

d'AUTREMONT - HELMS & ASSOCIATES
CONSULTING MECHANICAL ENGINEERS6311 NO. FIGUEROA STREET, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90042
(213) 255-7121Hugh d'Autremont
Loyd J. Helms
Richard L. Orcutt

18 Aug 69

Bernice & Jack McGee
4612 Merida
Fort Worth, Texas 76115

Hi Podners!

It disturbs me no end to read in the attached news clipping that Landsverk has written a book on Vikings in Oklahoma. I first became familiar with the Poleau and Heavener rune stones through your letters. Isn't he the fellow you sent your stuff to for translation? Isn't this all your idea and your story? If you want him assassinated I can get it done cheap - merely hire some jughead from skid row! Lots of other murders going on nowadays so we may as well get in on the act.

Big days are approaching in the d'Autremont family! Bill is due home from Vietnam almost any day between Aug 25 and Sept 5 for a 30-day leave before leaving for Ft. Bragg to complete his enlistment as an instructor. We plan to do some trout fishing in southern Oregon on which I'll give you a report.

By then you should be back from Colorado. It's hard for me to conceive of you're going on a mere vacation! Surely you have some companion (ulterior? alternate?) mission in mind such as digging up the bones of various fur trappers planted around Bent's Fort? Or perhaps you hope the Vikings got that far inland. If so, some Pawnee may have ran their fannys all the way into the Rockies.

I would like to borrow Ally Oop's time machine and go back to the year 1122 - with a sub-machine gun. With a dozen women along I could rewrite history as by the year 1800 my descendents would have established their own state. If I find the time machine, I'll advertise for volunteers.

Was interested in your author friend Kildare who's ingredient of success is 'work'. He is so right, except that it also requires enthusiasm which is a hit-or-miss proposition. The heat of summer has slowed me up as an example. However, within the next few days I should have 'Fringe of War' pretty well tied together and sent to my agent for what it is worth. The more I think about it, particularly as regards the lousy book market, it strikes me that the material I write is either 20 years too late or 20 years too soon. Nobody reads much any more it seems - too much TV.

Back to your Vikings. Your original idea of Vikings coming down the Wabash River from Lake Erie makes more sense to me than rounding Florida. It is only natural that these adventurous people wanted to explore the continent. Were I in their shoes I would go west. This means to take the first large tributary from the west when dropping down the Ohio-Mississippi. This is the Arkansas River which leads into Colorado. Once there, a herd of buffalo would run over me so that I fail to survive and can't write the story.

Be seein' you,

HUGH *Hugh*

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19 Aug 69

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Podners,

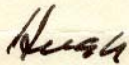
Attached are pages from a narrative by Nelson Lee, ex-Texas Ranger, titled 'Three Years Among the Comanches.' This book, first published in 1859, has been out of print until 1957 (Univ. Oklahoma Press). Briefly, the story is of his life including his 3 years captivity by Indians (1855-58).

Just happened to be reading it again and if I had not been alerted by you to Vikings in Oklahoma and Colorado I again would not have been impressed by what I read in the pages attached.

What has happened to these old ruins? Have they been destroyed by settlers? Is it possible they were built by Pueblo Indians? on the east flank of the Rockies? The Comanche legend Lee reported might have some basis in fact. It makes sense that a Viking would seem 10 feet tall to an Indian.

Odd how after writing to you on this subject yesterday I ran across these passages last night.

See ya,



HUGH

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28 Oct 69

Sgt. William A. d'Autremont
554 76 4434
HHC 6th Special Forces Group, Airborne
1st. Special Forces
Fort Bragg, North Carolina 28307

Dear Bill,

Your letter of 16 Oct 69 seems to confirm what I have suspected all along, that you are a confirmed traveler with consuming interest in places, events and people. Amen to all of it! I also gather that you have decided to hold your enlistment to a minimum and am glad that you have done so. In the meantime, we are still working on your auto registration and insurance.

