A TRADING EXPEDITION TO THE STINKING WATER, MARCH 1873

By Richard Seymour

The following account by Seymour apparently was based upon a diary, rewritten as an essay. As it gives more details about life in the Indian camp, it is somewhat more interesting than his January diary. It lacks, however, the immediacy of the earlier account.

The Stinking Water, a small tributary of the Frenchman's Fork of the Republican, enters that larger stream near present Palisade, Nebraska. The site of the Indian camp could be in either Hayes or Chase counties. From various accounts, we know the Stinking Water was a popular camping site for the Sioux while hunting in the region. It provided a continual, though small, supply of water, and its crooked stream runs through a narrow valley, which gave ample shelter to both hunters and horses. As a better known and mapped route, white hunters were more common in the valley of the Frenchman. The Sioux could winter on the Stinking Water and its two forks with far less chance of coming into contact with whites. It should be remembered that on most occasions the Indians, while resenting the encrouchment of the whites, were as little interested in coming into contact with them, as the whites were with them.

The Stinking Water had received its name, supposedly, when a large number of buffalo perished there during a blizzard. Early homesteaders thought it was because a herd of range cattle died in the same way, but the name of the stream was in use long before ranching days.

Section II

"All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits, and their entrances
And <u>one</u> <u>man</u> in his time plays <u>many</u> <u>parts</u>"

Tis true but this is a new part to me and I must tackle it. [There is need of money] "Il faut de l'argent" and dire is the need - I must write of what I see and hear; first, I will look at my guide notes or the written "ideas" - I now have in my possession. "I must not make a journal of my notes, but address some imaginary "Editor". So far, so good! Ed - Mediconian Actuality -- How is that? These communications must be written in the easy conversant style of epistolary volubility. "All down but mine part!" "Avoid prolixing; yet be careful not to fall into" -- "abrupt brevity"

Any where between 2½ inches and 2½ miles in length my descriptive paragraphs may be, but they <u>must</u> not be less than the inches or to exceed the miles -- tis a long scrope between these two for my imagination or "good sense" to run riot in.

"Do not affect one style." I should think not, when I have to choose from among so many, with full power to use all, if needed. I shall dish up these styles I think -- viz. a "dry style" a "plain style" a "neat style" an "elegant style" a "florid style", or, or, or, a wooden stile, seasoning to this dish will be "concise, diffuse, humorous, and pathetic," and I trust will suit the palate of my readers.

"Always make a point to what you say." I shall run things as thin as possible but I hope not "too thin". Now comes the instructions that I shall be "Au fait" in -- "Never obscure witticism". It is not likely that I shall fall into this error. Do I

by any means become cognizant of any "witticism" or "good thing" in any of my writings, do not fear that it will fall into obscurity. I shall only feel too proud to throw all the light upon it that it will bear.

"Then comes justgo to word do not fuss etc -- I will make the attempt. Note the spur, I wish it.

But how to commence is the question -- how shall I describe the Indian, shall I write a la Cooper and come "Lo, the poor Indian" , easternize the thing; or shall I westernize it and "Loathe the poor Indian" style; shall I speak of him as the "noble Red Man", the brave and magnanimous aborigine of Northern America -- or the hungry, greasy-looking animal that he is -- I had better easternize I think.

If I do write for a publication "tis better to err with the crowd than be singly wise". Truths, even in this, are both unpalatable and unprofitable.

Critic -- excuse this prelude and allow one to still remain, in your possession as

Sanguinary Richard

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Indian Encampment
Eau de Cologne Creek [Stinking Water]
March 1st, 1873

Editor Mediconian Actuality

True to my promise, I forward you a description of my last journey. I have witnessed a Bona-fide trade with the Sioux Indians, but first must describe the scenes along the way and the "outfit", this being a new word to many of your subscribers. I will explain its meaning. It is entirely a western production, and is applied to the following -- viz -- Any party of trappers, hunters, or traders who have got all their teams, riding animals, and their

equipment, cooking utensils, sustenance, and other necessaries ready for a journey are termed an "outfit", and known amongst the residents of their starting point as such and such a one's outfit, generally taking the name of the person leading the party. The "outfit" I now speak of was termed the "Clifford outfit", he being the traders and of course leader of his party.

The freitage consists of Sugar, Coffee, Flour, Corn Meal, Rice, Dried Apples, Blue Cloth, Domestic, and Calicoe of different patterns, Butcher Knifes, Tinware, Brass Cuttons, Brass Bridles, etc, for the purpose of exchanging these necessaries of an Indian's life with him for robes. Three two horse teams loaded with these goods and two extra horses. The trader drove one team, and a half-breed another, while the third was whipped along by a "White Man" who exists under the appelation of Bloody Dick.

