

The Tour Continues

Tulsa County

October 12-15, 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



Washington Irving Meeting the Osage

Oklahoma Senate Art

Sponsor: Charles Ford - Artist: Wayne Cooper

We reached a straggling Osage village, on the banks of the Arkansas.

Tulsa County October 11, 1832

Near or perhaps in Tulsa County, Irving passed an Osage village. The Osages had given up the land along the Arkansas, but had not left. He traveled with a small party of rangers, mounted soldiers, guides, and three friends who had traveled with him since New York. The three included an excitable, teenaged Swiss nobleman Count Albert Alexandre de Pourtalès, a brilliant scholar Charles Joseph Latrobe, and a nearly perfect Commissioner to the Indians Henry Leavitt Ellsworth. They came to see the West of the imagination.

Tulsa County October 12, 1832

The Trails of Tears had not begun, but Muscogee Creek Indians were already here. In fact Irving saw a group of Creeks coming from a ball game.

Some were on foot, some on horseback with gayly dressed females behind them. One had a scarlet handkerchief bound round his head with a turf of black feathers like a cock's tail. Another had a white handkerchief, with red feathers; while a third . . . had stuck in his turban a brilliant bunch of sumach.

Near Coweta that morning, they had a coffee break.

We made a halt in the forest, where there was abundance of peavine. We turned the horses loose to graze. A fire was made, water procured from an adjacent spring, and in a short time Tonish had a pot of coffee prepared.

They continued along the south edge of Broken Arrow.

. . . we passed by a lonely pool, covered with the most magnificent water-lilies I had ever beheld; among which swam several wood-ducks . . . water-fowl remarkable for the gracefulness and brilliancy of its plumage.



October 12

Friends for the Whole Day

Oklahoma Senate Art

Sponsor: Senator Ben Brown - Artist: Wayne Cooper

All day on October 12, along and around 131st St. South Albert-Alexandre, Comte de Pourtalès traveled in the company of a fine young Osage he met earlier. He continued to call him Mr. Manhattan.

I am enchanted with Mr. Manhattan . . . although he is only seventeen years old, his body, his size, and his proud bearing make him look twenty-five.

This was and will be the land of huge towering trees along the rivers and creeks, the trees that made Irving think of cathedrals.

We were overshadowed by lofty trees . . . as the glancing rays of the sun shone through the transparent leaves . . . I was reminded of the effect of sunshine among the stained windows and clustering columns of a Gothic cathedral.

Irving and his friends were trying to overtake a large body of rangers who were waiting for them on Riverside Drive. At nightfall the large body of rangers was still ahead.

Hoping to reach the camp of the rangers before nightfall, we pushed on until twilight, when we were obliged to halt on the borders of a ravine.

Washington Irving Park is on Memorial, north of the Arkansas River and Bixby and south of 131st Street. This may not be the exact campsite, but the park is a poetic place to see and experience today. It is full of native plants and trees and contains Sunnyside, Irving's home in New York, as the backdrop for the amphitheater in the park.

Campsite near Washington Irving Park

The rangers bivouacked under trees, at the bottom of the dell, while we pitched our tent on a rocky knoll near a running stream.



Irving and party settled in to sleep that night with their guests, a group of Osage men. The Osage men enjoyed a meal and coffee. Just before sleep, all were entertained with rap session. Pourtalès, the excitable teenager, loved pretty young women and was always attempting to court the lovely Creek and Osage maidens. This fact was not lost on the Osages who were fond of him, but also thought him comical. So they lay, side by side, before the campfire and started what sounded like rap.

(They) began a low nasal chant, drumming with their hands upon their breasts, by way of accompaniment. Their chant seemed to consist of regular staves, every one terminating, not in melodious cadence, but in the abrupt interjection huh! Uttered almost like a hiccup. They spoke of the young Count, whose animated character and eagerness for Indian enterprise had struck their fancy, and they indulged in some waggery about him and the young Indian beauties that produced great merriment.

Young Count Pourtalès had something to say about this 1832 rap session.

They treated us to a half dozen erotic songs which sounded like the far-off howling of wolves on a winter night. Then they lay on their backs, tapped their stomachs to give a very pleasant tremolo sound to their voices, and groaned several arias in which even the most expert ear could not have found the slightest melody, although the tremolo marked the measure quite clearly. After the song session and several libations made to the god of tobacco, they rolled up in their blankets, as we did, and slept soundly.

As he lay in the rain that night, Irving reflected on the Osages he had met.

I have . . . noticed Osages sitting around a fire in the most animated and lively conversation making the woods resound with peals of laughter. No one weeps more bitterly or profusely at the death of a relative. The Indian of poetical fiction is a personification of imaginary attributes.

Tulsa County, October 13, 1832

On the morning of October 13, Mr. Manhattan was gone. All the travelers felt the loss. The Count was devastated. He wouldn't see the exceptional youth again.

