

# The Tour Continues

## Oklahoma County

*October 23-29, 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

### Oklahoma County, October 23, 1832

Today, Tamed Cross Timbers near Edmond.

*We encamped on the banks of a small clear stream, on the northern border of the Cross Timber; and on the edge of the vast prairies, that extend away to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.*



On October 23, 1832, 176 years ago today, Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow slept east of Edmond. Perhaps his encampment was near the beautiful development of Stone Valley Ranch which has remnants of the dwarf forests of the Cross Timbers on its emerald green lawns. Irving was camping with a party of rangers, early cavalry, and three friends. Irving was the superstar of his time. The three Tourists with him would make their own marks on the world. It was going to be good long Tour.

In the course of the morning they saw a beaver dam.

*We crossed a deep stream with a complete beaver dam, above three feet high, making a large pond, and doubtless containing several families of that industrious animal, though not one showed his nose above water. The Captain would not permit this amphibious commonwealth to be disturbed.*

They were close, very close to the buffalo plains. Anticipation grew.

*We were now continually coming upon the tracks of buffaloes and wild horses; those of the former tended invariable to the south, as we could perceive by the direction of the trampled grass. It was evident we were on the great highway of these migratory herds, but that they had chiefly passed to the southward.*

All day on October 23, the hunters went in every direction and when one returned he had quite a story to tell. When the party was just north of Edmond and south of Guthrie a hunter returned and his friends described his foray.



*A ranger beheld a huge bear dragging the carcass of the deer along the dry channel of a brook, and growling and snarling at four or five officious wolves. The ranger fired at the bear, but missed him. Bruin seemed disposed to make battle and night was coming on, the young hunter felt dismayed at the wildness and darkness of the place, and the strange company he had fallen in with; so he returned empty handed to the camp, where, having told his story, he was heartily bantered by his more experienced comrades.*

Signs of Pawnee were evident that day.

*Beatte, who generally kept a parallel course several hundred yards distant from our line of march, to be on the look-out for game and who regarded every track with the knowing eye of an Indian, reported that he had come upon a very suspicious trail. There were the tracks of men who wore Pawnee moccasins. He had scented the smoke of mingled sumach and tobacco, such as the Indians use. He had observed the tracks of horses, mingled with those of a dog; and a mark in the dust where a cord had been trailed along; probably the long bridle, one end of which the Indian horsemen suffer to trail on the ground.*



Game was sighted and wild horses. Irving responded with delight at wild horses.

*We came in sight of six wild horses, among which I especially noticed two very handsome ones, a gray and a roan. They pranced about, with heads erect, and long flaunting tails, offering a proud contrast to our poor, spiritless, travel-tired steeds. Having reconnoitered us for a moment, they set off at a gallop, passed through a woody dingle, and in a little while emerged once more to view, trotting up a slope about a mile distant.*

The day ended without mishap.

*After a day's journey of fourteen miles in a southwest direction, we encamped on the banks of a small clear stream, on the northern border of the Cross Timber; and on the edge of the vast prairies, that extend away to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.*

There was discussion about the future of the Tour. Would they travel farther west or south?

*We had thus far pursued a western course; and having traversed the Cross Timber, were on the skirts of the Great Western Prairie. We were still, however in a very rough country, where food was scarce. The season was so far advanced that the grass was withered, and the prairies yielded no pasturage. The Indian fires on the prairies were approaching us from north, and south, and west; they might spread also from the east, and leave a scorched desert between us and the frontier, in which our horses might be famished.*

The decision was made to shape the course of the Tour to the east.

## **Oklahoma County, October 24, 1832**

*Here we at once came to a halt, in a beautiful grove of elms, on the site of an old Osage encampment.*



The camp tonight was Buffalo Camp since this was the first time the travelers of 1832 saw the buffalo they had been hoping for since the Tour began. They had seen plenty of signs, but today it would be buffalo. The two guides, Beatte the steady stalwart and Tonish the vaporing braggart, had prominent roles in the events of this day.

The Tourists and their friends awoke on October 24 with a sense of loss. The loss they were experiencing was to a great extent due to the absence of bread. No more did the young soldiers cackle and bark and moo.

*The morning broke bright and clear, but the camp had nothing of its usual gayety. The concert of the farm-yard was at an end; not a cock crew, nor dog barked; nor was there either singing or laughing; everyone pursued his avocations quietly and gravely. Some of the young men were getting as way-worn as their horses; and most of them, unaccustomed to the hunter's life, began to repine at its privations. What they most felt was the want of bread, their rations of flour having been exhausted for several days. Flour was disappearing; homesickness appearing. The good Commissioner felt it severely. 'I have today had my thoughts turned incessantly on home, and become most melancholy in the reflection; that you and the dear children were so far away.'*

Irving had traded once already to get a horse to his liking. Here on Route 66 he traded or swopped again, parting with \$70.00 to sweeten the following exchange.

