

## Big Game Hunting in Iowa

[The following account of a hunting trip in 1835 in northeastern Iowa was written by the Englishman, Charles Augustus Murray, who wandered widely in America in 1834-1836 and described his adventures in a two-volume work entitled *Travels in North America*. The extract here printed is from pages 110-129 of the second volume.—  
THE EDITOR.]

I found that two or three of the officers were planning a hunting expedition towards the head waters of Turkey River (which runs from north-west to south-east and falls into the Mississippi some miles below Prairie du Chien), where we were told that pheasants, deer, elk, and other game were in the greatest abundance. I requested permission to join the party, as my object was to see the country; and I could get no steam-boat, or other opportunity of visiting St. Peter's and the Falls of St. Anthony.

We accordingly set out in a large boat, containing about twenty men, a light cart, a pony, plenty of provisions, and a due supply of ammunition. Being obliged to ascend the Mississippi about ten miles, our progress was extremely slow; for the stream was strong, the head wind blowing pretty fresh (accompanied by an icy chilling sleet); and the boat could only be propelled by being pushed up with long poles along the shores of the various islands, where the current was the least formidable. However, as it was a "party of pleasure," the men were in the highest spirits, forgot the wet and the cold, and the boat

echoed with jokes and laughter. A cap was blown overboard, and a fellow plunged head over heels into the stream after it; he went some feet under water, rose, swam in pursuit, recovered the cap, bore it in triumph to land, and running up along the bank, was taken again on board. . . . .

In spite of wind and sleet, we were soon obliged to resume our slow ascent of the river, and in due course of time arrived at Painted Rock, the place of our debarkation. We pitched our tent in a low marshy hollow, which would be an admirable situation for a temple to the goddess of fever and ague. On the following morning we commenced our march into the interior: the whole party (consisting of three officers, four soldiers, myself, and servant) was on foot, and a stout pony drew our baggage in a sort of springless vehicle, resembling a small English tax-cart. After a tedious march over a high, barren, and uninteresting prairie, for three days, at the rate of twenty or twenty-five miles a day, we arrived at the point on Turkey River at which our grand hunt was to commence.

On the third day, in the forenoon, an Indian came galloping down with a loose rein towards us. On a nearer approach he proved to be a Winnebago, who had left his band (which was distant two or three miles) to reconnoitre our party. We soon came up with their main body, which was encamped by the side of a wooded hill, and presented a wild and picturesque appearance. They had just struck their

lodges, and were loading the horses to recommence their march, when we came up with them. Two or three of the chiefs, and the principal men, were sitting, as usual, and smoking, while the women gathered the bundles and packs, and the boys ran or galloped about, catching the more wild and refractory beasts of burthen. The officer of our party knew the chief, who had been down frequently to Fort Crawford, and we accordingly sat down and smoked the pipe of peace and recognition.

The conversation between white men and Winnebagoes is almost always carried on in Saukie, Menomenee, or some other dialect of the Chippeway, as their own language can scarcely be acquired or pronounced by any but their own tribe: it is dreadfully harsh and guttural; the lips, tongue, and palate, seem to have resigned their office to the uvula in the throat, or to some yet more remote ministers of sound. In all the Upper Mississippi I only heard of one white man who could speak and understand it tolerably; but their best interpreter is a half-breed named Pokette, who is equally popular with his white and red brethren; the latter of whom have granted him several fine tracts of land in the Wisconsin territory, where he resides. I am told that he keeps thirty or forty horses, and has made a fortune of above one hundred thousand dollars.

I fell in with him at Galena, and had half an hour's conversation with him, only for the pleasure of looking at him and scanning his magnificent and Hercu-

lean frame. I think he is the finest (though by no means the largest) mould of a man that ever I saw: he is about six feet four inches in height, and as perfectly proportioned as painter or statuary could desire. Perhaps his arms and legs are too muscular for perfect beauty of form; still, that is a defect easily pardoned. His countenance is open, manly, and intelligent; and his ruddy brown complexion, attesting the mingled blood of two distinct races, seems to bid defiance to cold, heat, or disease. He is proverbially good-natured, and is universally considered the strongest man in the Upper Mississippi.