To bring you up to date is part of the fun of pursuing my hobby, a hobby likely to be dead as a dodo-bird in forthcoming generations. Big game hunting in the future will likely decrease directly-proportional to the exploding world population. How often I have yearned for the lion hunt in Africa or the tiger in India, now already practically unknown without the expenditure of thousands of dollars. In the meantime I am happy to settle for elk and deer, certainly more edible than a lion!

I must reconstruct recent events from memory. These events were somewhat unusual as regards my normal hunting experiences and, as it is probable you will become a deer hunter in your own time, they may prove a source of education or afford you a feel for the chase, so I begin:

14 Oct 69 (Tues)

Our 10-man group left for Colorado after sundown in 4 vehicles. My driving party consisted of Russ Blumfield, Karl Whitman and Nick Havolich, all in Russ's camper which towed his jeep, which jeep I was the only man to handle in the days to come. Russ is the oldest of our entire party (60 years) and is effected with a heart problem but can't stay away! Karl is a WW II Naval Flier and Nick is a WW II Paratrooper, 11th Airborne Division, which landed at Leyte.

15 Oct 69 (Wed)

We traded driving chores all night with the 2 odd men sleeping in the camper, passing through Kingman, Arizona, and the painted desert. As luck finally had it, the weather was clear for photos in Monument Valley. Other times I have passed through there, it was either nightfall or was raining. Once in Colorado, we drove north to Gunnison from Durango and met the balance of the party at a motel. Our party is a mixture from all walks of life, each with contributing capabilities toward making a practical camp although about 3 are not real hunters.

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William A. d'Autremont

16 Oct (Thurs)

We awoke to snow on the ground. This was a heavy storm and boded well for the days ahead as snow drives game from the higher elevations and tends to concentrate them in lower and more accessible draws.

Our plan was to set up camp at last year's site near Fossil Ridge about 20 miles north of Gunnison. Driving up the separating ridge the snow grew deeper forcing us to apply chains and me to lead in the jeep, towing the 2-wheel drive vehicles through steep trouble spots. The camper finally had to be abandoned. Once on the ridge we found the snow 36" deep, too deep to muck a trail down the north side to Beaver Creek which forced us to set up camp on the summit.

Creating a camp in 3 feet of snow required not only shoveling but dragging a board with the jeep to clear the snow down to ground level so as to lay plastic, then rugs, then our 60 foot long sleeping tent known as the "Bowling Alley". Next came the Army squad tent used as the cook tent. We had 3 warming stoves, 2 for the Bowling Alley. Cook stoves were butane gas. Our newest innovation was a butane shower which now seemed ridiculous in the freezing weather. We built an outhouse, toilet seat on a bench, surrounded with tarps. I then attempted to break a road through to Beaver Creek but after half a mile I almost trapped the jeep. Not being able to turn around I backed out the entire distance.

17 Oct (Fri)

Last day to locate game! Nick and I scouted our old area on the slopes of Fossil Ridge. I didn't expect to find sign in this area and didn't - just wanted to be sure. Three other groups were supposed to check other areas but failed to do so for various reasons. This was to prove nearly disastrous but as events were to prove, we lucked out anyway.

In the meantime, our ridge was now packed with other hunting parties, all with problems such as stuck vehicles and broken axles. The snow had no crust as yet which made walking difficult. My pant legs were wired over my boots to keep the snow from slipping in the tops. I was arctic equipped.

Due to the chance of the drawing, our party had 9 cow elk tags, 1 bull elk tag and 2 deer tags, all of which would have bearing on our hunting. Most people would have been overjoyed to have cow tags in lieu of bull tags but what I wanted was a bull.

18 Oct (Sat)

Opening Day! Pure enthusiasm dimmed the agony of crawling out of the sack into sub-freezing darkness. Russ, Jim Tinker (a 40-year old Texan) and Warren Stewart (Ex-Army from Leyte) left with me in the jeep before dawn. Our intent was to hunt the lower elevations as the upper levels would be hunted by other parties who might push the game down, theoretically, that is. Actually, I wanted to hunt high but Russ asked me to go with him.