*I had been fortunate enough recently, by a further exchange, to get possession of the best horse in the troop; a full-blooded sorrel of excellent bottom, beautiful form, and most generous qualities. I felt quite like another being, now that I had an animal under me, spirited yet gentle, docile to a remarkable degree, and easy, elastic, and rapid in all his movements. He became almost as much attached to me as a dog; would follow me when I dismounted, would come to me in the morning to be noticed and caressed; and would put his muzzle between me and my book, as I sat reading at the foot of a tree.*

Irving certainly knew the worth of things. Commissioner Ellsworth knew the cost of things, though in this case he was mistaken about the money involved. Well, he knew the worth of things too.

*M Irving became dissatisfied with his little poney, who was evidently too small for a man of his size, and he made an exchange with Lieutenant Calwell for his horse and gave \$70 to boot. He rode this new horse but a few days when he became tired of him, and exchanged again with M Clements for a fine sorrel horse by paying boot again of \$35 – With this last horse he was evidently much pleased, and it was certainly a fine animal and deserving his affections.*

There was at least one promise that brought enjoyment. They were getting close to the buffalo prairies. And then the word was shouted that they all were hoping to hear. It was the word buffalo.

*Beatte called out and made signals, as if something were coming round the hill to intercept us. A skirt of thickets hid the approach of the supposed enemy from our view. We heard a trampling among the brushwood. My horse looked toward the place, snorted and pricked up his ears, when presently a couple of huge buffalo bulls came crashing through the brake, and making directly toward us. At sight of us they wheeled round, and scuttled along a narrow defile of the hill. In an instant half a score of rifles cracked off; there was a universal whoop and halloo, and away went half the troop, helter-skelter in pursuit, and*

*myself among the number. The most of us soon pulled up, and gave over a chase which led through birch and brier, and break-neck ravines. We all gave up. At least this time the buffalo were lost.*

During the many days Irving and his friends had been on the trail, they had disdain for anything much besides deer and bear. Turkey was the worst. They still had killed no buffalo. Now even turkeys were looking good.

*We came to a fine meadow with a broad clear stream winding through it . . . Here we at once came to a halt, in a beautiful grove of elms, on the site of an old Osage encampment. Scarcely had we dismounted, when a universal firing of rifles took place upon a large flock of turkeys, scattered about the grove, which proved to be a favorite roosting-place for these simple birds. They flew to the trees, and sat perched upon their branches, stretching out their long necks, and gazing in stupid astonishment, until eighteen of them were shot down. In the height of the carnage, word was brought that there were four buffaloes in a neighboring meadow. The turkeys were now abandoned for nobler game. My horse, who, under his former rider, had hunted the buffalo, seemed as much excited as myself, and endeavored to force his way through the bushes. At length we extricated ourselves. I found our little Frenchman, Tonish, curvetting on horseback round a great buffalo which he had wounded too severely to fly, and which he was keeping employed until we should come up. There was a mixture of the grand and the comic, in beholding this tremendous animal. The buffalo stood with his shaggy front always presented to his foe; his mouth open, his tongue parched, his eyes like coals of fire, and his tail erect with rage; every now and then he would make a faint rush upon his foe, who easily evaded his attack, capering and cutting all kinds of antics before him. We now made repeated shots at the buffalo, but they glanced into his mountain of flesh without proving mortal. He made a slow and grand retreat into the shallow river, turning upon his assailants whenever they pressed upon him; and when in the water, took his stand there as if prepared to sustain a siege. A rifle ball, more fatally lodged, sent a tremor through his frame. He turned and attempted to wade across the stream, but after tottering a few paces, slowly fell upon his side and expired. It was the fall of a hero.*

The travelers killed two more buffalo and found it difficult to eat the old tough bulls.

*A fat buck yielded us more savory meat for our evening's repast.*

## **Oklahoma County, October 25, 1832**

Tonight Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow encamped near Spencer. The friends were with the rangers, mounted soldiers from Fort Gibson, who were here to try to engage the western nations like the Pawnee, the Comanche, and the Kiowa. Yesterday they finally saw buffalo, but the bulls were so old and tough they made very poor eating. Commissioner Ellsworth was feeling peevish from his diet of meat, meat, meat.

