

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

B&C FOUNDER

An excerpt from *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail*

Drawings by Frederic Remington



During the fall of 1883 Theodore Roosevelt made his first trip to the Dakota Territory where he tasted frontier life as a wild ranchman. Unfortunately a family tragedy was the catalyst that led him back there and helped shape the man who would later become the founder of the Boone and Crockett Club.

While at his office in Albany, New York, in 1884, TR received notice by telegram announcing the birth of his daughter, but also that his wife Alice was critically ill. He rushed back to New York City only to lose both his wife as well as his mother on the same day. He went back to work as New York Assemblyman at once, but longed for the beauty of the Dakotas and the happiness he had found there. Following the 1884 Republican National Convention he struck out for the Dakotas. In his book, *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail* he records his experiences from 1884-1886. Following is an excerpt from his chapter on the "Frontier Types" he encounters on his Dakota adventures...

On one of my trips to the mountains I happened to come across several old-style hunters at the same time. Two were on their way out of the woods, after having been all winter and spring without seeing a white face. They had been lucky, and their battered pack-saddles carried bales of valuable furs—fisher, sable, otter, mink, beaver. The two men, though fast friends and allies for many years, contrasted oddly. One was a short, square-built, good-humored Kanuck, always laughing and talking, who interlarded his conversation with a singularly original mixture of the most villainous French and English profanity. His partner was an American, gray-eyed, tall and

straight as a young pine, with a saturnine, rather haughty face, and proud bearing. He spoke very little, and then in low tones, never using an oath; but he showed now and then a most unexpected sense of dry humor. Both were images of bronzed and rugged strength. Neither had the slightest touch of the bully in his nature; they treated others with the respect that they also exacted for themselves. They bore an excellent reputation as being not only highly skilled in woodcraft and the use of the rifle, but also men of tried courage and strict integrity, whose word could be always implicitly trusted.

I had with me at the time a hunter who, though their equal as marksman or woodsman, was their exact opposite morally. He was a pleasant companion and useful assistant, being very hard-working, and possessing a temper that never was ruffled by anything. He was also a good-looking fellow, with honest brown eyes; but he no more knew the difference between right and wrong than Adam did before the fall. Had he been at all conscious of his wickedness, or had he possessed the least sense of shame, he would have been unbearable as a companion; but he was so perfectly pleasant and easy, so good-humoredly tolerant of virtue in

others, and he so wholly lacked even a glimmering suspicion that murder, theft, and adultery were matters of anything more than individual taste, that I actually grew to be rather fond of him. He never related any of his past deeds of wickedness as matters either for boastfulness or for regret; they were simply repeated incidentally in the course of conversation. One

time we were talking of the curious angles bullets sometimes fly off at when they ricochet. To illustrate the matter he related an experience which I shall try to give in his own words.

"One time, when I was keeping a saloon down in New Mexico, there was a man owed me a grudge. Well, he took sick of the small-pox, and the doctor told him he'd said if that was reckoned he'd come first. So he came riding in with a gun [in the West the revolver is generally called a gun] and begun shooting; but I hit him first, and afterwards rode. I started on my horse to hit him; but the little Irishman who said he'd killed a man, a



FRENCH CANADIAN TRAPPER





FRONTIER TYPES



he begged hard for me to give him my gun and let him go after the other man and finish him. So I let him go; and when he caught up, blamed if the little cuss didn't get so nervous that he fired off into the ground, and the darned bullet struck a crowbar, and glanced up, and hit the other man square in the head and killed him! Now, that was a funny shot, wasn't it?"

The fourth member of our party round the camp-fire that night was a powerfully built trapper, partly French by blood, who wore a gayly colored capote, or blanket-coat, a greasy fur cap, and moccasins. He had grizzled hair, and a certain uneasy, half-furtive look about the eyes. Once or twice he showed a curious reluctance about allowing a man to approach him suddenly from behind. Altogether his actions were so odd that I felt some curiosity to learn his history. It turned out that he had been through a rather uncanny experience the winter before. He and another man had gone into a remote basin, or inclosed valley, in the heart of the mountains, where game was very plentiful; indeed, it was so abundant that they decided to pass the winter there. Accordingly they put up a log-cabin, working hard, and merely killing enough meat for their immediate use. Just as it was finished winter set in with tremendous snow-storms. Going out to hunt, in the first lull, they found, to their consternation, that every head of game had left the valley. Not an animal was to be found therein; they had abandoned it for their winter haunts. The outlook for the two adventurers was appalling. They were afraid of trying to break out through the deep snow-drifts, and starvation stared them in the face if they