Clifford is a man of medium height, of a rather muscular build and is married to a squaw belonging to the same tribe [the Cut-off Oglala,] in whose encampment I now am. The half-breed, Andy [Barrett], is a fine looking fellow, stands over the medium height, and built like a man who could stand wear, tear, and weather. He is the celebrated California Lassoist and the best thrower of a rope or lasso that I ever saw.

Bloody Dick! I cannot do him justice in description, but can only say that he is under the medium height, slightish build, and can boast of "some muscle" -- He appears to have had a fair English education, and is known by many of the Sioux Indians, who call him Shuga-man-i-ton Okah, Ka Tae an Kee-Kel taaw (The man who killed many wolves, when he was starving to death). Mohawk Indians, or rather the half-breed portion of the tribe who have emigrated from Pennsylvania to Nebraska, dub him the "dead man".

We started from Cliffords Ranche. this place is a very fair specimen of the advance of civilization on the American Frontier, and from the appearance of the surroundings, one could be easily led to think that civilization was indeed in its infancy, or if of an older age, some terrible misfortune must have befallen her, for she stands both blind and crippled here. The Ranche is situated on Medicine Creek, a small stream running into the Republican Fork of the Kansas river.

Our course lay nearly due west. The Medicine is a well timbered fine looking stream, plenty of water, and broad bottoms for farming purposes, and the hills are covered with buffalo grass, which cannot be beat for stock raising purposes. The country around here has been burnt off for miles and game is scarce. We wended our way slowly along this stream, and after a travel of about twenty miles we encamped on Brush Creek, a small tributary of the Medicine. The weather was cold, but by the side of a huge fire we soon felt warm enough, and here a scene of cooking commenced that beggards description.

The old adage "too many cooks spoil the broth", does not apply on the prairie. we were all cooks for that meal and right royally we supped. first something for the "inner man", broiled deer ribs, fried pork chops, hot biscuits, coffee, sugar and condensed milk. with appetites sharpened thro long fasting and keen winds, we did justice to our own cooking. Each one praising the dish he cooked himself.

We started early next morning and camped for the night in the head of a Cañon. We found plenty of wood there and had filled two small kegs with water. last nights scene of cooking was repeated.

Many of your readers are not acquainted with divides, cañons, pockets etc. phrases used to denote the shape of the land we

travel over. I will here give you a sketch of these which will make it more readily understood.

A to B is a wagon road on Main divide between two creeks. C. are canons, and the small branches running into C's are called pockets. spaces between C's are divides between canons. To the right and left of a main divide, the country appears broken and to one inexperienced in the way of prairie life, they are apt to take a short divide and find themselves on the same Creek they started from, but to prairie men the way is clear, and they seldom mistake one of these divides for the main one.

Leaving our camp in the morning, Eight Elk were espied, lazily resting on a patch of prairie where the grass was not burnt. These animals I think should hold the title of Monarchs of the Prairie, in precedence of the buffalo; three of them were fine antlered bucks. The leader rose to his feet and would turn his head toward us and take two or three steps raising his legs up high, then stand with head erect, giving a fine full view of his antlers. Throwing his hars forward, he looked the very picture of animal beauty on the "Qui vive". We did not molest them, but left them watching us until we slowly moved on from their sight.

About noon of this day we entered the Sand hills between Medicine Creek and Red Willow Creek, the latter called Cha Sha-sha-Waugh-a-pollo by the Sioux Indians. it is on this Creek where they cut the willows to be used for smoking.

We reached Red Willow before sundown and found two companies of Cavalry in camp who were on their way to the Indian village. I was introduced to the Captain in command, and we had a long talk. I found him a pleasant sort of a gentleman, etc.

Going down to our camp I found a house built close too, and hearing some one ask what Indian is that? I turned my eyes in that direction his finger was pointed and saw the back of a man who wore long unkempt hair, a buckskin shirt with ragged looking fringe

appending therefrom, and a pair of pantaloons that showed signs of diligent work with the needle and rivalled Joseph coat in the grotesque blending of heteregenous colors. Judge of my surprise when he turned to find that he was a white man, and I received an introduction to the "Lone Trapper", who I was informed was miles away from his once happy home.

We also found another trader here, bound for the same Indian camp and we made it a point to get the start of this trader in the morning. We arose long before day, and, just as the Eastern sky shoed the least sign of a silver lining, our horses were harnessed and salled [?] up and the "outfit" moved on before daylight. When the sun arose it brought a snow storm, and we traveled from Red Willow Creek to Blackwood Creek in a severe storm, the snow falling fast and driven by fierce cold winds that would nearly blind us at times.

