

With Cass in the Northwest in 1820

Edited by Ralph H. Brown

[*HEREWITH is presented the third and final installment of the journal kept by Charles C. Trowbridge while traveling as a member of the Cass expedition in the summer of 1820. Earlier sections of the journal, recording the writer's adventures and impressions of the country between Detroit and Sandy Lake in what is now northern Minnesota, appear in the issues of this magazine for June and September, ante, p. 126-148, 233-252. In the concluding section, Trowbridge describes the voyage down the Mississippi to the newly established post at the mouth of the Minnesota, thence to Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, by way of the Wisconsin and Fox rivers to Green Bay, and back to Detroit. Ed.]*

Sunday 16th July. To day the Governor held a council with the Indians residing at this Lake, and after giving them the usual advice respecting their conduct generally, and receiving in return, reiterated promises of friendship and affection to the American gover[n]ment, we proceeded to distribute a number of presents, among the most acceptable of which was ammuniton, they having fired the last round of powder in saluting the Governor on his arrival. After the pipe of peace was presented, (which ceremony always attends a council) the Governor proposed to the Chiefs, that some of them should accompany him to St Peters, with a view to conclude a peace with the Sioux with whom they have been at war from time immemorial.⁶⁷ They consented to have a meeting for the purpose of determining by the arrival of the Gov^r from the head of the Mississippi for which they understand he is to set out to morrow.

Monday July 17th Every thing was prepared for an early start to see the head waters of one of the longest Rivers in the world, and the great Northern Boundary of our expedition. The Governor set out in three canoes, accompanied by all the party except M^r Doty, M^r Chase and

⁶⁷ For a comprehensive view of the advance of the Chippewa into what had been Sioux territory and the resulting long-continued conflict, see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 80-88.

myself, who are left to superintend the remaining part of our brigade consisting of 12 white men & 8 indians, it being contemplated to return in a barge and two canoes from this place.

They took nothing but their blankets & provisions; being determined that weight of lading should not retard their progress.

Tuesday July 18th. On walking through the indian encampment this morning I observed a large number of old people assembled, and on enquiry found that it was a council convened to deliberate on the proposition made to them by the Gov^r. Tho' such a question might be settled without any difficulty, it is characteristic of the indians, that they duly weigh the most trivial matters before a decision is made.

Thursday 20th July, Being a day devoted to the collection of information:⁶⁸

On enquiry of M^r Ashman, I learn that there are 3 principal places of residence of the Indians of this country: these are, Fon du Lac, Sandy Lake, and Leech Lake.

The Fon du Lac Indians are in consequence of the paucity of game and fish, obliged to wander about in bands, on the small Lakes and Rivers with which this Country abounds; for they have neither Buffalo, Deer, Wolf, Fox or Racoon.

Their tribe consists of 45 men, 60 women & 240 children, besides 30 Half breeds. They do not partake of the genius and spirit of the Northern Indians; and although they consider the Sioux as their common enemy, yet their natural indolence prevents them from freely engaging in the scenes of war and bloodshed common to the other parts of their tribe.

The Sandy Lake Indians are more numerous than those of Fon du Lac: There are 85 men, 243 women & children and 35 Half breeds. They

⁶⁸ The material recorded by Trowbridge under this date closely parallels the account of Doty in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 7:195-206. Doty says that he occupied himself "in surveying the lake and acquiring information relative to the country" during the absence of Cass. He also implies, p. 195, that Cass specifically requested him to secure the information. The similarity of this portion of the accounts of Doty and Trowbridge, extending to the misspelling of words then in common usage, suggests that one was copied from the other, or that both were copied from the same source. The data, according to Doty, were "obtained from persons who have traveled over and resided in the country, almost from their infancy," a designation that excludes Ashmun, whose arrival was of comparatively recent date. The source of the map of river routes in Doty's report, p. 204, is not given, thus detracting from its authenticity. In estimating the Indian population, the informants may have known of similar tables included by Zebulon M. Pike in his *Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi*, Appendix, part 1, p. 66 (Philadelphia, 1810). These data are summarized by Warren, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5:459.

are divided into 3 parties, one of which resides at Sandy Lake, one at Rice Lake, and the third between Sandy and Leech Lakes.

These Indians hunt as far north as the Vermilion Lake, the head waters of the Fon du Lac River, on which the Am. Co. have an establishment. They take Bear, Otter, Muskrats, Beaver, Raccoon, Fishers, Martin, and sometimes Red & Gray foxes and Deer. The only Buffalo they kill are taken on the borders of the Sioux Country, which is the great bone of contention between the two nations.

The Lakes Winnipeg [*Winnebagoshish*], Cross [*Bemidji*], Red Cedar [*Cass*], Leech, and Sandy, abound in white fish, but none are so rich as those of Leech Lake. They are never known to ascend the Rivers.

Some other kinds of fish are caught, among which are Pike, Carp, Blk Bass, Catfish, and a kind resembling the white fish in colour and shape, but smaller, called the Telibee.⁶⁹ Without these very necessary animals, together with the wild rice, the trade could not be conducted in this country, for it would be utterly impossible to transport provisions from the South.

The white fish are taken in autumn, & the Telibeas in the spring of the year, in nets of 60 to 100 fathoms in length. Among the Water fowls, we saw the Bustard, Wild Goose, (both of which are similar) several kinds of Ducks, the Swan, Pelican, Loon, Gully & co[r]morant. The pheasant, pa[r]tridge & pigeon are found here, the latter numerous.

The Rein & Common Deer and the Moose are killed in the vicinity of this Lake, but it is a saying among these wise people, that he who kills a moose is perfect master of his trade.⁷⁰

This animal does not depend on its eyes, but their sense of hearing is very acute; and if once fairly raised from its bed will run sometimes 100 miles before it rests.

When an indian finds a fresh track of this animal, he follows it until

⁶⁹ In an interview in November, 1941, Dr. Samuel Eddy of the department of zoology in the University of Minnesota identified the pike as the northern pike, not the walleyed pike; the carp as the quillback or carp sucker, not the fish commonly called the carp today; the black bass as the largemouth bass; and the catfish as one of several species of bullhead. The tullibee is a type of whitefish familiar to present-day fishermen. Doty, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 7:196, records that it was "called by the savages the too-nee-bee, and by the French, 'telibeas'."

