

Travel.

SALMON FISHING IN HOKKAIDO.

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THE following account of a fishing expedition which I made in the summer of 1910 to the island of Hokkaido may be useful to officers in the Corps whose lot it may be to serve in the "Far East"—viz., Singapore, Hong Kong or North China.

With the exception of an interesting article in the February number of the *Badminton Magazine* for 1910, by Major Lavita, D.S.O., late R.H.A., I do not know of any literature bearing on this subject.

Hokkaido, so named by the Japanese since it was taken over by them, was formerly known as "Yesso." It is a large island situated some 50 or 60 miles north of the main Island of Japan, and due east of Vladivostock. Its scenery is very fine, it is well wooded, and intersected by numerous fine rivers, which at certain seasons of the year, June and July, contain large quantities of very fine sporting fish known locally as "masu," which correspond to our grilse. They are in appearance and behaviour indistinguishable from our own fish, being pink-fleshed; they make capital eating. The fish take the fly readily and give quite as good sport as our own salmon at home do.

The masu "run" begins in the southern rivers early in June, taking place later as we proceed north, and terminates about the end of July, after which they cease to rise to the fly. The fish run up the rivers from the sea to spawn. Large numbers are caught by the Japanese and Ainus in traps of various descriptions. The fish are very highly prized as an article of diet, and high prices are paid for them in the large towns.

Amongst the Ainus they form the staple article of diet. These people are rapidly becoming extinct with the advance of civilization, they are simple savages and an interesting people to see, and are commonly spoken of as the "Hairy Ainus," owing to the amount of hair that grows all over their bodies.

But this a digression. To return to our subject, I cannot do better than to relate my own itinerary and experience. We will assume that the traveller arrives at Tokyo on June 1st, and puts up at the hotel of the same name, which I can recommend. The

first thing that he will have to do is to obtain a "boy" to act as his cook, camp servant, and factotum generally; he must be strong and able to speak a little English, as only Japanese is spoken once the traveller gets off the beaten track. Inquiries for a "boy" must be made at the hotel or through friends, sometimes a "boy" can be obtained through the agency of the "Welcome Society," which can be joined on payment of 3 yen (a yen = 2s.). This Society has been formed for the purpose of assisting foreigners visiting the country; but care should be taken to avoid engaging anyone of the nature of a "guide," who is very expensive and quite useless for the purpose. I obtained my "boy" through the help of an officer in the Indian Army, who



A GROUP OF AINUS.

was then studying the Japanese language, and who very kindly lent me his own servant. As salary I paid him one yen a day and his expenses, which did not amount to much, as fish and rice formed his chief article of diet. Having secured his servant the sportsman should waste no time in Tokyo making purchases, but should at once proceed to Sapporo by rail. Before leaving Tokyo and civilization, I should recommend him to leave all superfluous non-sporting kit at the hotel where he is staying, the manager of the hotel will always readily take charge of it till the owner's return. Sapporo is a large Japanese town in Hokkaido, with some 80,000 inhabitants. It takes forty-four hours to reach

it from Tokyo. The railway service is very good, the trains being supplied with up-to-date restaurant cars and sleeping berths, and the fares are moderate. The passage across the Straits between Japan and Hokkaido is done very comfortably, excellent up-to-date steamers meet the principal trains. Timing himself to reach Sapporo, say, about June 5 or 6, the traveller should make this town his headquarters. There is a nice Japanese inn close to the station where good accommodation can be obtained, and where European food is supplied. There are several large shops in the town where all the necessary food supplies—viz., tinned meats, butter, milk, flour, oatmeal, &c., can be obtained of quite good quality and at a reasonable cost. I would not recommend the traveller to bring up any supplies from Yokohama, he will thus be saved considerable expense and trouble. The Japanese charge heavily for excess baggage on their railways. The supplies obtainable at Sapporo are quite good enough, except perhaps for the most fastidious individuals with very long purses—a class I should not recommend to undertake this trip, as they will probably have to put up with more roughing than would suit them. Sapporo also possesses a good Government bank where I would recommend the sportsman to deposit all his superfluous cash and only take up with him enough money in small notes, sufficient to pay current expenses—say 100 yen at the very outside for a three or four week's sojourn in the "wilderness," which should be ample to meet all his expenses, after he has laid in his stock of stores at Sapporo; probably he will not need half the sum. A two days' stay in this town should be sufficient to make all the necessary arrangements. Presuming that the sportsman has decided to follow the route I selected and has determined on trying the Suru river, which is one of the southern rivers, he will take train to a small wayside station called Numahatta, about five hours' railway journey. Here it is necessary to hire a "basha," or country vehicle, which is devoid of all springs and shaped after the fashion of a wagonette. A drive of about 16 miles across country, over what is supposed to be a "road," will take him to a small village called Mikawa; here he will be glad to leave his conveyance, as he will probably have experienced one of the roughest journeys, with the maximum amount of jolting, he has ever had in his life. It will be necessary to obtain another "basha" at Mikawa, and a further journey of 7 miles will take him to his first night's resting-place at a small village called Surafto, situated at the mouth of the Suru river. There is a

