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BIG GAME IN MONTANA FROM EARLY HISTORICAL RECORDS

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The journals of all the early explorers of the West are filled with descriptions of the game conditions they encountered. Subsisting on the resources of the country as most of them did, if game was abundant they feasted and enjoyed the sight of the multitude and variety of wild animals. If game was scarce or absent they starved and their journals recorded the hardships of famine.

The earliest and most complete record of conditions in primeval Montana is, of course, the journal of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 to 1806. After wintering with the Mandan Indians in what is now North Dakota, the expedition continued up the Missouri River by boat in the spring of 1804. The valleys of the upper Missouri and Yellowstone at that time supported an aggregation of game animals that for number and variety exceeded anything the eye of man had ever looked upon, except possibly the plains of East Africa. The combination of the vast expanses of prairie grass, which furnished unlimited pasture, with the cottonwood bottoms of the rivers affording wooded shelter, and the occasional "bad lands" and breaks with their further variety of habitat, rendered this region a paradise for game animals. I can give only a few extracts from the journal which are representative of the daily experience.

On April 21, below the Yellowstone: "We saw immense quantities of buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, geese, and some swan and ducks, out of which we procured three deer and four buffalo calves....also two beaver and one otter."

At the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone, April 26: "The wide plains, watered by the Missouri and the Yellowstone, spread themselves before the eye, enlivened by the irregular windings of the two rivers, and animated by vast herds of buffalo, deer, elk, and antelope....He therefore descended the hills and camped on the bank of the river, having killed as he crossed the plains, four buffaloes. The deer alone are shy and retire to the woods, but the elk, antelope and buffalo suffered him to approach them without alarm, and often followed him quietly for some distance."

Above Milk River, May 9: "As usual we are surrounded by buffalo, elk, common and black-tail deer, beaver, antelopes and wolves."

Above the Great Falls of the Missouri, June 17: "There are vast quantities of buffalo feeding on the plains or watering in the river, which is also strewed with the floating carcasses and limbs of these animals. They go in large herds to water about the falls, and as all the passages to the river near that place are narrow and steep, the foremost are pressed into the river by the impetus of those behind. In this way we have seen ten or a dozen disappear over the falls in a few minutes. They afford excellent food for the wolves, bears and birds of prey, which circumstance may account for the reluctance of the bears to yield their dominion over the neighborhood."

In the midst of all this abundance the party fed fat. "It requires some diligence to supply us plentifully, for we reserve our parched meal for the Rocky Mountains, where we do not expect to find much game, our principal item of food is meat, and the consumption of the whole 32 persons belonging to the party amounts to four deer, an elk and a deer, or one buffalo every 24 hours." As a general rule they were not satisfied with this modest requirement, and the record abounds with such entries. "The hunters brought in six elk, two buffalo, two mule deer and a bear." They did not even stop with a variety of buffalo beef, mountain sheep mutton, three kinds of venison, bear meat, besides beaver, prairie chickens, geese and ducks, but "the party killed five elk and a mule deer, and by way of experiment roasted some burrowing squirrels, which they found to be well flavored and tender."

The number, size, and ferocity of the grizzly bears along the Missouri River was extraordinary. The black bear, which is common on the lower part of the Missouri, was not seen in this region.

The Lewis and Clark party had frequent encounters with the grizzly bears, and grew to have a wholesome respect for them. The history of one such encounter will suffice.

