

The Tour Continues

Wagoner County

October 10–12, 1832

November 8, 1832 Overnight

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

October 10, 1832 Three Forks

Meeting of Verdigris & Grand & Arkansas Rivers

Colonel Chouteau's Trading Establishment

After leaving Fort Gibson, Irving and Ellsworth stopped at Colonel Chouteau's place to pick up Pourtalès and Latrobe. It was a motley crowd at Chouteau's place. There were the Osages. The way 1832 looked at the world was not today's way.

. . . stately fellows; stern and simple in garb and aspect. They wore no ornaments; their dress consisted merely of blankets, leggings, and moccasins. Their hair was cropped close, excepting a bristling ridge on the top, like the crest of a helmet, with a long scalp lock hanging behind.

There were the Mucogee People then called Creeks.

There is something, at the first glance, quite oriental in the appearance of this tribe. They dress in calico hunting-shirts of various brilliant colors, decorated with bright fringes, and belted with broad girdles, embroidered with beads: they had leggings of dressed deer skins, or of green or scarlet cloth, with embroidered knee bands and tassels: their moccasins are fancifully wrought and ornamented, and they wear gaudy handkerchiefs tastefully bound round their heads.

There were others for Irving to describe.

There was a sprinkling of trappers, hunters, half-breeds, creoles, negroes of every hue; and all that other rabble rout of nondescript beings that keep about the frontiers.

The Tourists headed across the Verdigris River. Today the bridge across the Verdigris is marked with a large stone stele.

We descended to the bank of the river and crossed in straggling file, the horses stepping cautiously from rock to rock, and in a manner feeling about for a foothold beneath the rushing and brawling stream. All

were excited. The young Count was in such a state he said he was about to die of excitement. He was ready and dressed in a embroidered outfit of purple leather. We descended to the bank of the river and crossed in straggling file, the horses stepping cautiously from rock to rock, and in a manner feeling about for a foothold beneath the rushing and brawling stream.

Today there is a memorial of the many events at the crossing. Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow headed north and west along the east bank of the Arkansas River with a party of rangers; some very young; some very grizzled.

They were a heterogeneous crew; some in frock-coats made of green blankets; others in leathern hunting-shirts, but the most part in marvelously ill-cut garments, much the worse for wear, and evidently put on for rugged service.



All slept near Poster that night. The western sights were new and intriguing.

. . . thridding lofty forests, and entangled thickets, and passing by Indian wigwams and negro huts, until toward dusk we arrived at a frontier farm-house, owned by a settler of the name of Berryhill. It was situated on a hill, below which the rangers had encamped in a circular grove, on the margin of a stream.

For the rangers the reason for the trip was to meet and parley with the Plains Indians. For Irving and his friends it was a chance to see the West of their imaginations. Irving was the superstar of his time. Henry Leavitt Ellsworth was in Oklahoma as a Commissioner to the Indians, but would one day be called the Father of the Department of Agriculture. Albert-Alexandre de Pourtalès was a Swiss Count who would serve in the Prussian Diplomatic Corps. Charles Joseph Latrobe was Pourtalès' teacher and companion and would become an important figure in Australia taking Melbourne from primitive to civilized. Guides hired by the four friends, Tonish and Beatte, were as good as could be and frontier to the bone. All the friends had followed Auguste Pierre Chouteau a great trader from a famous family, from Saint Louis to his trading establishment at the Three Forks. The two friends got all the way to Fort Gibson.

To find out what it was like to prepare for an evening's encampment, read Ellsworth's journal. He tells us in utmost detail.

The horses, are immediately unladed and hobbled, which is tying their fore legs together with a cord, so that they cannot move except by jumping with both fore legs together. The next thing, is, to make a fire. After a fire is made, a pole is cut about 6 feet long, & stuck into the ground. From the end of this, a wooden hood is suspended by a string or vine to hold the kettle for heating water or boiling coffee. Different kinds of meat are then spitted. In the fat is boiled some fritters. I need not say, that appetite waits impatiently to devour the repast. After supper, a watch is set to protect us from enemies & thieves, and our attention is then turned toward our repose.

