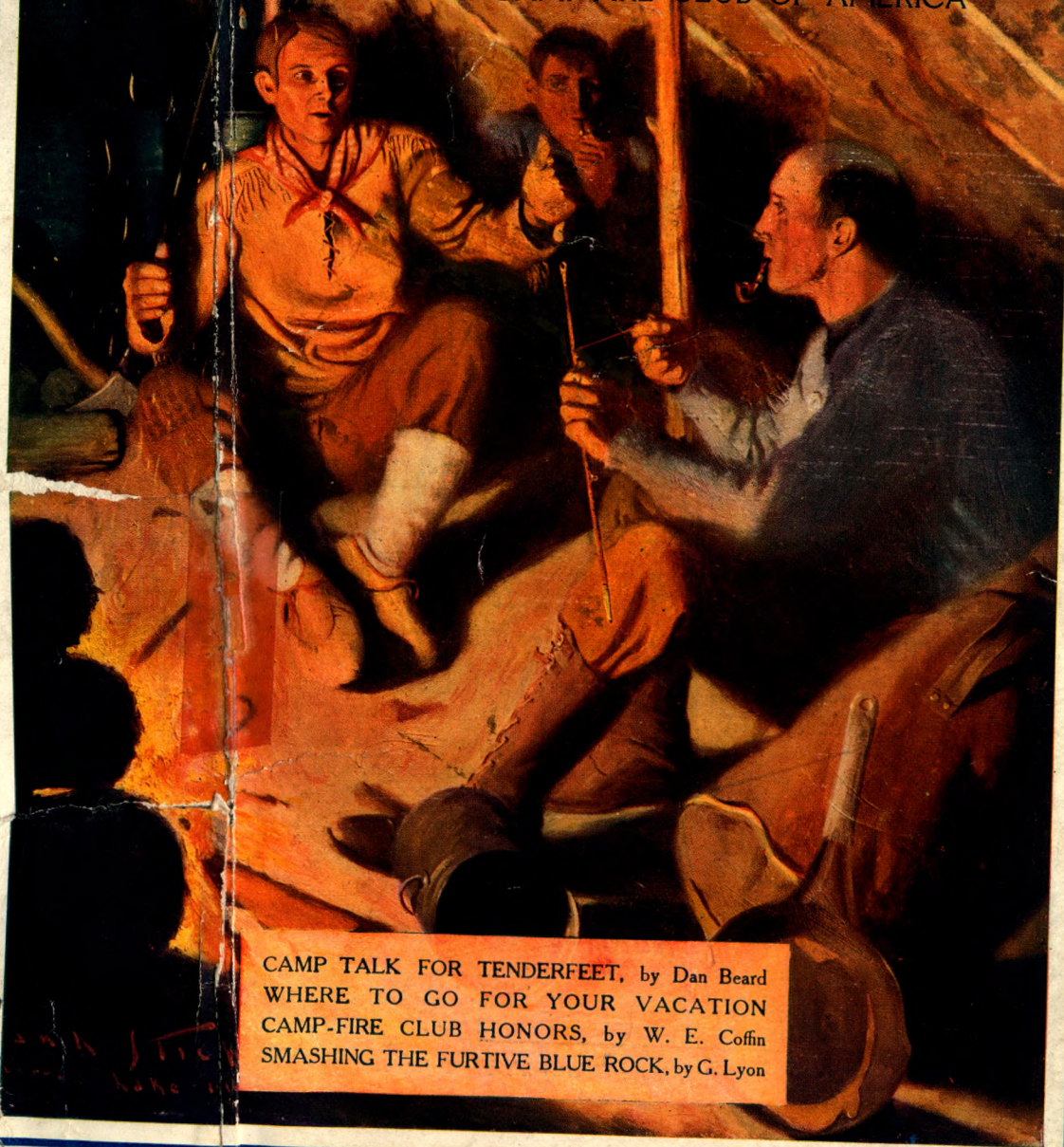


FIELD AND STREAM

OFFICIAL ORGAN of the CAMP-FIRE CLUB OF AMERICA



CAMP TALK FOR TENDERFEET, by Dan Beard
WHERE TO GO FOR YOUR VACATION
CAMP-FIRE CLUB HONORS, by W. E. Coffin
SMASHING THE FURTIVE BLUE ROCK, by G. Lyon

SPECIAL CAMPING AND VACATION NUMBER

Contents - June 1911



GOOD NIGHT!!