⁷⁰ In the expert opinion of Dr. Thomas S. Roberts of the Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota, Trowbridge's bustard was the Canada goose; his pheasant, the ruffed grouse; his partridge, the Canada or spruce grouse; and his pigeon, the passenger pigeon. Dr. Roberts also suggests that the "rein and common deer" would now be known as the caribou, and the white-tail or Virginia deer, respectively.

he comes near the spot where he expects to find him, from which he proceeds with all imaginable caution until he gets sight of his object, when he drops on his knees, and removing every obstruction however trifling, advance[s], until he can fire with certainty, when by breaking a twig not larger than a pipe stem he starts the moose from his bed, which is the proper time for him to secure his remuneration for the toils of the chase. It is remarkable that if the wind blows never so hard it is necessary to use the same precaution as if no air was stirring. No Snakes are found here except the small striped snake.

The Leech Lake Indians are more numerous and more warlike than either of the other bands, and are divided, each division having its own chief.

There are 200 men, who have 350 wives, & about 1100 children.

The Brachu, who resides at Sandy Lake is acknowledged to be the general leader of this part of the tribe as well as the others, but maintains little influence over those who are distant from him.⁷¹ The Chieftanship descends from father to son, and the women are always excluded, so that the line becomes extinct on the death of the last male of the old line. When this happens to be the case, (but I believe it seldom happens,) the vacancy is filled by election of the man most valiant, brave and powerful, or the most celebrated for wisdom and eloquence; and he inherits the title of chief together with all the honors of the last in power. This practice is never deviated from except by some daring fellow, who usurping the authority, holds the tribe in awe by his ferocity or the influence of numerous relatives devoted to his interest.

Such an one however is soon disposed of by his enemies.

The Brachu or present acknowledged Chief of all these tribes, raised himself to his present advanced station by his superior eloquence alone, and is said to be the first general ruler they ever have had.

The Game and fish are *generally* much the same at Leech Lake as at Sandy and the other lakes, but the white fish are thought far superior to those caught at the Saut de St Marie.

As the indians are extremely improvident, they are sometimes obliged

⁷¹ Other Cass journalists spell this name differently. The name presumably derives from "De Breche," identified by Pike, in his *Expeditions*, 45, and later by other visitors, as "Broken Tooth," reigning chief at an earlier time. The context and usage suggests that "the Brachu" had become the title, not the specific name, of the Sandy Lake chieftain.

to subsist on the Wau-be-se-pin. It is a root resembling the potatoe, is mealy when boiled, and grows in clay soil.

They have also the Sitch-auc-wau-besepin, which resembles the other, but is inferior in quality, and grows in every part of the Country. When these cannot be found, the Watapine is eaten by them: this is a small root, frequently pulled 3 feet in length and for preservation dried in the sun: it is most abundant on Lake Superior.⁷² The only way of cooking these is by boiling. In cases of extreme necessity they use a wood which resembles Bitter Sweet, growing to the tops of the highest trees; which when boiled is very palatable.

They eat every animal, and every part of it, and it is not unusual for them to season their rice with the intestines of Rabbits and other small game; a practice almost incredible were it not familiar to us.

Winter in this country commences about the first of December and closes about the first of April. The climate at Sandy Lake is similar to that of Montreal, but it is much colder at Fond du Lac, where the season is 15 days later. The snow on Lake Superior is often 3 feet in depth, but decreases to the west, so that they frequently have 3 feet snow at Fond du Lac when it is only two or three inches deep at Sandy Lake — and while a South wind may prevail 3 days at Fond du Lac without decreasing the snow, 12 hours of the same wind invariably produces a thaw at Sandy Lake.

The summer season is generally very warm and pleasant and so soon as winter disappears vegetation progresses very rapidly.

The traders here suffer nearly as much in the summer season from

⁷² Consultation of many Chippewa and Sioux vocabularies has not been rewarded by positive identification of the plants whose phonetic spellings are given in this passage. It may be said, at least, that *waub* is white and *sepin* root in the Chippewa tongue. In the informed opinion of Dr. C. O. Rosendahl of the department of botany in the University of Minnesota, expressed in a letter of April 14, 1941, it is "fairly certain" that "Wau-be-se-pin is the common Arrowhead — *Sagittaria latifolia*. Sitch-auc-wau-be-se-pin seems likely to be another species of Arrowhead, but this surmise may be wrong. Watapine might be the Ground nut — *Apios tuberosa*," but Dr. Rosendahl is "rather doubtful of this species being common along the south shore of Lake Superior, hence it is more likely to be some other plant." Henry H. Sibley, in the "Life and Adventures of Joseph Jack Frazer," in the *St. Paul Pioneer* for January 20, 1867, tells of a Sioux camp that "subsisted on the dried meat *cached* during the winter, and the *wap-si-pin*, or small bulbous root of the nature of a potatoe, found in the shallow ponds. These roots are a favorite food of the larger wild fowl, such as geese and mallard ducks. They have a slightly saccharine flavor, and are by no means in-nutritious, or unpleasant to the taste." This doubtless was the arrowhead. Doty, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 7:198, says that the bittersweet is also named "bois retors," and that "sitch-auc-wau-be-sepin" is the "crane potato."

the Musquitoes as from the want of provisions. Tho' they have none of the gnats mentioned on Lake Superior, yet the difference in the size, numbers, and venomous sting of the former insect are a sufficient counterbalance to any deficiency on that score.

Indeed we are obliged not only to use our nets, but to keep a smoke in our room during the night, or we should be serenaded by millions of these unwelcome visitors: and in the day time if we walk towards the woods it is necessary to use veils.

Goods are sold here at enormous prices, but owing to the indolence or dishonesty of the indians, very little is eventually realized.

All the goods are sold and reckoned by skins—a [*beaver?*] skin is estimated at \$2. A Blanket is sold for 4 to 6 skins. $\frac{1}{2}$ p^t powder 1 skin, 30 balls the same, a knife 1 skin, 1 fathom of twist Tobacco 2 skins, 3 plugs do 1 skin, a hatchet 1 skin, and in proportion for other articles.

