

In his report of September 1st, 1843, from St. Peter's Agency, in a part of then Iowa Territory that is ^{part of} now Minnesota, Amos J. Bruce wrote, "The last winter was one of unusual severity, even in this high latitude. From the 1st of November to the 1st of April the ground was covered with snow, and generally, throughout the winter, from two and a half to three feet deep. The Indians were in consequence unable to ~~hunt~~ hunt, and many would, no doubt, have starved, but for the timely aid of the Government, through the agent and officers of the fort, together with what the traders furnished the Indians in provisions. In fact some of the traders kept scarcely enough to feed their own people until supplies could be obtained from below, this spring. The commissary had to send to Galena to procure flour for the garrison, so bare had the necessity of the Indians left the fort for breadstuff. The last has been a lesson to them that I hope will be remembered; and in most instances, the Indians have shown a disposition to guard against the want of food this year, by planting and cultivating more corn than formerly. The Yanctons and Sissatons, who reside on the prairies and follow the chase, particularly the buffalo, fared well throughout the winter and spring; the buffaloes being more abundant and much nearer to them than in former years."

Governor John Chambers, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Iowa, reported on the 27th of the same month to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "All the tribes in this superintendency suffered severely from the great duration and intense cold of last winter; a large portion of their horses perished, and from their usual improvidence and wastefulness, some of them were reduced to great suffering for want of food. A portion of the Sioux must have perished, but for the prompt interposition of the War Department in supplying them with guns and ammunition, to enable them to sustain themselves by hunting."

The great losses of the Pawnees at the hands of the Sioux in the summer of 1843, was due indirectly to the severity of the preceding winter, and to the Government's consequent arming of these bands of Sioux, that by hunting they might save themselves from starvation. For, a part of this aid for hunting was subsequently used as munitions of war, and gave the Sioux, by reason of their now superior fighting equipment, unwonted advantage and victory over their hereditary enemies, the Pawnees, and put the Omahas also in mortal fear of them.

The defeat of the Pawnees by the Sioux, was at the former's new village on Willow Creek, Nebraska, on the then new Loup Fork Reservation, on the 27th of June, 1843: a village that had been built by the joint labors of the Grand, Republican, and Tappage Pawnees, and was still incomplete.

These three bands were in fact slowly transferring their residence from Platte River, where many of their people still lingered, to the new reservation; and it was while their numbers were thus divided and their equipment ~~in~~ firearms was meagre, that they were attacked by the Sioux. The Loup band of Pawnees had already completed its removal, but had established itself in a separate village.

We have accounts of this battle in the 1843 report of Daniel Miller, ^{then} Indian Agent at ^{old} Council Bluffs, and in that of Rev. Samuel Allis, ^{who was} Pawnee School Superintendent at Willow Creek ^{and} a witness of the fight; also in a paper written by the latter in 1876 and published in 1887 by the Historical Society of Nebraska.

"In the battle on the 27th June," wrote Miller, "twenty out of forty-one lodges were burned, in which battle sixty-seven Pawnees were slain, and twenty-six wounded, many of whom have since died; and in their hunting and war excursions, since the 1st of March, [i.e., between March 1 and August 18, date of the report.] sixty-nine others have been killed by their enemies—making one hundred and thirty-six that have died in wars during the past spring. Their loss of horses is estimated at some four hundred during this time; consequently, the Pawnees are left very poor. They ask, through their missionary, if a stop cannot be put to this savage warfare, and if they cannot, in some way, be remunerated for the loss of their property, which is estimated at from \$8,000 to \$12,000. One thing is certain, that if this savage war continues, we shall not succeed in civilizing the Pawnees.

"We learn by the upper Missouri traders, that the Sioux have declared themselves to be the lords of the plains, and are resolved on exterminating the Pawnees and Omahas, if not all the border tribes; that the Sioux started this season, from five to seven thousand strong, for that purpose; but, owing to some dissensions among themselves, only a small number reached the Pawnee villages.....Had the Pawnees been provided with arms and ammunition in their late fight, they would have succeeded in keeping off the Sioux. The farmers had loaned the guns which were put into their hands as a means of defence. Except those, there were probably not ten guns in the village."

"Among the killed, says Allis, "were the interpreter, La Chapelle, the first chiefs of the Republicans and Tappages; also the sons-in-law of the first Tappage and Grand Pawnee chiefs, and many of the chiefs and braves of the Republicans."

The battle does not seem to reflect any particular martial lustre ^{upon} ~~the~~ the Sioux; nor, we may add, upon the Loup Pawnees. It began with an attack on "Middle Chief, who was head chief of the tribe, early in

the morning, about a mile from the village. He was on foot, with a double-barrel gun, but no load in it; he kept retreating and pointing the gun at them. They fired several shots at him, and shot arrows at him, but did not hit him."

