

These are a few instances, taken somewhat at random, of what may be seen by any one who will use ordinary powers of observation, and if my hasty and imperfect account of them has interested any of you one half as much as the observations themselves interested me, I think you will be inclined to agree with me that, for some purpose at least, a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand.

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A NATURALIST IN THE GOLD RANGE, B. C.

By James M. Macoun.

(*Read March 7, 1890.*)

While the Gold Range proper includes the Selkirk, Purcell, and several other ranges of the Rocky Mountains, the term "Gold Range" is more frequently applied to that part of the system termed by geologists the Columbia Range. Lying between the N. E. arm of Shuswap Lake and the Canadian Pacific Railway is a group of mountains forming a part of this range, but to which no distinguishing name has yet been given; one of the mountains in this group, however, is known as Mount Queest, and I shall restrict myself to a brief account of an expedition made to it last summer in search of Natural History specimens. If my paper assume the form of a personal narrative it is only because I have thought it the best means of conveying impressions of the mountains and what is to be found on them, to those who have never been among them.

I was accompanied by one man, and late in July we left Sicamous, at the mouth of Eagle River, and rowing up the N. E. arm of Shuswap Lake camped, after a long day's pull, at the mouth of a small creek which we were to ascend the following day. Before sunrise we had packed a few pounds of bacon and flour in our blankets, and tying them securely on our backs, set out, my companion carrying a repeating shotgun and I a plant press well filled with papers. It was our intention to follow the creek to its source, and by doing so we hoped to reach a mass of snow almost due south of where we had camped. A well-defined path ran along the creek, and as we had heard that the plateau

which formed the summit of the range was a favorite hunting ground of the Indians, we imagined that by following it we should be able to ascend the mountain with little difficulty. For perhaps a hundred yards the trail was broad and well worn, trees on all sides had been "blazed," and there was every evidence that it had been much used, but we then came suddenly upon an opening in the woods and found that our supposed mountain trail led only to an old camping ground where canoes had been made the previous year. Our disappointment was somewhat lessened by the discovery of a faint trail which still led up the creek, and although in many places it was imperceptible we had always two or three marked trees in sight before us, and had no difficulty in making fair progress, for while there were fallen logs and trees without number, our path wound in and out, over and under them, in such a manner that there were no obstructions to delay us; suddenly all traces of the trail were lost, nor were there markings of any kind upon the trees. After some time spent in a fruitless search for a continuation of the trail we concluded that we had been following an old line of traps; why it should have ended so abruptly we could not understand until having decided that trail or no trail we would push on, we looked about us and saw that the creek valley had been gradually narrowing, so that where we stood the bottom of the valley was not more than thirty yards across; the hills rose steeply on either hand, and on moving forward a short distance and rounding a "shoulder" of a hill that had before prevented us from seeing what was ahead, the reason for the sudden termination of the trail was evident. The valley had grown still narrower, or rather there was no longer any valley at all, the creek flowing through a canyon about half a mile in length, in which distance it fell several hundred feet. As we looked up the gorge we saw something darting in and out of the water, now disappearing behind a log or rock and again coming into view twenty or thirty yards off, it was a dipper, or water-ouzel (*Cinclus Mexicanus*). A pair at least of these wonderful little birds is to be found somewhere on every stream in the Gold Range, and yet it is nowhere common. Until mated it leads a life which, did the bird not always appear to be active and happy, would seem the essence of loneliness, for two of them are never seen together except in the breeding season. The splashing of swiftly-running water

against logs and stones, or its roar as in little cascades it falls over obstructions to its course, is all the company the dipper asks, and all day long never resting, never wearying, it moves from place to place. It walks under water as if on dry land, and seems almost as much at home there as anywhere else ; it knows of but one way of getting behind the waterfall, where perhaps it has built its nest, and that is to go straight through it. Its song is described as "exquisitely sweet and melodious," but although I have seen many of them I have never heard one sing.

