

## SHASTA GAME.

Hunting the Wild Sheep and Mule-Deer--  
Exciting Sport Among the Lava Cliffs--  
John Tells what he Saw and Did.

[SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BULLETIN.]

SISSON'S STATION, near Mount Shasta, November 29, 1874.

The woods and waters of Shasta contain more wild life in that form which hunters call *game* than those of any other Alpine region I have ever entered. Trout and salmon in the streams, deer and bears in the forest and wild sheep in the topmost rocks. Winter came early this year, seeming to take even the wild animals by surprise. By the first week of November the storms had stripped off most of the bright autumn leaves and bleached all that were left. The robins assembled and fled to warm valleys before their wild cherries were half done. The deer came down into sheltered thickets and stood about as if unable to decide what to do. The bears, too, notwithstanding the warmth of their clothing, began to shuffle out of the snow into the lower canyons and gulches; and when on Mount Shasta I noticed that the wild sheep were also disturbed, as if contemplating removal to their winter pastures. A small flock of about a dozen were sheltering beneath dwarf pines a few hundred yards above my storm-rest.

On my return to the hotel I found four wild hunters--three from Bonnie Scotland, the other from England--all sterling fellows, who, instead of traveling tamely, guide-book in hand, mingle with hunters and trappers, and drink in the grandeur of our matchless wilds in magnificent enfranchisement from all conventions and creeds. Two of this company, Brown and Hepburn, were eagerly bent on hunting the wild sheep, not only for the sport of the thing, but to learn its habits, and see its wild homes, and procure specimens. Sisson, who is himself a keen hunter and an excellent guide to all kinds of game, soon made the necessary arrangements. Blankets, provisions, and rifles were heaped into a wagon, and on the morning of November 8th we set out for Sheep Rock. The party consisted of Sisson as guide and hunter-in-chief; Jerome, an enthusiastic hunter in the employ of Sisson, Brown, English, Hepburn, Scotch, and myself. Brown and Hepburn carried double-barreled breech-loading rifles, Jerome and Sisson, Remingtons.

### SHEEP ROCK.

Sheep Rock lies about 20 miles to the north of here, and is one of the principal winter pastures of the Shasta sheep. It is a mass of lava, presenting a bold, craggy front 2,000 feet high to the gray sage-plains of Shasta Valley. Its summit lies at an elevation of 5,500 feet above the level of the sea, and is several square miles in extent, abounding in grassy hollows where snow never lies deep. Here we hunted only one day. Sheep tracks were nowhere abundant. It was, therefore, clear that the brave fellows had not yet been

stormed down out of their Shasta pastures. Brown was the only one of the company so fortunate as to catch sight of a single sheep. A massive old ram, with enormous horns, allowed him a special interview, at a distance of twenty steps, but his rifle, unluckily, was not held in place, and the brave Otis, bounding over the lava, played him a handsome farewell.

### **MOUNT BREMER.**

Next morning we set out for Mount Bremer, the most noted stronghold of wild sheep in the whole Shasta region, in which large flocks abide both winter and summer. It is distant about thirty miles from Sheep Rock, and five miles from the south shore of the Lower Klamath lake. Our route lay over gray stretches of sage-plain, interrupted by rough lava slopes, timbered with juniper and yellow pine. We camped one night on the edge of a glacier-meadow, arriving early in the afternoon, and after lunch the rifles were carried into the adjacent plains and groves. Hepburn killed a fine buck antelope, which was brought into camp after dark. We had a blazing fire and we brought forward the beautiful stranger into the light and held up his head and steadied him upon his feet. The light fell full upon him, revealing the rare beauty of his color and form and eyes in the most startling manner imaginable. His height at the shoulder was 3 feet; length from nose to root of tail, 5 1/2 feet; length of horns, 7 3/4 inches; length of tail, 4 inches. Limbs smooth and graceful, somewhat slender, yet expressing abundance of substantial power. Head long, blunt and cow-like; hair, dense and spongy, about two inches long, rich yellowish brown on the back and upper half of the sides, white on the belly and lower half of the sides, with white patch on the buttock, and with three bars of white on the lower half of the neck. The tail white beneath, black above. Along the neck and between the ears the hair is four inches long, and stood erect like a mane. The ears were 7 inches long, stiff and pointed like those of a horse. The eyes, which, though dead, were still beautiful, were situated remarkably high, within one inch of the base of the horns. The antelope (*Antilocapra America*) is still abundant in the dry plains and open pine-woods between Mount Shasta and the Klamath lakes, being seen almost every day in flocks of a hundred or more.