"Captain Lewis then descended the hill and directed his course toward the river falling in from the West. He soon met a herd of at least 1,000 buffalo, and being desirous of providing for supper, shot one of them. The animal immediately began to bleed, and Captain Lewis, who had forgotten to reload his rifle, was intently watching to see him fall, when he beheld a large brown bear, which was stealing up on him unperceived and was already within twenty steps. At the first moment of surprise he lifted his rifle, but remembering instantly that it was not charged, and that he had no time to reload, he felt that there was no safety but in flight. It was in the open level plain, not a bush or a tree within 300 yards, the bank of the river sloping and not more than three feet high, so that there was no possible mode of concealment. Captain Lewis therefore thought of retreating at a quick walk, as fast as the bear advanced, toward the nearest tree, but as soon as he turned, the bear ran open mouthed and at full speed upon him. Captain Lewis ran about eighty yards, but finding that the animal gained on him fast, it flashed on his mind that, by getting into the water to such depth that the bear would be obliged to attack him swimming, there was still some chance of his life. He therefore turned about, plunged into the river about waist deep, and facing about presented the point of his espontoon. The bear arrived at the water's edge within twenty feet of him, but as soon as he put himself in this posture of defense, the bear seemed frightened, and wheeling about retreated with as much precipitation as he had pursued....He could not conceive the cause of the sudden alarm of the bear, but congratulated himself on his excape, when he saw his own track torn to pieces by the furious animal."

Above the Gates of the Mountains no further buffalo were encountered, though elk, black-tail and white-tail deer, antelope, mountain sheep, bear, and beaver were abundant.

At the headwaters of the Jefferson and on the Salmon River, game was comparatively scarce, though the party managed to get deer, elk or antelope nearly every day. The Shoshone Indians in this region were subsisting somewhat precariously, obtaining game with much difficulty, and supplementing their diet with roots and fish, while they waited for an accumulation of sufficient forces to enable them to venture across the mountains into the buffalo country, the home of their terrible enemies, the Blackfeet. We have the authority of Lieutenant Bradley for the statement that the Blackfeet subsisted almost entirely on buffalo meat, rarely using antelope, deer, elk, bighorn, bear or beaver, and scorning fish and wild fowl.

Crossing over the mountains from the Salmon to the Bitterroot Valley, the party still found game in sufficient quantity to satisfy their daily needs; but, with their plunge into the fastnesses of the Bitterroot Mountains over

the Lolo Trail, they, for the first time on the entire journey, were able to secure no game. The hunters killed one deer on Packer's Meadows in Lolo Pass, but for six days across the mountains they had no game until Captain Clark killed a wild horse on Obia Creek near the western terminus of the mountains. The party suffered severely from hunger, and were obliged to use the last of their scanty supplies of provisions and to kill three colts for food.

On their return journey in June of the next year over the crusted snow of the high divide, game was again scarce, though they record: "We saw several black tailed or mule deer, but could not get a shot at them, and were informed that there is an abundance of elk in the valley near the fishery on the Kooskooskee."

They got one deer at the crossing of Crooked Fork, two at Lolo Springs, and coming down Lolo Creek again entered into a plentiful game country. "We killed six deer, of which there are great numbers, as well as bighorn and elk in the neighborhood."

Compared with the marvelous game herds of the plains country and the open valleys of the interior, the heavily timbered country of Idaho and extreme western Montana has apparently always been relatively poor in game.

Ross Cox, of the Northwest Fur Company, records a trip in November 1812 from Spokane House up the Clark Fork River to the trading post somewhere near the present town of Thompson Falls. His party fared miserably on this trip, living chiefly on horse flesh and boiled rice, and it was not until they got up the river to more open country in the vicinity of Thompson that the hunters secured mountain sheep. The Flathead Indians were depending for subsistence largely on dried buffalo meat secured on their annual hunt east of the mountains.

Between 1808 and 1811 David Thompson of the Northwest Fur Company explored the Kootenai and Clark Fork valleys in Montana, establishing a trading post, Saleesh House, at the present site of Thompson Falls, and one on Pend Oreille Lake in Idaho. Travel throughout this country was on a somewhat precarious basis, with frequent periods when game was scarce or lacking. In May 1808, along the Kootenai River near the present site of Bonners Ferry, Thompson's journal records: "May 14. To this date we had the meat of a few small antelopes, but by no means enough to prevent us eating Moss Bread and dried carp, both poor harsh food." The "Moss Bread" was made by the Indians from the tree moss or lichen (Alectoria). "On the 16th we met two canoes, from whom we traded twelve singed musk rats and two shoulders of an antelope, thankful for a change from the Moss Bread, which gave us all the belly ache."

