

Hunting America's Last Bears

By ROBERT MORGAN

OUTSIDE the great national parks of the West, the icebound plains of the Far North, and the mountain fastnesses of Kadiak Island, there are few big game animals left in the United States, and a bear hunt, whether it be after the big grizzlies of the famous Alaskan Island, or the smaller bears which once frequented what is now the United States, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, is an unusual sporting event. Yet, during one of the last weeks of 1920 a bear hunt was held less than 100 miles from an American city of 400,000 inhabitants, on which five bears, ranging from 200 to 400 pounds, were killed, seven others seen, and the tracks of more than 30, aside from those killed by the hunters, noted.

Twenty-two hunters, five 'Cadien guides, and 33 hounds took part in the hunt, not to mention five or six southern darkies, taken along to attend to the cooking and other necessities of the hunters. It was the largest and most productive bear hunt held in the United States since 1917, when a chase productive of seven bears was held through the same section of the country, only a few miles from the hunting ground selected this year. This year's hunt took place over some 40 square miles of the Louisiana Marsh, that vast tract of tide-level lands lying along the Gulf of Mexico shore of the Pelican State, just west of the Atchafalaya River, and back of Vermillion Bay. It was given by Edward Avery McIlhenny, of Avery Island, Louisiana, who, by the way, killed the largest black bear ever taken in Louisiana, in 1916, near where this 1920 hunt was held. This big fellow was seven feet, seven and one-half inches and weighed 671 pounds.

Among the guests on the hunt were Paul J. Rainey, of Cotton Plant, Mississippi, whose African hunting exploits are historic among big game hunters, and who made the first motion pictures of the African big game in its haunts. Mr. Rainey arrived at the McIlhenny home on Avery Island with 23 dogs, ranging from the big fox hounds, Barrister, Lead, Jim and Ring, through other trailing hounds to Airedales for fighting a cornered bear, down to little Diamond, a dog of no particular breed, but a fighter of parts, game to the heart and destined to be the hero of the hunt. Among other well-known hunters called from distant parts of the country by Mr. McIlhenny were W. T. ("Bill") Young, of Nashville, Tennessee, who had just returned from a two-year jaunt after mountain sheep in the Selkirks and the coastal mountains of Alaska; Lou Kimmerer, who has been hunting wolves around his home in Paris, Texas, until he has virtually cleaned the county of these enemies to the stockmen; James Lord, of Hermansville, Minnesota, whose moose and caribou hunting has carried him close to the Arctic Circle, and Tom McHenry, of Macon, Mississippi, one of the best known fox hunters in the South. The balance of the party consisted of men who have hunted occasionally in various parts of the world, like the writer.

At five o'clock on the morning selected for the start from the McIlhenny "backyard," which consists of 40,000 acres of lowland, swamp and marsh, with 20,000 more under cultivation in the "front yard," the Rainey dogs, with their keepers, were loaded into an old converted lugger, and sent "chugging" away down a bayou into the heart of the marsh, while the hunters piled into a large motor boat and followed slowly after. The McIlhenny dogs, eight or ten in number, were sent overland in charge of three or four darkies, to meet us at the camp which was to be our headquarters for a week.

The run down the bayou to Vermillion Bay, across that shallow but treacherous arm of the Gulf of Mexico, and thence five or six miles up another bayou, into the midst of a tract of jungle which seemed thousands of miles from any human being, required the time until noon, but showed us the great marsh and all its teeming

life awakening for another day. Myriads of ducks rose before the boats, long wedges of geese passed high overhead; raccoons peered at us from clumps of wild rice and, as we passed up the second bayou, we saw tracks frequently showing where bear and deer had come down to the water, either to drink or to swim across.

The camp proved to be a commodious houseboat, which Mr. McIlhenny had had towed out from his plantation, and which accommodated all of us, provided we ate at the big table erected outside on the top of the high levee which here walled in the canal. A shelter provided for the ducks, while "Jones, the original ace of spades, prepared luncheon of ham, mallard ducks, sweet potatoes, corn, hot bread, jam and coffee. We struck out immediately into the swamp, but, not knowing the country well, caught no bear, though the dogs struck one hot trail on which the famous Barrister of the Rainey pack ran nearly all night, finally leaving it, when no one came to his help, and returned to a trapper's camp, where he was tied and brought to our camp in the morning.

