

# FROM DAYS GONE BY

## SCULPTOR IN BUCKSKIN: An autobiography by Alexander Phimister Proctor

### Another Summer in the Mountains

After weeks of solitary travel I reached the old Ute reservation, truly a happy hunting ground. The spruce and aspen covering the mountains were traversed in many directions by narrow grassy parks or meadows, and this meant fine country for game of all kinds. Through every valley and gulch ran a creek. There were game, wood, water, and grass everywhere. In a sheltered spot on the bank of a pretty creek I dumped packs and saddles, and in a few minutes the animals were knee-deep in juicy grass. With my tent up, I was ready for a long stay.

The next morning I shot a nice buck deer within a quarter of a mile of camp and promptly posed him for a model. That set the pattern for days to come. There was no sign of human beings in the daytime or campfires at night; the country was truly "mine." Every evening five buck deer came to feed in a small park about a quarter of a mile away. One of them was a gigantic old boy that made the others look like does.

One evening I heard an elk bugling about a mile away, which meant a fight, since it was mating time for the wapiti. Approaching the racket, I tied my hound to an aspen and climbed the tree. From my perch I could see two fine bulls charging about, but neither appeared ready to tackle the other.

Then, from a heavily timbered mountain close by, came a long bugle call. The two stags answered, and the new challenger came plunging down the mountainside. Scattered about the landscape were a dozen cow elk quietly feeding. Occasionally one of them would gaze at the rampaging bulls for a moment and then resume feeding, with no apparent interest in what was going on.

Another long bugle call floated down the mountain and was answered, and another bull charged onto my stage. Excitement grew, both on the ground and in the tree. The stags made short rushes, but no attacks. Then two of them squared off, hesitated a moment, and dashed together. The crash was so great that I nearly fell off my perch. I expected that their antlers would cling together and that the animals would try to down each other by main force. But to those wearers those huge antlers were as light as rapiers. Each thrust was parried with as swift a movement by the other, each stag trying for a vulnerable spot in the other's defense.

I named the two combatants Bill and Jack but played no favorites. Suddenly Bill threw his antlers back and smashed them down savagely on Jack's head. Bill tried to repeat the move, but Jack, taking advantage of the opening, dashed at him ferociously, his brow points catching Bill's neck. Then, gathering all his might, Jack dashed forward, hock-deep in the turf, and threw Bill on his side.

"He's a goner!" I gasped. But no. Quick as a flash Bill was up and with a mad rush caught Jack's belly on his brow points and heaved him clear off the ground. Jack landed on his feet, whirled, charged, and caught Bill in the side. Blood covered Bill as the two of them rolled over each other. In a minute they were on their feet, horns locked in deadly struggle. Meanwhile, the other two bulls charged frantically but didn't clinch.

Without warning still another bull plunged head down into the two fighters. Staggering, they broke away. Now there were five magnificent stags charging about menacing each other.

Suddenly the field was clear. All the animals had apparently moved through an opening into another park. As soon as I was sure they were gone I went down on to the battlefield looking for broken pieces of antlers. Then I heard a noise, and, looking in the direction the elk had gone, I saw a pair of antlers coming my way. I pulled the dog to me and dropped to one knee, just as the dim shape of another pair of antlers appeared. Soon there were five shadowy forms around us. The dog was trembling but quiet. Two of the wonderful creatures passed, circling, each taking several majestic strides and turning his head as if to study me. Then all of them whirled and crashed through the brush, plunging first to the right and then to the left into darkness.

Shouldering my rifle and calling the dog, I headed back to camp. A full moon came out, and on a barren hilltop I found a set of blanched elk horns, probably the result of an earlier combat such as the one I had just witnessed.

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A. Phimister Proctor was a professional member of the Boone and Crockett Club. Born in 1860, Proctor tells history of his 90-year lifetime as an artist and a sportsman in *Sculptor in Buckskin*