Thompson refers continually to "antelope," by which he probably means the common white-tail deer, though he may refer to mountain sheep, which should also have been plentifully encountered. Whichever they were, they made the principal subsistence in that country. In January 1810 at Saleesh House, he says: "We made a glacier of shore ice and placed 1,230 pounds of antelope in it." Again, in October 1811: "All the dried provisions are of Bison meat, and must be carefully kept for the voyage of next summer, so that for the winter we depend for subsistence on the antelopes. They are in sufficient numbers, but the hunting is precarious." Elk were apparently lacking or scarce in northwestern Montana at that time as they are rarely mentioned, though they did kill one elk (red deer) on the Moyie River in Idaho.

The fur-trapping expedition of Alexander Ross in 1823 and 1824 through western Montana and Idaho presents a graphic picture of game conditions at that early date. Leaving the Northwest Fur Company post at Spokane House in November 1823 he traveled up the Clark Fork. There were 40 men in the party from Spokane House, and he picked up 15 more in the Flathead country. This motley crew of 55 men was composed of 2 Americans, 17 Canadians, 5 half-breeds, 12 Iroquois, and the balance from 9 other Indian tribes. Besides the men there were 25 women, 64 children, and a cavalcade of 392 ponies.

With this multitude to feed in the dead of winter, no supplies were carried, and they depended on the day's kill of game for their rations. Rarely did the country fail to feed them abundantly. The first few days everybody banged away at the game along the route, but the expenditure of ammunition was so great that Ross prohibited general participation in the hunt, and kept four hunters ahead of the main party.

In the first part of March 1824 the expedition made camp at Hell Gate, about where Missoula now stands. "In this encampment we remained for a day or two, and our hunters killed four wild horses. Just at the time we were starting one morning, and in the act of crossing a dark ravine not far from our camp, about 20 of these beautiful and hardy tenants of the mountains came dashing down from a neighboring height, with their shaggy manes and long tails waving in the wind, but with all their keen scent, the rifles of our hunters brought 4 of them to the ground before they had time to turn around. It is a rare thing for them to be entrapped or approached, and our hunters were more delighted with their success in this little adventure than if they had killed a hundred buffalo. We also got 27 elks and 32 small deer at this place, which secured the party for a while from hunger."

Passing on up the Bitterroot Valley elk, deer, and mountain goats were very numerous. In Ross Hole the party, which was held up by deep snow, subsisted for about a month chiefly on mountain sheep, which were abundant in the mountains.

"The big horn sheep party had good luck during several days; but these animals were smaller in size than I had been in the habit of seeing elsewhere, with heads very disproportionate to the size of their bodies, and horns still more disproportionate to the size of the head. The average weight of these animals was 70 pounds, and the head of the male generally weighed as much as a third of the body, while the horns were twice the weight of the head without them. One of the ram's horns brought into our camp measured forty-nine inches in length, following the curve or greatest circle round the convex side; and the circumference in the thickest part was twenty-eight inches. This horn weighed eleven pounds."

If these measurements can be relied on, this is an all-time record head.

Ross found buffalo abundant in the Big Hole Basin, and encountered immense herds of buffalo in the Salmon River country in Idaho.

The presence of wild horses in the western Montana mountains indicates how rapidly they had spread over the West in the less than 300 years since the stock first escaped from the early Spanish conquistadors. Lewis and Clark mention seeing two wild mares and a colt in the Bitterroot, but remark that they were the first they had seen since they left the mouth of the Musselshell.

Wild horses were abundant along the Missouri River. The artist, Catlin, in 1832 gives an interesting description of the wild horses of the plains along the Missouri.

"The wild horse of these regions is a small, but very powerful animal, with an exceedingly prominent eye, sharp nose, high nostril, small feet and delicate leg, and undoubtedly have come from a stock introduced by the Spaniards at the time of the invasion of Mexico, which, having strayed off upon the prairies, have run wild, and stocked the plains from there to Lake Winnipeg, two or three thousand miles to the north."

