

TOWN OF MAMMOTHS' TUSKS REAPS CROP OF THE PAST



THE SCENE OF THE SIBERIAN MAMMOTH TUSK MART

A Trek of Nineteen Days to Call Upon Relics of Monsters Dead for a Thousand Centuries.

By BASSETT DIGBY.

There are not so very many towns nineteen days' journey from a railway. Even in Siberia, the land of great distances, there is only one. To this little oasis of two or three thousand Russian settlers and twice as many natives, the focal point of all the streams and bridle paths of the wilderness of northeastern Asia, gravitate the tusks of mammoths which died scores of thousands of years ago. If you found one, it is long odds that you wouldn't guess what it was, far less pay a handful of good gold for it. But Tom wants his ivory billiard balls and Mary her creamy piano keys—so the mad, white "toions" eagerly receive all this prehistoric trove that the Yakuti bring in.

Sprawling in a litter of straw, cheek by jowl with our baggage, we left the steel one evening and bore up into the north. Three days of trekking over the steppe brought us out of the Buriat tribesmen's country to the verge of a great belt of forest and sub-Arctic jungle, whence, by relay after relay of horses, we journeyed down the bank of the upper Lena to a village where we secured mosquito netting and sardines, kerosene and beer and the services of three men in a boat.

VOYAGING DOWNSTREAM IN THE TWILIGHT OF AN ARCTIC MIDNIGHT.

Six days we voyaged downstream—perspiring in deshabille on one day, shivering in blankets the next—till we came in a rainstorm to a village perched on a cliff at the confluence of a tributary. A tugboat that fed ravenously on logs took us north for three days, when in the mellow twilight of a summer midnight, under the lee of a silhouetted strip of cedars upthrown against the pink flush of dawn, there was a midstream transfer to a sternwheeler, which took us on to our destination.

A few years ago all the tusks came in piecemeal to this little town, but now the Siberian traders who live here have pushed out their feelers into the north. A base of a few huts has been established down near the delta, and here their agents await the arrival of newly found tusks, promptly exchanging for them cotton goods and tobacco, brick tea and iron cook pots.

When the ice floes pass down in early summer the hoards of tusks are sent upstream in tugs, to be held a couple of months for the annual trading fair, when the Russian fur and ivory agents come north with money and goods and the Yakuti come south with the spoils of the tundra.

THE NATIVES FETCH THE RICHES OF A FROZEN COUNTRY.

Then business is brisk. In spite of the organized searchers in the north, the large numbers of natives work independently, themselves bringing down their finds, along with dried moose and reindeer pelts and clusters of furs.

Mooring their canoes along the waterfront, they come up into the bazaar and squat by their gear, awaiting purchasers. Here one finds tusks among skins of sable and ermine, bear and wolf; white, blue and black fox; squirrel and marmot, beaver and otter, weasel and stoat and hamster; mountain sheep from the peaks of the Verkhoyansk range.

A key was turned in a massive padlock. Bolts were drawn. With a muffled clang the two folding doors of sheet iron were flung back.

We stepped out of the blinding July sunshine into pitch darkness.

"Well, what do you think of 'em?" asked the Russian.

"Where are they?"

"All around you. That's one against your leg. . . . Nicolai Ivanovitch, go and get a taper."

Before the workman came back, however, our eyes began to get used to the gloom; and dimly at first, then more and more clearly, this great hoard of Arctic loot appeared—like the slow developing of a photographic plate.

Huge horns that curled this way and that. Horns curved in almost circular spirals. The hollows of horns and the tips of horns. Tips blunt and tips sharp. Horns as slim as a bullock's or as thick as a tree trunk. Horns smooth as satin, as gnarled and rough as weatherworn old logs. No, not horns, but tusks, mammoth tusks by the dozen, by the score—hundreds and hundreds of them, cairn upon cairn, stack upon stack. Tons and tons of prehistoric ivory.

One need not have been a sentimentalist, I fancy, to have fallen a-musing, in that dim vault, of the vicissitudes of this store of tusks and of the men who faced the rigors of the coldest region on earth to obtain them.

How petty our historical periods seemed with their age! Some of the rugged old bull mammoths who fought their battles with these giant eleven-footers ranged the top of the world half a million years ago. Others passed their time upon earth only some 80,000 years ago, a mere yesterday—only about 75,000 years before the Egyptian pyramids were built.

HISTORY OF A TUSK; THE TRAGEDIES OF COMMERCIAL CONQUEST.

