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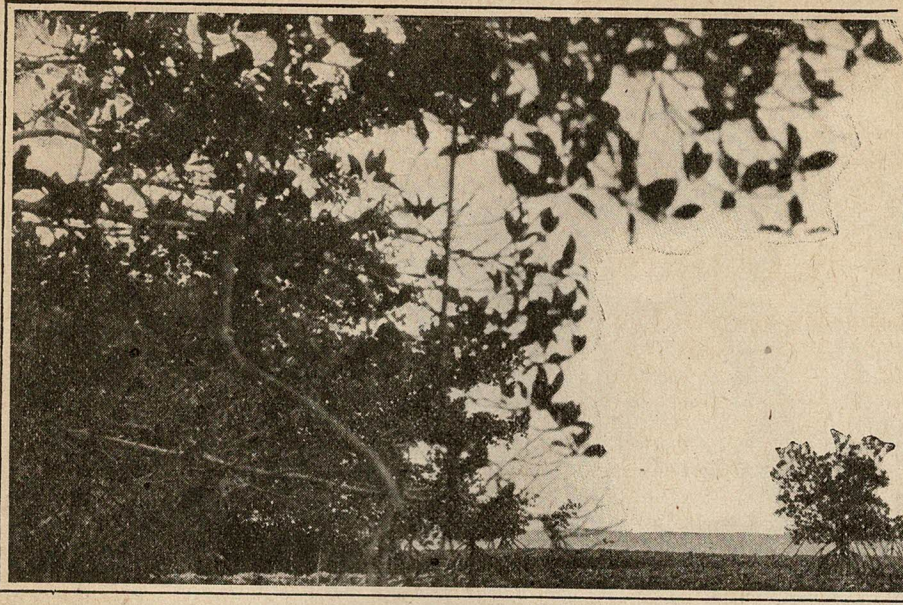
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**WORTHLESS LAND**—By Richard T. Ely





# Big Ones We Caught—and Lost

By ZANE GREY

IT TURNED OUT TO BE AN IDEAL DAY. THE AUTHOR CAUGHT ONE TARPON OF ABOUT SEVENTY-FIVE POUNDS

WE ENTERED the main channel of Lossmans River on an April morning and wound a zigzag course to get by the bars and the capes into the great bay that opened beyond.

I was to learn that Lossmans River did not really begin until we had traversed the chain of bays. The first of these was three miles long, almost as wide, and bordered by irregular shorelines of bright green. Channels and bays followed, one after another, for half a dozen miles. The water began to take on the brownish cast peculiar to the Everglades. I saw no fish and no ducks or other birds. We came at length into a region of islands, of every size and shape. And after a run of two hours we reached the last bay, a large beautiful sheet of brown water with low shores of green.

The surface was smooth and shining, scarcely rippled by the gentle breeze. Tarpon were rolling all about, some of which appeared the largest we had seen. As we were on the way to find a big rookery we did not tarry to try conclusions with the tarpon, feeling that as we had discovered them we could come back.

At the upper end of this long bay we entered what Captain Thad called Old Lossmans River; and for two hours more we did little else than turn bends in a bewilderingly crooked and narrowing stream. The rookery we sought no longer existed; and much disappointed we kept on and on, beyond the last patches of mangroves bordering the creek, out into the real Everglades.

I FOUND this recompense for the much-longed-for sight of another rookery of birds. We kept on until the boats stuck in the mud in a creek scarcely fifty feet wide. On three sides then I had view of the Everglades.

Evergrass would have been truer. Far from the low margin of the creek, far as my gaze could grasp, stretched a level plain of saw grass, a sedge resembling cat-tails, a

greenish brown in hue. Here and there a lonely palmetto dotted the landscape, and far on in the dim haze showed patches of trees or a group of palmettos. Wild fowl winged wavering flight over that wasteland.

It was summer. Heat veils rose from the prairie. A soft breeze blew hot in my face, bringing the scent of dry grass and distant swamp and far-off fragrance of flowers. No lonely solitude of desert ever equaled that wilderness! Low, level, monotonous it spread away endlessly to north and east, for what I knew to be far over a hundred miles. It was the home of wild fowl and beast and alligator, and the elusive Seminole.

Gazing across this waving sea of grass I had a conception of the Seminole's hatred of all that pertained to the white man. The Everglade Indian must love this inaccessible, inhospitable wilderness that was neither wholly land nor water. He was alone there. No white man could follow him. The last three hundred of his race would die there, and perish from the earth.

