



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

## Article Title: General Henry Atkinson's Report of the Yellowstone Expedition of 1825

Full Citation: Roger L Nichols, "General Henry Atkinson's Report of the Yellowstone Expedition of 1825," *Nebraska History* 44 (1963): 65-82

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1963Atkinson.pdf>

Date: 4/12/2012

Article Summary: Atkinson's report includes a narrative of the trip and descriptions of the Indian tribes he encountered. The War Department based its actions and policies on such reports.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: Henry Atkinson, James Monroe, John C Calhoun, William H Ashley, Henry Leavenworth, Benjamin O'Fallon, Jacob Brown

Place Names: Missouri River, Teton River, Yellow Stone River, Council Bluffs (Nebraska), St Louis (Missouri), Fort Atkinson (Nebraska), Fort Lookout (South Dakota)

Tribes Visited by Atkinson (as spelled in his report): Ottoes, Grand Paunees, Paunee Loups, Mahas, Poncar, Yanctons, Yanctonies, Tetons, Augallallas, Siones, Chayennes [or Chyennes], Hunkpapas, Ricaras, Mandans, Minetaries, Crows

Keywords: Henry Atkinson, Yellowstone Expedition, Benjamin O'Fallon, Arikaras, *Expedition up the Missouri*, Blackfeet, Assinaboins

Photographs / Images: schematic map of the Yellowstone Expedition, 1825

# GENERAL HENRY ATKINSON'S<sup>1</sup> REPORT OF THE YELLOWSTONE EXPEDITION OF 1825

EDITED BY ROGER L. NICHOLS

**A**MERICAN fur traders and explorers, traversing the Great Plains and struggling up the Missouri River and its tributaries, created much excitement among the Indians of the plains. Some tribes eagerly sought trade and friendship, while others reacted violently to real or imagined wrongs perpetrated by the whites. From 1805, when Lewis and Clark angered the Blackfeet, until the 1820's, whites meeting the Indians were uncertain what treatment they might expect.

---

<sup>1</sup> Atkinson, General Henry. Born in North Carolina in 1782, he entered the army as a captain in 1808. After serving at frontier posts in the southwest, he moved to New York where he was promoted to colonel and in 1815 assumed command of the 6th Infantry. In 1820 he was promoted to Brigadier General, but was reduced the next year when Congress cut army strength. Atkinson was active in Indian removal and served at Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis, from 1826 until his death in 1842. Allen Johnson & Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography*, (22 vols., New York, 1928-1936), 1:410. Hereafter cited at *DAB*.

*Roger L. Nichols, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, developed this paper as part of his work on a doctoral dissertation on General Atkinson being prepared under Professor Vernon Carstenson.*

In 1818 President James Monroe and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun planned to dispatch a large body of troops up the Missouri, hoping to awe the Indians. This movement, known as the Yellowstone Expedition, took its name from the river<sup>2</sup> that marked its destination. Its very size, however, mitigated against success. When an attempt to employ steamboats on the Missouri failed, the movement halted at Council Bluffs<sup>3</sup> in the fall of 1819. The following winter an economy-minded Congress cut the military appropriations, stopping the expedition.

During the next few years Indian depredations continued, and American traders applied to Congress for protection claiming that provocation by British agents caused these attacks. In 1823 the Arikaras, who along with the Blackfeet were causing most of the trouble, ambushed William H. Ashley<sup>4</sup> and his men returning down the Missouri. He appealed for assistance, and Colonel Henry Leavenworth,<sup>5</sup> then stationed at Fort Atkinson,<sup>6</sup> Council Bluffs,

---

<sup>2</sup> The Yellowstone River flows northeast through the Rocky Mountains in Montana joining the Missouri River approximately twenty miles east of the Montana-North Dakota border.

<sup>3</sup> Council Bluffs was named by Lewis and Clark in 1804. It is on the west bank of the Missouri River near present Fort Calhoun, Nebraska. Council Bluffs was the staging area for the expedition. Hiram M. Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (2 vols., New York, 1935), 2:924-925. Hereafter cited as Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*.

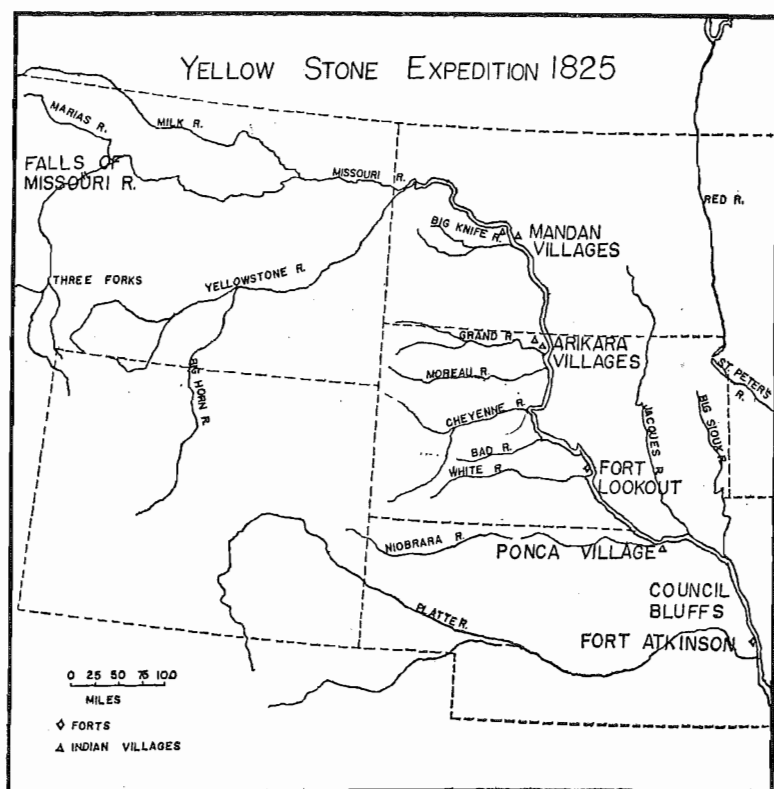
<sup>4</sup> Ashley, William H. Born in Virginia in 1778, he moved to Missouri where he became active in the gun powder business. In 1820 he entered politics being elected Lt. Governor of Missouri. During the 1820's Ashley entered the fur trade organizing the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. He later served in Congress and died in 1838. *DAB.*, 1:391-392.

