

The following is a transcription of a document by William Roy Bandy. The original, a typewritten draft, was found in the materials sent to Glenn Borkenhagen by Bandy's grandson Dirk Reith during August 2019. The original suggests that Bandy intended to change the order of some sections and remove others, but this writer was unable to translate his plan so this transcription is in order as originally typed.

THE MISSOURI BREAKS
Montana's Stupendous Badlands
Beautiful to look at. Tough to survey.

February 1964

Much interest has been shown in recent months in the so called 'Missouri River Breaks', the extensive area of rough unimproved waste land situated along the Missouri River extending from Fort Benton to Fort Peck. Portions of that area are broken up into extremely rough, broken badlands with steep slopes of varicolored clays, shale and sandstone, into diverse shapes and forms. The tremendous natural beauty and grandeur of these landscapes has led some to suggest that they be preserved in their natural state as a National Park. The notoriety accorded the area has reminded me of bygone days when as a Government surveyor I spent several long, hot summers on foot climbing up and down those same hills they are now praising so highly. I was in charge of survey parties cutting up the land into townships and into sections a mile square, with iron corner monuments established every half mile. In that way we really got a first hand look at the gorgeous beauty of the scenery. We realized at that early date that we were working in a wild untamed, wilderness-type land which contained many awe inspiring scenes. However, we viewed them at first as a land to be conquered.

So busily engaged, we were, at the arduous task of surveying the section lines up and down, and across those treacherous, crumbly, and cliffy slopes that we failed to recognize the full value of the primitive grandeur of the scenery. It's true, however, that man generally does not recognize such values until he has become separated from them. But now, that time has mellowed the harsh opinion I then formed of the hills as a place to survey. I do now agree that they do look far different when viewed from the seat of a Jeep, especially if one doesn't have to get out on the ground and climb around on foot

unless only a little just for fun. Fortunately too, we tend to forget the hardships encountered in the old days, and now look back on them as being most happy and carefree. Because of the great changes in camp-life during the past forty years I thought that a description of our camp life in the isolated wilderness during the horse and wagon days might be of interest, especially in the field of transportation.

My work in the upper part of the area embraced the section south of the Bear Paws, and north of the Missouri River, including the famous Black Coulee and Bullwhacker Creek badlands. Associated with me as party chiefs were Engineer Glenn F. Sawyer, who had a homestead on Raglan Bench, and Engineer Roscoe Veal, who hailed from the Kentucky hills. Other cadastral engineers who worked the south side of the Missouri River below the mouth of the Judith River included George F. Rigby, R.Y. Lyman, and Robert W. Livingston. Their work included the Dog Creek, Woodhawk, and Whiskey Ridge badlands.

The Black Coulee and Bullwhacker breaks, referred to above are an extremely rugged complex, being cut up by steep sloped gashes draining into the river which flows eastward in a narrow valley 700 feet below the surrounding benches. The area is covered with clumps of tangled juniper and gnarled, twisted cedars, with clusters of stunted, scarred pines bearing the signs of scores of bleak, frigid winters, and an equal number of dry, withering summers. Vast expanses of varicolored clays and shales laid bare by the erosion of past centuries form the steep slopes which are broken by high cliffs of sandstone some of which overhangs similar to the one in Hide-a-Way Coulee south of Slippery Ann Butte, where the notorious train robber, Kid Curry, secretly hid himself and his band from the Law. Incidentally, the Kid's hide-out was ready made, with a grove of cottonwood trees in front, screening his cabin from view.

My job of surveying those badlands by cutting them up into sections one mile square, with iron corner monuments established [each] half mile was not an easy task.

