

Excerpts from the Memoirs of Marie Rose Delorme Smith

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Buffalo Kill

They chose a captain to keep order in the camp. It was his duty also to issue orders to the riders who were on the lookout for water, or herds of buffalo, or any other riders he might spy. Our riders were given the best horses as they had so much extra riding to do. They would climb to the top of some high hill or butte where they could see a long way off. They always carried field glasses, and if a herd of buffalo was sighted there would be great excitement, as the men hustled about catching their best riding horses, strapping on their powder horn and placing their guns across the pommel of their saddle. The captain chose the best hunters and best shots for the slaughter. It was a grand sight to see them as they galloped away, their beaded shoulder straps glittering in the sun, as each loaded his gun while on full gallop, pouring in powder from the powder horn, ramming it down and dropping in the lead ball—several of which he was carrying in his mouth.

The traders bought their supply of shot from the stores before setting out, but not so the Indians. They saved the lead from the big packages they got from the Hudson's Bay Company in which tea was shipped. They melted it and poured it into long strips, afterwards cutting it into small pieces and then chewing it into ball shape. Even the little children helped with the shaping of the shot using their fine, strong teeth.

By this time the women were as excited as the men. They hustled about, emptied the carts and made ready to drive out to bring the meat into camp, while waiting for the men to come back from the slaughter so all could go out together and bring back what was killed.

It was the women's work to cure the meat, make the pemmican and dry the hides, tanning many for buffalo robes.

If we were lucky enough to be near a stream we would make camp for a few days while the women completed their work. When pitched, our camp looked like a small village of leather teepees. On finding a suitable camping ground, the carts were placed to form a large corral. The horses were driven inside so it was no trouble to catch them the following morning.

On breaking camp, the buffalo hides, forming the covering of the teepees, were

From Chapter I

June

CANADIAN CATTLEMEN

Eighty Years on the Plains

By MARIE ROSE SMITH

rolled up, the poles laid one on top of the other and the pegs gathered together. We carried extra poles and pegs, during the trek, in case of emergency.

Fuel was very scarce on the bald prairies, so we used "buffalo chips" or droppings, which when dried hard under the hot prairie sun, made a very hot fire, much like your hard wood fire.

Sometimes we had to travel a whole day before we could find water for the horses. Of course we kept ourselves supplied with empty whiskey kegs which we were careful to keep full of water in case of need.

Our horses often suffered very much from thirst, so you see, the scout, riding ahead held a very important post on the trek. At a signal from him we turned our course and the thirsty horses would lift their drooping heads and break into a trot. Near this body of water we would make camp or perhaps just stop long enough for our mid-day meal and replenish the empty kegs.

If the stream were big enough, we stopped to fish. After a big run over the prairie I liked to sit and fish too, even if

From Chapter III

Our most important industry was the making of pemmican. First I will tell you how second grade pemmican was prepared. Buffalo meat was cut into very thin slices or sheets, and then hung up to dry on rows of sacks made for this purpose. A fire was made underneath, so no flies would bother the meat while it was being smoked for curing and also being dried by the heat of the fire and the hot prairie sun.

When dry, stone mallets were used to pound the meat to powder in a parchment and when fine enough it was mixed with hot grease and dried berries. This mixture was then packed in large sacks of buffalo hide. Sometimes, for lack of time, the hair was left on the outside of the hide; the French called this *Taureaux*, others called it *Pimikan*, *The Manna of the Plains*.

To make first grade pemmican, the meat was first dried, then put into the fire for a minute or two to scorch. Big skins were laid out and the slightly scorched meat was placed on them and was ready to be pounded with a flail. The men beat it again and again, for the finer it was the better it would be for making first class pemmican. The beating was done by the men as it was too hard for the women to do. Hot buffalo grease was then melted and mixed with the powdered meat; so you see the difference between the grades of pemmican was the degree of fineness into which the meat was pounded.

It was the women's work to have the bags of buffalo skins ready. Just before this high grade pemmican was packed the

dried and crushed berries were mixed into it, and then with a heavy stick it was beaten into the bag, packed tightly and sewn in. After the pemmican was set an axe was used to get a piece to eat.

The sacks were square in shape and held about one hundred pounds each. They were stitched with sinew, using a square needle. A square needle is not as its name implies, but is three-sided in shape with a very sharp point, the thread end being round like an ordinary sewing needle. The razor-like edges of the needle, along the sides, cut the skin to allow for the passage of the sinew. This sinew is taken from each side of the back of the animal. It is a long strip stretching from under the shoulder to the thigh. It is really a gristle that is scraped clean of all meat and then dried. It is so strong and tough,

that it can be split as fine or as coarse as needed. It can be stretched fine enough for stringing beads. It was also used for violin strings. The Hudson's Bay Company used to pay us Twenty-five cents for a sinew.

From Chapter XI

Indian Buffalo Hunt

Brown had often witnessed the slaughtering of the buffalo by the Indians. Out of big logs they built a round corral, very high, and on each side, at the entrance, were built wings, also very high, through which the buffalo were coaxed to enter.

An Indian, called a "coaxer", dressed himself in a buffalo hide, horns and all, to resemble a buffalo as much as possible, and mingled with the herd, bellowing like one of them, and endeavoring to get them to follow him, and lead them to the entry of the corral.

Buffalo run in single file, and as they followed the false leader, many riders came behind making a great deal of noise to keep the animals advancing. When all have been coaxed into the trap, a gate, made of heavy logs was dropped into place. The Indians got on top of the corral and began their slaughter.

They used a flint lock gun if possible, but since few had these and ammuni-

tion was scarce, they resorted to bows and arrows to carry on the killing. They made their weapons of Choke Cherry wood and twisted sinew; the arrows were tipped with flint rock, and to such a sharp point as to be able to pierce the toughest hide.

The Indians called the corrals, "Buffalo ponds", and as the slaughter continued, the frightened animals ran about and piled up upon one another until the last one was slain.

Indians also hunted the buffalo on the open prairie. Sighting a herd feeding at leisure, the hunters urged their ponies into the midst of them. The buffalo then milled together against a common enemy, as the daring rider moved in and out of the labyrinth of paths among the doomed animals. He was fiendish as he exposed himself momentarily to be thrown from his horse and trampled into the earth under a hundred cruel hooves, or became a human plaything, tossed again and again into the air from the horns of an enraged animal.

As the hunters pressed on in hurry, they dropped their reins and guided their ponies by the pressure of their limbs only, by bending their half naked, supple bodies, now to this side, now to that, while the well trained pony responded with an obedience that made rider and pony one.

Each hunter carried a powder horn at his belt and bullets in his mouth, discharging and reloading their short flint lock muskets with incredible dexterity, as they aimed at the vital parts of the huge blundering beasts beside them.

After the cruel hunt, the hunters went out to look for the animals they had killed. The wounded buffalo groaned on every side. Some infuriated beasts, although mortally wounded, maintained themselves standing; vomiting blood, yet stubbornly fighting against death.