



"OUR PARTY WAS A LARGE ONE"

A DEER HUNT IN THE SOUTHWEST

By ELMER SMITH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

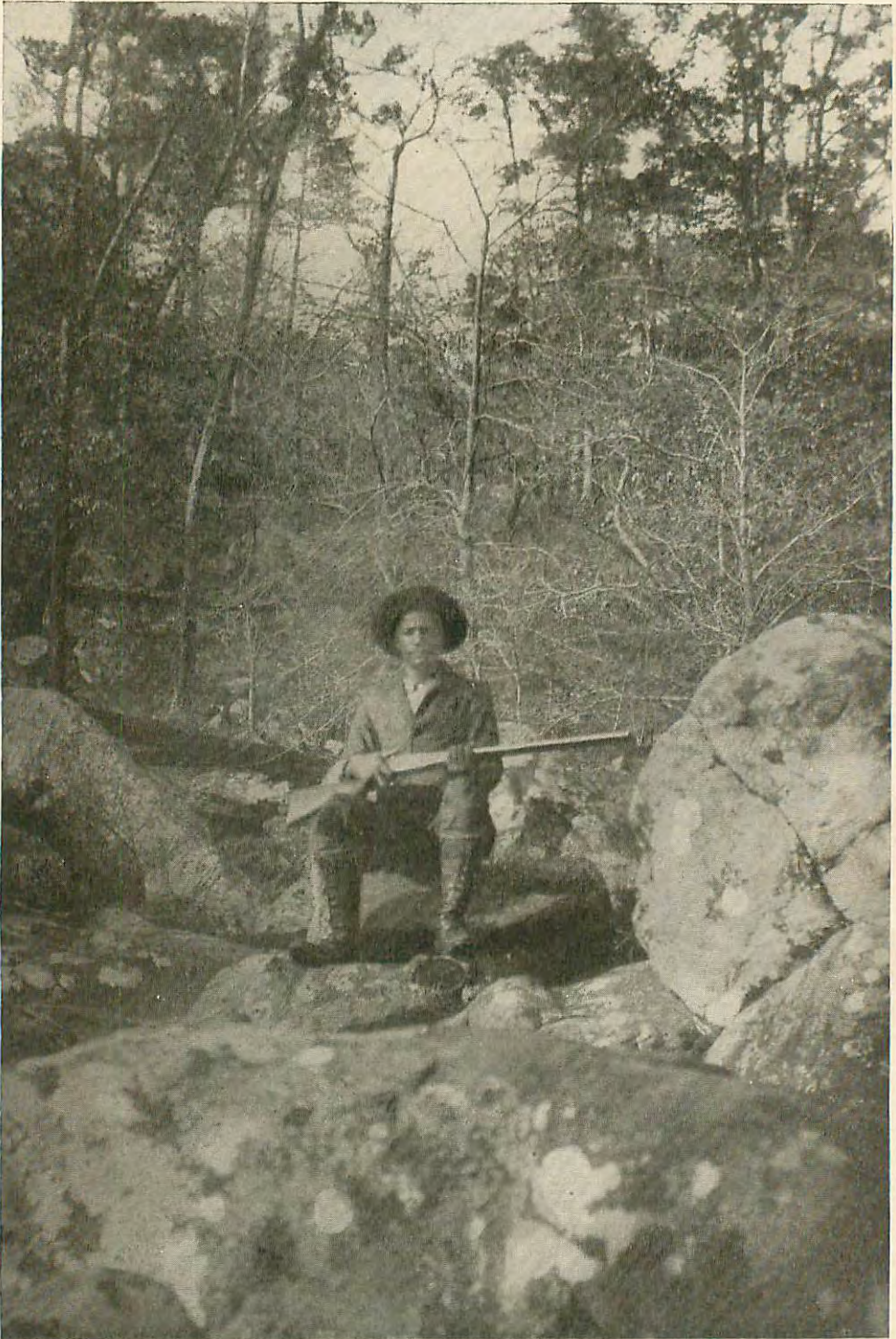


ON January 1st, 1907, eight of us, loaded with the usual complement of guns, trunks, and valises, left Gridley, Illinois, for our annual hunt in the South, accompanied by the well wishes of the crowd who came to see us off. We also carried four mince pies, which same promptly began to make trouble. At Chenoa, and before we were well started on our journey, a special guard had to be organized to look after those pies, and then everybody kept an eye on the guard. By such extraordinary caution the pies were saved until midnight, when somebody moved that they be eaten. The motion carried unanimously, and then our troubles, together with the pies, promptly disappeared.

