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INDIAN FISH KILLING.
BY JEFFERSON BERRYHILL.

Account of Indian Fish Killing has been given by the lot, but I have yet to see a story that gives a true picture to the subject. I speak from personal experience. I have seen it and lived it.

First of all the fish killing is a bit out of the picture for the Indians of today due to the fact that the occasion has been outlawed by the white men.

During the days of fish killing, the streams were full of various kinds and sizes of fishes and the Indian killed only that which he needed.

Sportmanship played a great part in this former national sport for the Indians. I shall try to prove my point as to the meaning of sportmanship, relative to the fish killing.

The thing that figures mostly in the Indian fish killing is a weed called The Devil's Shoe String. The root of this weed is very bitter. It is this nature of the weed that causes the fish to rise to the surface of the water after a procedure, which shall be explained later on in the article.

How the Devil's Shoe String effects the fish is yet unexplained. Various theories have been presented, but none has approval by the majority. Everyone has his own choice

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in the matter of explaining the matter. Some say it intoxicates the fish. Some say the fish become sickened. Still some say their breathing is effected and they come up for the air. However the fish are not poisoned as some people refer to it as being such. The taste in the flesh of the fish is not changed by the effect of the devil's shoe string.

The devil's shoe string is found in the sandy places, and sometimes in the mountainous region, but those of the sandy places are more the preferred ones as they are easier to get and seem to be more virulent.

Digging the strings is about the hardest part of the whole affair. It takes brain and muscle to be able to get your quota of the strings. One must cut the top weeds with some sharp instrument and dig into the ground about the roots deep enough so that the roots stick out long enough to be grasped by the puller. With some heavy cloth around the palm of your hand, you pull the root with all your might.

Sometimes all your might is not enough. Other times there are some that are easy to pull. The length of the roots vary in such that some have been pulled as long as six and seven feet long. The size of the root is very small.

Next procedure after one has pulled about, well, hundreds of strands of roots, is to convert those strands into bundles. This is done gathering some in a bunch and turning the ends back and tying each end of the bundle with smaller strands of strings. Each bundle should not more measure than one and one-half to two feet in length. The diameter of each bundle should be about one to one and one-half inches.

With out further ado, I must refer to the devil's shoe string as medicine. The Indians call it just that, but why I do not know unless it is the peculiar or the seemingly rare reaction of the stuff when applied in the water.

There are different methods employed in application of this method. The method to be used depends on the condition of the water. If it is a flowing stream then the medicine is scattered into the water in one place. If the kill should be in water that is stationery, then the medicine must be scattered or applied all over the chosen part in the still water.

In a river or even a lake there must be some preparation preceding the application of the medicine. There must be dams built. This is done by cutting large trees or using old logs and laying them across the river to form an obstruction to the traffic of the fish.

They must stay within these boundaries or there shall be no fish killed. Branches of trees also play large part in the building of the dams. Building of dams are similar in both lake and river.

Though the elderly Indians stuck to the old type of Fish Killing, modernity had entered into the way before the whole thing was outlawed. Modern youth had begun to build dams of chicken wire, or a seine. As modernity came, so went the national sport of the American Indian.

The medicine is not just thrown into the water as has been told by some story tellers. The medicine is also not in the form of the bundles when it becomes effective in the water. In the olden times the medicine or the bundles were pounded right in the water by the participants. Each participant made a mallet out of some young tree and also cut a bigger one about five or six feet long; then he shaped the end of the log or post that must stick above the surface of the water a very level and smooth end. This was done because the bundles were to be pounded to the nth degree, and not cut into small strips, as such would carry the greatest possible non-successful fish killing. The small bits of the medicine must be so thin and small when pounded that it shall readily

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be soaked with water as it hits it. Modern Indian youth had learned to take the bundles to the mill and have the medicine ground for the purpose when the end came. The effect was same. Only difference in the ground stuff and pounded was, the medicine was kept in a large barrel or even in tubs with water all night before it was put into the water next morning. In this method many a hard labor was eliminated.

When the medicine was put into the river in one spot, the fish seemed to sense the danger of a sort, so they swam down the stream until they got to the dam. Feeling there's no alternative, they would swim back the other direction, thereby victimizing themselves.

In the lake, fish become air minded while the medicine was yet being pounded. As the men stood in the water pounding the bundles, the fish were swimming all around them, but there was not any alarm until the signal was given to shoot.

~~The signal was a gun until the last bundle was eliminated.~~

During the fish killing, many honors were awarded. It was a splendid reputation to be called a good shot with the bow and arrows. It was an honor to kill the biggest fish during the occasion. It took skill to be able to look for and

find an arrow that has been lost in the water.

One must know how to shoot the fish. The medicine was potent so as to weaken the fish so that one might walk out into the water and pick one up. Many times you might see only a dark shadow on the surface of the water which meant that the fish was a foot or more under the surface of the water. One must know just where to shoot in that case to be able to hit the fish. Shoot directly as you see the object and you'll not have a fish to fry. One has to use his judgment as to how far on this side of the object to shoot to get his bacon. In shooting a gun one must have a keen eye and in shooting a fish with bow and arrow one must have a keen judgment.

There is an other phase of this Indian fish killing I do not leave out. Call it superstition, fol-de-rol, or what have you. It had its points and effects as I saw it. Before any of the participants or any one in the group looked into the chosen water, a ceremonial was in order. The one with ~~the power of medicine~~ paints a color on the cheeks of everybody. The Indians took no chances. Everybody was treated with the medicine. Why? The Indians claimed and based it on the experience that if there should be anybody among the throng

that expected an increase in the family, regardless of what the fish would not rise if he looked into the water. This was law and order. Everybody respected it accordingly.

Other members of the vegetation have been employed in the fish killing, but none has been as virulent or as popular as the devil's shoe string. Such others being; a tree called buckeye but this product of nature is too strong and it does not give the fish a sporting chance; the green walnuts if one can get enough of them, and any other weed of the noxious nature.

Thus ends the story of fish killing. The longing in the hearts of the old Indians, who watch the modern day oil wells and salt water become a menace to the lives of the fish, continue to ache. And they wish to know just why an honest man's hunt for the fish for his use to strengthen his body that he may live longer is more detrimental than to kill a fish without thinking at all. Indian killed that which he needed. Oil men kill because they must have heaven on earth with the money that he accumulates.