If an indian obtains credit for these articles, he expects to be furnished gratis, with a flint, needle, awl, gun worm, rings, tobacco, and a little vermilion; and in a credit of 600 skins, the trader considers himself recompensed (because he is obliged to do so) if he receives 300 in return.

The indians pay for their goods in Rice, Sugar or furs. A Mocoek of Sugar of 40 lbs is equivalent to 4 skins, a Sack of Rice (1 Bus) 2 skins, a large Beaver 2, a large Otter 2, 2 prime Buck skins 1, 3 Racoons, 1, 2 Lynx, 1, 2 fisher, 1.

One very necessary article to the indian hunter he never fails to pay for: this is his axe. When he returns from his hunting ground to the trading post, his best skins are selected and given to the trader for this instrument which he is sensible he cannot do without.

The Am Fur Compy have almost all the trade in this Section of the Country, tho' they are not unfrequently harrassed by petty traders.

Monday 24. July. About noon we had the pleasure of witnessing the return of our party.

They ascended the Mississippi to Upper Red Cedar Lake, distant from Sandy Lake about 350 miles.⁷³

They were prevented from ascending any farther on account of the difficulty of the navigation. The Country above is represented as very uninteresting: Mr Schoolcraft collected nothing in the mineralogical way

⁷³ The narrative shows clearly that the party laid no claim to having reached the final source of the river. The explorers reached Cass Lake, which Schoolcraft named Cassina, on July 21, and concluded that the Mississippi entered that lake from the south. The mileage given here is, of course, far in excess of the actual distance.

and Cap^t Douglass was equally unsuccessful in Botany. Red Cedar Lake is about 9 miles in circumference and situated in Lat ——. The River from Sandy to Cedar Lake is about 60 yds wide.

M^r Chase who has been out to survey & delineate Sandy Lake has also returned, and has probably the most correct chart that was ever made of it.⁷⁴ The shape is very singular: its width is in no one place more than 4 or 5 miles, but there are many deep indentations, and its circumference cannot be less than 30 miles. The shores are not generally sandy as has been supposed, but gravelly, abounding in the most beautiful Cornelians and agates, of which we have collected specimens in abundance. The point on which the Fort stands is one exception — and it was this point in all probability that gave the Lake its name.

Tuesday July 25. When our party returned from above we had everything in readiness for a start. The Barge which we repaired or rather finished, was one which the engagées had made during the summer season, when they could find no other manner of passing their time; and we collected a parcel of old fish nets and gum (which served as substitutes for oakum and pitch) with which we made it tolerably tight & fit for use.

Accordingly we left Sandy Lake at 3 p m, in the Barge & 3 canoes, leaving 2 behind as useless; and we were soon on the Mississippi, pulling away with light hearts and anxious hopes. I do not know when I have felt more happy than this afternoon, in the prospect of seeing again my much loved friends: and although we are still 1700 miles distant from them, yet we feel comparatively near to them.

The communication between the Lake and the Mississippi is two miles in length and about 30 yds in width.

We made to day 28 miles and encamped on a small Bottom, in the midst of swarms of musquitoes which promise to give us little rest.

We are accompanied by the Chief of the Sandy Lake tribe and 15 of his principal men, who are going to treat of a peace with the Sioux. On our passage this afternoon we observed another singular custom of the indians, which had not before presented itself to us.

The wife of the old chief had attached to a board (such an one as they bind their children to for the purpose of making them strait) a roll of cloth in the shape of an infant, which she had decorated with beads and

⁷⁴ No map that could be attributed to Chase was found among the documents consulted by the editor.

other ornaments, among which was the medal presented by the Governor; and this on landing was the first object of their care.

On enquiry we learned by our interpreter that it was intended to represent a young child of the chief's lately deceased, and that it was customary to carry this with them for two years from the period of its death, unless before that time he should be blessed with another, to which the image would give place — a singular superstition!

Wednesday July 26th. Last night to have the benefit of room & air we pitched our nets outside of the tent, and about one o'clock the rain suddenly commenced falling in torrents, and before we could collect our bedding &c, the tents were blown down; so that we were obliged to retreat for a time to the lodge of our indian friend the chief, where I remained until morning sleeping soundly in a puddle of water at least four inches deep in some places; yet I experienced no ill from it, perhaps because we are more enured to hardships than some time since.

At sun rise we started in the canoes, but the barge (and its party were left behind,) she having sprung a leak. During the day we shot at a Deer, some Ducks & a Heron, but only succeeded in getting two Ducks.

Passed during our course 3 small rapids, which tho' not dangerous would retard the progress of ascending boats very considerably. We find the Current very strong & rapid, the banks generally low and spreading into extensive bottoms, but sometimes very high & barren. We have seen today, Elm, Birch, Black walnut, a little Butternut & Pine.

At 7 in the evening we landed, and about 10 had the pleasure of seeing our barge come on pretty well repaired.

About 2 miles above our encampm^t, Pine River has its confluence with the Mississippi, and tho' a small stream considerably augments the latter, so that it is now nearly of an average width of 120 yds. We made to day as nearly as we are able to judge 100 miles, which with the distance yesterday makes us 128 from the Lake.

Thursday 27th July. At 5 we embarked, and about noon we passed La Riviere au Corbeau or Crow River, a considerable stream flowing through a low open Country.⁷⁵

We find the scenery dull and uninteresting, well calculated to remind the traveller that he is far from the haunts of civilised beings.

At 5 we arrived at the encampment of those indians who left Sandy

⁷⁵ This is the Crow Wing River of today, not to be confused with the Crow River, a tributary of the Mississippi entering at Dayton.

Lake to hunt, immediately after receiving ammunition from the Gov^r. They have killed only 5 or 6 Buffalo, not daring to go far south, on account of their differences with the sioux. We proceeded on two miles from their encampment and landed. Here they came with their squaws and presented us with fresh and dried Buffalo and venison in abundance.

In our descent to day we passed many rapids, some of which are rather dangerous.