He describes a herd on the Red River.

"In the herd we saw all the colors nearly that can be seen in a kennel of English hounds. Some were milk white, some jet black - others were sorrel, and bay, and cream color - many were of an iron grey, and others were pied, containing a variety of colors on the same animal. The manes

were very profuse, and hanging in the wildest confusion over their necks and faces - and their long tails swept the ground."

While the Northwest and Hudson Bay trappers were invading Montana from the West, the fur companies from St. Louis were following closely after Lewis and Clark up the Missouri and Yellowstone. That redoubtable Spaniard, Manuel Lisa, led the way with his post on the Yellowstone in 1809, and even dared to penetrate as far as the Three Forks of the Missouri, though the Blackfeet made short work of disposing of that invasion of their hunting grounds.

Fort Union, built by the American Fur Company about 1830, at the junction of the Yellowstone and the Missouri, became the center of the fur trade in that region. Many naturalists and sportsmen attracted by the reports of the vast stores of new flora and fauna in this game paradise ascended the Missouri River and enjoyed the baronial hospitality of the fort. The naturalists, Bradbury, Nuttall, and Audubon, have all left us a record of their visits to this region. The two most famous sportsmen who ascended the Missouri in the early days were Maximilian, Prince of Wied, and that eccentric Irish nobleman, Sir George Gore.

Prince Maximilian, a German naturalist and big-game hunter, has left us almost as vivid a record of game conditions on the upper Missouri as Lewis and Clark. In the year 1832 he ascended the Missouri as far as Marias River just below the Great Falls. His journal is filled with descriptions of the vast herds of game which were continually in sight. Like Lewis and Clark, the prince had many encounters with the ferocious grizzly bear. They were particularly abundant about the mouth of the Milk River. "The true country of these bears is on the Missouri. Where they are at present the most numerous is the tract about Milk River. Here there is no wood of any extent in which they are not found....There is no other species of bear on the upper Missouri, for the black bear is not found so high up."

It is interesting to note that the moose occasionally strayed as far out on the plains as this. "The Moose deer or Original (Cervus alces Amer.) is said to be common toward the upper part of the Milk River, and Deschamp himself had killed several of these animals on the Missouri in the vicinity of this river."

The bighorn sheep, which we ordinarily now associate with the high mountain country, was extraordinarily abundant along the upper Missouri in the breaks and bad-land formations. Maximilian saw bands of 30 to 50 at a time.

The Sir George Gore hunting expedition of 1854 to 1856 has given rise to many tales and traditions of that most eccentric and lordly Irishman. His retinue consisted of 40 men, 112 horses (some very fine ones), 12 yoke of oxen, 14

dogs, 6 wagons, and 24 carts painted red. He had one wagon loaded with guns and fishing tackle. For his own use he had 75 rifles and 15 shotguns. He slept in state in a brass bedstead, and carried 3 milk cows to supply his mess with fresh milk.

With this outfit he advanced leisurely across the plains to Powder River and up the Yellowstone to Tongue River where he passed the winter. The party is reported to have killed 6,000 buffalo at Tongue River.

On his return down river he built two Mackinaw boats at Fort Union to descend the river. He attempted to sell his surplus goods to the fur company agent at the fort, but being unable to agree on a price, and feeling that he was being held up, he made a heap of all the wagons and goods and burned the whole outfit, then threw all the iron parts in the river so that no one could use them.

The 30 years from 1810 to 1840 were the golden age of the Rocky Mountain fur trade. The hardy and adventerous bands of trappers roamed the whole region, and there is not a stream in Montana on which they did not set their traps from source to mouth. While these roaming trappers lived exclusively on the resources of the country, there were not enough of them to appreciably affect the vast game resources, though the introduction of guns, which better armed the Indians, doubtless resulted in a much increased rate of killing.

With the extermination or thinning out of the beaver, the fur trade passed its crest in the forties, leaving little permanent impression on the country except a better knowledge of its geography, which made later settlement and development possible.