I drove jeep trails on the Gunnison side of the ridge, all sagebrush between the timbered draws which was actually deer country. We were the first in the area and at late dawn I stopped on the flank of a deep canyon. Leaving the jeep we scattered to scope the area with me on the downhill side.

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Suddenly I scoped several deer at 1,000 yards, a couple of them big curious bucks. No elk in sight but at least I had found deer. I shouted to Jim to follow me with the jeep and took off. Enroute I was surprised to find my party were not following and learned later they had discovered their own deer herd.

Making my approach, the herd seemed to have disappeared - undoubtedly they had seen me approach as I had no cover. One buck trotted across and I sighted on him at 100 yards but my breath was so heavy I couldn't hold the cross-hairs steady, even when kneeling, so didn't fire. The idea was to get a sure shot if I was to spook the whole area.

In the meantime, I heard countless shots from hunters high on the ridge. It sounded like a Jap fire-fight, the volume of which was surprising. I feared it would spook my deer herd and actually did so.

Crossing a fence in disgust I wandered out to a high point between two draws. I was thinking about last year's hunt when we got only 3 elk, no deer and I had not even fired a shot! Suddenly I saw 2 deer on the opposite timbered draw, prancing about undecided. Laying prone, I was quite steady. I estimated 400 yards and fired. Nothing happened. Now up to 500 yards (cross-hairs almost 30" above the buck's back) then fired again. 'Plop' came the sound of the striking bullet and the 3-point buck was down. Using the same sight pattern I switched to the doe and had her down in one shot. Meat for sure!

The canyon was so steep I had difficulty crossing it. Approaching the buck I found it still alive and at each movement slid further down the steep hill. Cutting his jugular vein I was relieved to see him die.

After cleaning him out I approached the doe to find her also still alive, both shot rather high behind the shoulder. After cutting her jugular I watched her give up life, at least her head lost its blood. In gutting her, I found her heart still beating in my hand. This was a new experience to me and I had the unnerving sensation of imagining myself in the shoes of an ancient Aztec Priest at his human sacrifices.

Back on the rim, I saw the jeep on the hill at about 2 miles. I marked the fence post with my red streamer so as to find the place again then hiked through snow toward the jeep while figuring a way to get our 4-wheel drive Toyota in to the fence.

The jeep was absent and I waited while snow fell. Russ was soon back - Jim had a big buck down in the opposite draw. A long drive around the hill over sagebrush - A steep hike down to the buck, then to study it. 4 points - over 250 lbs! How to get it out? Russ was no help with his heart trouble and Warren had a badly sprained foot which left Jim and myself. I cut it in half while Jim hid his rifle for some reason in a Juniper about 30 yards away. My rifle was in the jeep. Suddenly another huge buck walked by at 70 yards following 2 does. I raced for Jim's rifle but by the time I leveled on the buck I could see only his rump disappearing in trees.

Jim and I were exhausted by the time we dragged the front quarters to the incline at the last hill, too steep for us to drag it up. Russ jeeped out to find the Toyota while Jim and I returned for the hindquarters which we cut into hams, each dragging out a leg. Nothing to do now but wait on the hill.

"Deer" exclaimed Jim. "One big buck with four does!"

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They stood browsing at 600 yards. Through Jim's scope I could see only does but was assured that the buck had fed over the side of a rise. They had seen us but seemed unconcerned. I waited till their heads were down then crept out of their sight down a draw.

At 300 yards I scoped again but could see no buck. They then moved out. To shorten the story I eventually caught up at 200 yards but never did see a buck so abandoned the chase.

Back on the hill, I found that the Toyota had winched up the buck. Jerry Laskey (the Polack) Doc Billings (also has heart problems) and Lee Whitehead (another ex-Navy Flier) were the new arrivals. We 4 left to recover my 2 deer and, after spending half an hour hunting a draw for a presumed cow elk, arrived at my fence post in approaching darkness.

