

MAY, 1911

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FIELD AND STREAM

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WORTH OF **PRIZES** FOR THE
BIG GAME FISHES

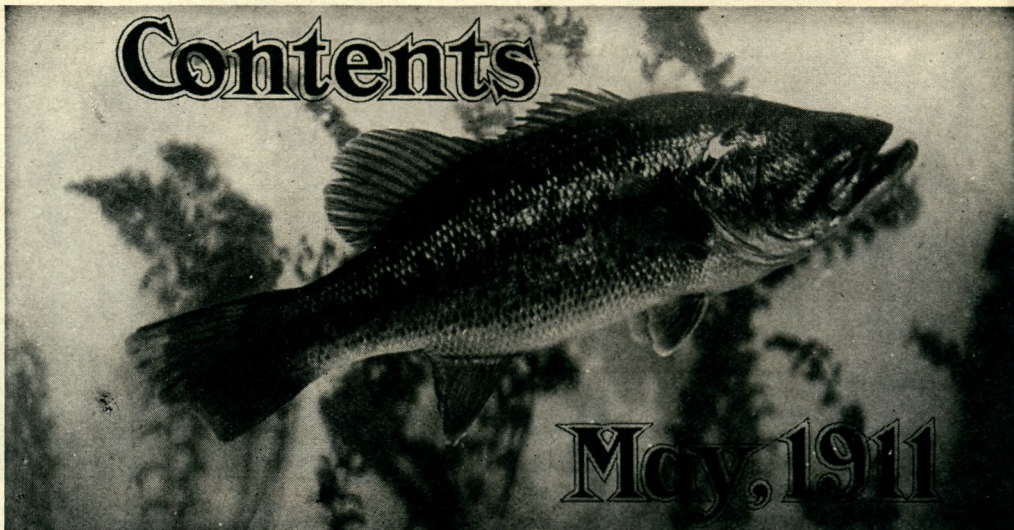


IN THIS ISSUE

BAIT CASTING - - by Clarence E. Mulford
AMATEUR TRAP SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP
FLY TYING ON THE STREAM, by Robert S. Lemmon
DOWN AN UNKNOWN JUNGLE RIVER, by Zane Grey



Contents



May, 1911

COVER DESIGN	H. I. Stickroth	
"SOME" COUGAR	Frontispiece	
BAIT CASTING FOR BASS	Clarence E. Mulford	3
At the elbow of the amateur. A practical lesson in this difficult art.		
EDITORIAL	The Albany Conference	12
DOWN AN UNKNOWN JUNGLE RIVER	Zane Grey	15
Part III. Down stream. Adventures with tiger cat and big fish.		
A HEALER OF THE WILDERNESS	Henry Wellington Wack	21
A new character in outdoor fiction.		
COUGAR HUNTING IN THE SIERRA MADRES	Daniel J. Singer	29
Part II. Good hunting with the lions and turkeys.		
DUCKING IN A GO-DEVIL	Norman Crowell	35
An automobile safari after the high flyers.		
LURING THE WILY TROUT	Vincent P. Riordan	39
Advice to the amateur. Not bad dope for the old hand, too.		
FLYMAKING ALONG THE STREAM	Robert S. Lemmon	42
Something we all are anxious to learn.		
CAMERA ADVENTURES IN THE CANADIAN FORESTS	M. S. Godshall, Pb. D.	46
An increasing popular sport.		
EUROPEAN FORESTRY	Warren H. Miller	51
Part VII. The enemies of the forest.		
AMATEUR TRAP SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP	Warren H. Miller	59
A 200 bird shoot at Travers Island. Illustrations by J. W. Macy.		
A TENDERFOOT'S MOOSE	J. A. McAleenan	65
How a chance trip resulted in big game and a complete restoration of love for the wild life.		
THE CARE OF THE MOTOR BOAT	Capt. John Chadwick	69
Part III. Yacht etiquette.		
WHERE TO GO		74
All the best places for Western trout, salmon, pike, pickerel and muscallonge.		
SPORTSMAN'S WORLD		81
DID IT EVER HAPPEN TO YOU		91
TOOLS OF THE CRAFT		93
Eliminating the Blanket, by W. H. Miller. More Knots, Ladd Plumley.		
\$2000 PRIZE FISHING CONTEST		106

