

TWO

THIS GUIDING GAME

It turns out that some of the best mountain men are in fact women and girls. Tex was delighted by any client's ability to shake off city behaviour, as in the first episode, in favour of rugged mountain masculinity, and his delight was not limited by (though it was certainly shaped by) conventions about gender. When an anxious and haughty family father turns back to town and the nearest stock ticker after a few days on the trail, his wife and four daughters turn out to be excellent mountain men, fulfilling all the requisites of the mountaineering hunting ethos, from pranks right down to excellent shooting. Tex's mountain masculinity is, therefore, of an especially broad and comprehensive sort, connected not primarily to sexed bodies but more to gendered behaviour (or rather, in this case, to cross-gendered behaviour). As in other cases, Tex combines a type of outdoorsmanly machismo with a counter-cultural willingness to accept transgressions of convention, in this case gender-bending, and even to revel in them. Only the know-it-all professor comes off as irredeemable; even though he comes around to Tex's view of fires in teepees, he makes it out to have been his own idea—hardly a surprise in an academic.

—AG

THIS GUIDING GAME

Yarns of the wilderness by a competent outdoorsman

By N. Vernon-Wood

A LOT OF PEOPLE ASK ME why I stay with this guiding game when there's more money to be made at forty-seven other varieties of honest toil. I suppose the main reason is that I don't know anything else, and twenty years of ramming around the hills sort of gets under your hide and plumb ruins a man for punching a time clock. Then there's the kick a man gets out of his pilgrims; you get closer to a man in a month's camping than you will in ten years in an office. It's right interesting to start out with a flock of folks that you don't know the first thing about and watch how they shake down.

I get a letter from some bird in New York asking can I take him out for a month; and after we have made the usual business arrangements, he will most always write about what outfit he needs to bring. In the old days, this wasn't much to worry about, but since the "Blazed Trail has crossed the Boulevard," as the catalog says, life has gotten some complicated. I like to kid myself that I can get a sort of line on my prospects from these letters, but you can't always sometimes tell.

I hooked me a man one time for hunting bighorn. He made his arrangements in two telegrams, and I said to Jim, "That's the way we like 'em: short and sweet"; but old Bill Wilson that runs the post office here come pretty near asking Ottawa for a new office and more help before we got out on the trail. I got letters about beds, rifles, ammunition, field glasses, and clothes. He wanted to know if I could run a movie camera. Was my help congenial? I showed Jim that one, and it darn near cost me \$10

a month. "If I have to be congenial after walking four–five miles through wet snow before breakfast wrangling your this and that pack r, it's going to cost you money, feller."

I got a letter saying that the Trans-Canada would land him at Lake Louise at ten forty-five in the morning, and that he would change into his trail clothes on the train and be ready to start at eleven. The day before he was due, I got a wire: "Bring plenty of strawberry jam." As I had sent the grubstake by freight and the rest of the outfit by trail two days ahead to Lake Louise, I had to chuck out some of my extra socks and shirts and stuff a few extra cans of jam in my war bag.

I was all primed to put in a month with one of those "Do it now," high-pressure ginks, and who was pernickety as the devil. I met him at the train, and I could see he was strung as tight as a fiddlestring and rarin to go. The outfit was camped across the tracks from the depot, and after we had collected his dunnage, we humped on over. Then Joe, the cook, broke the glad tidings that there wasn't any baking powder in the grubstake.

There's a sort of store three miles up the hill from the railway, and the only thing to do was grab a saddle pony and high tail up there. I told my dude he had better come too, and see the lake, anyway, as we would not come back that way, and Lake Louise is worth any man's time to see. I knew that he was figuring that I wasn't much of an outfitter, but I was certain I had ordered the baking powder, so I didn't worry much. The pilgrim unlimbered a box and got out a small movie camera, and away we went. While I went to see how much baking powder I could talk out of Casey Oliver up at the store, my man wandered down to the lake and it did look good that day. I darn near had to rope him and drag him away, and if he hadn't run out of film, we would have been there yet.

