

Scouting on Two Continents

By Major Frederick R. Burnham, Doubleday, Page & Company, Garden City, NY 1926, 370 pages. Foreword by Boone and Crockett member, John Hays Hammond.

Taking Chances

By Major Frederick R. Burnham, privately printed 1944, 293 pages.

Frederick Burnham was a Boone and Crockett Club member, probably as a result of his close friendship with Theodore Roosevelt, who was his great admirer. Although he was an American citizen, his exploits in Africa were better known in Great Britain, and the American public knew little of his incredibly adventurous life.

Burnham was born in Minnesota in 1860. In 1862, Indian raiders emboldened by the depleted conditions of the settlements, many of whose menfolk had departed to fight in the Civil War, terrorized the countryside and massacred the inhabitants of New Ulm. At that time, Burnham's family lived nearby, about 20 miles from Mankato. While his father was away seeking supplies, his mother saw an Indian raiding party approaching. Realizing that she could not flee fast enough with a two year old child, she hid him in a stack of newly shucked corn and cautioned him to remain silent. When she returned to her burned out cabin in the morning, she found her son had obeyed instructions and remained silent. His life had been spared and it was his start to a lifetime of high adventure.

By the time he was eighteen, Burnham was fighting the Apaches in Arizona. He hunted for gold in the Southwest, the Northwest and the Klondike. He learned to track and hide his tracks better than the Indians and his adversaries. During this time he became fascinated with the exploits of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa.

Burnham's attraction led to a move to Africa where he developed

a close association with Rhodes and his right-hand man, Dr. Jameson. He and Frederick Selous became the chief scouts for the small group of pioneers who conquered Rhodesia and defeated forever the ruling Matabele (Zulus) whose impi (regiments) vastly outnumbered them.

During the Boer War, Burnham became the Chief Scout for Lord Roberts who commanded the British army. His exploits as a scout were incredible. During this time he developed a close friendship with major (later Lord) Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, and they collaborated on many ideas for the future development of young people. Burnham later instigated the name of a mountain in the California Sierras, Mount Baden-Powell, for his admired friend.

Great Britain awarded Burnham with the rank of Major and the Distinguished Service Order, while allowing him to retain his American citizenship. He and his wife lived their later years in California. It is not surprising that Theodore Roosevelt would be attracted to Burnham. John Hays Hammond wrote: "I recall spending several hours with Roosevelt and Burnham after a luncheon at the White House to which we had been invited by President Roosevelt, and no higher tribute could be paid to the absorbing interest of Burnham's narrative of South African adventures than the mute

admiration of Roosevelt as he listened without interrupting."

Just after the turn of the century, during a time when new U.S. forest reserves were set up and there was a concern that world wildlife was being depleted, Roosevelt along with Chief Forester, Gifford Pinchot, and with the support of Burnham and others, proposed that our forest reserves and national parks be stocked with African wild animals. Bill HR 23621 to this end progressed nicely. Little seems to be known today about this legislation or the fact that it was defeated by one vote!

Frederick Burnham was modest and it apparently took much coaxing to get him to write his memoirs. He wrote only two books and if you read either of them you will not be disappointed. He was quite a man! ▲▲▲



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