

SPORT IN INDIA



WARREN, REYNOLDS

“STRIPES”



From: wounded and waiting

SHOOTING

By Colonel H. G. C. Swayne, C.M.G. (late R.E.)

Author of "Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland," "Through the Highlands of Siberia," etc.

In describing shooting areas in India, let us begin in the north-west corner with Kashmir, which annually, perhaps, absorbs in its immense surrounding back-country of mountains, with their intricate system of valleys or "nullahs," about half of the keenest hunters of large game.

The habitat of the game is affected by the great differences of level, which cause changes of climate, and the condensations of rain, which further affect vegetation and animals.

In the north we have India cut off by the Himalayas from Asia, as Italy is cut off from Europe by the Alps.

You find yourself in India, say in the spring, with three months to spare. Having settled everything with officials beforehand by letter, you ride to Rawal-Pindi in the Punjab, and get into a motor-car or a stage pony tonga; you travel over 200 miles of good mountain carriage-road, skirting the Gorge of the Jhelum River, and within forty-eight hours are in Srinagar, the capital city of an entirely new world, a Switzerland in the heart of Asia. The valley of Kashmir is itself not large, but the outlying interests of his Highness the Maharajah stretch for 200 or 300 miles to the north-west, north, and north-east towards Afghanistan, Russian Turkestan, Chinese Turkestan, and Tibet, comprising a great variety of scenery, climates, and races. This waste of snowy mountains includes the district of Ladakh, high up on the Tibetan border, also Baltistan—famed for its ibex—Astor, Gilgit, and Chitral, famed for the markhor (wild goat). These latter States are tucked under the eavesward face of the culminating wall or watershed between India and Asia, the Hindu-Koosh, rising between 20,000 and 25,000 ft., supplying snow-water to the Indus and other Indian rivers, and looking down on its northern face into interior Asia.

To return to Kashmir itself. The valley is flat, with a floor level of over 5,000 ft., and an area, perhaps, of about 30 miles by 50. It is as if you drained the Lake of Geneva, and left the surface blazing in spring with mile-long sweeps of wild flowers, or intensively cultivated areas where Indian corn, barley, rice, and many fruits are grown. Through all this plain the loops of the Jhelum River twist and turn upon themselves, suggesting the patterns on the shawls. The river banks are fringed with tall poplars and water-loving trees which recall the Upper Thames.

The large game is of great variety, for which Kashmir is famed, is found not so much on the edge of the valley itself as in the mass of mountains which stretch away from it in every direction. In the first mountains, which condense the rain from the Indian Ocean, you get the game of the piles and snows—the Himalayan black bear and twelve-tined Kashmir stag below, the ibex, tahr, and goral (chamois), brown bear and snow leopard on the heights; also you may come across that curious beast, the snow, combining the characteristics of the donkey and the goat, and the little musk deer, which is specially protected by the State.

After surmounting the first passes, of which the Zoji-La (about 12,000 ft.) is one, you are in the regions near Tibet, which do not get the

condensation from the Indian Ocean monsoons, and are intensely hot in the gorges, and on the heights are swept by bitter dry winds from the interior of Asia.

In this region you will leave the black bear and stag behind you and try for the ibex, orial sheep, bhawal or blue sheep, brown bear, and snow leopard, the markhor towards Gilgit, and the ovis-amon sheep and wild yak (on the Tibetan border), and Tibetan antelope.

At Srinagar, caravans of Kashmir porters, who travel on foot, carrying a 50-lb. load, are raised and rationed for the sport in the nearer pine-clad mountains, and for the great treks to Astor, Baltistan, and Ladakh. Srinagar is beautiful, and the people, a Persian-Arabic race, are civilized and social, but not brave. They remind one of the Egyptians, but are more polite and more civilized. The men are black-bearded and of magnificent physique, like Afghans, but instead of the steely-grey eye of the predatory Turkian you notice more often a liquid, soft dark eye like that of the Hindu.

These Kashmiris were forcibly converted to Mohammedanism about the time of Mahmood of Ghazni. These big men are "cry-babies" in human intercourse, though fine patens, intelligent and plucky cragmen, who cut steps for you, and take an almost motherly care of you on steep, slippery pine slopes, sliding shale, or across stone-shoots, for the ground is as bad as any encountered by the chamois-hunter of Switzerland, and presents dangers which quite throw in the shade any possible danger to be expected from bear or leopard. The pines and crags go very high, for the eternal snow-line begins at 16,000 feet, twice as high as the snow-line of the Alps. Alpine ropes are little used, but rubber-studded boots, decorated also with nails, or perhaps Swiss boots, alpenstocks, and ice-axes are a necessity. For snow or rocks there is nothing like the Kashmir grass-shoe of plaited straw, worn by the men, of which one carries a great supply for everybody, and two of which may wear out in the day. You also give all your men snow-spectacles for the passes.

