

Having discovered a village among the tules at the mouth of Lost River, the whites made a night attack upon it. The Indians became aware of their approach, and opposed their crossing of the river with a cloud of arrows. Nevertheless, the men charged boldly across on foot, just as the gray light of dawn began to make objects visible, and the Modocs fled in a panic and hid themselves among the tules. The water was about two feet deep, and cold almost to the point of freezing. It was then found that the rancheria was on an island in the lake; but the men waded out to it and surrounded the village, capturing about thirty prisoners, only three of whom were men. They spent the entire day in searching the tules along the banks of the river and on the lake shore for the secreted braves. The fugitives plunged into the icy water when discovered, and sought new hiding places, if fortunate enough to escape the bullets that were sent after them. Many were routed out and some fifteen killed in this way; nor did the men entirely escape injury, for several of them, as well as some of their horses, were wounded with arrows shot by the concealed savages.

They returned at night to their camp with their prisoners, where they remained several days. One night as Wright approached the fire to light his pipe, one of the three braves arose and asked him for a smoke. Wright made no response, but stooped down to get a lighted stick, when the Indian pushed him over and fled. He jumped to his feet and gave instant pursuit. The fugitive was soon overtaken, and, turning about, dealt his pursuer a blow with his fist, receiving in return a deadly thrust from a knife. Dragging the dead body after him, Wright returned to camp, when the women set up a howl that continued till daylight, effectually banishing sleep from the eyelids of their captors. The prisoners had always maintained that the guilty Indians were members of another rancheria, and finally, upon the promise of liberty, agreed to lead the men to the village of the robbers. The women and children were released, and with the two remaining braves for guides, the little party started in search of the rancheria. It was about the 1st of November, and bitterly cold, snow covering the ground to the depth of six inches. The horses broke through the hard crust that had formed on the snow, rendering progress both slow and tedious.

On the afternoon of the second day, having penetrated into the celebrated Lava Beds south of Tule Lake, about a dozen Indians were discovered, some of whom hastened to warn the village of danger, while the others took shelter behind rocks and juniper bushes, and discharged their arrows at the advancing party as soon as they came within range. A bushwacking contest was maintained for a long time, the savages falling steadily back toward the village. This was situated on a plateau and along a crescent ledge of rocks, where the ground sunk abruptly to a depth of about twenty feet. Within the ledge was what appeared to be the smooth bed of a stream. It was about thirty feet wide and one hundred yards long, with a slight incline terminating near the middle of the ledge,

where a cave opened into the rocks. Here the inhabitants of the village had taken shelter, tying their horses in front of it, where they could protect them with their arrows while lying concealed in the cave. The whites opened fire upon them from the top of the ledge of rocks, at a distance of a hundred yards, and the savages returned the fire, shooting their arrows with such force and precision that several of the men were wounded. They soon discovered that their shields of tule rushes were not bullet-proof, and retreated within the shelter of the cave with the loss of several warriors. One stalwart brave, probably a Medicine Man who desired to exhibit his supernatural powers, emerged from the cave so enveloped in shields that he resembled an animated basket. Behind their protecting fronts he felt so secure that he walked boldly forth and defied his assailants, only to be laid low by a well-aimed shot from the bluff above. After this exploit not an Indian ventured from the cave again.

How to dislodge them from their hole became the next question. The men were out of provisions and could not besiege the cave, the rocky and desert country affording no game or other means of subsistence of which they could avail themselves. A smudge was suggested. Hurriedly gathering logs and brush, the men cautiously pushed them over the edge of the bluff at the mouth of the cave and set fire to the heap. The Indians could not prevent this, for they were closely cooped up in the cave by the rifles of the men who stood guard opposite. From out the dark recesses of the cavern the imprisoned savages maintained a close watch upon the besiegers, and each head or arm that was exposed in adding fuel to the blazing pile was saluted with a shower of arrows, and one of the men was severely wounded in this way.

The heat and smoke rushed into the entrance in such volume that any one but a Modoc Indian would have been suffocated or roasted. They prostrated themselves upon their faces to breathe the little fresh air that came in along the bottom of the cave, and, with a courage born of desperation, resolved to perish there rather than go out to be slaughtered by their enemies. The attack upon them had been so sudden and unexpected that they had forgotten to take water with them into their retreat. Their place of shelter, also, was small, and had no outlet or means of ventilation save the entrance through which they were receiving such generous donations of heat and smoke. They could have held out but a little longer, when they were overjoyed to see their persecutors take their departure. The men had kept up a roasting fire for twenty-four hours; but being out of provisions, over a hundred miles distant from any source of supplies, and not knowing the terrible straits to which the enemy had become reduced, they had rolled a last contribution upon the burning pile and taken up their line of march for Yreka. To rush out into the fresh air, scatter the blazing logs and brush, and moisten their parched throats with cooling draughts of water, were the first acts of the savages. They were too thankful for their escape to think of pursuing or annoying the white men further.