



BY DAVID W. FENTON.

FOR the past twenty years annual jack-rabbit hunts and drives have taken place in the arid regions of the West, where there are five species of rabbit, of which the black-tailed jacks are the most numerous. Feeding on shrubs, bark of trees, vegetables, alfalfa, or anything green, and slaking thirst with the juice of the cactus pads, these "narrow-gauge mules," as they are often called, can live on the most unyielding soil.

The devastations in Australia by rabbits are well known. The damage to a single county in California one year reached \$600,000. That a county of Idaho has spent \$30,000 in bounties shows that the Western settlers are alive to the threatening danger. Many devices have been directed against these swift-footed pests. Poison, inoculation, fencing, the use of traps and electricity, have all been tried with varying success. Epidemics of disease among the jacks, and their natural enemies, the coyote, gray wolf, and the large hawks and eagles, have each contributed toward their destruction. But the large hunts and drives in the infested country have brought the greatest benefit to the ranchmen, and afforded much diversion to many enthusiastic hunters.

The sixth annual jack-rabbit hunt at Lamar, Col., last December, proved a great success, both in the number of jacks killed and the sport given the hunters. This yearly hunt has become a fixture in the State, and is anticipated by many enthusiasts. It is led by a gentleman of the "cloth," widely known as the "Parson."

A special train left Denver, carrying over a hundred sportsmen. The number was increased all along the route, until two hundred hunters assembled on the plains about Lamar on the

morning of the first day's hunt. The farmers, ranchmen and cattlemen, had driven to town, and each took care of from three to five hunters. The wagons wheeled slowly in the same general direction, at intervals of about two hundred yards.

Each squad of gunners preceded its wagon, which was used for carrying the game, and often a tired sportsman.

A few inches of snow had whitened the brown prairies, which glistened in the morning sunlight. Occasionally a long-eared jack could be seen dozing in his "form" behind a bunch of sage or chaparral.

Starting suddenly from their warm beds, the rabbits bounded away in long, swift leaps. The flash from a smokeless shell, followed by a dull report, told the same story in all directions. Toppling over, the jacks straightened out and died, without the squall so characteristic of the cotton-tails.

When started from his form, the jack-rabbit has a curious habit of making high, slow bounds from the prairie. He jumps leisurely away, looking back over his shoulder and dragging one hind leg, as if wounded. After a few such tantalizing manœuvres, he realizes his danger, lays his black ears down between his shoulders, stretches out, and skims the ground with twenty-foot bounds. It is a pretty sight to see a knowing jack put distance between himself and danger. Skimming away toward the horizon, he loses his characteristics and looks like a long, white, moving streak. As a graceful, fast runner, the jack's only peer is the lithe greyhound.

Toward evening the wagons began to arrive with various numbers of killed jacks. A huge rack, some five feet high and three hundred feet long, had been erected on the main street of the town. The rabbits were dressed, hung over the

horizontal rails in tiers, and left there to cool. Owing to the cold weather and blowing snow, the total of two thousand or more was small, compared with previous years.

The second day dawned clear and cold. The first streamers of daylight found an increased number of sportsmen, trying to break the previous day's record. The same general plan was pursued, but with a different line of march through some tempting alfalfa fields. The jacks were numerous. Occasionally attention was attracted to the skies, where the approach of a long V made every one crouch for a wing shot. Flocks of geese, the big gray fellows, often suffered the penalty of being more tempting than the jacks.

The noonday lunch added vigor and increased enthusiasm. In many of these lurching squads, dotted over the prairies, various wagers were made, on account of violent discussions regarding which feet of a rabbit made the separate marks of its track. The triangular track of a rabbit? with the fourth imprint trailing behind, was well known to all. So many, even of the patriarchs of these hunts, maintained that the forefeet, naturally and of course, made the front imprints, that a court of inquiry and judges were appointed. Careful inspection was given several jacks on the run. The size of the two different pairs of imprints of each track was compared with the feet of the rabbit. It was found that the hind feet were considerably larger and corresponded with the larger front tracks. It was finally decided and clearly proved that the hind feet made the front tracks, and the forefeet, while landing on the ground first, made the two rear imprints. The decision caused much surprise.

In a broad, open field, the track of a rabbit suddenly came to an abrupt close. There was evidence of a small battle. Fluttering off toward the south a bald eagle, clutching in his talons a struggling jack, disclosed the secret.

