

RANCH LIFE AND GAME SHOOTING IN THE WEST.

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II.

ANTELOPE SHOOTING ON THE CATTLE TRAIL.

EARLY last May I had to take a thousand head of young cattle, mostly of Eastern origin, from the railroad down to my range. Ordinarily we drive cattle down along the river bottom, but at that time there had been a series of freshets which had turned the stream itself into a raging torrent and its bed into a mass of treacherous quicksands, and as the cattle were for the most part young, and as is always the case in the spring, weak, we did not dare to trust them at the crossings, and indeed, had we done so, we would have run serious risk of losing the greater number. Accordingly we drove down along the great divide between the Little Missouri and the Beaver, making a six days' trail.

Owing to a variety of causes, our preparations had been very inadequate. The ranch wagon with a team of four accompanied us to carry our food and bedding. To work the cattle there were five men and myself, each with two horses, none of the latter being very well broken by the way. All of the five men were originally Easterners, backwoods men, stout, hardy fellows, but with only one cow-boy in the lot, the others being raw hands at the cattle business. I had intended said cow-boy to assume control of the whole outfit on the trail, but though a first-rate cow hand, he very shortly proved himself to be wholly incapable of acting as head, and after the first morning's work, during the course of which we got into inexplicable confusion, I was forced to take direct charge myself.

Our course lay for the most part through the bad lands, which enormously increased

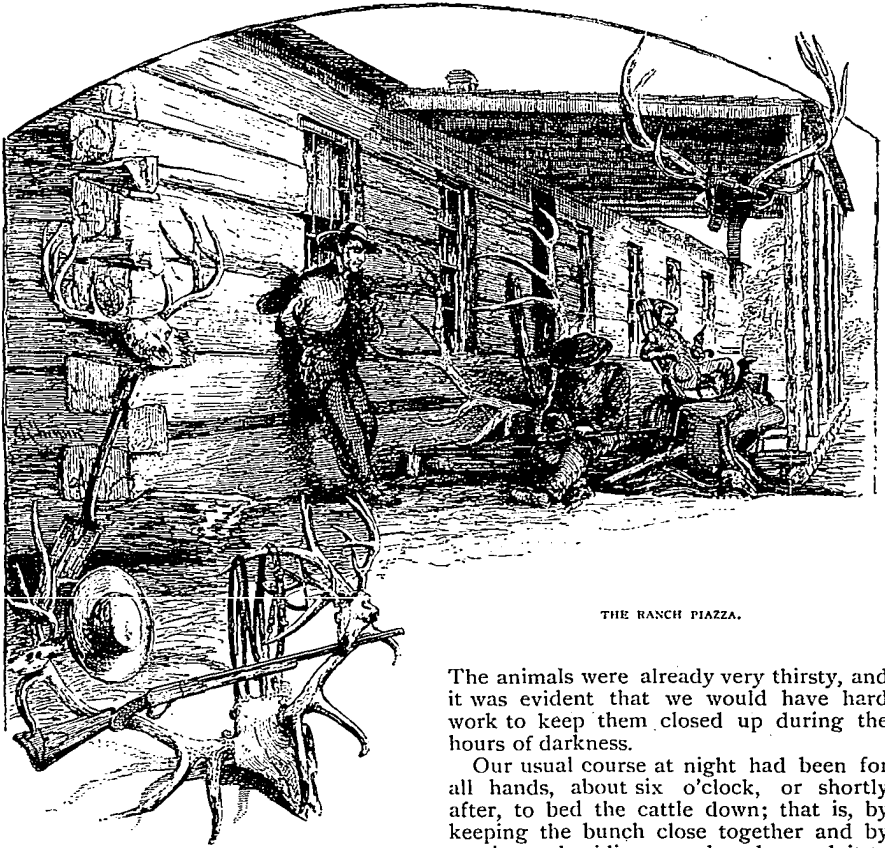
the difficulty of driving the cattle. A herd of cattle always travels strung out in lines, so that a thousand head, thus going almost in single file, stretch out to be a very great distance. The strong, speedy animals occupy the front, while the weak and sluggish fall naturally to the rear. On the march, I put two of the men at the head, a couple more to ride along the flanks, and the other two to hurry up the phalanx of reluctant beasts that hopelessly plodded along in the rear. In traveling through a tangled mass of rugged hills and winding defiles, it can readily be imagined that it was no easy task for six men to keep the cattle from breaking off in many different directions and to prevent the stronger beasts that formed the vanguard from entirely outstripping and leaving behind their weaker brethren. In addition, one of our numbers had always to keep an eye upon the band of our spare saddled ponies, which ran loose.

