

Forest and Stream

New York, Saturday, May 5, 1894 VOL. XLII--No. 18

OUR PARK GAME EXPLORATION

We announced in our issue of April 14 the *Forest and Stream's* enterprise of sending a staff expedition into the Yellowstone National Park. It was an enterprise with a purpose. This purpose was actual, definite and important, and its occasion pressing. It was nothing less than to make real to sixty-five million people of this country and to their agents in Congress the Yellowstone Park of today; to awaken them to the perils which threaten it; to arouse them to the necessity of immediate action to rescue it from these perils.

This was the undertaking, and it was one which might well challenge the enthusiasm and high endeavor of those to whom it was entrusted. To explore the Park in winter was an achievement of woodcraft; who shall say that it is also not a work of patriotism?

The event has proved that the enterprise was well timed. The course of events has been what we foresaw. The results of the expedition have been secured at a moment when they are certain to be of the highest possible utility.

The first chapter of the report is given to-day. It is a story of big-game destruction, an illicit, selfish, brutal raid on the remnant of a rare species-- the very choicest, most highly prized game of the Park. To tell the story, as it is told by *Forest and Stream* today at first hand, is to perform a service which rarely comes within the province of a sportsman's paper. It is an achievement of journalism, and a worthy achievement because done in the public interest.

But his recounting of the work of a buffalo butcher is not the sole end of the Yellowstone Park Game Exploration. To give this dark tale was necessary. But pleasanter relations are yet to come-- the story of the winter enchantments of the wonderland. To demonstrate the danger which imperils the Park, to show the need of immediate action, this is only the one result of the expedition. It yet remains to picture the Park with so graphic a pen that they who read shall be incited to a more jealous regard for these priceless possessions and to providing a more adequate preservation of them.

The account of the capture of Howell, the buffalo butcher, is given in full on another page and proves a story of far more than common interest. In the fullness of its detail, in the faithfulness with which it pictures the wintry solitudes where the butcher was plying his bloody trade, and in the statements made by all who took part in the capture, the story is complete and will hold the attention of every reader. It is full of interest, but in nothing more so than in the emphasis which it puts on the lack of law in the National Park, and it is this point which is the most remarkable feature of the whole affair.

Congress had enacted that the Secretary of the Interior should make regulations for the protection of the Park, and such regulations had been published; troops had been stationed in the Park to enforce these regulations, and for a time the regulations and the troops acted as a scarecrow and prevented anything like general violation of the rules. Every now and then, however, a man was caught killing elk or beaver, was taken to the Fort, shut up in the guard house for a few weeks and then set free, his horses, guns and other property being confiscated. There was no punishment for an offender.

Whatever may be said of those who invade the Park-- however bad they may be-- they are not fools. It took them only a few years to realize that the regulations were a dead letter, that the scarecrow was powerless to harm them, that however earnest and sincere the officers of the Government might be in their efforts to protect the treasures that had been given in charge to them, they could do nothing, for their hands were tied by the inaction of Congress. When these men fairly realized this, it was inevitable that they should do just what Howell did. The great reward which success promised justified them in taking the small risk of capture, to be followed by a short confinement, and in order that, if captured, they might lose little, they took into the Park the lightest outfit possible. Howell boasted that his capture property was worth only \$26.75, while if he succeeded in getting his spoils beyond the reservation-lines he stood to make \$2,000. He was perfectly frank about it, and evidently thought it a fair business risk. He knew as well as any one how entirely powerless his captors were to punish him, and talked about the matter with cynical boldness which showed clearly enough that he was well aware that he had violated no law-- that he had merely infringed a regulation, which was only a form of words, useful enough, perhaps, for the purpose of scaring tourists into good behavior, but hopelessly ineffective actually to accomplish anything against a determined man who knows what his rights are.

Howell was taken to the guard house and confined there, to be released at some future day and then no doubt-- unless some law shall be enacted for the Park-- to recommence his work of slaughter.

The orders from Washington are that offenders shall be held and their arrest be reported to the Department of the Interior. But a man in the guard house for a few weeks must eat, and yet there is no fund from which he can be supported. He is not a soldier and cannot be rationed, and so some one must pay his board or he must starve. So it has often happened in the past that the commanding officer has had to pay out of his own private pocket for weeks at a time for the food consumed by the prisoners that he had taken and was holding by the order of the Government. Could anything be more absurd?

Owing to the failure of Congress to enact the necessary laws and to provide the necessary moneys for the administration of the National Park, this great reservation, this unequalled possession of the people, has been managed in a way that is contemptible and disgraceful. With every disposition on the part of the Secretary of the Interior and the Superintendent to guard and cherish it as it should be guarded and cherished, it has been and is still managed in a way that must make each man who knows what it is and what it ought to be, blush for Congress, which in the past has been so careless of the best interest of the public. Happily there is now a prospect that the blunders of the past may be remedied by the bill which is now under consideration. The fate of this measure will depend on the action of a conference committee, whose members it is believed will be Messrs. Vest, Carey, and White (of California) from the Senate, and Messrs. Lacey, Hoar, and McRae from the House.