### **ON BREMER RANCH.**

On the 11th of November we arrived at the camp and cattle ranch of the Van Bremers, situated near the base of Mount Bremer, and next morning the sheep hunt began in earnest.

The Vans, after whom the mountain was named, are three brothers, who, weary of hunting and trapping, have settled in this splendid wilderness. They assured us we would encounter no other difficulty in finding sheep than wearisome scrambling in rocks and chaparral, and that two hundred or more made their home on the mountain, and reared their lambs there.

Six years ago they all three ascended the mountain with hounds and rifles to make a grand sheep hunt, hoping to capture a score at least, but after pursuing their noble game

for a week, their boots and clothes were torn off, and their hounds lamed and worn out, compelling them to abandon the chase after killing only half a dozen, and they have never attempted to hunt wild sheep since. The hounds, though powerful and well-trained, and keeping up the pursuit night and day, failed to run down a single sheep, old or young, so excellent is their endurance and skill. On smooth ground--that is, level or ascending--the hounds would gain upon them, but on descending ground, and on loose, rough, slopes, and jagged lava crags, they fell far and hopelessly behind.

### **A DAY'S HUNT AND WEARIED HUNTERS--MULE DEER.**

The morning after our arrival was delightfully crisp and exhilarating; frost crystals covered the sage-brush, and the snows of Shasta glowed rosily in the sunrise. The hunters strode up the bulging slopes of Mount Bremer, full of eager, hopeful life. I spent the day in examining a bluff of fossiliferous sandstone on the shore of Klamath lake, and, on returning to camp at sundown, I found Brown and Hepburn sheepless and weary, declaring that for roughness and general inaccessibility the abodes of Modoc sheep surpassed all the Highland crags and tropic jungles they had ever beheld. It seems that some sixty or eighty head in different flocks were seen during the day, and a few patent bullets from three-hundred-dollar rifles scattered among them without effect.

Jerome came in later, reported his having killed a mule-deer (*Cervus Macrotis*), which was brought into camp next morning. This proved to be a splendid buck, the first of the species I had seen. His weight, exclusive of the viscera, was 225 pounds; height of the shoulder, 3 feet 7 inches; girth behind the shoulders, 3 feet 10 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches; length from nose to root of tail, 5 feet 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches; length of tail, 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches; length of ears, 10 inches; length of antlers, 2 feet 4 inches. The general color is gray, nearly as in the common black-tailed species; tail white, with a tuft of black hairs 4 inches long on the end; anterior portion of the belly and brisket black; large patch on the buttock white; legs buff.

When the ears were extended horizontally the distance across from tip to tip was 2 feet 1 inch. It is mostly from the size of the ears that this species derives its name, although the whole body is large and mule-like.

The mule-deer is quite abundant here, but it is seldom seen in company with the black-tailed on the western slopes of the Sierra, or on the coast ranges. It is a much larger deer than the black-tailed and less elegant in general form. Its body is not so round, and in every particular, except the antlers, is constructed on a rougher, heavier and stronger plan. Hepburn declared that our specimen was about as grand and shaggy and noble as the red deer of Scotland.

