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## Razor-Backs

by Tobe Hodge

with illustrations by Walter Bobbett.

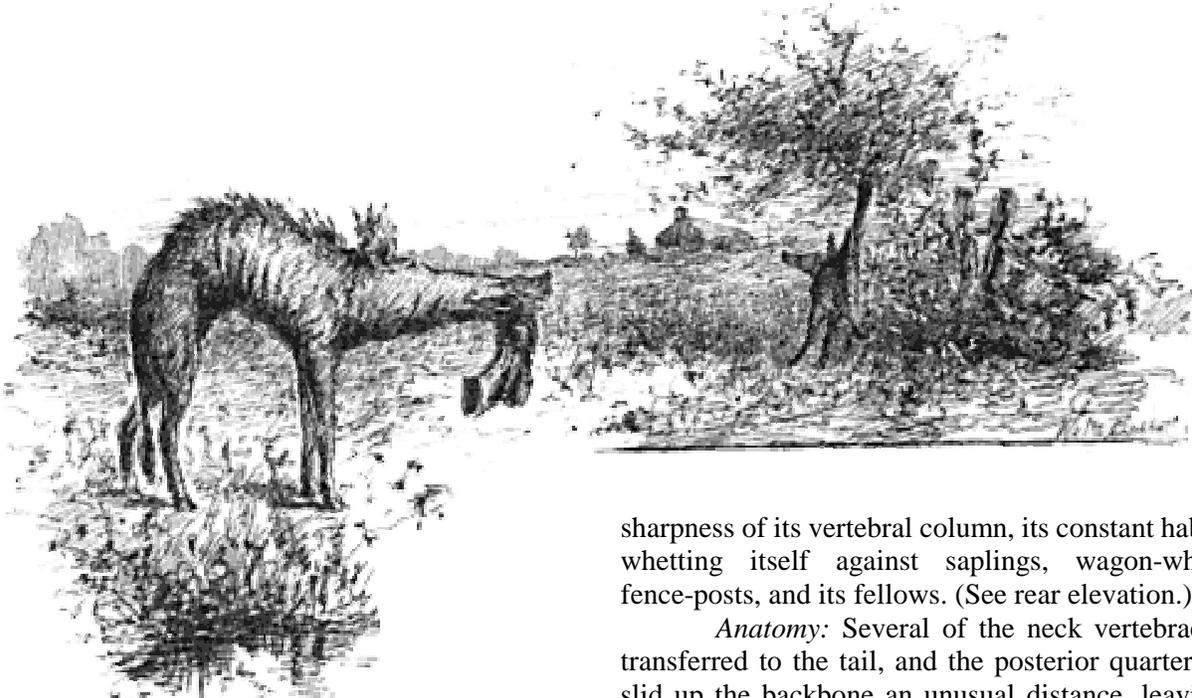
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Strange to say, the numerous searchers in the great domain of Natural History have left it for me, an humble scientist, to describe one of the most wonderful animals yet evolved — the Razorback Hog of West Virginia.

My attention was first drawn to this species of quadruped on the 2d day of September, 1881, when one ate the tail of my horse, the saddle, both stirrups and the hitching strap, then gave a squeal that scared my horse, so that I was compelled to take a long walk home when a ride was intended. This fixed the date in my mind, and induced a careful study of this omnivorous animal, the results of which I here record:

*Genus*, Sus.

*Species*, Razor-back.

This species of hog takes its name from its likeness to a razor with the thin edge up, the

sharpness of its vertebral column, its constant habit of whetting itself against saplings, wagon-wheels, fence-posts, and its fellows. (See rear elevation.)

*Anatomy*: Several of the neck vertebrae are transferred to the tail, and the posterior quarters are slid up the backbone an unusual distance, leaving a caudal appendage about two feet long in full-grown specimens, with the proverbial curl absent, but having instead thereof a brush like a cow. Ribs of extraordinary size, length and distinctness; compressed, united below and propping up the spinal column into the shape of a pot-handle.

*Nose*: Of prodigious length and searching capabilities, it being able to clean out half a mile of potato rows in a single night and split the fence-rails to get out of the patch in the morning. When this animal is put into a pen of just its width, to fatten, it puts its nose on the ground, throws up its hind quarters, and uses it as a pivot to turn around upon.

*Head*: Massive. I am informed by the natives that when a Razor-back is in prime order for killing, its head just balances its body when laid over a pole. Owing to the size of their heads and jowls, and infailing habit of going backward when they ought to go forward, they are captured in gill-nets like shad and white-fish.

