

HUNT FOR A WILDCAT.

A DAY'S SPORT IN TAGGED SULLIVAN COUNTY SWAMPS.

Wandering Propensities of the Animal—Tricks by Which he tries to Escape the Hunter—The Big Wildcat That Killed a Deer—A Lucky Shot.

The bay lynx, or wildcat, said Judge Crane of Port Jervis, is not a striking example of domestic devotion. Unlike the hero of the popular ballad, he loves to wander from his own fireside, and he is more fortunate than most fellows in the ability to indulge his wayward propensity. Most animals of our woods are extremely local in their habits. The wildcat is a tramp. It is customary for him to have two lairs, a dozen wayside haunts and perhaps as many more occasional stopping places. His two homes are frequently ten or dozen miles apart, and mark two points on the circumference of an approximate circle which encloses his stamping ground.

He starts from one of his habitations on his lonely jaunt, covering in the first twenty-four hours five or six miles on the main line of his route, while his excursions to the line are left through thicket and swamp right and many more miles. His route comprises a series of comings and goings, and eccentric figures. It is made up of small circles, his second residence. When he reaches his covers until he hunts the adjacent parts itself. His wayward fancy again leads him. Then he strikes off home, which may be by an altogether new route, or rather a series of routes. He is not a creature of habit. Occasionally he curls himself up like a house cat and sleeps on the ground, hunting usually by night, and sometimes two weeks may elapse before he regains his starting point. Without doubt he keeps this roving up all the time, although it is only during the winter months, when the snow holds the record of his wanderings, that we can be sure of his movements. For this reason too the winter is the only time we can hunt him scientifically. If he is disturbed by man he will pike off for the more distant home, perhaps running for eight miles in a perfectly straight line. If you can set a dog upon his hot track he will take to the nearest swamp or patch of briars, and wind and twist and turn until he almost unseats the reason of the calmest and most calculating old hound that ever followed a trail. He will not take to water or resort to other methods of obliterating his trail than a deer adopts. He simply goes round and round in the thickest brush he can find, depending all the time on mere strength and grit and endurance to win out and throw off the persisting hound. He is not afraid of the dog, but the latter bores him by his persistency, and he resorts to the same measures adopted by the man who owes you \$10. It is very difficult to tree a wildcat. Sometimes after being hunted for hours in the way I have indicated, a fresh and fast hound might make him climb a tree, but this is rare. The man who shoots a wildcat without understanding these principles is lucky.

Last week Lew Boyd, the presiding genius of the hunt at Hartwood, telephoned to me that he had found the fresh track of a cat.

'That cat's come back from Eden,' was the way Lew put it—Eden was the second place of residence of this particular cat—and he's on this side of the Monticello road, now.'

'So I telephoned to Miles Sturtevant to come down from Hartwood the next morning to meet me. I met his wagon on the road four miles from town. We bumped our way over the turnpike to the top of Sullivan county, and then turned into the old Texas road, picking up Lew Boyd and his hound on the way. Three miles further on the Gray road strikes out to the east at right angles. Here we dismissed the wagon, chained the hound and walked on in the direction of Gray Swamp. At the head of Gray Swamp we found the tracks of a big cat pointing toward the swamp, and a few yards further on we came upon a similar track crossing the road in the opposite direction. Lew asserted confidently that the two tracks were made that day, and by the same animal, and the question remained to be decided on which side of the road he was at that moment. He was of the opinion that the cat was in Long Swamp. So we trudged through the woods for three miles along the top of a low ridge.

We passed innumerable deer tracks on the way. As we neared Long Swamp we put up a fine deer that went dashing off toward Port Jervis, and a little later another jumped through the brush close by. Long Swamp is of the shape of an enormous two-fingered hand, covering hundreds of acres. After we gained the swamp the sun went under the clouds, and even the instinct of direction possessed by Lew Boyd, trained woodsman as he is, was

at fault. We made our way out by the aid of my pocket compass.

On the west edge of the swamp we came suddenly upon a place where the ground was torn and trampled. Tufts of hair and pieces of pelt lay about on the blood-stained snow, and there was every sign of a terrific struggle. On the edge of the battleground lay the branch of a deer, and a few feet further on we found its head and spine, gnawed clean. The work had been done two nights before, and from all signs this had been a no running battle of miles. The tragedy had all been enacted within a few feet, and we both felt a new respect for these animals that could do away with a nearly full-grown deer. Lew cut through to skirt the east end of the swamp in quest of a fresh track, and I went up Handy Hill in the opposite direction to look over a smaller swamp in the vicinity.

'The cat ain't here,' Lew announced definitely when we reached the swamp in Gray Swamp. 'He's back again.' 'Gray Swamp is the worst place in Sullivan county. It is almost impenetrable. It is perfectly flat, and in addition to the usual dense undergrowth it is overgrown with laurel whose branches are interplacod so thickly that it seems impossible for any creature to get through. I would not cross Gray Swamp for money; for a wildcat, I might. Unless he had wended or sighted us the animal was somewhere in the neighborhood, and we had reduced all likely hiding places to the depths of this swamp. Lew told me to go in and select as open a position as I could find while he walked around the swamp to look for tracks leading out. I wriggled and twisted and tore my way through the brush until I found a well-worn deer path along which I came upon several of their round beds. One of them, a little larger than the others was surrounded by the tracks, not much larger than a copper cent, of two fawns. It was pretty tough work getting inside of that swamp, and long before I had a suitable position I heard the brush within fifty feet of me. I couldn't see a thing but laurels and so I kept still and cursed my luck. My only chance was to remain quiet and wait for the dog to bring the animal around again. After the dog passed I hunted around until I found a fallen log, from the top of which I could see for a few yards about me. The sounds of the hunt held on quite to the further edge of the swamp and then gradually turned.

