the fore-

noon we spent riding the long circle with the cow-punchers of the round-up; in the afternoon we worked the herd, cutting the cattle, with much breakneck galloping and dextrous halting and wheeling. Then came the excitement and hard labor of roping, throwing, and branding the wild and vigorous range calves; in a corral, if one was handy, otherwise in a ring of horsemen. Soon after nightfall we lay down, in a log hut or tent, if at a line camp; under the open sky, if with the round-up wagon.

After ten days or so of such work, in which every man had to do his full share—for laggards and idlers, no matter who, get no mercy in the real and healthy democracy of the round up—I would go back to the ranch to turn to my books

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with added zest for a fortnight. Yet even during these weeks at the ranch there was some outdoor work; for I was breaking two or three colts. I took my time, breaking them gradually and gently, not, after the usual cowboy fashion, in a hurry, by sheer main strength and rough riding, with the attendant danger to the limbs of the man and very probable ruin to the manners of the horse. We rose early; each morning I stood on the low-roofed veranda, looking out under the line of murmuring, glossy-leaved cottonwoods, across the shallow river, to see the sun flame above the line of bluffs opposite. In the evening I strolled off for an hour or two's walk, rifle in hand. The roomy, homelike ranch house, with its long walls, shingled roof, and big chimneys and fireplaces, stands in a glade, in the midst of the thick forest, which covers half the bottom; behind rises, bare and steep, the wall of peaks, ridges, and table-lands.

During the summer in question I once or twice shot a whitetail buck right on this large bottom; once or twice I killed a blacktail in the hills behind, not a mile from the ranch house. Several times I killed and brought in prong-bucks, rising before dawn and riding off on a good horse for an all day's hunt in the rolling prairie country twelve or fifteen miles away. Occasionally I took the wagon and one of the men, driving to some good hunting-ground and spending a night or two; usually returning with two or three prong-bucks, and once with an elk—but this was later in the fall. Not infrequently I went away by myself on horseback for a couple of days, when all the men were on the round-up, and when I wished to hunt thoroughly some country quite a distance from the ranch. I made one such hunt in late August, because I happened to hear that a small bunch of mountain sheep were haunting a tract of very broken ground, with high hills, about fifteen miles away.

I left the ranch early in the morning, riding my favorite hunting-horse, old Manitou. The blanket and oilskin slicker were rolled and strapped behind the saddle; for provisions I carried salt, a small bag of hardtack, and a little tea and sugar, with a metal cup in which to boil my water. The rifle and a score of cartridges in my woven belt completed my outfit.

On my journey I shot two prairie chickens from a covey in the bottom of a brush coulie.

I rode more than six hours before reaching a good spot to camp. At first my route lay across grassy plateaus and along smooth, wooded coulies; but after a few miles the ground became very rugged and difficult. At last I got into the heart of the Bad Lands proper, where the hard, wrinkled earth was torn into shapes as sullen and grotesque as those of dreamland. The hills rose high, their barren flanks carved and channeled, their tops mere needles and knife-crests. Bands of black, red, and purple varied the gray and yellow-brown of their sides; the tufts of scanty vegetation were dull green. Sometimes I rode my horse at the bottom of narrow washouts, between straight walls of clay, but a few feet apart; sometimes I had to lead him as he scrambled up, down, and across the sheer faces of the buttes. The glare from the bare clay walls dazzled the eye; the air was burning under the hot August sun. I saw nothing living except the rattlesnakes, of which there were very many.

At last, in the midst of this devil's wilderness, I came on a lovely valley. A spring trickled out of a cedar cañon, and below this spring the narrow, deep ravine was green with luscious grass and was smooth for some hundreds of yards. Here I unsaddled, and turned old Manitou loose to drink and feed at his leisure. At the edge of the dark cedar wood I cleared a spot for my bed, and drew a few dead sticks for the fire. Then I lay down and watched drowsily until the afternoon shadows filled the wild and beautiful gorge in which I was camped. This happened early, for the valley was very narrow and the hills on either hand were steep and high.

Springing to my feet, I climbed the nearest ridge, and then made my way, by hard clambering, from peak to peak and from crest to crest, sometimes crossing and sometimes skirting the deep washouts and cañons. When possible I avoided appearing on the sky line, and I moved with the utmost caution, walking in a wide sweep so as to hunt across and up wind. There was much sheep sign, some of it fresh, though I saw none of the animals themselves; the square slots, with the



A ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAM

Drawn by J. Carter Beard.

indented marks of the toe points wide apart, contrasting strongly with the heart-shaped and delicate footprints of deer. The animals had, according to their habit, beaten trails along the summits of the higher crests; little side trails leading to any spur, peak, or other vantage-point from which there was a wide outlook over the country roundabout.