He is said never to have struck any person in anger except one fellow, a very powerful and well-known boxer, from one of the towns on the river, who had heard of Pokette's strength, and went to see him with the determination of thrashing (or, in American phrase, whipping) him. Accordingly he took an opportunity of giving a wanton and cruel blow to a favourite dog belonging to Pokette; and, on the latter remonstrating with him on his conduct, he attempted to treat the master as he had treated the dog. On offering this insolent outrage, he received a blow from the hand of Pokette which broke the bridge of his nose, closed up both his eyes, and broke or bruised some of the bones of the forehead so severely as to leave his recovery doubtful for several weeks.

To return to the Winnebago encampment. As the Indians were also upon a hunting expedition on

Turkey River, we all started together, and went a few miles in the same direction; but we soon divided, and they proceeded to the south-west, while our party kept a north-west course; consequently, on reaching the river, they were camped about six or eight miles below us. I little thought that these rascals would so pertinaciously and successfully endeavour to spoil our sport; but I suppose they considered us intruders, and determined to punish us accordingly. We had, in the mean time, killed nothing but a few pheasants and grouse; but our object in coming to Turkey River was to find deer, elks, and bears, all of which we had been taught to expect in abundance. We pitched our camp in a well-wooded valley (called here "a bottom") formed by the river; our wigwam was constructed, after the Menomenee fashion, of mats made from a kind of reed, and bound firmly in a semicircular form to a frame-work of willow, or other elastic wood, fastened by strings formed from the bark of the elm. The soldiers cut an abundance of firewood, and we were well provided with flour, biscuit, coffee, and pork; so that we had little to fear from cold or hunger.

The day after our arrival we all set off in different directions in search of game. Some of the party contented themselves with shooting ducks and pheasants; I and two or three others went in pursuit of the quadruped game. I confess I expected to kill one or two elk, perhaps a bear, and common deer *ad libitum*; however, after a walk of six or eight hours,

during which I forded the river twice, and went over many miles of ground, I returned without having seen a single deer. This surprised me the more, as I saw numberless beds and paths made by them, but no track of either elk or bear. My brother sportsmen were equally unfortunate, and no venison graced our board. I had, however, heard a great many shots, some of which were fired before daylight, and we soon perceived that our Indian neighbours had laid a plan to drive all the deer from the vicinity of our encampment.

We continued to while away some hours very agreeably in bee-hunting, at which sport two or three of the soldiers were very expert. Of the bee-trees which we cut down, one was very rich in honey; the flavour was delicious, and I ate it in quantities which would have nauseated me had it been made from garden plants, instead of being collected from the sweet wild flowers of the prairie. Our life was most luxurious in respect of bed and board, for we had plenty of provisions, besides the pheasants, grouse, &c. that we shot; and at night the soldiers made such a bonfire of heavy logs as to defy the annoyances of wet and cold.

The second day's sport was as fruitless as the first; but the same firing continued all around us, for which we vented many maledictions on our Indian tormentors. On the third day I contented myself with sauntering along the banks of the river and shooting a few pheasants: evening was closing in,

the weather was oppressively warm, and I lay down at the foot of a great tree to rest and cool myself by the breath of a gentle breeze, which crept with a low whisper through its leaves, when I distinctly heard a plashing noise in the water at the distance of a hundred yards. I rolled myself, silently and stealthily as a snake, towards the spot — the plashing still continued, and I thought it must be an Indian, either performing his ablutions, or walking up the bed of the stream, in order to conceal his footprints. At length I reached the unwieldy stump of a fallen tree, from which I could command a view of the water; and raising my head cautiously, saw a magnificent stag bathing and refreshing himself, unconscious of the glittering tube which was pointed straight at his heart.