<sup>5</sup> Leavenworth, Colonel Henry. Born in Connecticut in 1783, he entered the army as a captain in 1812. During the War of 1812 he was twice decorated for gallantry and in 1818 was promoted to Lt. Col. of the 5th Infantry. In 1821 he was assigned to the Sixth Infantry with brevet ranks of brigadier general and commander of the Northwest frontier. In 1823 he led a retaliatory expedition against the Arikara Indians after they had ambushed a fur brigade belonging to Gen. Ashley. Leavenworth died in 1834 while leading an expedition into the Southwest to negotiate peace treaties with the Indians. *DAB.*, 11:80.

<sup>6</sup> Fort Atkinson, established in 1819 as Cantonment Missouri, was built at Council Bluffs by the troops ascending the Missouri as part of the Yellowstone Expedition. In 1827 it was abandoned and the troops moved to Fort Leavenworth.

responded by leading a motley army of U. S. regulars, fur traders, and Sioux warriors to his rescue. Leavenworth's action proved ineffective, and the Indians escaped, after a brief skirmish.

Late the next year Congress appropriated \$10,000 to send a commission up the Missouri to conclude treaties of peace and friendship with various tribes living along that stream. With funds assured, President Monroe appointed General Henry Atkinson and Indian Agent Benjamin O'Fallon<sup>7</sup> as the government Commissioners.



<sup>7</sup> O'Fallon, Major Benjamin. Born in Kentucky in 1793, he was a nephew of William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis. O'Fallon served as an Indian Agent under Clark from 1817 to 1827 when he resigned to enter the fur trade. He died in 1842. DAB., 13:631-632.

Leaving St. Louis early in 1825, they met their military escort at Fort Atkinson. On May 16 they began their ascent of the Missouri using keel boats equipped with hand powered paddle wheel devices invented by Atkinson.<sup>8</sup> The expedition worked its way upstream until coming to 2000 Mile Creek, a tributary supposedly that distance from the Mississippi. From there they returned to Fort Atkinson while the Commissioners continued on to St. Louis, arriving in late October and having concluded twelve separate treaties with the Indians along the way.

General Atkinson submitted this report to his commanding officer, Major General Jacob Brown,<sup>9</sup> in November, 1825. It includes a brief narrative of the trip and descriptions of the various Indian tribes encountered. Although somewhat repetitious, it presents some interesting ideas and descriptions of the country and the Indians. The report, however, clearly demonstrates Atkinson's unawareness of the possible historical importance of this expedition. He takes the importance, danger, excitement, and drudgery all in stride, including only a minimum of detail. When compared with the glowing narratives of John C. Fremont or even the less colorful account of Lewis and Clark, Atkinson's prose appears dull and unimaginative. His report, however, was important as the War Department based its actions and policies on such documents from frontier army officers and Indian Agents.

---

<sup>8</sup> For a description of these hand powered paddle wheels, see Henry Atkinson to General T. S. Jesup, Franklin, Missouri, October 11, 1823, in Russell Reid and Clell G. Gannon, eds., "Journal of the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* (Bismarck, October, 1929), 4:54-56. Hereafter cited as "Journal," *NDHQ*.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, General Jacob. Born in Pennsylvania in 1775, he moved to New York state and became a prominent farmer and land speculator. In 1809 he was appointed a colonel of militia and in 1811 promoted to the rank of brigadier general. During the War of 1812 his brilliant defense of Sackett's Harbor earned Brown an appointment as a brigadier general in the regular army. In 1814 he was promoted to the rank of major general and in 1821 became commanding general of the Army, a position he retained until his death in 1828. *DAB*, 3:124-126.

As will be seen, Atkinson's spelling, particularly when discussing the Indians is usually phonetic and irregular, but to demonstrate the flavor of the report its original spelling and punctuation are left intact. Whenever possible people and places are identified, but the names given the various Indian bands have not been elaborated upon except in a few special cases. Finally, several paragraphs of material not pertinent to this expedition have been deleted.

This document was originally published as Henry Atkinson, *Expedition up the Missouri* (19 Congress, 1 session, House Executive Document no. 117, serial 136, Washington, 1826). Similar material also appears in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2:605-608, 656-657. The Yellowstone Expedition is more fully described in Russell Reid and Clell G. Gannon, eds., "Journal of the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition," in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* (Bismarck, October, 1929), 4:5-56; and in the unpublished manuscript Journal of Stephen Watts Kearny in the manuscript holdings of the Missouri Historical Society of St. Louis.

