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Sir George, the Buffalo Slayer

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History regards Sir St. George Gore as an ardent sportsman, a man who spent two years with the legendary Jim Bridger hunting game on the American plains from 1854 to 1856. But the truth is Sir George (he dropped the "Saint" for his American visit), the Eighth Baronet of Manor Gore near Sligo in northwest Ireland, was an enormously wealthy, self-indulgent nobleman who slaughtered animals on a whim.

His title provided an income of \$200,000 a year, allowing Sir George to do pretty much as he pleased. So when Sir William Drummond Stewart, an acquaintance met during a stag-hunting excursion in the Scottish highlands, recounted his adventures in America from 1833 to 1838 and again in 1843 as a comrade of such mountain men as Bridger, Kit Carson and Tom "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, Gore was inspired to outfit a "grand hunting company for the plains." Having long since taken residence in Brighton, south of London, and become an "absentee Irish landlord," Gore counted on his influence with the British branch of the American Fur Company to help arrange a "proper" hunting expedition in the spring of 1854.

According to author-artist Jack Roberts, who in 1977 chronicled Sir George's American adventures, the baronet was joined that first season by his good friend and equally "well-heeled sportsman" William Thomas Spencer Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, heir-apparent to the Fifth Earl Fitzwilliam, regarded as the richest man in British nobility. It was Sir George and Lord Fitzwilliam, if you please, as Gore ticked off a bill of particulars for a hunting holiday of some duration. And what a list it was. But first there was the matter of reaching America.

He originally intended to sail to New Orleans, then make his way north to St. Louis. But because of something Brigham Young said, the baronet changed his travel plans. Franklin Richards, president of the British Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in London, had received instructions from Young to avoid New Orleans when planning Mormon convert emigrations because of an outbreak of cholera and malaria in the lower Mississippi Valley. The American Fur Company passed the word to Gore, who opted to land in New York instead, reaching St. Louis by way of Pittsburgh. It was March 1854 when Sir George and his retinue arrived. (Fitzwilliam would accompany the party as far as Fort Laramie, then return to his family in England.)

Gore's entourage included his valet, a dog-handler and a pack of thirty-two greyhounds and eighteen foxhounds, a fly-tying specialist (who was constantly gathering new material for artificial flies), and attendants who cared for Sir George's arsenal: seventy-five rifles, more than a dozen shotguns (all muzzle-loaders but one Sharps rifle) and many pistols, including a number of revolvers. Captain Randolph B. Marcy, U.S. 5th Infantry, who gained fame for his role in the Utah Expedition of 1857-58, met Gore soon after his return from the mountains and "observed the names of Joseph Manton, James Purdey, Westley Richards and other celebrated makers" on his guns. All were fully engraved and fitted with carved English walnut stocks.

Of Every Description: There were two wagons filled with fishing equipment, splendid rods and reels of every description. For his personal comfort and convenience there were a large green and white linen tent, an ornamental brass bed that could be dismantled and packed quickly, a steel bathtub bearing Gore coat-of-arms, a portable iron table and iron wash stand, a complete set of pewterware, several camp stoves, a campaign chest and trunks filled with appropriate seasonal wardrobes, a fur-lined commode with removable chamber pot and a collection of leatherbound classics, according to author Roberts. There also were a sextant, two chronometers, a refracting telescope with 6-inch lens--and two milch cows.

Sir George ordered barrels of gunpowder, lead ball moulds for every caliber and a huge supply of percussion caps. Also on the list was an inflatable India rubber raft similar to the one used by John C. Fremont in 1843 to reach the island that now bears his name in the Great Salt Lake. And for any Indians the party might encounter, Gore brought gifts of iron kettles, knives, axes, hand tools, blankets, tin cups and mirrors, candles, calico cloth, rings, bracelets, hanks of trade beads and (in case of snakebite) an assortment of kegs containing 250 gallons of trade whiskey known on the frontier as "liquefied strychnine," plus a supply of fine wines and liquors for himself.

With several thousand Mormon converts camped in the vicinity of Westport, Missouri, ready to head for Great Salt Lake City, Gore moved across the Kansas border to the Chouteau trading post. Here he assembled his "expedition." Sir George hired Jim Bridger and Henry and Joseph Chatillon as guides. Aside from his personal entourage, Gore added forty men, 100 horses, twenty yoke of oxen and four six-mule Conestoga wagons (one for provisions, one as a chuck wagon, another as a blacksmith and wheelwright shop, and the fourth a tool shop). There were two freight wagons and twenty-one Red River carts (two-wheelers), each drawn by two horses (sixteen hauled Sir George's personal luggage and the remaining five carried

Indian goods and the property of the hired hands). He also brought along a bright red two-wheel odometer cart to haul behind his carriage--to record distances traveled. By mid-June the caravan reached Fort Laramie and assembled on the north bank of the Platte River to follow the Oregon Trail.

Passport in Hand: At St. Louis, Gore had obtained a letter from the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Central Division. It was a passport granting him permission as a foreigner to visit Indian country. It was a courtesy according to law, extended to Sir George and Lord Fitzwilliam as touring dignitaries to America. The superintendent who provided the documents was Alfred Cumming, who in three years would replace Brigham Young as governor of Utah Territory. Cumming did not realize how much he would regret issuing the passports.

Documents in hand and his expedition fully outfitted, the 43-year-old Irish bachelor aristocrat was ready to make his impression on the New World. There is no concise record of Gore's hunting exploits--he destroyed his diary before returning to England--but over the next two years, ranging along the Arkansas and South Platte rivers and into the Yampa Valley, before moving to Yellowstone country in what is now southern Montana and northern Wyoming, Sir George wreaked absolute havoc on the animal population. At one point, the Yampas asked him not to proceed farther into their hunting grounds, such was the toll his guns had taken. Fortunately, he agreed.

