

FROM MISSOULA TO WALLA WALLA IN 1857, ON HORSEBACK

In the fall (November) of the year 1857, I found myself in the Flathead Indian country, then in the Territory of Washington, where I had drifted with some Mormon Indian traders in October, 1856. At that time, 1856, there were in that country no white people except a few traders, a small Catholic Mission (the St. Ignatius), and a small Indian agency near the mouth of the Jocko river, and which was occupied by a white man named Henry G. Miller and Minnie Miller, his wife, a white woman, she being the first white woman ever in the present State of Montana, and being the only white woman then in that country. Miller and his wife came from Utah in the summer of 1856 and remained near the mouth of the Jocko river until the summer of 1857. I had remained in that country from about the middle of October, 1856, up to about the first of November, 1857, without seeing this white woman, or any other white woman during all of that time.

During all of the aforesaid time I had led something of a vagabond life, doing a little work for one or two of the Indian traders, and in hunting, fishing and trapping with the Indians and half breeds. Late in the fall of 1857, I became tired of my isolation from the white settlements, and became quite anxious to again mix with people of my own race and color, but how to do so was a serious question. The nearest place inhabited by white people was at Fort Walla Walla, in the Walla Walla Valley, about five hundred miles west of the place where I was then living, and the country intervening, being an Indian country inhabited by different tribes of Indians, many of said tribes being anything but friendly to the whites, and some of them actually in a state of hostility.

In the early fall of 1857, two men, one named Hugh O'Niel, and the other named Ransey, came into the Flathead country from Fort Colville, where they had been gold mining on the bars of the Columbia river. These men had been at Fort Walla Walla, and gave me a glowing account of that country, which made me more anxious to go there, but how to reach this land of promise was difficult to determine. About the first of November, of 1857, I had occasion to visit the Catholic Mission at Saint Ignatius, some thirty-eight miles north of the place where I was then stopping, and while there, I met a lay brother of the Cœur d'Alene Mission, who had come up from the last named Mission with a number of large pack mules, and with several half-breed men and their wives to pack down to that Mission from the Saint Ignatius Mission, the wheels, axes, etc.,

of a couple of wagons, which were taken apart, and made into packs and loaded on the mules.

The said lay brother was a good natured old Irishman, named McGeen. Brother McGeen told me that if I wanted to go to Walla Walla that he was going to start from Saint Ignatius on a day certain, within the next week, and would take a short trail to the mouth of the St. Regis Deboris river where it joined the Bitter Root or Missoula river, and if I would meet him there on a day he named, I could travel with him and his half-breeds to the Cœur d'Alene Mission, and which would be on my direct way to Fort Walla Walla. The point of meeting was about eighty miles down the Missoula river below where I was then staying.

I returned to my stopping place, fully determined to attempt the trip, full well considering the dangers to be encountered.

When the time came to make the start, it did not take a great while to make all necessary arrangements. I had two riding horses. On one of them I put a pack-saddle, and on it packed my small belongings, consisting of a single pair of blankets, a small quantity of bread and dried buffalo meat, a small flour sack containing two extra shirts, a few old letters, a few keepsakes from my distant home, a copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and a few "ic-tas" with which to pay Indians for ferriage, etc.

Upon the other horse I placed my riding saddle, and I was then ready for my journey. I must not forget to mention my riding horse, for I remember him with gratitude and fond recollection for the noble service that he rendered me on the trip. He was a strawberry roan of Spanish breed, and was a horse formerly owned and ridden by Pearson, Governor Stevens' noted express rider, on his long trips from The Dalles to Fort Benton and other distant points in 1855, when Governor Stevens was holding councils and negotiating treaties with the various Indian tribes in the Northwest, and from this fact the horse was always known and called Pearson.

In those days we had no riding bridles, but rode our horses with a hair rope made by the Indians of buffalo hair, the rope being placed around the lower jaw of the horse. My pack horse was led by a rope of the same kind placed around his nose and head in the form of a halter. Thus equipped, I commenced my long and dangerous journey, carrying no arms except one small butcher knife. The first day I travelled about forty miles and camped under a large pine tree without tent or fire. I hobbled my horses and turned them out to feed, grass of the finest quality being plentiful. Early on the following morning I saddled up my horses and resumed my journey, and late in the afternoon arrived on the bank of the Missoula river, opposite the mouth of the Saint Regis De Borgia river, the place

where I was to meet Brother McGeen with his Indian half-breeds with their pack animals. It seems that some mistake had been made as to the time of our starting, and that he had started one day earlier than he had intended, or that I had started one day too late, for we failed to meet at the designated point. I could see the remains of his camp fire on the opposite side of the river where he had encamped the night before, but not a man or horse was in sight.

