

Trail of the Lonesome Pine now Leads to 10,000 Stills

Having made arrangements for an adequate supply of liquor coming from the mountains, the bootleggers' next problem was that of transportation. Here was a more difficult task, because it was obviously much easier for the Government authorities to intercept rum runners in their journeys from one point to another than to locate moonshine stills in the fastnesses of the mountains. In practice, however, it proved difficult. The Government guarded the roads, but nine-tenths of the liquor manages to escape the cordon and reaches its destination.

After the mash is prepared and the "run" is made, the finished product is transported by hand down the mountains by trail runners and put in the hands of professional smugglers. These men are hired in gangs by the wholesale rum distributors, and paid off after each consignment is put through. If they are caught they are kept on the payroll and paid \$5 for each day spent in jail.

High Powered Autos Furnish Transportation.

The whisky runners use high powered automobiles, which speed along unfrequented mountain roads through the darkness, with their illicit cargoes concealed in the tonneaus by various forms of merchandise. Once the shipping point is reached the liquor is bottled and distributed through other channels to the various cities. Little of it reaches the Eastern States, as the bootleggers have found a ready and apparently less discriminating market throughout the Southern and Western States.

The automobile is a most important adjunct of the moonshiners' operations. Innocent tourists traveling through the picturesque mountain regions adjacent to the famous resorts, such as Pinehurst, have frequently been held up and had their cars ransacked. Great ingenuity has been displayed by the bootleggers in equipping automobiles with blind bottoms, extra tanks and similar contrivances for shipping their product from still to market. On more than one occasion the extra tire in the rear of the car has been found equipped with a copper coil filled with liquor.

Many of the moonshiners now own their own automobiles, thus saving an exorbitant amount, deducted by the bootleggers for transportation. It is a striking commentary on the changing conditions of the mountain folk that families now have motor cars, whereas in former days a mountaineer would be considered fortunate if he had a dilapidated wagon and a decrepit horse. This new prosperity is exemplified by Finley Minton, an eccentric moonshiner, whose home and shack and still were once not far from the summer resort of Big Creek, Tenn. Finley Minton spent a winter fishing in Florida. He made the trip in his car. It had always been his dream, he said, and it was fortunate that it came true the winter it did, for soon after he had returned to his cabin in the Holston Mountains he was shot to death by his brother-in-law in a disagreement over the operation of a still. At the time of his death two warrants were out for his arrest, one in the hands of Federal officers and the other in the hands of deputy sheriffs. Minton had predicted that he would be killed in a battle with revenuers. But that dream was unrealized.

He was well known to the colonists of Big Creek. He seemed to be no better off than the majority of mountaineers in the section, with their broad brimmed hats, their heavy boots, coarse woolen shirts and threadbare clothing. But he, like many of them, left enough money underneath the boards of his shack floor and hidden about in other places to make his careworn, work-tired, little widow a likely prospect for another marriage.

The mountain moonshiner runs but a small risk of being put in prison. Not one moonshiner in thirty is captured, and only about half of those arrested are convicted.

In the first place the mountainous region is so vast and so rugged and offers so many opportunities for concealment that anything like an adequate system of personal supervision is impossible. The Government agents hit the trail of a still. They find it and destroy it. Another one bobs up in the same locality—oftentimes on the identical spot that has been raided—and because the territory covered is a large one the revenue men might not visit the same district again for several weeks.

The moonshiners have an elaborate and effective system of alarms, and it is only in rare instances that the revenue men are able to surprise a group of men working about a still. At every mountain station where access can be had to the moonshine districts the mountaineers have scouts posted to watch the trails and the principal highways. At the first suspicion of "revenuers" the scout, mounted on a fast horse, is dashing across trails and ravines, while the revenue men take the slowly winding roads up the mountain. In most cases the scout arrives first, and in the event that he doesn't there is a code signal of rifle shots that resound through the hills, giving the alarm well ahead of the raid. The "women folk" and the boys and girls are all in league against the hated "revenuers," and many a time a still has been saved by the timely flashing of a hand mirror across the hills in the light of the sun.

