

TEN

AN' ALL WE DO IS HUNT

Tex here begins with a theme that also appears in “Tex Reads his Permit,” namely the idea that guides are nothing but poachers who have gone legal—this was an issue which was close to the bone for Tex, and the Warden in question certainly knew that. The jibe sounds right for the macho culture of western Canada in general and mountain men in particular, then or now. A similar sense of what is work and what is not still leads to a certain amount of mockery directed at people who work indoors, who “lay around close to the stove all winter, and [buy] their meat.” The story is largely about the frustrations of guiding inexperienced “pilgrims” (big game hunters) in the mountains.

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By N. Vernon-Wood

ITS FUNNY HOW THE OTHER fellows job always looks better than the one you've got yourself, if any.

The other day a Game Warden blew into my place, on winter patrols, which he claimed was plumb unnecessary, all the poachers havin gone into the Guide business, an makin so much money they lay around close to the stove all winter, and bought their meat.

"You birds shure got a cinch," he says, "Always got company, a cook to build your bannok, pack horses to carry fancy doo funnies, an them Pilgrims give you real money for doin just what you'd do anyhow. Look at us, alone three quarters over half the time, got to keep the trails in shape for you an your dudes to ride over, an if one of 'em chucks his snipe into a mess of dry pine needles, we have to fight the fire. The Government allows us one old plug pack horse, an we travel poor as Indians, all for a hundred a month an furnish your own grub."

I didn't put up any argument, whats the use, but I thought a whole lot. I bet if that Warden had to nurse along a flock of Pilgrims for a month, He'd be crazy as Joe Smith's dog, that froze his tail barkin at the moon.

Three four years back, I started out on a hunt with three birds who ran me bowlegged before we got through. One of them had been out with me before, and for a Pilgrim was bush wise. For a while everything was finer than frog hair, and I began to kid myself that here's one trip that wont put any more silver threads among the rust, but I didn't have my figures crossed.

We hunted in two couples, the Pilgrim that had experience takin one of the others, and me concentratin on the Captain, who hasnt yet bust anything. There was plenty of bear sign, but for a couple of days the bear saw us first, and one evening as we are sort of planning the next days grief, the old Pilgrim springs a suggestion that he an the other feller take a couple of days rations and drop down one of the valleys to see if they can wrangle them a Moose.

I cant say I am all hopped up with the idea, but after all, there don't seem to be any reason why, so I tell 'em forty eleven different things what not to do, and next morning they pack their Ruck sacks, and we wish them So long, an good luck.

The Skipper & I barge off to see if we can find a grizzly that's deaf, blind, an got a cold in his nose, so we can Indian up on him before he goes from here to there, but this country is healthy as hell for bear, so we came back to camp in the evening feeling sort of discouraged.

Up till then, the weather had been just what the doctor ordered, but that night the clouds got low, so that when we crawled out of our flea bags next morning, the visibility is what you might call poor. Not a peak in sight, and sort of crimped round the edges. The Skipper feels a little stale, and don't seem to be in any mad rush to hit the high spots, so that we are late getting organized.

LONG ABOUT TWO O'CLOCK, we were sittin in the lee of a big boulder, feeding our faces, when the Skipper says, "Holy cat, Tex, I forgot to bring any extra ammunition, all I have is the five shells that are in my rifle."

"Which by the way things are pannin out, is five too many" I said, and it aint any more than said, when about 200 yards away a grizzly looms up.

"What'll I do?" whispers the Skipper, all steamed up.

"Bust him where he's biggest, an when you get him down, keep him there." I tell him.

The Skipper took a long careful sight an lets drive. Old Eph, lets a beller out of him, an swung round, bitin at his flank. It aint till the third shot he goes down, an even then he is making plenty fuss. "Take your time, now an anchor him right" I says, but the Captain is too excited to hear anything.

Then that old Horribilus gets up, and starts our way, an it looks to me like he's making forty miles an hour. And is he hostile? I tell a man.