The Sioux party was large, and the fight lasted until about 2 P.M. "Some Pawnees came eighteen miles to assist, but few of the Loup band assisted. They staid at home and fortified their village. The Sioux would make a charge from a high bluff one-fourth of a mile from the village, kill some, fire some lodges, steal some horses, and ride back to the partisan on the bluff; at his command would make another charge, and so on until they had killed about sixty Pawnees, stolen several hundred horses, and fired thirty lodges. The Pawnees finally all got into the principal chief's lodge, made port-holes—his horse pen was filled with horses—and there was a desperate battle. Several Sioux were shot, but they would throw their dead and wounded across their horses and carry them off to prevent their being scalped. The Sioux finally found the Pawnee fire too hot for them and retreated back on their trail with their booty.

"The Pawnees were so badly frightened they threw their dead into corn caches and heads of ravines, covered them lightly, picked up some of their traps and left some in their lodges, crossed the river and went about three miles that night."

In this battle the three associated bands lost many of their best fighting men. During the fight the Pawnee "women and children were barricaded in the chief's lodge." The white missionaries and farmers were where they could see most of the battle, but ^{they} thought best not to interfere. Indeed, they could hardly have done so effectively, since most of their firearms had been loaned to the Pawnees.

In his later paper, from which a large part of the above account is taken, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ a glimpse is given by Mr. Allis of the great winter—^{as in the Pawnee country by him seen and experienced—} by which this disastrous fight was preceded and indirectly brought on. He relates, "The forepart of January, 1844, I moved my family to the upper station, three miles from Mr. Dunbar. The snow was so deep we had to go up on the ice of the Loup fork of the Platte to the mouth of Willow creek near our residence. We suffered severely that winter, beginning anew and not being very well provided for. It was also hard on the stock. My calves all died and I froze my fingers several times milking. We had a young babe three weeks old, and the house not very warm. March was the most severe of the winter, and I think it was the coldest winter I have experienced in this country. Myself, wife, and three children in one bed, and the last calf at the

foot of the bed, and even then it died. The Indians lost most of their horses and several of the Indians froze to death. Many froze their feet and hands, and one Indian boy froze his limbs so badly he walked several years on his knees till he died.

That "January, 1844," in the above, was in reality January, 1843, is clear; for Mr. Allis is manifestly telling of the first winter's residence on Willow Creek, which is well known to have been in 1842-3. In the eastern part of the Plains, 1843-4 was a mild winter and permitted of house-building. Moreover, the evidence in reports from the Indian country is that neither the winter of '43-4 nor that of '44-5 was very severe in the low eastern part of the Plains. Mr. Allis, or the printer for him, has made one or two other slips in his dates; for he has "1856" for 1836 in one instance, and has "1845" in his account of the battle of June 27th and in that of splitting his foot, which occurrences, as witnessed in writings of '43 and '44 by himself and others, were in the summer of '43—the summer following the intensely cold winter.

We note here two other testimonies as to the excessively cold winter of '42-3.

In the Pawnee section of his report of August 18, 1843, Agent Miller wrote: "The severity of the last winter caused the Indians of this region much suffering...; being great numbers of their horses in the deep snows."

Rev. John Dunbar, resident with the Pawnees as missionary, wrote in a letter of July 10, 1843, published in the Missionary Herald: "the Pawnees suffered much during the last winter, which they call 'a winter by itself, different from all other winters.'"

The lateness of the spring of 1843 greatly retarded the planting operations of the Pawnees, and the disappearance of the snow was followed by a period of ^{hairs and} swollen rivers, which, however, did not attain the flood heights of 1844; it was not until the last days of May that Agent Miller succeeded in reaching the Pawnees with wagons, from ^{his agency} ~~from~~ ^{on} the Missouri.

The suffering and loss endured by the Pawnees in the winter of '42-3, was shared in greater or less measure by the Otos, Missouris, ~~the~~ Kansas, and other Indians of the Missouri Valley. The Otos, in fact, left their villages on the lower Platte that winter, and quartered themselves on the Indian Agency at Bellevue, confusingly called, from its earlier and more northern location, "The Council Bluffs Agency." Wrote Agent Miller in the August following: "The Otoes are now on the chase, [for buffalo,] and were in quite a starving condition previous to starting on the hunt. I, during the past winter and spring, dealt out to the Otoes 22 barrels of pork, which had been purchased for them as a part of their last year's annuity; also, by their request, I purchased for them some 995 bushels of corn, as likewise 15 barrels of flour, (payable out of their annuities,) which had a tendency, together with their begging and stealing, to prevent great human suffering of hunger until May and June, at which time there was but little left with the whites or Pottawatomie Indians, in the provision line, for them either to beg or steal; consequently, numbers of the Otoo children have perished for want of food. Some ten lodges of the Otoes have returned to their village, as they had no horses to go on the chase. Their very appearance denotes great suffering from

hunger, [they] having subsisted almost entirely on roots and herbs." And in the same letter he ~~wrote~~ wrote, ~~that~~ "some of the traders lost considerable stock, both horses and cattle, whilst the Otoes were quartered upon us during the last winter and spring. As the animals durst not be turned out amongst these starving desperadoes, much of their stock perished for want of food. During this time, every exertion was made by me to get them away; but all in vain, until they had accomplished their object of begging and stealing all that could be got hold of at or near this post, on several occasions forcing houses, and carrying away the property of citizens living here and in the vicinity."

