

[How Snipe Hunting Was Invented]

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview 8

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th Street, NYC

DATE December 27, 1938

SUBJECT "HOW SNIPE HUNTING WAS INVENTED" (An Uncle Steve Robertson story)

1. Date and time of interview December 23, 1938
2. Place of interview Harry Reece's Book Store, 63 Washington Square, South, NYC
3. Name and address of informant Harry Reece, 63 Washington Square, South, NYC
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

(See previous interviews—11/29; 12/15)

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

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SUBJECT "HOW SNIPE HUNTING WAS INVENTED" (An Uncle Steve Robertson story)

My Uncle Steve Robertson who was a great pioneer of the very far west in his day, and which was a very early day indeed, told me how he invented "snipe hunting with sacks" one time when we were hunting deer in the mountains on the divide between Price Valley and Salmon Meadows, in the upper Weiser River country, in Idaho.

We had left our camp on Beaver Creek early in the morning and climbed up the divide to the summit and then hunted along the ridge but had seen nothing to shoot at larger than a pine squirrel and which, of course, did not interest us because we were carrying 30-30 rifles and had we shot a pine squirrel with a 30-30 rifle there would have been nothing left of the squirrel except possibly the spot where he had been sitting.

So we paid no attention to pine squirrels but kept on hunting for deer. Anyhow, Uncle Steve had said that if we hunted along the ridge we were on, we would 'more'n likely get at least a three-point 2 buck an' I'Gawd, maybe a five-point one, nobody could tell!

Since I was the "tenderfoot" of the two-man expedition and Uncle Steve, who knew all about shooting bear, hunting deer and fighting Indians was the "old timer", I was willing to take his word for it.

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But eventually, I got pretty tired and we sat down on a log to rest. It was my suggestion that we sit down. Uncle Steve, who was at that time probably about seventy years old, very lean and straight as an Indian, and whose gray eyes were still keen enough and quick enough to line an ivory bead-sight down a rifle barrel till it was squarely on the shoulder of a deer while it was in mid-air between one jump and the next jump, seemed to be rather disgusted with anyone who got tired enough to have to sit down and rest....

"'I'Gawd, us settin' here on this log restin' and jest waitin' for a danged fool buck deer to come along to be shot, instead of keepin' on and jumpin' 'em up for ourselves, makes me feel like a cussed 'snipe hunter' holdin' a sack an' waitin' for somebody to drive the damned snipes into it for him," Uncle Steve said. "But, I - gosh, that's the way some people are... they want somebody else to do the 'scairin' up' for 'em, and all they want to do is the ketchin'... they jest want to set there and 'hold th' sack!"

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"That's the way a feller was that was with our outfit oncet when Bob White and Mam, 'Mam' was Bob's wife, and me were migratin' from Arkansas out west one time..,

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"This feller's name was Slocum, Brad Slocum, and he was one of these tender-actin' persons that was always wantin' somebody else to do it, whatever it was, for him instead of doin' it for hisself. Well, it wasn't long till we'd changed his name from Brad to 'Babe' Slocum... 'cause that's jest the way he was, always wantin' somebody to hand him whatever he wanted instead of reachin' for it himself...

"Well, we let him come along 'cause he said he wanted to git out west, but th' further west we got th' tenderer he seemed to git and when we was quite a ways out on th' Platte River he jest got to be unbearable and so I invented 'huntin' snipes with a sack' to give him a

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chance to set and set and jest keep on settin' and wait as long as he damned please for somebody else to do it for him...

“The way it was, there was lots of snipes along the Platte where we was travelin' and every night when we'd camp you could hear them hollerin' jest as if they was invitin' somebody to come out and shoot a bunch of them and turn them into 'snipe pies'— and I'Gawd, snipe pie's good if you ever tasted anything that was really good!

“This feller, 'Babe' Slocum had eat snipe pie and knowed how good it was and every night when we'd camp and hear them snipe down along the swamps beside th' Old Platte River, chirpin, and singin', he'd start in teasin' Bob or me to go down there and git a mess of them so Mam could make a snipe pie out of them...

“And when Bob or me would say, 'Why th' hell don't you go down there and git a mess of them yourself?' he'd sort of whine and 4 say, 'to start with I don't know much about catchin' snipe and you and Bob know more about it than I do... and besides, I'm awful tired this evenin' and would rather set here in camp and rest!' I'Gawd it got to be plumb disgustin' so I figgered out: 'If he wants to 'set,' there ain't but one thing to do an' that is study up some scheme to let him set... and jest keep on settin... clean through Eternity if he wanted to; I-gosh, I wouldn't give a damn....

“So that's when I invented huntin' snipes with a sack.

“The next time he started whinin' for Bob or me to go git a mess of snipes, I jest up and said: 'Hell, you shore don't know much about huntin' snipes when you say for Bob or me, one or the other of us, to go down there and git a mess of snipes— Any danged fool ought to know it takes three men to hunt snipes. One can't do it by himself nor two can't do it, it takes three to do it... snipes is damned smart and they've got to be handled jest right or nobody ever can ketch any!'

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“that's danged funny,’ he said, ‘one man can hunt quails or two men can hunt quails and I don't see why th’ blue blazes it takes three men to hunt snipes... ain't they all birds?’ he said.

“Hell, yes, they're all birds but they're different kinds of birds and you got to hunt ‘em different... The only way to hunt quails is to hunt ‘em with a shot gun, but snipes is different, you got to drive ‘em in a sack and any danged fool ought to know one man's got to set and hold th’ sack while th’ other two men drive ‘em in it. So, 5 l'Gawd,’ I told him, ‘if you want a mess of snipe pie you got to go with Bob and me and help us git ‘em—’

“So, finally he said, ‘Well, I'm pretty tired tonight but if you'll let me set and hold th’ sack while you and Bob go and drive ‘em in it, I'll go and help you ketch a mess...’

“That's what I knowed he'd say, so I winked at Bob— we'd already talked it over and Bob knew the idea I had and the new way of huntin' snipe I had invented for Babe Slocum's 'special benefit. So, I told him, ‘Well, Bob and me's pretty tired too, but I reckon' you're tireder an' so you can hold th’ sack. Bob and me'll drive ‘em in as fast as we can and when there's a sackful you can yell and Bob and me'll come and help you carry them to camp.’

“We waited till after supper and then we took him up a gully about a half a mile from camp and which was out of sight of camp and told him to be shore and keep the mouth of the sack open so th’ snipe could come in it when we rounded up a bunch of them down by th’ Old Platte River and drove them up th’ gully...

“And l'Gawd, as far as I know he's still settin' up there in that gully waitin' for me and Bob to drive them damn snipe into his sack. Bob and me went back to camp, hitched up and drove about ten miles further and made another camp— So, that's the way it was.

“Yeah, l'Gawd, he's probably still settin' there holdin' that cussed sack open, waitin' for somebody else to drive th’ snipe into it for him... but some people is like that; all they want

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to do 6 is set and hold th' sack while somebody else does all the damned walkin' and climbin' and so forth, so they just set... and set... and hold th' doggone sack...

“But that's th' way snipe huntin' with sacks was invented, I know danged well that's the way it was, 'cause I'Gawd I invented it myself— Hell, if we're goin' to git a deer between now and next Christmas we got to go git it... nobody else ain't goin' to drive it up here on this cussed ridge for us to shoot at, while we're settin' on this darned log....”

This must have been the way this ancient American “snipe hunting game was invented”- for my Uncle Steve Robertson told me that was how it came about, and Uncle Steve... “jest couldn't endure no danged liar or any cussed man that ‘zaggerates!”