THE WAPITI OR ELK

IN the pursuit of *Cervus canadensis* the aim of the tracker is to distinguish the signs of the bull from those of the cow. As the number to be killed per season by each hunter is limited by law to one or two bulls, the pursuer is naturally interested in knowing how to tell the signs of the old ones.

They are:

1. Size of track;
2. Distance of track from center line;
3. Pointing outward of hoofs;
4. Hillock in track;
5. Lagging back with hind legs;
6. Closeness of track;
7. Roundness of toes;
8. Blazing of trees;
9. Pawing of ground;
10. Size and roundness of dew-claws.



ELK. (ONE-HALF NATURAL SIZE)
(1) Bull track. (A) Closeness of track. (B) Hillock. (2) Cow track, flat (note spread). (3) Trail of bull. (4) Trail of cow. (5) Trail of calf.

A male yearling has a bigger hoof, and consequently makes a larger track, than a female of



ELK

(6) Gallop. (7) Trot.

the same age, and as the track of a three-year-old bull is the size of that of a large cow, it is obvious that even the track of the largest sterile specimen of the hornless sex cannot approach in size that made by an old bull. As the general size of the elk differs in their various districts, this fact has to be considered; an elk in the Coast country, for example, is much inferior in weight to an elk of the same age in the Rockies. For this reason it is necessary to know the general size of the elks in the territory in which the tracking is done to estimate with approximate correctness the number of points on their horns from the size of the track.

The bigger the bull, the farther, of course, stand the tracks away from the center line. What has been said about this, and about the pointing outward of toes in the chapter on Virginia deer, applies also to the elk, with the difference, however, that in the latter it is always a *sure* sign of the bull, as is also the lagging back with the hind feet.

Like the fan-tail buck, the elk bull, in his manner of walking, makes a hill in his track, but there

is no dust heap in front of the latter's, as the elk apparently does not step off so clean.

The bull elk always manages to walk with tightly closed hoofs, at variance with the cow, which lets the hoofs spread more.

By reason of his weight and his habit of pawing the ground, the points of the hoofs or toes of an old bull become rather blunt, causing a much rounder track than a cow makes; and in a big track, like that of an elk, such features show up conspicuously, while it would be a hard matter to detect them in a much smaller deer track, even on the best tracking ground.

The dew-claws, being much thicker and blunter in the bull than in the cow, are a certain distinctive feature, but their imprint can be seen only in mud or snow, and there the other more prominent signs of the bull track are, as a rule, visible also and will be found more reliable.

The young bull often oversteps the forefoot track with the hind foot; therefore in case the tracks do not register it is necessary to examine the two individual tracks of one side. If the bigger track is in front, an old bull made it, and if

the reverse is the case, the animal is not worth following, because it is a young one.

Like all members of the deer tribes, the elk bull cleanses his horns of the velvet on trees, and, in addition to pawing the ground with the hoofs, he often belabors it with his horns in his anger with a rival.

Some consider the distance between the individual tracks in the attempt to determine the size and other points of the elk, and if the animal has been seen, this is well, but if there is only the trail to decide by, it appears to be a far-fetched "sign," because the foundation, a knowledge of the speed, is lacking.