

A SHORT TRIP TO ALASKA  
 IN 1914  
 THE JOURNEY AND LIFE OF GRACE  
 PART II

They made nine miles that first day. They stopped at Bull's Roadhouse, one of the dirtiest places they'd ever seen, to stay the night. Bill, Raymond and Grace were herding the cattle with the aid of Old Limpy the tame bull, Mrs. Sharkey followed, driving a wagon, Dutch and Mr. Sharkey brought the horse herd, and Nick O'Brien and Billy Epley drove the sheep. They had planned to drive fifteen miles, but heard that the Tonsina bridge had washed out. Grace and Bill Schnabel held the cattle while the men threw together a corral.

Early the next morning Raymond and Mr. Sharkey prepared to ride down to the Tonsina river, which was far too swift to ford, to help rebuild the bridge. Grace stood blinking in the sunny roadhouse yard, surrounded by foxes and martins in rickety cages, watching the men saddle up.

It was then that Dutch embarked on his brief and unfortunate career as a cowboy. Thinking to go help out down at the river, he had cut out the old pack mare Lucy; ancient, plodding Lucy; and saddled her up. Mounting, he lit inexpertly behind the saddle and Lucy turned into a fiend, throwing him sky-high. Mercifully, a manure pile broke his fall, and he was unhurt. Grace choked on a huge swallow of air, and glancing sideways at Raymond she saw he was grinning. They tried not to look at each other, to keep from bursting out laughing.

It was Dutch's incompetence on horseback that let Grace have her chance to prove herself as cowgirl.

"Bill and I herded cattle on willows and weeds and a little grass in all kinds of brush. The men went down and helped build a bridge. I certainly learned more about steers in those two days than I ever expected to know, and they can be 'ornery' critters when they get started. Bill was a great instructor however and he and I have gotten to be great pals. He was an old cow-puncher and a pioneer Alaskan and such experiences he has had and the stories he can tell. I could sit and listen by the hour. Because I got in and helped with the cattle when they needed it and because I didn't kick about some of the difficulties we met, it made quite a hit with him and he thinks I'll 'do' for a trip like this."

Letter G.C. to J.B.  
 June 29, 1914

Once the bridge was reconstructed they still had difficulty getting the sheep across. Half the bridge and part of the road were flooded in the still-rising river; they had to transport the sheep across in a wagon, fifteen at a time. The water was over the axles. The men worked far into the night getting them all across. Grace decided she would get up at three a.m. and ride back up to the roadhouse; she thought that Raymond and Bill must be exhausted and could use her help bringing the cattle on down the river. The men at the bridge discouraged her from making the trip alone -- they argued that a bear could likely spook her horse, she could get thrown, mauled, eaten -- who could tell what might happen? The argument reminded them of several good bear stories which they took the opportunity to recall. Grace decided to pay no attention.

In the middle of the night she cantered the six miles along the dusky road, and made it safe and sound to Bull's Roadhouse. She felt a little disappointed; after all the big talk she hadn't even glimpsed a grizzly. Raymond hadn't expected the extra help with the cattle herd and it gladdened his heart to see her trotting out of the shadowy woods, Chako's four white feet flashing, Grace smiling at his surprise.

Even with her help they didn't get the cattle across the river until eleven a.m., and then they continued straight on the nine miles through the woods to Woodland Roadhouse. The dust on the road was terrible.

"Grace rode from three in the morning until six in the evening with only about one hour's rest, pretty tired girl."

-Diary R. McK.  
 June 28, 1914

The rest of the outfit did not catch up with them until after midnight, so the three of them bedded down the cattle, put their horses in the corral and slept in real beds in the roadhouse.

The following day they let the cattle rest and feed while everyone took baths and washed their clothes. They sold Old Limpy the crippled bull for \$125 to a woman, Mrs. Peterson, who led him away, back to her home by Kinney Lake. Nick the shepherd caught a rabbit and Grace and Mrs. Sharkey fried and ate it, the meat was delicious after so much ham. Then Grace had a ride down the road behind the proprietor's dog-team, which she quite enjoyed. When they got back her clothes were drying in the roadhouse yard, Mrs. Sharkey was standing clean and scrubbed in the doorway watching as the men checked over the horses' feet, and far off, upon a low hill, Old Limpy gimped away at the side of a tiny woman.