The Toyota winch had 200 feet of cable. To this we attached 2 ropes, each 200 feet. We needed all of 600 feet to get down to my deer where the magpies had eaten the livers and hearts. I should have buried them in snow. It was with great pleasure that I watched the winch do all the work but it was dark before the carcasses were in the truck.

With 3 in the cab I stood in the back guiding Jerry back over our trail. As ill luck ordained, Jerry dropped his right wheels into slushy ground while gearing up a gradual incline and instead of backing out he grammawed ahead. We became hopelessly bogged. Our equipment consisted of one shovel and no flashlight. It rained sleet as we struggled through various stratagems while things went from worse to hopeless. We were stuck for the night 10 miles from camp.

Syphoning gas we burned enough wet sagebrush to get a small cook fire going, drying other sage from its heat. I sliced venison steaks from a flank and roasted it over a meek fire using a stick for a fork. The meat spent most of its cooking time in ashes which actually resulted in a rather pleasant flavor.

How can 4 men sleep in a cab? The answer, with my arctics, was for me to sleep in the back of the Toyota under a leaky tarp which shed some of the rain. Wow! My aching back! Worse, I shivered all night due to wet clothing. Every hour, Jerry started the engine to warm up the cab which did me no service in the back.

19 Oct (Sun)

The jeep arrived soon after sunup - Jim and Warren. After convincing them we had another way out, they risked dropping down the hill and soon towed us free.

Enroute to camp I saw the results of the firing on the ridge from the day before. It seemed that everybody in the camps had an elk but us! We now heard the story: The Colorado boys had scouted the area by airplane and knew exactly where the elk herd was located. On opening day they surrounded the area and made a real fine kill, about 70 animals. The remnants of the 300 animal herd were now scattered which meant back to the old tough grind of leg hunting singles in the days to come. I hunted the balance of Sunday and saw nothing but red hats and day-old sign.

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William A. d'Autremont

20 Oct (Mon)

I cruised all day following sign but found no animals. The less discussed regarding this bone weary expedition will ease my disappointments and frustrations.

21 Oct (Tues)

We now rationalized that a few of the elk may have returned to the draw of the "big kill", possibly even the lower portion. I figured to bird dog the bottom and kick something up which my buddies could pick off from the rim. Elk prefer deep timber, in this area found on the south slopes. Quakies are in the bottoms and sagebrush covers the north slopes.

The draw was a half mile wide and 500 feet deep. Dropping down the south slope I crossed to the north slope where the sun had melted some of the snow allowing me to walk quieter. I stirred no elk but did get surprised by several bounding does. For a better field of sight I climbed about 150 feet and stopped to scan. On the south slope at 500 yards I saw what was either a deer or a rock. Through the scope it proved to be a huge buck standing alert, afraid to move for fear I would spot him. Laying prone I sighted 30" above his shoulders and fired. He moved a few feet and stopped. Later I was to learn this shot had broken his lower shoulder but at the time I thought it was a miss. Another shot and he didn't move. On my 3rd shot he disappeared. The 2nd shot had passed through him and the 3rd shot knocked him down but I didn't know it at the time.

Carefully I approached the area while other deer arose from their beds to flee. I watched for my big buck to move out but saw nothing approaching his size. At 50 yards I saw horns and was satisfied he was down. This proved to be a big buck, over 250 pounds with 5 points counting the eye guard. This time I buried the liver in snow.

Back at the Toyota I rested with the others while chewing chocolate bars.

"My God! Look at the elk!" shouted Warren.

Four elk raced in single file along a sagebrush ridge at 250 yards, seemingly all cows. My buddies dropped to their knees and began firing. I raced to the jeep cab for my rifle and avoided passing over the firing line. Once in action I found the elk still running and assumed my buddies were missing. I had 3 shots in the chamber having failed to reload after shooting my buck. I figured the others were shooting at the big stuff so triggered at a calf (a bull) and saw it go down. I had barely time to throw a slug at a big cow just as she went over the hill so don't know if it hit.

