

# The Tour Continues

## Cleveland County

October 29--31, 1832

November 1, 1832

### Today's Names for Yesterday's Places

*A Tour on the Prairies* by Washington Irving

*Washington Irving on the Prairie* by Henry Leavitt Ellsworth

*The Rambler in Oklahoma* by Charles Joseph Latrobe

*On the Western Tour with Washington Irving* by Albert Alexandre de Pourtalès

#### Senate Art Work at the Oklahoma Capitol

Artist: Wayne Cooper

Sponsor: Williams Companies

*We . . . beheld 'the great Prairie' stretching to the right and left before us. The buffaloes stuck foot-long tongues out of their odd-shaped mouths, occasionally turned their immense, deformed heads, on which their hair stood up as straight as a lion's mane. There is a mixture of the awful and the comic in the look of these huge animals.*



#### Cleveland County, October 29, 1832

Early in the morning Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow left the campsite of a devastated piece of Oklahoma that had turned into a quagmire as eighty rangers, guides, and tourists slogged through three days of rain. After the unrelenting rain followed by a morning march, Irving saw the prairie.

*We emerged toward mid-day from the dreary belt of the Cross Timber, and to our infinite delight beheld the great Prairie stretching to the right and left before us. There is always an expansion of feeling in looking upon these boundless and fertile wastes; but I was doubly conscious of it after emerging from our close dungeon of innumerable boughs.*

The ranger captain freed the rangers for a day of buffalo hunting.

*The Captain determined to shape his course to a woody bottom about a mile distant, and to encamp there for a day or two, by way of having a regular buffalo hunt, and getting a supply of provisions.*

## October 29, 1832 All over Cleveland and Oklahoma County

### *The Grand Buffalo Hunt*

That woody bottom was along the Little River. The buffalo hunt went who knows where north and south, east and west, from Midwest City to Oklahoma City, from Moore to Norman, perhaps as far south as Noble. Surely it crossed Highway 77 and Interstate 35. On this hunt Beatte, the very good guide, was the leader and the teacher. Irving and his friends the young Count Pourtalès were together as the hunt began. Pourtalès buoyant and youthful, in purple leather with bright embroidery, experienced a lifetime on October 29 and 30 with all life's attendant highs and lows.

Rangers, guides, and tourists, all were after the kill. Irving described his kill in utmost detail.

*We perceived two buffalo bulls descending a slope. The Count fired, but it missed. The bulls galloped down hill. As they ran in different directions, we each singled one and separated. I was provided with a brace of veteran brass-barrelled pistols. Pistols are very effective in buffalo hunting, as the hunter can ride up close to the animal, and fire at it while at full speed. I was well mounted on a horse of excellent speed and bottom, that seemed eager for the chase, and soon overtook the game. A buffalo, when close pressed by the hunter, has an aspect most diabolical. His two short black horns, curve out of a huge frontlet of shaggy hair; his eyes glow like coals; his mouth is open, his tongue parched and drawn up into a half crescent; his tail is erect, and tufted and whisking about in the air, he is a perfect picture of mingled rage and terror. I urged my horse sufficiently near, when, taking aim, to my chagrin, both pistols missed fire. I was close upon the buffalo, when, in his despair, he turned round with a sudden snort and rushed upon me. My horse wheeled made a convulsive spring, and I came near being thrown at the feet of the buffalo. I again spurred in pursuit of the buffalo. He again set off in full tilt.*

That buffalo was lost to Irving, but not the next.

*I singled out a buffalo, and by a fortunate shot brought it down on the spot. It could not move, but lay there struggling in mortal agony, while the rest of the herd kept on their headlong career across the prairie. Now that the excitement was over, I could not but look with commiseration upon the poor animal that lay struggling and bleeding at my feet. I had inflicted pain in proportion to the bulk of my victim. The poor animal lingered in his agony. Wolves were skulking and howling; Ravens flapping about, croaking dismally. I primed one of the pistols. To inflict a wound thus in cool blood, I found a totally different thing from firing in the heat of the chase. My pistol for once proved true. The animal gave one convulsive throe and expired.*

And pretty much all of the buffalo that went back to camp after the hunt were the tongue – and hump. Remember that a buffalo's tongue was the important trophy and that all too often the only thing brought back to camp was that tongue, that delicacy. The tongue and the hump were prized. It was a very big hump and a very long tongue.