We searched in vain for my friend Manhattan. He had disappeared, with his horse . . . his relatives, cousins, etc., had dissuaded him from going off with the whites; they had terrified him! Good-by, then, oh mighty marksman.

TULSA Riverside Drive

As they traveled north and west they saw a ridge above the river; a ridge still here. Coming over the ridge today one can imagine 1832.

. . . the rangers set up a shout, and pointed to horses grazing in a woody bottom. A few paces brought us to an elevated ridge, from whence we looked down upon the encampment. It was a wild bandit, or Robin Hood, scene. In a beautiful open forest, traversed by a running stream, were booths of bark and branches, and tents of blankets, temporary shelters from the recent rain. Rangers were cooking at large fires made at the feet of trees; some were stretching and dressing deer skins; some were shooting at a mark, and some lying about on the grass. Venison jerked, and hung on frames, was drying over the embers in one place; in another lay carcasses recently brought in by the hunters. Horses were grazing here and there among the thickets. The main troop of Rangers camped in a superb spot. Large, beautiful trees shaded a little valley covered with abundant vegetation, reeds, and horse-bean plants, which made an excellent pasture for our horses. A stream supplied us with rather clear water, a rare and precious gift in this country.

In fact clear water was so precious; the Tourists must have stopped later that day or the next day to refresh themselves at the spring that still exists at the McBirney Mansion.

. . . clear water, a rare and precious gift in this country.



Once Irving and his friends were settled, Tulsa became the site of a productive honey hunt making Tulsa forever after, the Honey Camp.

The party was headed by a veteran bee-hunter, a tall lank fellow in homespun garb with a straw hat shaped not unlike a beehive. We traced the honey-laden bees to their hive, in the hollow trunk of a blasted oak. Bee-hunters now plied their axes vigorously. Down came the tree with a tremendous crash, bursting open all the hoarded treasures of the commonwealth. The party now fell to, with spoon and

hunting-knife, to scoop out the flakes of honey-comb.

Commissioner Ellsworth had his own take on the honey hunt.

A small fire was made. The bees poured out upon us, in great numbers but we stood still, and did not show fight, and they soon became 'good natured.' When the rangers and their guests left the honey tree, a quantity of honey was left behind in the hollow.

Irving wanted to know what would happen to the tree. The bee-hunter told him.

It will be cleared off by varmint, bears, and skunks, and racoons, and 'possoms. Bears is the knowingest varmint for finding out a bee-tree. They'll gnaw for days together at the trunk till they make a hole big enough to get in their paws, and then they'll haul out honey, bees and all.

As you travel north on Riverside Drive, you can see many of the animals Irving saw, bears, deer, antelope, wolves, geese, a cougar, an elk, a buffalo, and mallards.



NatureWorks **Bruins Riverpark Picnic**

The broad, sandy shore where we had landed, was intersected with innumerable tracks of elk, deer, bears, racoons, turkeys, and water-fowl . . . the claws of bears were to be traced on various trees.

'A bear! A bear!' was the cry.

Food was everywhere.

The surrounding country abounded with game. Camp was overstocked with provisions, and, as no less than twenty bee-trees had been cut down everyone revelled in luxury. The cooking was conducted in hunters' style; the meat . . . roasted or broiled with all its juices retained. Bread was a paste made of flour and water, twisted round the ends of sticks, and thus roasting it before the fire.

When the Tourists caught up with the large body of rangers; a dozen became eighty; rap became rapture.

There was nothing so pretty as our camp site with its fourteen fires which lit up the forest. The animated groups around the fires cast long, moving shadows against the tree trunk. There suddenly rose a strain of nasal melody a choir uniting their voices in a most lugubrious psalm tune led by one of the lieutenants who had officiated as schoolmaster, singing-master, and as Methodist preacher, in one of the villages of the frontier. The chant rose solemnly and sadly in the night air.

When the songs ended, discussion began about the trail ahead. The Captain spoke of Bald Hill, a landmark they would pass on the way. Irving went to his blanket and bearskin.

(Irving) soon fell into a sound and sweet sleep.

Tulsa County, October 14, 1832

It was a bright sunny morning, with a pure transparent atmosphere that seemed to bathe the very heart with gladness. Our group looks absolutely warlike, a long line of individuals on good mounts, armed with carbines, dressed in moccasins, leggings, leather shirts, coats, trousers, hats of all



possible descriptions, part American, part Indian. Sometimes we scrambled up broken and rocky hills, from the summits of which we had wide views stretching on one side over distant prairies diversified by groves and forests, and on the other ranging along a line of blue and shadowy hills beyond the waters of the Arkansas.

A short trip from the river can take you to the Washington Irving Monument at Easton and Vancouver. Before the highway the river could be seen from the site.



East

*It seems to me as if these beautiful regions
Answer literally to the
Description of the land of promise,
A land flowing with milk and honey.*

West

*As the night advanced we perceived above the trees to the west a ruddy glow
flushing up the sky.*

“It is at the Red Fork(Cimarron),” said Beatte .

