

It wasn't much to write home about, but it was the sweetest place to hide. You see, the 1870s was not a good decade for me. Without going into sordid details, I had some people from the Hudson's Bay Company looking for me. It had something to do with missing merchandise, a couple guns and a poker game gone sideways. Really, I'm a decent man. I didn't hurt anyone.

But, that's all beside the point.

I'm on the ridge, up the west side of the Souris River – looking east to Turtle Mountain – saying good-bye. Funny how that hill changes colour. When it's blue, the weather will be fine. If it's purple, there's a storm brewing.



Turtle Mountain, from the west

I'll miss this.

I've got what I can carry and am leaving the rest in the cave I found in the bank. If you're new to these parts I'm south of Melita, just downstream from Sourisford. I was near invisible here. But, no longer.

Farmers, surveyors and official scoundrels are moving in. There've been rumours for years, that the Feds, rail companies and the mounties are working together to clear the way for immigrant folks – folks from Ontario and Europe mostly. Folks who'll fall in line; do as they're told.

Two men showed up last summer – Gould and Elliot. Fine men, but no taste for the wilds of the prairie. They're building a grand stone house down there. Nice enough for their lady-folk and for a store.

There's talk of the railroad coming.

Well, it was a good run! But I reckon we frontier men are done.

Truth be told, it was likely my comforts in the wild that got me in this fix. If I wasn't at ease living off the land, I'd have stayed in Fort Garry and faced the music, likely be out of prison by now.

So, I keep moving. It's what I know. Like the

buffalo that used to come through this draw, thousands at a time they say! I never saw herds that big. It was before my time. But I saw some that were mighty impressive. They're only a few left now, too many people with guns, I guess.



The old crossing.

Buffalo were always on the move. Like me, they can smell the next meal up ahead.

I see the lure of this place for settlers. It's next to a couple of trails; the Yellow Quill goes north towards Brandon. And the Emerson [Trail] - what you'll someday call the Boundary Commission, goes east. It's a good, shallow crossing. There are always travelers coming through, and Assiniboine hunters. A couple of them found me, but they had no issue with me.

Lots of Assiniboine came through some years back. Smallpox was hitting them hard. So, they've gone west, hoping for buffalo and space away from the clutter.

That's what sours me about the changes going on. Folks are getting pushed out, getting hurt.

I caught the good years, before Ruperts Land was sold to Canada. Furs were the business. Locals did the trapping and folks like me did the buying. It worked. Everyone had their place. Everyone made enough. But, like an elder once told me, a white man's thirst is never quenched. So, now they want the land, not just the furs.

Charlie West is my name. I'll take one of these trails, away from Sourisford. And I hope you never find me!

Good-bye at Sourisford

A VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK



I adapted 'Goodbye at Sourisford' from a story written for Vantage Points 2.

See ya' later!

David Neufeld