M^r Forsyth while walking out this evening saw a herd of Buffalo, and to his great satisfaction killed one of them.

The E. side of the River from the River de Corbeau to our encampment is one immense prairie with very high banks, while the W. is generally Low and well timbered. On the shores we find occasionally some of our favorites, agates and cornelians.

We made to day about 90 miles.

Friday July 28th We got under way at an early hour this morning and soon fell in with our indian friends, without whose assistance we should find the navigation of the River very dangerous.

Having now got into the Buffalo Country, we landed about noon to enjoy the pleasures of a hunt.⁷⁶

Immediately on ascending the bank we saw three or four droves of these animals, containing from 20 to 30 in each, which is considered as a number unusually small. We divided our party and took guides or instructors, intending to do the business systematically, and went in pursuit.

Doct Woolcott, M^r Mackay and myself approached within 30 yards of a drove by crawling through the grass on our hands & knees, and after having taken deliberate aim, fired; but to our astonishment *every one* scampered *off apparently unhurt*.

The other droves were fired at with almost as little success, and we began to despair, until one of the indians brought a Bull down with a single ball; and afterwards two more were killed, together with an Elk and a Deer. The difficulty of killing a Buffalo is very great: I saw one

⁷⁶ In a letter written to Calhoun from Detroit, February 2, 1821, Cass states that "In this debatable land the game is very abundant. Buffaloes, Elk, & deer range unharmed and unconscious of harm. The mutual hostilities of the Chippeways & Sioux render it dangerous for either, unless in strong parties, to visit this portion of the Country. The consequence has been a great increase of all the animals, whose flesh is used for food or whose fur is valuable for market. We found herds of Buffalo quietly feeding on the plains. There is little difficulty in approaching sufficiently near to kill them." Department of War, Letters Received, National Archives.

shot seven or eight times without bringing him down, until an indian ran up to him and shot him through the head. The Elk is very large and strong, resembling a Deer only in shape and colour. The meat is much finer than that of the Buffalo which we yesterday tho't delicious. We landed at sun down very much fatigued, on a large prairie, where herds of Buffalo were seen feeding, but the temptation was not so great as it would have been in the morning, and we did not attempt to disturb them. These Prairies as well as we can judge are about 15 miles wide and extend from the River de Corbeau to the falls of St Anthony, with little interruption. They show few indications of vegetation, and are generally destitute of trees.

Saturday 29th July. This morning two of the Sandy Lake indians set out before us on foot, as they told us to hunt, but as we afterwards learned, to act as spies, for this is an invariable practice with either nation when approaching the Territory of another.

About 12, they returned to the Bank of the River, bringing with them a large piece of Bark, containing a communication in hieroglyphics from the Sioux Indians. Here a consultation was held and the contents of the letter explained to us. First, the Mississippi & St Peters [*Minnesota*] rivers were delineated, then the fort at the mouth of the latter, the sentinels at their posts, The principal chief, with a sword in one hand and a pipe in the other. On the river M, at different points the remains of 19 lodges were drawn, the number of warriors that had lately been at those encampments, with the Am. flag, and their object.⁷⁷

From all this we were made to know that the Sioux desired a peace, that the Am. officer wished it, that they had been hunting in this country, and had made 19 encampments, consequently had spent much time; and that their object in leaving this piece of Bark was to inform the Chippewas that no evil was intended them should they be on their journey to St Peters for the purpose of holding a Treaty.⁷⁸

Our indians were much pleased at the receipt of this intelligence and we saw nothing but manifestations of joy during the day; particularly when we passed the remains of the Sioux encampments, of which we saw 8 or 10 to day.

⁷⁷ The exchange of peace notes between the Chippewa and the Sioux is also treated by Doty, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 13:215, with the additional comment that the birchbark letter was preserved by the governor.

⁷⁸ The names St. Peter's, Mendota, and New Hope were often used interchangeably. The entire region about the mouth of the Minnesota was known as St. Peter's.

We stopped frequently to find Buffalo and cornelians, but both are growing scarce as we approach the falls.

Encamped at 6 p.m.

Sunday 30th July. At 9 this morning we arrived at the Falls of St Anthony, (in Sioux Minee Hah Hah.)⁷⁹ These afford a most romantic prospect, which is not a little heightened by the green foliage of a small island laying nearly in the centre of the perpendicular fall. The descent in the distance of $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile is 58 feet, but the perpendicular fall is only about 20 feet.

The rocks over which this body of water is precipitated are very beautiful white Sand stone. We made a portage of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile around the falls and about noon were ready to reembark for St Peters. Immediately after passing the falls a visible change takes place in the appearance of the country. The shores become Rocky, the Cliffs in many places perpendicular & very high.

In about two hours we arrived at the Fort. We found the troops stationed about one mile above the mouth of the St Peters, on a commanding eminence, chosen as a summer situation in consequence of the salubrity of the air.

The Officers are living in log huts, covered with bark, and rendered tolerably comfortable. The Soldiers are in tents. The troops erected a cantonement on their arrival here, near the mouth of the St Peters, but it was found to be an injudicious selection, on acc^t of a swamp in the neighborhood.

The permanent work is to be built on a very high & commanding point of land formed by the junction of the two Rivers.⁸⁰

Much of the land is said to be highly susceptible of cultivation, and

⁷⁹ The names of the Falls of St. Anthony and of Minnehaha Falls were sometimes confused, as here, by early writers.

⁸⁰ The Cass party arrived at a transitional stage in the development of this post, which was soon thereafter to bear the name Fort St. Anthony and finally Fort Snelling. The Fifth United States Infantry left Detroit in the spring of 1819 and proceeded by way of Green Bay and Prairie du Chien to the mouth of the Minnesota River, which was reached in the latter part of August. The first encampment was on the east bank of the Minnesota, near the present site of Mendota. In May, 1820, the troops were removed to a new location on the west bank of the Mississippi, north of the Minnesota River, forming a cantonment named Camp Coldwater, and there the explorers found them. No permanent buildings were erected at the Camp Coldwater site. As the journalist states, preparations were being made to build the fort on the high bluff at the junction of the two rivers. "It is in fact," says Schoolcraft in his *Narrative Journal*, 292, "the same point of land which first suggested to Lieutenant Pike the idea of its being an eligible situation for a fort." For a map of these sites, see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:424.

there can be no doubt of this fact if it resembles that adjacent to the present cantonement, where every garden vegetable grows luxuriantly. Peas were eaten in June and Corn on the 20th July, which is earlier than many of the States can boast of.

