

cluck

In the spring of 1874 I had an experience in fasting that I am not likely to forget. The Indian village was located at that time at the head of the Rosebud river. Ammunition was so low that we scarcely had a round apiece left. We were expecting a party in from the agency with ammunition and other supplies, and had been on the lookout for them for some time. It was finally decided that a party should be sent out in search of our friends from the reservation. The day before the party started what we thought to be smoke signals were discovered near the mouth of Tongue river, distant some four days' travel. Myself and two Indians were selected to go to this latter place and escort our friends into camp. We had no doubt but that the smoke we saw was a signal from this party, who did not know the exact location of our camp and were waiting for some of us to come to them and bring them in. I was the only one in the party who had any ammunition, and my supply consisted of two cartridges. I took my bow and some arrows with me.

164 Well, to make a long story short, we left the village with but one day's rations, as we did not expect to travel far and went west. The second day out, as luck would have it, I made two poor shots in an attempt to kill something to appease our Indians, and we were left at our wit's end to secure food to keep us from starvation. When we arrived at the mouth of Tongue river we discovered where a fire had been, but it had apparently been set by accident, and we had no other alternative but to retrace our steps. There was no evidence of a camp in the vicinity. On the way back to the village all three of us became nearly insane from hunger, having been eight days without a particle of food. We were very weak. When we were within twenty miles of the village I managed to kill three prairie chickens with my bow and arrow. I tried to induce my companions to eat as sparingly of the meat as possible, but they were so ravenously hungry that I could do nothing with them. I saved the necks of the chickens for myself, which I roasted, and thus got the benefit of the juice from the meat, which satisfied me until my arrival in camp. My two companions ate every particle of the bodies of the chickens raw. They were taken very sick shortly afterwards, and did not live long enough after reaching the village to enjoy another meal. We were ten days making the trip.

165 Our condition, when we arrived in camp, can be better imagined than described. We were literally skin and bones, the flesh being so drawn on our faces that we were almost unrecognizable by our most intimate acquaintances. It was a long while before I dared eat* enough food to satisfy my hunger, my stomach being so weak that the least bit of anything I ate nauseated me. The distance we traveled was a little over three hundred miles. The sufferings of my companions were terrible, and the sight of their misery only added to my own, as they were like little children, and looked to me for assistance in everything. We became so weak that the flesh on our bodies was in a constant quiver, and at the end of the seventh day of our fast all three of us were on the verge of insanity. How we ever lived to reach camp is a great wonder, as, in our weakened condition, we could travel but a short distance before being compelled to lie down and rest. I had no way, of course, of telling how much flesh I lost on the trip, but it didn't seem to me that there was a particle of substance between the bones of my body and the skin which covered them. I didn't think I would pull through, even after I got back to camp, and I am certain that if I had permitted myself to eat heartily of what the Indians prepared I would have gone the way my two poor companions went.

A few days after we got back to camp our Indian allies came up from the agency, and we had no further complaint to make over lack of ammunition. I was in the hostile camp, but the friendly Indians who lived upon the reservation found it greatly to their benefit to hold the most friendly re-