I offer my gun to the Captain, and tell him to get going, and get going quick, or there will be two little strangers in Hell for supper, but he don't

even hear me, so I line up my sights where I think they will do the most good, thinking meantime, that I will get just one shot, before that fool bear is all over us like a tent, when down he goes. That rush was his last effort.

By the time I've got him skinned, we both decide that we need the two fingers of Hudsons Bay, that a kill calls for, so we hightail for camp, feeling plumb chesty, and man, the yarn we will tell the Old Pilgrim. It gets better an wilder every minute.

The Old Pilgrim however is not in camp, and in no time at all it got dark, and still he don't show up. By midnight, I am beginning to ghost dance, an see him & his partner all spraddled out under some cliff they have slipped off, or up in a tree with six or seven grizzly tearin up the scenery below.

We build a big fire, and fire a shot at intervals. Nothing happens. Every time a coyote howls, I dash out of the teepee an answer, thinkin it's them but morning comes, an they don't.

THE WRANGLER & I start a rescue expedition, with ropes an first aid kits an what all. We cant even find a track until we have travelled five or six miles, when we pick 'em up on an old pack trail. Where the side valley hits the main branch of the Palliser, old Joe Blaney has a trapping shack, and when we get there, he is busy putting up wood. I asked him did he see any loose pilgrims around, an he told me "Shure, they stayed here night before last, aint they in camp yet?" We told him the trouble, and it seems they started out yesterday morning to hunt a side draw, an figured to cross the head of it, and come out on the summit where camp was. The only thing wrong with that was a cliff about a million feet straight up, on the summit side, that no man in his senses would even want to throw a stone down, let alone climb.

"Bet you four bits they're back in camp, right now listnin to the skipper kill that bear agen, an knocking the bottom out of the crock of rum" says the wrangler. It's as dark as the inside of a black cat when we drag ourselves into camp, but the cook & the skipper are holding it down alone. We all get spooky that night, and in the morning don't need any Big Ben to rouse us out. The cook and wrangler hit one way, and the skipper & me take another, landing back at Joe's shack early in the afternoon. I figure Joe will join in the merriment, an help comb the country.

"Did you run 'em down?" says Joe. What I said, aint fit for nice people to hear. Then Joe told us that the missin brethern had dragged it into his camp again last night. "They got jack potted up that draw, but thought they

could make the summit by swinging around to the west, an got into a mess of brule. By the time they backtracked themselves it was gettin dark, an they were closer here than there, so they bunked with me again.”

Fine, but whereinhell are they now, I wonder. “All I know, I put ’em on the trail to the pass,” said Joe, “an if they didn’t get to camp, I guess they missed it someplace, an are on the way back to the railroad. If they keep goin, an don’t bust a couple of legs, they’ll make it in a week.”

Which is plumb encouragin to me. We all start up the trail, and track the absent loved ones for about two hours, when all sign peters out again. I sent the cook back to camp with the skipper, telling the cook to hobble him if necessary. I aint taking chances on losing the only Pilgrim I have left. Buck & I quarter the country good and proper, but no luck.

We spent that night under a spruce, thinking up cuss words to spring on them explorers, when as an if we ever catch up on ’em. I begin to think our job will be to build a box, an ship ’em east in the baggage car.

We used all the next day circlin the country ‘till we were dizzy, an long about dark, strike for camp, hungry, tired, an decidin to quit guidin, an study for the ministry, or somthin soothin to the nerves.

About a mile from camp, we hear voices in the dark, an by the shrivelled up hind quarters of Abrahams pet goat, here are the lost battalion, with Joe hazin them along. I’m so tickled to see them, I don’t even cuss. Seems they landed at their pet road house again last night, after trying to walk down an old moose they started up on their way up the trail yesterday. The moose circled, and as per usual, night found ’em a mile or so from Joes. I told Joe to send me his bill for board an room, and chewed the mane off the old Pilgrim when I’d recovered my usual sang fried.

It might be as that Warden says, all we do is hunt an fish, but as the law sharps say, “Look at the mental anguish.”

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