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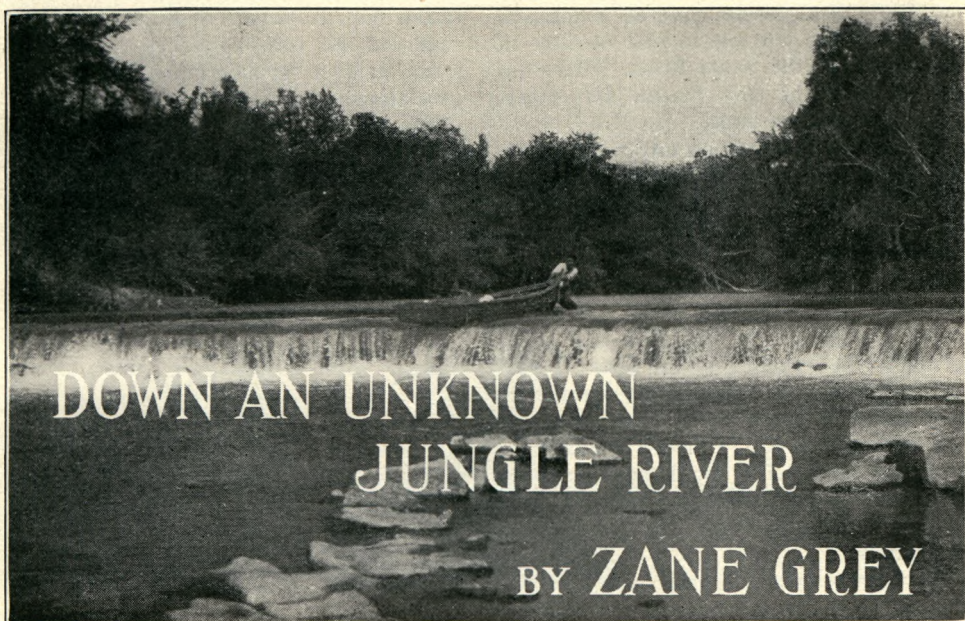
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A thrilling series of adventures with jaguars, wild boars, alligators and tropical snakes, encountered while exploring an unmapped river flowing down through the wildest jungles of Mexico

PART III

DOWN STREAM

WE SLEPT well the remainder of the night and, owing to the break in our slumbers, did not awaken early. The sun shone hot when I rolled out; a creamy mist was dissolving over the curve of the mountain range; parrots were screeching in the nearby trees.

After breakfast we broke camp and packed the boat. Before departing I carefully looked over the ground to see that nothing was left, and espied a fish line which George had baited and set the night before. I told him to pull it up. I happened to be busy at the boat when George started to take in the line. An exclamation from Pepe, George's yell, then a tremendous splash made me jump up on the bank in double quick time.

George was staggering along, leaning back hard on the heavy fish line. A long swirl in the water told of a powerful fish. It was pulling George in.

"Let go the line!" I yelled.

But instead of complying the boy

yelled for Pepe, and went clear to his knees before Pepe got to him. Both then hauled on the line. There was another tremendous splash, and the line slackened. The fish had torn loose. I examined the big tarpon hook and found it bent out of shape, the first time I had even seen one bent. George said he had baited the set line with half a pound of duck meat. Pepe could not name the fish, or whatever it was, and I certainly had no idea.

"I've held big tarpon," said George, "but this fish was pulling me in."

"I wish we could stay to have another try at him," I replied. "But we must be on the move—we don't know what we have before us."

When we got into the boat I took the oars, much to Pepe's surprise. It was necessary to explain to him that I would handle the boat in swift water. We shoved off, and I sent one regretful glance up the river, at the shady aisle between the green banks, at the white rapids, and the great colored dome of the mountain. I almost hesitated with the desire to see

more of that jungle covered mountain, but something told me to lose no time in the trip down the Santa Rosa. There did not seem to be any reason for hurry, yet I felt that we must.

Going down stream on any river, mostly, is pleasure, but drifting on the swift current of the Santa Rosa and rowing under the wonderful moss-bearded cypresses was almost like a dream. It was too beautiful to seem real. The smooth stretch before the first rapid was short, however, and all my attention had to be given to the handling of the boat. I saw that George and Pepe both expected to get out and wade down the rapids as we had waded up. I had a surprise in store for them. The rapids that we could not shoot would have to be pretty bad.

