

FEBRUARY, 1927

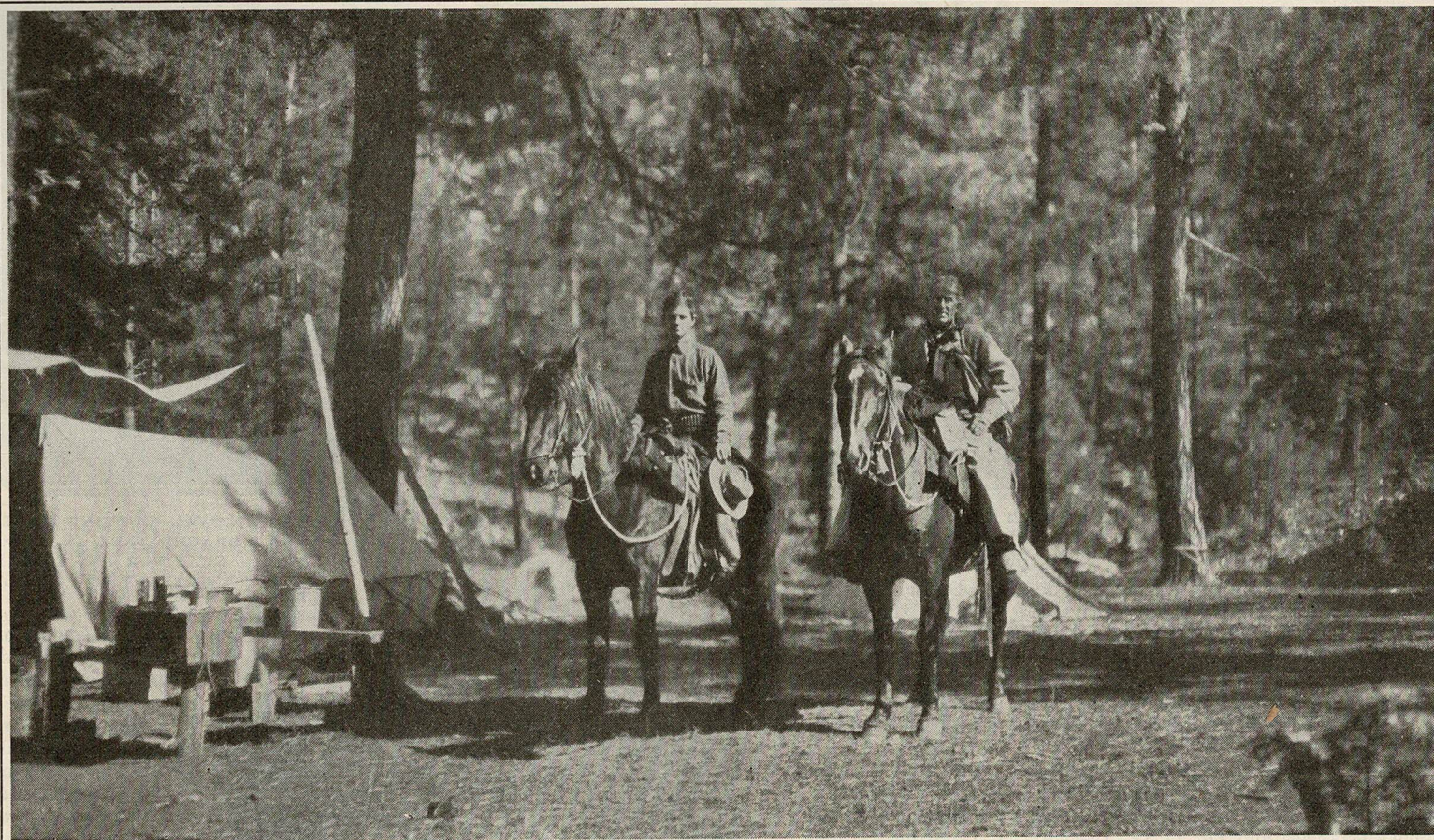
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THREE YEARS

The Country Gentleman



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ORE THAN 1,350,000 A MONTH



THE AUTHOR AND HIS SON ON THEIR FAVORITE HORSES, BRUTUS AND SARCH

My Son's First Bear

An Exciting Morning When the Dogs Jumped Three Big Ones

By ZANE GREY

IT IS with something of pride and yet misgiving that at last I am compelled to acknowledge that my son, Romer, is a chip of the old block.