\* \* \* \* \*

Louisville, November 23, 1825

SIR: I have the honor to submit to you a copy of the report of Major O'Fallon and myself, to the Hon. Secretary of War,<sup>10</sup> giving a detail of our operations as Commissioners appointed to treat with the Indian Tribes "beyond the Mississippi." It comprises both the movement of the military escort, and a description of the localities, habits, pursuits, and numbers of the several Indian Tribes with which we have made treaties, including the Blackfeet and Assinaboin Tribes, whom we did not see. As the detail is full, and contains the best information I can give upon these points, I beg leave to offer it as a part of my official report. . . .

The report is in the following words, to wit:

---

<sup>10</sup> Barbour, James. Born in Virginia in 1775, he entered state politics serving as Governor and later as U. S. Senator. Barbour was appointed Secretary of War by President John Quincy Adams in 1825. He retired from politics in 1830 and died in 1842. *DAB.*, 1:590-592.

On the 1st of March, the Commissioners applied themselves, at this place, (St. Louis,) in obtaining and transmitting the various articles for presents and supplies necessary to their operations. On the 17th, these preparations were completed and expedited, and, a few days after, the Commissioners took their departure for Council Bluffs, where they arrived on the 19th of April; and on the 13th of May, a boat, with the last of their supplies, reached the same point.

On the 16th of May, the transport boats<sup>11</sup> being in readiness, the full Commission,<sup>12</sup> with a military escort of four hundred and seventy-six men, commenced their ascent of the Missouri from Fort Atkinson, Council Bluffs, and arrived at the Poncar village at the mouth of White Paint Creek, a distance of three hundred miles, on the 8th of June; and, on the succeeding day, a council was held, and a treaty concluded with the Poncar Tribe of Indians.

On the 10th of June, the Commission and escort left the Poncar Village, and arrived at Fort Lookout,<sup>13</sup> a position occupied by the American Fur Company, twenty miles below the Grand Bend, on the right bank of the river, on the 17th. On the 21st, the Tetons, Yancions, and Yancionies, three distinct bands of the Sioux Nation, having arrived, a council was opened, and, on the 22d, a treaty concluded with them. On the 23d of June, the Commission and escort left Fort Lookout, and arrived at the mouth of Teton River<sup>14</sup> on the 30th, where there is an establishment of the American Fur Company, on the right bank of the River Missouri. Here the Commission remained till the 5th of July, for the Cheyennes and Siones to come in, who were at a distance in the plains. They having arrived, a council was opened on the 6th, with the Augallalla and Sione bands of Sioux, and with the Chyennes, and treaties with each of them concluded.

On the 7th of July, the Commission and escort left Teton River, and arrived at the mouth of Hidden Creek on

---

<sup>11</sup> The expedition consisted of nine keel boats. The eight used to move the soldiers and their equipment were: *Buffalo, Elk, White Bear, Otter, Raccoon, Beaver, Muskrat*, and *Mink*, with the last serving as a sort of flagship. In addition, a ninth boat, the *Lafayette*, belonged to the sutler, a civilian who acted as storekeeper and sold non-military goods to the soldiers. "Journal," *NDHQ*, 4:8.

<sup>12</sup> The Commission consisted of General Henry Atkinson and Major Benjamin O'Fallon, Commissioners; George H. Kennerly and Peter Wilson, Indian sub-Agents; and A. L. Langham, Secretary to the Commission. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Compiler, "Treaty with the Mandans," July 20, 1825, in *Treaties Between the United States and the Several Indian Tribes From 1778 to 1837* (Washington, 1837), 359.

<sup>13</sup> Fort Lookout was a Columbia Fur Company post at or near Fort Kiowa of the American Fur Company. These two were located on the east bank of the Missouri north of the mouth of the White River in South Dakota. Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2:928.

<sup>14</sup> The Teton River flows eastward joining the Missouri at Pierre, South Dakota. On modern maps it is labeled the Bad River.

the 11th, where Fire-Heart's band of Sioux<sup>15</sup> were met, and, on the 12th, they came into Council, and signed the treaty made with the other part of that Band on the 6th. On the same day, the Commission and escort left Hidden Creek, and arrived at the Ricara Villages<sup>16</sup> on the 15th. On the 16th, the Commission here councilled with, and concluded a treaty with the Hunk Papas, a band of the Sioux nation.

On the 18th, the Ricaras came into Council, with whom a treaty was concluded. On the same day the commission and escort re-commenced their ascent of the river, and reached the Lower Mandan Village<sup>17</sup> on the 26th July, and, on the 30th, a council was held and treaties concluded with the Mandans, Minnetaries, or Gros Ventres.

On the 3d of August, the Crow Tribe came in, and, on the 4th, they were met in council, and a treaty was concluded with them.

