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FIELD AND STREAM

OFFICIAL ORGAN of the CAMP-FIRE CLUB OF AMERICA



In this issue Stories by Prize Winners in \$2000. Fishing Contest

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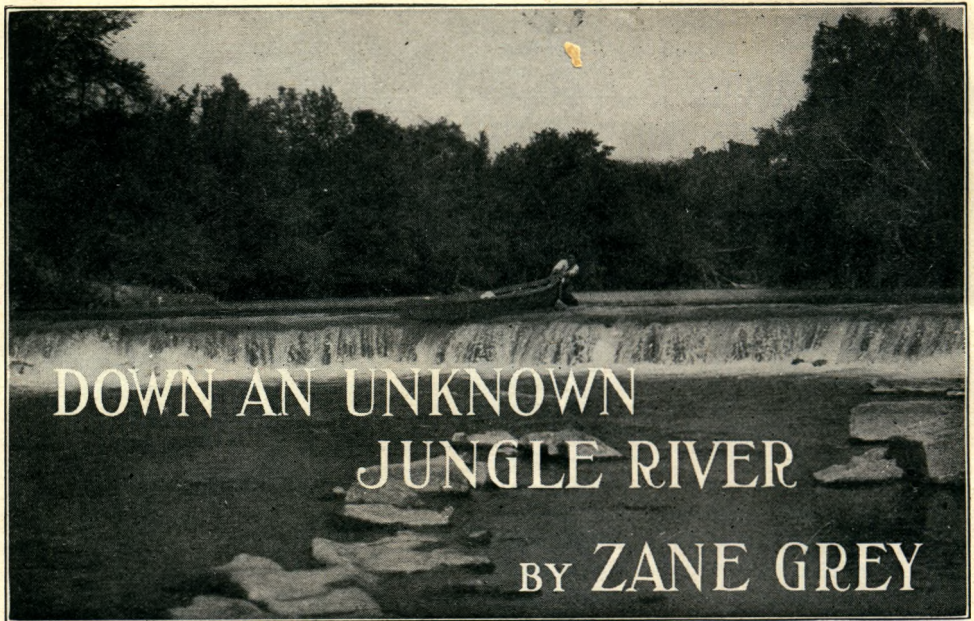
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A thrilling series of adventures with jaguars, wild boars, alligators and tropical snakes, encountered while exploring an unmapped river flowing down through the wildest jungles of Mexico

PART VII

TIGRE

WHEN the echoes of the shots died away the stillness seemed all the deeper. No rustle in the brush or scuffle on the sand gave evidence of a wounded or dying jaguar. George and Pepe declared there were two tigers and that they had hit one. I walked out upon the stones till I could see the opposite bar, but was not rewarded by a sight of dead game. Thereupon we returned to camp, somewhat discouraged at our ill luck, but planning another night watch.

In the morning George complained that he did not feel well. I told him he had been eating too much fresh meat, and that he had better be careful. Then I set off alone, crossed the river and found that the deer carcass was gone. In the sand near where it had lain were plenty of cat tracks but none of the big jaguar. Upon closer scrutiny I found the cat tracks to be those of a panther. He had half dragged, half carried the carcass up one of the steep trails, but from that point there was no further trace.

I struck out across the flat, intending to go as far as the jungle. Turtle doves fluttered before me in numberless flocks. Far to one side I saw some Muscovy ducks rising, sailing a few rods, then alighting. This occurred several times before I understood what it meant. There was probably a large flock feeding on the flat, and the ones in the rear were continually flying to get ahead of those to the fore.

Several turkeys ran through the bushes before me, but as I was carrying my rifle I paid little heed to them. I kept a keen lookout for *javelin*. Two or three times I was tempted to turn off the trail into little bamboo hollows; this, however, owing to a repugnance to ticks, I did not do. Finally, as I neared the high moss-decked wall of the jungle, I came upon a runway leading through the bottom of a deep swale, and here I found tiger tracks. Farther down the swale, under a great cluster of bamboo, I saw the scattered bones of several deer. I was sure that in this spot the lord of the jungle had feasted more than once. It was an open hollow with the ground bare under the bamboos. The run-

way led on into the dense leafy jungle. I planned to bait that lair with a deer carcass and watch it during the late afternoon.