The vast grass covered prairies were not the smooth surface they seem from afar. There are hills and dales, deep rifts and ravines sculpted by the weather, holes burrowed by small animals principally the prairie dog, buffalo grass and after a rain sheets of water. It is vast though and before the highway and structures of today, it seemed endless. Irving was all too aware when he made his kill.

*There is something inexpressibly lonely in the solitude of a prairie. The loneliness of a forest seems nothing to it. There the view is shut in by trees, and the imagination is left free to picture some livelier scene*

*beyond. But here we have an immense extent of landscape without a sign of human existence. As the delirium of the chase had passed away, I was peculiarly sensible to these circumstances.*

Other stratagems were tried to get a buffalo, to make everything work. Pistols misfired. Horses tired. Irving was ready to lay his bearskin by the foot of a tree by Little River. The Commissioner was concerned.

*After rejoining Mr. Irving, whom I found standing sentinel over his spoil, we did not immediately recollect the early twilight of a dull autumnal day drawing on, and that we had still to find our way to the Camp. Where was Poureales? We began to move; pausing often to scan the horizon to look out for our Camp and our young friend. No Pourtalès and no camp.*

Latrobe worried about his friend and about being lost himself.

*It must be recollected that none of us had been at the Camp, and we had but a general idea of the position and course of the creek upon which it was in all probability to be found.*

Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow slept at a campsite chosen by his companions. It was on the Little River near Moore and Norman. Irving added his descriptive fillagree.

*At length night closed in. We hoped to see the distant glare of camp-fires; we listened to catch the sound of the bells about the necks of the grazing horses. Nothing was to be heard but a monotonous concert of insects, with now and then the dismal howl of wolves mingling with the night breeze. We began to think of halting for the night. As we were preparing to dismount, we heard the report of a rifle, and shortly after, the notes of the bugle, calling up the night guard. The camp-fires soon broke on our sight, gleaming at a distance from among the thick groves of an alluvial bottom. Fires were blazing on every side; all hands were feasting upon roasted joints, broiled marrow-bones, and the juicy hump. Right glad were we to dismount and partake of the sturdy cheer. It was too dark now to send anyone in search of the young Count. Guns, however, were fired, and the bugles sounded to guide him to the camp. There was not a star visible to guide him, and we concluded that he would give up wandering and bivouac until daybreak.*

A terrible waste of meat provided more complications.

*It was a raw, overcast night. The carcasses of the buffaloes had drawn wolves. What rendered the gloom and wildness of the night more dreary to us, was the idea of the lonely and exposed situation of our young and inexperienced comrade. Where was Pourtalès? Was he safe? The bugle was sounded, guns fired, larger fires than ordinary kept up, all without success. Meat had been brought into camp, sufficient, indeed, to last the whole company for a month if properly cured and stored, and upon the Prairie lay remaining masses over which the wolves were holding their stormy jubilee. That melancholy concert sounded dolefully in my ears.*

The next day they set out to find Pourtalès.

All night Latrobe worried over what caused his friend to be lost. Perhaps he paid no attention in the excitement of the hunt. Perhaps he was gored by a buffalo. Perhaps a roving band of Indians took him. If Osages, it would be all right; if Pawnees not all right. And the wolves were a worry. They howled all night.

## Cleveland County, October 30, 1832



The next morning's search party was led by Irving and the young Count's mentor, Charles Joseph Latrobe; Mr. L. *A dozen of the rangers were soon ready to start, Mr. L. and myself taking the lead. We all set out across the prairie. I conducted Beatte and Antoine to the spot whence the young Count had continued the chase alone . . . They immediately distinguished the track of his horse amidst the tramlings of the buffaloes. While we were at halt, waiting until they could unravel the maze, Beatte suddenly gave a short Indian whoop, or rather yelp, and pointed to a distant hill, 'It is the Count!'*

Immediately another man appeared behind the first that Beatte saw. The search party was in an uproar. Only Count Pourtalès was missing from the camp the night before. They thought they spied their first Pawnees. They were thankfully two Rangers, out early that morning. However they suggested some Pawnees might be over a nearby hill. That was more danger for the Count, so the search began again led by the guide.

*Beatte would keep forward on an easy trot; his eyes fixed on the ground. A small herd of deer came bounding by us. Beatte levelled his rifle, and wounded one. The report of the rifle was almost immediately followed by a long halloo. A horseman was descried. A single glance showed him to be the young Count; there was a universal shout and scamper. With all his love of adventure, he seemed right glad to be once more among his friends.*

And the assembled friends were right glad to have him back and hear his story.

