

Outdoor Life

FEBRUARY 25¢

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Outdoor Life

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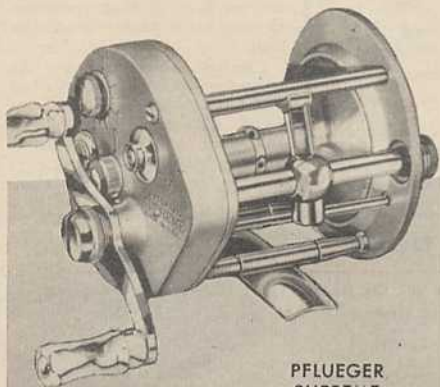
VOLUME 103 ★ FEBRUARY, 1949 ★ NUMBER 2



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YOU'VE GOT TO PORTAGE for MOOSE

Take a tip from me—
you won't get north-country bulls
along the railroad tracks. Hiking,
hauling, and paddling is the price
you'll have to pay for a trophy


by
ROB F. SANDERSON



the wilderness, you'd bunk and wrangle chow in a warm cabin. There'd be no heavy winter outfit, no balky outboard motor, no risk of being icebound in an early freeze. And there'd be no back-breaking job lugging out a bull moose that weighed more than half a ton on the hoof. There is, as a matter of fact, only one disadvantage to railroad-track hunting—you don't get any moose. As a hunter serious about bagging good bulls, I've learned that you've got to portage for them.

In 1946, of the moose taken by our party of seven only one (a three-year-old at that) was shot close enough to the railroad to be loaded without first being butchered into quarters. To my knowledge it was the only one shot near the tracks of the Ontario Northland Railway while we were there. The following season I checked results along a wide stretch of the Canadian National Railways and did not hear of a single railroad-track moose, although there were any number of hunters who worked along the tracks.

For our 1947 hunt, my brother Tom and I arrived in Ontario a couple of days early. We spent the time before the season opened reconnoitering in country of excellent moose reputation. Our findings caused us to forget any inclination we might have had to set up a base camp along the tracks. We stowed our outfit and provisions in a lake canoe fitted with a 2½-horsepower kicker, and at sunup the morning before opening day were putting toward



Lugging and stowing that broad-palmed rack and a big sack of meat was no cinch!

A few years ago a hunter could often bag his moose in Canada merely by purchasing a railroad ticket and dropping off at some comfortable way stop. There he could toast his feet beside an oversize cast-iron stove by night, wave to the tootie-train conductor by day, and collect a trophy rack within gunshot of the tracks—if not right on them.

But today railroad-track moose are

about extinct. The only advantage along the right of way is that sportsmen who don't like the local water can arrange with the baggageman on the thrice-weekly train to haul them in a case of beer. That's the only comfort they're likely to get.

I'm convinced that, as a base camp, the railroad track would be a mighty convenient place from which to hunt. Instead of braving freezing weather in



At likely spots we beached the canoe and looked for sign



We got a bull only because we went 'way back in the woods

the first portage of a hard fifty-mile trip. That evening we pitched our forester's tent on the south shore of Wolverine Lake, with intent to be up and out by dawn.

Early next morning, with the white light of our small gasoline lantern cutting the darkness, we slipped into cold woolens, and warmed a quick breakfast. As dawn began to bleach the sky we shoved off in the canoe with rifles fore and aft and a lunch amidships.

In the growing light I focused my 8 x 30's and scrutinized the boggy shores and shallow, grassy bays. Foot by foot I searched the lake's edge, for wild animals have a habit of standing motionless at such places, partly or almost wholly concealed by brush or tall grass. Gliding along the shore we could see bent-over grass and the big, blunt impressions of moose hoofs in the mud. But all the sign was old.

Signal for "Game Sighted"

It was just after sunrise and we were paddling slowly past a large bay, glassing the shores microscopically. I was asking myself why a fellow couldn't shoot his moose in an ideal setting like this when I was startled by a sharp lurching of the canoe. That was our silent signal for "game sighted."

A glance toward the north shore revealed a big bull standing in the tall grass by the edge of some willow brush. Even at that distance his nice rack silhouetted clearly against the sky.

