



It was a sorry sight when John Pritchard showed up last night But, first things first, John McKay is my name. I'm the factor at Hudson's Bay Company at Brandon House - where the Souris joins the Assiniboine. Pritchard's a 28-year-old employee of the rival XY Trading Company. This is my report on a most peculiar occurrence.

Pritchard's known to be positive and a skilled worker - adept at wilderness life. Earlier this summer, 1805, Pritchard accompanied a coworker part way to Fort Que-Appelle to deliver horses. On the way the horses spooked, and Pritchard's companion pursued the horses. Pritchard went to a lookout to spy for the coworker, but a sudden thunderstorm disoriented him, and he lost his way back to camp.

He faced the elements with no supplies. He had his clothes, his shoes and hat. When his shoes fell apart, he wrapped his bleeding feet with his clothing. The blinding sun and constant showers made travelling extremely difficult. He ate what he could scavenge - Frogs, magpies and breadroot. He tried fishing using a stick and his own hair as line but caught nothing. Mosquitos were relentless and black flies drew blood - as did the barbs of spear grass on his legs. Nights were spent sleeping on wet grass.

Pritchard kept tally of the miserable nights - marking a stick with his teeth. Being religious, he found the strength to persevere, but pain and hunger became almost unbearable.

On day 30 he found 2 abandoned trading posts on the south side of a lake - with - Halleluia! - socks and boots inside! And, he recognized Turtle Mountain! The lake was Whitewater.

With renewed hope Pritchard headed northwest in the direction of home. He caught the attention of Nakota travelers by raising a boot with a stick. He must have been a fright to look at with matted hair, welts and scars covering his wasting body - a naked, sunburned skeleton.

The travelers took pity on him and wrapped him in blankets, gave him pemmican and water, and carried him back to his fort in a rigged-up sleigh. And, Pritchard still carried his stick - with 40 marks in it.

The men at XY Fort Souris didn't recognize him at first - thinking he had perished. They brought him to me - hoping I'd nurse him back to health. I didn't let him look in a mirror for 15 days!

Company rivalries aside, we each know that but for the grace of God, he could be any one of us frontier men. Thankfully, Pritchard made a full recovery and has been invited to be the Factor at Fort Esperance in Saskatchewan.

Betty Sawatzky and David Neufeld adapted 'John Pritchard - Barely Alive' from a story written for Vantage Points 1.