Diplomacy Takes Place of Courage.

Stealth, too, has become a part of the equipment of the moonshiner, where aggression once held sway. This is due to the changing conditions and to the fact that the moonshiner has commercial interests at stake. Formerly a mountaineer would fight to protect his still as he would his family or his home, resenting the intrusion upon his traditional right to make his own brew.

He has not lost his courage by any means, but the viewpoint has changed, and to-day if he can escape capture himself he is willing to let the revenue agents take his still, for, with the greater profits accruing since the advent of prohibition, he can readily set himself up in business again, or at least he can borrow capital from those who are commercializing the hereditary instincts of the mountain people.

Desperate gun battles occur usually only when a surprise party of revenue men or deputy sheriffs surrounds a still while a run is being made, or when arrests are attempted in the homes of the mountaineers.

The peak of production was reached last year when 12,000,000 gallons of liquor came down from the moonshine mountains to be distributed among the gullible and the thirsty in the guise of "real, pre-war stuff." Owing to agricultural and economic conditions, it does not seem likely that this figure would be exceeded this year. On the other hand, there seems to be little probability that it will diminish.

Conditions in the Virginia-Tennessee district were regarded as so serious by the Government that a few weeks ago a mass meeting was called for the purpose of organizing law enforcement leagues among the citizens of the States to combat moonshiners and bootleggers. There were present Director W. A. Smith of Nashville, Tenn.; Director Robert A. Fulwiler of Richmond, Va., and sixteen officers from the two States. The outcome was an appeal from the Government, which was read in every Sunday school meeting in the two States on March 12.

The Government keeps 300 revenue men constantly on the mountain trails, and there are in addition as many as 1,500 county officials—sheriffs and deputy sheriffs—engaged in this everlasting war. And yet the river of moonshine flows on undiminished.

As the Revolutionary War brought into prominence Sumter, "The Swamp Fox," and other such guerrilla leaders, so has this solely guerrilla war brought into prominence a number of men who have become famous for deeds of individual daring—men who are on the side of the law because they have been converted to the belief that it should be respected—men who are

officers because the work of moonshine raiding gives outlet to their craving for action.

They are mountaineers themselves—mountaineers who have come down from the mountains a generation back or in their own time. In their veins runs the purest strain of Anglo-Saxon blood; they are pioneers who have remained pioneers. Their strain is undefiled by any foreign taint. Their names are strong, primitive, Anglo-Saxon. They are as their names. Invariably they are lean, lithe, thin-lipped, keen-faced men. They are as fearless as their enemies, the moonshiners. Creed Frazier, John Litton—they bear such names as these.

In searching for an illicit still in the mountains the officers first look for a stream, for the still must be situated within carrying distance of water, and the mountaineers have learned the unwisdom of locating near a road where passersby may see the light of the fire in the still furnace or sight the smoke rising above the trees. Another factor to be considered is selecting a vantage spot where sentinels can command every avenue of approach.

It has happened many times that tourists in the mountain districts have been stopped by one of these sentries and turned back, with a warning that "they better not go up thar." Usually, the driver heeds the command and turns back, much to the disgust of the tourists, who do not adequately appreciate the danger lurking in the mountain gulches.

The process of manufacture has improved in some ways since prohibition, and it is claimed in some quarters that the product is also superior to that distilled in the pre-prohibition days. A certain grade of moonshine manufactured in the Pound Gap district of Virginia has become popular in the larger cities, and the moonshiners have taken a pride in their commodity, using all copper stills and putting the mash through a longer process than in other sections.

Liquor Is Wholesaling at \$3 to \$4 Per Gallon.

Liquor is wholesaling to the professional runners there as low as \$3 and \$4 a gallon. But the price goes up fivefold in town. A mountaineer named Buck Wright, considered the dean of the moonshiners in that district, by reason of his age and experience, was known to have three stills operating simultaneously in the Gap, but the authorities were never able to locate any one of them. As it takes about ten days to make the whisky, from the time the mash is prepared to the time the pure liquor runs out of the "worm," the plan has many advantages. As soon as the run is made at one still attention is turned to another one, and thus the moonshiners have an uninterrupted yield of whisky and profit.