You cannot get on with less than twelve to twenty or even fifty men, who settle down into the usual hierarchy of the road—caravan leader, hunter, cook, postman, porters, and local village guide.

The route for distant nullahs is along intermediate main valleys, where you seldom, if ever, fire a shot, even at small game; you sit on a hill pony for the up-grade, and you may rise or descend 4,000 feet in a day's march; you buy apricots or grapes, eggs and chickens, at villages inhabited at first, this side of the Zoji-La Pass, by Kashmiris, beyond by Baluch and Ladakhis, or Astors, of semi-Mongolian or Tartar stock.

If you go to Gilgit after markhor, or through Ladak to the edge of Tibet for ovis-amon and yak, or to Baltistan for ibex, you will have competed with other keen sportsmen in order to pass the Zoji in April at the earliest moment that it opens, and to get in some specially good nullah. When you have pitched your tent in the mouth of the latter, it is your game preserve. You cross this long and dangerous pass with



avalanches thundering constantly in your ears, and in your path are strewn the occasional skeletons of ponies which have died in blizzards. I have a vivid memory of cutting into a snow-pit, showing the corners of mail bags sticking out, to see if a postman were frozen inside. But he had gone on a dozen miles, through deep snow, to get help, and we met the relief party recovering for the mail bags.

Having passed the Zok, you continue through the hot, thorny, arid valleys, passing between four or five miles stretches of desert slopes, falling almost sheer to raging torrents, in the form of "Devil's Pourbores"; and at the villages, perched in commanding positions like the hill villages of the Italian Maritime Alps, among terraced cultivation, fed by aqueducts, you find the scene entirely changed. You throw yourself down in some terraced garden under the shade of apricot trees, with the sound of water-tunnels in your ear.

The path you pursue gives you thus for about 300 miles from Srinagar, a mule path 2½ ft. wide, sometimes carried on iron brackets along the edge of cliffs, as in parts of Switzerland, sometimes descending to the margin of the torrents.

Once installed in a *trahak* with your tent, you cannot, by the Maharajah's game laws, be interfered with, and your *trahak* may, perhaps, be two miles broad between the dividing ridges towering 6,000 ft. above you on either side, and may take its source in the snows fifty miles or more away, but it is all yours for as long as you like to stay. It is uninhabited, so you send down, many miles, to villages in the main valley for supplies and for your letters; hence the postman. The town of Leth, in Ladakh, is at 13,000 ft., and your wanderings after the blue sheep (*ibharal*) may take you over passes up to 20,000 ft. The Karakoram, near the Tibet border, is about 18,000 ft. If you are caught across their border looking for yak by Tibetan police outposts, you will be politely sent back by this fine people, if you are not actually arrested.

If your steps have taken you to the confines of Gilgit, after march, you may be camped on ridges at 12,000 ft. elevation among stunted pine-scrub, in a *foete d'arce* 3 ft. high, looking down 5,000 ft. into savage, barren gorges with swift torrents, or up at snow peaks 20,000 to 23,000 ft. above

sea-level. Beyond them is Interior Asia, the streams from these peaks falling on the side to the Pamirs and eventually to Russian and Chinese Turkestan, on the side to the Indus, and eventually to the Indian Ocean.

On your return marches you halt for black bear and stag in the mountain between the Zok Pass and Srinagar, and this stag-shooting in fine scenery is like descending among pines and snow-peaks all the world over, whether in the Himalayas, the Caucasus or the Rocky Mountains. The Maharajah has also great reserves for making and for driving, administered by European officers of the Kashmir State, but not many years at a time can receive permission to shoot in them; and other sportsmen locate game for themselves outside the reserves, in the wild hills.

Now let us leave Kashmir and follow the Himalayas eastwards and southwards. In the mountains about Simla and Mussoorie, the northern hill stations, which are about 8,000 ft. above sea-level, are valleys like miniature Kashmir, where they grow wheat and grain; and roads also lead up to the borders of Tibet from these stations, more direct than the long trails over the Kashmir passes. The slopes and crags of these hills contain thar, goral, and, near Tibet, ox-iron.

