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A Celtic Nimrod in the Old West

More than a century ago, Sir St. George Gore spent a staggering half million dollars on a three year hunting expedition in the wilds of Montana, Wyoming and Colorado, a fabulous exploit never since equalled.

by Clark C. Spence

HIGH IN THE Rockies, on Colorado State Highway 84, a few miles northwest of the little town of Kremmling, stands a gleaming new bronze plaque, prepared in 1956 by the Historical Society of Colorado to commemorate the hunting expedition of an itinerant Irishman more than a century before.

In part, it reads:

GORE PASS

ALTITUDE 9,000 FEET

HERE IN 1855 CROSSED SIR ST. GEORGE GORE AN IRISH BARONET BENT ON SLAUGHTER OF GAME AND GUIDED BY JIM BRIDGER. FOR THREE YEARS HE SCoured COLORADO, MONTANA AND WYOMING, ACCOMPANIED USUALLY BY FORTY MEN, MANY CARTS, WAGONS, HOUNDS AND UNEXAMPLED CAMP LUXURIES. MORE THAN 2,000 BUFFALO, 1,600 ELK AND DEER, 100 BEARS WERE MASSACRED FOR SPORT.

This brief reminder is to a romantic and colorful episode of our past that has become so cloaked with legend and tradition as to have become almost folklore. If westerners know the name Gore it is frequently only in terms that are blurred and misleading. The story itself is not basically new. Standard state histories and guidebooks usually mention the expedition, but complete accounts and primary materials are rare. Bibliographer Henry R. Wagner once stated that the only contemporary narrative of the hunt to his knowledge was the version dictated by Henry Bostwick, a member of the party, for publication in the *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* in 1876.² But this, like most other accounts, is fragmentary;

The author of this interesting article on the Western hunting exploits of Sir St. George Gore is a native of Great Falls, who was raised in Idaho. He is now an assistant professor of history at Pennsylvania State University.

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many later ones not only perpetuate errors and misconceptions but add numerous new ones through misconstruction or over-popularization.³

Yet the story of the Gore expedition into western America needs no embellishment or adornment. In it, human interest, adventure, and drama are to be found with almost every turn of the wagon wheels. It is historical fact; but it is the stuff from which historical novels are written.

Sir St. George Gore was the eighth baronet of Gore Manor, County of Donegal, in northern Ireland. Wealthy, educated at Oxford, Gore never married: the two great loves of his life were hunting and fishing.⁴ He was "a sportsman among a thousand," wrote William F. Cody years later, "and he spent money with extraordinary freedom in the gratification of his passion."⁵ Captain Randolph Marcy of the United States Army, who met Gore in St. Louis soon after the Irishman's return from his hunt, believed:

The outfit and adventures of this titled Nimrod, conducted as they were upon a most gigantic scale, probably exceeded anything of the kind ever before attempted on this continent, and the results of his exploits will compare favorably with the performances of Gordon Cumming in Africa.⁶

Less sympathetic writers, notably Hubert Howe Bancroft (or at least one member of the Bancroft production line) viewed Gore's achievements with more distaste:



His only object in seeking the mighty solitudes of the heart of the American continent was the gratification of that savage instinct preserved with so much care by the landed aristocracy of Great Britain, the love of the chase, to secure themselves in the enjoyment of which the land is kept from the homeless poor.⁷

How Gore became interested in the idea of an elaborate hunting expedition into the vast reaches of the Frontier West is only conjectural.⁸ But certainly by early 1854 he had made up his mind to test his sporting abilities on the prairies and mountains of inland America. Presumably he landed in New York and made his way overland to St. Louis, the jumping-off point for the trans-Mississippi West, although it is not impossible that he may have come up the river from New Orleans. In any event, by the spring of 1854, Gore was in St. Louis making detailed preparations for the "hunt of hunts" that was to last nearly three years, reach into the wilds

of Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Dakotas, cost an estimated \$500,000, and bag game in almost unbelievable amounts.

There in the Mound City, at the gateway to the West, Sir St. George outfitted his expedition, using drafts on Baring Brothers of London, through P. Chouteau, Jr. & Co., the western arm of the American Fur Company.⁹ As his plans took shape, the Irish baronet acquired a sizeable collection of vehicles and livestock, including twenty-one two-horse *charettes*, painted red; four six-mule wagons; two three-yoke ox wagons; 112 head of horses, many of them extremely fine animals; eighteen

¹ *The Colorado Magazine*, XXIV (January, 1957), 14. Most accounts indicate that Gore spent the winter of 1854-1855 at Fort Laramie, after having hunted and fished in Colorado earlier. It is extremely doubtful that he and his party would have attempted to flounder through the Rockies in the early months of 1855. Hence it appears likely that Gore was in Colorado in the autumn of 1854, rather than in 1855, as the plaque indicates.

² F. George Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, I (1876), 128-131.

³ A thorough, but rather uncritical account appears as a chapter in Forbes Parkhill, *The Wildest of the West* (New York, 1951), 129-140. Another of the better versions, although not without its shortcomings, is the Lieutenant James H. Bradley Manuscript "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 245-251. The Bradley narrative is the basis for the account by E. A. Brininstool in the *Dillon Examiner*, July 30, 1924. Other descriptions of the expedition—highly popularized and grossly distorted—include: Joe Heflin Smith, "The Big Hunt of Sir St. George Gore," *The Cattleman*, XXXIX (August, 1952), 118ff.; E. Ward McCray, "The Damnedest Hunt in the World," *True*, XXV (October, 1955), 29ff.; William F. Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 131-143.

