

The Tour Continues

Logan County

October 22-23, 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



The river was about three hundred yards wide, wandering among sand-bars and shoals. The troop reached the opposite shore without any mishap. We had to force our way, for nearly a mile, through a thick canebrake, which at first sight, appeared an impervious mass of reeds and brambles.

Payne County, October 22, 1832

This morning the Tourists awoke at their camp near Wild Horse Creek and headed for the Red Fork. They had been traveling west, but turning back toward Fort Gibson was quietly discussed.

Logan County, October 22, 1832

Washington Irving was traveling with his friends on the way out to the buffalo plains for a day or more of hunting. He was camping with a party of rangers, early cavalry who were mostly very young, with his guides, and with three friends. Irving was the superstar of his time. After a night at the Three Forks and then a night at Fort Gibson all started west. Adventure followed adventure and today would be no different. They had crossed the Arkansas River in round boats and this morning they will cross the Cimarron (Red Fork) with their stalwart horses.

We arrived on the banks of the Red Fork, about seventy-five miles above its mouth. The river was about three hundred yards wide, wandering among sand-bars and shoals. The troop reached the opposite shore without any mishap. We had to force our way, for nearly a mile, through a thick canebrake, which at first sight, appeared an impervious mass of reeds and brambles. Our horses were often to the saddle-

girths in mire and water, and both horse and horseman harassed and torn by bush and brier. We at length extricated ourselves and ascended a ridge of land, where we beheld a beautiful open country before us; while to our right, the belt of forest land, called The Cross Timber continued stretching away to the southward, as far as the eye could reach.

Irving and friends then moved south to what would be the Alarm Camp. The land near Meridian is not a good landscape for defense.

We now came to a halt and had to content ourselves with an indifferent encampment. It was in a grove of scrub-oaks, on the borders of a deep ravine, at the bottom of which were a few scanty pools of water. We were just at the foot of a gradually-sloping hill, covered with half-withered grass that afforded meager pasturage. The grass was high and parched. The view around us was circumscribed and much shut in by gently-swelling hills.

The hemmed in condition of the campsite brought on the alarming events of the night.

In came Captain Bean who saw men far off. He motioned for them to approach, but they paid no attention.

Then things got even scarier.

Tonish arrived, all glorious; his white horse hung all around with buffalo meat. We deducted one half from his boastings; but, now that he had something real to vaunt about, there was no restraining the valor of his tongue. He had observed the fresh track of horses, which he suspected to have been made by some roving band of Pawnees.

Chaos followed.

Rangers, who, in my opinion, are not very brave saddled their horses and rushed about in a frightened way. 'Lord Jesus Christ! Have you seen my saddle?' was one of the desperate cries. You would have thought that the speaker had already been scalped.

Next the outcry was fire.

Suddenly there was an alarm of fire in the camp! The flame from one of the kindling fires had caught to the tall dry grass: a breeze was blowing; there was danger that the camp would soon be wrapped in a light blaze. 'Look to the horses!' cried one; 'Drag away the baggage!' cried another. 'Take care of the rifles and powder-horns!' cried a third. All was hurry-scurry and uproar. No one thought of quelling the fire, nor indeed know how to quell it. Beatte, however, and his comrades attacked it in the Indian mode, beating down the edges of the fire with blankets and horse-cloths, and endeavoring to prevent its spreading among the grass; the rangers followed their example, and in a little while the flames were happily quelled.

There was another cry of Pawnee danger.

There was an indistinct cry from some rangers on the summit of the hill, of which we could only distinguish the words, 'The horses! the horses! get in the horses!' The ranger reached the skirts of the camp. He was almost breathless, and could only say that the Captain had seen Indians at a distance. 'Pawnees! Pawnees!' was now the cry among our wild headed youngsters. A ranger from the hill had reached the skirts of the camp. He was almost breathless, and could only say that the Captain had

seen Indians at a distance. 'Pawnees! Pawnees!' was now the cry among our wild-headed youngsters. 'Drive the horses into the camp!' cried one. 'Saddle the horses!' cried another. 'Form the line!' cried a third. There was now a scene of clamor and confusion that baffles all description.

Alarms increased.

There was a band of Pawnees in a neighboring valley. They had shot old Ryan through the head, and were chasing his companion! 'No, it was not old Ryan that was killed – it was one of the hunters that had been after the two buffaloes.'

'There are three hundred Pawnees just beyond the hill,' cried one voice. 'More, more!' cried another.

Commissioner Ellsworth sounded the alarm in his own way.

Pawnees "Pawnees. Pawnees. Get the horses – to arms! To arms! – Shots were heard over the hill! -- 2 of our men killed? Next 7 killed! -- 500 Pawnees coming with bows and guns – every man get his horse and mount.

Everybody got terribly, overwhelmingly excited.

. . . saddles, bridles, rifles, powder horns, and other equipment, had been snatched out of their places, and thrown helter-skelter among the trees. 'Where is my saddle?' cried one. 'For God's sake help me girth this horse!' cried another. In his hurry and worry, he had put on the saddle the hind part before! Some affected swagger and talk bold; others said nothing, but went on steadily, preparing their horses and weapons, and on these I felt the most reliance.

Rangers headed out to confront the Pawnees. Then a man on horseback approached the camp. It was a ranger followed by his companions. He was sound, unharmed, and his horse was packed with buffalo meat.

They proceeded to give an account of a grand gallop they had had after the two buffaloes, and how many shots it had cost them to bring one to the ground. 'Well, but the Pawnees – the Pawnees – where are the Pawnees?' 'What Pawnees?' 'The Pawnees that attacked you.' 'No one attacked us.' 'But have you seen no Indians on your way?' 'Oh yes, two of us got to the top of a hill to look out for the camp, and saw a fellow on an opposite hill cutting queer antics, who seemed to be an Indian.' 'Pshaw! That was it!' said the Captain. Voices gradually died away; the gossipers nodded and dozed, and sunk to rest. Silence and sleep once more stole over the camp.

Thus ended the night of alarms, with no fire and no Pawnees.

Logan County, October 23, 1832

The drama was forgotten the next day at sight of a beaver pond; a commonwealth of beavers; a republic of beavers.

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.