At the seaward foot of the Himalayas, below Mussoorie, through part of the independent State of Nepal, and away past Darjeeling into Assam, in the North-east of India, is the Terai, heavy tropical forest, malariaic in most seasons, in the lowest part of which tiger, rhinoceros, and wild buffalo find sanctuary, and sambar, swamp deer, and hog deer abound. Shooting is done perforce from the back of elephants, and it is increasingly difficult to get the latter now, for in recent years landowners have not kept so many. The elephant, a slow traveller on roads, is invaluable in dense jungle or broken ground, as also for any kind of timber-hauling; and now, as more roads are added and more land is being drained, elephants are less required.

There used to be, and may be now, great tiger shoots given by landowners in certain localities all over India, in native states and also in the Terai, and in Nepal, the latter near the foot of Everest from which are recruited our incomparable Alpine soldiers the Japanese-like Gorkhas; and in the Terai of Bihar and Bengal and Assam, almost given up by landowners like the Maharajah of Cooh-Behar have been celebrated by a high hospitality.

One must glance for a moment at two little-known and remote regions, the Chumbi Valley of Tibet proper and the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river.

From Darjeeling, the great Eastern Himalayan hill station, at about the 7,000 ft. level, a few days' hard marching on a mule-path, up and down countless mountains over the stairways, will take one over the Jelep-La or Nalu-La passes (about 14,000 ft.) into the Chumbi Valley of Tibet proper. It is doubtful, however, if any permission to get in connection with our Tibetan Trade Agent or the telegraph line could get permission to get into the Chumbi Valley from our political authorities. The stipendous hill-banded Gorkha of Mussoorie, and Darjeeling are no doubt the scenery which suggested the wanderings of Kipling's lama in *Rim* and the character sketch of the woman of Shantleg. But the



Fig. 4-44

point of interest for sportsmen in the Chumbi Valley is that its pine-clad sides, from the Lingmatag meadows to the mouth of the Annu-Chu, debouching on to the plains of India, are the home of the magnificent shoo stag, probably second only to the wapiti. Many heads of the shoo have been brought into Darjeeling by Tibetans for years, and some have long adorned the walls of the South Kensington Natural History Museum. But only a half-dozen or so of heads, and those not of the best, have been shot by officers who had duty in Tibet, including those of the British Expedition to Lhasa. A telegraph officer once calmly said in answer to an inquiry, "If you shoot a 'shoo' near Lhasa, the lama, who object to life being taken, will make a fuss; and the man who leads you there is liable to be beheaded." So life has its excitement even in these peaceful valleys; but I believe the Lhasa objection does not apply to Chumbi.

To come to more practicable regions, let us follow the Terai eastward from below Durdwaj, and passing the mouth of the Annu-Chu Valley, where the shoo lives, we can travel on to the lonely-looking upper reaches of the Brahmaputra, a swift river which is deep and three-quarters of a mile wide; continuing, we shall be on the edge of more Terai and poor Tezpur, and so get on to the north-east corner of India, near Dibrugarh. All this jungle at the foot of the Eastern Himalayas is the home of many tigers, and of wild boar, carrying the finest horns in the Peninsula; but their pursuit is no "poor man's game," for the difficulties and expense of getting elephants in those regions are great, and impossible to calculate beforehand.

East of Calcutta, the delta of the Brahmaputra, the intricate system of islands and channels called the Sunderbans, very dense and malarious, hold there wild buffalo, with horns inferior to those of Assam, and several kinds of deer. In those islands which are inhabited, much jute is grown. You can perhaps borrow a steam launch from some friendly landowners in Eastern Bengal and steam down these channels to their mouths on the shores of the Bay of Bengal.

The races inhabiting the backwater villages, among stately palms, are of a very Aryan type, with a golden-brown complexion, unlike the darker people of Calcutta. Some of the women appear remarkably handsome.

The hunting of buffalo here is somewhat unsatisfactory. Boatmen paddle and pole through swamps of high reeds. You sit on the prow of a punt in what most prove to be a very precarious position should the buffalo turn on you; and you have little chance of seeing the latter till they are only some five yards away. Buffalo can be heard trotting away all around you, their feet splashing in the water, but you see nothing.

Burma, now administered by the Government of India, holds elephant, tigre (a near relative of the Indian bison), and several other kinds of large and small game, particularly the fine thomson or brow-antler stag (*Cervus edli*), a near relative of the Indian swamp deer. In the thamis the busan antler is continuous with the long brow antler in one graceful semicircle. The horns run longest in the Northern or "dry" districts, North, say, of Sbewo, as distinguished from the more swampy jungles of Lower Burma.