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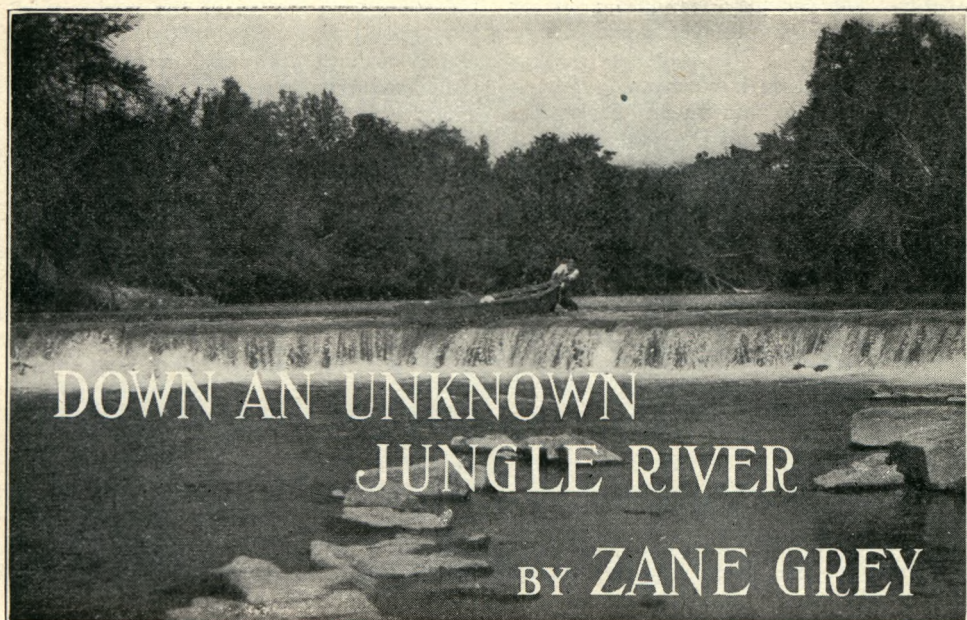
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ACCORDING to the new postal regulations, all subscriptions must be paid in advance. We will therefore be obliged to discontinue your subscription upon date of expiration, notice of which you will find in the last issue, and we ask that you will send renewal on receipt of this blank.



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

CHAPTER IV

SHOOTING RAPIDS

WE WERE fortunate in finding a grassy plot where ticks and other creeping things appeared few. This evening it was a little surprise to me to realize how I had begun to feel uncomfortably sensitive about these ticks. We pitched camp in short order, but were interrupted immediately.

Pepe went up the bank for firewood. We heard him slashing away with his machete. Then this sound ceased; there followed a silence, at length broken by a yell. George and I both caught up guns and bounded into the thicket. I led the way, calling out to Pepe, and crashing through a thorny brake came suddenly upon him. At the same instant I caught a glimpse of gray, black-striped forms slipping away into the jungle. Pepe shouted out something.

"Tiger-cats!" exclaimed George.

"Quiet now," I whispered.

With that I stole forward cautiously, Pepe and George coming noiselessly at

my heels. The thicket was lined with well-beaten trails, and by following these and stooping low it was possible to go ahead without rustling the brush. I could not see very far, owing to the gathering twilight. When we stopped to listen we heard a cracking of dead brush some distance off. Concluding the tiger-cats had gotten safely out of sight, I turned to go back to camp. We had not proceeded far when soft pattering footsteps halted me. Peering down one of the paths I saw a cat. I was amazed at its boldness. Surely it heard us, and instead of bounding into the thicket crouched in the path not twenty-five feet from me. I took a quick shot at the gray huddled form. It jerked spasmodically, stretched and lay still. I held the boys back a moment, then we advanced to find the cat dead. It was bigger than any wild cat I had ever seen. The color was a grayish yellow, almost white, lined and spotted with black. It was heavy enough to make a good load for Pepe.

