

California Wild Game

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California was somewhat deficient in varieties of game from the southwest. But what it lacked in variety, it more than compensated in quantity.

At the head of large game was the grizzly and cinamonⁿ bears, next came the elk, black tailed deer and antelope. All except the elk were abundant. The bears rather uncomfortably so far to stockmen. They were neither Jews nor Mohammedan, but were the greatest pork eaters I ever knew and never objected to a young colt or calf or a good melon patch.

The average citizen though he had no love for him, was willing to leave him alone, if Mr. Bear would do likewise. I never knew of their killing, but one man in our immediate vicinity, a little more than a mile from our house. We caught a huge old fellow in a log trap and had bear meat galore, but it is poor eating.

The California elk was a magnificent animal and sometimes dressed 700 pounds with antlers six feet wide. They were not so plentiful in the valleys as the other game, choosing the mountains for their home. Their flesh is rich, juicy and fairly tender.

The black tailed deer claimed a home wherever there was timber or thickets and their number was legion. The Indians never hunted them so they increased like a flock of sheep and were an easy prey to the hunters rifle. In the winter of 56-7 two hunters on the head of Stony Creek collected 600 skins leaving the meat. Such vandalism soon greatly diminished the supply.

The antelope is a plains' animal and only takes to the mountains for self protection. I have seen drove (the always go in droves) after drove on the plains where the towns of Williams and Willows now stand, if I estimated 200 in a band. They are the prettiest and most symmetrical animal, both in form and motion I ever saw. They don't bound like a deer when running, but seem to move almost without effort and on a perfectly horizontal line.

The flesh of a fat antelope is the best meat I ever ate. We depended the first two years of our stay entirely on game for our meat supply. It cost just one half as much as beef. Hunters supplied us just as the butcher wagons do rural districts now.

After the winter floods the water on the plains were confined to water holes. The hunter laid at the holes in the afternoon, killed what he wanted for the next day and had them all sold out before noon and returned to the holes for another supply. A hunter told me he killed four at one shot with a rifle.

The result was in two years they had about all been killed off or run back into the mountains. It was more difficult to kill elk and deer and they were fairly plentiful when antelope hunting ceased. The antelope is difficult to stalk, has a keen scent and shuns all kinds of cover and when in the open always keep sentinels out. Their carcasses weighed from 60 to 80 pounds.

Our game supply was precarious after the antelope was gone. We still had elk and deer when the hunter was successful. Of small game we had none, but ground squirrels and waterfowls. , But the supply was limitless.

Were I able to write a true statement of the numbers I could hardly expect to be believed. If I were to attempt to I would do it by acres instead attempting the number of fowls.

They embraced all varieties so far as I know common to America. Four distinct varieties of geese and every kind of duck I ever had or have seen besides ~~of~~ an endless variety of the snipe and gull families.

We killed and ate our own geese and ducks. One weeks consumption 36 mallards and three geese and still they were good. I have looked out over a level plain and as far as I could see it looked like a compact flock of geese. I have seen the foothills 12 miles from home look like they were covered with snow for miles so thick were the white brants.