nice little Japanese inn here where only Japanese food can be obtained. Next day the journey should be resumed up the Suru Valley. I should recommend pony transport from this on, as the "roads" are not suitable for wheeled transport after the first 12 to 15 miles. Last year, when I made this trip, the River Suru was itself unfishable; a glance at it soon convinced me of that, so I did not attempt to fish it, but selected a large tributary of the river called Numabirakawa, which runs into the Suru river about 13 miles from its mouth. The reason why I considered it useless to waste time fishing the Suru was because the Japanese were felling large quantities of timber in its upper reaches and floating the logs down stream necessarily causing much disturbance of the water. That I was correct in my judgment was proved subsequently. Two sportsmen went up the Suru just above where I branched off, but after a week's assiduous effort with rod and fly came away in disgust without seeing a fish, though some 20 miles away I was having as fine sport as ever I had in my life. My own camp was placed in a delightful spot about 25 miles above the mouth of the Suru river, amidst most beautiful scenery and perfect surroundings. Here I stayed about a fortnight, and had capital sport from the middle to the end of June. A fair average day's catch amounts to five masu. On two of my best days I landed seven fish, averaging just under 6 lb. each. My heaviest fish on this trip weighed exactly 10 lb. All the fishing is done from the bank wading. The fish were caught on the fly, and were all gaffed and landed by myself. I was usually accompanied by one of the Ainus, who were only too willing to go out with me all day and carry my bag if I gave them the fish which I did not require for my own use; there was consequently no waste of fish. Thirty-nine pounds was the heaviest total bag I have had on any one day.

About the end of June, having exhausted my supplies, I returned to Sapporo. After renewing my stock, I decided to try the Shiribetsu River. This is one of the western rivers; it is very easy to get at. By taking train to a large country town called Kuchan, which is only about four hours journey from Sapporo, and then marching some 10 or 15 miles up the river, good sport can be obtained. This river is much more accessible than the Suru, and does not entail so much roughing. Supplies are also more easily obtainable. Of course there are numerous other rivers all over Hokkaido. The fisherman has a large field to choose from. I have merely mentioned two of them which I have tried, and if he likes to go

further afield, fine sport, I believe, can be obtained on the Island of Saghalien. I had intended making the latter journey this summer, but the exigencies of the service prevented my doing so.

I will now briefly give some hints of value to the angler, the result of personal experience.



AN AINU BELLE.

Climate.—This is much the same as an English summer ; warm clothing must be taken, and the older the better, as long as it is serviceable. Light clothing such as khaki is also necessary, with a solar topi, as the sun is frequently hot in the middle of the day, but a terai hat is usually all that is needed. A good cheap oilskin coat is useful as heavy rains often fall.

Kit.—Tents are in my opinion absolutely necessary if good sport is to be obtained, as the further one gets away from villages the better. I had a small 60 lb. Field Service Cabul tent. A light servants' tent is also useful. The usual camp furniture for an ordinary shikar expedition will be required. Mosquito nets, with head guards, and gauntlets should also be taken.

Fishing Tackle.—I had a 16½ ft. salmon rod by Farlow, which did me very well, but it was more powerful than was necessary. I should recommend a 14 to 15 foot grilse rod, with a reel sufficient to carry about 60 yards of line, some light salmon casts and a good gaff. Wading trousers, and brogues must also be taken; they should be strong, and of the best quality obtainable, as much hard walking and clambering from pool to pool has to be done.

Flies.—"John Scott" and the "Blue Doctor" were by far the best flies that I tried, but all the "Doctors" both the "black" and "silver" were good. The best sizes being Nos. 1/0 and 3/0.

Travel as light as possible.—The whole of my kit with tents, stores, &c., and servants' belongings went comfortably on two pack ponies, and did not exceed 200 lb; I did nearly all the marching myself on foot.

The Habits of the Fish.—To be successful at masu fishing, the angler must be prepared to shift his ground frequently. These fish never remain in any one section of a river for more than a few days at a time, but are constantly running up the river to the upper reaches where they go to spawn. If therefore the angler has searched one section of a river without finding any fish, he should work higher, and higher up, until he comes across them. This is a very important point to know with regard to these fish, and a want of knowledge of this has sent many a sportsman away from Hokkaido without ever having seen a masu. Another point I would impress on a sportsman is never to wait in the lower reaches of the river "till the water clears," if the river should happen to be in flood at the time, but march up to the fishing ground where you intend to begin work and wait there for the water to clear. My experience is that the best fishing is obtained in the upper reaches, and the rivers here are all fishable, and in good order on the fourth day after a flood, provided of course, no rain falls in the interval. Whereas the rivers down below very often never clear at all, or perhaps not for ten to fifteen days after a heavy rainfall, and their condition cannot, therefore, be accepted as a criterion as to the state of the water in the upper reaches.

Some readers may think I have laid unnecessary stress on

these details, but I have heard of so many men who have been disappointed in their expectations of sport in this country, that I shall offer no apology for mentioning these details, as I am sure their lack of success was due, entirely, to a want of knowledge of the conditions of the country and the habits of the fish.

Supplies.—Vegetables and eggs can be obtained in most places up country at farm houses and villages, but all other supplies must be bought at Sapporo.

This is a trip I can thoroughly recommend to any man in search of good salmon fishing, he should, however, be fairly strong, as he will have to do a good deal of hard rough work, but the climate is healthy and bracing, and the country very pretty. Good drinking water can be obtained anywhere outside the towns. Mosquitoes are at times troublesome. I don't think I have ever spent a more enjoyable sporting holiday anywhere. The cost is not great, 400 yen for a six weeks' trip from Tokyo and back should be more than sufficient to cover all expenses.

The country has to my mind another great charm, it has not yet been discovered by the "globe trotter," at least he is not *en evidence*. I doubt if some of the water I was fishing over had ever been fished over by a white man before. Many interesting and amusing experiences were encountered during the trip, but the scope and object of this article would be much overstepped if any attempt were made to relate them. A kodak would be a most useful addition to one's kit. I much regret not having taken one myself, a very interesting and permanent record of one's travels would thus have been obtained.

I should recommend anyone contemplating making this trip to read Bachelor's book on "The Ainus and their Folklore," where much interesting information will be found about these peculiar people; also Major Lavita's article on "Salmon Fishing," contained in the February number of the *Badminton Magazine* for 1910.