When he was a baby some of my people told him the story of how I, as a little boy, used to babble about killing "bars an' bufflers." He took quite naturally to this wild declaration. And eight years ago, when he was nine, I took him on his first trip to Arizona, despite the advice of everybody, especially his mother.

On this trip Romer more than lived up to his promise—he shot holes through the bedding and tents, besides some perfectly innocent squirrels and birds; he stampered the horses, and rode as his favorite one of Haught's bucking burros; he made friends with a rustler cowboy who stole some of my outfit and nearly took Romer off too. In fact Romer scared me so that I vowed I would not take him to Arizona again till he had reached seventeen, which was last year.

Two Promises

HE NEVER let me forget that promise, and in justice he really earned its fulfillment. Now it happened that all this while his sister, Betty Zane, was growing up, and was beginning to tease to be taken to Arizona. From earliest infancy Betty Zane has loved horses. She began at three to draw pictures of them. She has kept it up, though I am not sure that she will be another Rosa Bonheur.

My books on wild horses are Betty's favorites, and she knows them by heart. She has asked a thousand

questions about Night and Black Star, White Stockings and Sarchedon, Silvermane, Wildfire, Brutus. Once I wrote her a letter and called her Lucy Bostil, after the heroine in my novel Wildfire. We discovered afterward that she had for months kept that letter under her pillow.

Finally Betty Zane extracted from me a promise that I would take her to Arizona some day, and let her ride Night and perhaps Brutus. In the two or three years that elapsed I was never permitted to forget that promise.

With Betty reaching the mature age of fourteen and Romer a man of seventeen—according to his version—and both of them equally wild to go to Arizona, I had to shoulder this terrific responsibility.

Romer demurred a little about his sister going. "She's only a kid, and this's going to be a bear hunt for men," he argued.

I got around the difficulty by saying we would leave Betty in camp with the rest of the tenderfeet.

My outfit left Altadena with two cars and a truck,

and camped that night on the desert above Salton Sea. Next night we slept—at least I slept—under the looming bulk of Superstition Mountain in Arizona; and the following afternoon we had climbed to the edge of the pine forest where we were to meet Lee Doyle and the Haughts.

What wonderful relief and joy to get back into the woods—especially the Arizona woods—after months on the sea! It came to me with something of shock. I had not visited Arizona for two years. Arizona—with its colored canyons and crags, its lofty rims, its black forests with the gold of aspen and scarlet of maple; its grand sweep of range, and grassy valley and mesquite ridge; its rushing streams. I slipped off to the edge of the ravine to be alone.

Two years! It had not seemed so long. How time flies! Something was knocking at my heart with remorse. But I did not have long for brooding reminiscence, for the cracking of many hoofs and the shouts of my party announced the arrival of Doyle with the horses.

Betty and Romer Take Their Pick

I HURRIED back to the clearing. Sure enough, there were the horses, dusty and ragged, with the cowboys dismounting. Betty nailed me on one side and Romer on the other, both babbling at once. Doyle met us, smiling. "How are the horses, Lee?" I asked.

"Fine and dandy. They're fat, and pretty tired. We've been five days on the road."

To Betty's credit, she picked Night out of the bunch of twenty-eight before I could identify him. And Romer did the same by Sarch. My brother, R. C., had ridden Sarch on many hunts; and now the spirited bay was to be Romer's. Presently one of Lee's cowboys came leading Brutus. He seemed as grand as ever, and his dark mottled chestnut skin shone in the sunlight. He stampered up to lift his noble head in a manner inimitably his own, and looked at me in the way that had always thrilled me.