The Missoula river at this point was, and is quite a large river, and fordable only at a very few places. I rode up and down the stream for a considerable distance, endeavoring to find the place where Brother McGeen with his pack animals had crossed, but failed to find any sign of where they had entered the river. I then turned to the place where I had first reached the river, undetermined whether to attempt to cross the stream or return again to my starting place in the Flathead country. I knew that it was a dangerous undertaking to attempt to cross, being alone. At the same time I did not want to retrace my steps, not knowing when I would have another opportunity to get out of that country. After deliberating on the matter for a short time, I determined to take the chances, and make the attempt to ford the river. I then took off all of my clothes except two woolen shirts, and tied them upon the top of my pack saddle, mounted my riding horse, leading my pack-horse, and started in.

At the place where I entered the water, it was quite shallow, but as I proceeded it gradually increased in depth, until I was about half way across the stream, where my horses struck swimming water. I kept my seat on my horse, until I was about two-thirds of the way across the stream, when, to relieve my horse of his load so as to enable him to swim with greater ease, I slipped out of my saddle on the lower side of my horse into the ice-cold water, retaining my riding rope in my hand, and catching hold of his mane with my left hand, and at the same time letting loose of the rope with which I was leading my pack-horse, and in this way swam on the lower side of my riding horse until near the shore. At this point, the water was very deep and running against a high cut bank. When my horse attempted to put his front feet on the bank, the water was so deep that his hind feet could not touch the bottom, and he reared up and fell back and came near falling upon me. I continued to hold on to my rope, and swam ashore, and then swam my horse down the stream until I found a place where he could get out; my pack-horse having swam down until he found a place where he could land. I then led my horses up to the fire of logs left burning by the McGeen party, and dry wood being plentiful, I made a large fire and warmed and dried and dressed myself, unpacked and unsaddled my horses, hobbled them and turned them out to feed and made

camp for the night, and after eating my supper of bread and dried meat, turned into my blankets, and slept as soundly as I ever did in the old farm house at my distant home down in "Dixie Land."

The next morning I made my breakfast on my bread and dried meat, packed and saddled my horses and started to overtake the McGeen party, which I did to my great relief before noon of that day.

I travelled with the party until we reached the Cœur d'Alene Mission, which took us from the crossing of the river about five or six days. Our way followed an old Indian trail which led up the Saint Regis river, crossing it many times, and which, for the most of the way, was through a forest of heavy pine, tamarack and cedar timber, and was obstructed by fallen timber, much of it of very large trees. I have seen many Indian trails, but never one so bad as this one. After following this trail for a long distance up the Saint Regis river, we left the river and crossed over the mountain on to the Cœur d'Alene river, and followed that stream down to the Mission. From the time I overtook the McGeen party until we reached the Mission, it snowed and rained nearly all of the time. The party had with them two small buffalo skin Indian lodges, in which we slept at night, which was some comfort.

Arriving at the Cœur d'Alene Mission, I was very hospitably received by the fathers then there, and I remained there two or three days to rest and recruit myself for the remainder and most dangerous part of my journey. I counselled with the fathers as to the best course to take, and they endeavored to tell me the route to take, and advised me to hire an Indian at the Mission to guide me to Snake river, and at a point above the Palouse Crossing. As I had two horses with me, I finally made a bargain with a Cœur d'Alene Indian to act as my guide, giving him one of my horses for so doing. Here I made a mistake in then and there turning the horse over to the Indian, and trusting to his honesty to do as he agreed to do. I obtained from the fathers at the Mission some bread, the shank-bone of a ham and some dried salmon, and tied my belongings and provisions on behind my riding saddle, and with my Indian guide, resumed my journey. That night we camped at a small prairie in the mountains, called "Wolf's Lodge," and the next day about noon, arrived at the foot of the Cœur d'Alene Lake, about where Fort Sherman was afterward located, where we found eight or ten lodges of Cœur d'Alene Indians in camp. Here my guide told me he could go no further, as one of his children back at the Mission was sick, and that he must return, but said he would get his brother to go on with me. After a long parley with his brother, the brother agreed to go, but had to go out on the range and get his horse. After a long delay he procured his horse, and an-