On the 6th of August, the Commission and escort left the Mandans, for the mouth of the Yellow Stone, with a view, if possible, of falling in with the Assinaboins and Blackfeet Indians, and reached that point on the 17th of August, where they remained till the 19th, when General Ashley arrived from across the Rocky Mountains, by the way of the head waters of the Yellow Stone, which he descended in skin canoes. Learning from him that the Blackfeet, from the best information he could get, were above the Falls of the Missouri,<sup>18</sup> and upon the heads of its branches, in the mountains, the Commission gave up all hope of seeing them at all; but, there being a possibility of yet finding the Assinaboins, the Commission, with an escort of five transports and 350 men, left the Yellow Stone on the morning of the 20th of August, and proceeded up the Missouri 120 miles further; but, finding no signs of Indians which were made during the present season, it was thought advisable to progress no further, as there was scarcely any probability of meeting with the Assinaboins by going higher up the river;

---

<sup>15</sup> Hidden Creek was probably one of a number of small creeks south of the Moreau River in South Dakota. Fire Heart led one of two groups of the Sione band of the Sioux tribe.

<sup>16</sup> The Arikara villages were located on the west side of the Missouri just north of the mouth of the Grand River in South Dakota. Frederick W. Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin, 30, part 1 (Washington, 1907), 83-86. Hereafter cited as Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*.

<sup>17</sup> The Mandans had several villages located just north of the Big Knife or Knife River on either side of the Missouri in North Dakota. *Ibid.*, 796-799.

<sup>18</sup> The Falls of the Missouri is the name given to a series of falls and rapids in the Missouri about twenty-five miles upstream from Fort Benton, Montana. Of these, one falls of eighty-seven feet is sometimes called the "Great Falls" and is just west of the 111th meridian. Captain William Ludlow, U. S. Corps of Engineers, compiler, Map, Montana Territory, West Half, 1875, 2nd edition, Wisconsin State Historical Society, map collection.



and, also, for the reason that the water was becoming low, and the heavy class of our transports rendered it doubtful whether it would be practicable to return if we continued to ascend many days longer: therefore, a retrograde movement was made on the 24th, and on the 26th we fell back to the Yellow Stone.

On the 27th of August, General Ashley, and his party of 23 men, with 100 packs of beaver, being taken on board the transports, the commission and escort recommenced their descent of the river, and reached the Mandans on the 30th of August, from whence they proceeded, on the 1st of September, to descend the river, touching at the Ricara villages on the 4th, Fort Lookout on the 9th, Poncar village on the 12th, and arrived at Council Bluffs on the 19th September; and, it is worthy of remark, that, during the whole expedition, although the annual rise of the Missouri was encountered, not a boat or a man was lost, nor did any accident occur of any sort of consequence.

On getting back to Council Bluffs, persons were sent off to bring in the Ottoes, Paunees, and Mahas, and, on the 26th of September, the Ottoes were met in council, at Fort Atkinson, and a treaty concluded with them. On the 30th September, a treaty was made with the three bands of Paunees; and, on the 6th October, the Mahas were councilled and treated with.

On the 7th, the commission embarked in the barge Antelope, and arrived at this place on the 20th.

The undersigned believing that it would be acceptable to you to receive from them such information as they have been able to collect, in relation to the various tribes they have treated with, proceed to give it, commencing with those residing lowest down the Missouri.

The Ottoes reside on the Platte, 25 miles south of the Missouri, in a dirt village,<sup>19</sup> consist of about 1,400 souls, of whom 275 are warriors; cultivate corn, pumpkins, squashes, &c. They leave their villages twice a year, and go in pursuit of game; sometimes to the south, to kill buffalo, but most commonly, of latter years, hunt on the Missouri below the Platte, , for elk, deer, &c. as the Paunees make objections to their killing buffalo on their lands. They also trap for beaver on the streams north of the Missouri, and succeed in

---

<sup>19</sup> An earthlodge floor was usually excavated to a depth of a foot or more. The central area was reserved for the fireplace with holes being dug for two or more sets of posts set at equal distances out from the hearth. Rafters and beams were then laid from the tops of the higher or inner roof supports to the tops of the lower outer supports. Smaller timbers and brush were then placed to cover the supports. These were then covered with grass and twigs with the final covering being of sod and dirt. A covered entranceway extended from one side usually away from the winter's prevailing winds. An opening at the center and top of the lodge permitted the escape of smoke from the fireplace immediately below.

making a few packs of the fur of that animal yearly.<sup>20</sup> They are now at peace with all the tribes around them. Their nearest enemies are the Sioux. They are decidedly friendly to the whites.

The Grand Paunees and Paunee Loups, reside on the Platte, 130 miles south of the Missouri; and the Paunee Republics on the Republican fork of the Kansas river, 150 miles south of the Missouri. These bands also live in dirt villages. The Grand Paunees consist of about 5,500 souls, of which 1,100 are warriors. The Paunee Loups are estimated at 3,500 souls, of which 700 are warriors; and the Paunee Republics at 1,250 souls, of which 250 are warriors. These bands are well armed with fusees,<sup>21</sup> abundantly supplied with mules and horses, and hold a prominent stand among their neighbors, as a warlike and brave nation. They are at peace with the surrounding tribes, enemies to the Sioux, Osages, and other distant tribes. They cultivate corn, pumpkins, squashes, &c. They leave their villages in the spring and fall, and go far into the plains, to the southwest, and northwest, in pursuit of buffalo, and succeed in supplying themselves with an abundance of the flesh of that animal for food, and their skins for robes, the principal article of their comfort in dress, and almost the only article they obtain for traffic with the traders. They deport themselves in a friendly manner towards the whites, a conduct it is believed they will continue to observe.