"Brutus has not been saddled since you rode him last," Doyle told me.

"Gee! I wonder if I can ride him," I replied, gazing at the big horse in pride and anxiety.

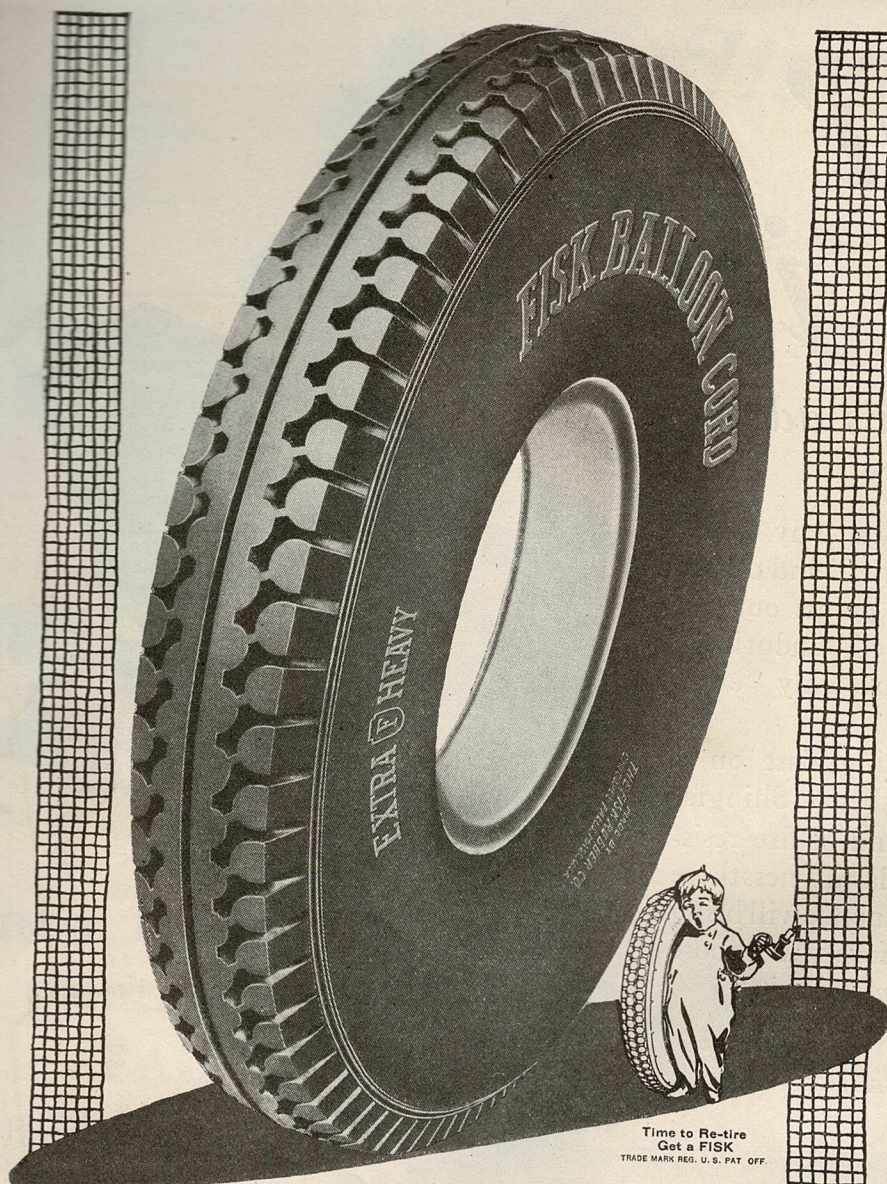
"Sure. He knows you."