Captain Raynolds' military, exploratory expedition of 1859-60 gives us a picture of much country which was still practically unaffected by the white man at that time. His party traveled across the Powder and Tongue Rivers, up the Yellowstone, then south up the Little Big Horn to the Oregon Trail, westward through Jackson Hole, up Henrys River to Henrys Lake, down the Madison to Three Forks, and thence down the Missouri River. He thus completely encircled the Yellowstone Park, which was not to be officially explored until the Washburn-Doane expedition of 1870.

Except in the vicinity of the Oregon Trail, no inroads had been made in the game. On the Powder and Tongue Rivers the buffalo had so overgrazed the range that the men were unable even to find sufficient pasturage for their mules, and were obliged to cut cottonwood from which the half-famished animals gnawed the bark and twigs. This condition continued for two weeks' travel. When they arrived at the valley of the Yellowstone Captain Raynolds says,

"When my party first reached the bluff overlooking the Yellowstone, the sight was one which, in a few years, will have passed away forever. I estimated that about fifteen miles length of the wide valley was in view. The entire tract of 40 or 50 square miles was covered with buffalo as thickly as in former days in the west (when cattle were driven to an eastern market) a pasture field would be which was intended to furnish subsistence to a large drove for a single night. I will not venture on an estimate of their probable numbers."

Elk, deer, and antelope were found abundantly in the country about Henrys Lake and the Madison basin, and a band of buffalo seen in the high Madison basin, as well as in the main valley below. Down the Missouri River from Three Forks to the Yellowstone game of all kinds was very abundant, though one gets the impression that there had been some reduction of the vast multitudes described by Lewis and Clark and Prince Maximilian.

Ten years later, in the winter of '69 and '70, my father, Peter Koch, wintered on the Missouri just below the Musselshell, cutting wood for the steamboats and wolfing. Living mostly on meat, he and his companions were able to go out every two or three days, about as one goes to the market now, and bring in a deer or an antelope. His journal records the killing for food that winter of 19 antelope, 1 sheep, 12 black-tail deer, 7 white-tail deer, 5 elk, and 2 buffalo. In the spring of 1870 he records a trip across the prairie from the Musselshell to the Little Rockies, when he traveled for three days without getting out of rifle shot of herds of buffalo which blackened the prairie.

The period from 1853 to 1870 marks the passing of the wilderness in western Montana and the interior valleys of the three forks of the Missouri, the Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson. The Stevens expedition of 1853 to 1855 was undertaken for the purpose of exploring a route for a Pacific railroad from St. Paul to Puget Sound. Mr. Stevens, with his indefatigable assistants, Mullan, Tinkham, Lander, Doty, Grover, and others, explored the whole mountain region of western Montana and Idaho. Captain Mullan established a winter base at Cantonment Stevens in the Bitterroot Valley, and by the end of 1855 every valley and mountain pass in the region had been traced out and mapped. As a logical sequence to this exploration Captain Mullan's road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton was constructed in 1859 to 1861.

Captain Mullan was an engineer above all things, and the report of his hundreds of miles of wilderness travel concerned itself little with such impracticable things as game animals or scenery. Road grades and elevations and economic possibilities of the new country were more in his

line. If he ever hunted big game it is not in the record. However, he did drop in an occasional note about the game. He says of the Jefferson River valley in 1853: "Game here was exceedingly abundant, large herds of deer and antelope being seen, and this is the favorite hunting ground of the Indians, the mountains in the vicinity being filled with large numbers of bear, moose and elk. Going down the Deerlodge Valley he reports, "Large numbers of antelope were feeding in it, and mountain sheep and goats were seen in the peaks around."

Immediately following Mullan's road development came the discovery of gold at Bannock and Alder Gulch in the early sixties. The lure of gold brought in thousands of adventurous prospectors, and on their heels came the settler, so that by 1870 western Montana, including the three forks of the Missouri, had definitely passed beyond the pioneer day.