⁴ Born in 1811, Gore was the only son of Sir Ralph Gore and Lady Grace Maxwell. He was educated at Winchester School and Oriel College, Oxford, and succeeded his father to the title in 1842. He died without heirs at Inverness on the last day of 1878. *The Times* (London), January 6, 1879; *The Illustrated London News*, January 11, 1879; *Burke's Peerage* (100th ed., London, 1953), 891. Little biographical information on Gore seems to survive. Sir Ralph Gore, the present and tenth baronet, says ". . . he left no records, no diaries behind him, as he spent so much of his time abroad. He was a great sportsman and fisherman, and as a bachelor always on the move very little was known of his doings by the other members of his family." Sir Ralph Gore to author (Bembridge, Isle of Wight, September 7, 1956).

⁵ Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 133.

⁶ Randolph B. Marcy, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border* (New York, 1874), 401-402. The Gordon Cumming referred to by Marcy was undoubtedly Roualeyn George Gordon-Cumming (1820-1866), intrepid sportsman who came to be known as "Lion Hunter" from his exploits in southern Africa, *DNB*, XIII, 298-299. Many of Marcy's comments on Gore and the Gore expedition appeared verbatim nearly a quarter of a century later in Henry Inman, *The Old Santa Fe Trail* (New York, 1897), 331.

⁷ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming* (San Francisco, 1890), 696.

⁸ Forbes Parkhill suspects that Gore may have become interested in the American West through the Earl of Fitzwilliam, who had been in Oregon on one leg of a round-the-world junket. Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 130. Evidence to support this is slight.

⁹ Chouteau's ledgers show drafts of at least £1,800 cashed by Gore in March and April, 1854. P. Chouteau, Jr. & Co. Ledger TT, entries for March 14, 1854; March 24, 1854; May 2, 1854, 643, 649, 704. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.



THE GORE COAT-OF-ARMS.

oxen; and three milk cows, the latter presumably to add a touch of domesticity to the whole.¹⁰ Much of the equipment was devoted to hauling fishing or hunting gear or to ease the life of the master hunter himself. One wagon was filled entirely with arms—countless pistols, a dozen or fifteen shotguns, and some seventy-five rifles, all muzzle-loaders save for one Sharp's breech-loader. Two wagons were laden with fishing tackle and a skilled fly-tier was on hand to fashion new lures throughout the trip.¹¹

A novel feature of the expedition was the variety of comforts brought along to the wilderness by the Donegal lord. With him went a large striped green and white linen tent—about ten by eighteen feet square—a rug for underfoot, a brass bedstead which unscrewed

and could be knocked down for easy transporting, a portable iron table, and a washstand.¹² What on the surface appeared to be an ordinary open-box spring wagon could be converted into comfortable living quarters in inclement weather merely by cranking into place a top carried in the wagon bed.¹³

Undoubtedly Gore traveled in lordly style compared with other western hunters and their accommodations, but this aspect of his expedition has probably been much over-emphasized. "At night," says one writer in a flight of fancy, "his camp looked like the bridal suite at the Waldorf."¹⁴ Imported serving men in costly livery and powdered wigs, fine sterling silver mugs (Gore would drink from no other), chest after chest of select wines and liqueurs, gold-plated buffalo guns—all of these may or may not have existed. But if they did, documentation is lamentably lacking.

To be sure, this was more than an ordinary hunting party. Its number has been estimated at from forty to two hundreds by various "experts," but the lower figure is most acceptable.¹⁵ Of the company, probably a few accompanied Gore from Ireland, but the majority seem to have been voyageurs or mountain men who joined the expedition at St. Louis or later at Fort Laramie. Early reports indicate that specialists of diverse kinds were included, with cooks, secretaries, hunters, stewards, and dog-tenders mentioned among others.¹⁶

¹⁰ Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 131. The *charette*, widely used by the French-Canadian voyageurs and American trappers, was often referred to as the Red River cart.

¹¹ Marcy noted in Gore's collection many fine guns, including those bearing the names of such noted manufacturers as Purdy, Westley Richards, and Joe Manton. Marcy, *Thirty Years*, 402.

¹² Bradley, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 247.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁴ Smith, "The Big Hunt of Sir St. George Gore," *The Catleman*, XXXIX (August, 1952), 118.

¹⁵ Henry Bostwick, who accompanied the group from Fort Laramie, gives the number as forty. Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 128. The Indian Agent for the Upper Missouri, who met Gore in the summer of 1856, stated at that time that Gore had forty-three retainers. Alfred J. Vaughan to Alfred Cumming (Fort Union, July 1856). Copy courtesy of the Historical Society of Montana. Marcy's estimate was "about fifty persons." Marcy, *Thirty Years*, 402. Another writer sets the number at "over a hundred persons." Velma Linford, "The Grand Encampment," *The Westerners Brand Book*, IV (Denver, 1949), 5. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, never prone to understate a case, set the number at two hundred. Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 131.

¹⁶ Marcy, *Thirty Years*, 402.

It was in May or June, under the expert guidance of Henry Chatillon (who had earlier escorted Francis Parkman west along the Oregon Trail), that the strange and splendid safari left the friendly hospitality of the river town and swung westward along the Missouri "in quest of anything that walked, bawled, flew or swam."¹⁷ Near Westport, an unofficial correspondent of the *Ohio State Journal* (Columbus) noted the expedition in mid-June,¹⁸ commenting with enthusiasm upon it and especially upon Gore's greyhounds and staghounds, which he described as "the most magnificent pack of dogs there were ever seen in this country."¹⁹

Past Fort Leavenworth pushed the procession,²⁰ out into the prairie lands where Gore had his first taste of buffalo hunting. Occasionally, too, he and his guest, Sir William Thomas Spencer Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, Sixth Earl of Fitzwilliam, chased coyotes and timber wolves over the rolling terrain with his hounds.²¹ Lord Fitzwilliam, who would ultimately fall heir to 115,800 English acres, was an amateur astronomer who carried with him "a splendid telescope." After a few months he was to leave the expedition and make his way back to St. Louis on his own.²²

