

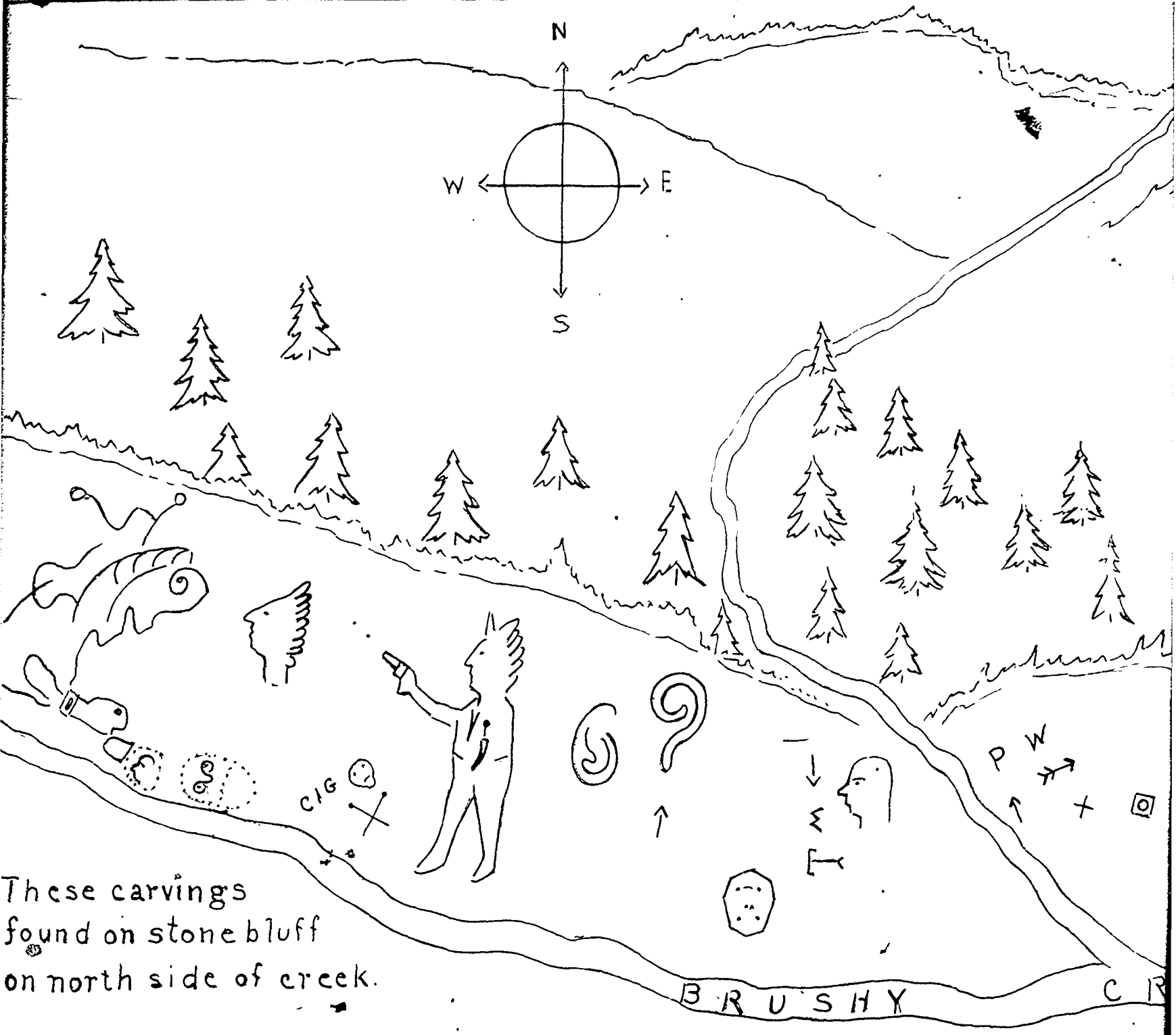
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A.



These carvings found on stone bluff on north side of creek.

T. 2. N. R. 14. E.

DONE BY BERNARD DE LA HA



BERNARD DE LA HARP IN YEAR 1719

T. 2. N. R. 15. E.

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Joe Southern
Interviewer
September 9-10, 1937.

Interview with John Moore
Pittsburg, Oklahoma
Route 2 Box 82

I am a white man, 45 years old. We discovered some carvings in 1935 on the stone bluff on the north side of Brushy Creek in Township 2 South, Ranges 14 and 15 East, Pittsburg County, which seem to have been carved with sharp tool by Bernard de la Harpe and his band of explorers of eastern Oklahoma in 1719. These carvings show that this band camped and spent several weeks in this vicinity probably hunting for gold bearing sand or stone. Their search extended southwest into Atoka County about fifteen miles to where the four great iron Springs are located where the water and sand will form into what is known as pyrites of iron which looks like gold. I am sending map of carvings and samples of the rock that they are supposed to have found and thought was metallic rock.