Soon at the crest we found 3 elk down which surprised me as mine was the only one I had seen fall. The biggest cow must have weighed over 600 pounds.

Cleaning out elk is no minor chore. From the size of their stomachs they must be the gourmets of the animal kingdom.

Unknown to us, other hunters were jeeping their way on the opposite side of the crest when we began our firing. Our barrage was such that they stopped the jeep and

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crawled under. They were somewhat maddy when they arrived to watch us gut out.

Within a few hours, we had everything loaded in the Toyota: 3 elk from the crest, 1 elk killed while I was bird dogging as well as my buck. Suddenly came carburetor trouble which Rod Kerstan practically rebuilt on the spot.

Back in camp, we proudly hung our meat, sort of catching up with our neighbors. I had to bury my buck in snow for the time being as we were out of deer tags. Hiding it was damaging to my ego.

22 Oct (Wed)

The morning was spent retrieving an elk Jim shot near 'Old Camp' the day before. The snow had melted enough to allow me to force a road through but had to use our power saw to clear a huge fir which had fallen across the jeep trail. Deep snow stopped us half a mile from the elk. The work now began in earnest. We halved the elk and rope-hauled each half to within winch distance of the Toyota, a demanding task.

That afternoon I purchased a buck license in Gunnison, \$50 to non-resident hunters. Roads proved to be a boggy quagmire with 2-wheel vehicles stuck everywhere which I towed out of trouble. I now looked horrible being bearded, torn and dirty.

23 Oct (Thurs)

Last day of hunt - no shots- few hunters - explored jeep trails all day long. Skinned our last elk and my big buck.

24 Oct (Fri)

Broke camp - slept in motel at Grand Junction. Home through Utah and Las Vegas.

25 Oct (Sat)

Passing near St. George, Utah, I finally picked up a football game on the radio. It happened to be Azusa-Pacific vs So. Utah (21-35), the same Pacific College which once helped sponsor Troop 335. Didn't even know they had a football team. We drove right by the stadium while they were playing.

26 Oct (Sun)

Home at 1:30 AM. In summary, our party had 10 animals, 6 of them elk. The elk amounts to about 2,400 net pounds of edible meat divided 10 ways. To this add my first 2 deer. Jim and I each get to keep our big bucks as we purchased the tags ourselves. I expect to have game meat in the locker for quite awhile.

Love from all,

Dad

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30 Jun 70

Bernice & Jack McGee
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Fort Worth, Texas 76115

Hi-yall!

Yes, am still speaking. Didn't really think you had given up as I recall from the past you are usually so busy I wonder if you don't sleep with your clothes on, or if not that bad spend your home hours in pajamas.

In any case, always you make up with facinating letters, damnably downright educational, such as all of these coin collectors loosing small change leading to pre-Christ invasions of the U.S. from the Mediterranean! If you prove that one we'll have to re-write a billion text books.

Regarding "Three Years Among the Commanches", I hope you find this book (if not I'll loan it to you) as it is very informative. The first half concerns the Texas-Mexican squabbles, very detailed and historical, at which time Nelson Lee was a ranger.

In 1855 he organized a group of 18 men near Matamoros with the intent of driving cattle to California. Following the grass, by April arrived 350 miles north of Eagle Pass. Here they were massacred other than four taken prisoner. Three were eventually tortured to death at a Commanche village on the upper Rio Grande in Northern New Mexico. Lee proved himself on speaking terms with the Great Spirit thanks to an "Alarm Watch" which only he could operate to rattle and bounce on the ground as even my own. As a result he spent the next 3 years as a Commanche slave.

Being no states at the time and Lee being in unfamiliar country with unnamed rivers I can only trace his wanderings with a topographical map while reading his description of terrain, usually mountains heading plains to the east and south. They had to be east of the Sangra De Cristo Mountains in Northern N.M. or Southern Colorado, more likely N.M. from which they could hunt the Staked Plains for buffalo, say out of modern Raton. It was somewhere in this vicinity he saw the ancient city.