By the end of a warm June, the party had arrived at Fort Laramie,²³ that fabled way station on the early road to gold and glory. Here Gore paused long enough to pick up a number of seasoned trappers as additions to his retinue, then veered sharply southward into what is now Colorado, this time under the guiding hand of Joseph Chatillon, brother of the illustrious Henry.²⁴

Crossing the Laramie plains and ranging down into North, Middle, and possibly Lost Park in Colorado,²⁵ Gore hunted the high reaches of the Rockies and fished the cold, crystal waters of the mountain trout streams with unfeigned delight. He is said to have been one of the first to visit Steamboat Springs and for years the legend persisted that he rounded up an entire tribe of Indians—some 800 or 850 strong—to hack roads and build bridges that his wagons might cross the mountain range which now bears his name.²⁶ According to one member of the party, at least, the expedition camped on all four sides of Pike's Peak prior to moving back northward to the Fort Laramie base of operations probably before the force of winter struck late in 1854.²⁷

There at this important post, where the Laramie and the North Platte converged, Gore settled in for the cold months, allowing his animals to recuperate, waiting for additional supplies, and enjoying the company of an interesting, if motley, array of Indians, traders, trappers, and adventurers. The Irishman's latest model and fancy firearms

¹⁷ Smith, "The Big Hunt of Sir St. George Gore," *The Catleman*, XXXIX (August, 1952), 118.

¹⁸ *Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 20, 1854. Bradley states that the expedition started in 1853; so does Brininstool, whose account is based largely on the Bradley manuscript. Bradley, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 246; *Dillon Examiner*, July 30, 1924. The description carried by the *Ohio State Journal* leaves no doubt that the party started in 1854.

¹⁹ "Between forty and fifty dogs, mostly greyhounds and stag hounds, of the most beautiful breeds, compose this part of the expedition. He had a large carriage, and probably a dozen large wagons to transport provisions, &c. These require five yoke of oxen to each wagon. These, with the horses, men &c., made up quite an imposing company." *Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 20, 1854.

²⁰ Parkhill states that young Bill Cody saw the expedition at Fort Leavenworth and "watched in openmouthed wonder." Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 131. Cody's account, written forty years after the event, does not mention actually having seen the expedition. Cody merely says "I was a boy at Fort Leavenworth in 1853 [sic] when he [Gore] arrived there from London and fitted out at his own expense." Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 131.

²¹ Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 130.

²² *Ibid.* Wentworth-Fitzwilliam was educated at Eton and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He stood as M.P. for Malton (1837-1841 and 1846-1847) and for Wicklow (1847-1857). He was Lord-Lieutenant of the West Riding of York (1853-1892) and Aide-de-camp to Queen Victoria (1884-1894). *Debrett's Peerage* (London, 1955), 468; *Who Was Who*, 1897-1916 (London, 1920), 248.

²³ C. G. Coutant, *History of Wyoming* (Laramie, 1899), I, 324.

²⁴ Henry Chatillon to *Denver Evening Post* (Cripple Creek, August 20, 1897). Copy courtesy of the State Historical Society of Colorado. This is the son of Joseph Chatillon and the nephew of the Henry Chatillon who guided the party to Fort Laramie.

²⁵ The veteran Colorado historian, Frank Hall, whose imagination covered more area than the facts warranted, states that Gore "traversed the North, Middle and South Parks, and most of the country between the Platte and the Columbia." Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado* (Chicago, 1889), I, 149-150.

²⁶ Some writers insist that traces of these rude roads and bridges were visible even down into the twentieth century. Alice Polk Hill, *Colorado Pioneers in Picture and Story* (Denver, 1915), 34. Parkhill discredits the story as having been almost impossible and logically concludes that Gore probably abandoned his wagons temporarily and made side trips on horseback. Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 133-134.

²⁷ Chatillon to *Denver Evening Post* (Cripple Creek, August 20, 1897). See *supra*, I, n. 1.



Jim Bridger, the most famous of all mountain men, acted as chief guide for the titled Irish nobleman whose fantastic hunting expedition into three states is told in this article. "Old Gabe" Bridger became a favorite of Sir St. George Gore.

fascinated the mountain men. Gore, in turn, was captivated with the rough and tumble lot that drifted into the fort. In particular, Gore was enchanted with Jim Bridger, the most famous of all his breed. "Old Gabe," as Bridger was called, had previously been ousted from the fort that bore his name, and when Gore offered him the job of guiding the expedition north when the thaws came, he accepted with alacrity.

The Irishman and his new chief guide present a tempting study in contrasts. At the time, Gore would have been forty-three or forty-four. A contemporary described him as "a fine built, stout, light haired and resolute looking man."²⁸ Author after author refers to his "straw-colored Dundreary whiskers;" Lucius Beebe, who goes so far as to screw a monocle into Gore's eye, notes that he "was given to deer-stalker caps and suits of exclamatory pattern."²⁹

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Bridger, tall and sinewy and looking every bit the true mountaineer with his long dark hair hanging down over his buckskin collar, would have been half a dozen years Gore's senior when the two first met at Fort Laramie.

Gore, the British blue-blood, university educated, was the impassioned sportsman par excellence. The illiterate Bridger, son of a surveyor and tavern owner, may have lacked breeding, but he had few peers as hunter, interpreter, or guide in the wilderness West he knew so well. For Gore, the opportunity to associate with such a master woodsman and frontiersman was the realization of a lifelong ambition.

As the days lengthened and the spring winds sent the melting snow in tumbling cascades down swollen streams, Fort Laramie fairly bustled with activity and the Gore expedition moved out, "Old Gabe" leading the van.³⁰ Traveling leisurely up the North Platte, the party followed the emigrant road to Casper Creek, then crossed northward to Powder River, and followed down Dry Fork to the spot where Fort Conner and nearby Fort Reno ultimately stood.³¹ This was terrain with which Bridger was thoroughly familiar and it was a hunter's paradise. Wild and desolate, the area was "totally unfit for the uses of a civilized being," according to a Federal officer a few years later; but it was also "interesting to a geologist, and a splendid Indian country."³²

Time was of little importance to Sir St. George Gore. Game was plentiful and life worth living. The Irishman thoroughly enjoyed himself. Normally,

²⁸ *Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 20, 1854.