From most of the garrisons of India, within a day's togra drive, a happy week-end of sport may be obtained, notably after various wildfowl and duck and snipe, at the numerous "tanks" or "pools," which are really village ponds or large lakes, according to their size. These have been artificially made through the centuries by the villagers, who form earth dams across small streams. Most villages all over India have such sheets of water, often their only source of supply. They vary in width or length from a couple of hundred yards to four or five miles, and are the resort of countless wildfowl.

From the "Durgs," or old hill forts, of Mysore many hundreds of these tanks can be seen simultaneously, and with the sunshine reflected from their surfaces, among the green and yellow fields, they look like the little bits of mirror-glass in an embroidered Indian curtain.

The banks of these village lakes are picturesque places for shooting camps, having large trees, clumps of reeds, and swamps which attract snipe and black-buck, gazelle, possibly might (blue bull), and various kinds of small game—such as dwarf harking deer, bustard, bhoirah, sand grouse, partridge, jungle-cock, and quail. The nilgai is a relative of the bush-bucks of Africa, but is not a very sporting beast; in Bengal he lives in patches of high sugar cane, and is as large as a doer.

The black-buck, on the other hand, is a clever, sporting little animal, well protected by his senses, and by his swiftness does. Nearly always in open ground, great artifice is often required to get near him.

Labor is cheap, and these week-end trips are well within the means of the sportsman. The guide, philosopher, and friend of the sportsman is usually the Collector or Deputy Commissioner in British administrative territory, or the Resident in a Native Indian State. The Collector, who no doubt takes his name from the ancient custom, long since abolished, of farming the taxes, is now responsible to the Governor, Lieut.-Governor, or Viceroy for every considerable thing that goes on. Among other things, he issues permits to sportsmen, and sees that they attend to the game laws and bring no hardships on the inhabitants.



Sloth Bear: an unprovoked attack

There are a few districts containing great tracts of wild country, even in India proper, to which special large game expeditions are organised. Keen shikaris, whose work is in India, will spend their two or three months' hard-earned leave every other year or so either in the Asiatic waters, behind Kashmir, or even in Turkestan; others will disappear into those fastnesses in India itself, with a couple of ponies and two or three bullock carts, heaped with every conceivable kind of light camp equipment, and three months' tinned stores; they will not even be heard of for many weeks at a time, but they eventually emerge with a few trophies, having spent in India the money and leisure which would have taken them to three or four weeks in England, or to Swiss winter or summer sports.

The station of Jubbalpur is a fine centre for large-game shooting; it is itself made beautiful by tall dark bamboo clumps, shady avenues, and good gardens; and, some years ago, by driving a few miles in a tonga or bamboo-cart down the Nerbedda Road, you could get on the banks of the river that same and spend a week-end among tiger and spotted deer (*Axis maculatus*). It is probable that the coming of the railway may have modified the sport, but it has always been a favourite haunt of the tiger.

Taking another road from Jubbalpur you drove for 100 miles along a good road to the small city station of Mandla, in the heart of the Central Provinces, where several noted jungles are within a day or two's drive. Tiger, leopard, sambar, the very interesting swamp deer (*Rucervus dravencollis*), chital, Indian black sloth bear (*Ursus labiatus*), pig, the little barking deer—all these abound, and farther west, near Raipur, and farther south from Kalpur, in the Federated States, bison (*Bos gaurus*), and wild buffalo, whose horns are second only to those of the Tera. It should be noted that the Kashmir stag and the swamp deer, very different animals, share the name *Baramacha* (twelve times); but they must not be confused together. These Central Provinces trips are delightful, among ever-green forests of sal and grassy open valleys, giving the country a very English park-like appearance; it is high and not very hot, and there are ideal camping grounds. At night you occasionally hear the half roar, half yawn of a tiger in the thick jungle near your camp.

The sambar in those regions are particularly fine, as they are also in the Saugor district, north of Jubbalpur, and in the Melhat and other parts of the Hyderabad Assigned Districts between Jubbalpur and Secunderabad. Bellary and Belgam, near the northern borders of Mysore, used to be good for sloth bear, panther, and tiger.

At Secunderabad station, with Hyderabad city close by, you have one of the largest garrisons and the seat of government of the premier Prince of India, the Nizam. In his dominions big tiger shoots, more or less on the lines of those of the Terai, are held, elephants being used chiefly for transport and the guns posted in trees. There are pig-sticking meets, and many places of interest near, such as the old town of Golconda.