nounced himself ready to proceed. I did not like this arrangement, but as the Indian had my horse, I was forced to submit to the change of guides. We started from the Indian camp and went down the Spokane river two or three miles, and then crossed it by fording. At that time it was nearly night and time to camp. The Indian said some of his people were camped a short distance from the river, and that we would go to their camp and stay all night with them, and I, seeing nothing better, agreed to his suggestion. About one or two miles from the river, we found five or six lodges of Cœur d'Alene Indians. We rode up to the lodge of the chief, and my guide and he talked a little while, and the chief then told us to get off of our horses and unsaddle them, and he then gave them to an Indian boy to take out and put them in the Indian herd of horses, and then invited us into his lodge. The first thing after going into the lodge was to have a smoke Indian fashion, passing the pipe from one to another, from right to left, each person taking two or three draws, and then passing it to the person sitting next to him on his left. He then directed his squaw to get us some supper, which she did by baking some bread out of some coarse flour from the Mission, and giving us the bread, some dried salmon and cooked camas roots. The first thing after we had eaten our supper was to have another smoke. After the smoke was ended, the chief asked me what I had in a small flour sack that I had; when I told him he directed me to empty out its contents that he might see what was in it, and, of course, I complied with his request, as it would have been folly to have refused.

When I placed the contents on a buffalo robe, and he saw several letters, old and badly worn by carriage, he asked me what they were. I gave him to understand that they were old letters that I had received from my people back in the States, and seeing that they were old and much worn, he evidently believed me, and directed me to put all of the things back into the sack. He then told me the reason why he had made me show him what I had in the sack. He said there were a lot of white men at Fort Colville, and also soldiers at Walla Walla, and that the chief of the Colville Indians had told him that if any white men passed through his country to search them and see if they were carrying any letters from the soldiers at one place to the white men at the other place, and if they had any to take them from them.

The next morning we had a breakfast similar to the supper of the night before. Our horses were brought in, and we saddled up and resumed our journey. It was quite cloudy, and soon after we started commenced snowing lightly, but melted as it fell. We followed a very dim old Indian trail through a hilly country, sparsely timbered with pine trees. Some time

after noon, we came to a lake, and as I now remember, it was rather a narrow lake between a quarter and a half mile wide and something more than a mile long. We followed down the side of it where we first struck it to the other end. Where we first struck it, the shores of it were rough and rocky, but when we reached the other end of it, it terminated in a rather sandy plain. Here we found where ten or fifteen lodges of Indians had been encamped, and from the indications that we saw, it appeared as though the Indians had moved from the place quite recently. I asked my guide what Indians they were that had been encamped there, and he said he did not know. Said maybe they were Spokanes or Palouses, "and if they are Palouses and catch us they will kill you, but if they kill you, they will kill me, too." This was not very consoling to me. I did not care very much if they killed my guide, but I did not really want to be killed. Some times in the following night, I was only sorry that they did not catch and kill my guide, as he really needed killing.

At the lower end of this lake, where the Indians had been encamped, there was a plain, well-worn old Indian trail, which we followed. Immediately after leaving this old Indian encampment, and in the trail which we were following, I saw something which was then a puzzle to me, and it was a puzzle that I have never been able to solve. In the trail leading from the Indian camp, were the tracks of a white man, who evidently wore a No. 10 shoe, and a rather light make of shoe. The tracks had the appearance of being quite recently made. What white man could possibly have been on foot in the country at that time was something I could not then understand, nor have I ever been able to fathom the mystery. That the tracks were made by a white man was plainly evident by the way the man walked. There were never made by an Indian. We followed this trail, leading, as I supposed in the direction of Snake river, the man's track still appearing in the trail, going in the same direction that we were going. When I left the Cœur d'Alene Mission the fathers told me there was a well known landmark called St. Joseph's Mountain, to the right of which I should go. After we left the lake we commenced to go up onto an elevated prairie. It was very cloudy, and we could tell nothing about the points of the compass. A short time before night, the guide stopped and said we must have a smoke, and after we had smoked, he told me to untie a white blanket that was tied on behind my saddle, and I did as he requested. He took the blanket and spread it out on the ground, gathered up a little snow that had remained in the roots of the bunch grass, and poured a little gunpowder into his hand on the snow and made a black mixture, and then took the blanket and with the paint made a rough map on it, showing the way we should go, at the same time claiming that one of his children was sick, and