²⁹ Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg, *The American West* (New York, 1955), 299.

³⁰ Most accounts contend that the hunting party left Fort Laramie as soon as the grass was high enough for grazing in the spring of 1855. Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 129; Stanley Vestal, *Jim Bridger* (New York, 1946), 194; Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 135. Bradley's account and that of Jeremiah Proteau, who was with the expedition, state that departure from Fort Laramie was not made until early in the fall. Bradley, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 247; Robert E. Strahorn, *The Hand-book of Wyoming and Guide to the Black Hills and Big Horn Regions for Citizen, Emigrant and Tourist* (Cheyenne, 1877), 221. However, since Bradley's chronology is in general erroneous and Proteau's memory proved poor on other phases of the hunt, neither can be accepted as the final authorities in this case.

³¹ Parkhill has the party following the Big Horn River north to the Yellowstone. Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 135. No other account places the route this far west; the others agree that it went down a branch of the Powder.



Sir St. George Gore and his elaborate hunting expedition reached Fort Laramie in June, 1874, and picked up a number of seasoned trappers to add to his retinue. This picture of the Wyoming fort was taken in 1876 by W. H. Jackson.

he slept late—often until ten or eleven o'clock—then had his bath, his breakfast, and possibly a small toddy before setting out on the day's hunt. Marcy, who knew both Gore and Bridger, states that the Irish lord usually hunted alone; others qualify this by saying that he rarely hunted unattended by six or seven men who acted as gun bearers or loaders or who flushed the game for the titled nimrod.³³

Frequently Gore did not complete his adventures until the moon was high overhead. After his dinner, he sometimes shared a few glasses of wine with his chief guide and read aloud to the illiterate mountaineer from some well-known literary work. Randolph Marcy's account of this aspect of the Gore-Bridger relationship in the wilderness of Wyoming and Montana is in itself something of a classic and bears repeating in full:

His favorite author was Shakspeare [*sic*], which Bridger "reckon'd was a leetle too high-falutin for him;" moreover, he remarked that he "rayther calculated that thar big Dutchman, Mr. Full-stuff, was a leetle bit too fond of lager beer," and suggested that probably it might have been better for the old man if he had imbibed the same amount of alcohol in the more condensed medium of good old Bourbon whisky.

Bridger seemed deeply interested in the adventures of Baron Munchausen, but admitted, after the reading was finished, that "he be dogoned ef he swallered every thing that thar *Baren* Mountchawson said, and, he thout he was a durn'd liar." Yet, upon further reflection, he acknowledged that some of his own experience among the Blackfeet would be equally marvelous, "*ef writ down in a book.*"

One evening Sir George entertained his auditor by reading to him Sir Walter Scott's account of the battle of Waterloo, and afterward asked him

if he did not regard that as the most sanguinary battle he had ever heard of. To which Bridger replied, "Wall, now Mr. Gore, that thar must 'a bin a considible of a skrimmage, dogon my skin ef it mustn't; them Britishers must 'a fit better thar than they did down to Horleans, whar Old Hickry gin um the forkedest sort o' chain-lightnin' that pehaps you ever did see in all yer born days!" And upon Sir George's expressing a little incredulity in regard to the estimate Bridger placed upon this battle, the latter added, "You can jist go yer pile on it, Mr. Gore—you can, as sure as yer born."³⁴

As the hunt progressed, the "Noblest Roamer of Them All," as Parkhill calls Gore, moved deliberately with his party down the Powder to its junction with the Yellowstone. The expedition then turned left up the Yellowstone, followed to the mouth of the Tongue, then swung up that stream. There, about eight miles above the confluence of the Tongue and the Yellowstone Rivers, on what later became the Fort Keogh military reservation, Gore erected a small fort of his own and prepared to spend the Montana winter.³⁵

Unfortunately, however, Henry Bostwick, the able wagon boss who had joined the expedition at Laramie and who was later killed at the Battle of the Big Hole,³⁶ accidentally set the timber on fire and destroyed all the

³² J. Hudson Snow (April, 1860) in Report of Brevet Brigadier General W. F. Reynolds, on the exploration of the Yellowstone and the country drained by that River, *Senate Executive Document No. 77*, 40 Cong., 1 Sess. (1867), 160. Serial 1317.

³³ Marcy, *Thirty Years*, 403; Bradley, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 249-250.

³⁴ Marcy, *Thirty Years*, 403-404.

³⁵ Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 129; Coutant, *History of Wyoming*, I, 326. According to Alfred Vaughan, Indian Agent for the Upper Missouri, this fort was 100 feet square and was used by Gore for illegal trading with the Indians. Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Union, July 1856). H.S.M.

³⁶ Anne McDonnell (ed.), "Fort Sarry Journal, 1855-1856," *Contributions*, X (1940), 301, n.279.

grass in the immediate area, making it necessary to seek new grazing grounds. The party then divided: one group wintered at the fort; Gore and the others spent the cold months in make-shift quarters nearer the mouth of the Tongue. For himself and his favorite horse, a Kentucky thoroughbred called Steel Trap, Gore had built a small log cabin. Although each man that winter was required to gather at least 125 pounds of cottonwood bark as forage for the animals, Sir St. George fed Steel Trap aristocratically on corn meal.³⁷

