

ANTELOPE TRAPPING IN THE WEST

How the Navajo Indians Slaughter Them in Large Numbers.

FLAGSTAFF, Arizona, Sept. 28.—The Navajo Indians of New-Mexico are considered by students of anthropology and the officers in the garrisons in the Indian country of the Southwest the most ingenious and sport-loving redskins within the domain of Uncle Sam. The unique manner of the Navajoes in catching antelopes is interesting, and is unknown by thousands of people even in the far West. Thousands of graceful antelopes still abound upon the vast tablelands of New-Mexico and Arizona, notwithstanding the incursions of the railroads and constant coming of hunters, settlers, and lumbermen in the Territories.

In the country just south of the Navajo Reservation, and between it and the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, one frequently comes upon long, straight rows of the trunks of trees and the branches of cedar and pine, stretching for miles across these treeless plains. In many places they are nearly rotted away, and only the larger limbs and trunks now mark these lines. These are the ruins of ancient antelope corrals or pens. The large bands of antelopes have long since been destroyed in this part of the country, and only small herds of from five to ten can be seen. These are mostly hunted down upon the American or white man's plan. However, directly south of Winslow, about fifty miles distant, large bands of these graceful creatures still roam, and there is in existence there a new corral that is in running order at the present time. It is here that the old men of the tribe, who believe in the ancient manner of catching game, enjoy their annual hunt.

This corral was built in 1890 by the order of the old chief, Gano Mumcho, and his son, Many Horses. A place was selected where a slight hill was found upon the border of a wide prairie. Not even a sagebrush could be seen, and trees for the corral had to be brought from the cedar-covered hills nearly ten miles away. They were cut and dragged to the place by the men and boys on horseback. A close pen, circular in form, about 100 feet across, was first built against the steep side of the hill, so that the tops of the posts used could not be seen from the opposite side. Two lines of trees were then dragged and laid loosely upon the ground, but close enough to appear like a brush fence. These lines at the pen are about twenty yards apart and run almost parallel for a hundred yards or so, and then spread apart at an angle of about thirty degrees and extend across the plains for four and a half or five miles.

When the party reaches the corral for the annual hunt the chief selects the officers, four to watch each point of the compass around the pen. For each a pit is dug deep enough to put him out of sight. The less space required the more the occupant is esteemed and considered worthy of promotion later on. The chief and his assistant then take their places at the right side of the entrance to the pen, standing in a hole dug for the purpose, and just deep enough to hide all except their heads. From five to eight Indians, on the fleetest horses, are sent out at daybreak to surround a band of antelopes and head them toward the corral. The antelope when startled keeps as far as possible away from any place where an enemy might be hiding; hence they keep as far away from the wings of the corral, which are on either side of them, as they can. After being closed in upon they cannot turn back, as the drivers are in hot pursuit, and they make a dash for the top of the hill, which to them appears to be the only opening between the horrid lines of brush fence. But, alas! for them, they find themselves inclosed in a stout pen, around which they run in a circle, never trying to jump over. The shouts and yells of the Indians at length so completely terrify the poor animals that they stand trembling and apparently unconscious of the Indians, who now approach and kill them with clubs, hatchets, stones, or anything at hand. As many as 250 have been caught at one time in this manner, and for wholesale destruction of game it surpasses any murdering process in vogue, and should be stopped entirely.

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