Such great numbers of rabbits were added to the large rack that the timbers were almost hidden from view by gray fur. When the last teams had arrived, there were 4,576 rabbits, 117 wild geese, and a wolf to show for the work of the two days' hunt. The game was packed away in a refrigerator car and shipped to Pueblo and Denver to feed

the poor. In the latter city the "Parson" distributed over twelve tons of meat, which provided many a glad Christmas dinner. In order to avoid the "repeaters," who, in previous years, had received more than their share, all wishing a rabbit were corraled behind a fenced inclosure. As each stepped out a six-pound jack was his Christmas portion.

The gratitude of the farmers was clearly shown by their generous hospitality. The benefit they receive from these hunts is unmistakable. Though in previous years as many as five thousand rabbits were killed on a single hunt, each year adds to the list. During the past six years over twenty-eight thousand have been shot about Lamar, while great numbers have fallen to individual hunters.

The drive is the most successful mode of exterminating the rabbits. The custom comes down from the Mission Indians, who used to capture the animals for food, making the skins into clothing. A net made from hemp was kept in a vertical position by sticks set at short intervals. Armed with clubs, the squaws were left to guard the net. The bucks, mounted on wild broncos, tore wildly over the plains, yelling and beating the brush with long sticks. The frightened jacks ran into the net and succumbed to the blows from the clubs. The Utes of Utah and the Moki Indians of Arizona used similar methods in their hunts.

The California drives follow a modification of the aboriginal custom. Wire netting some three feet high is divided into portable sections, and set up in the form of a wide-spreading V. These wings often extend two or three miles in each direction. They converge in a circular corral about one hundred feet in diameter, "Rabbit Day" is celebrated each year in many towns by a mammoth drive. It is a general holiday. Settlers drive in from neighboring towns, the railroads run excursions, and every kind of vehicle joins the procession. The wagons spread out and begin a slow march toward the corral. Great numbers of beaters are on foot, thrashing the bushes with sticks and clubs. Gradually the flanks narrow toward the circular inclosure, where great numbers of frantic animals run into the death-traps. Some run aimlessly about in

utter confusion, while others take the back track, falling before the clubs of the closing lines. Curiously enough, the jacks never attempt to jump the fence, which ordinarily would be an easy matter for their long hind legs. Fear seems to deprive them of this power.

Then comes the merciless slaughter. A blow on the head or just behind the ears brings instantaneous death. The inclosure is covered with dead jacks two or three deep. During the huge drive at Fresno, Cal., the number of killed jacks was estimated at 20,000, some 8,000 people taking part in the drive.

a public barbecue disposes of much of the meat, while considerable is shipped to the large cities, which afford a fair market. In the counties offering bounties, the scalps are returned as evidence. Little or no use is made of the skins, although the United States import each year many thousands of these pelts to be utilized for fur or made into felt.

The annual hunts in Utah around Thanksgiving have had good results. Dogs are often used to start up the rabbits, which are then picked off by the hunters. Another practice, of selecting two captains, is often employed. Each captain with his following forms an attacking party. The opposing forces proceed from opposite directions, driving the game toward each other. Clubs are the only weapons used. Many jacks escape, but this method of driving affords much amusement, as the friendly rivalry of the opposing sides is a strong incentive for vigorous work.

The various forms of open and inclosed coursing of jack-rabbits with greyhounds has given royal sport in a number of the Western States. In this way not a few jacks are killed each year. With inclosed coursing, the captured jacks are let loose in an inclosure from which there is no escape. It is only a matter of a few moments before they are turned and run down by the swift greyhounds. Open coursing gives the rabbit a greater chance for his life, while the spectators have less opportunity of witnessing the whole chase.

The meetings of the National Coursing Association are anticipated with eager interest in the West. The yearly tests have brought into competition some great runners, made famous by victories in Kansas, Colorado or California.

From a total number of two hundred and thirty large hunts and drives throughout the West, the country has been rid of a half million of rabbits, three-fourths of which were killed in California. The natural agencies of extermination and this incessant warfare against jack-rabbits have tended to produce diminishing numbers. Concentrated inter-State action in regard to giving bounties and united efforts on the part of settlers would tend to minimize the threatening danger from rabbits. Rut experience has shown the jack quite capable of holding his own in spite of the march of civilization. In fact he has become a menace to agriculture in Colorado, California and Utah, and the slightest relaxation of the drive would result in devastation there.



THE FIRST ARRIVALS IN THE CORRAL.