It was at the camp on Tongue River that the expedition lost its only man in its three-year existence—a hand known only as “Uno” who succumbed from apparently natural causes and was duly interred with decent Christian observance.³⁸ Here, too, came Gore’s first difficulties with the Indians. They resented the wanton slaughter of their game to satisfy the white man’s sporting appetite and were always alert for an opportunity to indulge in their favorite pastime of horse stealing. A band of Piegans successfully ran off twenty-one horses, even though they were followed some sixty miles by members of the expedition, until the trail was obliterated by a heavy snowstorm that forced the pursuers to return to their camp on the Tongue.³⁹ Later in the winter, the Bloods made a similar attempt to steal mounts but were foiled by an aroused camp which wounded one of the raiders, Big Plume, brother-in-law of Alexander Culbertson, long the chief agent

of the American Fur Company on the Upper Missouri.⁴⁰ Despite these experiences with “thieving redskins,” Gore seems to have maintained fair relations with the Indians and even carried on trade with them, much to the consternation of the Federal Indian Agent at Fort Union.⁴¹

As the first tender shoots of grass pushed their way upward in the spring of 1856, Gore broke camp, moved up the Tongue, crossed over to the Rosebud, then went up to the head of that stream to Wolf Mountain in search of the Crow Indians, with whom he traded for fresh horses.⁴² After hunting along the Rosebud and into the side country, he returned to the mouth of the Tongue, where he had two large wooden flatboats constructed. Part of his men used these to float down the Yellowstone, while Gore and the remainder trekked overland with the vehicles, hunting enroute.⁴³

In mid-June, James Chambers noted the arrival of Gore at Fort Sarpy, located on the right bank of the Yellowstone, about twenty-five miles below the mouth of the Big Horn.⁴⁴ Late in the following month Chambers recorded being with Alfred J. Vaughan, Indian Agent for the Upper Missouri,⁴⁵ searching for the Crows and encountering the Irish nobleman. “Cross’d the Miss in Sir George Gore’s Boats,” he wrote,

⁴⁰ Bradley, “Sir George Gore’s Expeditions,” *Contributions*, IX (1923), 248. Culbertson, a Pennsylvanian, was in the Upper Missouri country as early as 1833. By 1848 he was in charge of the American Fur Company’s posts on the Upper Missouri and the Yellowstone. About 1840 he married the very striking Natawista Iksana (“Medicine Snake Woman”), daughter of a Blood chieftain. Anne McDonnell (ed.), “Fort Benton Journal, 1854-1856,” *Contributions*, X (1940), 234, 240-242; *Contributions*, IX (1923), 341-342.

⁴¹ Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Union, July 1856). H.S.M.

⁴² Heldt, “Sir George Gore’s Expedition,” *Contributions*, I (1876), 129.

⁴³ Bradley says that Gore discharged a number of men, including Bridger, as he broke up the Tongue River camp. Bradley, “Sir George Gore’s Expedition,” *Contributions*, IX (1923), 248. J. Cecil Alter contends that Bridger accompanied Gore to Fort Berthold later in the year. J. Cecil Alter, *James Bridger* (Salt Lake City, 1925), 269.

⁴⁴ McDonnell, “Fort Sarpy Journal,” *Contributions*, X (1940), 174. The exact date of this entry is uncertain, except that it was made in June sometime after the seventeenth.

⁴⁵ Vaughan (1801-1871) was born in Virginia and entered the Indian Service in 1842. Agent for the Osage in 1845 and sub-agent for the Iowas, Sacs, and Foxes from 1848 to 1849, he became Agent for the Upper Missouri probably in 1853 and four years later was put in charge of the Blackfeet. *Ibid.*, 272; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana* (San Francisco, 1890), 691-692.

³⁷ Bradley, “Sir George Gore’s Expedition,” *Contributions*, IX (1923), 247.

³⁸ Heldt, “Sir George Gore’s Expedition,” *Contributions*, I (1876), 129. A standard story is that Gore wrote the relatives of the deceased and offered to send home the remains. When the family declined, he had a coffin made from a wagon bed and “Uno” was buried in a grave enclosed in a log mausoleum near where the Tongue and the Yellowstone come together. Bradley, “Sir George Gore’s Expedition,” *Contributions*, IX (1923), 248; Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 136. There is no mention of the name of the dead man’s family or how Gore was able to communicate with them.

³⁹ Bradley, “Sir George Gore’s Expedition,” *Contributions*, IX (1923), 247-248. “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s version of this clash differs slightly and is in keeping with his general emphasis on drama at the expense of truth. The Indians ran off Gore’s horses in the Big Horn country, says Cody, “and there was nothing for him and his men to do but foot it, a hundred and fifty miles back to Laramie, leaving some of their companions dead on the field of battle.” Cody, “Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains,” *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 132.

“—drank several glasses of Mountain dew with Sir George & camp’d at the lake with Lieut [Gouverneur] Warren . . .”⁴⁶ Warren, on a Government exploring expedition up the Yellowstone, found water transportation unavailable, but was able to purchase vehicles from Gore and proceeded immediately by land.⁴⁷

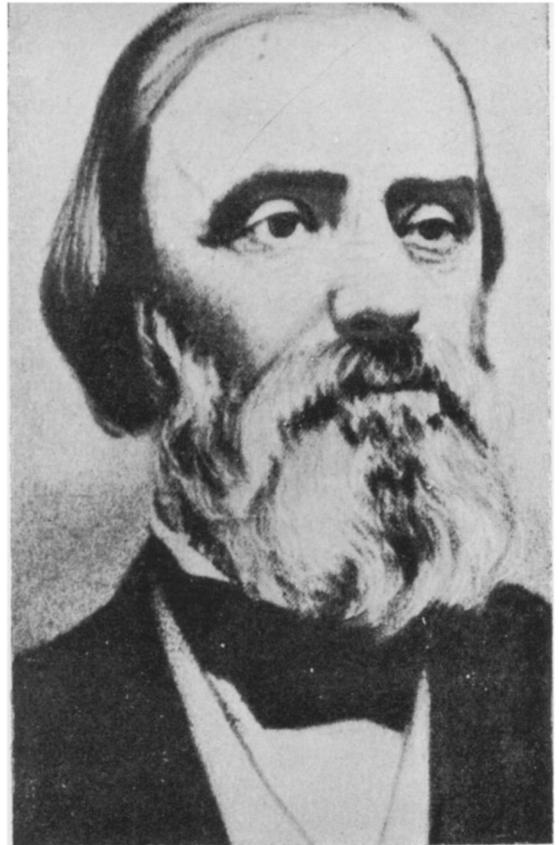
From Fort Sarpy and then Fort Union in the summer of 1856, the itinerary and the chronology for the remainder of the hunt become slightly blurred. Sometime before winter Gore’s safari swung southward up the Little Missouri into the Black Hills. There on the headwaters of the Belle Fourche, according to one account, gold was discovered, but the find was hushed up successfully by Sir St. George. This story stems solely from Jeremiah Proteau, who joined the expedition at Fort Laramie as hunter and teamster, and who made no mention of the alleged episode until 1877, after the Black Hills gold rush had occurred.