We decided that we could follow the creek no further, and after a short rest began the ascent of the shoulder. As we left the low, dark woods of the creek valley a mountain chipmunk (*Tamias Asiaticus* var. *borealis*), the smallest of the squirrel family in America, ran chattering across a ledge of rock above us. This tiny animal possesses to the full the characteristic activity of its family and is seldom at rest ; it is to be found everywhere in these mountains, and one soon grows to feel lonely when none happen to be near enough to make their presence known by their merry chatter. No more industrious animal is to be found anywhere ; all through the last weeks of summer and the short autumnal days, before the first heavy fall of snow drives him into winter quarters, he is employed in gathering and storing away roots and seeds for use during the winter. With his fore feet he fills the pouches with which nature has provided him—one on either side of his mouth—and returning to his snug little home beneath some stump or fallen tree, packs his harvest away in his store-room, for not satisfied with making the chamber he is to occupy warm and comfortable with moss and leaves he stores his food in another apartment than that in which he is to doze and dream away the long winter.

After leaving the creek we forced our way through a dense growth of small fir trees and underbrush until we were out of the creek valley and about 500 feet above the water. We were now between two creeks and on a ridge that seemed to extend to the summit, and up this we toiled for three hours. The whole mountain side had a few years before this been burned over, and the second growth timber was as yet very small ; the dense undergrowth effectually concealed the burnt logs with which the ground was strewn, and which could seldom be seen

before they were stumbled against. Not a trace of water had been seen since we had forsaken the creek, and dinner without it was out of the question. We had seen no berries yet, but a little higher up found *Vaccinium parvifolium* in abundance. Its fruit, although refreshing, could be eaten in small quantities only, as at this altitude it was hardly ripe yet and far from sweet. By three o'clock we were both pretty tired, as we had not only been climbing steadily, but all our strength had to be exerted a great deal of the time to enable us to force our way through thickets of balsam or alder ; and now we decided that water must be had even at the cost of losing some of the ground we had gained. We had been moving parallel to the creek, but had risen much more quickly than it, so that we were now nearly a thousand feet above it. Turning almost a right angle we began the descent, but so thickly grew the underbrush, and so many detours had to be made to avoid precipices, that it was five o'clock before we reached the water and found that we were just at the head of the canyon, half a mile from where we had been in the morning ; supper was soon ready, and before dark we were quite rested. The canyon was now behind us, and we resolved that come what might we would not again leave the creek, nor did we, and although the road was far from smooth and there were rocks and logs in abundance to climb over, shortly after noon the following day we saw the snow glistening through the trees, and knew that we had not much further to go. A few rods higher the woods ended abruptly, and before us was a meadow (if a meadow may be formed of flowers instead of grass) reaching to the foot of the mountain two hundred yards away. This little flat is about one-fourth of a mile wide and two hundred yards deep at the centre, the hills rising from it in the form of a semi-circle, so that the meadow made an arc of a circle, a veritable amphitheatre. Just at the edge of the woods our packs were thrown down, and we hurried across the intervening level ground to the foot of the last steep incline that led up to the snow, and had hardly begun to ascend it when we were startled by a sharp, clear whistle not unlike that used by yardmen about a railway station. Almost instantly it was answered from all sides, and we saw scampering toward an immense pile of rocks at the foot of a cliff, a dozen or more Hoary Marmots, or "whistlers," as they are generally called, (*Arctomys caligatus*.) Arrived

at their own quarters, and imagining themselves in safety, they soon recovered from their surprise and fright, and as we climbed the hill we saw here and there above a rock a head apparently watching us. Soon the animals themselves appeared, and by degrees returned to the agreeable occupation of fattening themselves for the long hibernation of the coming winter. The whistling went on at intervals, but the note of fear was changed to one that savored ever so slightly of impudence. Our minds were now at rest. Here was food in plenty, and although we discovered afterwards that the flesh of the whistler is neither very tender nor very palatable, it was easily procured and furnished us with several good meals when nothing better had been shot ; but at no other time did we attempt to take them. Only a few days before, the surrounding hills had been entirely covered with snow, but on many exposed places it had melted away and we ran up a grassy slope dotted with spring flowers. There was the beautiful *Erythronium giganteum*, a larger and much more handsome species than its brother the familiar Adder's Tongue or Dog-toothed Violet of our Ottawa woods, beside it grew *Anemone occidentalis*, the western mountain Anemone, a far larger and more attractive flower than any of our eastern forms of this genus. The little arctic buttercup *Ranunculus Eschscholtzii* was everywhere in profusion, and in the little rivulets running from the snow *Epilobium alpinum* grew in dense clumps, its delicate pink flowers massed together to attract attention. *Claytonia Caroliniana*, var. *sessilifolia*, was abundant too, but is not nearly so pretty as our Spring Beauty, of which it is a variety. Merely glancing at these as a foretaste of what was in store for us, we lost no time in climbing to the summit of the hill, which we soon reached, and from which we had a magnificent view of the surrounding country. Due north of us lay Shuswap Lake, and it was not difficult to trace with the eye the course of the creek from our feet to where it entered it. Far to the north and northeast were snow-capped mountains, and one glacier could be seen glittering in the sun. Towards the south the prospect was brighter. A mountain prairie, about three miles across, stretched from where we stood to a higher mountain. Further inland, a few groves of trees and frequent dashes of brilliant color, where the flowers of one species predominated, gave the whole an appearance of an im-