Wild places had always haunted me. Yet I had not anticipated any lure of the Everglades. But something seized me—the old passion to wander, to travel on foot, to seek, to find, to fight obstacles. And the insurmountable obstacle of the Everglades laid its strange hold on my imagination. No white man had ever mastered this wild country.

Yet, strong as my feeling was, I would not have wanted to roam long over the Everglades. I wanted to penetrate a few miles, by my own exertions, and satisfy a strong curiosity. Here I felt no longing for the unattainable.

A great snowy crane—the egret—winged lumbering flight across my vision; and I followed him until he was lost to view low down in the west. Of all wild birds the egret had been most hunted by men—hunted for the exquisite white plumes that decorated the female at the nesting! I certainly did not mark the flight of this wild

fowl to do it harm—rather with wonder at its beauty and sadness for its unhappy fate. Beauty is an unending joy, yet in many ways it pays a terrible price.

This border of the Everglades was about twenty miles, as a crow flies, from the coast. Yet it might as well have been a thousand. Here was the sedgy portal of the unknown. I had come to the Ten Thousand Islands and the Everglades to fish and to photograph. And I was finding myself slowly awakening to a profound realization of the tremendousness of this strange wild region of America.

ALL during the long ride down through lakes and lanes I felt the oppression of the truth. The Everglades region was great through its aloofness. It could not be possessed. Assuredly the Seminole had been absorbed by it, as proved by his lonely, secretive, self-sufficient existence.

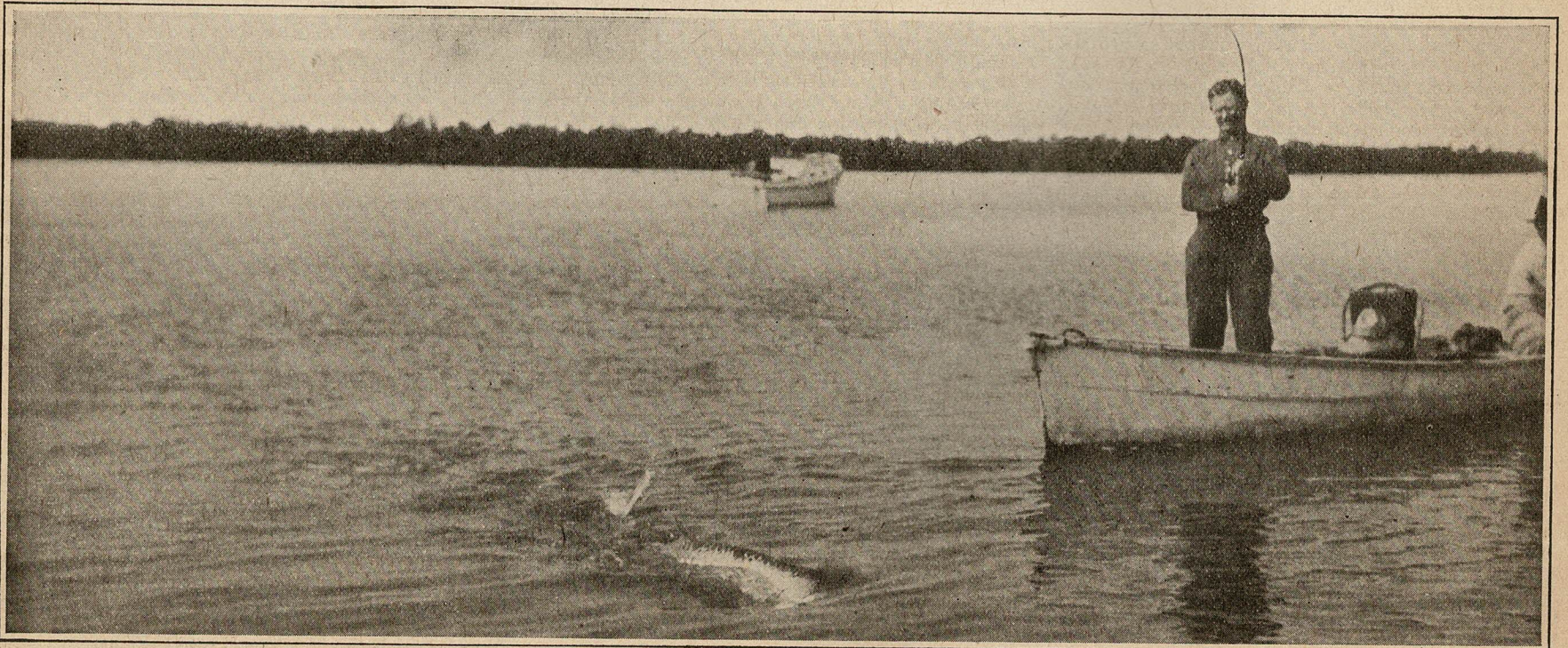
Upon our return to the big bay we found that a brisk breeze had ruffled the water, putting an end to the rolling of tarpon. Therefore we continued on down the channels, back to the houseboat. Along the coast the wind was blowing hard.