The account of the Yellowstone expedition of 1863, led by James Stuart, is probably the last description of the big game days in the three forks of the Missouri before the tide of gold seekers swept in. Crossing these valleys in April 1863, en route from Bannock to the Yellowstone, Stuart records: "Between Stinking Water and Madison, saw elk and sheep; saw plenty deer and antelope on Madison, also twenty elk, black bear, buffalo. In Gallatin Valley saw black-tail, white-tail, and twenty elk, plenty geese, ducks and prairie chicken, 4 or 5 black bear. In Bozeman Pass between Gallatin and Yellowstone saw 100 elk, killed grizzly bear."

It is perhaps not generally realized how far eastern Montana lagged behind the western valleys in settlement. At a time when Missoula, Helena, Virginia City, and Bozeman were thriving towns, with stores, restaurants and banks, and a surrounding of well developed ranches, the Yellowstone Valley, Judith Basin, and Missouri Valley were still almost primitive wilderness, teeming with game herds, and guarded by roaming bands of Blackfeet, Sioux, and Crow Indians, who made travel possible only at the risk of life and scalp.

General Edward S. Godfrey is responsible for the statement that in 1876 there was not a ranch west of Bismarck, North Dakota, nor east of Bozeman, Montana.

After the Fort Phil Kearney massacre in December 1866, the Government ordered all forts abandoned and the Bozeman road up the Yellowstone closed to travel. The plains Indians, in particular the Sioux tribes, were being crowded westward by the encroaching tide of settlement, and were in no mood to give road to the white man. The Yellowstone Valley and Bozeman Pass, which was the most direct route to the settlements of Montana, was as effectively closed as if it had been locked and barred.

The Custer campaign of 1876 marked the inevitable end of the Indian domination of the country, and in 1883 the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad definitely put a close to the Montana frontier period.

The extermination of the buffalo herds followed close on the heels of the railroad. Theodore Roosevelt, in "Hunting Trips of a Ranchman," writes: "The last of the great southern herds was destroyed in 1878, though scattered herds escaped and wandered into the desolate wastes of the Southwest. Meanwhile, equally savage war was waged on the northern herds, and five years later the last of these was also destroyed and broken up. The bulk of the slaughter was done in the dozen years from 1872 to 1883; never before in all history were so many large wild animals of one species slain in so short a time."

Roosevelt's description of hunting in the vicinity of his Little Missouri ranch in 1885 gives a good idea of the reduction in game by that time. He says, "Five years ago elk were abundant in the valley of the Little Missouri, and in fall were found wandering in great herds of over a hundred individuals each. But they have now vanished completely, except that one or two may lurk in some of the most remote and broken places, where there are still deep wooded ravines." A few scattered individual buffalo were left, and Roosevelt shot a couple in 1885. The grizzly bear at that time had been completely exterminated in the plains country. White-tail deer were still fairly abundant in the river bottoms, and black-tail deer and sheep in the bad lands.

The original range of the buffalo in Montana included all of the plains country in eastern Montana and all of the open valleys in the West. It is notable that Lewis and Clark did not encounter buffalo west of the Gates of the Mountains on the Missouri. They did not see them on any of the three forks of the Missouri, or in the Bitterroot or Clark Fork valleys. This must have been a temporary condition, since several explorers subsequently report them farther west. Alexander Ross, in March 1824, found plenty of buffalo in the Big Hole Basin, as did Mullan in December 1853, and they most likely wintered there. Ross also found large herds in the Salmon River. Captain Raynolds reports buffalo in the Madison Basin and the Madison Valley in 1860. James Stuart saw buffalo in the Jefferson Valley in 1863.

Since the coming of the white man there have apparently been no buffalo west of the Continental Divide in Montana, though they formerly existed there. In Governor Stevens' 1853 report Dr. Suckley writes, "Buffalo were formerly in great numbers in this valley (Bitterroot) as attested by the number of skulls seen, and by the reports of the inhabitants. For a number of years past, none had

been seen west of the mountains, but singular to relate, a buffalo bull was killed at the mouth of the Pend Oreille River on the day I passed it. The Indians were in great joy over this, believing that the buffalo were coming back to them."