mense park, the innumerable rivulets and brooks defined by the deeper green of the grass that grew along them, appearing to be so many intersecting paths and heightening the effect of artificiality.

There seemed to be a great many species of flowers growing on this prairie, but a closer examination the next day showed that after all there were but three conspicuous species, the red blue and yellow blossoms of which blended in so many different ways and formed such novel combinations that it seemed incredible that there should not be at least a dozen species represented. Others indeed there were, but not such as formed noticeable patches of color, but the three colors in some form or other were everywhere. In one place could be seen many yards covered with *Lupinus Nootkatensis*, a common British Columbia lupine, but one could never tire of its spikes of beautiful blue flowers, which exhibit all the varying shades between the lightest caerulean and the deepest smalt blue. Again, it would be mixed with the bright scarlet flowers of *Castilleja miniata*, or those of the yellow *Arnica*. As a rule, however, while all three flowers were present one was generally sufficiently in excess of the others to give the impression that it alone was to be seen, but on turning the eyes a little to one side some other color filled them. As we turned to descend the hill a porcupine was seen walking slowly towards us along its crest, and my companion could not refrain from picking up a stick and giving chase. Beyond a slight increase in his speed, as he turned away, the animal gave no evidence of being in the least frightened or even aware of our presence. A blow from the stick ruffled his equanimity a little, but before he could show fight a second had fractured his skull and he was hauled in triumph down the hill to camp, for we had decided to camp just where we had left our packs, and at once set about making ourselves comfortable. A level spot was soon found; *Bryanthus empetriformis*, the nearest approach to heather we have in Canada, grew everywhere, and enough of it was soon pulled to make a bed. There was dry wood in abundance; the pot was soon boiling, and after a cup of tea we felt quite at home. We did not ascend to the summit again that night, but in the immediate vicinity of the camp forty species of plants were collected before dark; many of them were small and of little interest to any but a botanist, but there were among them flowers that

would have added to the beauty of any garden, *Mimulus Lewisii*, the Western monkey-flower, being one of the most conspicuous. To my mind none of the species in ordinary cultivation are at all to be compared with it. On a ledge of rock grew a solitary clump of *Epilobium latifolium*, but its dwarf habit and larger flowers make it much more attractive than its weed-like brother *E. spicatum* which grew near it. Beside and in every rivulet grew *Caltha leptosepala*, in general appearance not at all like *Caltha palustris*, the marsh marigold or cowslip of the East; the flowers are bluish-white instead of yellow, and the whole plant is much smaller than *Caltha palustris*. The porcupine was the largest animal seen while we were on this mountain, although there must have been caribou, bear, deer and mountain goats in considerable numbers, as fresh tracks were seen every day, but we never caught a glimpse of the animals themselves.

Besides the locality near our camp which I have mentioned, colonies of the Hoary Marmot were found in many other places; with them were frequently Parry's *Spermophile* (*Spermophilus empetra*) and the Little Chief Hare (*Lagomys princeps*), although the spermophile preferred more open ground in which it could burrow easily. It is one of the largest of the ground squirrels, and was our principal food while on the mountain; we found its flesh to be delicate in flavour, tender, and much to be preferred to that of the marmot. The Little Chief Hare is an exceedingly interesting animal, and much has yet to be learned of its habits. Very little larger than the common rat, it is a typical hare in appearance as well as structure, with many of the habits of the common hare of Eastern Canada. Small and much the colour of the rocks which it frequents, it is seldom seen except when it attracts attention by its sharp whistle, and as the whistle is generally given just as it dives into a safe place among the rocks, specimens are not as a rule easy to procure. They are said to hibernate in nests made of moss, dried leaves and similar material, but it is hard to believe that so much time is spent in the careful cutting and drying of leaves that are to be used in the composition of a nest and not for food, when everywhere about are dried leaves of all sorts and sizes, and in sufficient quantity to furnish homes for all the animals that frequent the place; but it is said that they eat nothing when in winter quarters.