All lines had to be run straight north and south, or east and west, leaving little opportunity to go around to take advantage of existing game trails or cow paths that always follow the easiest way. In addition the lines must be cleared of brush to permit measuring and aligning every foot of the way. Thus, it was a case of running straight over 'Hill and Dale'; along steep, crumbly slopes and across chasms. The cornerman was furnished a saddle horse and a pack horse for carrying the iron posts and the tools as closely to the line as possible. The cornerman usually had a water bag from which he could supplement our supply of water in our canteens, but, unfortunately he could seldom get his horses near enough to line for us to get a drink. The lack of water during the long hot days in the glaring badlands was a hardship not soon forgotten. The wise man soon learned to conserve the water in his canteen until late in the afternoon. Although the tasks were not easy, occasionally something happened to break the monotony and help us forget for a moment how dry we were. It was not uncommon to get a glimpse of a bobcat creeping through the brush, or spying at us from the sanctuary of a brushy tree. At times a timber wolf would voice his displeasure by a long drawn out howl that would raise the hair on one's head. One morning after a heavy rain tracks of those bloodthirsty brutes showed plainly in the soft ground how they, with one on each side of a yearling colt, had chased it into the rough bottom of a coulee, where it had stumbled to the ground never to rise again.

Transportation was a major problem. A heavy California type freight wagon pulled by four or six horses was used for moving the heavier items of the camp, and for hauling supplies from town. The driver was known as the teamster, or camp-tender, and was chosen with care. He must be experienced, not only in handling horses, but must be adept at finding his way over strange roads, and in getting out of tight places. Thorough dependability was required, because he frequently made long trips alone with the success of the camp depending on his return in due time.

Finding a centrally located campsite in the badlands accessible by wagon, with water, wood, and grass available was a job that taxed the ingenuity of the camp-tender. He had to be an expert teamster to pilot a four-horse team with a heavy load along an untrodden ridge top, threading his way along the sandstone hummocks, and between clumps of brush and trees. Lack of drinking water at many places forced the establishment of 'dry' camps, where drinking water, and sometimes water for all purposes including the horses and washing, must be hauled from distant springs or homesteader's wells. For that purpose an old fashioned threshing-machine type wagon was made by members of the crew.

In the Black Coulee area camp supplies were brought in from Big Sandy where most of the supplies were purchased from the big store of McNamara and Marlow. After getting farther southeast towards Cow Creek we sent to Chinook for supplies purchased from the Thomas O'Hanlon Co. Both of those towns were 60 to 80 miles away, requiring five days to a week to make the round trip. A good teamster and a good cook are the two key men in a party. A good cook keeps the men happy, and a good teamster keeps the supply lines open. It has been said that the responsibilities of a chief of party in the wilderness are similar to those of the captain of a ship. In camp he is both judge and jury, and his word is Law. Fortunately, it was seldom necessary to exercise those functions. A rule against gambling and liquor in camp, rigidly enforced, seemed to promote harmony.

We planned to send to town for supplies about twice a month, generally right after moving to a new camp. It can thus be seen that with the receipt of fresh supplies limited to once in two weeks, and your camp being 70 miles from town, that there must be close cooperation with the cook in making out the order for groceries, for one could not run down to the corner store upon suddenly discovering you were out of yeast, baking powder, flour or some other vital necessity. It meant a close check of supplies on hand when ordering, and likewise the teamster must carefully check his load before leaving

town for the distant hills. No small part of his chores was the job of running from store to store to pick the small items requested by the men in camp. Especially since many of them had specified certain brands of tooth paste and so forth. Sometimes as a result of a hurried departure for town from the new camp before there was a beaten path to it through the brush, the driver often was faced on the return trip with the additional handicap of trying to follow his dim tracks back to camp after dark. Experienced horses will usually follow the dim trail.

There was always an air of expectancy in camp the evening the freight wagon was due to return laden with supplies including fresh meat, mail, tobacco, and dozens of other personal things the boys had ordered, ranging from chewing gum to fancy stationery. On such occasions, if the wagon was late, the boys would sit around a campfire listening in the still night air to the coyote's song and for the chuck of the wagon, creak of leather, or the voice of the teamster urging the tired horses homeward. Arrival of the wagon, swinging in alongside the cook tent, and the smell of sweating horses, was the most exciting thing that had happened in camp for days. The boys swarmed out, some unloading the wagon while others helped care for the horses. The mail sack was taken to the office tent where it was distributed while the tired driver ate his warmed-over supper while relating the latest news of the outside world. Later, delivery of the many purchased personal articles, and returning the proper change to each, kept the harried driver busy for some time. Before retiring for the night the fresh quarter of beef would be unwrapped and swung high in a tree, or on the propped up wagon tongue to keep cool until wrapped again at daylight the next morning.

