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We Shot a Deer

By Ferdie Deering

Ever since I was old enough to listen to early day Indian Territory settlers tell how they shot down their daily meat in the front yard, I have wondered what inspires so many modern hunters to head for the hills during the annual open deer season.

They go in such numbers that the shy little animals have become almost as scarce here in the southwest as polar bears in Cuba.

Modern hunters couldn't be going hunting for the same reasons Indian Territory hunters lugged home the venison because anybody who can add two-and-two can see it is cheaper to buy a beef or hog than it is to buy a gun, license and other hunting paraphernalia, then take time to tramp over miles of mountains hunting something to shoot at.

Nor even with all that walking could exercise be the

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prime mover in the hunter's spirit because many deer hunters get plenty of exercise every day anyhow.

It couldn't be, either, that they go deer hunting to relax. If a huntsman expects to bag his quota of one deer he can't spend much time in relaxation or the season will be over before he gets it.

The scenery couldn't account for deer hunting's popularity, because mountain scenery in Oklahoma is more beautiful when leaves are budding in the spring or earlier in the fall when trees are transformed by Jack Frost's paint brush into a waving myriad of color.

All of these and other possible reasons I considered but none satisfied my curiosity. So last fall, when I was unexpectedly offered a chance, I decided to go deer hunting and, if possible, shoot a deer to find out for myself.

Francis Flood, world traveler who has shot at tigers in India, elephants in Africa and stalked big game in South American jungles, arranged the hunting trip with some natives of the Kiamichi mountains in the wilds of McCurtain county,

I borrowed a red cap, hustled some leather boots and packed my razor. I later found out the latter action was inappropriate for a hunting trip and those boots got terribly heavy before the trip was over. ~~But~~ anyway, I went hunting.

The season already was under way when we arrived in the hills. but we were assured that "plenty of Deer" remained in the hills. I soon learned that "plenty of deer" in southeastern Oklahoma means that a liberal estimate fixes the number of animals as about equal to the number of hunters in a given area.

We arose at 4 o'clock next morning to get an early chance at the deer. The camp arsenal was brought forth and my ignorance of firearms, it developed, placed me under a handicap from the start. Instead of choosing one of the heavy high-powered rifles like Ezra Beavers, J.E. Beavers, Roy Currance and Flood carried, I selected an automatic .22 caliber rifle. No need to tote a cannon over the mountains, I thought.

We started walking. We walked miles and miles, up the creek path, down the old log tram trail and over the hills  
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into the mountains. We passed a lot of hunters' camps and an even larger number of hunters. Some had seen deer. Some had shot at deer. A few even knew fellows who had killed deer.

But we saw only deer tracks and most of them appeared to be several hours old.

"If there're any deer up here they'll probably get tromped to death by so many hunters as they is here," drawled Roy, one of our guides.

Well, it didn't take long for me to learn two very important facts about deer hunting.

The first was that a swivel chair is no place to train for a deer hunt.

The second was that leather-soled boots are not made for mountain climbing. The round rocks and pine needles quickly polish the soles to a glassy slickness, making footing uncertain, necessitating many additional steps going up and causing many tumbles going down.

By mid-morning I was panting and wondering why I had worn so many clothes. Whoever told me it was cool in the mountains,

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anyway? I had just about concluded it would be more fun to let the deer hunt us a while. They would have better hunting because there seemed to be so many more hunters than deer.

We were laboring down a mountain slope when a gray and white streak sprang from a thicket in the ravine. Our first deer! It was not more than 50 yards away.

"Hey, don't shoot that," yelled <sup>Flood</sup> "That's a doe."

His advice was unnecessary because by the time I got my gun into shooting position the deer had disappeared over the mountain top.

We struggled up hill and down a couple of hours more. Every mountain seemed higher, slicker and steeper to me. I lagged behind. Soon my companions were out of sight over a ridge. I labored onward more slowly.

Finally, I sat down on a log to regain my lost wind.

A few ~~/~~moments later I glanced to the next mountain slope, hoping to see some hunters who could tell me how to get back to camp. My heart jumped three beats when I saw a big buck standing in front of a clump of bushes. Frantically, I

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grabbed for the rifle I had several times considered abandoning as excess baggage when the going was unusually rough.

I pointed the rifle in the direction of the deer and banged away as fast as I could.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The deer dropped.

I tumbled into the ravine and strained my tired muscles up the side of the mountain to claim my kill. It seemed a half mile, at least; the distance may have been 250 yards.

As I approached, I heard voices. My companions already were gathered around the deer, a fine 10-point buck weighing perhaps a couple of hundred pounds. My chest expanded.

"I had to take the second shot at him before he fell," Ezra was saying as I puffed into the circle.

"Oh, did you shoot at this deer, too?" I asked, trying to appear nonchalant.

"Yeah, I just grazed him here on the shoulder with the first shot," he replied, "but I got him right here with the second one."

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"You mean that's where I shot him," I said, not quite comprehending that he was claiming the deer as his own. He slit the buck's throat with his knife.

The boys all laughed.

"Do you think you shot this deer?" somebody asked.

"Why, sure---why, I shot at him three times from right over there on that next slope," I boasted modestly. "Why, certainly, it's my deer."

"If you shot it, you're in bad," Flood, said, "because it's against the law to shoot a deer with a .22 rifle."

"But you didn't shoot it," Ezra added, "because your gun was loaded with blanks. We didn't think you'd be shooting at any deer and we didn't have enough rifles to go around, so we just loaded that .22 with blanks and gave it to you so you could shoot it if you got lost."

Sure enough, the rest of the shells in my gun were blanks.

Now, I know how a hunter feels when he shoots a deer, because Ezra and I shot one. It was merely a quirk of fate that his shots took effect and mine didn't. Who can say that if I

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had been shooting a legal rifle and it had been loaded with bullets, I wouldn't have a nice pair of antlers for a hall hatrack?

But I still don't know why deer hunting is so popular. My muscles were too sore to continue the investigation next day.