Heading the canoe toward shore, we bent our paddles as if they were umbrella stays. Then, safely hidden from sight by a point that jutted into the bay, we paddled noiselessly. After an eternity of minutes the canoe glided around the point, and my heart bumped a rib. The big bull was still there—but not at shooting range. Three hundred yards of water lay between us, much too long a shot from a wobbly canoe. The binoculars had dwarfed the distance from the point to the moose, and we had failed to allow for it.

I turned and looked at Tom. His quick nod assured me that we were agreed on trying for a closer shot.

Sliding my paddle into the water—to take it into the canoe would risk a thump—I eased one knee to the floor, snuggled the rifle, and thumbed the hammer back to full cock.

Tom paddled slowly from the stern, on the upwind side. It wasn't easy, since the wind tended to push the bow away from him. But with the bow slightly to one side I was directly between the moose and Tom's paddle, and my motionless figure screened all movement of the blade. (An old Indian once told me that the glint from a moving maple paddle had saved the lives of more moose than he had shot.)

The distance closed slowly. At 200 yards the rustling of grass along the gunwales sounded like rattling chains. Leveling my Winchester for a trial aim, I froze. The peephole of the receiver-sight disk was clogged!

Meanwhile we slid closer. With head lifted high, the bull sensed danger. Tom slowed the canoe and I knew in his mind he was screaming "Shoot! Shoot!" With forced deliberation I lowered the breech below the gunwales, unscrewed the disk, and dropped it. Slowly I raised the barrel again.

Not more than 100 yards away, the nervous bull, shortsighted though moose are, was staring straight at me. Any perceptible movement would startle him. His magnificent head lifted higher, his feet shifted apprehensively, and he was ready to bolt.

Drawing a deep breath, I took a trial bead. The vacant hole in the receiver looked big enough to throw a washtub through, and as I centered the front bead the unexpected happened. The bull pivoted and lunged toward the brush. With a quick side movement to keep the muzzle on his front quarters, I fired.

Wham! Some have complained about the recoil of the .348, but I never felt a thing. I scarcely heard the report. The big beast toppled into the tall grass. Savagely I worked the lever and closed home on another 250-grain cartridge.

The bull lurched to his feet. Again I fired, knocking him down for the second time. Levering another cartridge, I waited. There was no movement in

the grass; we could see only the rack of motionless horns protruding above it. Stepping out into the shallow water, we stalked forward with ready guns. But this time the bull was down for keeps. The second bullet, a heart shot, had finished him.

Adjusting the front legs and using them for levers, we rolled the monarch over on his back (after several tries), and began the muscle-straining task of drawing and quartering him. Almost four hours passed before the meat was cached in dense balsam shade on a pole platform under a bough cover. This kept the meat off the ground, ventilated, and away from wandering late-season blowflies.

With hopes high we continued the hunt. But a few scattered flights of ducks were the only moving creatures we saw. Just before sundown we arrived back at camp with the dressed-out head and a flour sack full of moose liver. After eight hours of paddling and butchering we were tired and sore.

Our camp site was a point in a tiny sheltered bay off the southern arm of the lake, about eight miles from where we shot the bull. The landing was rocky but firewood was abundant, much of it dried poplars cut by beavers from a near-by lodge. Soon we had a merry blaze dancing under a couple of kettles.

We Kept Shooting the Moose

Over a dinner of braised moose liver and slumgullion we shot the moose again several times and discussed just how we'd shoot another the next day. Because the wind was rising on the main lake, we decided to look over a series of narrow arms and bays. On the small waterways we'd be sheltered from the wind and able to get around easily and quietly.

We were up with the dawn, but after paddling the whole day long and investigating all channels, creeks, bays, and backwaters behind beaver dams, we found no fresh moose sign, although old sign was not uncommon. For the next several days it was the same story. We hauled our cache of meat into camp—

(continued on page 110)

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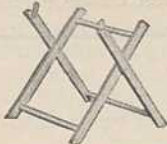
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PORTAGE FOR MOOSE!