*Ears:* Notched in from one to fifteen places, sometimes slit, sometimes punctured like a colander: often absent. I am informed upon no less an authority than an Associate Judge, that the notches and punctures are made by whoever catches the pig first, and are private marks to establish ownership — pork signatures, as it were, of the natives. The slits are caused by domestic difficulties, and the absence of both ears is due to a desire upon the part of non-owners to destroy the record, so that they may be stolen with impunity.

*Eyes:* Small, and so inexpressibly mean in expression that they are set close together, in order that they may watch each other. A Razor-back Hog left alone with Vesuvius for a week would set it going.

*Hind legs:* Of great activity, extension, and endurance, enabling these animals to gather corn from the stalk at the height of six feet for hours at a time; and when chased, to jump a fence having eight rails and a rider, leaving a charge of number-ten shot to follow.

*Viviparous:* In lots of from eleven to twenty-three, the young showing great instinct for concealment at the sound of Booh! They are provided at birth with six-inch lactometers, which rise from a horizontal to a perpendicular, as their hunger is satisfied.

Their young are very active. I once stopped at a log cabin having the usual surroundings of a bit of garden, a dead branch for firewood, thirteen white-headed children under marriageable age, and an antiquated thorough-bred Razor-back Hog with the maximum number of little Razor-backs.

The absence of a dog from usual cabin surroundings is accounted for in this way: A dog is never seen where there is a Razor-back, unless there is something defective in the dog; he then lives on the cabin roof, in the stable loft or some other elevated place. The Razorback is the dog's natural enemy. I once had a fine brave dog to flush a flock of Razorbacks nine miles from my home; I did not see him again for four days, when he put in a woeful appearance, with the whole flock after him. He had been abridged by some six inches, lost one ear and a back scalp and several teeth. His stump did not leave its retreat between his legs for many days afterward. To this day if I go sideways at him with one shoulder humped up, and my mouth caught up at one corner,

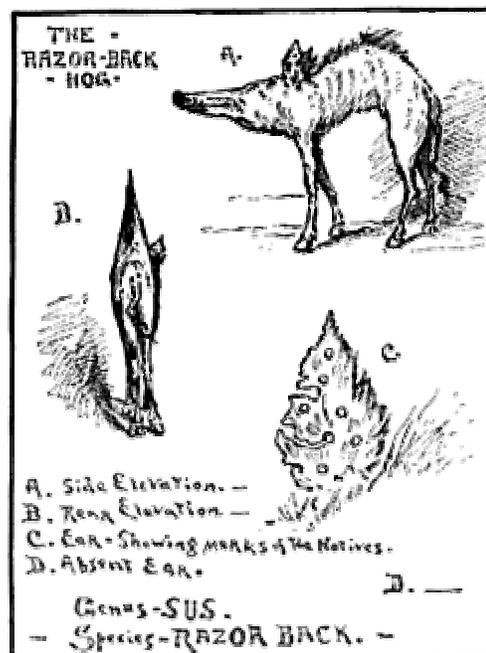


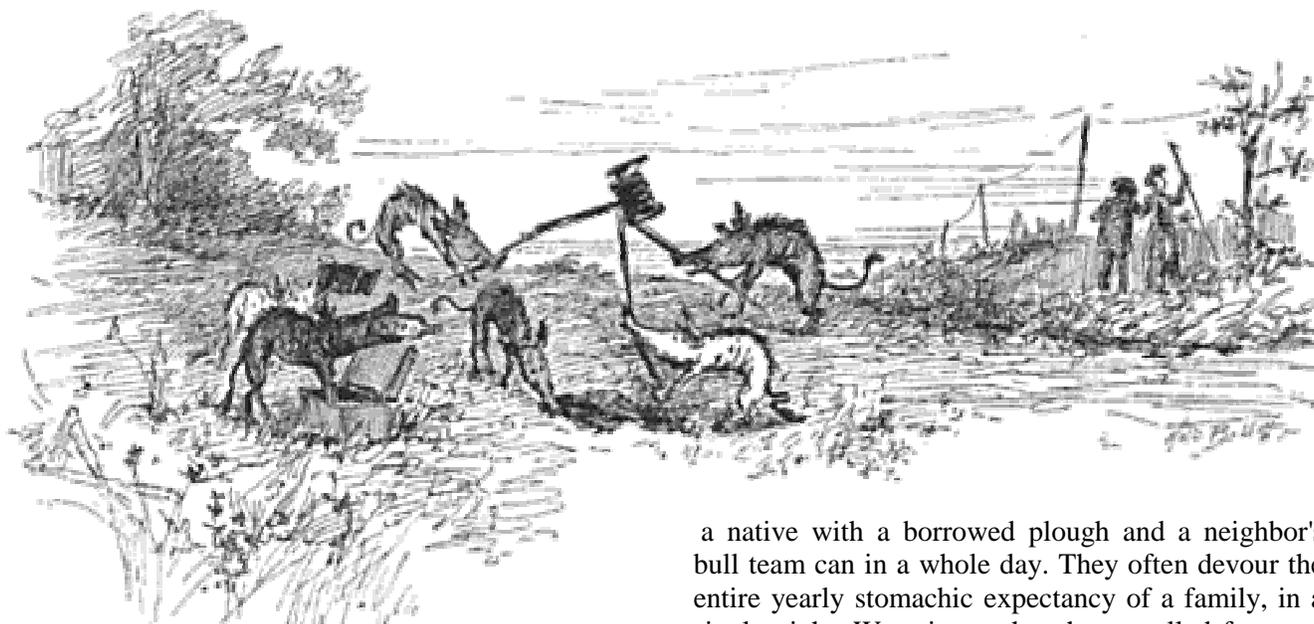
Diagram furnished by the author.