The Mahas also live in a dirt village, situated on the Horn, a branch of the Platte, 80 miles southwest from Council Bluffs. They are estimated at 2750 souls, of which 550 are warriors; are partially supplied with fusees, possess horses and mules sufficient for their own purposes; cultivate corn, pumpkins, squashes, mellons, &c. In the spring and fall they leave their village for the chase, and go north west for buffalo, and, occasionally, on the south of the Missouri, for elk, deer, &c. They dress in buffalo robes generally, but also use blankets and strouds,<sup>22</sup> which they get in exchange from the traders for buffalo robes and deer skins. They take but little beaver. They are very friendly to the whites, and are pacific in their general character; are at peace with their immediate neighbors, but at war with the Sioux.

The Poncar, are a small tribe of not more than 900, or 1,000 souls, of which 180 are warriors. They live in a dirt village at the mouth of White Paint Creek on the Missouri, 300 miles, by the river, above Council Bluffs: are pretty well armed with fusees, and well supplied with horses, and mules. Like the tribes before mentioned, they cultivate corn, pumpkins, &c. and leave their village in the spring and fall for the chase. They hunt in the neighboring coun-

---

<sup>20</sup> Beaver furs were shipped in bundles or packs, and sold by the pound, while most other furs sold by the pelt.

<sup>21</sup> Fusees (also fuzees or fusils) were cheap, light flintlock muskets which the Indians acquired through the fur trade.

<sup>22</sup> Strouds were coarse heavy woolen blankets used in the fur trade.

try to the west and northwest, for buffalo, of which they get an abundant supply, both of flesh for food, and robes for clothing and traffic. They are a branch of the Mahas, speak the same language, and, like them, are very friendly to the whites. They are brave and warlike, and have for many years sustained themselves, in their present position, against the Sioux, their nearest neighbors to the north, and, till lately, their bitter enemies. They are now at peace with the Yanctons, and all the tribes above named.

The Yanctons are a band of the Sioux, and rove in the plains north of the Missouri, from near the Great Bend, down as far as the Sioux river. They do not cultivate, but live by the chase alone, subsisting principally upon buffalo. They cover themselves with leather tents, or lodges, which they move about from place to place, as the buffalo may chance to range. They are pretty well supplied with fusees, and with horses, and a few mules. They are estimated at 3,000 souls, of which 600 are warriors. They are comfortably habited in frocks, or shirts of dressed skins, and leggins, reaching to the waist, of the same; they use besides, robes of buffalo skins, which are frequently beautifully wrought with porcupine quills, or painted tastefully; are friendly to the whites, but make war upon almost all other tribes, except those of their own nation.—Their trading ground is on the river Jaques.<sup>23</sup>

The Yanctonies are also a roving band of the Sioux, and range in the intermediate country, between the Missouri and the river St. Peters,<sup>24</sup> embracing the head waters of the river Jaques. They also hunt the buffaloe, whose flesh is their principal means of subsistence, and their skins, with those of the elk and deer, their chief raiment. They live in leather lodges, which they move at pleasure, are well armed with fusees, and supplied with horses and a few mules. They are estimated at 4000 souls, of which 800 are warriors.—Friendly to the whites, and enemies to all Indians, but the tribes of their own nation; their trading ground is also on the river Jaques.

The Tetons are a band of Sioux, who rove in a district of country south of the Great Bend, and upon the waters of White river,<sup>25</sup> and as far back as the Black Hills: their general rendezvous is near Fort Lookout. They depend on the chase alone for subsistence, and like the Yanctons and Yanctonies, pursue buffaloe for meat and raiment, and have garments of similar construction: live in leather lodges: principally armed with fusees, but use the bow and quiver: and are well supplied with horses and some mules. They are estimated at 3000 souls, of which 600 are warriors. They take but little beaver, and their principal traffic is in

---

<sup>23</sup> Riviere a Jacques was the French name for the James River. It flows south through eastern South Dakota, entering the Missouri below Yankton.

<sup>24</sup> The St. Peters River flows east through central Minnesota joining the Mississippi at Minneapolis-St. Paul.

<sup>25</sup> The White River heads in Nebraska and flows east through southern South Dakota to the Missouri below Chamberlain.

buffaloe robes.—They are friendly to the Whites, and like the two bands above mentioned, look upon all Indians who do not speak their language as enemies; except the Chyennes with whom they are at peace.

The Augallallas are a band of Sioux, inhabiting a district of country on the Teton river, stretching back from the Missouri to the Black Hills. Their habits, and pursuits, and means of subsistence, and manner of apparel, are similar to those of the Sioux, already mentioned; are armed after the same manner; have horses and mules in abundance, and are warlike in character. They are friendly to the whites, and at peace with the Chyennes, but enemies to all other tribes but those of their own nation. They are estimated at 1500 souls, of which 300 are warriors. Their general rendezvous is at the mouth of the Teton River, where there is a trading establishment for their accommodation. They trade buffaloe robes principally, taking but little beaver.