"Pepe says there are two or three kinds of cats besides the big tiger," remarked

George, "and we may run into a lot of them. We ought to get some dandy skins."

It was almost dark when we got back to camp. Part of our supper was burnt, but that did not interfere with our enjoyment of it. We were very hungry and tired and pleased with the events of the day. As we sat around the camp-fire there was a constant whirring of water fowl over our heads, and an incessant hum of insects from the jungle.

Pepe made a good job of skinning the tiger-cat, and I stretched the skin on a framework of sticks and salted it. I anticipated difficulty in preserving skins in that hot climate. Then we went to bed, very grateful for the cool breeze and for the absence of mosquitoes.

Upon awakening I found the sun an hour high; I was stiff and sore and thirsty. Pepe and Allen slept so soundly it seemed selfish to awaken them. About camp there was a melodious concourse of birds, but the parrots did not visit us that morning. While I was washing in the river a troop of deer came down to a bar upon the opposite side. I ran for my rifle and by mistake took up George's .32. I had a splendid shot at less than one hundred yards, but the ball dropped fifteen feet in front of the leading buck. The deer ran into the deep bushy willows. Pepe jumped up, and George rolled out of his blanket with one eye still glued shut. Telling them to cook breakfast I took my gun and started off to climb the high river bluff.

It was my idea to look out over the surrounding country and get the lay of the land. The matter of climbing the bluff would have been easy but for the fact that I wished to avoid contact with the grass, brush, trees, even dead branches, as all were covered with ticks. The upper half of the bluff was bare, and when I reached that part I soon surmounted it.

I faced south with something of eagerness. Fortunately the mist had dissolved under the warm rays of the sun, affording an unobstructed view. That scene was wild and haunting, yet different from what fancy had pictured. The great expanse of jungle was gray, the green line of cypress, palm and bamboo following

the southward course of the river. The mountain range some ten miles distant sloped to the south and faded away in the haze. The river disappeared in rich dark verdure, and but for it, which afforded a water road back to civilization, I would have been lost in a dense gray-green overgrowth of tropical wilderness. Once or twice I thought I caught a faint roar of waterfall on the morning breeze, yet I could not be sure, and I returned toward camp with a sober appreciation of the difficulty of my enterprise, and a more thrilling sense of its hazard and charm.

Soon we were under way again, Pepe strong and willing at the oars, George keen-eyed for something to shoot at. This time I had my rifle and shotgun close at hand, ready for use. Half a mile below, the river running still and deep, entered a shaded waterway so narrow that in places the branches of wide spreading and leaning cypresses met and intertwined their moss-fringed foliage. This lane was a paradise for birds that ranged from huge speckled cranes, six feet high, to little yellow birds almost too small to see. George kept popping away with his .22 and soon had several chicalocki and two ducks. Black squirrels were numerous and very tame. In fact, all the creatures along this shaded stream were so fearless that it was easy to see they had never been shot at. I woke sleepy cranes with my fishing rod and once pushed a blue heron off a log. We heard animals of some species running back from the bank but could not see them.

All at once a soft breeze coming upstream bore a deep roar of tumbling waters. For an instant I had a sensation of utter dread. For that roar was a familiar one to me and I knew what it meant. A canoeist learns, long before he comes to rapids, to judge what they are from the sound. The heavy sullen roar, almost a rumble, took my attention from the beautiful birds, the moss-shaded bowers, and the overhanging jungle.

"That water sounds different," remarked George.

"Yes, I guess it does," I replied grimly, and began to pack my guns away in their cases.