How were they found, these tusks, and what of the men who found them? Which had been hacked from a shaggy-headed monster of flesh and blood, newly exposed by a landslide on the thawing cliff of a Kolymsk range? Which had been seen afar off, dark, curly things sticking out of the level sea of snow on the Taimyr? Which had been dredged in a trawl from the shifting bars of the Lena delta? Which had been smashed or sawn from a gigantic white skull bleaching in a tangle of tundra brambles? Which had been raked up from the sandy beaches of Novi Sibir or brought to view by the gale-driven ice packs that pound along the undermined cliffs of the Liakhov isles?

Yakut and Samoyede, Tungus and Lamut, Yukaghir, Ostiak and Tchukcha, men of races you have never heard of, had ranged the unmapped Arctic wilds for this trove, now mere grist to the mill of commerce, flung, like so many bales of cotton or kegs of pork, into a trader's cellar.

Dangers innumerable had been braved for these tusks, men had been maimed and killed.

Leprosy and snow blindness, frostbite and starvation, lingering deaths in crevasses in the ice. Frail skin canoes capsized by the unexpected shifting of that awkward cargo. Death from the paw of a vengeful polar bear, from the teeth of a ravening wolf pack—flung, like so many bales of cotton or kegs of pork, into a trader's cellar.

They brought the tusks out into the sunshine one day, and we sorted them. These were perfect, those were pretty good; here were some with serious flaws. These were good tusks with bad spots; those were bad tusks with good spots. That heap yonder would serve for billiard balls; the next heap

for making the Russian ball, which is larger. This for knife handles, that for combs. These for powder puff boxes de luxe; those for piano keys.

There was a babel of tongues at this sorting. The owner of the hoard was a Caucasian, who spoke Russian to the world—though doubtless he soliloquized in the polyglot dialects of Tiflis when occasional tusks fell on his foot. We talked Russian and French to him, and the man painting on numbers talked Baltic German to us. The laborers were Yakuti, to whom we talked Yakut, pure and patois. One man was a Yukaghir, member of a vanishing race of nomads roaming the Arctic shore near Kolymsk—only 400 of them now. He talked Yukaghir, though none of us understood it. A Tungus laborer talked Tungusian and dog-Russian. Two Chinese tinsmiths came in and prattled in Pekingese. The Yakuti, who are a race of Mongol-Turkish stock, understand the speech of the Constantinople cafes; so to them we made occasional observations in Turkish. My companion had just come from Africa and found himself drawing automatically on his fund of Arabic and Swahili coolie orders. And we ourselves conversed in English, tintured with American cuss words.

MUCH ENERGY SHOWN AFTER SUBTLE ALLUSIONS TO VODKA.

Each tusk had to be closely examined, this side and that, point and hollow. A long job for us and an arduous one for the workmen, whose flagging spirits and energies we revived with glimpses of small silver and allusions to vodka.

Handling a thousand or two mammoth tusks is instructive.

You learn in a day, for instance, that the scientific world is quite wrong in describing and picturing the typical mammoth as a beast with tusks so curly that they form almost a circle. Not one tusk in ten forms a third of a circle, not one in twenty even a semi-circle. Nor is this tusk merely a matter of growth. Some of the biggest tusks form only a third of a circle, some of the smallest two-thirds of a circle.

Two curious tusks that we examined—one of them four and a half feet long, the other three feet—were slim and almost straight.

I am at a loss to understand the remark in the great anatomist Richard Owen's "Palae-

ontology": "The numerous fossil tusks of the mammoth which have been discovered and recorded may be ranged under two averages of size—the larger ones at 9½ feet, the smaller at 5 feet." The latter probably belonged to the female mammoth, he added.

There is no tendency in the tusks to fall into any particular average of size. All sizes are encountered with equal promiscuity, except that naturally the very large and very small are scarcer than specimens ranging from four to eight feet.

Male and female tusks are quite simply distinguished, but by no means solely by the length, though cow tusks run shorter than bull. The bull tusk tapers considerably from socket to tip. The cow tusk is almost the same breadth throughout, beginning to taper perceptibly only a few inches from the tip. Moreover, the hollow socket in the female mammoth's tusk is shorter than in the male's. This is a distinctive sex trait in tusks of calves insufficiently grown to indicate a tapering or lack of it.

How long do mammoth tusks run? Ah! I see the ever-omniscient Encyclopaedia Britannica holds up its hand:

"The tusks . . . in the adult males attained a length of from 9 to 10 feet, measured along the outer curve."

One of the famous Beechey finds at Eschscholtz Bay, Alaska, in 1826, ran 9 feet 2 inches, part of the tip being missing. The tusks of the Adams specimen, now at St. Petersburg, ran 9 feet 6 inches.

