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THE HORSE

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A Bannock leader respected by the whites for a variety of abilities during the early years of the Snake country fur trade, The Horse wound up with a large composite band of about 1,500 men by the time that fur hunting reached its height after 1824. Well-informed white trappers watched with care when The Horse and his associates were around. The Horse's band took credit for having wiped out John Reid's temporary post on the lower Boise at the beginning of 1814, as well as for destroying a party of Owyhees (Hawaiians) who had set out in 1818 to explore the Owyhee River country, which was named for their misadventure. In the summer of 1824, Pierre Tevanitagon and his party of Iroquois trappers felt lucky to escape alive (but pillaged of their possessions) when The Horse and his warriors suddenly turned hostile upon hearing of trouble between some white trappers and Indians far to the west. Left destitute on the Portneuf north of Lava Hot Springs, Old Pierre scarcely knew what to do until Jedediah Smith and six more mountain men happened to turn up in time to escort his Iroquois back to the Hudson's Bay Company expedition they were supposed to rejoin. Meanwhile, The Horse and his crew headed south past Salt Lake, where they met and wiped out most of Etienne Provost's trapping party near Provo River in the fall of 1824. From then on, The Horse really did not have to do a lot more to command respect.

When Peter Skeen Ogden met The Horse and his band along the Snake near Raft River, March 26, 1826, he "received them kindly . . . but they are too well known to trust out of sight." By now, The Horse had spent a winter with American trappers on Bear River, where his Bannock followers traded for knives and trinkets and got along well with the mountain men for a change. The Horse now carried an American flag, and promised peace. His people had about 150 guns (obtained from the Hudson's Bay trade), but needed more arms and ammunition to protect themselves from the ravages of Blackfoot horse thieves. They also needed more horses to make up for their losses. These they generally stole from the Shoshoni, although they were ready to slip off with horses from any other convenient source. So the trappers looked out: as Ogden described his Bannock guests, "they are noted Horse-thieves [in a country where almost everyone was a pretty good horse thief] and when they find themselves Superior in numbers will have recourse to the most violent means to obtain their ends . . .

." Ogden met The Horse again, November 25, 1827, and equipped him with a looking glass, a shirt, an axe, some ammunition, and scalpers, as well as beads and other goods of interest to Indians. Ogden had some trouble then with theft as well, although The Horse did manage to return one of the traps stolen from Ogden's men a week later.

Aware that most whites objected to horse stealing (and to most other kinds of stealing), The Horse did what he could to return whatever his band picked up. (For The Horse's people, stealing was an accomplishment to be proud of, and a lot of the trouble between his band and the whites grew out of a difference of opinion on the virtue of theft.) When his band raided an American Fur Company cache in Cache Valley in 1830, The Horse arranged the return of everything that could be recovered. A. A. Ferris, of the party that made the cache, described The Horse as "a distinguished chef and warrior." The whites certainly owed

A debt of gratitude to this high souled and amiable chief for an act of chivalry that has scarce a parallel in the annals of any age or nation, in respect either of lofty courage, or disinterested friendship. . . . [N]oted for his attachment to the whites. . . . [he] forms a striking contrast to his people, being as remarkable for his uprightness and candour as they are noted for treachery and dishonesty.

While we remained near the Snake village on Bear River, the preceding autumn, they formed a plot to massacre us solely for the purpose of possessing themselves of our arms and baggage. Relying on their professions of friendship, and unsuspecting of ill faith, we took no precautions against surprise, but allowed them to rove freely through camp, and handle our arms, and in short gave them every advantage that could be desired. The temptation was too much for their easy virtue. Such an opportunity of enriching themselves, though at the cost of the blackest ingratitude, they could not consent to let slip, and therefore held a council on the subject at which it was resolved to enter our camp under the mask of friendship, seize our arms, and butcher us all on the spot.

In these preliminary proceedings the Horn Chief [Ferris referred to The Horse as the Horn Chief] took no part, he having preserved the strictest silence throughout the whole debate. But when the foul scheme was fully resolved upon and every arrangement made for carrying it into effect, he arose and made a short speech in which he charged them with ingratitude, cowardice, and the basest breach of faith, and after heaping upon them the most stinging sarcasms and reproaches, concluded by telling them he did not think they were manly enough to attempt putting their infamous design into execution, but to remember if they did, that he would

be there to aid and die with those they purposed to destroy.

Early the following morning the Snakes assembled at our camp with their weapons concealed beneath their robes; but this excited no suspicion for we had been accustomed to see them go armed at all times and upon every occasion. None of their women and children however appeared, and this was so unusual that some of my companions remarked it at the time; still the wily devils masked their intention so completely by an appearance of frank familiarity and trusting confidence, that the idea even of an attack never occurred to us.

At length when they had collected to more than thrice our number, the Horn Chief suddenly appeared in the center of our camp, mounted on a noble horse and fully equipped for war. He was of middle stature, of severe and dignified mien, and wore a visage deeply marked by the wrinkles of age and thought, which with his long gray hair showed him to have been the sport of precarious fortune for at least the venerable term of sixty winters. His head was surmounted by a curious cap or crown, made of the stuffed skin of an antelope's head, with the ears and horns still attached, which gave him a bold, commanding and somewhat ferocious appearance.

Immediately upon his arrival he commenced a loud and threatening harrangue to his people, the tenor of which we could not comprehend, but which we inferred from his looks, tone of voice and gestures, boded them no good, and this opinion was strengthened by their sneaking off one after another until he was left quite alone. He followed immediately after, himself, leaving us to conjecture his meaning. However he afterwards met with the Iroquois, and informed them of the whole matter, and the same time showing the tip of his little finger, significantly remarked that we escaped "that big."

It appears they were assembling to execute their diabolical plot, and about to commence the work of blood when the Horn Chief so opportunely arrived. He instantly addressed them, reminded them of his resolution, dared them to fire a gun, called them cowards, women, and in short so bullied and shamed them that they sneaked away without attempting to do us any injury. It was not for months afterwards that all this came to our knowledge, and we learned how providential had been our deliverance, and how greatly we were under obligation to the friendship, courage, and presence of mind of this noble son of the forest, whose lofty heroism in our defence may proudly rival the best achievements of the days of chivalry.

Generally The Horse and his band spent the fall out hunting buffalo on the upper Snake plains and on farther north and east.

Each spring they returned west to Camas Prairie and the Boise region to dig camas and fish for salmon. Finally, sometime in the fall of 1832, they got into a major battle with their old enemies, the Blackfeet, on Lost River. Blackfoot losses (49 altogether) far exceeded the nine Bannock lost in the fight. But The Horse was one of the Bannock casualties.

The way the story reached W. A. Ferris, The Horse habitually rushed out to fight the Blackfeet, regardless of hazard.

He always rushed headlong upon his enemies without fear of death, and rendered himself so terrible to them by his prowess, that his presence alone, was often sufficient to put them to flight.

Several months later, The Horse's band still was in mourning when Captain B. L. E. Bonneville met them on the Portneuf. Washington Irving, in describing the incident, mentioned some other incidents of how The Horse helped keep peace with the trappers:

He had shown great magnanimity in this intercourse with the white men. One of the great men of his family had been slain in an attack upon a band of trappers passing through the territories of his tribe. Vengeance had been sworn by the Bannocks; but The Horse interfered. Declaring himself the friend of white men, and, having great influence and authority among his people, he compelled them to forego all vindictive plans and to conduct themselves amicably whenever they came in contact with the traders.