For most of the trip west the travelers loved the tour and the adventure.

Mr. Irving declares for all to hear that he has never slept or eaten so well as he does now that he is a nomad. We never drink anything but water. Sometimes it is heated by the sun or muddied by our horses' hooves, but our thirst makes it taste delicious. We have deer, prairie-hen, wild turkey, squirrel, and grilled, boiled, raw, cooked, and fried corn. We pick wild grapes in groves of trees in the middle of the prairies. We have coffee and sassafras tea. Everything is seasoned with a hellish appetite.

Wagoner County, October 11, 1832

On October 11, 1832 Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow camped on the banks of the Arkansas River near Coweta. His friends and fellow travelers included singularly romantic Albert-Alexandre Pourtalès, Comte de Pourtalès; scholarly gentleman Charles Joseph Latrobe; and rectitudinous Henry Leavitt Ellsworth. Irving and Latrobe were pretty tolerant and easy going. It was the relationship between the mature, virtuous Commissioner and the young, callow Count that was hard going. Commissioner Ellsworth knew Pourtalès was a nobleman and that had to stand for something!

M. Pourteles was full of fun & frolic. So eager was M Pourteles to prepare in the best manner for game by getting linnen patches, for his balls that he cut up his finest linnen collars for that purpose – But he is heir apparent to a large estate in Switzerland & Bohemia!!

On October 11, they were on the trail by seven o'clock. The party moved parallel to the east bank of the Arkansas River. Sometimes the undergrowth and vines were just too much and they headed to the prairie. They passed the harbingers of the Creeks who would soon claim this land.

For some miles the country was sprinkled with Creek villages and farm-houses; the inhabitants of which appeared to have adopted, with considerable facility, the rudiments of civilization, and to have thriven in consequence. Their farms were well stocked, and their houses had a look of comfort and abundance.

Sometime during the day, they had the chance to see the Creeks who dwelt on these farms coming home from a grand game of ball.

Some were on foot, some on horseback; the latter, occasionally, with gayly dressed females behind them. They have a gypsy fondness for brilliant colors and gay decorations, and are bright and fanciful objects when seen at a distance on the prairies. One had a scarlet handkerchief bound round his head, surmounted with a turf of black feathers like a cock's tail. Another had a white handkerchief, with red feathers; while a third, for want of a plume, had stuck in his turban a brilliant bunch of sumach.

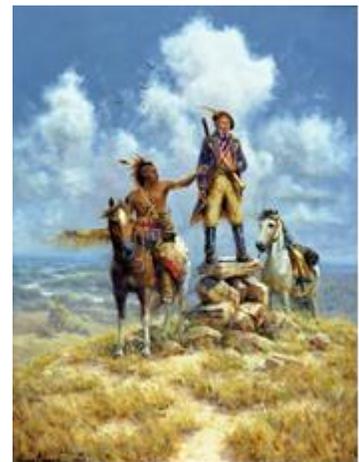
The travelers lost their way for a while, passing the last house on the trail. As they traveled a footpath toward the empty west, they spied an Osage on horseback.

Friends for a Day at Oklahoma Capitol

Count Albert-Alexandre de Pourtalès and Osage Youth

Artist: Wayne Cooper Sponsor: Senator Ben Brown

He was about nineteen or twenty years of age, but well grown, with the fine Roman countenance common to his tribe, and he rode with his blanket wrapped around his loins, his naked bust would have furnished a model for statuary. He was mounted on a beautiful piebald horse, a mottled white and brown, of the wild breed of the prairies, decorated with a broad collar, from which hung in front a tuft of horse-hair dyed of a bright scarlet.



Teenaged Count Pourtalès knew that he had found a soul mate and that they would travel the together to the end of the tour, friends forever. He even gave the young Osage a name, Mr. Manhattan.