Pepe rowed on and George popped away



"THE WATER WAS SWIFT AND ALWAYS DROPPED OVER SOME LEDGE IN A ROUNDED FALL"

with his .22, both unconscious of the menace in that dull continuous roar. But I knew we were soon to drop into the real wilderness, and that there could be no turning back. Keeping a sharp lookout ahead, I revolved in my mind the necessity for caution and skilful handling of the boat. But I realized, too, the incongruous fact that too much care, an overzealousness on the side of precaution, was a worse asset for such a trip than sheer recklessness. Good judgment in looking over rapids, a quick seizing of the best way to get through, then a spirit the opposite of timidity—that is the ideal to be striven for.

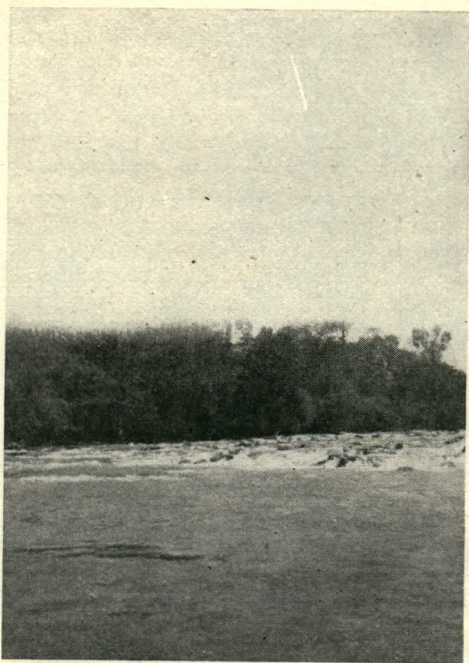
Presently there was a break in the level surface of the river. The banks were low and shelved out in rocky points. This relieved me, for I saw that we could land just above the falls. What I feared most was a narrow gorge impossible to portage round or go through. As we approached the break the roar seemed to divide itself, hollow and shallow near at hand, rushing and heavy farther on.

Pepe rowed close to the bank and landed on the first strip of rock. We got out, and walking along this ledge soon reached the fall. It was a straight drop of some

ten or twelve feet. The water was shallow all the way across. This passage seemed to present no difficulty beyond carrying the supplies and outfit around. But there was white water below the fall as far as I could see. From here came the roar that had perturbed me.

Portaging the outfit around that fall turned out to be a job I hoped we would not have to repeat. The portage was not long nor very rugged, but the cracked rock made going very disagreeable. The boys stumbled often; Pepe fell and broke open a box, and I had a hard knock. There was a wide shelving apron below the fall, over which the water ran a foot or so in depth. I stationed George and Pepe here, then went up to get the boat. I waded out with it, ran the stern over the drop, bore down hard on the bow and shoved off. The boat went down with a flop and did not ship a cupful of water. Pepe caught it and waded to the lower ledge where we had carried our things. Here we packed carefully.

I went downstream a little way to take a look at the rapids. They were just bad enough to make it hard work to avoid accidents. If the country had been such that damage to boat or supplies could have



"IT WAS ALL RAPID WATER, THIS STRETCH"

been replaced I would have gone at those rapids with delight. As it was I could not keep from worrying. I walked up and down, looked over the rapids more than was wise, and still hesitated about going into them. But it had to be done, so finally I took the oars with gripping fingers, and backed the boat downstream.

To my right in the middle of the narrow river was a racy current that I kept out of as long as possible. But presently I was drawn into it and the boat shot forward, headed into the first incline, and went racing smoothly down toward the white waves of the rapids. This was a trying moment for me. When we thumped into the back-lash of the first big wave the water thrashed round and over the boys. Then we were in the thick of roar and rush. I knew I was not handling the boat well. We grazed stones that should have been easy to avoid, and bumped on hidden ones, and got half broadside of the current. Pepe, by quick action with an oar, pushed the stern aside from collision with more than one rock. Several times I missed a stroke when a powerful one was needed. We passed be-

tween stones so close together that I had to ship the oars. It was all rapid water, this stretch, but the bad places with sunken rocks, falls and big waves were strung out at such distances apart that I always got the boat going right before we went into them.