Well, of those I examined at the mammoth mart, twenty or thirty ran between 9 feet 6 and 10 feet 6 inches. A few ran 11 feet and an inch or two. One 11-footer in particular had a skin of beautifully symmetric grain, like a brown kid glove seen under a magnifying glass; it was mahogany color, not a crack in it, sound as the tusk of a freshly killed elephant. Another tusk ran 11 feet 5 inches. One tusk ran 12 feet 1 inch.

The monster tusk of the lot ran 12 feet 9

inches. It was bright blue, and thinner and straighter than most of them.

I doubt if there is any other natural growth, animal or vegetable, extinct or existent, that varies in color and texture as much as the mammoth tusk. Some, very few, that come into the North Siberian mart are as white as elephant tusks. These have come straight from a quarter of a million years' cold storage, discovered in a carcass that eternally frozen soil or a deposit of ice has only recently yielded up.

Then there are tusks that look like stained mahogany, highly polished near the point, though coarsening in grain toward the butt.

There are blends of mahogany and white and mahogany and cream.

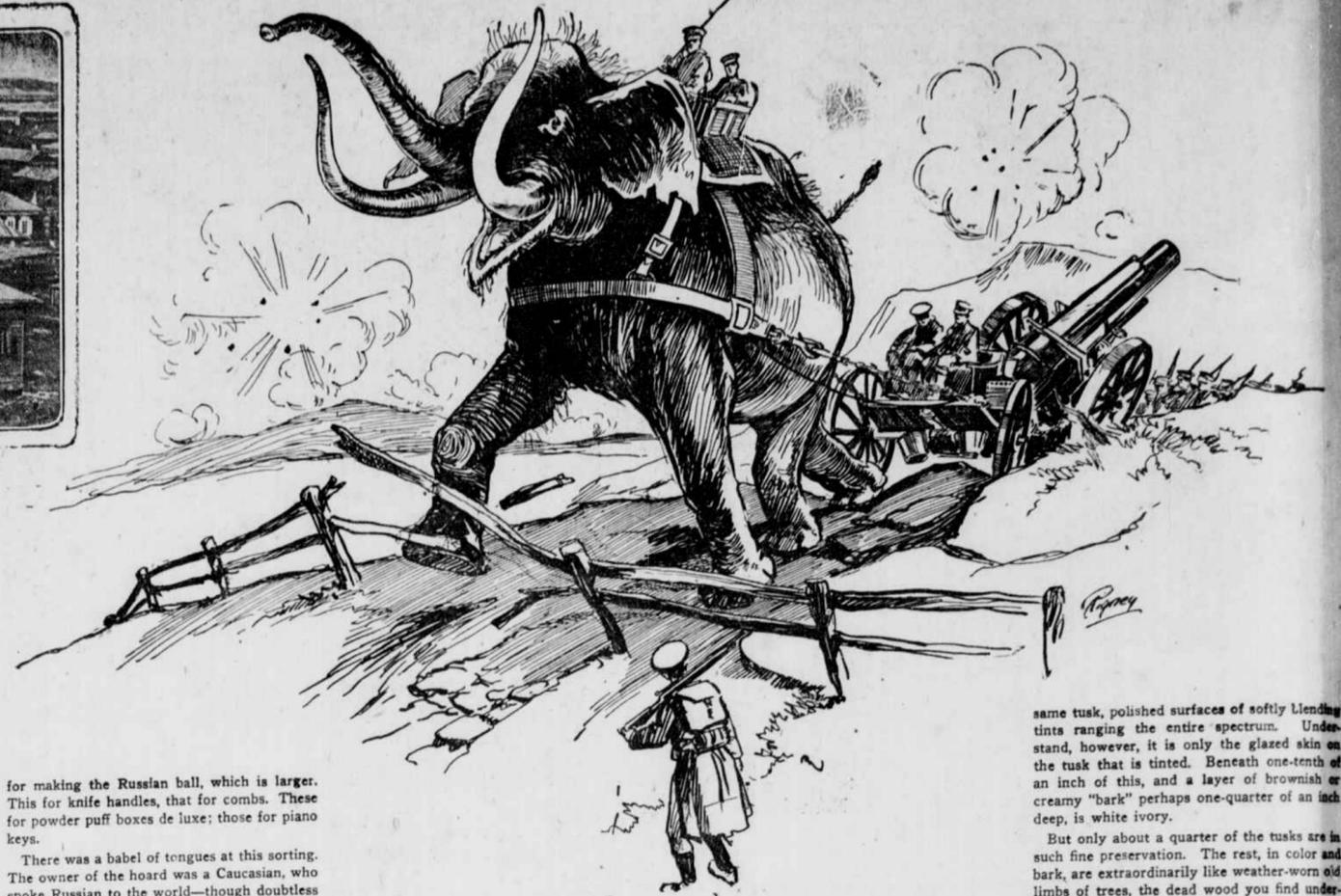
There are bright blue tusks, tusks of steely blue, tusks of walnut and russet and brick red. Not only are these tints present, but there are rich and delicate combinations—superimposed one on another—of several tints on the

