

# HUCKLEBERRY DAYS HERE

Where New York's Supply of the  
Fruit Comes from, and How  
It Is Gathered.

## WORK FOR 10,000 PICKERS

Interesting Statistics Regarding the  
Crop That Is Sent to This City—

Battles with Snakes Always

Accompany a Berry-

Picking Campaign.

KINGSTON, July 6.—The huckleberry harvest promises this year to amount to many thousands of bushels from the bushes which cover the mountain tops of Ulster, Orange, Sullivan, and Greene Counties. The berries now coming to market sell at 15 cents a quart, but in a week or so the markets will be flooded with berries, and 6 cents a quart will be considered a good price.

Few people living at a distance from the huckleberry-growing country realize the real import of a big huckleberry harvest. It means shoes, stockings, and warm raiment for the coming Winter and a thousand little comforts to the myriads of people, young and old, who swarm the mountain sides and upland meadows culling the wild and delicious fruit. This year, fortunately for the berry pickers, the harvest will be an enormous one.

It is calculated that within a week or two fully 10,000 people in the four counties named will be engaged in picking huckleberries, and that the production will be over 2,500 bushels per day. That will be 80,000 quarts, which, reckoned at the average price paid the pickers of 6 cents a quart, means that they will earn \$4,800 a day. Picking continues for about three weeks, and by working seven days a week, as they do, the pickers in these counties will add to their wealth about \$100,000. It may run higher than this, as hundreds of the pickers sell their berries for the highest market price from door to door in the large towns surrounding the berry country.

### Where the Berries Come From.

The great huckleberry country from which New York receives her principal supplies is in Ulster County. Two-thirds of the berries that reach New York are either produced in Ulster County or reach the market through it. The berries shipped from the river points south of Kingston come from the spur of the Shawangunk chain of mountains known as the Esopus and Paltz Mountains, as they lie in the different townships. This district covers a territory about twenty-five miles in length and at some places two miles in width. The great berry country of the main Shawangunk range stretches from Lake Mohonk on the north to the Delaware River on the south, crossing about half of Ulster County and the whole of Orange and a portion of Sullivan County. Ellenville, in Ulster County, is the heart of this district. Huckleberries grow in great profusion on these mountains from the cleared ground at their foot up to the very ridges wherever there is enough soil to give them root.

The greatest huckleberry patch in the Shawangunk is near Aowasting Lake. Here the mountain meadows stretch for thousands of acres, and the berries grow so thick as to crowd out all other vegetation. In a few days this great field will be swarming with pickers, who will never leave this field until every berry has been stripped from the stalks.

### Where Juicy Ones Grow.

The largest and richest berries come from High Point, partly in the town of Olive and partly in Rochester. This high mountain juts out from the rest of the Shawangunk chain, and rises solitary in the midst of a level plain. Its wind-swept heights have been a good target for fire until almost every vestige of forest has been destroyed. Yet it is clothed with blueberry bushes to its very top. The mountain is over 2,000 feet above tide water, and for several hundred acres is as flat as a table. Here the great luscious huckleberries grow on their heather-like stems larger and more juicy than in any other place. The berries grow on short stems, rising straight from the ground for about nine inches, and there are sometimes as many as fifty berries on one stalk. They are gathered by pulling the stalks up by the roots and stripping off berries and leaves until the palls are full, when they are turned over to one of the party, who winnows them by blowing away the leaves with a fan. All the pickers have to do is to take a seat among the growing berries and pluck up the stalks as far as they can reach, moving only when all the stalks have been pulled. This district stretches over fully twenty square miles, covering the whole of the Southern Catskills in Delaware, Ulster, and Sullivan Counties.

The Northern Catskills, around Overlook Mountain, Round Top, and the other peaks in Northern Ulster and in Greene and Schoharie Counties, and the Helderbergs will also produce thousands of bushels of berries, but not of such a good quality as the High Point berries, as the presence of the great Summer hotels has made the mountain burners wary of being caught setting fire to the woods, and in these localities the huckleberry bushes have nearly all run to wood, and produce seedy and dry-ers." The bushes in many places are several feet in height and the berries worthless.

### Berry Pickers Make Forest Fires.

This burning over of the mountains where huckleberries grow is due to the fact that the very best and choicest fruit grows where the ground has been burned over the previous Autumn. The ash of decaying vegetation makes a fertilizer of peculiar value to huckleberries, and they thrive on it wonderfully. There are always enough berries that escape the pickers to thoroughly seed the ground anew, and when the mold is burned over, it forms a phosphate which nourishes the seeds and causes the fields to be covered with new shoots, bearing large, juicy, seedling berries the following Summer. The best crop of berries the bushes bear is on their first year, which explains why the berry pickers start their fires in the woods.

During the season the huckleberry is a staple article of food with the farmers. They are eaten from big bowls holding a quart or more. Flooded with rich cream and with the tops sprinkled with powdered sugar and nutmeg, the farmer dines like a King.

### Berries and Snakes.

Huckleberry picking is not always a picnic. Where the most beautiful berries grow there cannot be found a drop of drinking water, especially in high altitudes, and that very necessary article must be carried long distances by the pickers. Then, too, there are snakes. Snakes love huckleberry patches and every great camp of huckleberry pickers is also more or less a slaughtering party for snakes. Adders are the most plentiful, with copperheads or pilots rather frequent. It is alleged that these two latter varieties eat huckleberries, but it is more likely that they are attracted to the berry patches by the numbers of field mice that do eat the berries. Most all professional berry pickers wear high-topped boots or leggins of sheepskin, with the wool outside, as a protection against the possible bite of a snake. Sometimes when a snake strikes at the legs of a berry picker its fangs will hook fast in the wool and it cannot escape. Then it is easily trod on and killed.