that he wanted to go back home. I told him he must go on to Snake river. I could see that he was not in a good humor. We mounted our horses and rode on until nearly dark, when we came to a creek, with a few quite large pine trees standing near the stream, and here we camped. We unsaddled our horses, hobbled them and turned them out to feed. We then built a small fire, ate our scant supper, had a smoke and rolled up in our blankets and went to sleep. I rolled up in my blanket and went to sleep under one of the pine trees, and the guide did likewise, but at some little distance from me. I slept quite soundly until probably some time after midnight, when I woke up, and found my horse standing beside me, and the Indian and his horse gone, the scoundrel having deliberately deserted me. I looked around, but could find no trace of the Indian or his horse. I went to sleep again, and slept soundly until morning, when I ate my scanty breakfast, saddled my horse and resumed my journey. After crossing the creek I again saw this white man's track in the trail. After going two or three miles, I came to a dry valley about a half a mile wide, and as I remember it, leading off down to my right, with a large number of Indian trails running parallel with each other, and worn down deep, and here I lost all trace of the white man's track. Looking down this valley, I saw large bands of horses, and believing that these trails led down to the Palouse Crossing, which I was endeavoring to avoid, I crossed over them, and took to the prairie without any trail, going in the direction which I believed would lead me to Snake river. I was going up all the time in an elevated grass country, and about noon I came to a spring in the hills, and stopped, watered my horse, and ate my lunch. After resting myself and horse, I resumed my journey, and just about sundown (it having cleared up partially), I arrived on top of a hill on the prairie, from which point I could see a piece of water far down below me. I was at a loss to tell if it was Snake river, or a small lake. Nevertheless, I started down the hill toward it, as I needed some water, as did also my horse. A portion of the way was too steep to ride, so I walked and led my horse. After going some distance, I could hear the water roaring; then I was satisfied that it was no lake, and as I knew in reason, there could be no other river there than the Snake, I felt better. I proceeded down towards the river, following a small ravine that led down to the river. Just as I reached the mouth of the ravine, at a point where an Indian trail passed up the river, I very unexpectedly met an Indian and a squaw coming on the trail going up the river. They seemed as much surprised as I was, and the Indian, who could talk a little English, and a smattering of Chinook jargon, hailed me with the usual salutation of "How," and I replied in the same manner. He asked me from whence I came, and I told him from the

Flathead country. He then asked me where I was going, and I told him to Walla Walla. He then asked me if I was alone, and I put on a bold face and told him "No," that there was a party of about fifteen white men with me who were a short distance behind.

He then told me there was a camp of some eight or ten lodges of Nez Perce Indians camped a short distance down the river, and told me to go down and camp with them, which I promised to do, without, however, intending to do so. The Indian and his squaw then rode on up the trail and I rode down to the river and watered my horse and obtained a drink myself, and waited and watched the two Indians go up the river about a half a mile, where they camped, turned their horses loose, and built a fire. I then returned to the mouth of the ravine, down which I had come, and rode back up it about a quarter of a mile, and turned up on a small depression of the prairie, and went into camp. I unsaddled my horse and turned him loose to feed. I then made a meal on my small stock of provisions, and after letting my horse feed a while, I spread down my blankets and prepared to go to sleep, but before doing so I brought my horse up near my bed, and with my hair rope put a halter on him, and tied the other end of the rope around my waist and went to sleep, and slept as sound as I ever did in my life. In the morning early, I arose, ate my breakfast out of my fast disappearing commissary, saddled my horse and started down toward the river, intending to ride down to the Indian camp and get them to put me over the river, as I knew that all of the Indians on the lower part of Snake river had good canoes. I rode to the camp and rode up to the lodge of the chief, and asked him to have some one take a canoe and put me over the river, but he absolutely refused, and told me to swim it, which to my mind was an impossibility to do. I was in a quandary, as I had reason to believe that I was only a short distance above the Palouse crossing, which I was endeavoring to avoid, believing that if I went there I would in all probability be killed. Here I was in a dilemma, as I did not want to retrace my steps back to the Coeur d'Alene Mission, and the only show I had was to cross the river, but how to do it was the question. However, I soon made up my mind to take a desperate chance, and attempt to cross. I noticed that there was considerable driftwood on the banks of the river, and at that point there was very little current in the stream, and as I had two hair ropes with me I determined to get two large sticks of driftwood and lash them together so as to make a raft, turn my horse loose and make him swim, and attempt to cross on my raft, a decidedly dangerous and desperate undertaking. While looking for a good place to make the attempt, I came on to two Indian boys with a large canoe gathering driftwood on the bank of the stream. I rode up to them