(continued from page 37)

but that was all that we accomplished. Tom and I felt very lucky about having been on the ground early, not only because we shot the bull the first morning, but because by the fifth or sixth day four other parties were camped on the lake shore. Almost all were hunters who had intended to remain near the railroad tracks but they tired of inaction, and as a last resort portaged in to see if they could duplicate our luck—after word about our bull spread rapidly along the north-country grapevine.

The newcomers were altogether too active, and some were doing unnecessary shooting. So Tom and I decided that if a few portages are good, more are better. Storing all unnecessary equipment on an island, we loaded a skeleton outfit into the canoe and cruised off for parts unknown accompanied by our half-Indian guide who had arrived a few days previously. The new country we had selected was unfamiliar to all of us, but we had nothing to lose by exploring it.

Not counting lifts at beaver dams and rapids, we traveled five portages. Beyond the first two the trails were either obscured after years of disuse or completely flooded out by new beaver dams. Thus several hours of travel time were lost while we prospected trails and cleared them sufficiently to take the canoe across. Despite these delays, by sunset our canoe swept past the last rapids in the scenic Willowleaf River and shot out onto the calm waters of Berry Lake.

Selecting a near-by point for a camp site, we soon had the tent mushroomed over a bed of thick balsam boughs while the kettles boiled up a batch of rice, three partridges we killed on a portage, dried figs, and a quart of thick soup. Our canoe landing was a sandy beach and we dozed off to the swish of water rippling in and out.

The next three days we explored all the country to the north and east. Wherever we suspected moose sign we landed the canoe to look around. We even hunted back into the swamps and drove several points of land. Generally there was considerable old sign but, except in the swamps, we seldom found any recent bull tracks. Most all the fresh tracks we saw were the huge prints of timber wolves who ran the beaches nightly. The giant paw marks were sometimes almost as big as my hand.

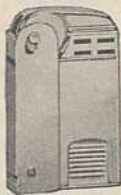
Our allotted time flashed by, but since the opening-day moose the only big game we had seen was a bear at a distance. We had taken an enthusiastic gamble on new country which required time to prospect, and we had drawn a blank. That night by firelight we searched the map for a likely place to spend our last two days. The best chance appeared to be an unnamed lake to the south, shaped like a figure eight. It was some miles away, but rather than move our camp for so short a time we decided to commute.

Next morning we ate bannock and

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bacon in cold darkness and, crossing the portage by flashlight, were on the lake at dawn. As we paddled out across the water I gassed the west shore which was lighting first. Suddenly I heard a whisper from the sharp-eyed guide, "Moose! Ahead in the water!"

In the middle distance ripples were spreading from a vaguely outlined head. The canoe drove ahead each time the paddles hit the water, and sitting in the middle bottom I squeezed out all the details those Zeiss binoculars would give. Horns, where are you? But no horns appeared.

The moose was an awkward young cow. We followed her and watched as she tried to scramble up the steep shore or over loose boulders. Each time she fell back into the water, and finally she swam toward the other shore. The rest of the morning passed without sign of life except for a poriky on a log by the lake inlet, but in the afternoon we were heartened by finding some very fresh moose tracks on a beach.

We quit early, resolving to be back at dawn the next day, and we were. By 9 o'clock we were well down the same lake. Tom was scanning the shore when suddenly he dropped his glasses and grabbed a paddle.

"Two bulls! Big boys!" he exclaimed. They were both big all right, and more than half a mile away, monkeyshining along the lake's edge. They had made a stage entrance by strolling out of the brush at the very spot on which Tom had focused his "moose finders."

Getting Each Other's Size

As the canoe sped forward, I gassed the huge bulls. Both were substantially larger than mine. The mating season was waning, but several times when they matched their huge palms and braced against each other I expected a show-down fight. After a minute or two of roughing it they disengaged. Just getting each other's size in case a mademoiselle showed, I guess.