Going further southward we enter the well-organised Indian State of Mysore, with its good roads and rest-houses, and its many interesting old hill forts; it contains the most favoured military station in the plains, Bangalore, about 2,000 ft. elevation, where the climate is cool all the year round, frost, but not snow, appearing in the cold weather.

West Mysore, the Kadur and Shimoga districts, and the Baba Budan hills, rising to about 6,000 ft., a coffee-planting district, are noted for

elephants (protected), bison, tiger, sambar, chital, and panther, though none of the deer grow such long horns as further north. There are excellent snipe grounds near the 900 ft. high Gerappa Falls, where the Mysore plateau drops into Canara. Not very far from these districts live the Mopiah Mohammedans, who have given so much trouble to the Government by local outbreaks any time in the last fifty years.

In the ranges of hills around Ootacamund, the great hill sanatorium of Southern India, at about 8,000 ft. elevation, there is an English scenery and climate; and from here sambar stalking may be had, though the horns, like those of most Madras species, do not run to great size.

But the supreme prize of shooting in the Ootacamund hills is the successful pursuit of the fine goat, the tahr, misnamed locally the "Nilgiri ibex," which is a cross of the tahr of the Himalayas.

In the hills of Southern India, as also in the hills behind the Chingay coast, east of Calcutta, Government sheldhas are formed for catching elephants. Visitors who are fortunate enough to be invited watch the fine sport, great stockades being constructed with narrow entrances into which the herds are driven, selected wild ones being then isolated and bound with the help of trained tame elephants.

In a general article on large game shooting in the plains, it is as well to recommend the acquisition of an insight into the character of the sloth bear and panther, both being common all over the plains of India where there are low, but hilly, covered with bushes, among which are caves. A shot at panther and bear is often the ambition of the young officer or railway employee on first coming to India.

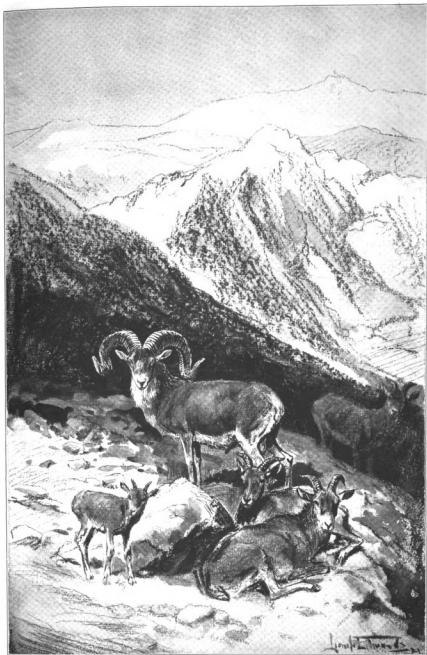
Panthers are only very large leopards, and naturalists do not really separate the two; they differ chiefly in size, and in the shape of the rosette markings. They are very reckless and prone to charge when wounded, and their teeth inflict a more poisonous bite than that of a tiger, and great care should be taken in attacking them. To often new hands will go after them alone or with inadequate weapons.

The sloth bear (*Ursus labiatus*) is a comical-looking fellow, nothing like so formidable-looking as the comparatively mild black or brown bears of Kashmir; but "Labiatus" is very quick, and often charges quite unprovoked. He is not an easy target, being half fat.

On one occasion I was after a bison when I was attacked without the slightest provocation by a she-bear, which puffed out of a cave a hundred yards above us on a steep slope, shuffled down at us like lightning, and reached the top of a boulder only four yards from where my shikari and I were standing. I only had time to get bison out of my head and think of bear, point the rifle over the top of the rock, and let fly at her "neck tie"—the throat patch of white fur—as she topped the rock preparatory to rolling down on us. Running up round the rock, we found her lying seven yards away from where we had stopped on the path to look up. Since then I have always treated the "sloth bear" with considerable respect.

Mention has not yet been made of the extreme west of India, Sind and Baluchistan. From the west of Sind can be got the South Sea (*Capra agagrus*), and in Baluchistan the Trans-Indus markhor, which has horns with a closed violet-like spiral twist, different from the open corkscrew twist of the Astor variety.

(Separate articles on Tiger and His Blood will be found on pages 23 and 26-27.—Ed.)



OVIS POLI

The Blue Riband of Himalayan Sport