At the close of the same hard winter, the Kansas Indians ~~were~~ were ~~in~~ in a like condition of ~~starvation~~ starvation, having raised but little in the way of provisions in the summer of '42; and as a result they were stimulated, as were many of the other tribes, to unusual agricultural efforts in the spring of '43. Says Mr. Cummins, their agent, "at their pressing request, I employed about eighteen hands, and cultivated about two hundred acres of corn, and planted thirty bushels of Irish potatoes for them; this I agreed to do, provided they would turn in and plant and tend as much corn as they could, which they did, and to my surprise they raised themselves more than they have done for many years. I thought it almost impossible for them to do so, as they had no provisions, nor nothing to buy with. Fortunately for them, the buffalo came in near their village; they also subsisted a part of the time on roots."

It was at the beginning of this same winter—November 8, 1842, according to an entry of September 6, 1843, in Captain Cooke's journal—that Antoine Robidoux, westward bound over the Santa Fe Trail with a train of goods for his trading-posts on the Pacific slope of the mountains, had his progress disastrously ~~arrested~~ arrested by a terrific blizzard in the vicinity of Cottonwood Fork. In this great snowstorm "more than a hundred" of his "horses and mules perished, and indeed one man." Antoine had lost his only axe, making it impossible to "cut down cottonwoods for food to save his animals." According to Scharf, who probably refers to the same event ^(confusing two notable winters) although he dates it "1845," it was not one snow only, but a succession of "the most terrible storms," that overwhelmed the unfortunate Antoine. "His brother Joseph.... sent to his relief, and had him brought in, or he would have perished. He was found in a most deplorable condition, and saved."

The late ^{of Trinidad, who came to the Rocky Mountains in 1836, and is} Richens L. Wootton, better known to the present generation as "Uncle Dick Wootton," ~~is mentioned~~ in the story of his life edited by

of this winter, Conard, relates, "I went up one time to where the town of Greeley is now, to trade with the Arapahoe Indians. While I was there a terrible snow-storm came on and lasted so long that the Indians ran out of food, because they could not get out to kill any game. I got about as hungry that time as a man ever gets, and swam the South Platte River one morning when it was full of melting ice, to get a wild goose that I had shot on the opposite bank."

That the winter of 1842-3 was one of deep snows and unusual cold in Wyoming, is indicated by an entry ~~in the journal of Fremont's second expedition to the Rocky Mountains, in which that explorer tells of meeting, on July 30, 1843, an Ogalallah Sioux Indian whose village had lost all their animals by the severity of the preceding winter.~~

The same winter was doubtless of exceptional rigor in the northern parts of the Rocky Mountains generally. Its character at and north of the Yellowstone may be judged by the experiences of Charles Larpenteur, who ^{for the American Fur Company in that} ~~traveled~~ winter (albeit called "1843-44" by Coues in "Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri") made an expedition from Fort Union, near mouth of the Yellowstone, to Woody Mountain, British America, and traded six weeks with the Crees in a dismal valley camp ^{under} ~~and~~ and north ~~of~~ of a precipice. The ^{journey north} ~~was~~ and back—altogether some 200 miles—was made through piercing cold and blinding blizzards, partly by floundering through snowdrifts and partly over a windswept trail which had been so hard packed by Indian travel that the drifting snow could not lodge upon it. On the return journey the snow had so completely filled the hollows on either side of this road that travel save by the beaten trail was virtually impossible, although a detour was preferable owing to report that a chief, villaged on the direct road, and who had recently been angered at Fort Union, intended to rob them. At camping-places along the road, both going and coming, fires were made in pits sunk through the snow, and the travelers slept in bedrooms cleared out from deep snowdrifts. Both on the road ~~and~~ and in the Indian village—for a period of two months, January and February—blizzards swept the country in almost daily succession. One of the nights on the road, Larpenteur afterward said was probably the coldest that he ~~had~~ ever felt. At the Cree village two of the traders' mules perished, and were found frozen stiff—one lying down, the other in a standing position. ^{After the} ~~trade,~~ trade, eight men, sent up from Fort Union with horses for conveying the robes that had been traded for, had suffered so much from the cold that on their arrival "it was almost impossible to recognize them—noses, cheeks, and eyes all scabby from frost-bite, and so dark from exposure that they looked more like Indians than white men."

And finally, in Marcus Whitman's famous journey east from Oregon, as related by Amos Lawrence Lovejoy, his traveling companion across the mountains, and in the heroic and well nigh superhuman buffetings with deep snows, icy currents, intense cold, and piercing winds that were involved in that journey, we have proof that the excessive rigor of the winter of 1842-43 was not an incident of the eastern Rocky Mountains and Great Plains alone, but prevailed over the western Rockies also; as, indeed, it seems to have done over the entire breadth of our country.

In a letter of April 1st, 1847, published in ~~the~~ the Missionary Herald, Doctor Whitman himself testified to the extraordinary character of that winter, when he wrote, "It was to open a practical route and safe passage and secure a favorable report of the journey from the emigrants, which, in connection with other objects, caused me to leave my family and brave the toils and dangers of the journey, notwithstanding the unusual severity of the winter and the great depth of snow."



