

THE ELK'S MISTAKE

CLINTON J MONTANA



Coach Webb ate bugs





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by both elk and Indians. Known from the accounts of early explorers, Missionaries and archaeologists, Indian hunting methods west of the Mississippi have been extensively documented, and several ingenious hunting methods have emerged. They range from simple snares and traps, to complicated jump and surrounds.

Jumps

Hunting in the more open terrain east of the Mississippi was difficult, and elk were seldom killed, en masse, except at specific locations such as jumps. A jump site usually consisted of a small or very steep embankment, with a good feed area above. The Indians kept casual track of these jump sites, and when a herd of buffalo or elk wandered onto the plain above the jump site, a hasty hunt was planned.

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The younger men and youths who could run fast, covered themselves with animal skins and then, wading, bent over to very open. Slowly, these men flanked both sides of the herd. They could then run to the side of the jump when alerted. A series of men then carefully positioned themselves on a line on the far side of the animals.

When everyone was in position, a signal was given and the Indians threw off their disguises. The startled animals ran hysterically away from the Indians who chased them, toward the jump. Their speed of flight, and the Indians' loud yelling behind them, urged the fleeing animals over the edge en masse. Women and older men waited below to kill the crippled animals and butcher the carcasses.

While this was a favorite method of pre-horse Indians to kill buffalo in great numbers, elk were also slaughtered at these jumps. Early explorers tell of finding jump areas where the ground below was strewn with hundreds of bleached elk and buffalo bones from hundreds of years ago.

In 1832, Warren Angus Ferris, a member of a trapping party near Green River, Wyoming, told of navigating a steep trail along a precipice caused by the scouring of the river below. He noted that at the foot of the bluff were the bones of many buffalo and elk that had run off the cliff and killed.

While most of the major jump areas were abandoned by commercial bone pickers (used for fertilizer) and trophy souvenir hunters, it was not long ago that a traveler could still find less known jump areas with skeletons still intact. Coyd Paul, a Chippewa-Cree friend of mine, told me that a boy on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation of North-Central Montana, had often scoured through several old jump sites for arrowheads and recalls finding several stone heads imbedded in bones. Today, these sites have been picked clean.

Roundups

and kids, often referred to as corals or suncoats, were used to capture and kill large numbers of animals, elk included. The Indians usually had several areas, much like the jump areas, where they would drive the animals

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