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Winter Sport in Virginia and North Carolina

The following excerpt from an article in "Field and Stream," by H.C. Herring, M.D., graphically describes [waterfowl hunting] on Ocracoke Island:

"What about geese and ducks? You always bring back a lot. Where do you go?" I told him there was only one section which would completely answer all demands of the amateur and professional sportsman, and that was on the Island of Ocracoke.

"To supply the necessary information I turned to a map of North Carolina and placed my finger on a little island, midway between Capes Lookout and Hatteras, where could be found more fowl from November until March than at any other point in America. And to the continued enjoyment of the sportsmen be it said, they are less migratory than elsewhere. They are satisfied to remain until their flight for the North in the spring. I also told him that the best gunning was over-and to come. The first period was from November 15th until the first of January, since after their long flight there was more or less of a mix-up, and at this time the new arrivals would continually fly around looking for their mates, and would readily stool to almost anything. Not much hunting during this period, they are not very wild. For still another reason it is the ideal time-the hunter can remain in the blind the entire day and suffer no discomfort. The same conditions are true during the month of March, when they are mating and selecting leaders for the different squads to pilot them in their long flight to the North. After hearing all this, my friend heaved a sigh and asked me if I could not arrange my business and go with him. A hasty reflection over my professional duties enables me to locate a gap where I could put in ten days; so I told him on the following Monday morning we would be off for the hunting ground.

"We arrived at our destination about 6:00 o'clock and at once fell into the hands of that hospitable old lady, Mrs. Bragg, renowned for the incomparable meals that she provides for half-famished sportsmen and visitors. After we had disposed of a hot supper and hermetically sealed it with an oyster roast, we called upon "Old Kit" to go after our prince of hunters, Bill Gaskill.

"About 9:00 o'clock Bill arrived, and then there welled afresh a new variety of epithets because he had not mastered the art or doctrine of telepathy. After the epithetical

atmosphere had cleared, Bill broke the silence and said: "You fellows get your baggage and go aboard the "Honk"- you'll have no business coming ashore again until you get ready to come home. If you want luck you've got to stay with the fowl." The "Honk" is a houseboat, complete in all its appointments, and under the management of its captain it does enable one to live with the fowl. It is propelled by a gas engine. Amidship there is a commodious saloon, which will nicely accommodate four persons, and its unique construction admirably answers the demands of a sleeping, sitting and mess room. Here the sportsman can even realize the whispers of fancy. After a day's hunt, no trouble getting ashore, tugging up to the hotel and making a complete change so as to be presentable for supper and the sitting-room; you simply stay aboard the "Honk," surrounded by game.

"After a day's hard shooting, the wild fowl are frightened and scattered, and the best sport is not on that particular reef on the morrow, but another point, all the way from fifteen to forty miles distant. Baron Munchausen never spent the night in a houseboat anchored on the feeding ground of water fowl- if he ever had, there would have been another chapter of his "Travels." The din is indescribably grand and deafening; yet this music from a million throats is as sweet and inspiring as the whisper of a maiden. It convalesces the grumbler; it restores to health the dyspeptic, and is an anesthetic to every ail and condition- complete happiness. Luna sheds her silvery rays upon the heavenly scene, and distinctly visible are many victims of the morrow, gliding around, bent upon discovery or to satisfy their curiosity. But Bill's orders are to fire no guns at night.

"The long hours of darkness had passed. Stepping on deck for a minute to further enjoy the scene we were promptly called to breakfast. The sleeping apartment had been changed into a messroom, and the table groaned with the delicious viands. Slices cut from the breast of duck or goose and properly fried supply a dish fit for the gods.

"Just before sunrise we were in the blinds with live decoys placed around. When a goose or duck is only slightly crippled it is caught and carefully cared for. It soon gets over its fright and in a few days will eat from the hand. Later it is used to lure its feathered friends into trouble.

"The first day was calm, and consequently there was a low tide, but we had enough sport to give a keen anticipation for the next day's work- eleven geese and twenty-seven ducks was our bag. The following day was an ideal one, with a sharp, northwest wind that chilled to the marrow. We shot and shot, until the relish for sport had actually come to an end- numb fingers, aching feet, all suggested to Bill to take us aboard the "Honk."

"The fowl are here, and all that is necessary is to follow the hints already given, which will

both suit the delicate in health and test the nerve of the most hardy. In starting for the blind leave your overcoat behind. It is not only cumbersome, but will cause many a good shot to go wrong. Provide yourself with a waterproof suit, and thus clad, the wind cannot enter and there is a perfect freedom of the arms in handling the gun.”