

There was neither milk nor sugar in the coffee, but never had anything tasted so good to the policeman. His host plied him with questions, and as they talked the wind almost drowned out their voices; the little cabin shook at each violent gust.

MacNeil eventually had his turn at asking questions, and much to his surprise learned that he was only 10 miles from Fort Macleod—still was many miles from Fort Kipp, his destination.

"You sure musta circled some", Jensen observed. "But you were lucky. Man, it musta been a wild night in the open."

"It was a bit rough", MacNeil grinned. "Especially with the horse I had. A wiry little cuss, but he's not familiar with this part of the country."

Jensen turned out to be one of the bull-whackers who in bygone days freighted buffalo hides by oxen and Red river cart over the deep-gouged trail from Fort Benton, Mont.

He told MacNeil that the cabin they were in was close to the old trail over which he had gone countless times from Fort Macleod through country where not-too-friendly Indians roamed at will. Things had changed with the coming of the Mounted Police, he reminisced, and he was loud in his praise of the work they had done in policing the old West.

Time passed, the storm continuing unabated, and at mid-morning the place was still quite dark.

"Guess you're kinda sleepy", Jensen suddenly remarked, getting up and producing some blankets. "You better roll up in these for a while. Don't see no chance of you gettin' out today."

MacNeil, dog tired, didn't need coaxing, and though the blankets were filthy in the extreme, he appreciated their warmth. Curled up on the floor before the open fire he soon dozed off.

All that day and the following night MacNeil was Jensen's guest. Several times

he tramped through the snow and attended to his horse; the rest of the time he fretted impatiently, waiting for the storm to let up so that he could be on his way.

Finally on the morning of the second day, the storm broke. Jensen directed MacNeil to go due south-east and impressed upon him the need for sticking to the old Benton trail. Accompanying the constable outside, he dug a hole about three feet deep not far from the cabin and graphically demonstrated that there actually was such a trail—it was a good one, as clearly defined as a railway track. Etched in the hard surface of the prairie by the fur-laden carts of former days it had remained uneffaced by the passing years.

"When in doubt", Jensen advised, "Just work back and forth until your horse steps into it again."

Bidding good-bye, MacNeil swung into the saddle and was again on his way. Tremendous drifts made the going difficult for Custer who floundered through them up to his middle.

The old bull-whacker's advice proved valuable, for MacNeil checked his direction many times by searching for the trail, which, buried under snow that had not packed sufficiently to bear much weight, was easy to find by stepping into it.

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FORT Kipp was a welcome sight when he pulled up before it shortly after sundown that evening and received hearty greetings from "Dusty" Shaver, the lone constable in charge.

With a sigh of relief MacNeil slid from the saddle. The worst patrol he ever experienced was over.