"You're getting close," shouted George, warningly.

With two sweeps of the oars I turned the boat stern first down stream; we dipped on the low green incline, and sailed down toward the waves. We bunted with a shock into the first wave and the water flew all over the boys. Pepe was tremendously excited; he yelled and made wild motions with his hands; George looked a little frightened. Whatever the rapid appeared to them it was magnificent to me, and it was play to manage the boat in such water. A little pull on one oar, and then on the other kept the stern straight down stream. The channel I could make out a long way ahead. I amused myself by watching George and Pepe. There were stones in the channel and the water rose angrily about them. A glance was enough to tell that we could float over these without striking. But the boys thought we were going to hit every stone and were uneasy all the time. Twice I had to work to pass ledges and sunken trees upon which the current bore down hard. When we neared one of these I dipped the oars and pulled back to stop or lessen the momentum, then a stroke turned the boat half broadside to the current. That would force us to one side, and another stroke would turn the boat straight. At the bottom of this rapid we encountered a long triangle of choppy waves that we bumped and splashed over. We came through with nothing wet but the

raised flap of canvas in the stern. Pepe regarded me with admiring eyes, said I would make a "grande mozo," and George proclaimed shooting rapids great sport.

We drifted through several little rifts and then stopped at the head of the narrow chute that had been such a stumbling block to us on the way up. Looked at from above this long narrow channel, with several S curves, was a fascinating bit of water for a canoeist. It tempted me to shoot it even with the boat. But I remembered the four-foot waves at the bottom, and besides I resented the opportunity of that spirit of daring so early in the game. Risk and perhaps peril would come soon enough. So I decided to walk along the shore and float the boat through with a rope.

The thing looked a good deal easier than it turned out to be. We got half way through without any trouble. Then at the narrowest point and most abrupt curve Pepe misunderstood me and pulled back on the rope when he should have let it slack. The boat swung in, nearly smashing me against the bank, and the sweeping current began to bulge dangerously near the gunwale. I saw disaster and yelled for Pepe to let go. Instead he pulled all the harder. To cap the climax George, who was trying to get the rope out of Pepe's muscular hands, suddenly dropped it and made a dive for his rifle.

"Deer! deer!" he cried, hurriedly throwing a shell into the chamber. He shot downstream, and looking that way I saw several deer under the firs on the rocky flat. George shot three more times and the bullets went *spinging* into the trees. The deer bounded out of sight.