The Siones are also Sioux, and are commonly separated into two bands. They inhabit the country on both sides of the Missouri, from the Teton river, as high up as some 50 miles above Chyenne river;<sup>26</sup> but range further from the Missouri on the north side. Their habits, pursuits, means of subsistence, mode of apparel, &c. are similar to those of the Sioux bands before noticed. Beside bow and quiver, they are well armed with fusees, and are well supplied with horses and some mules. They are estimated at 4000 souls, of which 800 are warriors, are friendly to the whites, and at peace with the Chyennes, Riccaras and Mandans:—Their principal rendezvous is at, or near, the mouth of the Chyenne river, where their trading ground is pointed out. They traffic principally in robes, taking but little beaver.

The Chayennes are a tribe of Indians, driven by the Sioux some years since, from the Red river country<sup>27</sup> across the Missouri, and now inhabit the country on the Chyenne river, from near its mouth, back to the Black Hills. Their habits, pursuits, and means of subsistence, and manner of dress, are similar to that of the Sioux; like them they live in leather lodges, and rove at pleasure, according to the direction in which buffaloe are to be found; use the bow and quiver, but are very well armed with fusees, and have an abundance of horses and mules. They are very friendly to the whites, and are at peace with the Augallallas, Siones, and Ricaras. They are estimated at 3000 souls, of which from 550 to 600 are warriors.—Their principal rendezvous is towards the Black Hills, and their trading ground at the mouth of Cherry river, a branch of the Chayenne, 40 miles above its mouth. They have had but little intercourse, here-

---

<sup>26</sup> The Cheyenne River flows northeast through central South Dakota, joining the Missouri about fifty miles north of Pierre. The Siones, or Saones, were sometimes called the Blackfeet Sioux, and were a division of the Teton Sioux. In 1804 Lewis and Clark estimated their strength at 900 souls. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, 2:464.

<sup>27</sup> This is the famous Red River of the north which separates Minnesota and North Dakota and flows north into Lake Winnipeg.

tofore, with traders: their articles of traffic are robes, and some beaver.

The Hunkpapas are a band of Sioux, that rove in the intermediate country between the Missouri and the head waters of the Saint Peter's River, and are similar in their habits and pursuits, in every respect, to the bands of Sioux already mentioned; armed with bows and quivers, and fuses, and supplied with horses. They are estimated at 1500 souls, of which 300 are warriors. They are friendly to the whites, and are at peace with the Ricaras and Mandans; their trading ground is on the Jaques, and their articles of traffic are buffalo robes and a few other skins of fur.

The Ricaras, a branch of the Pawnees Nation, reside at their old dirt village, occupied by them for the last thirty years. They cultivate corn and squashes, and a peculiar sort of indigenous tobacco, with a narrow small leaf. They hunt in the surrounding country on the South of the Missouri, for Buffalo, which are generally found in ten to twenty miles from their villages. On the flesh of this animal, and their abundant crops of corn and vegetables, they live in great plenty. They dress like the Sioux and have leather lodges, which they use in the winter season, when they leave their dirt villages to occupy some convenient point for fuel and pasturage, or browsing for their horses; with which animal they are well supplied. They are armed after the manner of the Sioux, with bow and quiver, and fuses; are estimated at 2,500 souls, of which 500 are warriors. Their late outrages, committed on the whites, are well known to you, and it should be remarked that they have, for many years before, been treacherous and insolent to strangers. It is believed, however, the offensive operations against them, by our troops, conducted by Colonel Leavenworth, has brought them to a full sense of their misconduct, and that they feel humbled and chastened; this, with our late visit to them, on which occasion a good understanding has been established, and all former difficulties removed, we have no doubt they will remain friendly towards the Americans.

Traders are located at their villages, and they traffic in robes and beaver.

The Mandans and Minetaries, who are identified as one tribe, reside in their dirt villages, five in number, near the mouth of Knife River.<sup>28</sup> They cultivate corn and squashes, and, like the Ricaras, kill buffalo in their immediate neighborhood, on the South side of the Missouri. They do not cross to the North side of the River to hunt, being in continual fear of the Assinaboins. They live in great ease and plenty, as the buffalo range most of the year near them, and they raise large quantities of corn and vegetables; also, the indigenous tobacco. They are apparelled like the Sioux, and are armed almost after the same manner. Their numbers are estimated at 3,000 souls, of which 500 are warriors.

---

<sup>28</sup> The Knife or Big Knife River flows east, entering the Missouri north of Stanton, North Dakota. Several Indian villages were located near its mouth. See note 17 above.

Formerly they were very friendly to the whites, but, for some few years past, their young men have occasionally robbed some trading parties of the whites, and have committed some murders. These acts, however, it is believed, have never been sanctioned by the nation. At present they are very friendly disposed towards Americans, and every part of their conduct justifies a belief that they will continue so. Trading houses are established among them, and they barter robes and some beaver. They are at peace with the Ricaras, Crows, and Hunkpapas, and Sione bands of the Sioux.

The Crows are a roving tribe of Indians inhabiting an extensive district of country stretching from the Black Hills West of the Rocky Mountains, embracing the Big Horn<sup>29</sup> and other Southern branches of the Yellow Stone River. They, like the tribes last mentioned, have garments of dressed skins, and robes of dressed buffalo skins. They are very well armed with fuseses, and use the bow and quiver; have a great number of horses and some mules. They live in leather lodges and pursue the buffalo as a principal means of subsistence. They were, until within a year or two, very friendly to the whites; but since then, have appeared restless and dissatisfied, and have committed some robberies. It is hoped that they will, in future, conduct themselves in a peaceable manner. It is understood they are not at peace with any tribe but the Mandans and Minnetaries, and the Keawas and Araphos, who reside on the head waters of the Arkansas and Platte. The mouth of the Little Horn, a branch of the Big Horn, is pointed out as their trading ground.