Driving cattle is at all times most tediously-irritating work. To get the animals to string out and to begin walking is often a task of no mean difficulty, and when it is once done, it becomes almost as hard to keep the wedge-shaped bunch that always forms in the rear from dropping altogether out of connection with the front animals. The horses have to be perpetually ridden to and fro and hither and thither, to head off a refractory steer, to keep the line from making a break down into a valley, to hurry up the loiterers, or to prevent the thirsty brutes from making a rush towards some quaking quagmire. The progress of a herd, such as this was, is always slow, and we could make but a few miles a day, generally dividing the distance into a morning and an afternoon march, so as to give the cattle feed and rest at midday, when we ourselves would drive the spare

ponies into an improvised rope corral by the wagon and catch up the horses for the change.

The weather during the course of the trip went through a gamut of changes with that extraordinary and inconsequential rapidity that characterizes atmospheric variations on the plains. The second day out there was a light snow falling all day, the wind blew so furiously that early in the

noon, we had driven them along the very backbone of the divide through a grimly barren and forbidding country across which ran lines of buttes wrought into the most fantastic shapes of the peculiar bad lands formation. Night came on while we were still many miles from the string of deep spring pools which held the nearest water. The fagged-out condition of the cattle forced us to go into camp even before the sun set.



THE RANCH PIAZZA.

afternoon we were obliged to drive the cattle down into a sheltered valley to keep them over night, and the cold was so intense that even in the sun the water froze at noon. Forty-eight hours afterwards we really suffered from extreme heat.

Owing to the slowness with which the cattle traveled, we were obliged to make one dry night camp. This was on the night of the third day. After watering the cattle, at

The animals were already very thirsty, and it was evident that we would have hard work to keep them closed up during the hours of darkness.

Our usual course at night had been for all hands, about six o'clock, or shortly after, to bed the cattle down; that is, by keeping the bunch close together and by continuously riding round and round it to finally persuade the animals to lie down in a comparatively small space. Most of them being pretty tired, the odds were that they would not try to break out until morning, and the night hours were divided into four watches of two hours each, two of the six men taking each watch; thus every man had two watches one night and one the next.

On the night in question, however, it was



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THEODORE ROOSEVELT IN SPORTING COSTUME.

evident that no two men would be able to hold the cattle, and practically, all six of us were up all night long, part of the time lying or sitting on the grass by our horses, watching the slumbering beasts, but for almost as much of it galloping furiously around the cattle in the darkness, every rider receiving one or more severe falls before morning, while heading back the strings of thirsty animals that continually tried to break out first from one side and then from the other of the bedding ground. Of course, had they once succeeded in breaking out in such stretch of rough country as we were in, it would have been an impossibility to have gotten them together again.

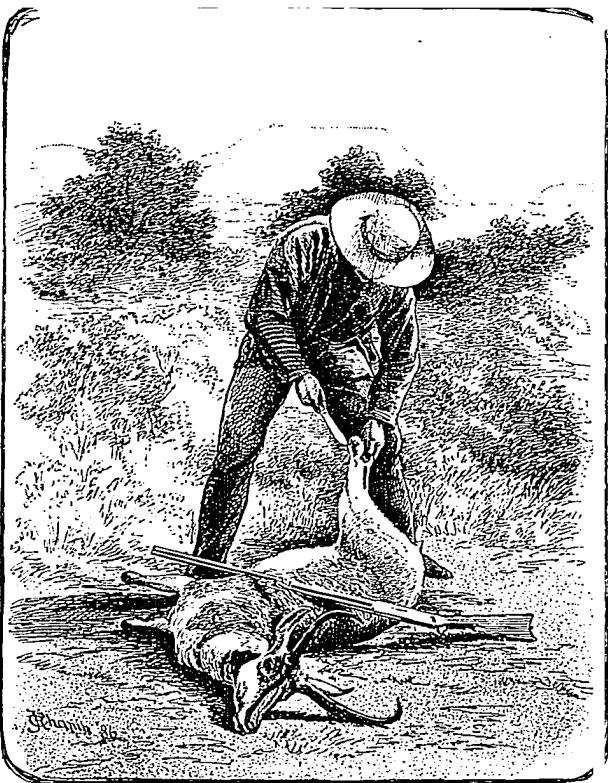
The next morning we made a very early start, as soon as the cattle began to again grow restive, for it is much easier to drive restive beasts than to keep them together while stationary, and after a long and very

tiresome journey, during the course of which the herd spread out to an even greater extent than ordinary, the thirst making the stronger animals travel faster than usual, while the weaker ones, becoming exhausted, could hardly be moved along at all, we finally reached, in the middle of the afternoon, the line of spring pools spoken of. Our own fare had so far been very rough. We had slept under our blankets in the open with our oil skin slickers to at least partially shelter us from rain and snow, and our food had consisted simply of coffee, pork, and rather soggy biscuits.