I am enchanted with Mr. Manhattan . . . (who) now follows us on a little pony with no saddle and only a

buffalo-hide strap for a bridle. He is the handsomest male Indian that I have ever seen, and, although he is only seventeen years old, his body, his size, and his proud bearing make him look twenty-five.

Later at a fork in the trail, the Count, Mr. Manhattan, and Mr. Latrobe took one fork and the rest of the party took the other. Irving was distressed that they were leaving the protection of the larger party.

The young Count and his companion came to a halt and prepared to take leave of us. The Osages and Pawnees were at war, and they might fall in with some warrior party of the later, who are ferocious foes; besides, their small number, and their valuable horses, would form a great temptation. Nothing could restrain the romantic ardor of the Count for a campaign of buffalo hunting with the Osages. His travelling companion, of discreeter age and calmer temperament, was convinced of the rashness of the enterprise; but he could not control the impetuous zeal of his youthful friend, and he was too loyal to leave him to pursue his hazardous scheme alone.

Tourists Irving and Ellsworth now headed toward the Arkansas River.

We came in sight of the Arkansas. It presented a broad and rapid stream, bordered by a beach of fine sand, overgrown with willows and cottonwood trees. Beyond the river, the eye wandered over a beautiful champaign country, of flowery plains and sloping uplands, diversified by groves and clumps of trees, and long screens of woodland; the whole wearing the aspect of complete, and even ornamental cultivation, instead of native wilderness.

Those left behind found a promising site on the banks of the river near today's Coweta. At that point the Count, the Virtuoso Latrobe, and Mr. Manhattan came back.

We heard a halloo . . . and beheld the young Count and his party . . . We welcomed them to the camp with heartfelt satisfaction; for their departure upon so hazardous an expedition had caused us great uneasiness. A short experiment had convinced them of the toil and difficulty of inexperienced travellers like themselves making their way through the wilderness.

Mr. Manhattan would be with them too.

The Count had prevailed upon the young Osage, to continue with him, and still calculated upon achieving great exploits . . . on the buffalo prairies.

At 10:30 the next morning they had a coffee break.

We made a halt in the forest, where there was abundance of pea-vine. A fire was made, water procured from an adjacent spring, and in a short time Tonish, had a pot of coffee prepared for our refreshment. The horses banqueted luxuriously on the pea-vines, and some lay down and rolled amongst them.

This is the land of the huge towering trees.

We were overshadowed by lofty trees, with straight smooth trunks, like stately columns; and 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. There is a grandeur and solemnity in our spacious forests of the West, that awaken in me the same feeling I have experienced in those vast and venerable piles, and the sound of the wind sweeping through them, supplies occasionally the deep breathings of the organ.

Wagoner County, November 8, 1832

After nearly a month of traveling Washington Irving returned to Colonel Chouteau's establishment. He and the Commissioner slept there overnight.

On November 8, 1832 Washington Irving of Sleepy Hollow slept at under roof for the first time in a month. He was at the trading establishment of Colonel Chouteau near the Three Forks. Colonel Chouteau offered them something they had not tasted for nearly a month. Ellsworth anticipated the early 20th Century and Prohibition.

We were cordially greeted, by our kind friends here and soon joined them in a supper where much more was provided than left – we were offered some cordials which we tasted. And let me add on(e) word in favor of the temperance cause – our army were certainly exposed to many hardships – but not a drop of liquor was taken with us, nor a drop craved to my knowledge – Had our men got access to liquor, when they were wet & fatigued & a little ailing, I have no doubt many would never have returned alive.

Irving insisted on calling Colonel Auguste Chouteau's trading establishment an agency – as for the Indians.

We arrived at the Agency. Here we passed the night comfortable, yet the close, and destitute of freshness; and when I woke in the night and gazed about me upon complete darkness, I missed the glorious companionship of the stars.

Wagoner to Muscogee County

Morning, November 9, 1832

They hailed the boat to carry them over. Today they could cross on a one way bridge.

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.