We were bound for the Indian Territory. For several years we had been going to the South for a winter hunt, and our destination this year was Hartshorne, where we had a number of friends who provided a royal entertainment for us during our stay. A point twenty miles south of Hartshorne, in

the Jack Fork mountains, was chosen for the scene of our hunt, and early on the following morning we were on the move. Augmented by our Hartshorne friends, our party was a large one. The trip over the mountains was exceedingly pleasant, and we reached our camping place on the bank of Jack Fork Creek at about four o'clock in the afternoon. On the way out quite a number of quail had been killed, and while some of the boys put up the tents, others got busy with the supper. By dark we had everything ship-shape, and supper being announced, we all fell to with appetites sharpened by our long walk. We were after deer but we spent several days in hunting small game such as quail, squirrel, etc., and in fishing the small streams for bass. The fish, however, were not striking well at this season of the year, but a few were caught, among them a 5½-pound bass which was a beauty.

We had a lively, jolly crowd, and after the day's hunt was done, and the supper dishes cleared away, we gathered round the camp fire and swapped stories, telling of previous hunts, and thrilling escapes from



"JIM IS A GREAT HUNTER AND UNDERSTANDS THE MOUNTAINS"

killing something. Then Bill Drum, looking like the Sunday-school superintendent in disguise, would entertain the crowd with a few select songs and a jig or two, and some of his comical stories. About the time the boys were ready to turn in, Bill would single out an unsuspecting victim, get him seated by the camp fire, and either talk him to sleep or stay with him until 4 A. M. Bill's average sleeping time for a night for the time we were out, was, as he said "An hour and a half, and twenty minutes."

One day, after an unsuccessful deer drive, Mike and Bill Drum started out to look for bear signs. After an hour's tramp they reached the main prong of Jack Fork Creek, and Bill discovered a large hollow sycamore tree which showed unmistakable signs of having been used as a bear den—but the bear was not at home. Looking around a little, they found another smaller tree, hollow and broken off by the wind, about five feet from the ground. The bear must be in there they thought, but to get him out was the problem. There was a small hole at the bottom of the tree, and Bill concluded to put his head in and look up. If anything "darked de hole" they would know the bear was there. About the time Bill got his head and shoulders in the hole, he heard a great scraping and scratching above. He thought the bear was outside and coming down. He undertook to back out rapidly, but stuck fast.

"Shoot him, Mike, before he gets me," yelled Bill, and then he used up most of his choice language he had been saving for corn planting time the next spring, and with a mighty jerk he backed out, minus his vest and suspenders. He seized his gun, but was much relieved to see a big hoot owl flapping off through the tree tops. Bill's dreams were full of bear tracks for a week.

After a few days' sport our visitors returned to their homes and we were left alone except for Jim Threet, who remained to drive deer for us, and was with us almost all the time we were out. Jim is a great hunter, understands the mountains thoroughly, and can run like a hound. He is blessed with an inexhaustible fund of good nature, and his smile is as pleasant as sunshine on a frosty morning. After two weeks of hunting in our first camp, we decided to move to Anderson Creek, a distance of about eighteen miles. Wagons were engaged, and

we struck camp and pulled out. I will venture to say that there was not a man in the crowd that ever saw anything to equal a portion of that road. It was worse than the far famed "Rocky Road to Dublin." We reached camp at about 5:30 o'clock, and had to hustle to get things in shape before dark. After supper a bunch of tired boys went to bed in good season.

The hunting here was much better. There was more game, and the mountains were not so high. After a day or two Jim went to town one afternoon for the mail. Will Savage brought him out the next day, and on the road they succeeded in getting a shot at a bunch of turkeys, and brought a fine gobbler into camp. Will prepared and cooked the turkey, and we enjoyed a Thanksgiving supper that was out of sight—in about twenty minutes. On the second day a couple of Hartshorne gentlemen came over with a fine bunch of dogs, and the way they would tune up when on a hot trail, was enough to make the heart of a sportsman glad. A drive was arranged in the afternoon, but although the dogs started several deer, none came within range, until we were on the way to camp. It was about dark when one came within seventy-five yards of Will Drum and George Woodell, who opened up a fusilade with their Savage rifles which sounded like a hail storm on a tin roof. Owing to the darkness—or something else—the deer escaped. A second drive was organized for the next day, and this time a bunch of deer got too close to Will Mitchell, who promptly handed them a couple of loads of buckshot. They ran down the line to Will Savage, who saluted them with three shots at long range. Then they returned to Mitchell, who gave them another load of buckshot. After that they scattered the dogs taking up the trail of the smallest one. Two large bucks, badly wounded, went but a short distance, and were each dispatched by well aimed shots from the guns of Bill and Mike Drum. It was conceded by all that if it had not been for "Mitch," as we called him, we would not have got the deer, so the glory of the hunt went to him, and he wore the smile that won't come off, for three days, in consequence of his honors. The deer were loaded on to a pony, their feet tied together, and with a deer on each side, the pony was turned loose to make her way down the



"WE HAD MEAT IN CAMP"

mountain. She came into camp at dusk, presenting a very grotesque appearance, for the deer had slipped forward as the pony came down hill, and their white tails were just even with her eyes.