Certain it is that in early autumn the industrious little creature sets to work, and much of its time is spent in cutting and piling up leaves which it conveys to some hole among broken rocks, that has been chosen for the winter.

Three species of trees grew about our camp, all conifers : a spruce, *Picea Engelmani* ; a hemlock, *Tsuga Mertensiana* ; and a balsam, *Abies sub-alpina* ; none of them were of large size, but although we were camped within a few hundred feet of the snow, they were almost as large as the same species had been a thousand feet below. No fruit of any kind was found at the altitude of our camp, but about a mile lower down the mountain *Vaccinium myrtilloides* and *Vaccinium ovalifolium* formed in many places the principal undergrowth ; the berries of the latter resemble our common blueberries in appearance, but are much more acid, and not valued highly when other fruit is to be had. *Vaccinium myrtilloides* is unequalled among Canadian wild fruits ; its berries are large, about half the size of the cultivated black cherry, which it exactly resembles in colour, the flavour is exquisite, and it possesses the rare quality of leaving no feeling of satiety, no matter how many of them may be eaten.

Of small birds there were about a dozen species on the mountain, several of them forms of common occurrence in Eastern Canada ; the pine siskin (*Spinus pinus*) and white-winged cross-bill (*Loxia leucoptera*) were flocking together, the rasping note of the red breasted nuthatch and the assertive call of the kinglet (*Regulus calendulus*) were frequently heard, several little winter wrens sang continually behind our camp, and a family of mountain blue-birds (*Sialia arctica*) occupied a hollow tree near us. Although we were camped at an altitude of more than 6000 feet the rufous-backed humming bird (*Trochilus rufus*) was almost as common as it had been at the coast. Of game birds but two species were shot, the blue or sooty grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus fuliginosus*) and the rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus rupestris*) ; the former is a common bird throughout Western British Columbia, and we had counted upon shooting as many of them as we should need for food ; the ptarmigan is found only on the summits of high mountains, generally near the snow.

The descent of the mountain was not so difficult as disagreeable,

for we now knew the best way to go and did not leave the creek valley except at the canyon, and there by climbing a few hundred feet the steep rocks were avoided ; the great trouble was to move slowly enough, for in four hours after we had left our camp on the mountain, scratched and torn we had reached our boat at the lake.

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EXCURSIONS.

The excursions held by the Club during the past season have been remarkably successful in every way. In addition to the general excursions sub-excursions have also been made under the guidance of the leaders upon the Saturday afternoons throughout the summer. These will be mentioned in the Annual Reports of the Branches.

EXCURSION No. 1.—May 31, 1890.—A most successful field-day was held to Butternut Grove, in the Chelsea Mountains, as the first General Excursion of the Club. The locality was a new one, and proved to be all that could be desired. The members and their friends, to the number of 130 availed themselves of this opportunity to spend a pleasant and instructive day in the woods. The weather was simply perfect, and the interest shewn by all was a guarantee of the thorough enjoyment which everyone shared. At 4 o'clock the genial and popular President, Dr. R. W. Ells, having called the party together beneath the refreshing shade of a grove of beech trees, congratulated all present upon the complete success of the day ; he then asked the leaders to speak of the various treasures collected in their several branches during the Excursion. Mr. Fletcher was first called upon ; he spoke of the rarer and more interesting plants. Mr. Kingston, who followed him with observations upon birds seen during the day, found an attentive and eager audience. Mr. T. J. MacLaughlin, when speaking of the insects which had been taken, made an eloquent address and touched upon some of the points of the theory of development as illustrated in the insect world. Mr. H. M. Ami explained concisely the geological formation of the district, and was followed on the same subject by Prof. Bailey, F.R.S.C., of the University of New Brunswick, and also a member of the Club, who expressed his pleasure at being able to attend one of the excursions of the Club, of which he had often read accounts. At the invitation of the President, Mr. Horace T. Martin, of the Montreal Natural History Society, addressed the meeting. He spoke in high terms of the systematic manner in which



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