But Night gave no hint of recognition. I had owned him for twelve years. He was as glossy and black as when I first saw him. He did not seem old. I saw at once that he was gentler, but he had the same old fire in his dark

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A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK—ROMER AND HIS BEAR



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My Son's First Bear

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eyes. He reminded me of Black Star, his running mate of Riders of the Purple Sage. Star was gone, and so was White Stockings, another beloved horse. Time brings loss.

Betty appeared to make friends very easily with Night. He was more amenable to women than to men; which led me to believe that he had been hurt by cowboys or Indians. Romer took possession of Sarch, as it was plain the big shaggy bay with mane and tail that swept the ground had taken possession of him.

Then I looked over my other favorites, Sorrel and Nig and Spot and Calamity Jane. Spot was still as white as snow, with the one black spot on his forehead, which gave him his name. They all seemed to be in splendid condition.

Off for the Lodge

MY OWN saddles were at the lodge, which was five miles up the trail, under the base of the mountain. Doyle, however, had half a dozen or more saddles which were available. So we decided not to wait for Haught's pack outfit. George Takahashi started on foot, ahead of us, saying: "Me have big fire an' supper when you come."

Captain and Mrs. Mitchell also decided to walk. The captain was great in a canoe, but hardly at home in a Western saddle.

Romer saddled Sarch and rode off down into the ravine, cracking the rocks with hollow ring and splashing water high as his head.

Doyle led out a pretty little mustang, brown and sleek and graceful, which he paraded before my daughter.

Betty was excited, pleased, and plainly in a quandary. "Oh, dad, isn't this a lovely pony? Oh, what shall I do? I can't ride all of them at once. . . . What's his name?"

"Reckon he hasn't any," replied Lee. "It's up to you to give him a name."

"Tonto!" cried Betty promptly.

Soon then we had mounts ready for Betty, and for Captain Mitchell's daughter, Frances, and Mildred. Ken and Ed rode off to try and catch up with Romer. Tommy and Hildred, the last of my party, were bride and groom. We found horses for them, and then we started off.

Dogs Just Rarin' to Go

ON THE way up we met Haught and his two rangy sons, Ed and Richard. The old bear hunter looked as rugged as one of the great pine trees.

"Well, Haught, old-timer, how are the dogs?" I asked.

"Reckon they're fine, an' rarin' to hunt," he replied.

"How about bears?"

"Wal, there's some bar, up high. Acorns scattered this fall. There's a big old Jasper of a grizzly in Cheylon Canyon. He's a cow killer. We sure want to smoke up that varmint."

It had been my hope that we could hunt from the lodge, but Haught said such a plan was impractical because of the distances to be covered. A far better idea would be to go up on top of the mountain, where grass and water were plenty, and make camp in one of the canyons.

I considered the feasibility of leaving our tenderfoot contingent at the lodge, but realizing that I only wanted to shirk the risk and worry of taking them, I decided against my selfishness.

"Well," I announced, after a conference with Haught, "I'm sorry, but you tender California rosebuds will have to crawl out in the cold dark dawn. We're hitting the trail up."

They thought it would be fun, and I did not arouse them from their dreams. But at five next morning I did awaken them

from sweet slumbers, and then it was different. The morning was nipping and dark as pitch. Even for me it was a grim business to get into my boots.

But at last I got them out. We ate breakfast at sunrise, and had most of our packing done when the Haughts came with their burros. One of these was the little gray burro that had been Romer's mount seven years before. Next Lee and his boys trooped in with the saddle horses. It was a busy hour, and must have been exceedingly interesting to my guests who were new to such experience. Fortunately the horses were gentle and there were no mules.

The trail was bad, just a deep zigzag rut full of loose rocks. I halted every dozen rods or so and at every turn of the zigzag trail to let the horses catch their breath. At last we reached the top, to my great satisfaction and pleasure.

At Beaver Dam Camp we unsaddled the horses and turned them loose into the corral on the lower bench, where they rolled their sweaty backs in the dust. It was about mid-afternoon and very warm in the sun. The shade, as always in Arizona, was cool. When we had rested we set about cutting pine and spruce boughs for our beds, always one of the pleasantest of camp tasks.