First, it was necessary to get the deer. This might prove bothersome, for my hands and wrists were already sprinkled with *pinilius*, and I certainly did not want to stay in the brush very long at a time. The ticks were making me nervous. I imagined I felt an itching all the time, and writhed inside my clothes.

"Well, bite! blame you!" I said resignedly, and stepped into the low bushes, and went up and out of the swale. I had scarcely got my head over the level when I espied a troop of deer within easy range. Before they saw or winded me I let drive. The one I had singled out fell over sideways; the others bounded away. When I saw the work of the soft nose .351 bullet I no longer wondered at the deer falling in his tracks.

"If I ever hit a tigre like that it will be all day with him," I commented. There were two things about hunting a jaguar that I had been bidden to keep in mind—his fierce aggressiveness and remarkable tenacity of life. These are qualities that make game worthy of a hunter's steel. I dragged the deer down into the bamboo swale and skinned out a haunch. Next to the wild-turkey meat, I liked venison best, and I was glad of this as an excuse, for shooting these tame tropical deer somehow seemed murder to me. I left the carcass in a favorable position, and then hurried back to camp.

To my great relief I had managed to escape bringing any *garrapatoes* with me; it took me, however, a half-hour to rid myself of my collection of *pinilius*.

"Pepe, what's the difference between a *garrapato* and a *pinilius*?" I asked.

"The big tick is the little one's mother," replied Pepe, and then volunteered more interesting natural history for my edification. Of course, I took Pepe's word for it.

There were only a few ticks up here in the uplands; down along the Panuco River, where the cattle roamed, there were millions in every square rod. The under side of every leaf and blade of grass was red with ticks. The size of the ticks depended upon whether or not they got a chance to



"THE RUNWAY LED ON INTO A DENSE LEAFY JUNGLE"

stick to a steer or any beast. If they could not suck blood they could not grow, yet they appeared to live indefinitely. The *pinilius* grew into a *garrapato*, and a *garrapato* bred a hundred thousand *pinilius* within her body. Two singular facts concerning these ticks were that instinct made them always crawl upward and that they vanished from the earth during the season of summer rains.

With me it was as George had sagely predicted—the ticks would make it serious for me. I soaked my hunting suit of Duxbax in kerosene in the hope that this heroic method would enable me to spend at least a reasonable time hunting. Then I waited for the long, hot hours to pass. It was cool in the shade, but the sunlight resembled the heat of a fire. At last five o'clock came, and I put on the damp suit. Soaked with the oil it was heavier and hotter than



A VISTA OF THE SANTA ROSA

sealskin, and before I got across the river I was nearly roasted. The evening wind sprang up and the gusts were like blasts from a furnace. My body was bathed in perspiration; it ran down my wrists, over my hands and wet the gun. This cure for ticks—if it were one—was worse than their bites. When I reached the shade of the bamboo swale it was none too soon for me. I threw off the coat, noticing as I did so that there were more ticks upon it than at any time before. The bottom of my trousers, too, had gathered an exceeding quantity. I brushed them off, muttering the while that I believed they liked kerosene, and looked as if they were drinking it. I found it easy, however, to brush them off of the wet Duxbax, and soon composed myself to rest and watch.

The position I chose afforded me a clear view of the bare space under the bamboos, and of the hollow where the runway disappeared in the jungle. The deer carcass, which lay as I had left it, was about a hundred feet from me. This seemed rather close, but I had to accept it, for if I had moved farther away I could not have commanded both points.

