

Forest and Stream

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Game Bag and Gun.

Park Poachers and Their Ways.

Montana, May 3, -- *Editor, Forest and Stream:* It was during January 1893, that I became acquainted with Howell, the Yellowstone Park poacher of whom we have recently heard so much. He is a man of a little more than ordinary intelligence, has a fair education, is stoutly built, with dark hair, bluish gray eyes and a heavy blond mustache. His business has been prospecting and hunting for a living among the Rockies in Montana, and he has all the rugged strength and endurance that Rocky Mountain hunters and prospectors possess.

From conversations had with Howell in 1893, I learned that there were a number of hunters besides himself in the vicinity of the National Park and Cooke City, who gained a livelihood by poaching in the Park and selling elk heads to the taxidermists residing along the railroad. One man had sold sixty scalps from elk heads that were not worth the trouble of mounting at \$5 each, besides quite a number of complete heads at from \$8 to \$20 each.

I asked Howell how this could be done with Capt. Anderson and two companies of soldiers guarding the Park and the game. He said "It is the simplest thing in the world. When the snow begins to fall in September and October, we wait until a nice snowstorm has set in, and then taking a saddle horse and two or more pack horses, we start for the Park and travel fast. After reaching the ground we have previously selected to hunt over, we make a long detour and cross our tracks perhaps ten miles from camp so as to ascertain whether the soldiers are following our trail or not. If no other tracks are seen we go back to camp feeling safe, for we know that the new snow will obliterate all tracks before dawn. We then secure enough elk to load our pack horses and are soon on our way out of the Park and to the railroad. The railroad companies are glad to haul freight and we have no trouble there in getting our spoils to market."

The above is what was gleaned in 1893, and here is the substance of a conversation in 1894 since Howell became known to Capt. Anderson and others. "On the 19th of September last, I took my camp outfit and grub for the winter, and loaded it on to a toboggan and started for the Park. From that time until Feb. 10, I saw no human being. The snow was very deep and my method of camping was to build a fire at night on the snow, and after cooking, to pile logs on to the fire and let it burn. By morning a hole would be melted in the snow so deep that when I stood up by the fire I could barely see out, and if any one had chanced to be looking for me they would not be likely to see me. I had very little trouble in marketing heads. I have known eleven buffalo to be hauled in one day through the Park,, and one taxidermist in Livingston has bought twenty-two heads this winter at from \$10 to \$125 each, and I know of one head being sent to New York that sold for \$275 green. There are trappers in the Park all the time during the fur season. I occasionally saw men fishing, and one of them I saw was trapping and used the fish line as a blind. The soldiers did not see through his device, for it takes a mountaineer to see all the signs. I have concluded to try other ways of gaining a livelihood, and I will let the Park alone if the soldiers will let me alone from this time on."

From what has been said and from other facts that have come to my knowledge, I conclude that a considerable number of the inhabitants of Cooke City are making a living from the sale of game from our only National Game Preserve, and that not only people from Cooke City, but others, are spending the best part of the game season dodging what Uncle Sam thinks is a sufficient force of soldiers to guard his game.

I would rather have three good intelligent, honorable men, inured to the life of a prospector and hunter in these mountains, to watch that Park, than all the soldiers now there, and I am personally acquainted with men who are educated, intelligent and honorable who will not kill a doe or even a mother grouse, for meat when they are hungry, who have spent this whole winter alone in cabins miles away in the mountains, content to live on bacon, coffee, flour and sugar, with just a frying pan and a tin can for their cooking utensils. Men of such a stamp are the ones Uncle Sam should hire to look after the Park, and a good plan to hire them on is to give them a liberal salary, the privilege of shooting the first hunter they see within the Park, if he will not give himself up, and to pay a reward in hard cash for every poacher captured.

I believe that the true way to preserve our stock of buffalo in the park is to start a hay ranch there and to build an inclosure, into which the buffalo should be put in the fall. Two good men should watch them as

carefully as they would Nancy Hanks if they had her to care for, for we all know that the buffalo is little nearer extinction than it should be.

If Howell, by his desire for buffalo scalps, has aroused Uncle Sam so as to cause him to care for his game as he should, I am ready to give three cheers for Howell, and three hisses for the taxidermists that buy his game and aid him, and men like him, to evade justice.

J.

Helena, Montana.

[The letter which we print is from an old correspondent, a man not very long in the West, yet long enough to have learned something of life there. Much of what Howell says is no doubt true, but it is pretty badly mixed up with what is not true; for example, it would take a considerable force of men to haul eleven buffalo, or even eleven buffalo heads, and they would make a broad trail that would last all winter. We question Howell's statement that from Sept. 19 to Feb. 10 he saw no human being. He had a partner when he went into the Park, though just what became of this man is not known. We entirely agree with our correspondent as to the importance of additional mountaineers to patrol the Park. They can do work that a soldier cannot, and instead of a single scout in the Park there should be at least a half a dozen. The project of rounding up the National Park buffalo and driving them into an inclosure is entirely impracticable, but a considerable number of calves and young might be captured and kept in confinement, and it is not unlikely that this may be done at no very distant day. The enactment of a law for the punishment of crimes in the Yellowstone Park will no doubt have the effect of largely reducing the poaching on its borders, and after one poacher shall have been sent to prison for this offense, infractions of the regulations will almost wholly cease.]