### **THE HUNT CONTINUED.**

On the second day of the hunt all the rifles were again carried up the wild mountain, and many sheep were seen, but only one was killed. It was a bonnie yearling lamb, whose horns were only small spikes. After being wounded it still ran nimbly over the lava,

followed by our one dog *Guy*, who, according to Jerome, "treed it on a rock," where it was killed by a second shot. Brown and Hepburn were impressed more profoundly than ever with the excellence of Mount Bremer as a sheep castle and with the nobleness of nature's wild sheep, having obtained views of several flocks leaping grandly from rock to rock in full exposure.

So much hard hunting for so little mutton was rather trying, and neither Brown nor Hepburn cared to face the mountain next day. The Vans informed us that large flocks frequently descended the mountain and strolled out into the Modoc lava-beds. We, therefore, determined to hunt in that direction, and as one of the Vans consented to guide us we became sanguine once more. Blankets, etc., were piled into the wagon and driven round to Rett lake, where we were to camp, while the hunters rode in different directions after game; but this day nothing was seen excepting sage-hens and wolves.

### **SISSON JOINS THE HUNT AMONG THE LAVA CLIFFS.**

Next day we returned to Van Bremer's, hunting on the way back. Sisson, who had thus far been engaged mostly about camp, set out afoot this morning for a square day's hunting, all by himself, declaring he would "kill a ram before night." Jerome drove round with a wagon, while our guide, Van Bremer, Hepburn, Brown and myself rode straight cross the lava plains between Klamath lake and Mount Bremer, hoping to find game on the way. Nor were we disappointed. We were riding through the sage, in single file, when Van suddenly dismounted and handed me his bridle-rein. I was looking at Mount Bremer at the time, and studying its glacial sculpture, but Van's sharp eyes were looking for sheep, and found them. There they were, fifty or more, rams, ewes and lambs, only sixty or seventy rods off, all in clear sight, on the open plain. The noble animals saw us, however, before we saw them, and stood gazing at us, evidently frightened and feeling caught on account of the levelness of the plain. To the right of them was a jagged battlement of lava; to the left their grand Castle Mountain. They looked excitedly this way and that, as if undecided as to which of the two shelters they should flee to. Meanwhile Van and Hepburn ran toward them, crouching in the sage and taking advantage of a slight swell in the ground, while hunter Brown, who was always doing unheard-of things, had taken his rifle apart and locked it in a box, and sent it home in the wagon like a case of mathematical instruments--a condition of affairs called bad luck. As soon as the hunters' heads began to appear above the swell, the watchful game, seeing the absolute need of moving somewhere, were at length led off toward their mountain by an old ram, all the rest following nearly in single file. The hunters were now within 250 yards, and just as the sheep got under full headway they drew up and took deliberate aim. Van, as he stood with his fourteen-pound rifle to his eye, looked exactly like the figures one sees on powder-flasks; but when Hepburn was aiming, his tall, manly form was slanted back in the sage-brush, like the mast of a clipper ship. Both fired the same moment and down went a noble old ram as if struck with lightning. A moment's silence, and bang went Hepburn's second barrel and down dropped another sheep. Well done Scotch rifle! A ram with one barrel, a ewe with the other. The scene was wildly exciting, but gunless Brown sat enveloped in the luck he had manufactured in the morning, speaking not a word; outwardly cool as icy Shasta, but perhaps like that old volcano--hot

within. The brave sheep were now bounding wildly over the plain in a direct line for their stronghold, and a bright thought flashed into Brown. He would head the flying game and drive it back to be shot. So, nerving himself as if ready for an English steeple-chase, he dashed his spurless heels upon his calm mustang, but after galloping madly through the sage at the rate of about two miles an hour he was compelled to draw rein in despair. In the meantime, Hepburn's ram rose again, and after staggering a few rods ran firm and erect with its huge horns thrown back over its shoulders. A second shot missed him and he fled like the wind to the shelter of the lava cliffs. This was a fine specimen, apparently full grown, broad-shouldered and massive like a buffalo, and would probably weigh 350 pounds.