after the manner of Razor-backs, he goes straight to the garret and hides.

"Joe," screamed a woman with a voice like a rip saw; "Joe, come yere quick! That pesky little pig has done got inter the garden again, an's chawen the cabbage an' tomats. Forty times sence meetin' day I've had to drop the baby an' run that pig 'till I wuz nearly done dead. Why don't you yoke him, like you said you would, an' keep him out?"

"Yo—yo—yoke him?" Joe stuttered. "Give me a clo—clo—clothes pin, an' I will; nothen else 'll fit his neck. I 'll sti—sti—stick it on crossways."

Joe started to catch the invader; not in a hurry — the hereditary transmission of qualities precludes that in a native of West Virginia — but with an all-day mountain-trot sure to win some time. The pursued pig deliberately took a tomato in its mouth for future consumption, and started on the same leisurely jog; in half an hour Joe and the pig had made a map of the chase over the garden beds, as intricate as the scroll-work upon a dollar green-back. The pig was finally captured by his lactometer as he was going between the fence palings, and was by it carried into the cabin, squealing, biting and kicking, to be measured for a yoke.



The cabin had a one-light window of eight by ten glass, before which Joe took his stand with the pig under his arm and rule in hand ready to measure his neck with great nicety. The situation afforded Mrs. Joe the opportunity she long had sought to punish that juvenile Razor-back; she slipped up behind and savagely stabbed him in the region of his lactometer with a darning needle. He gave a wild shriek and went square through the window, taking out a pane of glass clean. Joe gazed a moment in astonishment, first after the flying pig; next at the empty sash; then he exclaimed triumphantly: "A—a—a—eight by ten, by gum!"

*Omnivorous:* Glass, tin cans, hoop skirts, gum shoes — I have failed to ascertain from the oldest Justice of the Peace in the State that Razor-backs ever refused to eat any article from a lady's friz to a wheelbarrow.

My entire photographic apparatus — camera, tent, camp-stool and chemicals — were consumed by a flock of them while I was fixing a young mountain maid properly in the landscape for a picture.

*Habits:* Nocturnal, diurnal, weekly, monthly, annual, cycles-infinite, undefinable.

They are both promoters and destroyers of agricultural enterprise. They can upturn more ground in an hour — keeping their noses in practice — than

a native with a borrowed plough and a neighbor's bull team can in a whole day. They often devour the entire yearly stomachic expectancy of a family, in a single night. Were it not that the so-called farms of West Virginia are set on edge, and both sides favorable to arborary products — such as persimmons, paw-paws, beech-nuts, buck-eyes, etc. — the inhabitants would be reduced to working for a living.

*Evolution:* They are great travelers, and always go in a trot. Their quadrupedal locomotors are in some way connected with an internal grunting arrangement. This capability for locomotion, and their innate sinfulness, scientifically explain their existence in West Virginia and their ancestry. There is no authority for even supposing that all the swine historically described as going down into the sea or lake with devils in them were drowned. The Sinaitic, Vatican and Alexandrian MSS. say "choked"; so I stake my scientific reputation upon the assertion that the Razor-back Hogs of West Virginia are descended from the survivors of those owned by the A.D. 1 pork-raisers, for the reasons that they have more devil in them than can possibly be compressed into modern pork, have cloven feet, a long tail, and never miss an opportunity to upset a bucket, eat a week's washing, or squeal when the baby is asleep. I have the word of a Mayor of a Town for saying that they have been known to come seven miles from the country to be run over on the railroad in order to kick up a suit for damages against the company.

