



THE LEGENDARY HUNTS OF
THEODORE ROOSEVELT

An excerpt from the upcoming book, *The Legendary Hunts of Theodore Roosevelt* by John Seerey-Lester. Due out this winter in a special Boone and Crockett Edition.

SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO THE CANE BRAKES

1907

In his second term as president, Theodore Roosevelt made a return visit to hunt black bear in the canebrakes of the Mississippi Delta. On this outing in the fall of 1907, TR was determined to hunt in the traditional way of the Delta, using horse, hound, and horn. On his previous bear hunt in Mississippi, he had come away disappointed after the entire hunt had turned into a circus and publicity spectacle.



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Upon his arrival in Louisiana, the president made it clear he did not want a repeat of the previous misadventure. He arrived in the company of Dr. Presley M. Rixey, surgeon-general of the US Navy, and his hunting companion and friend, Dr. Alexander Lambert. They were the guests of Louisiana's future governor, John M. Parker, and John A. McIlhenny, founder of the Tabasco Sauce empire, who had arranged the hunt.

TR was fascinated with the sporting traditions of the region and was looking forward to hunting in the almost virgin wilderness. He was also pleased to be in the company of so many expert bear hunters.

In particular, he was delighted that the party would include Ben Lilly, the famous bear hunter, along with Holt Collier, a former slave who had guided TR on his first visit to the region in 1902. With Collier were two young Mississippians, Clive and Harley Metcalfe.

TR had done a lot of reading on the exploits of such legendary bear hunters as Davy Crockett, John (Grizzly) Adams, and Wade Hampton III. He had also gained something of a reputation for bear hunting in his own right.

Collier and the Metcalfes brought a pack of 22 bear hounds, bringing the total number of dogs to 34. The Metcalfes and Collier, along with the loquacious Lilly, soon took control of the hunt.

On the first night at camp, there had been a great deal of discussion about the number of hunters and dogs for so few bears. TR was particularly disappointed that he had been assigned to hunt from a stand. He wanted to be out on horseback with the

dogs riding the bear to bay.

Their first camp was at Tensas Bayou, and during the initial few days one bear was shot, though no one was able to drive a bruin to TR. The Metcalfes claimed there were plenty of bears, but that they had probably been scared off when the scouts searched for sign and cut numerous trails prior to the hunt.

Ben Lilly, who had killed over 120 bears during his lifetime, suggested they relocate to another hunting area, and Collier and the Metcalfes concurred. The change was somewhat disconcerting to the hunt organizers who had spent several weeks cutting trails and clearing campsites. Nonetheless, the president's camp was moved about 20 miles south to Tallulah at Bear Lake. It was here that Louisiana farmer Ichabod Osborn and his son Tom joined the hunt.

It was the same set-up as before: the hunters at one campfire, the local black handlers and dogs at a separate fire. True to form, TR spent most of his time at the locals' fire, sharing stories. This eventually led to both camps coming together.

TR enjoyed seeing and hearing all the wildlife around the camp. As a keen birder and conservationist, he was interested in everything around him, from mockingbirds, brightly colored finches, cardinals, and warblers to the many owls and woodpeckers, the most notable being the ivory-bill (now extinct). TR spotted three of the ivory-bills, which he described as being nosy but very wary.

Initially, the trip organizers intended that TR should sit in a stand at the new camp. But Collier, who had hunted with the president

before, instructed Clive Metcalfe to take the president and stalk on foot and horseback.

"He ain't no baby," Collier said to Clive, "and don't put him in no more stands."

This must have pleased TR immensely as he headed out of the camp with the hounds, riding through the canebrakes and palmettos. After a while Clive Metcalfe, who had been riding with the president and the Osborns, galloped off between two thick stands of canebrakes.

TR and the Osborns rode a different route at a gentler pace for about an hour until they heard the distant yelping of a hound. Hearing this, the three tore through the dense undergrowth, navigating deadfalls and tangled vines, which could jerk a man out of his saddle.

They soon caught up to the hounds and dismounted so they could follow the handlers and dogs on foot. They tried to walk as quietly as possible through the densely packed stalks of cane but making some noise was unavoidable.

The yelping of the dogs told the hunters that the bear was on the move, making a "walking bay." Metcalfe was able to determine the bear's direction and herded the hunters through the cane. Suddenly he pointed to a dark shape beyond the cane and motioned TR to crouch down so he could see the bear more easily.

Not far ahead, TR saw the bear treading ever so softly, actually moving toward the men. Every now and then it would stop and glance back, perhaps hoping to attack an unwary hound, like a pitcher trying to catch a player stealing a base. But the dogs were too well trained and stayed back. TR's heart was pounding as the bear closed to within 20 yards of him.

Although the bear was

difficult to see in the thick patch of cane, TR fired his rifle, hitting the animal just behind the shoulder and causing it to slump forward. Immediately the dogs raced in, followed by TR and the other men, trying to prevent the hounds from getting injured. Though mortally wounded, the bear still had a lot of fight in him and could do some serious damage to the dogs.

Approaching to within six paces of the bruin, TR fired again, killing the bear instantly. The tumultuous sounds of the worrying hounds echoed through the canebrakes, heralding a successful hunt.

The bear was a lean sow that weighed 202 pounds. They dragged the beast out to the edge of the cane and a horn was sounded to summon the other hunters.

The president was pleased with his visit to Louisiana and later credited Collier and the Metcalfes for making the hunt successful.

COMING THIS WINTER

This story, along with three others will be a part of the special Boone and Crockett Edition of John Seerey-Lester's newest release, *The Legendary Hunts of Theodore Roosevelt*. This large-format, 200-page book will feature more than 100 paintings and drawings that illustrate stories about the numerous hunts that Theodore Roosevelt was a part of in his lifetime. The Boone and Crockett Edition includes several pages of exclusive content about Theodore Roosevelt and B&C not found in the regular edition and is only available from the Boone and Crockett Club.

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THE LEGENDARY HUNTS OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT

by

JOHN SEEREY-LESTER

Acclaimed wildlife artist John Seerey-Lester takes you on a historic journey in words and paintings that will make you feel as though you were there, sharing the exciting adventures with the former president in the new book, *The Legendary Hunts of Theodore Roosevelt*.



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This much anticipated new book features over 50 true stories devoted to Roosevelt's most spectacular hunts on three continents. Complementing Seerey-Lester's fascinating text will be some 120 of his paintings and sketches, which altogether provide a fascinating glimpse into the life of the former president and his passion for wildlife and adventure.



"While there are numerous photographs of TR in hunting camps and the like, I know of only one photograph of him shooting a rifle while on the hunt. John Seerey-Lester... has filled this gap by creating more than 60 paintings of TR for this book. Seerey-Lester as you will see is more than an artist; he is a historian who embraces his subjects, and especially TR, both accurately and dramatically."

—TWEED ROOSEVELT

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