We didn't get away that day, and he said he wouldn't have missed it for a farm. All that was wrong with that guy was nerves. He had about worked himself to a frazzle and after he had slept out a few nights and done some climbing, he was right as rain. Instead of staying out a month, he ran it nearly two, and we were down to straight sheep meat and bannock, but it was jake with him. Jim and Joe kicked like bay steers because we were out of jam and sweet stuff, but our pilgrim didn't let out a word. He was a contented as a hog in mud, and as long as there was game to stalk, he would stay on a mountain all day and night. Around camp he was one of the gang, and we all liked him plenty, which just proves you can't look at a frog and figure how far he will jump.

I got stuck with a bunch of scientific sharps once that nearly got my nanny, though. Most any pilgrim will give a guide credit for knowing something, but these birds allowed we were just about one short jump ahead of a pack horse in intelligence. The big augur of the layout was a professor of geology, and he was highbrow and high-hat. He had a dinky hen-skin sleeping bag that didn't look very adequate to me, so I figured that I would put him in the tepee with me and his assistant, and keep a fire going lots when we got up higher.

When he saw me packing a load of nice dry jack pine into the tepee that night, he wanted to know what for. I explained about his bag, and said I would see that the fire was kept going. You should have heard him blow up. He had gotten that bag out of a book on camping, and it was the last work in lightness and comfort, and anyway who ever heard of a fire inside a tent. Preposterous and unthinkable, and a lot more. Besides, his bed would likely catch fire. I offered to bet him four bits that when he got through he would burn it, anyhow, but he wouldn't take advantage of my abysmal ignorance. Then I tried to tell him the difference between a tepee and a tent, and explained that the Indians had been using them for some considerable time, and that they cooked in 'em and everything, but it was no go. He just naturally knew that you couldn't have a fire inside a canvas thing without having it flaming round your ears, so I let it go at that. We had to camp up on the Pipestone Pass for him to get some geology, and it was crimpy round the edges up there. I used to get a heap of satisfaction lying in my snoozing sack and list'ning to the professor shivering himself warm and using what I figured was academic cuss words.

One evening he sort of circled around to the subject of fires in tepees, and I lit a small one that night. He watched it carefully for quite a while, and then started to give his assistant and me the scientific principles involved, why the smoke, etc., went out of the vent, and before a week went by, to hear him tell it, he was the bird that invented tepees, and he had figured some improvements that the Nitchies had overlooked.

A couple of nights after, we were sitting round the camp fire, smoking and telling lies, when Jim says: "I struck a fossil bed up that creek across from camp when I went after the horses this morning. There's a bench of Cambrian rock there plumb full of trilobites; look-it this one." I saw the professor sort of prick up his ears, and, knowing Jim was kind of hipped on geology, I says, "I thought it was igneous rock up there." "Igneous my foot," says Jim. "You know damn well that the only igneous rock in this part is

in the Ice River Valley; this is all sedimentary,” and away he goes ridin’ his hobby to a queen’s taste. He started at the Pre-Cambrian and went all the way up and down the line. You could have knocked the professor’s eyes off with a club, they boggled out so.

When we got to our tepee for the night, he said, “I had no conception, Wood, that you men knew any geology. That man’s discourse this evening was most interesting and authoritative.” “Hell,” I said, “we travel with so many brainy sharps, and have to listen to ’em, that we get so we can discourse on anything from gin to geology, and half the time we don’t know what we are talking about ourselves.”

Then there is the chap that wants to see the whole of the Rocky Mountains in ten days. He most always comes up provided with all the maps that he can accumulate, and expects to go through the country on the high lope. There used to be a New Yorker and his wife that came here every summer, and they got so they were sure stuck on this neck of the woods, but I had to educate him to the right way to enjoy it. The first trip he made, he sort of had the notion he wasn’t getting his money’s worth because a day’s travel only got him about fifteen miles or so from where he had started. He didn’t figure that you can’t chase pack horses without laying up a bunch of grief. If you get two miles and a half an hour out of a string you are doing about average, and five hours of that is a day’s work for a horse that has to rustle his living. You can’t rush, and not have sore backs and poor horses.

