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For National Morale: **SPORT AS USUAL!**

RAYMOND J. BROWN, Editor
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THE COON'S MEXICAN COUSIN

by
ROB F. SANDERSON



Sanderson and his 30-inch chulu. Half the beast's length consisted of tail

WHEN we rounded a rocky abutment on the mountain-side, I hardly expected to see something brownish gray running through the cover on the opposite slope of the wide canyon we were skirting. But there it was, and Manuel saw it at the same instant.

"Chulu! Chulu!" he cried. "Chulu muey grande!"

I was off my horse and jerked my carbine from its saddle boot in an instant. But when I looked again across the canyon, the running form had disappeared.

Then I saw it crossing a short stretch of open, rock-littered slope. Lining the sights I fired a quick off-hand shot. The bullet struck low, but flying rock fragments must have hit the animal. It rolled over, regained its footing, and nimbly vanished into the thick brush before I could work the bolt for a second shot.

Manuel just shrugged his shoulders, exhaled smoke from his raw Mexican cigarette, and rode back to rope my horse, which invariably mistook my fir-

ing for the report of a race-track starter's gun.

The first chulu I had ever seen, and very possibly the last for this trip. I had missed my only shot. Since early morning Manuel and I had pushed our wiry little horses across boulders and loose rock rubble, searching the steep mountain slopes for chulu sign. Cacti and catclaw raked our clothes and furrowed our skin, but we dared not dodge sidewise for fear our weight would overbalance the small mounts and send both horse and rider tumbling into the yawning canyon bottoms below.

Manuel coming with the horses interrupted my retrospection, and, mounted alongside my companion, we conferred in simple Spanish. The Sonoran sun was well across the azure desert sky, and to be caught even two miles from camp when the long shadows of an early dusk fell across this rugged, deep-canyoned terrain, was to spend a night in the open without blankets. It was warm enough for shirt sleeves in the afternoon, but I knew there'd be frost before morning, and having little taste for such hardship, we reined the horses toward home. At least, I consoled myself, I'd got a rough idea of the looks of a live chulu even

though I caught only an eighty-yard glimpse.

I had photographed the fleeing form in my mind. It ran at a nimble gallop, long tail erect like a flagpole. Predominantly brown, it appeared to have gray-white markings on the forequarters. This checked with what I had read concerning the Mexican chulu, or coati-mondi; marked with brown to gray, top fur tipped with white two to three feet in length, with a ringed tail as long as the body itself. The Brazilian species is more gaily marked, with a chestnut back and orange belly. These two western-hemisphere areas, Brazil and Mexico-Central America, are the only places the species frequents.

"Popular talk," Manuel explained to me, "among us Mexicans is that the chulu is half monkey and half raccoon."

Of course, that's not so. Its tail, ringed like a coon's and long as a monkey's, is not prehensile, and anatomical and dental differences classify the chulu as a distinct species. An expert climber and very docile when tamed young, they have been termed "coon bears," "Mexican honey bears," and "tropical raccoons." It's an omnivorous animal.

The extremely strange appearance of the coati or chulu had challenged my imagination. I resolved to bag a specimen on this hunting expedition. Although scientific data stated that the creatures range as far north as
(Continued on page 86)

Manuel was alert for any sign of action on the slope beyond



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Coon's Mexican Cousin

(Continued from page 40)

southern Mexico only, I felt sure some lived in Sonora. Old hunters and prospectors who had ranged the mountains of the Great Sonoran Desert had told me a few tales of an animal called "chulu" by the natives, the description of which coincided in major respects with that of the Mexican coati-mondi.

"They've got the funniest snout you ever seen," one old hunter told me. "Can roll it right back like an elephant curls his trunk. And under that snout is the sharpest set of razor fangs that ever killed a dog! They've bled lots of good hounds to death at the throat fer me."

So I felt sure I would find chulu in the Sonoran mountains. Doubtless the Sonoran chulu is a desert variation of the arboreal coati found in the south, just as the desert raccoon of our southwestern desert is a cousin of the raccoon in eastern, wooded United States.

"Yes," an old patriarch living back in the mountains had told me, "there are some chulus here. Not many, but a few. My son, Manuel, is an expert horseman and he will take you to them in the morning."

And so we had started out, and Manuel had showed me a chulu, and I had missed it.