As Proteau relates it, he and Lamourie, another of Gore’s employees, were at the falls of a stream known as Swift or Rapid Creek, one of the tributaries of the Cheyenne.

As we were standing by the falls I noticed some yellow-looking stuff in the water, and I said to Lamourie—“By George, there’s gold!”

I took off my shirt and scooped up three double handfuls of the yellow stuff, and put it in my shirt. Then Lamourie and I went back to camp. Sir George noticed me as we reached camp, and asked me what I had in my shirt. I said, “Gold.” He then looked at it a little while, when [sic] he said, “O no, Jerry, that’s not gold; that’s mica.” I was not very well posted about gold and thought Sir George was. He took it and put it in two black bottles, and placed them in his chest. The next day we marched out of the Black Hills, and two or three days after Bridger told me that Sir George told him it was gold. Sir George also told Lamourie that if he would prospect on the head of Swift creek he would find rich gold⁴⁸ there.

Later writers contend that Gore hastened to withdraw from the Black Hills in order that his men might not desert him to search for riches.⁴⁹ One more enterprising popularizer suggests



Alexander Culbertson, long undisputed “king” on behalf of the American Fur company, became enraged over the hunting excesses committed by Sir St. George Gore and his western safari. Culbertson also had a personal reason for his growing antagonism toward the noble Irish hunter.

that Gore effectively silenced Proteau with doubling his wages for a month.⁵⁰ “Twenty years were to elapse before gold was rediscovered in the Black Hills,” says Parkhill. “Had Gore proclaimed his discovery, the Deadwood country would have been settled two decades earlier and warfare with the Indians might have assumed vast proportions.”⁵¹

In all likelihood Parkhill places too much faith in Proteau’s rather improbable tale. Where in the world has free

⁴⁶ McDonnell, “Fort Sarpy Journal,” *Contributions*, X (1940), 174. Entry for July 24, 1856.

⁴⁷ Warren was in command of a small detachment of the Second Infantry under orders to examine the Yellowstone River. No mackinaw boats were available at Fort Union, but with the vehicles obtained from Gore, he started up the river overland on July 25. *Explorations in Nebraska*. Preliminary report of Lieut. G. K. Warren, Topographical Engineer, to Captain A. A. Humphreys, Topographical Engineers, in charge of Office of Explorations and Surveys, War Department, in *Report of the Secretary of War for 1853*, 627. Serial 975

⁴⁸ Strahorn, *Hand-book of Wyoming*, 221-222.

⁴⁹ Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 138. Proteau, however, states that the expedition left the Black Hills because of the Indian Menace. Strahorn, *Hand-book of Wyoming*, 222.

⁵⁰ McCray, “The Damnedest Hunt in the World,” *True*, XXV (October, 1955), 74.

gold ever been found by the handfuls? Where were the falls on Rapid Creek so artistically portrayed and labelled "Proteau's Gold Mine" to accompany Proteau's narrative in 1877?⁵² Very likely the story—which clearly demonstrates the superiority of hindsight over foresight—is merely another of the romantic legends that grew up around the Gore expedition. Actually, there are variations of the account which ascribe the discovery of gold to other members of the party and in at least two different locales. Some insist that gold was found by Louis Dapron and two others attached to the expedition in 1854, before Proteau ever became a member, while the group was about seventy-five miles southwest of Fort Laramie in what later became Albany County, Wyoming.⁵³ Other sources accept the basic outline of the story, mentioning no names, but place it in a Colorado setting. "This is gold," Gore is supposed to have said, "but I did not come here to seek gold! I don't need it. This is a pleasure hunt."⁵⁴

In the meantime, gold discovery or none, Gore's relations with both Indians and whites in the Upper Missouri country were deteriorating. At Fort Union, where the Yellowstone flows into the Missouri, Alexander Culbertson had long held sway as undisputed "King" on behalf of the American Fur Company. Now neither Culbertson nor Indian Agent Alfred Vaughan viewed Gore's presence with less than dissatisfaction. Perhaps the wounding of Big

Plume, Culbertson's brother-in-law, by Gore's men in the abortive Blood raid on the Tongue River camp in the winter of 1855-1856, accounted for at least part of Culbertson's antagonism toward the Irish huntsman. Much of Vaughan's antipathy undoubtedly stemmed from an honest belief that, even at this early date, the Indian game supply suffered severely and needlessly from such large-scale hunting depredations.