I saw hardly anything of the banks of the river. They blurred in my sight, but sometimes they were near, sometimes far. We turned corners where rocky ledges pointed out, constricting the stream and making a curve. What lay round the curve was always a question and a cause for suspense. More than once we raced down a chute and straight into a rocky wall, against which Pepe would strike his oar hard.

More than once he had a narrow escape from being knocked overboard. I tried to get him not to stand up. Finally at the foot of a long rapid I was drifting with the current when Pepe stood up and yelled. There was a stone directly in our way and I dropped the oars into the water with a quick jerk. Pepe shot out of the stern as if he had been flung from a catapult. He swam with the current while I drifted and backed the boat toward him, but he reached smooth water and the shore before I could pick him up.

We had a good laugh all around. There were three inches of water in the boat, but the canvas had protected our grips and supplies. George and I were almost as wet as Pepe. With that long rapid behind me I felt different. It was what I had needed. My nervousness disappeared and I had no dread of the next rapid or anything that lay before us. While Pepe and George baled out the boat I rested and meditated on the change in my feelings. I had made mistakes in that rapid just passed. Luck had favored me. I went over the mistakes and saw where I had been wrong and how I would have avoided them, if I had felt right. This was a dare-devil trip, and the dare-devil in me had not been liberated. It took just the nervous dread, hard work, blunders and accidents, danger and luck to unleash the spirit which alone could make such a trip a success. Pepe and George by this time had a blind faith in me. They could scarcely appreciate the real hazard

of our undertaking and I had no desire to impart it to them.

Then we were on our way again, and it was no surprise to hear a dull roar round the next bend. But this time, though the hair rose stiff under my hat, I did not feel the chill, the uncertainty, the lack of confidence that had before weakened me.

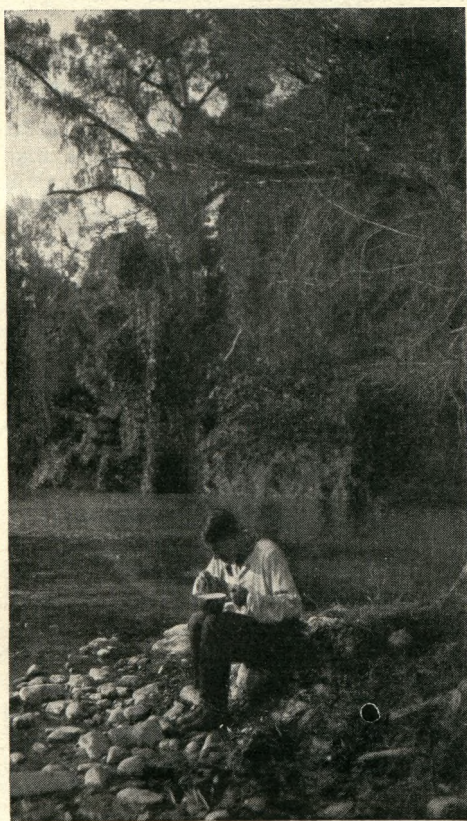
A turn in the winding lane of cypresses revealed walls of gray rock between which the river disappeared. At the head of the ravine we found a long shallow incline. We tumbled overboard and with Pepe and George at the stern and me at the bow we waded down. The water tore round our legs and rose higher and higher. Soon the boys had to jump aboard, but I held to the bow an instant longer, then leaped on and made for the oars. I got them, and just in time for a strong pull on the left which righted the boat when we hit the waves. At the bottom of these swift inclines was always a chaos of leaping green and white waves. The blunt stern of the boat made a great splash and the spray flew over us. We came out of the roar and hiss and smoke to drift into a mill-race current. I had never seen such long inclines of swift water as we were meeting. This one terminated in a sullen plunge between two huge rocks. It was no place to take a boat, but one glance showed me there was no other way. George yelled and Pepe's eyes started from his head when I backed down that chute. Down! with the speed of the wind; then we were raised aloft, light as a feather, to crash into the back-lashers. The din deafened me, the spray blinded me—then we were out again among the little choppy waves, soon to glide into another long smooth runway.