same tusk, polished surfaces of softly blending tints ranging the entire spectrum. Understand, however, it is only the glazed skin on the tusk that is tinted. Beneath one-tenth of an inch of this, and a layer of brownish or creamy "bark" perhaps one-quarter of an inch deep, is white ivory.

But only about a quarter of the tusks are in such fine preservation. The rest, in color and bark, are extraordinarily like weather-worn old limbs of trees, the dead wood you find underfoot in forests. Some of them, recollect, have been lying exposed to rain and snow, frost and thaw and sunshine since thousands of years before the earliest Assyrian civilization.

And there were the tusks that had been exposed to water action—pounded about the Arctic beaches and rolled along the pebbly bed of swift creeks swollen with the spring's melted snows; gripped in jammed masses of driftwood and rock for years—perhaps centuries—with the restless shingle wearing away their bark. Curious, dead-white spindles and lumps, pitted and honeycombed.

There were other ivory vaults. To reach one of them we had to descend five steps. We slipped as we entered; then we saw that the walls and roof and floor were thickly incrustated with frost. The tusks were coated with ice. No artificial cold storage, this. Though it was 88 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade outside, and day and night for a week the mercury had never sank below 80, the ground up here, in the coldest town in the world, is eternally frozen at a depth of eight feet.



SATURDAY AND SUNDAY FOR HOSPITALS

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They do more than that. They now provide an additional basis for distribution of funds. It was decided last year to take into account in making the apportionments not only the number of days of free treatment, but also the cost of care and treatment of ward patients up to but not exceeding \$2 a day. These two elements are multiplied, the one by the other, and the resulting product gives the number of credit units, upon which distribution is based.

Thus, if one hospital gives 100,000 days of free treatment and its ward patients cost only \$1 a day it has just 100,000 credit units. If another hospital gives only 50,000 free days, but its patients cost \$2 a day each, it also gets 100,000 credit units, and the two institutions share equally in the distribution of funds. The

work of apportionment and distribution is performed by a committee consisting of four of the trustees of the association, the Mayor of New York, the postmaster of New York and the president of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York.

It is interesting to observe that a number of the founders of the association are still, after thirty-five years, actively connected with it. Among these are Charles Lanier, who has been its treasurer from the beginning and still serves in that capacity; George Macculloch Miller, its honorary president, and Jacob Schiff.

The growth, both of the association and its work, has been very large and on the whole pretty steady. The receipts have generally increased from year to year, excepting in 1909-'10, when there was a serious falling off, but the increase since has been so marked as to bring last year's receipts up to probably as high a figure as they would have reached had the growth not been temporarily checked in these three "lean" years.

In 1879-'80 the association comprised only fifteen hospitals, and its receipts were \$26,455.07. That was an average of \$1,763.67 for each member. In 1913-'14 the membership had more than trebled, amounting to forty-seven, but the receipts had increased by a far greater ratio, amounting to \$133,784.58, or an average of \$2,846.47 each. The amounts actually received vary, however, very much from the average, according to the size of the hospitals, their proportionate amount of free work and their cost of operation. Last year, as for many years, Mount Sinai led the list. It had given in the preceding year no fewer than 106,618 hospital days of free treatment, and the average cost of its ward patients was \$2.32 a diem, which for purposes of apportionment was reckoned at \$2, giving the hospital 213,236 credit units and making its apportionment \$10,617.70. Five others received more than \$5,000 each, while three got only \$250 each.

It may be added that the payments of the city to these associated hospitals on account of public charges amounted to only 12 per cent of the cost of the free work done. There was left no less than \$2,782,381.40 which had to be secured from benevolent sources. The Saturday and Sunday gifts were only a little way toward it. How this great sum is to be secured each year is a vital and paramount problem, in the solution of which the hospital association invites general co-operation. It is not well that of the 7,000 beds in these forty-seven hospitals about 1,000 were unoccupied last year, not for lack of sufferers who needed to occupy them, but for lack of funds to maintain them.

All of which leads to the practical and personal inquiry: What did you give to the collection yesterday or what are you going to give to-day? For yesterday was Hospital Saturday and to-day is Hospital Sunday.

