

THE WINTER HOME OF THE BARREN GROUND CARIBOU.

By J. B. TYRRELL, M.A., F.G.S., F.G.S.A.

Among the few large animals still found in great numbers on this continent, the Barren-ground Caribou (*Rangifer Grænländicus*, Linn.) is probably the most interesting and important. It is the principal occupant of the great lonely wastes that extend southward from the shores of the Arctic Sea, not only in America but also in Europe and Asia. The Indians who people the northern part of Canada, including the Chipewyans, Yellow-knives and Dog-ribs, subsist very largely on its flesh, while its light warm skin with its thick covering of light grey hair furnishes them with beds and winter clothing, and the tanned hides, sewed with the sinews from the back, supply them with footgear and comfortable tents. In fact all their necessities, except their ammunition, tea and tobacco and a small amount of summer clothing, are supplied by the Caribou.

In size the Barren ground Caribou is much smaller than the woodland species, an adult female shot by the writer near Lake Athabasca being about as large as the common Virginia deer of this vicinity, and weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds; while an adult male of the woodland species, obtained in the rocky country east of Lake Winnipeg, the head of which is now in the Museum of the Geological Survey, weighed between three and four hundred pounds.

The horns are very large and irregular, very few of them being alike, and all being apparently unsuited to travel through the thick woods. The males are said to shed their horns in November, while the females retain theirs throughout the winter and shed them early in the following spring.

Their winter coat of long hair is shed early in July, and by August or the beginning of September the hide is in excellent condition, and the hair is soft and not too long, so that at this season the Indians endeavour to kill a sufficient number to furnish themselves with clothing for the winter. Later in the year the hair becomes harder and more brittle, and the hide is said to be riddled with holes made by the larvæ of a bot fly.

In summer these deer live on the great rocky wilderness that extends from a short distance north of Athabasca and Reindeer Lakes, between Great Slave Lake and Hudson's Bay, to the Arctic Ocean. In the autumn they collect together in large bands and move southwards into the wooded country where they spend the winter, leaving again for the Barrens in the early spring.

During the present year the writer spent the summer in one of their favourite wintering grounds in the hitherto unexplored region north of Churchill River and south-east of Lake Athabasca. Almost all of the deer were at the time away to the north, but a few stragglers had remained behind.

Our party entered the country by ascending the Caribou River, a stream about as large as the Rideau, flowing into Churchill River 225 miles north of Battleford. On the first of July it was found to be at its extreme high water level. Its banks were overhung with willows, and its bed was quicksand, so that we could neither track nor pole, but were obliged to ascend it with the paddle against a heavy and constant current. The river flows in a wide valley, with high granite ridges at some distance back on both sides.

As the river is ascended, poplar, white spruce, and all underbrush gradually disappear, and the country becomes generally wooded with Banksian Pine, with Black Spruce in the wet places, and great stony tracts devoid of timber of any kind. We have now reached the winter home of the Caribou which in this region stretches northward from about Lat $56^{\circ} 45'$. It consists of long almost bare hills of Archæan rocks, separated by wide valleys, the bottoms of which are filled with sand and ridges of boulders. In these valleys lie many small lakes, on the shore of one of which, near the head of Caribou River, the Hudson's Bay Company established a small trading post last autumn, and traded with the Indians throughout the winter, but in spite of the fact that meat is abundant the Indians are not going back there this winter and the post has been abandoned.

The Indians report that the deer collect on the frozen surface of these lakes during the day in immense herds, and are readily killed as long as the desire remains to shoot them, or till the whole herd is

exterminated. My informants stated that last winter the hunters killed from one to three hundred deer apiece. Besides deer a fairly successful hunt of fur-bearing animals was also made.

This region, so full of magnificent game every winter, is very easily accessible, and a party of hunters could spend a few weeks among the deer without the least discomfort and at the same time have glorious sport. The railroad runs to Prince Albert and from there the winter home of the Caribou is only 250 miles in a straight line, a distance that could readily be covered in a week with dogs, and three forts of the Hudson's Bay Company would furnish stopping places on the route—Isle à la Crosse, the most northerly of the three, is the home of Mr. H. G. Moberly, the officer in charge of the whole district, and a keener sportsman, a pleasanter host, and a more genial companion cannot be found in the west.

Farther to the north, at Fond du Lac, near the east end of Lake Athabasca, a venerable old half-breed named José Mercredi, a native of Red River, has kept one of the Trading Posts of the Hudson's Bay Company for the past forty-seven years, supplying a band of about 80 Chipewyans with ammunition, tea, tobacco and the few other products of civilization which they require, receiving in return a large amount of Caribou meat, in the form of dried meat and pemican, which is sent to assist in supporting the people at Fort Chipewyan and other less favoured posts on Athabasca and Slave Rivers. Fond du Lac itself is situated at a narrow part of the lake on one of the main paths used by the Caribou southward, and Mercredi informed me that for a week or more in the autumn the deer can be killed in great numbers from the door of the Post as they pass through the yard and among the houses. Several of the men were said to have killed as many as four hundred during the past year.

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OVIS CANADENSIS DALLI, *Nelson*.

By R. G. McCONNELL.

While crossing the Rocky Mountains, in 1888, from Fort Macpherson on Peel River to Lapierre House on the Porcupine, Lat. 67° 40' N., the writer was fortunate enough to come across the interesting



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