The next day I went hunting for wild hogs, but I was resolved to shoot a chulu to add to my specimen collection, and on the second day Manuel and I persuaded John, an expert hunter and a dependable shot, to accompany us to chulu country.

THE Sierras Negras comprise such precipitous topography that even the reckless vaqueros seldom venture into it. Manuel had not been there for six years. The entire surface is covered with loose, black volcanic rock which is easily dislodged by horses' hoofs and may roll a quarter mile down the mountainside, to send back ominous, dull echos from the canyon floors.

Presently it was noon and our throats were dry. The horses stepped cautiously along the steeply piled loose rock below an outcrop, and we were urging them on in an attempt to keep pace with the adroit Manuel, who deftly guided his mount across the forbidding terrain and through the thorn and cactus tangles.

"Hurry!" John, a short way ahead, shot the word back urgently.

Looking ahead I could see the stoic Manuel sitting motionless on his mount about a hundred feet ahead on the ridge crest. His arm and index finger were outstretched toward something beyond the ridge.

"Chulu! Chulu!" he was saying in short, excited whispers. "Muey chulus!" There must have been six or eight. All I could glimpse was the flagpole tails as the band dodged and fled through the brush down along the ridge into a rock saddle. In an instant I was on the ground. I snatched my carbine and sprinted toward the vanished chulus.

At the lowest part of the saddle John overtook me. Breathless, we scanned the country unsuccessfully for the chulus. Looking back, John saw Manuel immobile astride his horse.


"The chulus didn't climb the rise in the ridge just ahead," John quickly reasoned, "or Manuel would have them spotted and be dancing on his saddle horn by now. They took the down slope into one of these two canyons."

"This way," I elected, selecting the

(Continued on next page)

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Coon's Mexican Cousin
(Continued from page 86)

narrower canyon. "The other canyon's too wide to hunt anyway."
"You take the canyon bottom and I'll cover the cliff," John shouted at parting. I skidded down the slope, loose rock and gravel giving way under my feet. Several times I almost fell on my face and all but dropped my carbine. Loose rock clattered ahead of me, and it looked as though I had no chance to shoot. Suddenly a rifle report shattered the silent canyon. Ahead to the left a shower of shattered rock burst into the air. Looking up I saw the dwarfed figure of John sitting behind his 'scope on the brink of the distant cliff. I scampered up a rock outcrop that bulged above the brush just ahead of me. A hundred feet below, two flagpole tails fitted through the brush and were gone before I could gain footing and raise my rifle on the precarious perch.

FOR five minutes I scanned the canyon walls for a flick of movement. Of course, if the chulu fled down the canyon they were safe. But they had no more chance of getting up those thinly brushed slopes alive, I thought, than a polar bear had. Then I heard a faint clatter, and turning, saw a falling rock, dislodged from the right canyon wall, bouncing down the slope.

Glancing above it I spotted two brownish gray forms humping for the upper rim. They were within ten feet of safety when I fired hastily ahead of them to turn them back.

They veered abruptly from the stinging shower of bullet-shattered rock and came bounding zigzag down the rocky precipice. Being about a hundred yards away, I could follow most of their flight across the semi-open slope.

I was handicapped by shooting off-hand—and if I knelt the slope would cut off my line of sight. Several times I thought I'd scored a hit. I saw the animal roll down slope and stop for a second; but each time it sprang to its feet and bounded away.

The chulu I was following had almost got down below my line of vision. I had begun to realize what small targets the animals were, so I shot with greater precision. On my last shot the chulu sprang into the air, fell thirty feet, and lodged in a patch of brush. The other of the pair had disappeared.

I combed the area but found not a trace of chulu. I discovered where the bullet had struck the gravelly earth, but there was no blood.

I heard someone shout in Spanish and turning, I saw a man in chaps bounding down the far canyon slope after a wounded chulu that was fast outdistancing him. It was Manuel, who had marked the animal I'd wounded, and had gone to retrieve it. Fleeing for dear life under a fusillade of stones thrown by its pursuer, the beast had a good chance to escape, as I watched the pair drop from sight into the lower canyon.

Back up on the ridge I met John. "How many?" he asked, grinning in his broad, good-humored way.

"You count 'em," I evaded. "They're all over—the mountain."

We adroitly detoured around the cacti on our way back to the horses, limping as the embedded barbs bit deeper with each movement.

There at the horses was Manuel. He was sitting on a rock, nonchalantly puffing a lumpy cigarette.

Lying beside him was the dead chulu!

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