Suddenly something light and soft and graceful made a curving leap over the brush. I caught another glimpse of the tawny skin a few feet further on, aimed at it quickly and fired. The thing dropped and sank slowly among the bushes. It looked as though it lay crouching for a spring when

I worked my way to it, its face toward me, and the fire in its eyes not yet dead. A moment later the dog burst through the brush and buried his teeth in the cat's neck without a moment's hesitation. The hound is of the Jerk Cole breed, a strain known throughout this region for honesty, gameness and grit. Many a good dog flinch from a wildcat, dead or alive. Will this one went at it as though he had never known any other kind of business.

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IN A PRISON LAUNDRY.

A Prison Where Washing is "Taken In" and Exceedingly Well Done. There are several problems connected with the finding of employment for law-breakers during their detention in the present world. Work in prisons should be punitive, profitable to the State, and beneficial to malefactors, who ought, if necessary, to be able to turn to account, after they are discharged, what they have learnt while in confinement. All these conditions are fulfilled by laundry work as it is carried on at Strangeways Gaol, Manchester. More than twenty years ago Miss Little, the matron, made an innovation in this department. Hitherto the prison laundry had been given up solely to washing for the institution. On Miss Little's initiative linen was "taken in" from outside in addition. And ever since this system has been continued, with very satisfactory results.

By permission of the Prison Commissioners, I recently visited (write a representative) the laundry in Strangeways Prison. It consists of two large rooms—one for washing, the other for ironing, packing up, etc.—and is like other laundries, with only a few exceptions. In the first place, the women are, of course, all uniformly attired, each wearing a blue print dress, to which is attached the usual numbered badge. Next, there is a partition between each washing tub for the purpose of preventing talking.

'A prisoner is not usually allowed out of her cell till she gets a stripe on her arm,' I was told by the officer in charge, who, in the absence of Miss Little, showed me around. 'Before that can be obtained she has to serve a month. But the Commissioners allow a woman to wash without a stripe, on condition that she is partitioned off from the others.'

Lastly, the work is exceedingly well done, much better than in many private laundries that I have had the misfortune to know. I have seen showier linen than that I inspected at Strangeways—gloss covers a multitude of washing sins—but none more honestly and skilfully 'got up.'

'Do you select women haphazard for working in the wash house?' I asked. 'No,' replied my cicerone. 'When one

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comes in, we ask her what she can do. If she says 'sewing,' we give her sewing. So it is with other things. Cotton picking, though, is the last resort. Everybody has to do something, though we do not, of course, look for anything from half-witted women; they do almost what they like. 'But if a woman is strong, and is passed by the doctor—that is essential—we put her in the wash-house. There is an instruction officer there, and she teaches her if necessary. The women, I may say, are very willing as a rule, and there is not much trouble with them. It is very rarely, too, that one is sent out of the wash-house. If a woman is reported for misconduct, she is kept out till she has permission to resume her work. That is a form of punishment that is greatly disliked, principally because the diet is so much better when she is in the laundry. A first-class prisoner does not get any meat at all for a month—only gruel and bread. If she goes into the laundry, she gets a third-class diet.' The difference between the two scales is considerable. A female prisoner on third-class diet is entitled to 6 ozs. of bread and

one pint of gruel for breakfast, and a similar ration for supper. On Sunday and Wednesday she gets for dinner 4 ozs. of bread, 6 ozs. of potatoes, and 6 ozs. of suet pudding; on Monday and Fridays, 6 ozs. of bread, 8 ozs. of potatoes, and 3 ozs. of cooked beet without bone; on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 6 ozs. of bread, 6 ozs. of potatoes, and three-quarters of a pint of soup.

'How many women do you employ in the laundry?' was my next question.

'About sixty usually, and we keep them going, too. We have twenty-five washes, from clubs, hotels, private houses, etc., every week, besides, of course, the prison washing; and our customers pay us about £22 per week on an average.'

'And the hours, what are they?'

'From half-past six in the morning till half-past five at night.'

'Your workers are always coming and going, of course,' I remarked. 'That, I suppose, is rather awkward?'

'Well, yes, it is to some extent. But a number of the women come here again and again. We know what they can do, and they know their work. So the difficulty is not so great as might be supposed.'

'Are any of the women competent to earn their living in a laundry after they leave here—I mean any of those who came into the prison with little or no previous knowledge of the washerwoman's trade?'

'Certainly, that is the great advantage of working in the laundry. They have a 'trade in their fingers' when they go inside. Many get situations. We very often have women here for eighteen months at a stretch. Some of them are employed in the wash house all the time they are in our hands, and when they have completed their sentences they are good workers.'

'Does the laundry pay?'

'I think it returns a profit. Although the wash-house in Strangeways Gaol was the first of her Majesty's laundries to take work from outside, others, I believe, now do likewise, to a greater or lesser extent. From the housewife's point of view, this is a feature of prison life that cannot become too general, for good washers are scarce, and more of them that are trained the greater is the chance of domestic peace—Tit-Bit

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