I sat with my back against a clump of bamboos, the little rifle across my knees, and an extra clip of cartridges on the ground at my left. After taking that po-

sition I determined, if the tiger came, not to move out of my tracks, and to kill him. It is desirable for a hunter, when his quarry is dangerous, to make up his mind beforehand, if that be possible. I had twelve powerful shells that I could shoot in half of twelve seconds; and I would have been willing to face two jaguars. This, of course, was before I had yet been introduced to one.

The sun set and the wind died down. What a relief was the cooling shade! The little breeze that was left fortunately blew at right angles to the swale, so that there did not seem much danger of the tiger winding me down the jungle runway.

For long moments I was tense and alert. I listened till I thought I had almost lost the sense of hearing. The jungle leaves were whispering; the insects were humming. I had expected to hear myriads of birds and see processions of deer, and perhaps a drove of *javelin*. But if any living creatures ventured near me it was without my knowledge. The hour between sunset and twilight passed—a long wait; still I did not lose the feeling that something would happen. My faculties of alertness tired, however, and needed distraction. So I took stock of the big clump of bamboos under which lay the

deer carcass. It was a remarkable growth, that gracefully drooping cluster of slender bamboo poles. I remembered that as a youngster I had often wondered where the long cane fishing poles came from. Here I counted one hundred and sixty-nine in a clump no bigger than a barrel. They were yellow in color with black bands, and they rose straight for a few yards, then began to lean out, to bend slightly, at last to droop with their abundance of spiked leaves. I was marveling at the beauty of these slender tips when a noise startled me.

All in an instant I was strung like a whip-cord. What it was that I heard puzzled me. After a moment I seemed to fix the sound as having been an expulsion of breath from some creature's lungs. Warily I glanced around, raising myself a little, and craning my neck. A deep growl made me whirl.

There stood a jaguar with head up and paw on the deer carcass. I felt perfectly cool, but I was astounded. Even as I cautiously edged the rifle over my knee I took in the beautiful creature's points. He was yellow, almost white with black spots; he was short and stocky with enormous stumpy legs. But it was his head that most amazed me. It seemed huge.

He opened his jaws in a threatening growl, and his long yellow fangs gleamed. Not hurriedly nor yet slowly, I fired. I heard the bullet strike him as plainly as if I had hit him with a board. I saw the dust fly from his hide. He leaped straight up with a roar that shook my nerve. I felt cold and tight all over. When he came down, sprawled on all fours, I pulled the automatic again.

The bullet went through him for this time I saw fur fly. He leaped at me with strange hoarse utterance. When he landed I shot again and knocked him flat. I thought he was done for, but he tumbled and wrestled about, scattering the dust and leaves. Three times more I fired, too hastily, too sure of him, and as good as missed.

It took two deliberate seconds to snap in the other clip and push down the rod that threw the shell into the barrel. In that interval he would have got to me, if he could have kept his sense of direc-

tion. But he zigzagged; he was hard hit, had lost his equilibrium.

Then he made a magnificent leap that landed him within twenty-five feet of me, and when he plunged down he rolled clear over. I shot him through and through twice, yet he got up wheezing blood, uttering a kind of bellow, and sprang again at me.

If ever I fought a panic it was then! For a single instant the rifle wobbled. I was sick. Then I steadied down, grimly realizing in a lightning flash that it was my life at stake.

Once while he was in the air I pulled, twice while he was down. Ten feet from me he rose to his full height, pawing the air with great spread claws, coughing, bleeding, desperate, horrible. I shot him straight between the wide spread paws.

With twisted body, staggering, and blowing bloody froth all over me, he lunged forward blindly and fell over into the hollow.

Then began a furious wrestling that I imagined was his death throes. I could not see him down among the leaves and vines, but I shot again into the commotion. There was a cessation of the struggles; then a movement of the weeds showed me he was creeping toward the jungle.

