

Rocky Mountain Outfit

2008 Winter Camp



Bradley C Bailey (Pilgrim), Bill Gantic #1880, Vic Barkin #1543, and Tom Karnuta (Pilgrim)

During the weekend of January 18th – 20th, 2008 four of us got together for a winter camp. Tom Karnuta picked the site, and I took care of getting everything coordinated. I wanted the overall feel of the camp to be similar to what Osborne Russell experienced and described in his journal.

"We all had snug lodges made of dressed Buffalo skins in the center of which we built a fire and generally comprised about six men to the lodge. The long winter evenings were passed away by collecting in some of the most spacious lodges and entering into debates arguments or spinning long yarns until midnight in perfect good humor..."

The site was just east of Salida, Colorado at about 9000' elevation. This is near the headwaters of the Arkansas River, just to the west of the Bayou Salade and in the southern end of the Upper Arkansas Valley. There are a fair number of historical references to the Bayou Salade, or South Park, mentioning it as being a paradise. As far as weather goes, it is usually colder than the Upper Arkansas Valley and much windier. I sometimes wonder if the Upper Arkansas Valley would've been preferred to the mountaineers since it is so close, it sure seems like a better place to me.

We had a couple of good storms blow through the valley in December and early January which left us with quite a bit of snow on the ground and we were having a cold spell. At the camp site the snow was at least knee deep or more. A couple of days before camp we had a fresh snowfall, so the entire site was beautiful with untracked snow as far as the eye could see.



Bill and Tom carrying gear to camp

Tom and I had headed out to the site on Thursday afternoon and cleared out a spot so we could set up the lodge. Friday morning, the 18th of January, Bill Gantic and I met at Tom's house and headed to the camp site. I spent a little time snowshoeing to see what kind of game I could find. There was plenty of fresh rabbit sign, but I never actually saw any.

We spent the rest of the daylight hours getting camp set up, hauling in wood, and getting water from the nearby spring. Due to the amount of snow, we had to haul in wood from elsewhere since we couldn't find much down or dry wood. We got our blankets and buffalo robes situated and then put on a pot into which went wild rice, onions, potatoes, elk meat, salt & other spices, and whatever else fell in. When we get together we all contribute to the pot to make a stew which can be enjoyed by all. We let that cook for a few hours while we caught up and swapped stories. When it was done cooking we had a good supper of stew, hardtack, and jerky. We then passed around a bottle of shrub and another of Taos lightening. The evening ended with us playing Monte and gambling for hardtack.

It was a very clear night and the temperature dropped to about -10F. We had to break ice out of all the kettles and the potatoes that we had were frozen solid. I think they could've been quite effective as weapons if needed.



Glowing tipi in the night, snow shoes in front



Vic Barkin snow shoeing

We woke up with the sun and got the fire going. Tom made coffee and I reheated some of the previous nights stew. While drinking our coffee and finishing up some breakfast we heard a hail to camp as Vic Barkin found his way in. Once Vic got settled in, we finished the rounds of coffee and smoked our pipes. It was a beautiful day with the temperatures probably in the 20s. The sun sure felt nice so we decided to get out of the lodge and get some fresh air. That fresh untracked snow was calling to us. We strapped on our snowshoes and headed for a trip to explore the surroundings, while taking turns breaking trail. Bill and I were experimenting with some simple bindings, his were of ticking, and mine were of 1/2" wide brain tanned elk strips about 6' long. Overall we were both pleased with the way the bindings worked.

Another thing that I was experimenting with this trip was wrapping blanket scraps around my bare feet inside my side seam moccasins. This worked out very well, and while I was snowshoeing my feet were very comfortable.

After heading back we got the fire going again and put some fresh buffalo tongues I had brought into a pot to start simmering for dinner. While they were cooking we sat around and listened to stories from Vic's past adventures. Tom cast some round balls and I laid back and took a bit of a rest.

Eventually the tongues were cooked so I peeled off the skin and cut it up. I put it back in the pot with some onion and pepper for just a little bit more. I poured some of the broth into the stew from the day before and heated that up. The tongue came out great and we enjoyed a good dinner.



Our snowshoe trail

Again we spent the night with a bottle of shrub around the fire and playing cards before we drifted off. Come morning we spent some time around the fire and drank some coffee. Vic packed up shortly after, and I packed up while Tom and Bill were off doing another snowshoe scout. When they got back we did a little bit of shooting and then started taking down the lodge and packing out.

Overall we had a great time at the camp. I had hoped to be able to get out and make some meat as well as do a couple of sewing projects, but I didn't get around to it. It was just nice being able to relax and spend time with my brothers. I'm ready for another one!



Tom Karnuta sitting near the camp fire



Bill Gantic relaxing around the fire



Bill Gantic and Vic Barkin enjoying coffee and a pipe

Bradley C Bailey
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