We had fresh meat for a few days after the wagon came from town, but we were too far out in the country to have ice, and those days were long before the modern portable refrigerators were available. However, by wrapping beef in several thicknesses of canvas during the day, and hanging it up at night to cool off, it would keep for several

days. A makeshift collar for the butter constructed by placing a box in the shady side of a bank with a wet gunny sack hung over the front.

As we moved eastward into the lower Bullwhacker Hills we got further and further away from Big Sandy. It now took at least a week to make the round trip, and longer if the freighter encountered a rain storm and had to hole up for a day or two on account of the gumbo. Harold Stensland, a farm lad from west of Glasgow was our teamster here. Used to roughing it in the Larb Hills, he was at home in this gumbo country.

Bullwhacker Creek got its name because it lay across the famous old freight route leading from Cow Island to Fort Benton. The early-day freight wagons were pulled by long strings of oxen, hence the name "Bullwhacker". It must have taken a heap of whacken' to coax the ox teams over those gumbo hills!

We switched from Big Sandy to Chinook as a trading post after reaching the Cow Creek country. Chinook was reached by crossing the Bear Paws by the way of Cleveland Gap.

On the divide between Bullwhacker and Cow Creek we made the acquaintance of a lone inhabitant of the badlands, Dave Newton. An old bachelor, Mr. Newton lived in a cabin on a squatter's claim many miles from the nearest neighbor. It was fortunate for us that he chose that place for he had a well that supplied the only drinking water for miles around. When we first sampled his water we were afraid to drink it because it was the color of strong tea, or weak coffee. For a time we hauled drinking water from Harry Little's well on Cow Creek, fifteen miles away. But later after trying it out and becoming accustomed to it we like Newton's water very well. In fact, we then hauled water from Newton's well to our camps farther south in the breaks.

While searching for camp water several miles south of the Newton place I discovered a flow of natural gas bubbling up through a mud spring. The water from the

spring was kept roily at all times by the gas. Not knowing it was gas, I caught a tomato can of it and touched a match to it. The blaze flashed up and singed my eyebrows.

Mr. Newton said he hailed from Kentucky, but he was not one to talk much about his past. We were amused to see that he always picked up his old squirrel rifle when he spied a rider headed toward his cabin. Holding it at his side he would peep out the window to see if it was friend or foe. If it turned out to be a stranger he would talk through the crack in the door until finding out their business. He was always neighborly to us though, and stored our wagons and outfit, and wintered our horses several winters. Mr. Little lived with his two boys on Cow Creek at the crossing of the road to Landusky. Landusky, even at that early date was a ghost town occupied only the shades of old Pete Landusky. Mr. Little used to tell about the days when as a cowboy he would shack up with Charley Russell during the winter months.

A mile or so below Little's place on Cow Creek we found, scattered about some old broken dishes, glass, and pieces of wagon wheels and irons. Later, in searching through the Fort Benton newspapers of 1877 at the Historical Library an item was found describing how at that point a freight outfit belonging to the Baker Company had been burned by a marauding band of Indians. It seemed that the freight outfit heading for Fort Benton had camped there for the night. The next morning before breakfast, while all the men except one were out in the hills rounding up the oxen some Indians had rode up. For some reason the Indians killed the lone man who was getting breakfast, and burned the outfit. Seeing the fire and commotion at camp, the men in the hills hid out and walked back the twenty-odd miles to the Cown Island Stockade which they had left [the previous] morning. Arriving at the stockade after dark they were suspected of being Indians by the guards, who pinned them down until daylight, when they were recognized as white men.

Bandy note at bottom of page: Dictated to here Aug 20, 1971