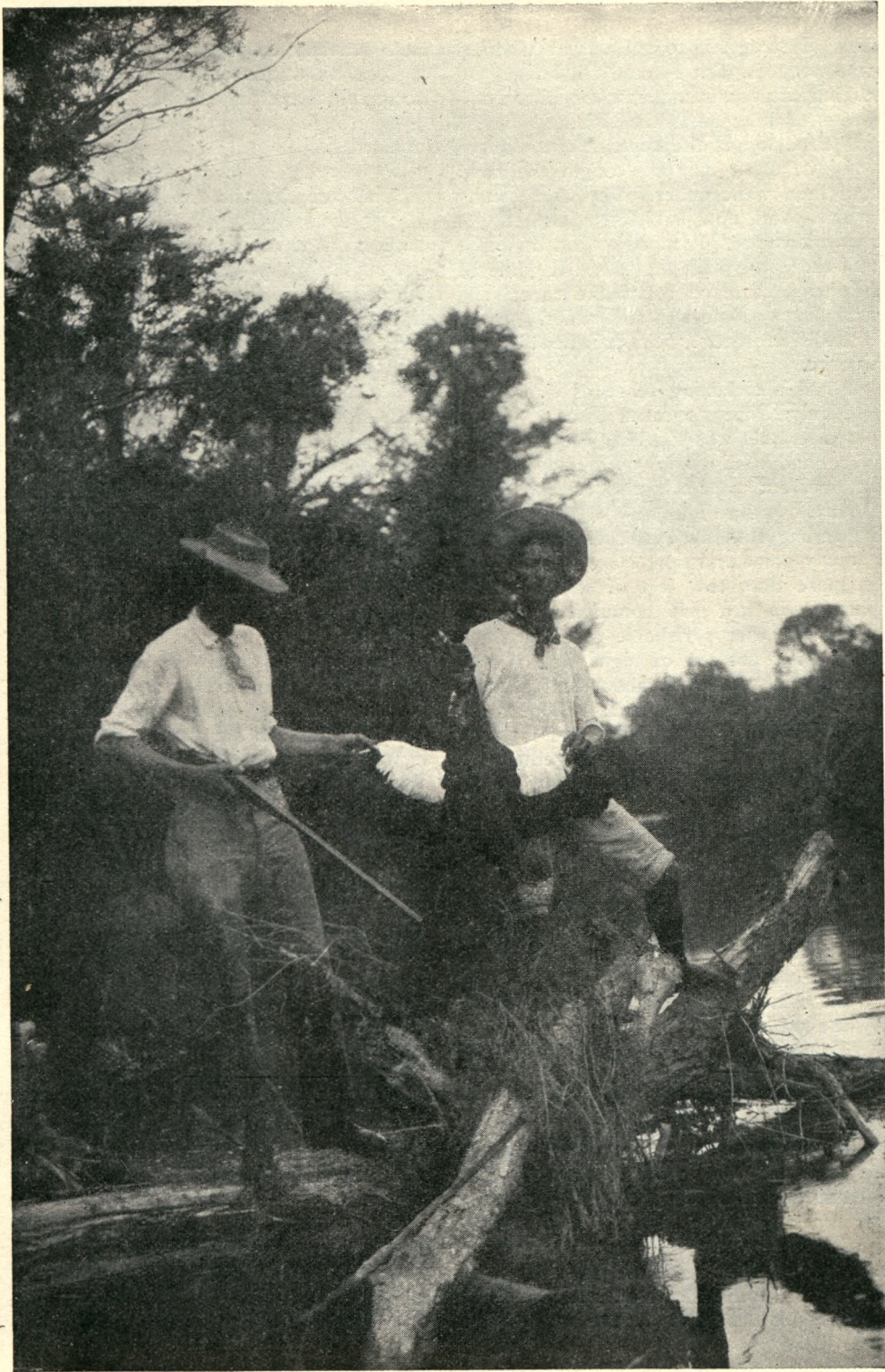
When I turned again the water was roaring into the boat. I was being pressed hard into the bank.

"Loosen the rope—tell him, George!" I yelled.

George shouted in Spanish and Pepe promptly dropped the rope in the water. That was the worst thing he could have done.

"Grab the bow! don't let it swing out!" I ordered.

The bow swung out into the current before George could reach in I was help-



THE DUCK THAT WAS MAINLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TRIP

less. I struggled to get out of where I was wedged. But I could not budge. In a kind of despair that saw all of the outfit lost I hung on to the boat and bawled for Pepe to get the rope. Pepe plunged into the swift current, caught the rope, and then went under. The boat swung around, and, now half full of water, got away from me. I leaped out on the ledge and ran along with the boat. It gathered headway, careened round the curve, and shot down. Pepe was still under.

"He's drowned! he's drowned!" cried George.

I had a sickening sense of that when suddenly Pepe appeared like a brown porpoise. He was touching the bottom in places and holding back on the rope. Then the current rolled him over and over. Before I had an idea of how to avert the impending loss the boat drifted back of a rocky point and sank close to the shore in more than two feet of water. As I plunged in my grip containing camera, films and other perishable goods was the only thing not out of sight, and it was sinking. I rescued it about half soaked, and threw it upon the rocks. Pepe came up still holding to the rope, and I towed him out of the current. Together we lifted the boat and hauled the bow up on the shore.

"Pretty lucky!" I exclaimed, with relief so deep I had to sit down and laugh. "Lift out the stuff, Pepe."

"Pretty tough luck!" growled George. He jerked open his grip, and throwing out articles of wet clothing—which he had no concern for—he gazed in dismay at his whole store of cigarettes ruined by the water.

"Young man, I'll have something to say to you presently," I said, severely.

Nothing had been carried from the boat. That part of our supplies which would be affected by water was packed in tin cases and so suffered no damage. The ammunition was waterproof. But both my Parker hammerless and .351 Automatic Winchester were full of water. I took them apart and laid the pieces in the sun. While I was occupied Pepe spread out the rest of the outfit, and then baled out the boat. The sun was so hot that the things dried quickly, and we

lost scarcely an hour by the accident. Before we started I took good occasion to lecture Pepe and George, and when I got through they were both very sober and quiet.