Lt. James Bradley, an infantry officer with a special interest in frontier history, spoke to members of the expedition and kept a journal of his interviews. He described the Eighth Baronet of Manor Gore as "of medium height, but rather stout, bald with short side whiskers, a good walker but poor horseman, a good shot from a rest, but rather indifferent offhand." That little aside by Bradley would indicate Gore wounded more animals than he killed outright.

Bradley went on to write that Gore's daily hunting forays usually began with a party of seven (Gore being the only shooter). "He never loaded his own gun, but after firing passed it on to an attendant, who gave him another already charged." It was his habit to sleep until 10 or 11 in the morning, take his bath, eat breakfast and set out for the day's hunt, returning after dark. He shot at anything and everything. In his autobiography, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border*, Marcy says Gore boasted to him that during his two years on the plains he killed forty grizzly bears and 2,500 buffaloes!

He spent the winter of 1854-55 around Fort Laramie, conducting occasional buffalo hunts, and finally constructed his own stockade (Fort Gore) at the confluence of the Tongue River and Pumpkin Creek south of today's Miles

City, Montana, where he wintered in 1855-56. Hunting sorties along the Yellowstone Valley between Bighorn and Powder rivers added to Gore's huge collection of trophies, more than the wagons could carry.

His slaughter of the buffalo herds so infuriated the plains tribes that they complained to their Indian agents of this stranger who killed for sheer pleasure. Alfred Vaughn, agent at Fort Union on the Missouri River, wrote to Cumming that Gore was "palpably violating" the terms of his passport by trading with the Crow Indians and that the Upper Missouri tribes were angry with this foreigner who "drives and kills off their game." Vaughn said Gore told him of killing 105 bears and some 2,000 buffaloes, 1,600 elk and deer for "pure sport."

Sir George's attitude toward the complaints was to ignore them. Since the departure of Lord Fitzwilliam, he had taken to inviting "Old Gabe" Bridger to the green and white tent in the evenings for a dollop of the "good stuff," while the baronet read aloud from his collection of the classics. From these congenial evenings sprang some remarkable anecdotes, confirmed not only by Gore and Marcy, but by Bridger himself.

Bridger and the Bard: Sir George's favorite was Shakespeare, and Bridger, who could neither read nor write, reckoned, according to Marcy, the bard was "a leetle too highfalutin for him." What's more, he told Gore, he "rayther calculated that thar big Dutchman, Mr. Full-stuff, was a leetle bit too fond of lager beer." The old scout took an interest, however, in the adventures of Baron Munchausen, but admitted after the reading was finished "that he be dogond ef he swallered every thing that thar Baren Mountchawson said, and he thout he was a durn'd liar."

Captain Eugene F. Ware, a volunteer cavalry officer in the Seventh Iowa, mentions in his book on frontier Indian warfare during the 1860s that he fell heir to one of Sir George's hunting hounds at Fort Kearny (as did Captain Albert Tracy at Camp Floyd). Ware included a 1911 reminiscence of Jim Bridger from the Kansas City Star in which it said the mountain man was so enthused by Shakespeare, because of Gore's readings, that "he waylaid an emigrant train and bought a copy for a yoke of oxen, then hired a boy at \$40 to read to him," only to quit in a rage at "Richard III"--he "wouldn't listen to any more talk of any man who war mean enough to kill his mother!"

At Tongue River, Sir George knew the time had come to abandon his fort and begin the journey home. His men built two flatboats to haul the buffalo robes, hides, peltries, antlers and trophy heads. When they reached Fort Union, Gore offered up his expedition equipment for sale at a reasonable price, but to his astonishment and outrage, James Kipp, senior trader for the

American Fur Company on the Upper Missouri--sensing he had this arrogant and obnoxious foreigner in a tight spot--offered him a pittance.

The Irish nobleman exploded. One of Gore's men, Henry Bostwick, was a witness to what happened next: "[Sir George] fancied that, in his remoteness from man, the company was seeking to speculate upon his necessities. He seems to have been mercurial, wrathful, effervescent, and reckless and heedless of the consequences, he would not stand for the terms perscribed. He accordingly burned his wagons and all the Indian goods and supplies not needed, in front of the fort, guarding the flames from the plunder of whites and Indians."

Consigned to the Pyre: All of the splendid trappings of that fabulous caravan were consigned to the pyre: Gore's elegant carriage, the Conestogas, the freight wagons, the Red River carts, the tent, the brass bedstead, the French carpets, the down-filled pillows, the India rubber boat, his campaign chests and trunks, the chronometers, sextant and barometer, Sir George's violin and case, his library of first editions--all put to the torch. Even his log books, letters and journal. His fury, it seemed, knew no bounds; he was as if possessed. He kept only his firearms, some of the trade goods, a few saddles and bridles, and his trophies. Kipp and company employees, safe behind the walls of Fort Union, could only watch in wonder and dismay at the destruction.

When Bostwick hesitantly asked to buy a cart and harness, Sir George piled on extras worth many hundreds of dollars, while his hired hand protested he had but \$12. "Let him have those goods," the Irishman ordered, "and charge him just the \$12." In St. Louis months later, Sir George settled his accounts, paying Bridger \$750 for his service, and boarded a ship for England. His "grand hunting company for the plains" had cost him something shy of \$250,000--but it was an adventure he would never forget. In later years, there would be in the state of Colorado a Gore Pass at the summit of Gore Range (seventeen miles west of Kremmling), Gore Canyon, Gore Mountain, Gore Lake, Gore Creek, Gore Wilderness Area and, for a brief period in 1905, Gore City. As for the Eighth Baronet of Manor Gore, he remained unmarried until his death at Inverness, Scotland, in 1878.