When Vaughan and Gore first met in the summer of 1856 near Fort Union, the Indian Agent had challenged the Irishman's right to hunt in Indian Territory. Gore produced a passport dated May 24, 1854, and issued in St. Louis by Colonel Alfred Cumming, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Central Division. Vaughan immediately protested that Gore had violated not only his passport but the Indian intercourse laws as well. On several occasions he complained to his superiors that Gore had traded with the Crows in all types of Indian goods, including powder and ball. He protested against the killing and scattering of game vital to the sustenance of the red man, merely so that nobility might enjoy itself.⁵⁵ "What can I do against so large a number of men coming into a country like this so very remote from civilization; and doing & acting as they please," he grumbled to Cumming. "Nothing, I assure you beyond apprising you of the facts on paper."⁵⁶

Through channels Cumming passed these comments on to George Manypenny, U. S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs.⁵⁷ Another interested bystander, M. C. Meiggs, wrote directly to the Secretary of the Interior, in December, 1856, with more concern than accuracy, that Gore had killed at least 6,000 buffalo. "We punish an Indian for killing

⁵² Parkhill, *Wildest of the West*, 138. Beebe and Clegg parrot Parkhill concerning this episode and even include what is represented to be a drawing of part of Gore's party fishing in the Black Hills. Beebe and Clegg, *The American West*, 370. The clothing of the four men in the drawing, however, mark it as being of a later period, not of the 1850's. The Culver Service, to which it is credited, is now unable to turn up either the picture or information concerning it.

⁵³ See Lloyd McFarling (ed.), *Exploring the Northern Plains 1804-1876* (Caldwell, 1955), 287.

⁵⁴ Coutant, *History of Wyoming*, I, 325. Henry Chatillon relates that Gore broke camp immediately upon hearing of the discovery and that Dapron later tried unsuccessfully to locate the site where gold had been found. Chatillon to *Denver Evening Post* (Cripple Creek, August 20, 1897). Velma Linford states that one Captain Douglas, a member of the expedition, returned with colors to Gore's camp, near modern Centennial, Wyoming. Gore was disinterested, but the creek on which the gold had been found was named Douglas Creek and there was mining on it later. Linford, "The Grand Encampment," *The Westerners Brand Book*, IV (1949), 5.

⁵⁵ Federal Writers' Project, *Colorado* (New York, 1941), 288.

⁵⁶ Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Union, July 1856). H.S.M.; Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Pierre, November 9, 1856). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1856. C620. Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives.

⁵⁷ Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Union, July 1856). H.S.M.

⁵⁸ Cumming to George Manypenny (St. Louis, December 12, 1856). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1856. C620. B.I.A.

⁵⁹ M. C. Meiggs to Secretary of Interior Robert McClelland (Washington, December 20, 1856). Central Superintendency Letters Received, 1856. M234. B.I.A.

a settler's cow for food," pointed out Meiggs. "How can such destruction of their game be permitted by their friends in the Government of the United States?"⁵⁸

Superintendent Cumming then suggested, and Commissioner Manypenny concurred, that the Federal Government take legal action to recover from Gore all pelts, skins, antlers, and other trophies taken from hunting grounds reserved for the Indians. These might then be sold and the proceeds applied for the benefit of the maligned redskins.⁵⁹ The Secretary of Interior, however, advocated more restraint, especially since an alien was involved. Besides, he suggested, would not the cost of legal process be more than the value of the trophies in question? The Superintendents of Indian Affairs "should be instructed to be more cautious, in future, in granting strangers privileges that can be so abused."⁶⁰

If Gore was blissfully unaware of this exchange of views in the nation's capitol, he was not unacquainted with troubles on the Upper Missouri. At one point, a raid by the Sioux seriously disrupted his itinerary and brought forth a string of Gaelic invectives from the usually imperturbable hunter.⁶¹ William F. Cody's interesting but unreliable narrative declares that Gore "actually proposed to Uncle Sam to whip the entire Sioux nation at his own expense, and vowed that he could, in thirty days,

equip a little army of his own, which would wipe those murderous thieves from the face of the earth."⁶² No account previous to Cody's mentions such an offer and none appears in Government files. Very likely it is simply another bit of folklore that has become a part of the Gore saga.

At Fort Union, Gore dickered with Alexander Culbertson for transportation down the Missouri. Culbertson agreed to provide mackinaw boats and to purchase the Irishman's surplus wagons and equipment, but through some misunderstanding as to terms, Gore came to believe that Culbertson was attempting to gouge him in the highly civilized way in this uncivilized wilderness.⁶³ Gore's reaction was explosive. "He seems to have been mercurial, wrathful, effervescent, and reckless, and heedless of the consequences, he would not stand the terms prescribed."⁶⁴ Rather than deal with Culbertson, he had three of his wagons, twenty carts, harness, and a large amount of Indian goods and unneeded supplies piled on the river bank in front of the fort and burned under armed guard. At night he had the iron that remained from the fire thrown into the river, that none might be salvaged and utilized. His surplus livestock were sold cheaply or given away to the riffraff whites and Indians who hung around the trading post. The expedition was now "decimated by mutual consent" and proceeded to Fort Berthold.⁶⁵

It may have been a moral victory that Gore won over Culbertson but it was a costly one. Gore had salvaged his personal belongings and his trophies to take down the river with him,⁶⁶ but the community at Fort Berthold had been forewarned of the approach of a

⁵⁸ Manypenny to McClelland (Washington, January 13, 1857). Copy. Report Book No. 10, 42-43. B.I.A.

⁵⁹ McClelland to Manypenny (Washington, January 16, 1857). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1857. 1407. B.I.A.