The Blackfeet Indians, who, as before mentioned, we did not see, inhabit, it is believed, all the district of country from the Falls of the Missouri back into the Rocky Mountains, and around Northwardly to the head of Maria's River.<sup>30</sup> They carry their war excursions to the South as far as the Big Horn. The intermediate country between the upper part of the Yellow Stone and the three forks of the Missouri<sup>31</sup> is considered as neutral ground, both the Crows and themselves being afraid to visit it, only with war parties, owing to the deadly hostility existing between them. The Blackfeet hunting ground, is, therefore, confined to the country embracing the three forks of the Missouri, West into the mountains, and below, Northeasterly, to the head of Maria's River, and more Northwards on the head waters of

---

<sup>29</sup> The Big Horn River flows through the mountains of that same name northeast into the Yellowstone River about 60 miles northeast of Billings, Montana.

<sup>30</sup> Maria's River flows southeast meeting the Missouri approximately 15 miles east of Fort Benton, Montana. The name is now spelled without the apostrophe.

<sup>31</sup> These, named the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin Rivers by Lewis and Clark, flow north through the eastern Rocky Mountains in Southwestern Montana.

the Katchewina,<sup>32</sup> beyond our boundaries. It is understood, of latter years, they rarely come below the Falls of the Missouri. This tribe is broken into several bands, and wander promiscuously over the country above described. They often carry their wars across the mountains against the Flatheads and Snakes, as well as to the East upon the Assinaboins, and to the South, against the Crows.

It is a numerous tribe, estimated, by those who have visited their neighbors lately, at 5,000 warriors. In consequence of the hostile attitude they maintain towards Indians and Americans, it will be a difficult matter to communicate with them.

It is thought, however, that a Commission, with a protecting military escort, might ascend to the Falls of Missouri in one season, and, by remaining there during the winter, a friendly intercourse might be opened with them. British traders sometimes go among them and trade, we understand, with safety; but, notwithstanding, they rob and kill those traders whenever they find them beyond the limits of their own country, or when they find them attempting to pass through on a visit to any other tribe. The Blackfeet, also, we understand, depend on the chase alone for subsistence, live in leather lodges, and dress in skins and robes. They hold the best country for beaver East of the mountains, it being as yet but little trapped in, either by themselves or the British traders.

The Assinaboins are a tribe of the Sioux nation, and are broken into several bands; inhabit the country from the head of Milk River<sup>33</sup> East on both sides of the parallel of latitude 49 deg. back towards Lake Travers.<sup>34</sup> They frequently visit with the Missouri, and push war parties across against the Mandans and Minetarees. Their number is estimated at 2,000 warriors. They rove like the other bands of Sioux, and depend on the chase for subsistence and raiment; use the bow and quiver, and are well armed with fusees, and their long intercourse with the Hudson Bay traders<sup>35</sup> has rendered them formidable in war. Until within a few years, they have been employed by those traders to procure buffalo for their subsistence. Latterly, those traders have been supplied in meat by the half breed Crees Indians, and the Assinaboins are left without the means of trade, as the Northwest trad-

---

<sup>32</sup> The Kachewina was a local corruption of the Cree name Kis-is-ska-tche-wan (fast flowing) which came to be called Saskatchewan by the mid-1700's. J. F. C. Wright, *Saskatchewan, The History of a Province* (n. p., 1955), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> The Milk River flows southeast through Montana and enters the Missouri approximately 110 miles west of the mouth of the Yellowstone. See note 2 above.

<sup>34</sup> Lake Traverse is located between South Dakota and Minnesota at the headwaters of the Minnesota and Red Rivers.

<sup>35</sup> These men were the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company operating in the area.

ers<sup>36</sup> do not barter for buffalo robes, they being too bulky an article to bear transportation by the route they carry their furs and light peltries; and those Indians take but little beaver: hence exists a great desire; on their part, to trade with the Americans on the Missouri, and it is believed such a trade will shortly be opened, as the Sub-Agent stationed at the Mandans has been instructed by the principal Agent to bring about a reconciliation between them and the Mandans, for which purpose they had been sent for, and were expected at the Mandans by the middle of September. They are friendly to the Americans, and, if the proposed reconciliation takes place, a valuable trade to our countrymen will no doubt ensue.

Notwithstanding the many rumors that the Northwest traders are holding intercourse and exercising an injurious influence over the Indians on the Missouri, no such fact appears to exist, nor is it believed that any of their traders have been across to the Missouri below Milk River for several years. Mr. Mackenzie,<sup>37</sup> then a British trader, visited the Mandans in 1820. If the British have traded and trapped within our limits East of the Rocky Mountains latterly, it has been above the Falls of the Missouri, among the Black-foot Indians, which we understand has, and probably is now, the case. They can have no possible interest in coming to the Missouri lower than Milk River, to trade, as the Indians below that point have little or nothing to barter but Buffalo robes, an article not trafficked in by them, for the reasons above mentioned. It is, moreover, believed, and the fact is not doubted, that none of the Indians residing on the Missouri River visit the Northwest establishments on Red River.