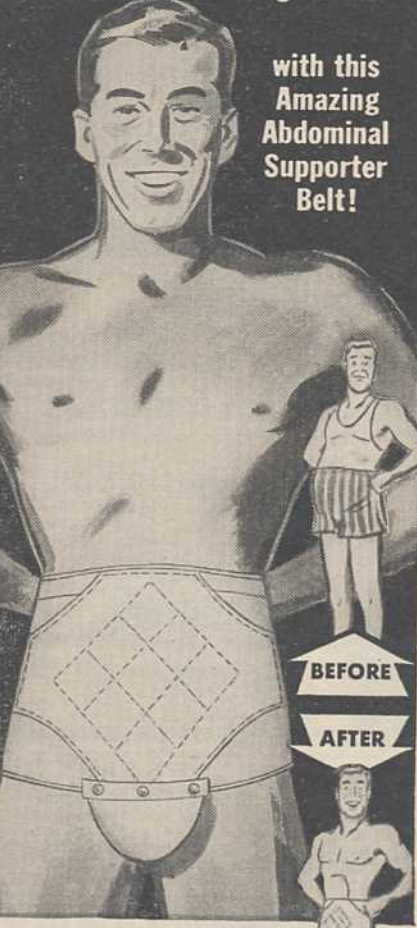
The guide headed the canoe downwind toward a point which would give Tom a nice overwater shot of about 150 yards. At about 500-yard range one of the big bulls turned and deliberately strode into the brush. The other looked around nonchalantly, then followed. Our hopes disappeared, too, as first the shiny polished horns and then the glossy brown-black rump vanished before our eyes.

We landed immediately and tracked them inland for a short distance, but the bulls were walking rapidly and the woods were so dry and noisy that our chances of nearing them were slight indeed. We never saw them again because the next day we broke camp and headed for home.

Judging from the moose tracks around that last lake, we agreed afterward that if we had portaged all the way back on opening day we'd have bagged two moose instead of one. But like anyone else, we were reluctant to tote a few hundred pounds of moose meat over a succession of portages.

Portaging a moose is the quickest way to understand why many hunters stay close to railroads; a grown bull is

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a lot of steak to stagger under. But as one unsuccessful railroad-track hunter told us, "Next year I'm coming up to hunt, not to guard the right of way. I'm going back in after 'em."

I talked to several hunters who felt the same way. Why spend two weeks of your time and buy an expensive license if you don't intend to portage to good moose country? The rash of hunting activity along the tracks on opening day scares any game that might be in the vicinity. Moreover, people who live near the railroad spot the game, and they're ready to take it before a newcomer has time to prospect the area.

Most hunters, I'm sure, will agree that a fine trophy is worth tough portaging and the hardships of wilderness camping. If you're really serious about moose, every carry is added insurance. Tom and I have thumbed our maps for months and figured out a dandy chain of portages, because we know they pay off in meat and next season we're hoping for a jackpot of two nice bulls. THE END

Picking Firewood

Not all woods are good for campfires, and the best of them aren't always suitable. Fuel that explodes and tosses live coals about promiscuously will be all right for a quick luncheon fire kindled in the open. But the same wood burning inside a tent might bring disaster, and would even be risky when used to warm an open-front shelter.

Campers must often use whatever wood is abundant near their tent sites, but sometimes a wider choice is possible. When it is, the following suggestions will help you pick the best fuel for your needs:

Best firewoods: Hickory, hard maple, white ash, white oak, beech, birch, dogwood, holly, ironwood, locust, and mulberry.

These varieties especially the first four, are sought by experienced woodsmen who want a constant fire with plenty of heat—beds of glowing coals that don't fill the chef's eyes with smoke or demand a lot of time and attention for refueling. They are also suitable for wood-burning tent and cabin heaters.

Quick-burning woods: Alder, balsam, cottonwood, hemlock, soft maple, pitch pine, poplar, spruce, sycamore, and tamarack.

These are often ideal for a short-lived and very hot fire. But they turn rapidly into ashes instead of coals, and are not good for long-time cookery. They also make very poor fuel when green—hard to start and keep burning.

Woods that burn when green: White ash, beech, yellow birch, hickory, hard maple, and white oak are the best choices when green stuff must be used. Green sticks of these woods may also be mixed in with dry, faster-burning fuel to maintain a fire overnight.

There is, of course, a great difference between green wood and wood that is wet but seasoned. Green timber contains sap and is difficult to ignite and



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