Dr. Cooper states in the same report in 1860, "I saw one or more old skulls daily in the valley of the Little Blackfoot and Hell Gate Rivers, quite down to the junction with the Bitterroot."

The western limits of the buffalo range have been quite generally recognized, but it is less commonly known that the earliest records show an absence of elk in western Montana and northern Idaho in many sections where the character of the country would lead one to expect their occurrence. The explorers' records show an abundance of elk all through eastern and central Montana as far west as Missoula, through the Wyoming mountains, and west through the upper waters of the Salmon and Snake Rivers, and into the Blue Mountains of Oregon.

The Lewis and Clark journals make the definite statement that no elk were seen from the time they crossed the Bitterroot Mountains till they approached the mouth of the Columbia River. On the return journey in May 1806 the party hunted intensively for a month in the vicinity of the Clearwater River above Orofino without killing a single elk. The journals of David Thompson, Ross Cox, Alexander Ross, and W. A. Ferris, through the period from 1800 to 1830, make no mention of elk in the northwest part of Montana in what are now Lincoln, Sanders, and Mineral Counties, or in that portion of Idaho and eastern Washington north of the Salmon and Snake Rivers. The Palouse prairie country, south of Spokane, lacking buffalo and elk, in spite of ideal grass and cover conditions for game, apparently never carried any such richness of game animals as the Montana prairies.

On the basis of this evidence it seems a fairly sound conclusion that the present elk herds of the upper Clearwater, which winter precariously in the deep snows of the mountains, came originally from the Montana side, from the Bitterroot Valley, and never did winter in the lower country on the west side of the mountains. This may explain why, with the Bitterroot Valley closed to them by settlement, the elk show a reluctance to drift down stream to the west for better winter range.

The theory has been developed, and to a considerable degree accepted by field naturalists, that before the coming of the white man the mountains were very thinly populated with game, particularly elk and buffalo, and that it was only through persistent hunting in the plains and valleys that these animals were driven back in the mountains for refuge. This theory is based to a large extent on Lewis and Clark's record of the scarcity of game in the Bitterroot

Mountains, and on a half dozen accounts of early exploration of the Yellowstone Park, from 1870 to 1875.

I am unable to accept this theory. It is probably based on relative rather than actual numbers of game animals in the mountains as compared with the plains country.

To a man accustomed to the daily sight of hundreds of animals on the plains, the ordinary mountain occurrence of game would seem scarcity. James Stuart in 1863 on the Yellowstone expedition writes: "Game is getting very scarce. Saw only 3 antelope and 4 elk today." Today the sight of that much game almost anywhere would mark a red-letter day.

Much has been made of Lewis and Clark's semistarvation while crossing the Bitterroot Mountains. As a matter of fact, this has always been a rather poor game country, and at no subsequent time has game been sufficiently plentiful to enable a large party to subsist on the country. The Lewis and Clark party saw as much game as any later party might have seen on the same route. In the westward journey they got a deer in Lolo Pass and a wild horse on Obia Creek. Coming back in June they saw several blacktail deer, and state that, "We were informed that there is an abundance of elk in the valley near the fishery on the Kooskooskee." Since the snow still lay deep on the high divides it is possible that these elk wintered along the Lochsa River (Kooskooskee) just as they do now.

In 1893 the Carlin hunting party hunted several days in the best of the elk country on the Lochsa before getting an elk, and nearly starved in going out down the Lochsa River. In July 1914 I made a month's pack trip on the Clearwater National Forest, including the Lolo Trail, and saw just one deer. One can hardly conclude from these facts that there has been an increase in game numbers in the Bitterroot Mountains since Lewis and Clark's day.

The balance of the argument is based on game conditions described by early explorers in the Yellowstone Park. There are several such records - the Washburn-Doane expedition of 1870, the Hayden survey of 1871, Captain Jones' expedition of 1873, Lord Dunraven in 1874, Captain Ludlow, with George Bird Grinnell, in 1875, and others.