A Dangerous Stand

AN HOUR before sunset Lee and his cowboys arrived with eight pack horses; and shortly afterward the Haughts came with their laden burros and the hounds. Then indeed there were tasks for all hands and some to spare.

By dark we had eight tents up, with as many comfortable beds made; and when George's cheery "Come an' get!" pealed out, we were a weary, happy, hungry crew.

At sunrise, when the gold tipped the pines, we rode off up the canyon, the horses frisky, the hounds eager and keen. At the head of Beaver we were to separate.

"Wal, Ed an' Richard an' me will go down the Z. G. trail with the dogs," decided the old bear hunter. "Now, Mr. Grey, you leave somebody on every one of them good stands, an' when you yell we'll start the dogs an' drive up the canyon."

Our plan was to surround a big deep canyon that indented the mountainside, and take up stands from which a sharp eye might sight a running bear.

I took Romer to the far side of the canyon, on the western slope of a jutting rocky cape which overlooked the colorful abyss. There was always a good chance of a bear running round under this cape. It was also a dangerous stand, as I well remembered, having had more than one bear run between me and the top. Here we tied our horses, and divesting ourselves of chaps we tackled the rocky perpendicular descent down to the flat rock where I wanted to take the boy.

The Opening Thrill

"GEE! What a place!" exclaimed Romer, breathing hard, and gazing down at the cliffs, the jumbles of rock, the slopes of oak and maple, the brushy ravines and bare ridges that stretch down and down toward the black valley. We had not been there ten minutes when I thought I heard a hound.

"Listen," I whispered, getting up.

Suddenly Romer let out a sharp cry and snatched up his rifle. Keen and tense he leveled it. Spang! I was quick enough in gaze to see a big gray bear flashing down a bare slope, and a puff of dust close to him where Romer's bullet had struck. He shot again. Then the bear disappeared in a thicket.

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"By golly, son, that was a grizzly! You darn near hit him. Look sharp down there, everywhere, and far ahead of where you think he might be. . . . Look, there come the dogs. . . ."

Romer leaned over the edge of the precipice, his rifle extended, his body tense.

We did not see that bear again. Gradually the strain relaxed. We could hear the hounds baying, but the sound traveled away.

"I'm afraid they've taken him around the promontory," I said.

Romer was wild to climb back to our horses and ride on to try and head off the hounds, but I would not consider it.

"Hard luck, son. Lee and the cowboys will ride around, if the dogs run that way. But there might be another bear. Just look at the wild places under you, and along these slopes, and above us too."

A Cinnamon in Action

I HAD hardly gotten the words out when Romer leaped right off his feet. His face blazed and his hair waved up, like the mane of a lion. "Oh, dad! Look! This way!"

He began to shoot. How the .30 government rifle awoke the ringing echoes! I leaped to his side. Instantly I saw a red bear, a cinnamon, on the slope to our right, five or six hundred yards distant, but high up, and most uncomfortably close to the level that led to our stand. Romer's bullets struck white smoke from the stones all around the bear.

"Steady up, son," I admonished, though in the grip of thrilling excitement. "It's your chance. But you've got to be quick and sure. . . . You're shooting high. . . . Gosh, we mustn't let him get up as high as we are. He's a cinnamon. He'd charge us."

Romer had five shots, all running.

"Smoke him up, dad," he cried, his voice shrilling high. "Don't let him turn and come at us."

"Load up. Be quick," I replied. The cinnamon got farther away, higher up, harder to shoot at. While Romer was reloading I sent five hurried shots at the bear, one of which I saw took effect, but instead of stopping him, it turned him up and back in the one direction I feared he might take.