We halted at Blackwood, no running water in this creek, but plenty in holes. We found a sufficiency of dried wood and dined; rested about two hours and moved on a distance of four or five miles and camped in the head of another canon at dark. We were lucky in finding plenty of wood. The storm increased, the cold was intense, and the wind blowing fearfully.

We arose early next morning and traveled to Eau de Cologne Creek, rested at noon, then went about 2 miles farther up stream to camp for the night. The storm increased and we passed a wretched night, the wind blowing thro our robes and chilling us to the very marrow of our bones. I had a narrow escape from freezing my fingers when sleeping. I awakened to find them cold, stiff, and to feel three times their natural size; by dint of hard rubbing and warming, I warded off that catastrophe.

Next [or that] morning, with cold hands and blue noses, we looked at each other, each one shaking his head in an ominous manner and wearing a doleful cast in our countenances, we got ready to start. The storm did not abate, and we therefore had

more ashes for breakfast than any other article of diet. We wound in and out of the hills, snaking our way to the divide; no abatement of the storm.

about noon we dined, and such a dinner. Oh! Ye of Epicuran taste, what do you think of raw fresh pork, frozen so hard as to be compelled to cut it with the axe, a slice of this with a facing of condensed milk composed the viands for this meal. It was eaten with a seeming relish by these prairie men, and I verily believe their grastomonic powers are of force enough to digest a wooden bucket or a wagon wheel, with butchers Knives for dessert, without the least inconvenience arising from indigestion. I never knew of one who suffered from that scourge of "good-living", the gout or dyspepsia. Yet these men are all hearty and strong.

In the afternoon we arrived at our camping and trading point on Eau de Cologne Creek. no Indians here, only one lodge which belonged to the trader's squaw-wife. We made ourselves as comfortable for the night as possible as it is for a whiteman to do in an Indians lodge. We were informed that the Sioux encampment was about ten miles from here, on Whiteman's Fork of the Republican River. They would move over on the morrow. The traders squaw being posted as to their time of showing by visitors from the village.

The storm had abated, and we looked for fine weather in the morning. As we expected the sun arose clear and bright and gave promise of a fine day. We awaited anxiously for the Indians to come, and about noon we were awarded by the sight of nearly fifty of these Bedoin's of the Prairie. They were galloping and running their horses, as if in a chase.

Turning to the opposite side of the creek I espied the two companies of cavalry we had left at Red Willow Creek, following our trail, distant about 2 miles from where I stood and four

from these Indians. They had seen the soldiers moving sometime before, but not being aware of their approach they had mistaken them for a herd of buffaloes and had started to chase them. coming closer they recognized the moving objects to be soldiers. They at once brought their ponies to a walk and came riding slowly to our camp. When within one hundred yards of our wagons, they halted, dismounted, and sat upon the ground in a semi-circle on the brow of a hill, and awaited patiently for the soldiers interpreter to come and talk. he came and after a smoke he delivered his message.

Early in the month of December last, Whistler, the chief [of the Cut-off Oglala], Fat Badger and [Hand Smeller,] another warrior, belonging to this tribe, started from their village to go to the Railroad for the purpose of visiting the Whites and getting a trader to come to them, as they had many robes they wished to exchange for the necessaries of life. These three Indians were to be gone twenty days. They have not yet returned, and the supposition was that they had been killed by the Pawnee, many of these Indians being within twenty miles of the Sioux, and they are deadly enemies to each other.

Subsequent events have proven that the Pawnee did not kill these three Indians, but that they met their deaths at the hand of two white men, who were trapping on Cottonwood Creek, a tributary of the Republican and whose hospitality they had accepted for the night. Where this tragedy will end remains yet to be seen. The Indians, especially this tribe, hold vigorously to the rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and in this case I think they will not be satisfied if they get a whole set.

The soldiers are now looking for the Indians bodies and the perpetrators of this dastardly act, which will, no doubt, place many of the lives of new settlers in jeopardy, as well as

the safety of their horses, for Indians will steal even if they do not kill, and the killing of these members of their tribe will be their excuse for any outrages they may commit upon the Whites for some time to come. Not only an excuse for this band alone, but the cry will soon be taken up by the whole of the Sioux nation.

In the afternoon of this day could be seen many moving objects to our right and coming this way. Upon a nearer approach we discovered them to be the Indians moving camp. The arrived at last. The warriors attended to their riding ponies, while the squaws set to work unloading their pack animals and then erecting their lodges or tepes.