During the night it increased, and morning disclosed muddy water. As we could not fish we rested and wrote notes and worked over tackle.

As the wind was northwest we were rather fearful of more bad weather, and as we had experienced almost nothing but bad weather—from the standpoint of Californians—for more than two months, we were inclined to be peevish. But toward sunset the wind died away.

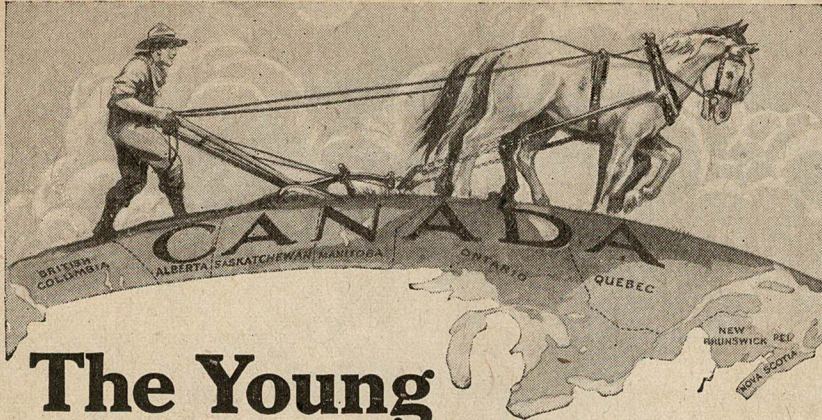
Long before sunrise I was up, patrolling the deck. A silvery mist, almost as thick as fog, obscured water and shore line. By and by I caught a glimpse of the dim, shadowy mangroves. Then through the opaque gloom the sun appeared, pale and spectral. Gradually the sun brightened to silver, and the mist began to dissolve, and

(Continued on Page 32)



A RUNNING WAVE APPEARED ON THE SURFACE OF THE WATER. A HUGE SILVER HEAD WAVED UP





## The Young Giant Next Door

**C**ANADA, your progressive young neighbor on the north, is fast growing up. Do you realize what a young giant of a nation Canada has already become? Here are some startling facts:—

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## Big Ones We Caught—and Lost

(Continued from Page 9)

a cool, dewy, balmy spring morning was at hand.

Half an hour later the sun shone hot and a cloudless blue sky beamed down upon us, as with launch and string of skiffs we skimmed away for the day's fishing. It turned out to be an ideal day, like summer, and not wanting in fishing thrills. I caught one tarpon of about seventy-five pounds. When hooked he made three leaps right at the boat, clean, sharp, straight jumps like those of a marlin, and the last one just missed the skiff. He splashed water all over us and thumped the keel as he shot under.

I was reminded again that tarpon have more than once leaped into boats, to the peril of boatman and angler. I had my action planned in case one came aboard, and it was to go the tarpon one better on a leap. At Tampico I saw a huge tarpon sail up into the air and turn over, to come down in a head dive right into the skiff. He knocked the bottom out and went almost through.

We made a rather long run to a place called Thickahatchie Bay. The only difference between this bay and a hundred others all around it was that it was larger.

**I**N SOME of the coves of bays adjacent to Thickahatchie Bay we found tarpon rolling; and leaving the launches we poled around in skiffs hunting for favorable grounds. As in bonefishing the fact of having located tarpon did not mean that we would find a good place to fish for them. There must not be any current, or a rocky or grassy bottom. Usually it took time to discover this; and in fact before we had satisfactorily located ourselves the day was done. We had, however, found an ideal string of coves, in some of which were large tarpon. I had one strike this day, and the fish came up with a heavy crash, showing half his broad body. Before I could wind in the slack and jerk, the tarpon had thrown the hook.

Captain Thad decided this fish would weigh around one hundred and eighty; and he also said that there were bigger fish than that in these coves.

The following morning we went back to our promising coves. Taking to the skiffs we paddled along.

Soon we were anchored at the most favorable points, for the time being—R. C. at the corner of an island and I out some few hundred feet. It would have been impossible for me not to have been excited and thrilled in such an environment, with big silver tarpon rolling out so close I could pitch a bait upon their backs.

"There's one made a swirl over the bait on your little rod," said Thad. "I reckon he'll do business. You'll sure have a job with that mosquito tackle."