The Country back of the Fort is a handsome rolling prairie, abounding in small Lakes, where fish are caught in abundance.

Here we found Lieut^t [Andrew] Talcott & Cap^t [Matthew J.] Magee of the Missouri Expedition, who had travelled from the Council Bluffs by land, across the country, and owing to the ignorance of their guide were on the route 21 days. Tho' M^r Talcott estimates the distance to be no more than 300 miles. Their provisions & baggage, and that of their Soldiers, of whom they had 12, were carried on Pack horses. Their object is, to mark out a road for expresses, but they expect to find it a very difficult task, as most of the Country is a low prairie.⁸¹

Monday 31. July. This day the Indians of the Sioux and Chippeway nations met each other at the council House of L^t [Lawrence] Taliafer[r]o the Indian Agent at this place, and after a council of some length, a peace was concluded, which they protested should be lasting as the Sun.⁸² This however may *not* be a lasting peace, for as it appears, it was only made between 3 of the Sioux Bands and one of the Chippeways, and of course, agreeably to their customs does not affect the distant bands of either nation.

Besides the Sioux tho' a cowardly race, are very tenacious of their right to the hunting grounds on the Mississippi, and easily take umbrage.

The Sioux Indians hunt the Buffalo with the horse and bow; a plan more efficient than the other, as their horses are well trained, and their arrows, which shoot with great force are barbed with steel.

It is said that they drive these arrows entirely thro' the fleshy parts of the Buffalo. They also have guns, which they use for common hunting purposes; if they can procure ammunition.

⁸¹ The officers mentioned by Trowbridge and Captain Stephen W. Kearny, with a command of a dozen soldiers, had been at the cantonment for five days. The "Journal of Stephen Watts Kearny," kept on this trip, has been edited by Valentine M. Porter and published in the *Missouri Historical Collections*, 3: 8-29, 99-131. "Low prairie," in the specific meaning of the time, was descriptive of a wet or marshy terrain.

⁸² Lawrence Taliaferro resigned his military commission in 1819 to become Indian agent at the Minnesota fort, a position which he occupied until 1840. Schoolcraft notes, in his *Narrative Journal*, 304, that on August 1 "A treaty of peace was this day concluded between the Sioux and Chippeways in the presence of Governor Cass, Colonel [Henry] Leavenworth, Mr. Talliferro, the Indian agent at St. Peter's, and a number of the officers of the garrison." Leavenworth was the commandant at the fort.

They are a very ill looking race of beings and almost as indolent as the northern Chippeways.

Monday July 31st From the observations taken this morning by Cap^t Douglass and Lieut. Talcott the latitude of this place (S^t Peters) has been ascertained to be 44° 45' north.

S^t Peters may boast of many curiosities. M^r Schoolcraft has procured some handsome specimens of native copper from the cliffs on the east side of the river; and we have seen curiosities in natural history. The Gofer [Gopher]⁸³ is one of them. This animal is nearly of the size of a black squirrel, but much in appearance like a rat, and is very destructive to the gardens. It lives and moves altogether under ground and works it[s] way with great ease and swiftness. Its teeth and claws are very long, and, they are provided with a bag on each side of the head, capable of holding a gill each, in which as they progress they draw the earth; when these are full they return to the mouth of the hole and discharge their burden; and from repeated observations it has been ascertained that only three seconds of time are necessary for collecting and discharging each load, feeding themselves at the same time on the roots of such vegetables as come in their way.

A singular bird has also been found here, of which no account has been seen in history. It is much of the size of a robin and has a long bill and webbed feet, and is of a beautiful white colour.⁸⁴

Wednesday August 2nd. About 9 we left S^t Peters and descended the river 7 miles, where we stopped to view a cave, of which [Jonathan] Carver spoke as of a great curiosity. About 80 yards from the bank of the river we found its mouth, and having lighted a number of torches we proceeded to explore. A broad entrance of the height of eight feet, led us to a large chamber, through which ran a little brook, whose water was clear as crystal and very cold: from this we passed through a low, narrow passage into another chamber less than the first. These are the only rooms which we discovered, and after penetrating a distance of 400 yd's from the last, in all which distance we were obliged to crawl on our hands and knees, we turned about, well satisfied that no other opening could be found, and that the water which had ran through and

⁸³ The word enclosed in brackets was written by the author above the line, and was doubtless intended as a correction. The reference is to the pocket gopher.

⁸⁴ Dr. Thomas S. Roberts, in a letter to the writer dated November 19, 1941, suggests that this bird was probably "a young black tern which is so largely white that it would appear white on the wing."

caused the excavation through which we had made our way with so much difficulty, proceeded from a spring perhaps not far distant from the place at which we turned about. The name of Carver had been cut on the soft sand stone of which this cave is formed, but tho' we searched, we could not find it, and after leaving our names marked on the rocks at its mouth we reembarked and continued our course, not a little elated with the idea of soon seeing our home & friends. About noon we arrived at a Sioux village, containing 8 large houses or wigwams, and a number of small ones.⁸⁵ On landing we were saluted by the Chiefs and ushered into a large wigwam, where Buffalo robes were spread for us to sit on, and after some time, an old warrior commenced a speech which he continued nearly half an hour, and the purport of which was, to inform us that they were pleased with our attention in calling at their village, &c, that they entertained a strong attachment for the Americans, and to conclude, in the ordinary way, said that they were poor, and hoped their father the Gov. would give them some of his Tobacco and milk, (whiskey); which request was granted, and we received in return a large quantity of green corn, which is in the summer Season almost their only food, for they are too indolent to hunt when they can possibly subsist without, and their squaws do all the labor of the field.