*I pulled the trigger—Oh, fury! Only the firing cap went off! At that humiliating point, I thought of another difficulty which had not occurred to me before. Where were my companions? Where were the riflemen camped? Since morning I had made so many detours, had run about so much, and had especially in the last hour, wandered around until I was unable to recognize a single reference point. And the sun was sinking. Until it set, I wandered about in all directions, shouting occasionally and then listening in vain for a human sound. In my ignorance of the terrain each step could take me farther from the others, I made a wise decision. I tied my horse's legs to keep him from going off too far; then I climbed an elm that had thick branches. I made a good easy-chair of my saddle, and thanks to my fatigue I soon fell asleep. Although the nights were cold, I did not light a fire for two reasons. First of all, I did not have the necessary materials; then, even if I had had, it was safer not to light one since there was no way of knowing if there were Pawnees nearby. I was awakened once or twice by a concert of wolves, who howled in the thicket about twenty paces from me. At daybreak I saddled my horse and went up and down the countryside, always keeping in sight of the tree where I had spent the night and to which my tracks might lead those who would be sent to find me. I returned to my tree at noon. Suddenly I heard a rifle shot.*

*Nimble as a squirrel, I climbed to the top of my elm in a flash. With the aid of my glass, I made out two horsemen heading toward my tree. I immediately shouted the most powerful 'hola!' To my great joy, my shout was heard. Soon I saw other riders. Then panting with joy, I climbed down from the tree, got on my horse, and galloped off to meet them.*

The search party returned to the encampment. The Captain ordered the preservation of all the meat for all the tomorrows of the tour and was ignored.

*Capt enjoined upon each ones mess to jerk buffaloe meat, to guard against want. Few have complied with the requisition.*

That afternoon, everyone was relieved. Irving was excited and happy because a prairie dog town was close to camp.

*I determined to pay a visit. The prairie dog is about the size of a rabbit. He is of a sprightly mercurial nature; quick, sensitive, and somewhat petulant living in large communities continually full of sport, business, and public affairs, on gossiping visits to each other's houses, or congregating in the cool of the evening. They pass half the night in revelry, barking or yelping. However, should there be the least alarm, they all vanish. In case they are hard pressed by their pursuers they will assume a pugnacious air, and a most whimsical look of important wrath and defiance. At sight of us, the picket guards scampered in a gave the alarm; whereupon every inhabitant gave a short yelp, or bark, and dived into his hole, his heels twinkling in the air as if he had thrown a somerset. We traversed the whole village, or republic, which covered an area of about thirty acres, but not a whisker of an inhabitant was to be seen. By and by, a cautious old burgher would slowly put forth the end of his nose, but instantly draw it in again. Another, at a greater distance, would emerge entirely; but catching a glance of use, would throw a somerset, and plunge back into his hole. At length, some taking courage from the continued stillness, would steal forth, and hurry off to a distant hole, the residence possibly of some family connection, or gossiping friend. Others, still more bold, assembled in little knots, in the streets and public places, as if to discuss the recent outrages offered to the commonwealth.*

After a successful day that included bringing home the lost Count and seeing the prairie dog republicans, Irving and his friends reveled in a mellow and happy evening.

*Our camp was that night once more a scene of good humour, contentment and joyous pastime. Tonish . . . put forth all his cunning in the preparation of sundry delicacies, to the enjoyment of which no one had as good a right as Pourtalès, after the preceding day's fast and redundant exercise . . . the barking, howling, and yelping, of the wolves seemed to be yet greater on this second night of their feast than the preceding, not one complained of being disturbed by it.*

## **Cleveland County, October 31, 1832**

*We left the prairie, and struck . . . through a ragged tract of country, overgrown with scrubbed forests and entangled thickets and intersected by deep ravines, and brisk-running streams, the sources of the Little River.*

On October 31, 1832 Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow camped near Little River west of Norman perhaps where Thunderbird Park is today. It was now decided that it was time to head back to the fort as quickly and as easily as possible.

*. . . a council was held as to our future movements. Symptoms of discontent had appeared for a day or two past among the rangers, most of whom, unaccustomed to the life of the prairies, had become impatient of its privations, as well as the restraints of the camp. The want of bread had been felt severely, and they were wearied with constant travel. In fact, the novelty and excitement of the expedition were at an end. They had hunted the deer, the bear, the elk, the buffalo, and the wild horse, and had no further object of leading interest to look forward to. A general inclination prevailed . . . to turn homeward.*

On that day, the horses that caused grave concern, though through the wildly careless behavior of the young rangers there were many others.