I never saw a more noble or graceful animal; he tossed his great antlers in the air, then dipped his nose in the water and snorted aloud; then he stamped with his feet, and splashed till the spray fell over his sleek and dappled sides. Here a sportsman would interrupt me, saying, "A truce to your description,— did you shoot him through the brain or through the heart?" And a fair querist might ask, "Had you the heart to shoot so beautiful a creature?" Alas! alas! my answer would satisfy neither! I had left my rifle at home, and had only my fowling-piece, loaded with partridge shot; I was sixty yards from the stag, and could not possibly creep, undiscovered, a step nearer, and I had not the

heart to wound the poor animal, when there was little or no chance of killing him. I therefore saw him conclude his bath; and then clearing, at one bound, the willow bushes which fringed the opposite bank, he disappeared in a thicket. I marked well the place; and resolving to take an early opportunity of renewing my visit under more favourable circumstances, returned home.

On the following day, I sallied forth with my trusty double-rifle, carefully loaded, each barrel carrying a ball weighing an ounce. I chose the middle of the day; because the deer, after feeding all the morning, generally go down to the streams to drink previously to their lying down during the warm hours of noon-tide. I crept noiselessly to my stump, gathered a few scattered branches to complete the shelter of my hiding-place, and lay down with that mingled feeling (so well known to every hunter) which unites the impatience of a lover with the patience of a Job! I suppose I had been there nearly two hours, when I thought I heard a rustling on the opposite side; it was only a squirrel hopping from bough to bough. Again I was startled by a saucy pheasant, who seemed conscious of the security which he now gained from his insignificance, and strutted, and scraped, and crowed within a few paces of the muzzle of my rifle. At length, I distinctly heard a noise among the willows, on which my anxious look was rivetted; it grew louder and louder, and then I heard a step in the water, but could not



yet see my victim, as the bank made a small bend, and he was concealed by the projecting bushes.

I held my breath, examined the copper caps; and as I saw the willows waving in the very same place in which he had crossed the day before, I cocked and pointed my rifle at the spot where he must emerge: the willows on the very edge of the bank move,— my finger is on the trigger, when, NOT my noble stag, but an Indian carrying on his shoulder a hind-quarter of venison, jumps down upon the smooth sand of the beach! I was so mad with anger and disappointment, that I could scarcely take the sight of the rifle from the fellow's breast! I remained motionless, but watching all his movements. He put down his rifle and his venison; and shading his eyes with his hands, made a long and deliberate examination of the bank on which I was concealed; but my faithful stump was too much even for his practised eyes, and I remained unobserved. He then examined, carefully, every deer track and foot-print on the sand whereon he stood; after which, resuming his rifle and meat, he tried the river at several places in order to find the shallowest ford.

As it happened, he chose the point exactly opposite to me; so that when he came up the bank, he was within a few feet of me. He passed close by my stump without noticing me, and I then gave a sudden and loud Pawnee yell. He certainly did jump at this unexpected apparition of a man armed with a rifle; but I hastened to dispel any feelings of uneasiness

by friendly signs, because I do not conceive such a trial to be any fair test of a man's courage, and I have no doubt that if he had given me a similar surprise, I should have been more startled than he was. He smiled when I showed him my hiding-place, and explained to him my object in selecting it. I took him home to our wigwam; and as my companions had met with no success, we bought his meat for some bread and a drink of whisky.

On the following day I determined to get a deer, and accordingly started with two soldiers to a large grove or bottom, where they had seen several the evening before. The weather was dry; and as our footsteps on the dead leaves were thus audible at a great distance, the difficulty of approaching so watchful an enemy was much increased. As the Indians had driven off the greater part of the game from our immediate neighbourhood, we walked ten or eleven miles up the river before we began to hunt; we then followed its winding descent, and saw three or four does, but could not get near enough to shoot; at length one started near me, and galloped off through the thick brushwood. I fired and wounded it very severely; it staggered, and turned round two or three times; still it got off through the thicket before I could get another sight of it. At the same time, I heard another shot fired by a soldier, a quarter of a mile on our right. I looked in vain for blood, by which to track my wounded deer, and gave it up in despair when, just as I was making towards

the river, to rejoin my companion, I came upon some fresh blood-tracks: after following them a hundred yards, I found a doe quite dead, but still warm; I thought it was the one which I had just shot, and hallooed to the soldier, who returned to assist me in skinning and hanging it up out of reach of the wolves. On examining the wound, the doe proved to be the one which he had shot, as the ball had entered on the right side, and I had fired from the left; he thought he had missed her.