So we passed rapid after rapid, all connected by slanting channels of swift water. Such formation of stream-bed was new and strange to me. But I had scarcely time to enjoy the ride between the water-falls, and, when we were in the midst of the green billowy waves with here and there ugly rocks splitting the current, I had work on my hands.

It dawned on me, during a breathing spell, that I had lost count of the rapids.

The last I remembered was number eleven, then far, far behind. By and by we came to a bold rocky bluff around which the river split. This worried me, for what branch to take was a matter of doubt. Evidently this bluff was an island. It had a yellow front and long bare ledges leading into the river. Leaving the boat we climbed the bluff to find it covered with palm trees. Up there it was so hot and dry that it did not seem to be jungle at all. Even the palm leaves were yellow and parched. I could not stand the heat. We took one look at the surrounding country, so wild and dry and still, and then clambered down the loose dusty shelves.

Then we surveyed the right branch of the river, and followed it a little way. The stream here foamed and swirled among jagged rocks. At the foot of this rapid stretched the first dead water we



SUPPER ON THE SANTA ROSA

had encountered for miles. A flock of wild geese rose from under our feet and flew downstream.

We returned to look at the left branch of the river. It was open and one continuous succession of low steps. That would have decided me, even if the greater volume of water had not gone down on this left side. As far as we could see was a wide open river, running over little ledges. It looked to be the easiest and swiftest navigation we had come upon and so indeed it proved. The water was swift and always dropped over some ledge in a rounded fall that was safe for us to shoot. It was great fun going over these places. We hung our feet over the gunwales most of the time, sliding them along the slippery ledge or giving a kick to help the momentum. When we came to a fall I would drop off at the bow, hold the boat back and swing it straight, then jump in, and over we would go—souse!

There were so many of these ledges and they were so close together that going over them grew to be a habit, and once we almost had a wreck. But I saved the boat on the verge of a fall more than four feet high. I held on while the swift water surged up to my knees, and I yelled for the boys to jump off. As the stern where they sat was already over the fall it was somewhat difficult to make them vacate quickly enough.

"Tumble out! quick, idiots!" I bawled.

Over they went, up to their necks in the boiling foam, and not a second too soon, for I could hold the boat no longer. It went over smoothly, just dipping the stern under water. If the boys had remained aboard the boat would have swamped. As it was Pepe managed to catch the rope, which I had wisely thrown out, and he drifted down to the next

ledge. We found this nearly as high as the last one. So I sent the boys below to catch the boat. This worked all right. The shelves slanted slightly with the shallow part of the water just at the break of the ledge. We passed half a dozen of these, making good time, and before we knew it we were again in a deep smooth jungle lane with bamboo and streamers of moss waving over us.

The shade was cool, and I settled down in the stern seat, grateful for the rest. To my surprise I did not see a bird. The jungle was asleep. Once or twice I fancied I heard the gurgle and tinkle of water running over rocks. We glided along silently with Pepe rowing leisurely as if weary, George asleep, and me dreamily watching the beautiful green banks. They were high, a mass of big-leafed vines, flowering and fragrant, above which towered the jungle giants. This was by far the most beautiful strip of river we had navigated. I was revelling in the cool recesses under the leaning cypresses, in the soft swish of bearded moss and the rustle of palms, in the dreamy hum of that resting jungle when my pleasure was brought to an abrupt end.

"Santa Maria!" yelled Pepe. In moments of excitement he often called aloud the names of saints or the Virgin.

I came out of my trance. The boat was stuck in a mud bank. That branch of the river ended right there. We had come all these miles only to run into a blind pocket. One glance at the high yellow bank, here crumbling and bare, told me there was no outlet.

George rubbed his eyes and, searching for a cigarette, muttered: "I said it was coming to us. We've got to go back."

Next article: Running the gauntlet of jungle snakes, ducks and deer on Cypress Island.

(To be continued.)