The first French explorer to enter the bounds of the present Oklahoma was Bernard de la Harpe, commandant of a small outpost in the valley of Red River. Acting under the directions of the colonial authorities, in the

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summer of 1719, at the head of a small party, he left his outpost and marched parallel with the course of Red River, entering Oklahoma near the southeastern corner of what is now McCurtain County. He then marched in a direction more nearly to the north, across McCurtain, Pushmataha, Latimer and Pittsburg Counties, crossing the Canadian River near the mouth of the North Canadian. The expedition then marched northward, across McIntosh County and through the western part of Muskogee County, to a place near the Arkansas River, about midway between Muskogee and Tulsa.

La Harpe's journal of this expedition is a very interesting description of eastern Oklahoma, as it looked to the first white men who ever saw it. While crossing the rough country of the Kiamichi Mountains, he found black rocks "lined within by several grains resembling gold," and some flint lined with white metal" which La Harpe thought "would not fail to denote metallic mines," Farther on he found a large pearl in one of the streams. - Passing on "through very beautiful sloping country" and "through beautiful prairies" he at last arrived in the vicinity of

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the Canadian River, where he found the Indians "busy smoking some unicorn." It has been reported by other Frenchmen that these animals lived in that region though they were probably elks, as La Harpe did not say that he saw any unicorn alive.

In addition to his keen interest in grains of gold, large pearls, and fabled unicorn, La Harpe also noted the fine country of the Canadian River section. He wrote, "the lands of these quarters are very fertile, black and light, the country is open and it is only by little canyons that one can perceive some thickets of oak, chestnuts and of mulberry; the prairies are high and fitted to the culture of wheat and other grains. The savages cultivate their prodigious quantities of tobacco which they press into flat loaves after having pounded it. The hunting is abundant not only for beef, bears and roebuck but generally for all other animals. The river furnishes very good fish and, although it is sometimes very low, it never fails to remain two or three feet deep."

La Harpe also saw the value of a trading post in the region of the Canadian River when he said, "There is

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not in the whole colony of Louisiana an establishment more useful to make than on the branch of this river not only because of the mild climate, the fertility of the land, the richness of the minerals, but also because of the possibility of trade that one might introduce with Spain and New Mexico."

It is surprising to know that even at that early date keen rivalry existed between the traders of the French colony and those of the English colonies, for the trade of the Indian people so far from the settlement of either. Yet La Harpe recorded the arrival of a Chickasaw Indian at the big Caddoan Indian village in Muskogee County, who had brought English goods to trade. The Chickasaws were always friendly with the English people, but were sometimes at war with the French colonists.

Though most of the French exploring parties came by way of the rivers in dugout canoes, La Harpe and his men traveled from his log fort in Red River, coming overland, the horses loaded with packs of knives, beads, and other articles to be used as presents to the Indians.

When La Harpe arrived at a large Caddoan village located

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near the present site of Haskell, in Muskogee County, several thousand Indians assembled to "sing the calumet" a ceremony of speech-making and smoking the calumet, or peace pipe, that lasted from early morning until far into the night. This meant that the Indians declared their friendship with the French.

Upon his arrival, the chiefs placed La Harpe on a buffalo robe and carried him to a shady arbor where the calumet was sung. They painted his face with "ultramarine," a blue paint the Indians used, and gave him presents of "thirty buffalo hides, several pieces of rock salt, some chunks of tobacco of grey-green and some little ultramarine," in addition to a little girl captive who was being held in slavery by them. One of the chiefs gave him "a crown of eagle plumes decorated with little buds of all colors, two calumet plumes, one of war and one of peace, presenting the most valuable gift that these warriors could make."

La Harpe returned these expressions of peace and friendship by presenting the Indians with more than fifteen hundred pounds of gifts from his load of knives,

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beads, bullets, powder and other goods. He also planted a post in the center of the Indian village, upon which he had one of his men carve the coat-of-arms of the French king as a seal to the alliance of friendship with the Indians.

Having accomplished a successful expedition, La Harpe and his men departed over the way they had come. Upon the return journey all of the horses were lost, so that the men had to walk a part of the way, arriving at their destination on Red River on October 13, 1719, worn out and sick from their hard, venturesome trip.

In 1840 as the Choctaws moved into this part of what is now Oklahoma and settled up the country, they discovered a bunch of wild horses supposed to have accumulated from the horses of La Harpe, lost while the French were in camp in Pittsburg County where these carvings were found. These horses, about 500 in number, ranged in what is now Atoka and Pushmataha Counties, and the Choctaws would gather them in the spring of the year with dogs and horsebackmen and corral them, taking the best of these horses while in a weakened condition from hard winters.

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The Choctaw tribe held these horses in common. Under their rulings they would belong to any Choctaw Indian who was able to capture them. This was continued until the year 1900. One of the Choctaws by the name of Joe Homer bought the horse claim through the Choctaw Council and sold to W. R. Surrell, a white man who now resides in Atoka, Oklahoma, a man fifty-eight years of age. From 1900 to 1905 Surrell and others gathered and sold the last of this wild horse herd.

Wild Horse Creek in Pushmataha County was named by the Choctaws on account of these wild horses ranging and being caught on this small stream. Wild Horse Prairie was also so named by the Choctaws. This wild horse range was between McGee and Buck Creeks in Atoka and Pushmataha Counties.