

my view of the Old West in general, and of Canadian history, in particular.

At the end of May, 1987, wildlife photographer Chris Paul and I left Chicago and started the long drive to Banff. We followed the route of the original "D", "E" and "F" Troops, which had taken a train from Toronto to Chicago and on through St. Paul, Minnesota, to Fargo, North Dakota. From Fargo, they marched northward and joined "A", "B" and "C" Troops, which had wintered in Lower Fort Garry. At Dufferin, near present-day Emerson, Manitoba, the March West began, and we followed a similar route along Highway 2. Anyone who has seen this terrain can appreciate that the "originals" must have had a very uncomfortable journey with their cavalcade of horses, ox-carts, and cattle. The wind blows dirt in your face, the sun beats down on your brow, and the mosquitoes attack with a vengeance. Even by automobile, it is a somewhat unpleasant trip, with very little to see in terms of landscapes.

At Weyburn, Saskatchewan, we headed northwest toward Regina and straight into a thunderstorm complete with howling winds and hail. It was reminiscent of Henri Julien's "Storm on the Third of August", which he sketched during the original expedition. After a 24-hour drive from Chicago, we reached Regina, covering in half a day the same ground the first Mounties had taken more than a month to travel.

Prior to our departure I had made arrangements with Malcolm Wake to visit the RCMP Museum. Corporal Michael V. Shaver, then of Depot Division, had offered to give us a tour of the Training Academy as well. A special treat was the graduation and Sergeant Major's parade scheduled for the same day. Unfortunately, those ceremonies had to be moved indoors because of the inclement weather. But we enjoyed them all the same.

Malcolm Wake took us on a fascinating tour of the Museum and Chapel. And he put to rest a few lingering myths as well. For example, most books suggest that the first Mounties were grossly underpaid. Actually they were well-paid for the time. Another popular image is that all of the originals were expert horsemen. Wake pointed out a page in the first "Commissioner's Report" written by Commissioner G.A. French in January 1875. This account detailed the March West, and in it French wrote, "According to the Act, all men should have been able to ride; but when put to the test, it was very evident that a good many rated their abilities in this line too highly." French had another interesting entry: "Dr. Kittson reports that every man in the Force gained in weight on the trip except one, and, as he naïvely remarks, relative to this one, 'he was the better for losing a little.'" Not every Mountie resembled a matinee idol, although reading the report, one can see that the caliber of the men, in general, was exceptional by any standard.

The Museum displays and artifacts tell the stories of "The Lost Patrol", "The Mad Trapper", and such famous men as Macleod, Walsh, Potts, Steele, and others. But when Corporal Shaver took us through the Academy, we met the men and women whose stories still rest in the future. These are the recruits who are working in classrooms and gymnasiums, firing ranges and driving courses, as they go through a 26-week program to become the newest members of the Force. Everything about the Academy is impressive, from the comprehensive curriculum each recruit must complete, to the discipline they all display.

That discipline even shows in the dormitories where each 32-bed room holds one troop, and where every bed, every closet, and every drawer is arranged precisely alike. Shaver explained that, "Everything is exactly the same because we are trying to instill in the recruit the need to pay attention to detail." Recruits