

The Indian Hunt

by Ed Borcia The Cow Puncher Artist



AN OLD HUNTER NAVAJO



A NAVAJO HUNTING PARTY



EVERY estate fellow in New Mexico, from jackrabbit to antelope, knows that his life isn't worth a scamper now, for the Indian hunts are on. They begin when the first snow falls.

Until Miles swooped down upon them the Apaches held everything south of the Santa Fe. Then the big general, with Lawton beside him, crashed through the sage and cactus and frightened Geronimo's war paint pale with the heliograph and brought the whole tribe to terms, that made the northern Indian snigger.

North of the Santa Fe live four friendly tribes, who had been for long years casting greedy glances across the railroad track, while their mouths watered at the sight of the fat antelopes beyond. Nothing but the better part of valor kept them on their own side.

Miles opened for them a happy hunting ground here on earth. The conquest of the Apaches meant the prosperity of the Zunis, Moquis, Pueblos and Navajos. Whereas in old acquests they had ventured into southern lands on the rarest occasions, and then seldom lived to regret their boldness, they were now free to travel where they pleased and lay in such stores of jerked meat for the winter months as would tempt any epicure of an Indian. Ever since that happy year when the news was spread that the Apaches had received their final squelching at the hands of the whites, there has been an annual excursion to the lands below the Santa Fe.

In the latter part of August the expeditions start. From the four tribes they come: bands of thirty or forty men, each band under the leadership of one. The tribes never combine on a hunt, but they often cross one another's path, and their relations are always friendly. They are friendly with the whites, too.

They take along two or three saddle horses and as many burros to carry for them will be plenty of meat to bring back, to say nothing of horns and skulls that can be sold to traders. The Indians have the economy of industry down to a fine point, and they never waste a possible bone of a slain animal.

There are stirring times in the towns when the hunt begins. I came by a Navajo hogan one day when the head of the hoganhold was getting ready.

"My blanket—the new one!" he shouted to his wife.

She was breaking sticks several yards away, and she discreetly didn't hear. She broke sticks faster.

"My blanket!" he roared.

She broke sticks still faster and leaned far over them and saw only the sticks.

He walked slowly to her and kicked her.

She made no remark, but went on breaking sticks. He kicked her again, and it took three times more to make an impression. Then she rolled over in a heap and looked as if she had become a good Indian at last.

"Answer!" he said, and then he saw that she was past answering, and he kicked her for that, too. He muttered all the way back to the hogan, and when he got there he explained the case, between Navajo oaths.

"She should weave five large blankets within the year," he said. "When I go on the hunt I wear one and sell the others to traders or ranchers. To-morrow we start, and I must have the five blankets. She has not finished the fifth, that is why she would not answer when I asked for it. I have kicked her each day for the last month in order to hurry her, and still it is undone. I go now to kick her again."

One blanket is a good three months' work for the average squaw. It is evident that this Navajo had a high esteem for his wife's abilities.

The three neighboring tribes also wear Navajo blankets on their hunts. Each man puts on in the first place as many American clothes as he can beg, borrow or steal, and atop of all these he wraps the blanket with its gorgeous central diamond striding his back. His hat, if he has one, is some white man's cast-off, sometimes ornamented with an eagle's feather.

When the next day came I saw the huntsmen off. Near the entrance of the village they were gathered around their horses and their squaws were gathered around them.

"He's a great man," one of them said, pointing to her husband. He looked a giant on his horse, and his blanket was splendid.



A PUEBLO INDIAN BUCK.



PUEBLO INDIAN PACKING ANTELOPE

...ver their heads and they are all the napper.

Usually they camp for only a night at a time. Sometimes they build a fire for one meal and move on as soon as it is over. All the time their sight and hearing and all the other senses that only an Indian has are strained for sign of antelope or deer or jackrabbit or wild turkey. The silver tip and black bear is left sacredly alone; it is part of the Indians' religion to leave bears unharmed, very likely because it is a safe thing for an Indian to do so. They have a way of fixing their religion to suit circumstances.

There is one custom of these people that we might better follow. When white men hunt they camp beside water—always beside it, so that it will be handy to them. While they stay there no animal approaches and very likely they return to town empty-handed and take home game bought in the sneak-hours of the morning when markets are opening. Indians know better. They find water, then pitch camp a mile away after they have filled several kogs which are easily rolled to camp. They sleep comfortably, knowing that their trap is set near water. In the morning they go to the water and find all kinds of tracks—the delicate pointed hoofmarks of the deer and antelope; the three-pointed sign of the turkey; the round print of the rabbit; all of these sometimes broken by the heavier tread of the bear or blurred past recognition by its rollings.