Sheriff John M. Litton of Abingdon, Va., found something new in moonshining the other day when he discovered that coal had been used to make the still fire. Wood has been the fuel from time immemorial, and this departure from tradition is another example of the ingenuity being used by moonshiners to escape detection, as the fumes from a coal fire would be much less visible than wood smoke. The expense of transporting coal into the mountains, however, is much greater and would hardly have paid at the low prices of pre-prohibition days.

Incidentally, Litton, who is known throughout the State as "Two-Gun" Litton, is one of the most successful still hunters in the Blue Ridge section of Southeast Virginia. He stands on a par with Creed Frazier of Scott county and W. H. Greenway, Sheriff of Greene county, Tenn. Despite numerous attempts to take his life, Sheriff Litton is still on the job—a feared man by all moonshiners. He was outwitted once, though, by the strategy of a group of moonshiners.

Word was passed through Abingdon that a group of moonshiners, intent upon "getting" the Sheriff, were to attack the court house on a certain night. With characteristic thoroughness Litton prepared for them, barricading himself, with several companions, behind the walls of the little building. The night went by, and no attack. The next morning a mountaineer brought a message to the court house.

"Tell that fool, Litton, that we waited until he got his men at the jail, and then we brought the stuff through the other end of town. Don't forget to tell Litton that 500 gallons came through Abingdon."

Investigation proved that the message was true—that the band of rum runners had brought the whisky in a caravan of armed automobiles from the Holston Mountain district through Abingdon and thence to Bristol, where it was shipped to Knoxville, Tenn.

Blair's Gap, in East Tennessee, has recently been the scene of many bloody encounters between the moonshiners and still hunters. The men in this region, like those of Pound's Gap, have acquired a reputation of putting out a mellow product—triple run moonshine. It is thick and beady and has more substance than the ordinary thin corn liquor, and because of a demand for the product illicit distilling has taken great strides lately. A proportionate activity has been started by Government officials and State authorities to stamp out the spread of the industry.

In a raid last October Sheriff J. W. Mosby, one of the most picturesque of still raiders, a giant in stature, a dead shot and a veteran of many mountain campaigns, was shot through the side by a boy 18 years old, who was guarding his father's still. Mosby and a deputy Sheriff, George Larkins, had set out upon a hunt for a still, which they heard was operating in a remote locality in the Gap. Sighting it from a distance, they were surprised to see it abandoned, and walked forward confident of no opposition. Shots rang out, and Mosby fell with a bullet in his side and his left arm shattered. Rolling over on his side, Mosby took careful aim at the boy, who had started running, and fired twice from his revolver. The second bullet took the fleeing moonshiner squarely in the neck. He plunged through the bushes, toppled over and rolled down the other side of the hill. The boy was Homer Gord, a relative of the Crawford clan, who have frequently been in trouble with the authorities.

Child Drunkards Not Uncommon in Mountains

Drinking starts early among the people of the hills, and it is not an infrequent occurrence to find children of the mountain folk staggering down the trails in a half drunken stupor on their way to the schools. Boys often begin to drink moonshine at the age of 9 or 10 years, and the unmistakable odor of corn whisky is often detected clinging about the lips of the girl pupils.

Many of the raids in the Kentucky and Tennessee mountains have been undertaken on complaints of school teachers, who have been shocked to find conditions bordering upon a state of savagery among the school children, and usually in these cases voluntary passes are made up of the better element in the neighboring towns, and the menace to the future generations is for the time being wiped out.

Such was the case when Miss Winnie Childress, a teacher in a school at Paperville, Tenn., a little settlement four miles from Bristol, appealed to the authorities last February for aid in conducting her classes. Drunkenness among the children, she said, had completely demoralized the school, and discipline had become a mockery. Sheriff Sells had no difficulty in organizing raiding parties and clearing the ridge of the activities of moonshiners, at least as far as the children were concerned.