These movable houses consist of straight wooden poles about 2½ inches in thickness and sixteen to twenty feet long. They are generally made of pine or cedar and shaved smooth. from 12 to 20 of these poles are used in the erection of a lodge and form the frame or skeleton. The squaw ties three poles together at the top with a long piece of rawhide. The surplus part of the rope is allowed to hang down loosely. These poles when tied are set up in the shape of a triangle, the base being equal on each side. Then other poles are set up, the tops resting on the three that are tied, until the base forms a circle. The last pole erected has the covering which is usually buffalo hides, dressed with the hair off. Many of these coverings are now made from canvass issued to them by the government.

When the poles are all erected the squaw takes hold of the ropes and walks around the outside of the poles, binding the tops together, and ties it near the bottom of a pole on the inside. Then the sides of the canvass is taken and brought around to the front. Two or three small pins are used in fastening the bottom of the lodge at the entrance; then around the base at the outside larger pins, near a foot long, are driven thro holes in the canvass,

made for that purpose, and into the ground, which holds the covering down, generally using a pin to each pole.

A space of about a yard in length and eighteen inches wide is left for the entrance, over which they swing on the outside a piece of undressed buffalo hide shaped for that purpose. at the top of this aperture, they peg the covering together until it reaches about two thirds of the way to the top. The remainder is left open as an escape for the smoke.

The lodge that I am now in consists of sixteen poles. These poles are about five feet apart at the bottom. There appears to be plenty of room for a warrior and his family in this. The basement is near to nine yards in diameter. To the right on entering are placed his robes, where he and his family sleep; in the centre the fire is built. on the left and at the back are the traders goods and where he sleeps.

In addition to the room taken up by these goods and the sleeping place of the owners, I have seen over forty men (Indians) sit around and feast inside this lodge and then there be space enough for innumerable lot of dogs and pups belonging to the lodge.

Some of these lodges houses two seperate families, which may consist of two grown men, two women who are mothers, and ten or twelve children; from the infant in arms to the boy who is old enough to go to war, or the girl who is waiting for a partner to seek her. Many of the men live a-la-Mormon and worry thru a life with more than one woman, some having as many as four or five wives. When these women get too quarrelsome they are put with other [separate] lodges and visited by their lord, when he feels generously so inclined. While they all live in one, he rules them with a "rod of" wood--

The women and girls do all the laborous work, pack and unpack their ponies, erect the lodges, hew the wood and draw

the water. In their camps can often be seen a woman with a load of wood on her back, she toddling along and swaying from side to side with the weight. These loads are so heavy that they can not sometimes get them to their backs without help; little girls of nine or ten years old carry loads that surprises a Whiteman. Few of the men will help them even when the loads are too heavy. I have seen a squaw, with a load of wood enough for a horse to pack, strain and work to get it to her back and a dozen Indian men be not twenty yards from her, and they rendered her no assistance. let her strain and pull and work. let her strain and pull and work. They appeared perfectly nonchalant, but at each new strenuous effort of the woman, they would give a kind of grunting, "Waugh", which did not appear to me to help her at all or lighten her load.

I have several times stepped from among such a crowd and helped a woman with a similar load to her feet. To any remark respecting my action from these men I would reply "I am a Whiteman, and Whitemen will always help their women."

A curious kind of a grunt, a "waugh" of another kind, comes answering back. The only interpretation into English that I can give it is "not for Joseph".

Nearly all of this band came to us to day. There are about twenty-five lodges to come yet. They are at the head of the Republican River killing buffalo and making robes. We have about seventy lodges erected now, and the camp is rather romantically situated; a stream of water, "Eau de Cologne Creek", running thro it. To the East and West, the tall bluffs run up to the divides. To the North a valley which the stream runs thru, but very few trees. The land on the east side gives forth a plentiful growth of willows and brush. To the south can be seen the wending of the picturesque little stream, heavy patches of timber

on each side. The white spots are the tepes glistening in the sun. Ever and anon, a gleam of sunlight from a piece of silver will flash from lodge to lodge, denoting the ingress or egress of a warrior from one to another.

on the hills feeding around are innumerable number of their ponies and mules, many of them gayly decked with feathers or pieces of bright silver. Scattered around and among these herds a few warriors on the watch may be seen, making a picture that few of your readers have had the pleasure to see.

About thirty of the men have started to North Platte City and will visit the Fort, for the purpose of ascertaining more of the facts concerning the death of their Chief or headman, Whistler and his companions. They more than half suspect the true facts of the case; dark looks and angry glances are cast at whitemen now. There is a bombshell and it remains to be seen whether it will fizzle or explode. We shall know in a few days.

