

The following account of a visit a group of Government surveyors made to an all Indian Fair on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation fifty years ago points up some of the great changes that have taken place in the customs of the people, and in transportation facilities, particularly as affecting recreation. Instead of the simple picnic, country dance, or local ball game of the past that the surveyors would enjoy in those days, we must now have everything from water skiing, boating, to drag races. I am thinking of the plight of the survey crew that spent six or seven months of the summer living in tents far down in the badlands south of the Bear Paw mountains, along the Missouri River in what is now the renowned Missouri River Breaks. Being sixty to seventy miles from the railroad at Big Sandy or Chinook, and relying upon horse drawn lumber wagons for transportation, trips to conventional recreation facilities were extremely limited because of the time it would take to get outside. However, with eight or ten young fellows in camp they would usually stir up some excitement of their own; if nothing more than a 'snipe hunt' or just getting out after supper and catching a cottontail rabbit in their hands just for fun.

I recall a time when we were camped well down toward the mouth of Cow Creek a special occasion arose and a group of us attended the little all Indian Fair at the village of Hayes, Montana at the southern tip of the Little Rockies. We had been trudging through the scrub and stunted pines, and juniper up and down the badland slopes all summer, and ~~we~~ had a Labor Day weekend coming up. Wanting to make the most of it, we were wondering what we might do for excitement. A seventy mile trip to Chinook or Big Sandy in a lumber wagon was out of the question. But the teamster, on one of his trips out to civilization, ^{heard} that the Indians were going to have a Fair at Hayes only twenty-five miles away.

An Indian Fair did not appeal very much to us, but under the circumstances it seemed worth trying. About seven or eight of us including Glenn Sawyer, Harold Stensland, Ralph Stensland, Clarence Kee, Knewt Peterson, and Fred Blanchard, and myself hooked up a team, threw some blankets in the wagon, and struck out early Sunday morning for the big celebration. As we approached ^{our destination,} ~~about eleven~~ o'clock in the morning we could see the white tents shining in the prairie east of the village. At this time some of us began to have some second thoughts of just how we would make out among the strangers, for after all, we had invited ourselves to their powwow. Driving up through the widely scattered tents, wagons with picketed horses beside them, bright colored clothing and blankets hanging on lines, with other familiar sights, dogs barking and small children staring, we headed for the Big Tent where the flags were fluttering. Pulling to a halt we put our best foot forward and did our best to show that we came in peace.

An older member of the tribe, apparently a chief, came out to inquire our business. Upon learning that we were just a group of surveyors out to visit their Fair he was all smiles and proceeded to give us the 'Red Carpet' treatment. They assigned for our exclusive use a big white round teepee all complete with the long slender poles sticking out the top. This tent which was pitched on a clean plot of grass, served as our headquarters while there. It was a great accommodation where we could go to rest and relax in private during the day, and sleep at night. Being the only white people there we were singled out for special treatment. Girls and boys were galloping around on their spotted ponies, and would ride up and stop and smile and show friendliness towards the surveyors.

Later on Mr. Warroir, the Chief, loaned me his feathered headdress and bucks in jacket with the fancy trimmings on it in which I could have my picture taken. In the afternoon they put on a home talent show in front of the rustic grand stand (see photo). The show was all free and consisted of horse

aces, some trick riding, and various games and dances. About the middle of the afternoon's program the announcer, speaking in English, invited the "Government surveyors to join in a tug-of-war with the Indians. We accepted and got out in front of the grand stand and got hold on one end of a long rope. The Indians on the other end beat us badly by pulling us all over the place. This tickled the sober indians and they hollered and whooped with glee. When things quieted down the M. C. announced - "Government Surveyors Invite to Indian Dance Tonight".

In the evening as darkness approached, with drums and tom toms booming, the Indians assembled in the Big Circular tent. A mixture of squaws and bucks, big, little, old and young, formed a circle in the big tent, with arms locked, surrounding a half dozen or a dozen young bucks on a platform in the center. The ones in the circle would chant and sing-song ~~and~~, step sidewise to the beat of the drums for a while, then, the bucks on the inside, all dressed up and painted, with shiny trinkets and bells hanging on their clothing, would put on a few minutes of fancy dances and when they ran down the ones in the circle would sing and side step some more. While standing watching, Chief Warroir made a space for me between two comely squaws and pushed me in saying "you dance". I joined in the fun, as did most of the other boys. The bucks danceing the War Dance, Hunters Dance and others was a sight not soon to be forgotten.

Later in the evening the boys joined in some round modern dances, and found some of the girls equally good at that form of dancing. The following day we returned to camp with a warm feeling of friendship toward our neighbors, and well satisfied with our labor day weekend.