

THE MODOCS IN 1851.

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IN March, 1851, gold was discovered in Yreka Flats, and in a few weeks several thousand miners were working there and on Greenhorn Creek. In the summer following, a number of men took up claims in Shasta Valley and cut hay for the Yreka market. Besides the ox teams used in hauling the hay to town, they all ranched a number of horses, mules and cattle, belonging to themselves and parties in the mines. The Modoc Indians made occasional forays into the valley and drove off small bands of stock to their country, a hundred miles to the eastward. Much stock that was no doubt stolen by white thieves was charged to the account of these savage marauders, and it is very questionable if they were guilty of half of the thefts ascribed to them. Late in the summer they stampeded a corral of animals near Butteville and made off with forty-six fine mules and horses, many of them belonging to the pack train of Augustus Meamber, then on his way to Yreka with a load of goods. That this act was committed by the Modocs there was ample evidence to show. A company of twenty men was raised, consisting chiefly of miners from the vicinity of Yreka, to follow the thieves into the heart of the Modoc country, punish them for their roguery, and, if possible, recover the stolen property. With them, as scout and general adviser, went Ben Wright, the mountaineer whose exploits the following year gave him great notoriety on the coast, and two Oregon Indians, who were his close companions. Well supplied with jerked beef, the little company set out upon the trail of the robbers, which they followed across the Butte Creek Mountains, and on the third day arrived in the vicinity of Lost River. After a scout of two days Wright and one of his Indians reported the discovery of an Indian village on the river bank, containing over 200 warriors, near which was being herded a large quantity of stock. Some of the men wanted to rush off at once and make an attack upon the rancheria; but they were informed that such a method of fighting Indians, especially when they were in such superior numbers, would result in the extermination of the attacking party; strategy must be used to take the enemy by surprise.

The bridge across Lost River, on the emigrant trail, is one provided by Nature. A rocky wall crosses the bed of the stream, running from shore to shore, on the top of which the water is very shallow, forming an excellent ford, which is known far and wide as the "Natural Bridge." It was but a short distance from this the Indian rancheria stood. Refreshed by a good night's sleep, the party rode leisurely toward the village, passing the ford in the afternoon. The Indians rushed out to observe them; but as they rode carelessly along, as though they were but a party of travelers, the excitement was allayed. Eight miles further they stopped and made all the usual preparations for camping, and the Indian scouts who had followed them returned to the rancheria with the information that they were simply a party of Bostonians journeying through the country, and

had gone into camp for the night. About an hour after dark the horses were brought in and saddled up; and leaving them with five men in the camp, with orders to bring them on at daylight, or sooner if sent for, the other fifteen started back on foot on their errand of blood. The ford at the Natural Bridge was recrossed, and the two or three miles that intervened between it and the doomed village were quickly traversed, when, to their chagrin, the party found themselves on the wrong side of the stream. The windings of the river had deceived them, and they were now on the side opposite to the rancheria, with no means of crossing and no time to return by the way of the ford. In this dilemma they determined to attack the village from that side and accomplish as much as the circumstances would permit.

With the first signs of dawn a slight stir was made in the Indian camp. A brave emerged from one of the wickiups and uttered a peculiar cry, which was responded to by three or four others, who came into camp and disappeared in the tent, having undoubtedly been on guard duty. The chief who had given them the signal of relief then turned to his pony and began to unfasten him from his picket. His uplifted hand suddenly dropped, and the chief plunged forward upon the ground with the death cry on his lips, as the sound of a rifle shot echoed along the stream and startled the slumbering village. As the surprised savages rushed from their wickiups they were met by a shower of bullets from their assailants. They defended themselves bravely, and for some time a stubborn contest was maintained by the parties across the narrow, but deep, stream which separated them. They discharged their arrows with great accuracy and several of the men were wounded by these missiles, while the archers endeavored to shelter themselves behind shields made of tule rushes and pieces of tin that had once been used for culinary purposes by murdered emigrants. The battle waged fiercely until the Modocs learned that their shields were not impervious to bullets, and then they began to waver, and finally fled in haste, abandoning their village to its fate.

The five men who had been left with the animals now came up to the deserted camp, and, thinking the battle to be on the opposite side, jumped into the canoes they found tied to the bank and crossed over. With these the whole party recrossed to the village. Sixteen dead Modocs were found, and in the abandoned wickiups were discovered scalps in abundance, many of which had been torn from the heads of white people.

During the next few weeks several skirmishes were had with the Indians, resulting in the death of a few more of the savages. The whites, though few in number, had a deadly advantage in an encounter. With rifles and revolvers they could vanquish a hundred armed simply with bows and arrows; the more easily that the Indians were unaware of the long range of those weapons. When they learned that to be beyond the range of an arrow was no protection from the deadly bullet, they became panic-stricken and sought only to save themselves by flight.