### THE SAVAGE ELEMENTS IN MAN--SOME RESULTS.

Leading the mean, lean lives we do, we little know how much wildness there is in us. Only a few centuries separate us from great-grandfathers that were savage as wolves; this is the secret of our love for the hunt. Savageness is natural; civilization, at least in this stage of the play, is strained and unnatural. It requires centuries to tame men, while they are capable of being resavagized in as many years. In the wild exhilaration raised by the running of the game, and the firing, and the pursuit of the wounded, we could have torn and worried like mastiffs, but all this passed away, and we were Christians again. We went up to the ewe, which was "all that was left of them--left of the fifty." She was still breathing, but helpless. Her eye was remarkably mild and gentle, and called out sympathy as if she were human. Poor woman-sheep! She was shot through the head and never knew what hurt her. Bremer drew a big knife and coolly shed her blood, which formed a crimson pool in a hollow of the lava.

It was near sundown and we were five miles from camp. The stars came out, and every trace of excitement faded from our minds. Sisson reached camp just when we did, and reported more blood. He had killed a ram on the mountain and a couple of mule-deer.

Both the ram and the ewe were said by Van Bremer to be considerably below the average size. They measured as follows:

	RAM.		EWE.	
	ft.	in.	ft.	in.
Height at shoulders	3	6	3	0
Girth	3	11	3	3 1/4
Length from nose to root of tail	5	10 1/4	4	3 1/2
Length of ears	0	4 3/4	0	5
Length of tail	0	4 1/4	0	4 1/2
Length of horns around curve	2	9	0	11 1/2
Distance across, from tip to tip	2	5 1/2	--	--
Circumference of horns at base	1	4	0	6

The general color at this season is dull-blue, gray on the sides, and the male nearly black on the legs and belly; the female white on inside of legs and belly, and both with a very conspicuous white patch on the buttocks. The hair is close and spongy, like that of the deer.

### **LAST DAY OF THE HUNT--A STORM.**

On the fifth and last day of the hunt the fastnesses of Mount Bremer were invaded once more, but no blood was shed. Brown's luck was, of course, as unique as possible. He had shot elephants in Ceylon, yet no one of these Modoc sheep ever appeared to suspect him of being a hunter, and whether crashing through the brushwood or hammering over the lava blocks with his iron-shod shoes, they still seemed to welcome his approach. To-day he sat down in a lonely place and deliberately took off his shoes, and laid his gun beyond his reach; presently he heard footsteps, and looking round, there stood a ram as if for sacrifice. The grounds of this special familiarity so conspicuous through all the hunt are not easily guessed. Perhaps the secret lay in his color, or general brightness. For everything about Brown was bright. His coat was glossy mole-skin, his gun also was unnaturally bright and lay shining on the frosty ground like an icicle, and the nails in his English shoes glittered like crystals of feldspar. There stood the ram, there lay the hunter. He dared not move toward his rifle for fear of breaking up the meeting. Big Horns, therefore, gazed on the brightness undisturbed, and quietly disappeared in the thicket. Brown, however, lay still four hours longer until long shadows grew out over the plain, then returning to camp declared that the shooting of wild sheep was only a matter of time, and that *still* hunting was the only proper method, and after describing the gestures of his visitor and his immense horns, added, with great animation, "I would give twenty English sovereigns to shoot one of these fine fellows." Some one hinted that an ounce of lead was price enough when properly paid.

The day was all sunshine, and the sun went down in a glow of that delicious purple so common in sage-brush "deserts." But next morning the wind blew stormily and the air was dark with snow-flowers. We intended hunting two days longer to allow time for the arrival of "Brown's luck," but mountain and plain are already white, and a pass of 6,000 feet high lay between us and home, and the danger of being snow-bound so late in the season hastened our departure. Therefore all our game, sheep, deer, antelope, fox, geese and sage-hens were packed and crammed into the wagon and our hunt was done.

JOHN MUIR.