It is difficult to say what amount of income flows into the pockets of the mountaineers every year from the sale of moonshine. They have not yet learned to enjoy the fruits of prosperity, and their humble mountain cabins and dilapidated attire are no guides to the size of their pocketbooks. Finley Minton, who "bought himself a car and got some fishin' tackle and

Above to right—"Uncle Pete" and his still. "Uncle Pete" defied the officers for years, but since prohibition he was even more contemptuous of the "revenuers" declaring that it "was just fun to pot them." It took a force of thirty deputies to capture him.

To right—A wayside distillery on the road to Blair's Gap. These two stills were found in the cellar of the ancient cabin in full operation. On this road more than a score of officers have been shot from behind.

Below—A typical mountain still and its tenders. Thousands of them are operating now every day in every nook and corner of the "moonshine belt."

tuck it easy down in Florida," was an exception to the rule. It is a speculative business, and often the entire investment is lost through the activities of the raiders before the moonshiners have made a single run.

Some mountaineers make as high as \$3,000 on a single consignment of whisky, representing in all about six weeks' work. Others, who have small stills and work by themselves, will not average more than a hundred dollars a week profit. When it is considered that money was almost an unknown commodity some years ago in many of the mountain districts—corn and hogs being used as currency, as in the days of primitive civilization—the mountaineers have actually become enriched far beyond the dreams of avarice.

Summer colonists who have been in the habit of going to the mountain resorts in the Blue Ridge and other ranges in the moonshine belt have deplored the great changes that have taken place in these sections. Before the arrival of prohibition the mountaineers were regarded with a degree of romantic respect. They were stalwart, carefree, independent fellows, who performed their tasks with a cheerful willingness, were unfailingly polite to the women visitors and gave little trouble to the authorities.

Stilling was done on a small scale, and the authorities did not interfere greatly. In fact, there was a sort of adventurous fascination in sitting on the hotel porch and looking over the mountains at a wisp of smoke stealing its way into the blue heavens, and realizing that the moonshine operations about which so much fiction of the John Fox type has been written were being conducted within the range of one's vision.

Prohibition changed all this. Moonshining became a sordid, commercialized business, in which it seemed the entire mountaineer population was engaged. Workers were no longer available, and, instead of the rest and quiet which had been the chief attraction of these resorts, the visitors found themselves in the midst of an atmosphere of intrigue and guerrilla warfare. Shootings were of frequent occurrence during the night and day.

The most trusted mountaineers were being thrown into prison or else wounded by bullets from the revenue officers. The mountain passes seemed to reek with liquor, and women were afraid to trust themselves alone on the roads after dusk had fallen. Many of the resorts reported that last summer was the worst in the history of their existence.

"I saw them loading liquor into cars as though it were water," said one society woman, in explaining the reason for having rented the house she had occupied at the famous Big Creek resort in the Holston Mountains for a score of summers.

Through the efforts of the Law and Order League and the activities of Deputy Sheriff Floyd Hopkins, who was later appointed Federal raiding officer, in recognition of his efficient handling of the whisky traffic, this section was cleaned up last spring, and in the summer of 1921 many of the former summer visitors returned. Hopkins proved a "find" for the State authorities, who, up to the time of his appointment, despaired of ever getting the moonshine situation under control.

He had the advantage of being born in the district—a typical mountaineer, 27 years old, six feet three inches in height, a dead shot with revolver or rifle, and a tireless worker on the trail. Unfortunately, he made many enemies among his col-



Watching for the "Revenuers." When a stranger is sighted the boy will imitate the whistle of a bird and then disappear in the brush. At the signal the moonshiners grasp their guns and prepare for a battle.



leagues in the Government service and was later discharged, but while he was combating the ranges the moonshine operators kept under cover. Since his retirement the Law and Order League has taken over the work of supervision, and during the last few weeks there has been little trouble reported in the vicinity.