The next step is to choose tracks and separate. Sometimes there is a squabble over the choice and the chief must settle matters.

Occasionally the whole band of hunters starts at the head of a canyon and makes a drive. The antelope has small enough chance then. Turkeys can be driven up a hill; they will run hard all the way, but they won't fly back, except on rare occasions, and this the hunters count on. Indians are poor shots, but they are more foxy than a white man and that's wherein their success lies. They know their aim isn't good, so they improve it by crossing sticks for a gun rest. They never weary of crawling, and so they sneak for miles after a victim that we would probably frighten away by chasing openly.

The meat is jerked from day to day while they travel. Most of the turkeys and rabbits are disposed of at ranches, the larger game kept for winter. The men live simply while they are hunting; tortillas are easily made and their ingredients easily carried and prairie dogs are frequent. An Indian is the only animal except a coyote that I ever saw eat a prairie dog.

Hunting game is not the only object of the animal trip. There are ranches where old clothes may be begged or bought in trade and Indian eyes are always alert for such chances.

Besides the meat brought home there are horns and hides. If the men have time they scrape the hides; if not, they let the squaws do it. The squaws always do the tanning. The scraping is done with horse ribs, and whenever a band of Indians comes upon a horse's skeleton there is a great scramble for ribs.

Eagles are prizes. They are hard to shoot and the brave who brings one down has several feathers in his cap.

The heads of antelopes are always preserved. A hoop is fastened in the skin and the head used as a pouch while traveling. There is still another use for it in the hunt.

"Nearly shot an Indian to-day," said a cow puncher to me.

"How?"

"Saw an antelope's head stickin' out from behind a clump of sagebrush and so I got my rifle and sighted. Just before I said 'bing' the thing came out from the brush and if it wasn't a Zuni with a black blotch painted on his shirt front to look like an antelope's breast, and an antelope's head fitted over his own with a hoop to hold it. He was stalking game and he came near being the game himself."

"A miss is as good as a mile," I said.

"I believe it was the worst miss I could have made," reflected the cow puncher.

down upon the disturbance without offering to settle it. Then came the order to start and away rode the train, leaving the quarrel to settle itself as it might.

They were a more gorgeous sight, these braves, than they would be after a month's hard wear of the new blankets should dim their brightness. They were new and shining now, evenly colored with the American dyes that had been acquired in trade. Below them swung in the stirrup long buckskin-clad legs.

The addresses were according to the wearer's fortune. Some had soft felt or straw hats, one splurged in a derby, and some consoled themselves with the headband of their tribe. In every case there was a knot of hair at the back of the head; the knot that picks out a Navajo man for you wherever you may see him by its twist up and its twist down and its cord around the middle.

They were parting gifts of their women—the tejas, or buckskin moccasins that curl up at the toe like a Turkish slipper. These are not embroidered, for they have to stand wear that would spoil the embroidery in no time.

Proudest ornament of all were the strings of turquoises that some displayed

natives had mined stones in their own way and for themselves, and had punched holes in them and strung them. Now the mines have passed out of their hands, but they cling to what stones they have and wear them as they are privileged. A stone for a horse and you have every man's wealth registered in his neckpiece.

Beyond the plains lie the mountains and the canyons and all the ruggednesses where game may be stalked and the hunt is merry. There the band of men is busy from the snows of early September until the storms grow so fierce that they are driven home to stay. This happens in October or sometimes not until November.

The fall hunt is more fun than work to every man who joins it. A hogan is more to an Indian's liking than any stone or 'dobe house can ever come to be, and the hogan is what every man camps in while on the hunt. All the tribes buy the Navajos live in stone or adobe houses while at home and the hunt is a gay outing to them, the vacation trip of the year.

The hogan is quickly built. It is nothing more than a circle of piled-up branches that reach about eight feet high. A fire is built in the middle of this and around the fire the men stretch themselves, feet toward it. There is no roof

"Mine is greater," put in another woman.

"He is not. Mine is the handsomer, and his blanket is of better wool than the other."

"It is not so."

"It is."

And the jangle became a wrangle and

there were two fighting squaws in the crowd.

"Mine always shoots the most antelope," one screamed.

"Mine will bring three times as many deer as yours. You shall see," shrieked the other.

The respective husbands looked calmly

at the squaws.

"I'll show you," said the other.

"I'll show you," said the other.

"I'll show you," said the other.

"I'll show you," said the other.