

FIRST DRAFT

Early adventure tourist visited outlaws, rugged landscapes and Grand Junction

At Christmas 1899, Roger Pocock was nearing the end of his remarkable solo horseback journey from Canada to Mexico City, a trip that had taken him through Grand Junction.

Unarmed and unfazed, he had met Indians, cowboys and outlaws. He worried about thieves when he was in towns, but he traveled hundreds of miles in areas inhabited by outlaws “with no misgivings.”



BOB SILBERNAGEL

He visited Grand Junction in August 1899.

“Swinging down out of the Roan Mountains, (I) saw the steel rails gleaming in the Grand River settlements, and cantered through the farms to the city of Grand Junction,” Pocock wrote. Then he

enjoyed “a two-day debauch on milk and honey, whiskey, cigars, fruit and chocolate.”

Born in Wales in 1865, Pocock was always restless. As a young adult, he moved to Canada, and in 1884, he joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. There, he found camaraderie, regimentation and adventure.

He lasted only two years because he lost most of his toes to frostbite on a frigid 300-mile march during the North-West rebellion of 1885.

Pocock next worked as a sailor, cowboy and missionary, and he began writing. But he wanted more. So, on June 28, 1899, he “rode out from the gates of Fort Macleod (Alberta) to make a record in horsemanship — or get killed” in the attempt.

No one else was known to have ridden north to south across the western United States then. Others had embarked on long horseback journeys, but few had done so purely for adventure.

Pocock wrote a chronicle of his journey for Lloyd's Weekly newspaper in London, which was published in 10 installments in 1900. But he listed few dates in his report, so readers must guess when he visited most locations.

On the Fourth of July, he said he joined a celebration held by Blackfoot Indians in Montana, 40 miles south of the Canadian border.

It was likely mid-July when he arrived at Yellowstone National Park, where he was impressed with the landscape, but disgusted by the tourists.

“The forest reeks with them, camped in the glades ... dragged through the blinding dust in wagonettes,” he wrote. “The bears ... ravish the ash-heaps at the camps and hotels, and are photographed in the act by school-ma'ns in dusters and eyeglasses.”

Pocock continued south to Jackson Hole, then it southeast through Brown's Park to Green River, Utah, and on to Grand Junction. After his brief respite here, he climbed up to Glade Park, then rode a steep trail down to Unaweep Canyon and along the Dolores River.

He found a rugged route out of the canyon, and “After many hours of hard fighting I had conquered the Gateway trail,” he wrote. “Seventeen miles of park and prairie brought me to the first ranch on the Mesa la Sal in Utah.”

He rested, then continued to Monticello, Utah, where he tried to hire a guide to lead him to Robber's Roost, west of Canyonlands. Everyone he approached refused, so he went alone.

The Roost, he said, is “entirely surrounded by canyons, (and) can only be reached by one or two difficult trails.” He found one of those trails from the Dirty Devil River.

He disproved newspaper accounts that claimed outlaws at the Roost lived in luxury, in a cave equipped with machine guns, electric lights and a piano.

“I saw few modern conveniences in the cabins of the outlaws,” he said. “Their homes were common ranches, their camps below the average of comfort.”

He listened politely to the outlaws' stories, protected most of their identities, and expressed sympathy for the circumstances that led them to crime.

Pocock explained the leadership of the Roost: “Captain M'Carty, described as general manager is thirty-five to forty years of age. He is from Oregon, a cowboy,



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The Battle of Duck Lake occurred in March, 1885 in Saskatchewan during the North-west Rebellion. Roger Pocock was on his way toward the battle site with his Royal Canadian Mounted Police regiment when he suffered frostbite and most of his toes were amputated. He was discharged from the RCMP the following year.

horse-breaker and expert roper... Mr. Butch Cassidy, second in command, is a cowboy.”

Tom McCarty, famed for bank robberies in Telluride and Delta, was in his late 40s in 1899, and he may well have been at the Roost that year.

However, while one newspaper listed McCarty as the head of the Roost gang, most historians believe Cassidy was the leader. But it's unlikely Cassidy was present in autumn 1899 when Pocock visited. He was hiding out on a ranch near Alma, New Mexico, then.

Pocock's visit came a few months after the notorious June 2 train robbery near Wilcox, Wyoming. Pocock mentioned that crime, and he probably met some of those involved.

Among the dozen outlaws he cited as regulars at the Roost were the Roberts brothers. Harvey Logan, aka Kid Curry, and Harry Longabaugh, aka, the Sundance Kid, occasionally called themselves the Roberts brothers. Both may have been involved in the Wilcox Robbery.

Pocock left the outlaw stronghold and rode through Bluff, Utah, and Monument Valley, then headed west to Tuba City, Arizona.

Pocock stopped at Flagstaff, Arizona, and left his horses in a stable as he traveled by coach to the Grand Canyon. Again, he disparaged the tourists — “taking themselves so seriously in dusters, Kodaks, and eyeglasses” — even though he was one of them.

He rode a mule to the bottom of the canyon and marveled at the unique landscape. The top of the canyon was a pine forest “like those of Norway,” he explained for his English readers. “But the depths at my feet were in the climate of Central Africa.”

He returned to Flagstaff, then rode on to Phoenix and into the southern Arizona desert, where, he said, “every plant, every reptile is the armed and deadly enemy of mankind.”

At the Mexican border, other travelers convinced

him to carry a pistol, even though he admitted he was a terrible shot.

He reached pleasant farming regions south of Chihuahua, but contracted the flu. In Silao, about 400 miles north of Mexico City, he accused a hotel manager of stealing hay from Pocock's horse, and ended up in jail.

After five hours, he was released. He spent the night with an American doctor who had arranged his release, then continued to Mexico City, where he arrived on Jan. 21, 1900.

He had traveled over 3,600 miles during his 200-day journey across a region that remained one of the wildest in North America. It marked Pocock as one of the West's early adventure tourists.

But it was far from Pocock's last adventure. He joined a mercenary group during the Boer War, and served as an officer and an unofficial British spy during World War I. In the 1920s, he attempted unsuccessfully to organize a round-the-world airplane trip.

He wrote numerous newspaper articles, his autobiography and a handful of novels. One, called “Curly,” was set in the American Southwest and featured Robber's Roost.

His created the Legion of Frontiersmen, an international organization of men who had served in various parts of the British Empire. The Legion still exists.

Pocock died in November 1941 in England.

Sources: “Canada to Mexico: A Ride Across the Great American Desert,” by Roger Pocock, in Lloyd's Weekly newspaper, July to September, 1900; “Following the Frontier,” by Roger Pocock; “Outrider of Empire: The Life and Adventures of Roger Pocock,” by Geoffrey A. Pocock; “Roger Pocock — Eclipsed Hero,” by CuChullain O'Reilly, at www.longridersguild.com; historic newspaper articles at www.newspapers.com.

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Roger Pocock

Roger Pocock, famous English author, soldier, traveler and founder of the Legion of Frontiersmen, who is arranging the round-the-world flight to be conducted under the auspices of the legion.

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Roger Pocock as he appeared about 1923, when he was attempting to organize an around-the-world airplane flight. This photograph appeared in many newspapers at the time.



LLOYD'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER THROUGH WWW.NEWSPAPERS.COM

Roger Pocock, mounted and ready to get on the trail. This drawing accompanied one of his Lloyd's Weekly newspaper accounts of his 1899 journey.

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