*Our horses were generally much jaded by the fatigues of travelling and hunting, and had fallen away sadly for want of good pasturage, and from being tethered at night, to protect them from Indian depredations." The rangers just didn't care for their seriously important mounts. . . . had acted with little forethought; galloping off after the game we encountered. They had strained and wearied their horses, instead of husbanding their strength and spirits. On a tour of this kind, horses should as seldom as possible be put off of a quiet walk; and the average day's journey should not exceed ten miles.*

Worries about the horses grew deeper with other concerns.

*It was the time, too, when the hunting parties of Indians set fire to the prairies; the herbage, throughout this part of the country, was in that parched state, favorable to combustion, and there was daily more and more risk, that the prairies between us and the fort would be set on fire by some of the return parties of Osages, and a scorched desert left for us to traverse.*

Irving and the other travelers were very fearful that they might have to make the miles back to the east on foot. It decision was now firm.

*It was determined to give up all further progress, and turning our faces to the southeast, to make the best of our way back to Fort Gibson.*

They were coming away from two exciting days, everyone tense with the rigors of a buffalo hunt and the loss of a dear friend. With thanks the friend was found and they could set off in a pleasant mood. They now had to cross Little River one more time going south and then turn east for good. A good day's journey for the horses was fifteen miles, and that was stretching them too far. It was more than a week therefore before they would even see Fort Gibson.

At ten o'clock we accordingly started, under the guidance of Beatte, who had hunted over this part of the country, and knew the direct route to the garrison. For some distance, we skirted the prairie. We saw a variety of wild animals, deer, white and black wolves, buffaloes, and wild horses. The Cross Timbers again raised a brambly and tangly guise; a guise created by many seasons.

*Fires made on the prairies by the Indian hunters penetrated these forests, scorching and calcining the lower twigs and branches of the trees, and leaving them black and hard, so as to tear the flesh of man and horse. It was like struggling through forests of cast iron; . . . country, overgrown with scrubbed forests and entangled thickets and intersected by deep ravines, and brisk- running streams, the sources of the Little River.*

Provisions from the buffalo hunt sustained them on October 31.

*About three o'clock on October 31, 1832, we encamped by some pools of water in a small valley, having come about fourteen miles. We had brought on a supply of provisions from our last camp, and supped*

*heartily upon stewed buffalo meat, roasted venison, beignets, or fritters of flour fried in bear's lard, and tea made of a species of the goldenrod, which we had found, throughout our whole route almost as grateful a beverage as coffee. That night the coffee seems to have played out. The coffee on the trail was chancy, but always appreciated by Indian guests as well as the travelers. Coffee was roasted in a frying-pan, without much care, pounded in leathern bag, with a round stone, and boiled in our prime and almost only kitchen utensil, the camp-kettle, in branch or brook water; which on the prairies, is deeply colored by the soil, of which it always holds abundant particles in a state of solution and suspension. In fact, in the course of our tour, we had tasted the quality of every variety of soil, and the draughts of water we had taken might vie in diversity of color, if not of flavor, with the tinctures of an apothecary's shop.*

## **Cleveland County, November 1, 1832**

The first daybreak of November of 1832 was beautiful and the camp was cheerful as the bugle sounded and they started the march.

*The camp again resounded with cheerful voices; every one was animated with the thoughts of soon being at the fort, and reveling on bread and vegetables. All this transient gayety, however, soon died away amidst the fatigues of our march, which lay through the same kind of rough, hilly, thicketed country as that of yesterday.*

Now it was time to cross the Little River for a last time.

*We arrived at the valley of the Little River. At present it had overflowed its banks, and inundated a great part of the valley. The difficulty was to distinguish the stream from the broad sheets of water it had formed, and to find a place where it might be forded; for it was in general deep and miry, with abrupt crumbling banks. We wander . . . a trackless labyrinth . . .*

They got hungrier and colder and wearier and their horses gave out one by one.

Irving returned to New York to write *A Tour on the Prairies* from his notes. It was published in 1835 and has been in print continuously since then. To find out the reason that Irving came to Oklahoma; to find out more about the time he came; to learn more about the people who were here and the people who came with him; read *A Tour on the Prairies* by Washington Irving.