Charley Niergarth, the only "dyed in the wool Dutchman" in the bunch, was troubled with an omnivorous appetite that was never satisfied. Every evening Charley could be found humped over the camp fire with frying pan in hand, cooking a stew of some kind for an extra supper. One night when he had concluded to vary the program by roasting some potatoes in the coals, the boys planned to rob him, but to get him away from the fire was the problem. Several attempts failed miserably, and then someone had a bright idea. He proposed a serenade for Mitchell, who had gone to bed early, and Charley, who is proud of his ability in that line, fell into the trap at once. He was the first man in the tent, and as soon as he was in, the boys got busy swiping his "spuds." When he came out he soon discovered his loss, and sat gazing dejectedly into the fire.

"Are they about done, Charley?" asked one of the party.

"Done? They're done and gone, by gosh," he said.

The loss was a serious one, but the boys finally produced the potatoes and gave him his share, so that he was able to go to bed with his hunger more or less satisfied.

Our time was getting short, and we were busy every day, hunting persistently. One day we made a drive in another direction, and the boys started a deer up to Mr. White and Jim Threet, who opened fire. The deer, badly wounded, started for a water hole six miles away, with Jim and the dog in hot pursuit. The boys say that when the deer reached the water hole Jim was sitting on the bank waiting for him. At any rate he was there soon after, and dispatched the deer with a well aimed shot. The aid of a nearby rancher was enlisted, and the deer which proved to be a fine five pronged buck, was brought into camp midst the barking of dogs and the tooting of horns.

All sorts of funny things happened, and

we played many a prank on each other. One of our pranks made Mike Drum think that he had had a narrow escape from asphyxiation. Mike has the commendable habit of going to bed early at home, and on one night he followed his habit, while the rest of the boys were up and stirring. One of them conceived the brilliant plan of putting an empty lard can over the stove pipe projecting from the tent. In about five minutes the inside of that tent was as blue as indigo. Then we had a shadow picture of an imitation boxing match, and Mike came out of the tent snorting like a tortoise, his arms beating the air like a Dutch windmill in a storm. When he discovered the nature of the trouble, he bombarded our tent with all the missiles he could find, until he was tired, and then went to bed.

David Davis had an experience while hunting one day, that he will not soon forget. He was standing on the bank of a small run, when two deer walked up to

within twelve feet of where he stood. With visions of those two animals hanging at the tent door, Davis took aim and pulled the trigger. Snap! The gun had missed fire. The deer stood quietly regarding David, who pumped in another load. Another snap. Then the deer vamoosed, Davis still trying to fire. Out of six attempts he got two shots, but the deer had then got into the brush and he missed them. Upon investigation he found that the firing pin of his gun had become so shortened by long use, that it would not explode the cartridge. What he said was plainly and entirely appropriate.

On our last day in camp we started several deer, but none were killed. After supper we indulged in a literary program. A vote of thanks was extended to everybody, Bill Drum delivered a farewell address with much feeling, and Smith sang "Has Anybody Seen Our Cat!" Morning found us up early, and at noon we were back at Harts-horne, and our great hunt was only a memory.

BILL SMITH'S WHOPPER

I never heard no one deny
That Old Bill Smith knows how to lie.
Of all the men I ever saw
He wags about the smoothest jaw
For tellin' stories. 'Tisn't hard
For Bill to spin 'em by the yard.
He starts his tongue a-goin' and
Just rattles on to beat the band.

Remember one day, three or four
Of us was down to Slocum's store
A-braggin' of the shootin' we
Had done, when Bill, he says, says he:
"One time, 'twas years and years ago,
When pigeons was so thick, you know,
I made a shot so big, I swow,
I'm 'fraid to tell it even now!

"But, any way, 'twas in the fall
And near my house I'd built a tall,
Round stack of oats on which had lit
Wild pigeons till they covered it
From top to bottom, just that thick
There really wasn't room to stick
A pin between 'em! There they set
So saucy-like, and et and et.

"I took my rifle down and just
Poured powder in her till she'd bust
I feared! And then rammed down a ball
And then contrived, somehow to crawl
Behind a fence that wound about
Right up to that there stack without
Their seein', when there came to me
A sort of brain-wave, you'll agree.

"I knew the way them pigeons set
That, to do my best, I couldn't get
More than a dozen at a shot,
Which seemed a pesky little lot.
But when that brain-wave that was sent
From somewhere reached me, I just bent
That rifle-barrel right 'round my knee
Till it was half a circle, see?

"Well, when I fired her off I found
That ball had gone right 'round and 'round
That stack and killed of pigeons fine
Just plump nine hundred and ninety-nine!"
"Make it a thousand, Bill," we said,
But Bill he slowly shook his head—
"No, I won't tell a lie," said he,
"For just one pigeon, no sirree!"

—Nixon Waterman in *Searchlight Philosophy*