The swamp here consists, first, of soft ground, about a foot above water level, overgrown with underbrush, clumps of palmettos, small live oaks, and tall cypresses, mostly dead, remnants of a heavier forest which has been killed by many years of battle with the salt water of the tides. There are no paths through this swamp, and the ground is studded with "cypress knees"—bent and gnarled roots and shoots of the cypress, rising six inches to a foot from the ground and furnishing constant stumblingblocks as the



Top—The first bear, weight, 300 pounds. Paul J. Rainey, big game hunter recently home from Africa, kneeling with hands clasped. Bottom, left—The saddest one of all—a deer dog left out of the bear hunt because he might teach the bear dogs to run deer. Right—The dog boat, crossing Vermillion Bay.

hunter fights his way through the jungle. Back of the swamp, of course, is higher land, rising gradually to the level country of the "sugar bowl" and "rice pocket" of Louisiana. Toward the Gulf the swamp becomes marsh; that is to say, the land lowers, the shrubbery, palmettos and trees disappear, and the whole quaking bog is covered with a growth of so-called "wild rice" from four to ten feet in height. Throughout both swamp and marsh are found numerous small pools and bayous, apparently full of water, but really filled to a depth of three or four feet with black, sticky mud, and then four or five inches of water on top. All in all, it is the hardest going for both men and dogs, according to Mr. Rainey, Mr. Young, Mr. Lord and other of the experienced hunters, of any part of the hunting grounds of the United States.

The second day of the hunt was spent, likewise, in getting acquainted with the country. On the third day, the party following the dogs struck the first bear. Rainey, Lord, Young and

Largest Louisiana Bear on Record Killed in 1916.

THE largest black bear ever killed in Louisiana, as far as there are any official records, was shot by Edward A. McIlhenny, on Avery Island, November 21, 1916. This bear weighed 671 pounds, and its measurements, as preserved by Mr. McIlhenny, were as follows:

Length, pad of hind foot to tip of nose, 9 ft. 2½ in.

Length, nose to root of tail, 7 ft. 7½ in. Girth, 4 ft. 9¼ in.; neck, 2 ft. 5 in.; forearm, 17½ in.; fore-paw, 14 in.; hind leg, at joint of femur and tibia, 30 in.; head, 32¼ in.

For comparison, it may be said that the largest bear killed in the neighborhood of Avery Island in 1920 weighed approximately 400 pounds, and that this is considered a large bear of this variety, but signs of much larger bear were seen.

McHenry, with young Louis Stoner, were following the trailing hounds, with W. L. Callicut and Willie Miller some hundred yards behind, with the fighting dogs, coupled two together. Barrister and Jim hit the trail at the same time, apparently rousing the bear from a snooze beneath a clump of palmettos. They ran him for half a mile down this particular peninsula of swamp between two bayous, when Bruin attempted to turn and cross one of the bayous, but, coming up behind one of the men on stand, got the man-scent and turned again into the jungle. Twice the dogs ran him up and down the tongue of swamp, and then the hunters, by cutting across, released the fighting dogs and the entire pack caught up with the bear.

He ran about 200 yards farther, slipping through the underbrush at a speed almost equal to that of a deer, a gait which called forth every effort of the hounds to keep up. Then, two of the Airedales got in so close that they began nipping at his hind legs, when the bear sat up at the foot of a large dead cypress stump and began to fight for his life. Little Diamond, the "full-blooded 'dog'," as Rainey described him, rushed in and leaped at the bear's nose, but the hunted animal caught the dog with a full forearm swing on one hip, tearing open the flesh and knocking the dog like some huge white ball of snow, clear over the top of a palmetto some four or five feet high.

"Goodby, Diamond," shouted Rainey as he prepared to shoot the bear, but Willie Miller, Rainey's master of hounds, rushing round the palmetto, found his little pet in the midst of a pool about ten feet wide, filled with mud with a little water on the surface. Despite the blow and the long driving fall, Diamond had lit, like the fisherman's long line, in the midst of this pocket of soft mud, and it had broken his fall so completely that, save for the cuts on his hip, he was unhurt. Pulled out by Miller, the brave little dog tried again and again to get at the bear, which received eight bullets from the hunters before he finally toppled over, dead. He weighed 300 pounds. That was all the bear for that day, but on the next, Luis Charbot, a 60-year-old "boy" who traps for a living and had his camp about a hundred yards from ours, while going the round of his traps, met a bear, rounding a palmetto clump, face to face. The bear had been routed out by the noise of the hounds running another bear, and was trying to get out of the swamp without any noise.

"Dat b'ar, he were so close dat I dursn't shoot, for de fear dat ef Ah mees heem, he claw me," said Charbot, "so Ah back off an' Ah back off onteel Ah get ten oh feeiteen feet from heem. Dat b'ar, he jus' stan' an' look me hup an' down, lak he know me. An' den Ah keel him, queeck, at one shot, dat's all."

The following day, Tom McHenry and Mr. McIlhenny added two bears—one each—to the score, killing them as they ran ahead of the dogs, without either bear having the opportunity to fight. On the next day John Riggs, one of the guides, shot another which had been routed out by the hounds following another bear. Heavy rains then drove the hunters home without a chance at the dozens of other bears still remaining in the swamps. More than 30 separate trails were reported by the hunters, all of bears which the hounds were not chasing, but which, hearing the hounds after other bears, were trying to get out of the swamp. On several occasions, bear were heard going through the brush

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