and after taking a look at them saw that they were slaves—this I could tell from the fact that their hair had been cut short. I had seen the Nez Perce Indians passing through the Flathead country going to the buffalo country and had noticed Indians of this description with them, and learned that they were slaves, being captives taken in Southern Oregon and California, and when captured their hair was cut short, and kept cut in that manner. I rode up to them and asked them to put me over the river, offering them some Indian goods which I had brought with me, consisting of a few yards of calico, Indian paint, brass tacks, etc., which I had brought with me to trade to Indians for ferriage and provisions. I showed them the goods and offered them all I had if they would put me over. At first they absolutely refused, but after talking with each other, one of them went around a bend in the river, evidently to see if they put me over if they would be seen from the Indian lodges above. When he came back they held a short conversation between themselves, and then made signs that they would cross me. They took my saddle and little pack off my horse and put them in the canoe, and told me to get in, and started across leading my horse, he swimming below the canoe. In a few minutes we were over, and a happier tenderfoot you never saw. I saddled up and started without any trail, and when I climbed to the top of the hill, I looked down the river and saw an Indian camp about three or four miles below the point where I crossed.

I travelled all that day in the direction, as I supposed of Fort Walla Walla, and over a high grass covered country, devoid of trees, streams or trails, and at night camped at a spring that I found in the hills. The next morning the country was covered with a very heavy fog, that continued nearly all that day. After traveling some distance I fell into a large Indian trail, and later in the day saw through the fog, the tops of trees, and soon came to a stream of water, which I have since learned was the Touchet river. Here I stopped and let my horse rest and feed for a while, while I consumed the remainder of my provisions.

Before leaving the Flathead country the men, O'Neil and Ramsey, had told me that the soldiers at Fort Walla Walla had been in the habit of making hay out on Dry Creek, some six or seven miles from the Fort.

After resting my horse, I resumed my journey, still following the Indian trail, and after going some distance I again saw some trees, and on arriving at them found a stream, or the bed of a stream, but do not now remember whether or no there was any water in it. After passing over this stream for a short distance, I saw where some person had been cutting grass, and going a little further I found wagon tracks where some persons had been hauling hay. I then knew that I was near the promised land, and a happier mortal never lived.

By this time the fog had lifted and I was enabled to see for quite a distance. I rode on a few miles, and saw a band of horses off some distance from the trail. The horses looked to be too large for Indian horses, and as I drew nearer to them, I saw two mounted men, apparently herding them. I rode towards them and soon discovered that the two men wore blue overcoats. I rode up to them, and found that they were two soldiers herding dragoon horses. Then I felt that my troubles and fears for personal safety were all over. I asked them how far it was to the Fort, and they told me about two miles. I rode on and soon came in sight of the Dragoon Cantonment, and as I came to Mill Creek, just above the Suttler's Store, I met Col. William Craig, Henry G. Miller and William Scott. I had a letter for Col. Craig, which had been given me by Henri M. Chase, which I handed to Col. Craig, and, after reading it, he told me the road leading to his house, about one mile distant, and told me to go there and stop, and that he would soon be at home. I went to the house, turned my horse out and prepared to take a rest, being nearly tired out, and that night had the first good square meal, the first that I had had for many days, and to which I did full justice. This ended one of the most venturesome and dangerous journeys ever taken by a young tenderfoot.

NOTE—I went to Spokane in August, 1911, and went out to Liberty Lake, some twelve miles from the City of Spokane, and feel satisfied that the lake that I found on my journey was Liberty Lake, and as I crossed no stream after leaving the lake, except the stream on which I camped when my Indian guide left me, I am constrained to believe that stream was what is now called "Hangman's Creek."

FRANK H. WOODY.