Regarding the sky.

“It seems but three miles distant.

Yet it perhaps is twenty.”

North

If you keep along yonder, by the edge of the prairies you will come to a bald hill with a pile of stones upon it.

Well those stones were set up by the Osages as a land mark.

*From that spot you may have a sight of the
Red Fork (Cimarron).*

Far in the distance was Bald Hill, Irving’s final sight in Tulsa. Bald hill is visible today from the Vista Room at Gilcrease, America’s Museum. Travel to Post Oak Lodge and to the Tulsa Centennial Botanical Garden and see it up close.

Bald Hill

By the edge of the prairie, you will come to a bald hill, with a pile of stones upon it.

Irving and friends had traveled on the east side of the Arkansas since October 10 and would continue until October 15 when they would cross over the Cimarron.



Our march continued parallel to the Arkansas, through rich and varied country; . . . where the gigantic trees were entangled with grape-vines, hanging like cordage from their branches; sometimes we coasted along . . . glassy pools, imbedded like mirrors in the quiet bosom of the forest, reflecting its autumnal foliage, and patches of the clear blue sky.

You can leave the Washington Irving Monument at Easton and Vancouver and travel south on Quanah, go under OK 64 and head through the industrial area along the Arkansas River. When you reach Sand Springs, turn north at Adams until you see the Drug Warehouse. There are the sand springs that named Sand Springs; possible camp site for October 14. Another possible campsite is the Keystone Ancient Forest where many trees are as they were in 1832: another might be somewhere in Sand Springs River Park.

The horses were hobbled and left to graze, fires were laid, and shots were heard. Hunters brought in a fine buck and a fat doe.

Then the star hunter arrived.

Just as the night set in, there was a great shouting and immediately afterwards a body of young rangers came parading round the various fires, bearing one of their comrades in triumph on their shoulders.



NatureWorks Wichita Wapiti

The young huntsman, whose name was M'Lellan, was the hero of the camp for the night and was the "father of the feast" into the bargain; for portions of his elk were seen roasting at every fire.

Cooking the game involved boiling and roasting. Both products were handled with knives since they brought bowls, but no spoons on the trail.

After fire is made, a pole is cut about 6 feet long, & stuck into the ground – from the end of this, a wooden hook is suspended by a string or vine to hold the kettle – the different kinds of meats are then spitted, and placed nearly perpendicular before the fire – both ends of the stick are sharpened, and the meat is shifted occasionally, to cook it thoroughly – I need not say, that appetite waits impatiently to devour the repast.

With honey in Tulsa and elk in Sand Springs, the 1832 travelers were living off the fat of the land. And it looked like more successful hunting was ahead.

Tulsa County October 15, 1832

Morning arrived and a cacophony, human and animal, awakened Irving.

I was awakened before daybreak the next morning, by the mournful howling of a wolf, who was skulking about the purlieus of the camp, attracted by the scent of venison. Scarcely had the first gray streak of dawn appeared, when a youngster shaking off his sleep, crowed in imitation of a cock, with a loud, clear note and prolonged cadence, that would have done credit to the most veteran chanticleer. . . . The chant was echoed from lodge to lodge, and followed by the cackling of hens, quacking of ducks, gabbling of turkeys, and grunting of swine, until we seemed to have been transported into the midst of a farmyard . . .

As you travel west from Sand Springs, you are surrounded by rolling hills and beautiful open country; champaign country. Irving climbed one of these hills.

. . . we came upon a well-worn Indian track, and following it, scrambled to the summit of a hill . . . we had a wide prospect over a country . . . enriched by groves and clumps of trees of varied turf and foliage.

Later that morning, perhaps while still in Tulsa County, they came upon a skunk. The talented Latrobe wrote about the event.

It happened that our approach roused a poor skunk from his noontide slumber under a fallen tree. His destruction was speedily effected by Tonish and Beatte, not however before it had avenged itself by filling the air with such a subtil and fetid odour as was almost beyond human endurance.

Irving hated the skunk and the thought of having it for dinner was unthinkable.

It was murdered and the killers were made the objects of merriment. I had the vexation to see the carcass, stripped of its skin, and looking like a fat suckling pig. I made a solemn vow, in secret, that our fire should not be disgraced by the cooking of that polecat.

Irving and friends headed toward the Cimarron. They reached it and crossed the Arkansas where Irving dropped the skunk in the water. They loafed by a creek for two days while Pourtalès pouted. Hunger became so sharp that Irving happily ate skunk. They painfully traveled the iron hard wood and razor sharp briars of the Cross-Timbers. They endured three days of rain in a quagmire near Oklahoma City. They entered the vast grasslands around Interstate 35 and experienced a breathtaking, invigorating, terrifying buffalo hunt. At the turn toward home, they saw an apple green sunset. Irving arrived back in New York, looked at his sketches and his notes, and began the filigree.

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.