staid. The man I met had his dog with him. They put themselves on very short commons, so as to use up their flour as slowly as possible, and hunted unweariedly, but saw nothing. Soon a violent quarrel broke out between them. The other man, a fierce, sullen fellow, insisted that the dog should be killed, but the owner was exceedingly attached to it, and refused. For a couple of weeks they spoke no word to each other, though cooped in the little narrow pen of logs. Then one night the owner of the dog was wakened by the animal crying out; the other man had tried to kill it with his knife, but failed. The provisions were now almost exhausted, and the two men were glaring at each other with the rage of maddened, ravening hunger. Neither dared to sleep, for fear that the other would kill him. Then the one who owned the dog at last spoke, and proposed that, to give each a chance for his life, they should separate. He would take half of the handful of flour that was left and start off to try to get home; the other should stay where he was; and if he tried to follow the first, he was warned that he would be shot without mercy. A like fate was to be the portion of the wanderer if driven to return to the hut. The arrangement was agreed to and the two men separated, neither daring to turn his back while they were within rifle-shot of each other. For two days the one who went off toiled on with weary weakness through the snow-drifts. Late on the second afternoon, as he looked back from a high ridge, he saw in the far distance a black speck against the snow, coming along on his trail. His companion was dogging his footsteps. Immediately he followed his own trail back a little and lay in ambush. At dusk his companion came

stealthily up, rifle in hand, peering cautiously ahead, his drawn face showing the starved, eager ferocity of a wild beast, and the man he was hunting shot him down exactly as if he had been one. Leaving the body where it fell, the wanderer continued his journey, the dog staggering painfully behind him. The next evening he baked his last cake and divided it with the dog. In the morning, with his belt drawn still tighter round his skeleton body, he once more set out, with apparently only a few hours of dull misery between him and death. At noon he crossed the track of a huge timberwolf; instantly the dog gave tongue, and, rallying its strength, ran along the trail. The man struggled after. At last his strength gave out and he sat down to die; but while sitting still, slowly stiffening with the cold, he heard the dog baying in the woods. Shaking off his mortal numbness, he crawled towards the sound, and found the wolf over the body of a deer that he

had just killed, and keeping the dog from it. At the approach of the new assailant the wolf sullenly drew off, and man and dog tore the raw deer-flesh with hideous eagerness. It made them very sick for the next twenty-four hours; but, lying by the carcass for two or three days, they recovered strength. A week afterwards the trapper reached a miner's cabin in safety. There he told his tale, and the unknown man who alone might possibly have contradicted it lay dead in the depths of the wolf-haunted forest. ■

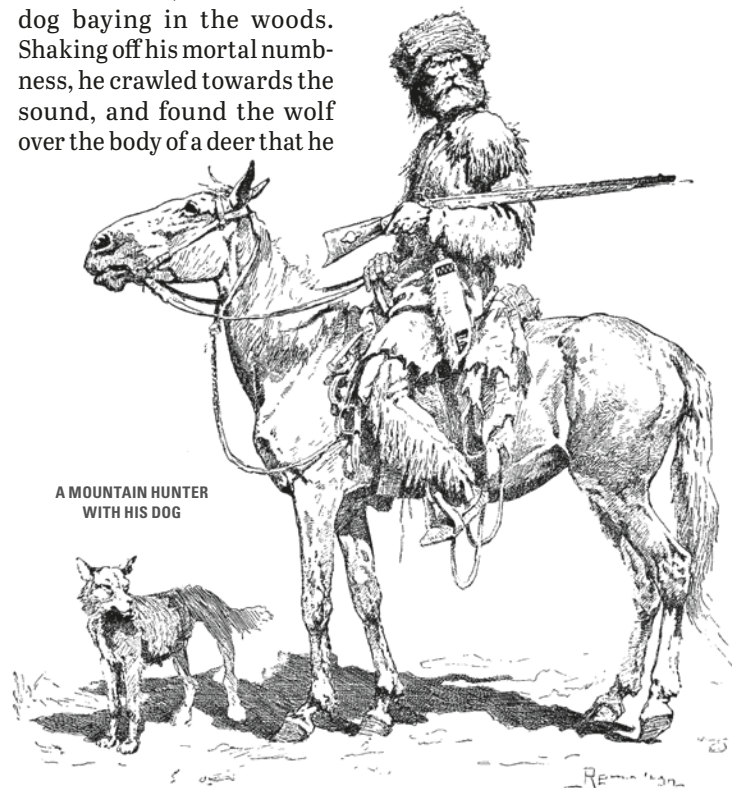
Throughout TR's travels he encountered many unique characters including mountain hunters, trappers, cowboys, claimjumpers, cattle thieves, horse thieves, man killers, and frontier women. For more tales of the Dakotas, read TR's Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail now available as part of the B&C Classics Series.



Order your copy of Theodore Roosevelt's *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*

Contact B&C at 888-840-4868 or boone-crockett.org

Paperback \$24.95
Associates pay only \$19.95
Also available as an ebook from major online retailers



A MOUNTAIN HUNTER WITH HIS DOG