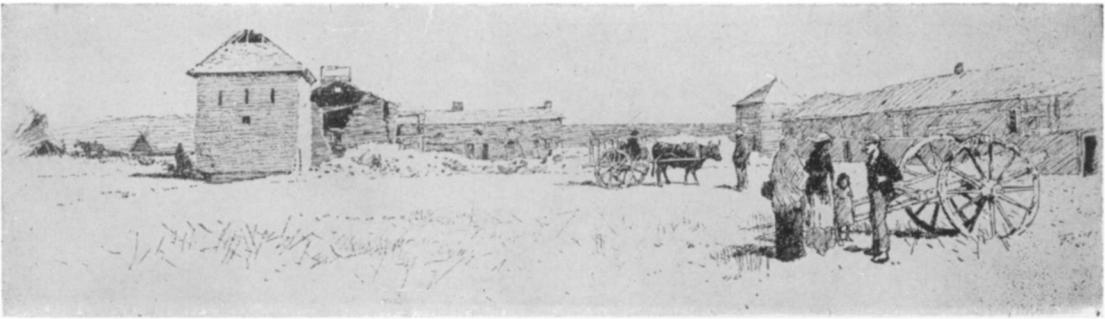
⁶⁰ Vaughan reported rumors late in 1856 that Gore and twelve of his men had been murdered by Blackfeet and Sioux in the area between the mouth of the Yellowstone and Fort Pierre. Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Pierre, November 9, 1856). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1856. C620. B.I.A. Later, on Christmas Day, Vaughan reported the savages peaceful and Gore safe in winter quarters at Fort Berthold. ". . . His detention in the country I learn is occasioned by the unkind treatment he says of the Blackfeet & Uncpappas breaking in upon his travelling arrangements," wrote Vaughan. Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Pierre, December 25, 1856). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1857. C736. B.I.A. Proteau says that the Sioux raid occurred as the expedition was heading back up the Little Missouri from the Black Hills adventure. Strahorn, *Hand-book of Wyoming*, 222. Louis Sears, a Dakota pioneer, later recalled that Gore had wintered (1855-1856) near the mouth of the Little Missouri and that the Sioux stole all his horses and plundered his wagons. *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, I (1906), 349. The date used by Sears is in error, unless this is a reference to the Piegan and Blood raids on Gore's Tongue River camp.

⁶² Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 132.

⁶³ Henry Bostwick says that Culbertson agreed to construct two mackinaw boats and to take the stock, wagons, and equipment at a stipulated price. Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 130. Bradley says that Gore engaged one mackinaw boat from Culbertson at the rate of one dollar per foot. Bradley, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 249.

⁶⁴ Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 129.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; Bradley, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, IX (1923), 249.



rich Irish nobleman and promptly boosted prices for the occasion. That Gore did not appreciate these attempts to profit at his expense any more than he had those of Culbertson is indicated by the fact that during the remainder of the 1856-1857 winter he generally restricted his purchases to basic necessities.⁶⁷ In fact, during most of the frozen months he eschewed the company of the whites at Berthold and lived in rude tribal quarters with Crow's Breast, one of the local Hidatsa chiefs. But as soon as the ice went out in the spring of 1857, Gore was off down the Missouri for St. Louis and ultimately his Irish homeland.⁶⁸ He was to make one more trip to America before his death in 1878, this time to the Florida Everglades, not to the great West.⁶⁹

And so the Big Hunt of Sir St. George Gore came to a close. It had cost an estimated half million dollars, had covered at least 6,000 miles of rugged terrain—much of it uncharted—and it had consumed the better part of three years. By Gore's own admission, the expedition had slaughtered 2,000 buffalo, 1,600 deer and elk, and 105 bears—a carnage executed purely in the name of sport.

For Gore, the experience had undoubtedly been a rewarding one. In the words of Marcy, he was:

... one of those enthusiastic, ardent sportsmen who derived more real satisfaction and pleasure from one day's successful hunting than can possibly be imagined by those who have never participated in this exhilarating and healthful amusement. Besides, he returned home with a renovated constitution, good health and spirits, and a new lease of perhaps ten years to his life, and finally, he had seen something of life out of the ordinary beaten track of the great mass of other tourists.⁷⁰

In Colorado, Gore Canyon, Gore Pass, and the Gore Range perpetuate the name of this sporting baronet.⁷¹ Yet he contributed little that was tangible to the unfolding drama of western development. If his exploits represented the adventuresome spirit of the times, they also showed man's wasteful and destructive nature at its worst. But Sir St. George Gore differed from other sportsmen of his era and later only in that his persistence was greater, his stay was longer, his expedition more fabulous and his purse was deeper than most.

⁶⁶ J. Cecil Alter says that Gore and the remainder of his party made the journey to Berthold by canoe. Alter, *James Bridger*, 268. Heldt, quoting Bostwick, says that he used the two flatboats that had been constructed at the mouth of the Tongue. Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 130. Contemporary Letters from Agent Vaughan, however, indicate that what remained of Gore's party split: the two flatboats, loaded with trophies, came down the Missouri under the care of four men; Gore and twelve others went overland. Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Pierre, November 9, 1856). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1856. C620. B.I.A.; Vaughan to Cumming (Fort Pierre, December 25, 1856). Upper Missouri Letters Received, 1857. C736. B.I.A.

⁶⁷ One notable exception occurred when a Berthold contractor, from whom Gore had purchased beef at fifty dollars a head, raised the price fifty per cent. Gore promptly bought fifty head from a rival of the first, not because he needed more than half a dozen, but simply to teach a moral lesson. Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 131.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; Years later, Captain Jean-Baptiste La Barge mentioned that he had carried Gore and his outfit aboard his steamer on the Missouri, but no dates are given. Lucile M. Kane (trans. and ed.), *Military Life in Dakota: The Journal of Philippe Regis de Trobriand* (St. Paul, 1951), 303. James Fisk also recorded later that he had met Gore in 1858, when the latter was returning "from a hunting excursion from the Black Hills to the Jefferson fork of the Missouri." Expedition of Captain Fisk to the Rocky Mountains, *House Executive Document No. 45*, 38 Cong., 1 Sess. (1863-1864), 34. Serial 1189. Fisk's memory was poor in this instance: the date was probably 1856.

⁶⁹ Heldt says that the Everglades trip was in 1875. Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," *Contributions*, I (1876), 128. Cody contends that it came the year after the completion of the western hunt—or 1858. Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan*, XVII (June, 1894), 132-133.

⁷⁰ Marcy, *Thirty Years*, 402-403.

⁷¹ Glendive, Montana, seat of Dawson County, was named for Glendive Creek—a corruption of Glendale, the name originally given it by Gore. Federal Writers' Project, *Montana* (New York, 1949), 186.