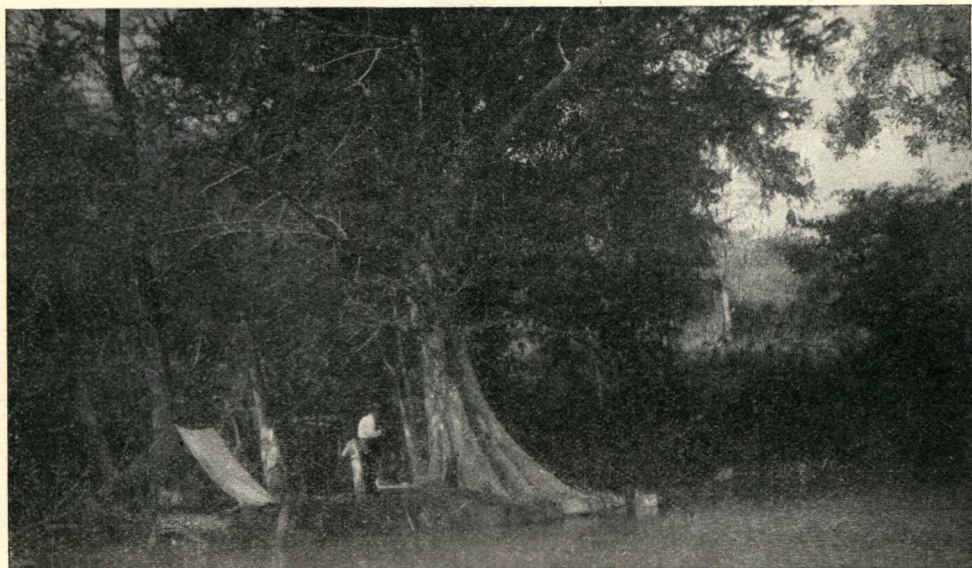
I observed, however, that by the time we had run the next rapid they were enjoying themselves again. We had a long succession of rapids which we shot without anything approaching a mishap. When we drifted into the level stretch Pepe relieved me at the oars. We glided downstream under the drooping bamboos, under the silken streamers of silvery moss, under the dark cool bowers of matted vine and blossoming creepers. And as we passed this time the jungle silence awoke to the crack of George's guns, and the discordant cry of river fowl. My guns were both at my hand, and the rifle was loaded, but I did not use either. I contented myself with snapping a picture here and there, and watching the bamboo thickets and the mouths of the little dry ravines.

That ride was again so interesting, so full of sound and action and color, that it seemed a very short one. The murmur of water on the rocks told me that it was time to change seats with Pepe. We drifted down two short rapids and then came to the gravelly channels between the islands we had noted on the way up. The water was shallow down these rippling channels, and fearing we might strike a stone I tumbled out over the bow and, wading slowly, let the boat down till we came to still water again. I was about to get in when I espied what I thought was an alligator lying along a log near the river. I pointed it out to Pepe.

"Iguana!" he exclaimed, in delight, and reached for his machete.

The reptile was several feet long, blue black on top, and with the exception of a blunt rounded head, had semblance to an alligator.

"Don't shoot. I'll get him," whispered Pepe, slipping out of the boat. He began to wade ashore when the iguana raised its head. That was too much for George who promptly shot at it. The reptile flopped off the log and started up the bank with Pepe in hot pursuit brandish-



CAMP ON THE SANTA ROSA

ing his machete. Remarkably awkward as that iguana was, he could surely cover ground with his stumpy legs. Pepe got close enough once and he swung the machete. The blow cut off a piece of the long tail, but the only effect it produced was to make the iguana run faster. They disappeared in the brush, and presently Pepe reappeared, having given up the chase. The iguana could be heard crashing through the dry thickets. Pepe returned to the boat, covered with ticks, and much concerned at the failure to capture the big lizard, which he said made fine eating.

Shortly after that we passed the scene of our first camp and then drifted under the railroad bridge. George and Pepe looked as if they were occupied with the same thought I had—that once beyond the railroad bridge we would plunge into the jungle wilderness and there could be no turning back. As we rounded a bend I was both sorry and glad to see the bridge vanish.