The bighorns of the Bad Lands, unlike those of the mountains, shift their range but little, winter or summer. Save in the breeding season, when each master ram gets together his own herd, the ewes, lambs, and yearlings are apt to go in bands by themselves, while the males wander in

small parties; now and then a very morose old fellow lives by himself, in some precipitous, out-of-the-way retreat. The rut begins with them much later than with deer; the exact time varies with the locality, but it is always after the bitter winter weather has set in. Then the old rams fight fiercely together, and on rare occasions utter a long grunting bleat or call. They are marvelous climbers, and dwell by choice always among cliffs and jagged, broken ground, whether wooded or not. An old bighorn ram is heavier than the largest yet; his huge curved horns, massive yet supple build, and proud bearing mark him as one of the noblest beasts

of the chase. He is wary; great skill and caution must be shown in approaching him; and no one but a good climber, with a steady head, sound lungs, and trained muscles, can successfully hunt him in his own rugged fastnesses. The chase of no other kind of American big game ranks higher, or more thoroughly tests the manliest qualities of the hunter.

I walked back to camp in the gloaming, taking care to reach it before it grew really dark; for in the Bad Lands it is entirely impossible to travel, or to find any given locality, after nightfall. Old Manitou had eaten his fill, and looked up at me with pricked ears and wise, friendly face as I climbed down the side of the cedar cañon; then he came slowly towards me to see if I had not something for him. I rubbed his soft nose and gave him a cracker; then I picketed him to a solitary cedar, where the feed was good. Afterwards I kindled a small fire, roasted both prairie fowl, ate one, and put the other by for breakfast; and soon rolled myself in my blanket, with a saddle for a pillow, and the oilskin beneath. Manitou was munching the grass near by. I lay just outside the line of stiff black cedars; the night air was soft in my face; I gazed at the shining and brilliant multitude of stars until my eyelids closed.

The chill breath which comes before dawn awakened me. It was still and dark. Through the gloom I could indistinctly make out the loom of the old horse, lying down. I was speedily ready, and groped and stumbled slowly up the hill, and then along its crest to a peak. Here I sat down and waited a quarter of an hour or so, until gray appeared in the east, and the dim light-streaks enabled me to walk farther. Before sunrise I was two miles from camp; then I crawled cautiously to a high ridge, and, crouching behind it, scanned all the landscape eagerly. In a few minutes a movement about a third of a mile to the right, midway down a hill, caught my eye. Another glance showed me three white specks moving along the hillside. They were the white rumps of three fine mountain sheep, on their way to drink at a little alkaline pool in the bottom of a deep, narrow valley. In a moment they went out of sight round a bend of the valley; and I rose and trotted briskly towards them, along the ridge.

There were two or three deep gullies to cross, and a high shoulder over which to clamber; so I was out of breath when I reached the bend beyond which they had disappeared. Taking advantage of a scrawny sagebrush as cover, I peeped over the edge, and at once saw the sheep, three big young rams. They had finished drinking and were standing beside the little miry pool, about three hundred yards distant. Slipping back, I dropped down into the bottom of the valley, where a narrow washout zigzagged from side to side, between straight walls of clay.

An indistinct game trail, evidently sometimes used by both bighorn and blacktail, ran up this washout; the bottom was of clay, so that I walked noiselessly; and the crookedness of the washout's course afforded ample security against discovery by the sharp eyes of the quarry. In a couple of minutes I stalked stealthily round the last bend, my rifle cocked and at the ready, expecting to see the rams by the pool. However, they had gone, and the muddy water was settling in their deep hoof-marks. Running on, I looked over the edge of the cut bank, and saw them slowly quartering up the hillside, cropping the sparse tufts of coarse grass. I whistled, and as they stood at gaze I put a bullet into the biggest, a little too far aft of the shoulder, but ranging forward. He raced after the others, but soon fell behind, and turned off on his own line, at a walk, with drooping head. I followed his tracks, found him in a washout a quarter of a mile beyond, and finished him with another shot. I walked back to camp, breakfasted, and rode Manitou to where the sheep lay. Packing it securely behind the saddle, and shifting the blanket roll to in front of the saddle-horn, I led the horse until we were clear of the Bad Lands; then mounted him, and was back at the ranch soon after midday. The mutton of a fat young mountain ram, at this season of the year, is delicious.

Such quick success is rare in hunting sheep. Generally each head has cost me several days of hard, faithful work; and more than once I have hunted over a week without any reward whatsoever. But the quarry is so noble that the ultimate triumph—sure to come, if the hunter will but persevere long enough—atones for all previous toil and failure.