One of my light tackles was really too light, but as we needed several rods to each skiff I was risking this five-and-a-half ounce tip. The reel was a 3-0 full of Number Nine line. And when I saw this line start to move slowly away from the boat I had quite a second of panic.

"He's got it," said Thad.

**N**OTHING happened for what seemed ages. Suddenly a silver blaze flashed in the water not ten feet from the boat; then followed a boiling swirl and bulge.

I was tinglingly aware that the tarpon had swirled right under our noses, but I had no hope that he still held the bait. All in an instant my line hissed away through the water. Swiftly as I could throw on the drag I still was not quick enough to jerk before he leaped. He went ten feet into the air, a deformed, convulsive fish shape, all silver and spray. Then as he crashed back I got the slack line in and hooked him, careful even in my excitement not to break the light rig.

My reel screeched, the line hissed out, the little rod wagged. The tarpon burst out with a crack, and throwing himself high he turned clear over in the air, gills and mouth spread so wide that I saw the sky through them. I heard him shake himself like a huge dog. Then he plunged down. But only to shoot up again, straight, broadside to us, mouth shut—a most beautiful sight.

In the ten seconds or more following, while Thad wound in the other line and

pulled up anchor, the fish leaped sheer and high five more times, with as many crashing lunges on the surface.

This performance altogether ran off two hundred yards of my line. If he had not sounded then he would have hung himself on the mangroves. But he went down, and while I pumped and reeled as hard as I dared, Captain Thad backed the skiff on him. I had to look up all the time at the alarming bend of the little rod, lest I pull a fraction too hard and break it. The strain on me was as severe as if I had been pulling on heavy tackle. I worked so hard that I turned the tarpon away from the dangerous mangroves.

**N**OT until we reached fairly deep water did my tarpon enter upon his second series of leaps. I had not expected much. But he amazed and delighted me. If he had been tired it must have been from his first leaping, for all the strain I could put on him had not been felt. He tumbled in and out of the water like a gigantic silver leap-frog. Straight at R. C. This was too good to be true. Yet it could not be denied. He danced over the frothy water; he wagged up and plunged down; he made of himself a silver blur. And with a last effort he smashed out right in front of R. C. and twisted himself all out of shape—to souse back with a sullen sound.

The spectacular part of the battle was apparently over. In all I was forty minutes subduing this tarpon, though the time seemed brief. My left arm was numb, and my hand so stiff I could hardly shut it. We judged the fish would weigh well over a hundred pounds.

In the succeeding hour R. C.'s thrilling whistle brought me to my feet, camera in hand, four times. Sharks! It was most exasperating; and the language that floated across the quiet space of water was humorous and otherwise.

We moved up into the cove, taking a position across from the other skiff. The tarpon fell into one of their inactive spells, showing but seldom.

"Somethin' doing over there," said Thad, interrupting my contemplations.

R. C.'s whistle followed, and I wheeled in time to see him rise and extend his rod. I saw the line rise out of the water, from a point near the skiff out to a distance of thirty yards. It strung taut. Then R. C. jerked hard. A running wave appeared on the surface of the water. It swelled and burst with a roar. A huge silver head waved up, wreathed in white, with great jaws spread V-shaped. There followed a loud tussling sound. Bait and leader flew high into the air. The tarpon had ejected the hook. The huge head sank.

"Aw-w-w!" cried R. C., in most poignant distress. "He was a whale. Did you see him? . . . Oh, what a fish!"

**H**E SLAMMED the rod hard down in the skiff and stood a moment staring at the widening circles where the tarpon had disappeared.

"Cheer up, R. C.," I called. "It was hard luck, but you've lost bigger fish than that."

We remained there, faithful to the chance of a strike, until the tarpon worked slowly out into the bay, rolling less and less, and time came when we no longer saw them. Then we rowed back to the launch, and were soon speeding down through the chain of bays. R. C. laughed about the big tarpon, and took the ill luck vastly more tranquilly than I.

Once more I attended to the myriads of wild fowl and the changing of channel, island and bay. And it chanced that I saw a number of fish hawks. It really must have been fish-hawk day. Most of them were poising above the water, or flying around, watching for a mullet on the surface. I saw several dive, but at too great a distance for me to mark the result. Presently one appeared flying heavily, carrying a long object in its talons. As it approached I was amazed to see the object was a rather heavy crooked stick of wood. This fish hawk was building a nest. Not long after that I espied another standing on the edge of a huge nest in the top of a high dead mangrove.

**EDITOR'S NOTE**—Another article on Everglades fishing by Mr. Grey, the last of the series, will appear in an early issue.