This was a feast day, and we were admitted (which is an unusual condescension,) in the hut where the Indians were collected. Here were four or five fires, over each of which hung a large brass kettle filled with corn: around these fires they danced and sang until the corn was sufficiently boiled, when having made an offering of a small part of it to the Great spirit, each one filled his wooden bowl, holding probably two gallons, and commenced eating. Here the scene ceased to be interesting and we improved the opportunity to depart, lest we might be importuned to grant more favors.

The current being rapid and our men considerably refreshed, we made a distance of 49 miles although we had stopped frequently, and landed about 5 miles above the river St Croix.

Thursday 3 Aug^t 1820. About sun rise we were at the mouth of the

⁸⁵ The village, which was known as Kaposia, was that of Chief Little Crow, near the present site of South St. Paul. Schoolcraft, in his *Narrative Journal*, 315, notes that the party "stopped to examine a remarkable cavern on the east banks of the Mississippi called *Wakon-teebe* by the Narcotah or Sioux Indians, but which, in compliment to the memory of its first European visitor, should be denominated Carver's Cave." The cave, which was explored in 1766 by Jonathan Carver and is commonly known by his name, is located below Dayton's Bluff in St. Paul. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:57.

St Croix, which empties into the M. on the east side, and is a very handsome stream, at its mouth nearly 200 yards wide. In the afternoon we arrived at another Sioux village, beautifully situated on the west side of the river.⁸⁶ Here we landed and after a short discourse with the Chief of the village continued our journey. From this village it is nine miles to lake Pepin, which, tho' called a lake is nothing more than the expansion of the waters of the M. to the width, (generally) of four miles.

The water of this lake is extremely pure and the Cliffs by which it is bordered, approaching nearer to the river than above, where the bottoms are from one to three miles wide, present a succession of the most delightful scenery imaginable.

Here dwells a remarkable fish, vulgarly called the shovel mouthed sturgeon, but Doct^r Mitchill I presume would feel somewhat vexed at such a perversion of scientific terms.⁸⁷ The projection from the head resembles in shape the bill of a Duck and is from 8 to 12 inches in length; we saw many, but having no good spears, were unable to take one.

Cornelians are found in greater abundance on the shores of this Lake than above, and are of a better quality than any we have before seen.

We made to day 65 miles.

Friday 4 Aug. At the remains of an indian encampment we found the bones of one of the sturgeon, and intend to transmit it to the learned Doctor; it will at least serve to excite his curiosity.

Nothing remarkable occurred to day & we landed at sunset, having made 60 miles.⁸⁸

Saturday Aug. 5, 1820. Being very anxious to see Prairie Du Chien to day we set out before day break, and at 5 in the afternoon we arrived at the village, having travelled in that time 111 miles.

Between the falls of St Anthony and the Prairie, we found instead of the numerous rapids which so often threatened destruction to our Canoes, sandbars without number, which extending in every direction from the shores very much impeded our progress; and indeed we were fortunate if we did not strike 15 or 20 of them in a day: so that difficulties present

⁸⁶ The village of Chief Red Wing, on the site of the city that bears his name.

⁸⁷ Samuel L. Mitchill, distinguished scientist, prolific author, and editor from 1802 to 1808 of the *Medical Repository*, was an influential outlet for papers in many scientific fields.

⁸⁸ Curiously, no mention is made of a stop at the large Sioux village of Wabasha, about fifty miles south of Lake Pepin on the present site of Winona. Schoolcraft notes that a "short halt" was made there on the afternoon of August 4. See his *Narrative Journal*, 334.

themselves as well below as above the falls, tho' they can be more easily surmounted.

From the foot of Lake Pepin (which is computed to be 30 miles in length,) to Prairie du Chien, the bluffs are about four miles distant from each other, and the intervening land is a rich bottom, timbered principally with Cotton wood.

The principal rivers between St Peters & the Prairie, are, the St Croix, Cannon, Chippeway, Buffalo, Drift wood, Wing Prairie, Black, Root, Racoon, Bad Axe, Tower, & Garlick Rivers: none of these however are very considerable except the St Croix.⁸⁹

Village of P. du Chien Aug 6. This village is situated three miles above the mouth of the Ouisconsin river, on a Prairie about 2 miles in width, and contains (including the adjacent settlement,) about ninety houses, and as many families. (492 inhab. including 131 troops.)

The native inhabitants are all french, whose ancestors migrated to this Country in the Early settlement of Louisiana by that nation, A.D. 1719. Most of them support themselves in a very miserable manner, subsisting in part, during the summer, on corn &c procured from the indians. Some however have seen more of the world and live comfortably.

Fort Crawford, so called, is handsomely built and is the only ornament to the place.⁹⁰

There are at present only 2 companies of the 5th Reg^t inf^y, stationed here; and the post is under the command of Major [Peter] Muhlenberg a very gentlemanly officer.

The U. S. have a "Factory" here for the purpose of supplying the indians with goods; the object was in its origin to prevent imposition by the traders, but it is tho^t to be an unprofitable establishment.⁹¹

⁸⁹ The journalist probably did not intend this to be an exhaustive or discriminating list. The Buffalo River is the Beef River of today, which was known earlier as the River des Boeufs and also as the Bonsecours; it enters on the Wisconsin side. See Winchell's map, in *The Geology of Minnesota*, 1:2. Not mentioned among the major tributaries are the Trempealeau, the Zumbro, which was named the River des Embarras by the French explorers, and the Upper Iowa rivers.

⁹⁰ Fort Crawford was one of a series of frontier forts erected in 1816. "The site chosen for the structure was the spot occupied by Fort Shelby or Fort McKay, which had burned down after the departure of the British," according to Bruce E. Mahan, *Old Fort Crawford and the Frontier*, 71 (Iowa City, 1926). Fort Crawford was rebuilt on a new site, on elevated ground, between 1829 and 1834.

⁹¹ Located at Prairie du Chien was one of the more important units in the chain of stores owned and operated by the government in the Indian factory system. Twenty-eight factories were established at frontier forts between 1795 and 1822, but not more than seven or eight were active at any given time. Their purposes were many: to protect the Indians against exploitation, to strengthen the military front, to promote

The state of society here is a very unhappy one — no schools — no church — & no ministers.