They made good time the next four days, driving the cattle hard. They were halfway to Fairbanks, crossing an enormous, empty wilderness of windy plains and mountains, contradictory elements of heat and rain, violent rivers, snarls of thickets, snow and dust. Scattered roadhouses, and the odd corral or settler's cabin were the only signs of humanity. It began

8 UPPER LEFT EDGE MAY 1913

to rain in earnest, and kept on day and night until the fourth of July. They pressed on, now and then seeking shelter in barns, more often just camping along the road. Grace spent a day sick in bed with a hot water bag, listening to the rain tap on her little tent. When the men were moving the cattle out of camp to start up the trail one of the horses got tangled up in her tent ropes and pulled the whole thing down. The cattle spooked and nearly stampeded, but Raymond and Bill managed to soothe them. She listened to their sounds as the herd moved off -- the snorts and moans of the steers, the jangling of tack, the men's voices, low and muffled, the squeak of their slickers.

Grace luxuriated in sleep, catching up on all she had missed. It was almost a treat to be a little sick -- usually she was as strong as an ox. She droused through the day, sipping tea, thinking about writing a letter but feeling too lazy. She thumbed through her tiny red leather diary, reading back to the beginning of the trip. She replayed conversations in her head. She and Raymond had both started diaries of the trip back in Seattle; later she planned to tease him into letting her read his. Raymond was saucy but he'd never refuse her for long. He was such a nice friend to invite her along. Falling asleep in that wild place, rain pouring from the luminescent skies, her head pillowed on her riding boots, Grace felt completely happy.

In the morning Grace rode on the wagon with Billy Epley and Mrs. Sharkey. They passed the cattle and sheep and went on to Dry Creek Roadhouse, which was run by Mr. and Mrs. Cassidy, a young couple who had come up on the boat the Sampson with them.

In the night most of the horses strayed away and lost themselves miles down the Copper River in thick timber. Bill Schnabel started after them early, following their trail. Grace carried Raymond's breakfast out to him where he was sleeping by the cattle, and told him the news. She stayed with him awhile, and helped hold the cattle until Bill should get back. Dutch saddled up one of the remaining horses, a four-year-old named 'Nigger' none of them had ever tried, and which he'd been warned against. This time he was nearly killed, the horse threw him so hard. His face was cut up and bloody, his back terribly sprained, and they feared he had internal injuries. They waited for a day while Dutch laid in the Dry Creek Roadhouse, barely moving, and Mrs. Sharkey kept hot packs on him and tended to his cuts.

Bill made it back about noon, mustering the wayward horse herd. From Dry Creek they could see Mt. Wrangell; smoke was observed drifting up from the active volcano. Grace and Bill and Raymond held the cattle down by the creek, letting them feed while they decided what to do about Dutch; short-handed as they were, they could hardly afford to lose another of their outfit. In the morning they decided they couldn't afford to wait. Dutch was purple and grumbling, but the Cassidys were taking good care of him, and he would catch up with them as soon as he was fit.

Two days out of Dry Creek the horse flies and gnats were so bad that the cattle were wild with their fierce stings, and could hardly be driven. Constantly they plunged off into the thick brush and timber on either side of the road, where they could only be followed on foot. For hours Grace rode through the dust and heat, her clothes full of thorns, her black horse slippery with sweat, his hide quivering under the vicious stings of the insects. Grace sat her horse at the back of the herd of dusty red and white cattle, holding Raymond's mount Cy while he struggled on foot off into the brush after a couple of panicked steers. The dust rippled and parted as she glanced back down the road, and she observed two men approaching on horseback. One hailed her with his hat. They turned out to be government men, Signal Corps officers, and they pitched in with the herd for a few miles, through the worst heat of the day. Bedding the cattle down that night they decided to start night-herding, getting up about three a.m., to avoid the horse flies.

"You have no idea what a regular old Sourdough I am getting to be. I can be just as dirty and stay that way and still be perfectly happy. I can eat beans and bacon twice a day and enjoy them. I have gone two days and two nights without undressing or combing my hair. Don't you think that is going some? One day we had a terribly hard day with the cattle. The horse flies drove them wild and we spent most of the day fighting them back into the road out of the timber. We got to camp about eleven o'clock and I was so tired I simply took off my boots, unrolled my bed on a 'near' level spot and rolled in without taking off my clothes. I even left my hat on to hold the mosquito veil away from my face as I didn't take the time to put up my mosquito tent. I got up at three thirty the next morning and went all that day and the next night without any sleep except an hour or two curled up by the campfire while the cattle were 'bedded down'. Don't you think I am a tough one? The funny part is that I feel fine most of the time and eat as much as most of the men."

Letter G.C. to  
 her sister Pearl  
 July 14th, 1914



GRACE  
 IN  
 1913

The days were growing a little shorter, it became quite dusky for a few hours at night. Grace finally saw the moon, for the first time since leaving Washington. She had lettuce and radishes at the Poplar Grove Roadhouse, the first vegetables in over a month. She spent part of a day at the Sourdough Roadhouse while they waited for evening. A woman, Mrs. Yager, ran the place on her own. It was the cleanest, pleasantest place they had encountered so far.