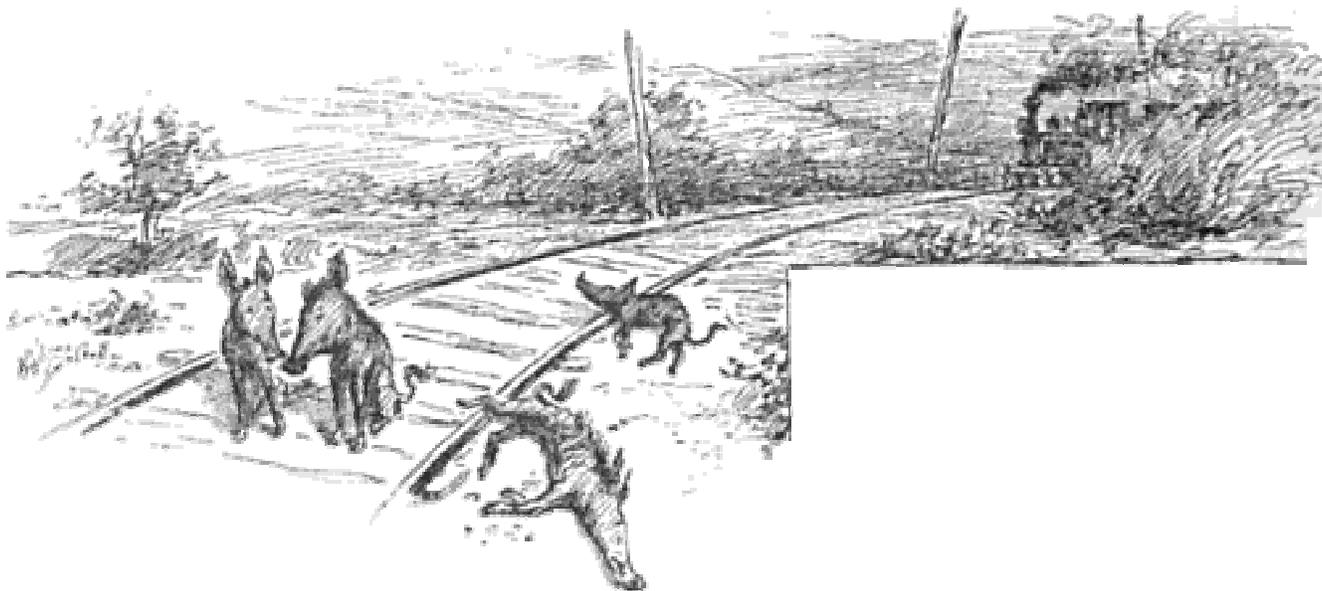
"The Iron-clad Grave Insurance Company against Razor-backs" is doing a good business.

*Geographical distribution:* The whole of the great unfenced State of West Virginia.

Should anything pertaining to this discovery of mine develop in the future, or have escaped me in this relation, it will be the subject of another paper. It seems proper to say, in speaking of this species of quadruped, that the only good thing that can be said of them is, that by no possible means can any bacon

be derived from them.

*Tobe Hodge*



**Editor's Note:**

Tobe Hodge was the pseudonym of Charles McIlvaine (1840–1909) a Civil War veteran who rose to the rank of Captain in the 97th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers. After his retirement from the military in 1863, McIlvaine worked for the railroad in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. He also developed his craft as a writer and pursued an avid interest in the study of mushrooms and fungi, becoming an amateur mycologist.

Primarily as Tobe Hodge, McIlvaine authored a variety of fictional sketches, poems and short stories, often written in an approximation of the rural West Virginia dialect and/or caricaturing that part of the United States. These works were

published in *Century Magazine*, *American Magazine*, *Harper's Magazine* and similar periodicals, as well as by the Detroit Free Press.

Under his real name McIlvaine authored several book-length works of fiction including *A Legend of Polecat Hollow*, *An American Story* (1884) and *Outdoors, Indoors, and Up the Chimney* (1906). He is best known for his non-fiction study: *Toadstools, Mushrooms, Fungi Edible and Poisonous. One Thousand American Fungi. How to select and cook the edible; how to distinguish and avoid the poisonous*, first published in 1900 and still considered a classic work of American mycology.