The Santa Rosa opened out wide and ran swiftly over smooth stone. Deep cracks a foot or so wide, crossed the river diagonally. Fish darted in and out of these. We had about half a mile of this, when, after turning a hilly bend we entered a long rapid. The water was still

swift and smooth and shallow. There was scarcely a wave or ripple. At times the boat struck fast on the flat rock and we had to get out to shove off. As far ahead as I could see extended this wide slant of water. On the left rose a thick line of huge cypresses all festooned with gray moss that drooped to the water; on the right a bare bluff of crumbling rock reared itself. It looked like blue clay baked and cracked by the sun. A few palms fringed the top.

After getting out of the boat a dozen times or more it occurred to me that I might save energy. So I sat on the bow with my feet in the water. The little channels ran every way, and it was necessary to turn the boat often, which I did with a kick of my foot. Then we drifted along, whirling round and round. Occasionally Pepe would drop his brown foot in and kick his end of the bow off a shallow ledge.

It dawned upon me that here was a new and unique way to travel down stream. It was different from anything I had ever tried before. The water was swift and seldom deeper than a foot, except in the cracks that ribbed the level river bed. Fish were so numerous that I kicked at many as they passed or darted under the boat. There were thousands of

small ones and many large. Occasionally a big fellow would make the water roar as he lunged into a crack. There was a fish that resembled a mullet, and some kind of a bass with a blue tail. This fish was so swift and I saw so many that would weigh five pounds or more that I jointed up my small rod and putting on a spinner began to cast it about. I felt two light fish hit it and then a heavy shock that momentarily checked the drifting boat. The water split in a streaky splash, and I was just about to jump off to follow the fish when it broke the leader. Then I tried a fly without getting a strike. By way of variety George shot at several of the blue-tailed bass—if such they were—and he made them jump out of the water like a real northern bronze-back.

This long shut-in stretch appeared to be endless. But for the swift movement of the boat, which made a little breeze, the heat would have been intolerable. I was glad to be wet. The cool water sent thrills over me. Little clouds of steam rose from all of us. I began to think I had been wise in boiling the water we drank, and in dosing out quinine and anti-malaria pills from the start. We all suffered from a parching thirst. Pepe scooped water up in his hand; George would have followed suit had I not stopped him. Finally we squeezed the juice of a lime into a cup of water and drank that.

We drifted five miles under the glaring sun, and still the bare blue bluff persisted, and the line of gray-veiled cypresses, and the strange formation of stream bed. During all that distance I sat on the bow seat, occasionally kicking the boat off a ledge, and whirling it around. The ride was novel and strange, but at last the sameness of it palled upon me. I wondered when we would come to the end of this hot stretch and once more enter the cool shady jungle.

"Buck! buck!" whispered Pepe, suddenly, pointing down along the right-hand shore.

I saw a fine big deer leap back from the water and start to climb the side of a gully that indented the bluff. Snatching up the .351 I shoved in the safety catch. The distance was far—perhaps two hundred and fifty yards—but I let drive without elevating the sights. A cloud of dust puffed up under the nose of the climbing buck. He leaped up the steep winding trail, his white flag standing, his reddish coat glistening. That shot gave me the range, and I pulled the automatic again—again—again. Each bullet sent up a white puff, each nearer the deer. I held a little firmer and finer at the space ahead of him and pressed the trigger twice. The buck went down, slipped off the trail and raising a cloud of dust rolled over and over, and then falling sheer into space struck the rock with a sudden crash.

We drifted down a little, and, wading, pulled the boat to shore. Pepe pronounced the buck to be very large, but it appeared small to me. The bullet that had stopped it had gone through the neck near the shoulder. If there was an unbroken bone left in that deer I would greatly miss my guess. We cut out the haunch the least crushed by the fall, and resumed our drifting down the river. How remarkable it was for me to see buzzards circling down before we had gone half a mile! These birds of prey did not fly from the country on either side of the river. They sailed, dropped down from the blue sky where they had been invisible. I watched them soaring and circling till a curve in the river hid them from view.

And with this bend came a welcome change. The bluff played out in a rocky bench beyond which the green jungle was relief to aching eyes. As we made this point the evening breeze started to blow. We beached the boat here and unloaded to make camp.

Next installment: Tiger cats; heavy rapids; lost in a blind pocket.

(To be continued.)