I yelled for Romer to hurry, but he was shooting before I got the words out of my mouth. Then while I reloaded with swift hands, I could not see the effect of his shots. I heard his bullets spang from the rocks. When I looked up again the boy was lowering his rifle. The bear had turned and was surely gaining the level ledge, where he might double back at us, and under cover of brush and ragged sections of cliffs, get close before we could see him again.

I missed with my first shot, stung him with a second, and as he lunged up, red and fearful, his shaggy hair on end, he offered for the fraction of a moment the best target I had had. When I shot again he pitched back and, rolling in a ball, bounced down the slope and over the oak thickets. When he reached an open space he spread out and leaped like a greyhound.

Another Hot Trail

ROMER yelled for me to shoot—shoot—that he was getting away. I did shoot, the fourth time, and heard the bullet strike him. Then again he began to roll. I had one more chance at him in another open place, before he rolled into a ravine out of sight. Romer was frantic with disappointment. He laid down the camera, with which he had snapped a picture while I was shooting.

"He's our bear, son, I'm sure," I replied, marking the place where he had disappeared.

Then I stepped back to reload. Romer left off his excited talk to whisper: "Dad, I hear the hounds again, closer!"

"You're right. Well! I believe they've brought your big gray bear around under this slope to our left. They must be in that black gully. Watch sharp while I load up."

I sat down. Romer's presence, of course, had made this situation most poignantly exciting, but it would not have been without its thrill had I been alone. I heard the bay of the hounds.

"Son, that's a hot trail," I said. "They've jumped a bear. Look with all your eyes!"

I stood up, a little to the left of my son. "There! There!" he called ringingly.

"But he's black—not gray. Dad, it's another!"

And with the last words he fired. It took me a moment to locate this one. Romer's next shot, puffing up white smoke, helped me. But I discovered the hounds first, four or five of them in a row. Then out from behind a bush loomed a black bear that must have been very large, for the distance was long, close to a thousand yards. The dog nearest him was white and he could scarcely have been ten feet behind the bear, and about the same distance behind him was another dog, tan in color.

"Careful, Rome," I warned sharply. "Don't kill a dog. Aim carefully—at the bear's head."

Fast and Furious

ROMER had three shots while the bear was coming head on, down that slope, and each bullet hit in front or close beside him.

"Good work! That's shooting," I said admiringly. "Load up quick, now. Maybe this is the old pig eater. . . . There, he turned and slapped over one of the dogs. Wow! Hurry, son."

I took two shots at the beast, holding under his nose, hoping to stop him from going down into the densely thicketed ravine. But he went on, and disappeared just as Romer was ready again.

"He'll come out on this side, Romer. Keep your eyes peeled. I'll go round the rock so I can see the head of that ravine. He might turn up there."

Before I reached the desired point Romer began to shoot again, calling wildly at the same time. "He's close, dad. . . . Spang! He's walking — Spang! . . . Oh, he's headed up and he's mad. Spang!"

When I had leaped to Romer's side again I was amazed to see the bear on the slope right under us. And in the sudden ensuing alarm I took a snap shot, and missed clean. Then I concluded I needed a little steadying myself. But things had certainly happened fast.

"Take time, son."

The Moment of Triumph

I HEARD the boy panting. But he did take time to aim. The distance had lessened greatly, and the closeness of the bear now, the apparent imminence of danger, might well have hindered good shooting. That ugly snarling beast, coming slowly, head up, began to get on my nerves.

"Spang!"

The bear went down, right upon the dogs. There was a howling mêlée, during which I cautioned the boy to withhold his fire. Then the bear began to roll like a huge full sack. That, added to the sound of the last bullet striking, was conclusive evidence to me.

"Romer, he's your bear," I called.

He did not answer. We watched the bear roll farther and stop and stretch out and lie still. The hounds reached him, surrounded him, uttering deep-throated bays. Then I turned to Romer. He was pale, intense, with drops of sweat standing out on his brow, and his big brown hand shook a little.

"Gee, dad! Didn't they come thick and fast? Three bears! Look out—there might be another one. . . . Some bear hunt!"



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