Every evening the judge would get out his map and have me show him exactly where we were. Then he would point two–three inches farther on, and ask, “Can’t we get here tomorrow?” I tried to explain the difference between a few inches of trail on paper and the stuff we had to herd the outfit over. The maps do not show all the kinks and twists on the trail, or put in the windfalls that have to be cut, or the muskeg that bogs the ponies. Neither do they show where there’s horse feed and where there ain’t a thing but spruce forest, so that you have to suit your day’s travel to your camping places. It all looks smooth as frog hair on the maps.

Well, we have to send our pilgrims home satisfied, if we expect to make a living, so we aims to please. I laid low until we had been out long enough for the grub packs to get lightened some and we had made the turn for home. Then one morning we shook ourselves out bright and early and gave an imitation of three guides breaking camp on the jump. I told the judge that we would camp at Bow Lakes that night, which was all of thirty miles

from where we were on the Saskatchewan. I took good care not to tell him that last part, though.

Joe gave all hands a couple of dough gods and some cold bacon to put in our saddle pockets, and we were away with a whoop and a holler. We lost a little time cutting out windfalls on Bear Creek, and a fool pony bogged down on those mud slides at the foot of the Pyramid, but outside of that we plugged along steady as you please. It was getting dusk when we went over Bow Pass, and by the time we had dropped down below the lakes it was dark as the insides of a black cat.

We didn't have any company around the camp fire that night; the judge had been kind of quiet for the last few hours. Next morning he didn't show up when Joe yelled, "Grub pile," so I went to his tent to see how come.

He just opened one eye and says, I think we had better lay over today, Wood."

I thought so, too. He was so stiff his eyelid creaked when he opened it. His wife and I went fishing, but he didn't show up until long about four o'clock in the afternoon. He was back the next summer, and while we were sort of going over things before we hit the trail, he said, "I just want to loaf around this trip, Wood. I think there is something in what you say about the disadvantage of rushing through the country." Just then I caught his wife's eye, and I had to look hard at his fishing rod.

It's funny about the women. Nine out of ten men ask, "Isn't this trail thing too strenuous and rough for ladies? I don't know if it's just luck, but any women I have had to do with fitted in like a cartridge in a rifle. I figure that if a woman don't like the outdoors she never gets far enough to get here. The ones that do, know they are going to like it, and that's half the battle.

One summer we got a family that had me worried for a while. There was Mr. and Mrs. Van Dieman, three daughters, and a governess. Five females, and we figured that they would have us herding with the squirrels before they got through. Old man Van was sort of stuck on himself, and didn't approve of his family getting too friendly with any rough-neck horse wranglers. I heard him bawling out the youngest one day because she came over to where we were talking about this and that, and it sort of got me on the prod. We hadn't been out only two days when he got to ghost dancing about what the market was doing, and said he would have to go back.

I started Jim back with him, feeling sort as if I had fallen down on my job, and that the market was just a bluff, but Mrs. Van called me over,

and said, "Now, don't feel badly about this, Tex. My husband really hates camping and has never finished any trip we have started. I think possibly that we will get along quite well without him."

"You're happy right," thinks I, but kept it at thinking.

Fifteen minutes after Jim and old Van had left camp you could feel the difference. While we lay in camp waiting for Jim to get back, we climbed and fished and had a sort of field day. I want to tell the world, that after I had put in a day with that aggregation on a mountain, I knew I had been some place. There wasn't a thing they wouldn't try once. Every morning they would line up in bathing suits and hit the Spray River. Man, I used to be scared pink. The water was swift and cold as charity, but as Joe said, "All them gals need is gills, and they would sure be fish." They were right sore because I wouldn't let 'em ride a bronc we were trying to break for a pack horse. Us guides never knew the minute one of 'em wouldn't pull some stunt on us that would trip us into the drink, or such like. We would find our sleeping bags sewn up, and one rainy night they let our tent down on us.

They showed Joe a thing or two about cooking, and did it so that he didn't get peeved about it; and by the red-eyed Mike, the oldest one beat the skin off me at shooting. The day we got back to Banff they gave us a party up at the big hotel, and danced us bow-legged. Someone asked me if women weren't quite a problem on the trail. I'll tell a man they are, but not the way that bird meant.

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