I sat down to reload the clips. They were hard to load for even a calm person, and now, in the reaction of that desperate situation, I was far from calm. The jaguar crept steadily away, as I could tell by the swaying weeds and branches. What wonderfully vitality! I must have shot him all to pieces. At last my trembling fingers pushed home shells in the two clips, and once more I loaded the rifle. Then I drew a deep full breath and made a powerful effort at composure. I had shot big game, and game that dashed at a hunter when it was hurt. But this was a different experience. I would never entirely get over it. How close that jaguar had come to getting me was proved by his own blood which he had coughed into my face. I recalled that I had felt the wind of his great paw.

In a moment I was myself again and more determined than ever to have that

beautiful spotted skin for my den. So I hurried along the runway and entered the jungle. Beyond the edge, where the bushes made a dense thicket, it was dry forest with little green low down. The hollow gave place to a dry wash. I could not see the jaguar, but I could hear him dragging himself through the brush, cracking sticks, shaking saplings.

Presently I ran across a bloody trail and followed it. Every little while I would stop to listen. When the wounded jaguar was still I waited until he started to move again. It was hard going. The brush was thick and had to be broken and crawled under or through. As I had left my coat behind, my shirt was soon torn to rags. I peered ahead with sharp eyes, expecting every minute to come in sight of the poor crippled beast. I wanted to put him out of his agony. So I kept on doggedly for what must have been a long time.

The first premonition I had of my carelessness was to note that the shadows were gathering in the jungle. It would soon be night. I must turn back while I had light enough to follow my back-track out to the open. The second came in shape of a hot pain in my arm, as keen as if I had jagged it with a thorn. Holding it out I discovered, to my dismay, that it was spotted with *garrapatoes*.

At once I turned back, and if I thought again of the jaguar it was that I could come after him the next day, or send Pepe. Another vicious bite, this time on my leg, confirmed my suspicions that many of the ticks had been on me long enough to begin their nefarious business. Then I was bitten in several places. Those bites were as hot as the touch of a live coal, yet they made me break out in a dripping cold sweat. It was imperative that I get back to camp without losing a moment which could be saved. From a rapid walk I fell into a trot. I got off my back-trail and had to hunt for it. Every time a tick bit me I jumped as if stung. The worst of it was that I knew I was collecting more *garrapatoes* with almost every step. When I grasped a dead branch to push it out of my way I could feel the ticks come away on my hand.

Then I would whip my arm in the air, flinging some of them off to pattern on the dry ground. Impossible as it was to run through that matted jungle I almost accomplished it. When I got out into the open, I did run, not even stopping for my coat, and I crossed the flat at top speed.

It was almost dark when I reached the river bank and dashed down to frighten a herd of deer. I waded the narrowest part of the shoal, and running up the island burst into the bright circle of camp-fire. Pepe and George jumped up with exclamations of fright. I was so choked up and breathless that at first I could not speak. My ragged, sleeveless shirt I threw into the fire, and then jerked off the rest of my clothes. In the bright glare I saw my arms black with *garrapatoes* and a sprinkling of black dots over the rest of my body. I was in agony.

"Boys, hurry, get busy!" I said, with grim effort at endurance.

It was well for me that I had a native like Pepe with me. First he dashed a bucket of cold water over me. How welcome it was! Then he told me to point out the ticks that were deepest, biting the hardest, he explained. I thought I was being eaten alive; it seemed impossible to tell *where* I was being bitten. But anything is possible with the mind. By absolute concentration on the pain I was enduring I was able to locate the severest points. Then the red-hot cigarette tips scorched my skin. That was the most trying ordeal of all my hunting days, or any other days. Pepe smoked and wore out three cigarettes and George two before they had popped all the biting ticks!

Then I was still covered with them. Pepe bathed me in *canya*, which was a bath of fire, and soon removed them all. I felt flayed alive, peeled of my skin, and sprinkled with fiery sparks. When I had gotten into my pajamas and lain down, I was as weak as a sick cat. Pepe said the *canya* would take away the sting very soon, but it was some time before I was resting easily.

(To be continued)

Next article:—George's Jaguar.