*I took two blue pills, hoping they would regulate internal matters.*

October 25, 1832 was an exciting day, but it didn't actually start so well.

*We left the buffalo camp and had a toilsome and harassing march over ridges of hills, covered with a ragged meagre forest . . . and broken by deep gullies.*

It seemed the dwarf forests of the Cross Timbers wouldn't get behind them.

*Among the oaks I observe many of the most diminutive size; some not above a foot high, yet bearing abundance of small acorns.*

Today at Clar-Mar Drive and Hogback Road is a plaque honoring the day of Ringing the Wild Horse. This meadow has been honored time and time again as the valley of Ringing the Wild Horse.

Look to the south from the site and see the Valley of the Wild Horse. Commissioner Ellsworth was effusive.



*When we left our encampment we thought we must soon come to the North fork of the Canadian – we were two miles distant only – as we descended the gentle declivity, which leads to the valley, on the north side, we discovered a most beautiful smooth prairie 2 miles long, and 1 ½ miles wide – The southerly side was skirted by the cotton wood and other trees which grew upon the banks of the north fork, running almost in a semicircle – the North West & East was bounded by small oaks – Nor was the beauty of the landscape, all – On the right of us was a large herd of wild horses! On the left a small herd of buffaloe!*

Latrobe also remembered the sight of this valley with delight and amazement.

*We came unexpectedly in sight of the North Fork of the Canadian. We saw before us a meadow of about four miles long by one in breadth, bounded towards the river by a gigantic grove of cotton-wood trees, indicating the course of the river. To the right appeared a large troop of wild horses, and to the left, toward the lower end of the prairie, were seen the huge backs of a number of Bison.*

As Irving saw the valley, it was equal in beauty to the valley Ellsworth and Latrobe described.

*This line of rugged hills swept down into a valley, through which flowed the north fork of the Red River. A beautiful meadow about half a mile wide, enamelled with yellow autumnal flowers, stretched for two or three miles along the foot of the hills, bordered on the opposite side by the river, whose banks were fringed with cotton-wood trees, the bright foliage of which refreshed and delighted the eye, after being wearied by the contemplation of monotonous wastes of brown forest. The meadow was finely diversified by groves and clumps of trees, so happily dispersed, that they seemed as if set out by the hand of art. We beheld a troop of wild horses, quietly grazing on a green lawn, about a mile distant to our right, while to our left, at nearly the same distance, were several buffaloes; some feeding, others reposing and ruminating among the high rich herbage, under the shade of a clump of cotton-wood trees. The whole had the appearance of a broad beautiful tract of pasture land, on the highly ornamented estate of some gentleman farmer, with his cattle grazing about the lawns and meadows.*

A council of war was held and it was decided to ring the wild horse.

*This requires a large party of horsemen, well mounted. They extend themselves in each direction . . . and gradually form a ring so as to surround the game. Two or three ride toward the horses, who start off in an opposite direction. Whenever they approach the bounds of the ring, however, a huntsman presents himself and turns them from their course. In this way they are checked and driven back at every point; and kept galloping round and round this magic circle, until, being completely tired down, it is easy for the hunters to ride up beside them, and throw the lariat over their heads.*

When the ring was finally made and the maneuver attempted, nearly all the horses escaped. Tonish turned the scene into a debacle by jumping the gun and sending the horses off and away. Only one good horse was

captured.

*As to little Scaramouch Tonish, who had marred the whole scene by his precipitancy, he had been more successful than he deserved, having managed to catch a beautiful cream-colored colt, about seven months old who had not strength to keep up with his companions. The mercurial little Frenchman was beside himself with exultation. No bad action is without its reward.*

*The maneuver completed, they left the valley. Irving continued the day's story.*

*We forded the North Fork, a rapid stream, and of a purity seldom to be found in the rivers of the prairie. We again ascended among hills, from one of which we had an extensive view over this belt of cross timber, and a cheerless prospect it was; hill beyond hill, forest beyond forest, all of one sad russet hue.*

That night Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow encamped somewhere near Spencer and north of Arcadia.

*. . . in a valley, beside a scanty pool, under a scattered grove of elms, the upper branches of which were fringed with tufts of the mystic mistletoe.*

The next day, October 26 would bring rain, lots of rain, a deluge.



## **Oklahoma County, October 26, 27, 28, 1832**

### **26 Rain, 27 Rain, 28 Rain**

*Our late bustling encampment had a forlorn and desolate appearance.*

On October 26, 1832 Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow slept in or near Midwest City, perhaps on the banks of Crutchco Creek. Irving woke on October 26 to sun, but soon it was covered with gray which matched the dull hue of the cheerless country. Foul weather kept him at that camp for two more nights. Rain was incessant.