Attempts have been made by naturalists to build up the theory from the records of these parties, but the evidence is not very convincing. The Washburn-Doane expedition in 1870, while running rather short on game for the table at times, certainly indicates a general abundance of game. While their journals probably do not mention all the animals they saw, their record indicates the presence of much game. There was a party of 15 lodges of Crow Indians ahead of them and two white hunting parties in the park at the same time, which may explain a temporary shortage of game along the lines of travel.

"Aug. 26. Killed an antelope. Aug. 24. Saw two bull elk and one bear. Ground tracked by passage of herds of elk and mountain sheep, and bear signs everywhere visible. Aug. 28. Abundance of venison and trout in camp. Aug. 29. Saw black bear. Aug. 31. Saw large flock of mountain sheep in the canyon. Sept. 1. Yellowstone Valley above canyon, elk feeding in small bands. Sept. 6. Yellowstone Lake. The ground was trodden by thousands of elk and sheep. Bear tracks numerous. Sept. 8. Saw two grizzly bears and two cubs. Sept. 18. Saw fresh signs of buffalo. At head of Snake River found game plentiful and tame, and had no trouble in obtaining an abundant supply."

As a matter of fact, most of these early parties saw much more game than the average visitor to the park would probably have seen in any subsequent years. I have personally made four trips through Yellowstone Park. On the first trip in 1894 we spent a full month in the park, and in 1897 I crossed the park with a pack outfit, from Crandall Creek via Mount Washburn and the canyon to the Gallatin. On neither trip did we see any elk or buffalo, and no considerable quantity of game except antelope on the Lamar River.

The general statement is correct that elk and buffalo were primarily plains animals in the sense that they occurred in vastly greater numbers in the plains country, with some timber or mountain shelter, than they did in the higher mountain country, and likewise mountain sheep were far more abundant in the breaks of the Missouri River, or in steep, cliffy country low down along the Clark Fork River than they ever were in the high timberline country. But there is ample evidence that these animals also ranged the high mountain country in probably considerably greater quantities than they have occurred at any time since the valleys were settled. In other words, the plains animals were killed off, not driven back in the mountains, and the rough mountain country continued to give some refuge to the animals that already were there.

The early fur trappers recognized a mountain buffalo as distinct from the plains variety. There were doubtless small bands which stayed in the higher mountain valleys the year round. Buffalo were seen in considerable numbers in the Big Hole Basin in early March 1824 by Alexander Ross, and in December 1853 by Captain Mullan, so without doubt they wintered in the high, snow-covered valley. Captain Raynolds saw a band in June in the high Madison Basin.

Doubtless the elk from the mountains, and also the mule and white-tail deer, usually wintered lower down than they are forced to do at present by the restriction of settlements; and an adequate winter range is the great problem in the present perpetuation of the game herds.

It is probable that the period through the nineties and early nineteen hundreds witnessed the lowest point in

game numbers through most of Montana. I was brought up in the Gallatin Valley in Montana and usually spent most of the summer in the hills through the nineties, yet at that time game was so scarce that the sight of a single deer, elk or sheep was a most unusual event. I often traveled for weeks with a pack outfit through the high mountain country without sight of any big game whatever.

The South Fork of the Flathead and the Sun River country is today considered an excellent game country. Deer, elk, and goats are relatively abundant, yet in the fall of 1905 and again in 1906 I rode for a month with pack outfit through the wildest part of that country with a rifle on my saddle, and, with the exception of one goat, never saw or got a shot at a single big game animal, though grouse were fairly abundant.

With the creation of the national forests and the cooperation given the State by forest officers in enforcement of game laws, better general sentiment toward game laws, and the establishment of numerous game refuges, there has been a very considerable increase in game animals in most parts of the State. There is much to be done in the way of more scientific management of game resources, but conditions are distinctly better than they were, and there is now little probability of game becoming extinct in this State.

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