Monday Aug. 7. Having learned that an indian of the Win[n]ebago nation had some years since discovered a remarkable cave about twenty miles from this place, he was accordingly sent for, and the Gov, dispatched me with an interpreter to ascertain the truth of his story. We started on horseback (for in this country there is no difficulty in traveling through the woods in that manner,) and travelled 18 miles, to Kickapoo river, a small stream emptying into the Ouisconsin. Here we stayed at night and on the morning of the 8th travelled five miles further by a circuitous route to the Cave, which is of Limestone, about 40 feet square and 20 ft high. As is usual with savages they had, with a view to get some presents, told us a false tale, and instead of silver ore, which we were told we should find in abundance, we saw nothing but the petrifications usually found in Limestone Caves, called Stalactites.

The result was, that I returned, much dissappointed, and the guide lost his conditionally promised compensation.

Wednesday 9th Aug. Mr Schoolcraft, who had been down the river about 70 miles to visit a lead mine, returned this morning, with a good collection of specimens, mineralogical and geological.⁹²

He represents the Country below as highly interesting. The lead ore in the mines on the Mississippi lays on and near the surface of the earth, a singular fact, known in no other part of the world.

At the mine which he, ([M^r Schoolcraft) visited it is dug by the squaws, of the Fox nation, who inhabit that part of the Country, and

peace, and to offset the influence of other countries. The Prairie du Chien post was typical in its ill success, which was caused by the high cost of freight, limitations placed upon the superintendents, and the frequent necessity of selling to the Indians on credit. The government stores were abolished in 1822. Edgar B. Wesley, in *Dictionary of American History*, 2:238.

⁹² Schoolcraft's three-day tour, a kind of sequel to his earlier exploration of the Missouri lead mines, took him to the vicinity of present-day Dubuque, Iowa, and Galena, Illinois. An area of some sixty square miles on the Iowa side was then known as Dubuque's lead mines. Julien Dubuque, to whom the Fox Indians had granted the privilege of working the mines, died in 1810, and after that the Indians showed increasing jealousy of the whites. Within the area, the most active mining had long been concentrated in a small district, known as the Indian diggings, near the mouth of the River Tete de Mort. By the 1820's, many of the mines had been abandoned and the Indians were forced to the necessity of searching for lead metal in the ash heaps of earlier, perhaps even ancient, smelting sites. Schoolcraft found that the Indians delivered the ore in baskets to traders, who paid two dollars for 120 pounds, payable in goods. Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal*, 343-346; Thwaites, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 13:279-289.

they also trade with the merchants. Few persons are so industrious as to dig deep into the earth, rather choosing to abandon the digging when it becomes laborious, thereby losing perhaps the richest fruits of their perseverance.

The french people here, use sleigh bells on their harness at all seasons, and think it quite a mark of distinction.

Wednesday Aug 9th We left Prairie du Chien and proceeded to ascend the Ouisconsin, which we found very difficult, on account of the sand bars, which are more numerous, and render the ascent more tedious than the descent of the Mississippi. The water being very low makes our traveling more irksome, for we are frequently obliged to wade.⁹³ The width of the river varies, according to the abundance or fewness of the bars, but is generally 100 yds wide. There are many handsome bluffs, on this as well as on the Mississippi, but generally much sameness in the appearance of the country.

There are in this river some of the "planters" of the Missouri.⁹⁴

On Monday the 14th Aug we arrived at the portage between the Ouisconsin & fox rivers, having made in 4½ days, against a rapid current and other difficulties, 165 miles.

We had no sooner arrived at the portage, than we discovered twenty or thirty indians coming towards us on horseback at full speed, (They had no lances, but bows, in modern fashion,). They were Winebagoes, of whom there are a large number residing near this portage.

We landed our goods & employed a frenchman, (who is the only white person residing here,) to assist us in transporting them across — which was expeditiously done with oxen, & for which we paid \$2 per load. The portage is made through a low prairie, much infested by Rattle Snakes. It is little more than 1½ miles in length, and as the Ouisconsin has been ascertained by an accurate calculation of Cap^t Douglass, to be 28½ feet higher than the Fox, no one can doubt of the practicability of constructing a Canal, which would save much time and expense.⁹⁵

⁹³ The party was now following the much traveled Fox-Wisconsin route, connecting the Mississippi and Great Lakes systems. "By all odds the most important topographic feature of Wisconsin in relation to its history is the diagonal valley which extends from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi," writes Lawrence Martin in the *Physical Geography of Wisconsin*, 21 (Madison, 1932).

⁹⁴ A "planter" or "sawyer" was, to the riverman, a log or tree that had become lodged in the river's bottom or bank, creating a hazard to navigation.

⁹⁵ This is a surprisingly precise measurement. The Cass party was not the first to recognize the possibilities of a canal at this place. A small connecting ditch was dug perhaps as early as 1766; the government canal, passing through the city of Portage,

At the opposite side of the portage we were visited by all the indians of the Village, about 100 in number, whose object was to procure whiskey, which we gave, and they departed.

Tuesday Aug 15th 1820 We bid adieu to the waters of the Ouisconsin & the great tributary of the Gulph of Mexico, with sincere pleasure. The Fox at the portage is not more than 10 yards wide, but is different in its nature from the Ouisconsin — its waters are very deep, and flow through immense fields of Wild rice, which are from one to four miles wide, and greatly obstruct the navigation in some places, for the country is so level that near its head the river has no channel. On the 16th we passed through Lac Le Beuf 53 miles from the portage, & Lake puckaway, 9 miles farther, both small, and only 2 miles wide, so that they may be called more properly expansions of the river to the solid banks.

On Friday the 18th Aug we passed through Lac Des Puants* or Winnebago Lake, 161 miles from the portage. This lake is 18 miles long and from 4 to 8 broad, with high, mountainous shores: its waters are very shallow & rocky.