On the way to that night's camp, the party saw seven Osage warriors. The warriors had finished a buffalo hunt and now were after Pawnee horses and scalps. The especially virtuous Commissioner Ellsworth spoke to them of peace.

*. . . exhorting them to abstain for all offense acts against the Pawnees; informing them of the plan of their father at Washington, to put an end to all war among his red children; and assuring them that he was sent to the frontier to establish a universal peace.*

The Osages listened with silence and good manners yet they heard something like this,

*As their great father intended so soon to put an end to all warfare, it behooved them to make the most of the little time that was left to them.*

Off they went to steal horses.

Irving arrived after the campsite had been chosen.

*On overtaking the troop, I found it encamping in a rich bottom of woodland, traversed by a small stream, running between deep crumbling banks. A drizzling rain ushered in the autumnal storm that had been brewing. Preparations were immediately made to weather it; our tent was pitched, and our saddles, saddle-bags, packages of coffee, sugar, salt, and every thing else that could be damaged by the rain, were gathered under its shelter. The rangers formed similar shelters of bark and skins, or of blankets stretched on poles with great fires in front. The rain set in sullenly and steadily for two days. The brook which flowed peaceably on our arrival, swelled into a turbid and boiling torrent, and the forest became little better than a mere swamp. Our poor, way-worn horses, reduced by weary travel and scanty pasturage, lost all remaining spirit, and stood, with drooping heads, flagging ears, and half closed eyes, dozing and steaming in the rain.*



The rain went on and on. The fires were immense. Whole trees were burning, totally oblivious to the damp. The rangers and the guides could make a fire in almost any circumstance. The Commissioner described how they did it.

*Once I was wet "through & through." My excellent servants looked for an old dry tree – the outer bark was wet – but they cut into the tree, and found some light decayed wood, that was dry – with the help of dry roots which have been protected from the rains by the inclination of the tree a fire was slow(l)y got up.*

The rain went on and on. Stories were told. The loquacious guide Tonish was in a state, feeling his age.

*The change of weather had taken sharp hold of our little Frenchman. His meagre frame was racked with rheumatic pains and twinges. He had the toothache—the earache—his face was tied up—he had shooting pains in every limb . . . he was in an incessant fidget about the fire, roasting, and stewing, and groaning, and scolding, and swearing.*

The dependable guide Beatte felt sorry for himself.

*I am all broke to pieces and good for nothing; I no care now what happened to me any more. However, for all that, it would take a pretty strong man to put me down, anyhow.*

The rain went on and on. Some hunters left the camp and were hard pressed by the rain.

*The lagging gait and reeking flanks of their horses gave evidence of hard riding; and, on nearer approach, we found them hung round with meat like a butcher's shambles. In fact, they had been scouring an immense prairie that extended beyond the forest, and which was covered with buffalo.*

The rain went on and on.

*The mud around our tent was over shoe – I got some grape vines, & bushes to lay down before our door, to save mud from our parlour bed room drawing room & dining hall all together. M Pourteles & Brailey have nothing but mocassins and their feet are wet every moment. We go to rest tonight in a wet tent – and wet every thing.*

The rain went on and on.

*By this time the low jungle, in which the party had been lying, soaked with rain for the last forty hours, had become a perfect Slough of Despond, and not a blade of grass was left.*

## **Oklahoma County, October 29, 1832**

The rain stopped and the Tourists and their colleagues marched.

*The morning opened gloomy and lowering; but toward eight o'clock the sun struggled forth and lighted up the forest. Now began a scene of bustle, and clamor, and gayety, stripping the poles of the wet blankets, loading the baggage horses. I always felt disposed to linger, that I might behold the wilderness relapsing into silence and solitude . . . The surrounding forest was trampled into a quagmire. Trees felled and partly hewn in pieces, and scattered in huge fragments; tent-poles stripped of their covering; smouldering fires, with great morsels of roasted venison and buffalo meat, standing in wooden spits before them hacked and slashed by the knives of hungry hunters. Turkey-buzzards, or vultures, were already on the wing, wheeling their magnificent flight high in the air, and preparing for a descent.*

*Our late bustling encampment had a forlorn and desolate appearance.*

And then Irving and his friends came out of the forest and saw what they had been traveling toward, vast buffalo grasslands – and buffalo. This day, October 29, would be the day of the grand buffalo hunt. A long Tour was still left.

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.