With respect to the river, and bordering country, from Council Bluffs to the extreme point the expedition reached in its ascent, both may be compared to that below the Bluffs, until we arrive at the mouth of Poncar river, a distance of 300 miles by water.—The river thus high being as difficult of navigation as it is below, and the bottom lands equally fertile and productive.

---

<sup>36</sup> These men were the employees of the North West Company operating in competition with the Hudson's Bay Company until 1821 when the two firms combined under the latter name. They transported their furs overland to Montreal and thus could only trade in lightweight, expensive pelts.

<sup>37</sup> Mr. ? Mackenzie. The number of Mackenzies and McKenzies in the Canadian fur trade is truly confusing. If Atkinson spelled his name correctly, this was probably Donald Mackenzie, employee of the North West Company and leader of three Snake Country expeditions in the period 1816-1818. Dale Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (New York, 1953), pp. 93, 117-118. Otherwise, it might have been Kenneth McKenzie also an employee of that company until the merger with Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1:383-386.



The timber, however, which is chiefly cotton-wood, interspersed with ash, elm and some oak and hickory, decreases somewhat in quantity and size, in the bottoms, and of which there is an entire absence on the uplands. Immediately on reaching Poncar river, the face of the country materially changes:—The bottom lands become narrow, and less fertile, with but little timber, and the bluffs are more elevated, and approach nearer the river.—The navigation is easier, the current being more gentle, and the banks affording better ground for cordelling.<sup>38</sup> The country maintains this character as far up as the Aricara villages, a distance of 400 miles.—Here the country has a much more favorable aspect,—the bottoms resume their usual width, of from three to five or six miles, and with a considerable quantity of cotton-wood, interspersed with ash and elm, skirting the river.—The soil is fertile, but less so than it is below Poncar river, and the plains are clothed with a short and nutritive grass.—The face of the country changes but little from hence to the mouth of the Yellow-stone river, and above on the Missouri for 120 miles, the point from whence the expedition retrograded, except that the soil becomes more thin, and less fertile, and the Missouri being but little more than half the width above the Yellow-stone, that it maintains below its junction with that river.—It is understood, however, to be navigable for large keel boats to the falls, a distance of 750 miles above the confluence of these rivers.

With regard to the propriety of establishing a military post near the Mandans, as suggested by your communication of the 21st July,<sup>39</sup> it will be seen by reference to the report of the commissioners, that no circumstances, either relating to the conduct of the British traders in a supposed intercourse with our Indians in that quarter, or as relates to the Indians themselves, would call for such a measure.—The British traders, as stated in the report, never, of latter years, visit the Indians residing on the Missouri below the

---

<sup>38</sup> Cordelling was a French term applied to towing or pulling keelboats upstream with ropes. Usually a rope was tied between the bow and the top of the mast, and a second tied to the middle of this leading to shore, from where the crew pulled. A military gentleman, "Notes on the Missouri River, and some of the Native Tribes in its Neighbourhood," *The Analectic Magazine* (Philadelphia, April, 1820), New Series, vol. 1, No. 4, p. 305.

<sup>39</sup> In this letter Gen. Brown suggested that Atkinson station all or part of his escort at the mouth of the Yellowstone River or near the Mandan Villages if he thought the situation warranted such action. General Jacob Brown to Henry Atkinson, Washington, July 21, 1825, printed in the *Missouri Republican*, St. Louis, August 22, 1825.

falls of that river, nor do those Indians visit the British establishments on Red river.—And as all the Tribes east of the Mountains, except the Blackfeet, are friendly disposed towards Americans, our traders can go among them in great safety, without the protection of a military force. If, however, it should be thought advisable by government, to establish a military post in the upper country, as a point of rest to our traders, I would recommend the mouth of Yellow-stone river as the most eligible position, for here is the diverging point, whence our traders must approach the mountains, to the west and north-west.—But, to give a practical protection to our people, who seek for furs, as this article is only to be profitably found upon the head waters of our rivers in the mountains, a military force should be located near the three forks of the Missouri. Still this is a point so remote, that a garrison could not be sustained there without vast expense, for it would be highly imprudent to depend on the game of the country for subsistence, as it is well known that buffalo quit any neighborhood occupied by white men; and besides the expense, it would be difficult to send up supplies from the interior.—From these considerations, I am of opinion, that it is inexpedient, at this time, to extend our military post above Council Bluffs.—I should rather recommend, that once in three or four years, a military force of 300 to 400 men should ascend the Missouri, as high as the falls of that river:—By leaving Council Bluffs as early as the first of April, in a suitable class of transports, that point might be reached by the first of July; this would allow the detachment, July, August, and part of September, to open a communication with the Blackfeet Indians, which would result, I have no doubt, in a friendly understanding with that nation, and open a profitable intercourse for our traders. An occasional show of imposing military force in an Indian country, produces, in my opinion, a better effect than a permanent location of troops among them. . . .

If, as it is contemplated by government, the Indian tribes residing in the interior of the country are to be removed, and located on the borders of Missouri and Arkansas, it will require a cordon of posts along that whole extent of country to preserve peace among the multiplied number of tribes, and to give protection to our frontier.

With very great respect, sir,

I have the honor to be

your most obedient servant,

H. Atkinson, Brig. Gen. U. S. Army.

Major General Brown,

Commander in Chief, Washington City.