About noon today, the runners or scouts came into camp with the information that a fire was burning away to the north west. They had seen the smoke raising in dense columns. Pawnee Killers signal. He was coming. I went out and looked at it and like the Indians came to the same conclusion. I watched the apparent smoke for some time and noticed a peculiarity about it that disabused me of that idea.

Calling an Indian, we watched it together and came to the conclusion that it was a hurricane travelling toward us. Indian said, "Tau hau Atat", "Heap wind."

A Hurricane, You bet! Here comes your simoon, Ye Bedowins, was ejaculated from one whiteman.

There was not a breath of air in camp, but in direction of the storm could be seen the dust and sand in clouds, twisting

and twirling, forming all kinds of shapes and antics in the air. Warriors rushed from one place to another or stood nonchalantly giving orders or watching the women take precautions for the safety of their lodges, pegging them down tighter and fastening them with ropes. We moved to of our wagons to the side of the trade lodge as a wind breaker and fastened the wagon sheets in sail fashopn. Propped the poles inside with forked sticks and tied the lodge down with many stout lariats. All the fires in the lodge were put out, and then we all waited for the storm to strike the village--it came on, and when within one hundred yards, it was a cloud of sand and dust so thick that it appeared like night.

Someone cried out, "Children, run into the brush and willows." Helter, skelter, for this shelter, went the squaws and children, tumbling over each other in the hurry. Two or three breezes struck us. it was the forerunner of the dust, and the hurricane in full blast was upon us; all in and around camp was as dark as night.

in addition to our precautions for the safety of the trade lodge, it took the combined efforts of the whitemen to hold our tepe down. We held to the support of the poles on the inside, and the wind would then sometimes raise us from our feet.

Our Indian landlord said it is no good, the lodge was sure to go. We persevered and was rewarded. Our lodge withstood the storm. all around was a wreck, lodges blown down and property scattered around in a confusion that was bewildering--one half of the village was lying on the prairie. The wind abated somewhat about midnight, but kept on blowing in fitful gust until noon the next day.

We have been visited by a party of dancers and have had an Omaha dance in our lodge. Long before the dancers entered our lodge we could hear the tap, tap, of their drums and the low chanting of their voices. The sound came nearer and then [in] the

opening of the lodge popped and [sic] Indian, naked to the waist, drum in hand. he was followed by three others, each one bearing a drum. They poured into the lodge until they numbered about twenty-five. The drums were tapped and the song commenced. The pots were put on the fire, and the hostess set to cooking for thirty.

The song and beating of the drums got louder. Bodies swayed and heads were moving from side to side keeping time with the song. Legs caught the enthusiasm and brought one man to his feet. he hopped up and down, first on one foot, then on another; with head down and body bent he worked with his feet upon the ground, as if he wished to harden that particular spot. The drums and song ceased and the dancer stopped to recount his brave deeds, told the others how many horses he had stolen, how many unarmed men and children he had killed. This was all listened to quietly and at the end he would receive a conglatuary [sic] "Waugh", from the rest of the dancers.

Some five or six, at other [times] more, would be up and stamping on the ground. Even a musician or two would become infected and drop their instruments to stamp. Many of them were dressed in a fantastic manner, long feathers, beads, all colors of calicoes, skins of animals, with bell buttons fastened to their dress. One fellow had about a dozen of the bell buttons fastened to his mocassin on his right foot. That was his best foot, for it was put forward thro all his dancing and made three hops to his other['s] one.

The purpose of this "Omaha" dance was a begging one. They wished to ask the trader for something, and he being well acquainted with Indian life anticipated them during a lull in the din and dance, he commenced throwing them down presents of beads, brass-tacks, bell buttons, paint, a piece or two of calico, or a fancy colored scarf.

These traders, especially this one, has a practical knowledge of the influence of the "connecting link" and knew full well the best way to ingratiate himself, into the good graces of these wild fellows, is to fill their stomach, Satisfy the appetite, tis the safest and quickest way to touch their generosity or to put off any begging request that they may wish to make. Therefore he gave them plenty of Coffee, Bread, boiled corn meal, and rice. last, and not the least, a camp kettle full of----boild dried apples.

After getting on the outside an immense quantity of this "truck" and dividing their presents, the dancing and singing went on, but, at the close of each recounting of past deeds, the orator would turn to the trader and say, "My friend, I give you this robe. I make you a present of it," at the same time handing him a robe that he [had] brought with him. by this means the trader got seven robes in this one dance.