Both the horses and cattle were so exhausted that I thought we had better make a thirty-six hours' halt where we were, especially as there was excellent water, very good feed, and as the country was admirably adapted for keeping a guard over the herd with little trouble to the men or exhaustion to the ponies. All our work had

not ended yet, however, for at least a score of the steers and cows managed to get firmly stuck in the mud holes along the edges of the pool, and we spent until well on into the evening drawing them out.

The land here was a rolling prairie with a few rounded hills. We camped in the bottom of a winding valley whose sides sloped steeply down, their lower portions covered here and there with groves of tall cotton-wood trees. Near one of these groves, we drew up the wagon, a deep pool of icy water being but a few yards distant. A more beautiful place for a camp cannot be imagined, and we were ourselves almost as glad to be free from the worry and labor of the drive as was the unfortunate herd. But one drawback to our complete happiness still existed in the fact that we did not have, and had not for some time had, any fresh meat, and it is wonderful how men leading an active out-of-door life get to feel their carnivorous tastes develop.



SKINNING THE ANTILOPE.

Next day, accordingly, I determined to devote to going after antelope, one or two bands of which we had seen near the trail. The cattle were more than content to feed quietly on the thick bunch grass and, from the nature of the ground, two men at a time were amply able to watch them and to head off any bunch which seemed inclined to wander far away.

distance off. Tying my pony to a sage bush, I executed a most careful stalk up a shallow dry-water course to a point from which I deemed I could get a shot, only to find to my chagrin that the band had left the place. I suppose they had seen me in the distance and had promptly run off the instant that I began the approach—a favorite trick with antelopes.



A WELCOME BURDEN.

I started soon after breakfast, for antelope are the only game which can be hunted as well in the middle of the day as early or late. I was riding a well-trained hunting pony, and had with me the little forty-sixty Winchester saddle gun. Before I had left the wagon camp a mile behind me, I came across a little band of prong horns, catching a glimpse of them as they lay sunning themselves on the side of a hill, a very long

I made one other unsuccessful stalk in the morning, and spent nearly half an hour in trying to flag an old buck up to me, lying behind a ridge and waving a handkerchief fixed to the end of a rifle to and fro over its top. Curiosity is with antelope a perfect disease, and they will often be unable to resist the temptation to find out what an unknown object, or one going through singular motions, means, even if

the price of gratifying their mania for information has to be paid with their lives. This particular old buck, however, although greatly interested and excited by the motions of the handkerchief, could not make up his mind to approach close enough to give me a fair shot, and after cantering to and fro, snorting and stamping his feet, advancing a few yards towards me, suddenly bolting back as many, and then returning, he eventually evidently came to the conclusion that there was something uncanny about the whole affair, and took to his heels for good.

I went back to the pony and rode on several miles further to where the country became less prairie-like in character, the valleys being somewhat deeper and the ridges closer together, when I again dismounted and began to hunt over the ground on foot; and this time my perseverance was rewarded. As I was topping one ridge, I saw a little band of five bucks slowly walking over the crest of the one directly across. I had come up very cautiously, and felt certain that I had not been seen. The instant that the last of the animals disappeared I raced forward at a sharp gait,

pulling up as I breasted the hill side opposite, so that I should not be blown when I came to shoot. The antelope had been proceeding in a very leisurely manner, stopping to indulge in mock combats with each other, or to nibble a mouthful of grass now and then; and when I came to the top of the ridge, they had halted for good, perhaps 150 yards off.

I was out for meat, not for trophies, and so I took the one that offered me the fairest shot, a young buck which stood broadside to me; he was fat and in good condition for an antelope, but with small horns. The bullet went fairly in behind the shoulder, and though he galloped off with the rest of the band for a couple of hundred yards, his pace gradually slackened, he came to a halt, then walked backwards in a curious manner for a few feet, fell over, and was dead when I came to him.

After dressing him, and I may remark parenthetically that this work of butchering, especially when far from water is one of the disagreeable sides of a hunter's life, I got him on the pony (it was a quiet little beast, used to packing all sorts of strange things behind its rider) and started towards



DEER AT HOME.

the camp. The shadows had begun to lengthen out well before I got there, to receive a very real and cordial welcome from my hungry associates. Before long the venison steaks were frying or broiling over the mass of glowing coals raked out from beneath the roaring and crackling cotton wood logs, and I should be almost afraid to state how much we ate. Suffice it to say

that there was very little indeed left of that antelope after next morning's breakfast.

The following day we took the somewhat refreshed cattle away from our resting ground, and after two rather long and irksome drives, were able to head them out upon the great river bottom where the ranch house stands.

[To be continued.]