We found no more game this day, and returned to the camp. The other sportsmen had met with no success. The Indians now set fire to the prairies and woods all around us, and the chance of good sport daily diminished. These malicious neighbours were determined to drive us from the district; they evidently watched our every motion; and whenever we entered a wood or grove to hunt, they were sure to set the dry grass on fire. Half a mile to the windward they pursued this plan so effectually, as not only to spoil our hunting, but on two occasions to oblige me to provide hastily for my personal safety: on the first of these, they set fire to a wood where I was passing, and compelled me to cross a creek for fear of being overtaken by the flames; on the second, having watched me as I crossed a large dry prairie, beyond which was some timber that I wished to try for deer, they set fire to the grass in two or three places to the windward; and as it was blowing fresh at the time, I saw that I should not have time to

escape by flight; so I resorted to the simple expedient, in which lies the only chance of safety on such occasions: I set the prairie on fire where I myself was walking, and then placed myself in the middle of the black barren space which I thus created, and which covered many acres before the advancing flames reached its border; when they did so they naturally expired for want of fuel, but they continued their leaping, smoking, and crackling way on each side of me to the right and to the left. It was altogether a disagreeable sensation, and I was half choked with hot dust and smoke.

On the following afternoon, I went out again in a direction that we had not tried, where the prairie was not yet burnt. I could find no deer, and the shades of night began to close round me, when, on the opposite hills to those on which I stood, I observed two or three slender pillars of curling smoke arising out of the wood, which was evidently now fired on purpose by the Indians. I sat down to watch the effect; for, although I had seen many prairie fires, I had never enjoyed so good an opportunity as the present; for the ground rose in a kind of amphitheatre, of which I had a full and commanding view. Now the flames crept slowly along the ground, then, as the wind rose, they burst forth with increasing might, fed by the dry and decayed elders of the forest, which crackled, tottered, and fell beneath their burning power; they now rose aloft in a thousand fantastic and picturesque forms, lighting up the whole landscape to a

lurid hue; while the dense clouds of smoke which rolled gloomily over the hills, mixed with the crash of the falling timber, gave a dreadful splendour to the scene. I sat for some time enjoying it; and when I rose to pursue my course towards home, I had much difficulty in finding it. The night relapsed into its natural darkness; the prairie at my feet was black, burnt, and trackless, and I could see neither stream nor outline of hill by which to direct my steps.

I sat down again for a few minutes to rest myself, and to recollect, as well as I might be able, any or all the circumstances which should guide me in the direction which I ought to take. While I remained in this position a band of prairie wolves, on an opposite hill, began their wild and shrill concert; and I was somewhat startled at hearing it answered by the long loud howl of a single wolf, of the large black species, that stood and grinned at me, only a few yards from the spot where I was seated. I did not approve of so close a neighbourhood to this animal, and I called to him to be off, thinking that the sound of my voice would scare him away; but as he still remained I thought it better to prepare my rifle, in case he should come still nearer, but determined not to fire until the muzzle touched his body, as it was too dark to make a sure shot at any distance beyond a few feet. However, he soon slunk away, and left me alone.

Fortunately I remembered the relative bearings of our camp, and of the point whence the wind came,

and after scrambling through a few thickets, and breaking my shins over more than one log of fallen wood, I reached home without accident or adventure. The whole country around us was now so completely burnt up and devastated, that nothing remained for us but to resume our march towards the fort.