Lee escaped by tomahawking Rolling Thunder who knelt at a spring then traveled horse-back southwesterly following mountains for concealment to be rescued by a Mexican north of the Rio Grande. From here he went to Cuba then returned to New York, the state of his birth. You oughta read this fantastic adventure.

Best I can do.

Se ya,



HUGH d'AUTREMONT

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28 Jun 71

Bernice & Jack McGee
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Fort Worth, Texas 76115

Dear Bernice,

I appreciate your kind words in your last letter, which letter, incidentally, was such a comprehensive report on your activities and the Chaco culture we had to read it three times!

In my abysmal ignorance I was not even aware such a culture existed! Frankly, I am excited over the whole affair and will take time to get over there - given any kind of opportunity. Imagine! A culture possibly equal to Toltec right here in the good ol' U.S. - and very little data available to the public.

Amazing how these early cultures die away - or perhaps move away. My personal belief (hardly my own theory) is their salinization problem, a common problem to engineers. A few years ago, Mexico was rasing hell with Uncle Sam regarding the high salinity of their share of Colorado River water. Corn and cotton simply refused to grow any longer on the irrigated border stretches of Sonora and Baja California. The answer, of course, is sub-irrigation, a very expensive approach to the problem but it is a permanent solution.

Assuming you are not familiar with the problems of salinity, I'll explain how it is handled above the border, say at Blyth. Drains are laid 10 to 15 feet below the surface to collect all irrigation water seeping downward, which is then piped back to the river - the purpose being not to allow salts to collect in the soil. This flushing action of the soil naturally increases the percentages of salts and alkalinity in the river below as we now have the same amounts of minerals but less water to carry it, due to loss in evaporation and the transpiration effect (moisture lost to air) of plants in irrigated fields. So, unless Mexico sub-irrigates as we do, the first few inches of irrigated soil becomes heavy in salts.

The Chaco culture probably had the same problem. Early Indian culture on the Salt River near Phoenix left evidence of miles of canals - probably extended to stay ahead of the salt problem until running out of gradient. After that, the culture disappeared. Recently, tens of thousands of acres along the Salt River were abandoned by Whites who failed to understand solar effects where using minimum water, (heat dissolves carbon dioxide gas minimizing its breakup and dissolving effect with salts) so that the ground surface becomes saline, something like the lime deposited in a boiling tea kettle.

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Bernice & Jack McGee

Some rivers have much more salinity than others. Rivers with tributaries tapping ancient salt beds from primeval seas (The Bad Lands, Gila Mountains, etc.) naturally have a higher salinity content than Mid-western or eastern rivers. Heavy rainfall also helps flush the soil.

Rivers such as the Nile overcome the problem by flooding yearly and depositing fresh soil. The new Nile Dam (AKWA?) means nothing but trouble in the future unless Nile river banks are sub-irrigated.


People depreciate modern Iraq (Persia) for not attaining the extensive irrigation system utilized in ancient times. Ye Gods! The soils are still full of salts from ancient irrigation and the dams on the Euphrates and Mesopotamian Rivers do not allow soil replenishment.

Anyway, I think this is why the Chaco culture disappeared. Extermination through warfare or disease has only a short range effect as another culture will take its place if food can be grown in the vicinity. I doubt if climate could have changed much in the past 1,500 years so rainfall has limited bearing.

I hope you write an article on the Chaco culture and if so, perhaps these points are worth a paragraph to you. Which reminds me - how do you expect me to take 3 magazines in hopes I'll get to see one of your articles? When one is published, let me know so I can order the issue.

Meanwhile, you folks just keep on hondoing 'n writing. Adventuring means health and longivety - but be sure to write me about it! As for the 'Boy', honestly, I've been too busy lately to do much writing about that young feller. However, I'll eventually finish the job.

See ya,


HUGH