At the east end of the Lake are two Winebago villages, (one on each side of the river,) where we stopped a short time, and procured some assistance in the persons of two indians, to guide us down a rapid, which commences at the end of the Lake. From this place to Green Bay the river is very rocky, and at present in consequence of the lowness of the water, very dangerous. We were obliged to make a constant succession of *dechargés* to the Bay, and in addition to our other ill fortune, we broke our barge on the rocks, so that we were under the necessity of employing indians to carry its lading, in their Canoes; to which act of industry nothing would tempt them but the promise of a barrel of whiskey.

On Sunday the 20th of Aug we arrived at the Fort, distant from Lac Des Puants about 33 miles.⁹⁶

Fort Howard is situated about three miles above the mouth of the Fox River, and for the distance of three miles above it, the shores are

was commenced in 1849; and the first recorded steamboat passage was in 1846. Martin, *Physical Geography of Wisconsin*, 355.

* The Winnebagoes are called Puants or "Stinkers" [author's note].

⁹⁶ This fort, named in honor of General Benjamin Howard, was built in 1816 on the left bank of the Fox River, about a mile above the junction with the Duck River. Its site, now within the city of Green Bay, was occupied earlier by a French fort, known as La Baye. "Fort Howard (1824-1832)," in *Green Bay Historical Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 5, p. 3 (September-October, 1928); Louise P. Kellogg, "Old Fort Howard," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 18:125-127 (December, 1934).

thickly settled. There are 54 houses, containing in all about 60 families.

Most of the inhabitants are either of french alone, or of french & indian extraction, and appear very poor.

There are some *americans* however, but this is not their permanent place of residence, their only object being to trade with the indians.

There are now upwards of 600 men at this post, under the command of Cap^t Whistler, by whom we were treated with much kindness during our stay.⁹⁷

The present fort is built on a low sandy plain, which is a very unhealthy as well as inconvenient situation, and most of the troops are now employed in erecting another fort, about 3 miles above this, on a very beautiful & commanding eminence.⁹⁸

Tuesday 22nd Aug^r 1820. At the mouth of the Fox, a division took place in our brigade; the Governor, Cap^t Douglass, Mr Schoolcraft, Lieut Mackay, R. A. Forsyth, with the frenchmen, steered for Chicago, while Mess^{rs} Doty, Chase & myself took the north shore of the Lake for Mackinac.

Soon after we parted, the wind rose, and we were compelled to labor excessively hard, as the indians of whom our crew was composed, were determined to work very little, having now no *Great father* to control them.

We continued to buffet the waves to our great vexation & fatigue, until Tuesday the 29th Aug, when we were so fortunate as to arrive in safety at Mackinac, where we were very hospitably received by our friends Col Boyd,⁹⁹ Mess^{rs} Crooks, [Robert] Stuart and Capt Pierce.

The Country on the north shore of Lake Michigan is very barren, & little susceptible of cultivation. Nothing important occurred to us in the voyage.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Identified as Captain William Whistler by M. M. Quaife, in *Checagou, From Indian Wigwam to Modern City, 1673-1835*, 83 (Chicago, 1933). Whistler was temporarily in command of Fort Howard during the absence of Colonel Joseph L. Smith, the commandant. Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal*, 370.

⁹⁸ Colonel Smith wished to remove the post to a spot known as Camp Smith, and much of the garrison was there when the Cass expedition arrived. Smith "kept the garrison there for over a year. He was, however, superseded in 1821 by Colonel Ninian Pinckney of the Third United States Infantry, who immediately revoked Smith's orders and concentrated all the troops once more at Fort Howard." Kellogg, in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 18:130.

⁹⁹ Perhaps reference is to George Boyd, Indian agent at Mackinac.

¹⁰⁰ The journey of Trowbridge, Doty, and Chase from Green Bay to Mackinac was more leisurely than the quickened tempo of the narrative suggests. They had sufficient opportunity to collect geological specimens of use to Schoolcraft in the preparation of

At Mackinac we remained until the 9th September, when we were once more gratified with the sight of our friends Capt D. and Mr Schoolcraft, from whom we learned that the Gov and the other gentlemen had proceeded by land from Chicago to Detroit.

Note: The distance from Green Bay to Mackinac is 230 miles. From Chicago to M. 300 miles.

The Country from Chicago to M. on the east side of Lake Michigan is represented as extremely uninteresting.¹⁰¹

On Wednesday 13 Sep^t we left Mackinac for Detroit where we arrived in ten days overjoyed to meet once more our friends.

And thus ends my dull, uninteresting, ungrammatical &c. &c. &c. &c — of a four months voyage, in which time we travelled in Bark Canoes 4388 miles!¹⁰²

his report. The routes of the parties that went from Green Bay to Detroit may be followed by reference to Schoolcraft's *Narrative Journal* and Cass's manuscript report to Calhoun. The division led by Cass coasted the western shore of Lake Michigan to Chicago, a settlement described by Schoolcraft in his *Narrative Journal*, 383, as consisting of the garrison and "ten or twelve dwelling houses, with an aggregate population, of probably, sixty souls." There the group again divided, and one of its members, Wolcott, remained to continue his duties as Indian agent. Cass, with Mackay and Forsyth, accompanied by John Kinzie, who had substituted for Wolcott during the summer, set out on horseback for Detroit, following the beach road to the Chemin River, near the present site of Michigan City, Indiana. This route led the travelers to the Sauk Trail, later known as the Chicago Road, which ran from the vicinity of Rock Island, Illinois, to Detroit. Early routes to and from Chicago have been carefully considered by M. M. Quaife, in *Chicago's Highways, Old and New* (Chicago, 1923). Cass's arrival in Detroit was announced in the *Gazette* for September 15, 1820. Douglass and Schoolcraft journeyed by canoe along the eastern coast of Lake Michigan to Mackinac, where they joined Doty and Trowbridge.

¹⁰¹ Dull and unsatisfying, certainly, is Schoolcraft's narrative of this portion of the exploration, which was apparently done in haste.

¹⁰² This mileage suggests a precision of measurement that could not possibly be attained. Cass, in his letter of September 14, 1820, reported to Calhoun that he returned on September 10 "after a very fortunate journey of four thousand miles, and an accomplishment, without any adverse accident, of every object entrusted to me." The two divisions which returned via Mackinac and St. Ignace necessarily traveled a greater distance.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).