

Spotted Tail being the authorized speaker for the Indians, followed in a speech in which he went over a long list of promises made to him and his people by former government agents and commissioners and unfulfilled. He complained bitterly of being delayed so long this summer upon the Missouri; claimed this had caused many deaths in his camp. He recited the promise of the President, made to him in Washington last fall, that his people should settle in the place of their choice, which place he described as the South Fork of the White Earth River. He expressed a determination of breaking up his camps twenty miles east of the Missouri in ten days, and settling out for the place of his selection; made threats that he would burn up the present agency buildings; was rather arrogant and dictatorial, and was opposed to the commission visiting and examining the country he had chosen. His speech, summed up, meant that he would not settle upon the Missouri, and that he would settle nowhere but on the South Fork. It was evident that both the manner and words of Spotted Tail's speech were for Indian populace.

General Stanley spoke on the part of the commissioners, carefully explaining to the Indians the intention of the government to settle them in permanent homes; the desire to have them contented; the necessity for economy, and finally the intention of the commission to visit the South Fork country notwithstanding Spotted Tail's objections. This ended the council. The commission looked over the country some ten miles to the eastward of old Ponca Agency, and looked into the valleys of the Niobrara and Ponca Rivers. The country is comparatively destitute of timber, and the grass is of varieties which the winter kills, and only a small band of Indians, say 300 to 500, could ever become self-supporting there.

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The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Mr. Hayt, left for Washington on the 12th and upon the 13th the commission, having procured escort and transportation, and being themselves handsomely fitted for the plains, through the courtesy of Maj. P.D. Vroom, Third Cavalry, commanding the post at Red Cloud, set out to examine the country chosen by these two tribes of Sioux for their future homes. The first two days and a half were spent in making 65 miles to the traders' stores at the forks of White Earth River. The road follows the Yellow Medicine Creek most of the way, and leads southwest. There is some good grazing land on the Yellow Medicine, but the land is of the bad lands kind, full of alkali, with flats of wire grass, and unfit for cultivation. The water is alkaline and bad. No timber for building.

After nooning the third day at the crossing of White Earth River, we encamped ten miles above the mouth of South Fork of White Earth River, and upon that stream. The contrast between these two branches of White Earth River is very great. The South Fork has a gravelly bed, clear, fresh, and good water, is easily fordable at all points. The North Fork, or the main river, has a bed of quicksand, is difficult to cross, and the water is the very worst found in any river of the great plains, being strongly charged with various alkaline salts, and carrying such a quantity of fine, impalpable powdered earth gathered in the bad lands, that the running water resembles ordinary whitewash, and differs from the muddy waters of the streams of the Missouri Basin in the fact that the water does not settle when dipped up, but remains turbid and unfit for use. Animals will not drink it if they can find other water, and as wells dug in the White River bottom furnish unwholesome water, this deficiency of water fit to use is an insurmountable objection to the valley of the main White Earth River as a home for Indians.

The main camp of the Ogallalas, under Red Cloud, was near where we camped the night of the third day out, 75 miles from their agency. This is about as close to the Missouri River as this tribe has been, and is as close to the present Red Cloud Agency as wood, water, and grass combined could be found for their use and the subsistence of their animals, and for last nine months they have packed out their subsistence from their agency on the Missouri River the best way they could. The fact alone shows that with a little aid in the means of transportation, and a little organization, these Indians can soon be educated to do their carrying business, and solve this vexed subject of transportation.