

Tom 'Broken Hand' Fitzpatrick

Rendezvous was in full swing, and the 'fast young men' of the mountains were trying to out do each other in all manner of mad pranks. There was horse racing, wrestling, fine riding, shooting, hawk throwing, knife throwing, caber tossing and all the other manlier sports. But a gloom settled over the festivities because Tom Fitzpatrick, one of the Booshways had not been seen. He had left weeks earlier to go and look for the horse train that was late in coming to rendezvous. That same evening he turned up near the rendezvous camps. "The poor man was reduced to a skeleton and was almost senseless. Without horse or weapons, his feet bare and his clothing in shreds, he could not have lived many more days. A general rejoicing ensued. Revived after a meal of meat and corn, Tom told his story to an astonished audience.

Fitzpatrick had the misfortune to run into a group of Arapaho Indians blocking the trail. Quickly turning into the foothills of the Windriver Mountains, he galloped up steep slopes with the Indians in close pursuit. His spare horse fell behind, and the one he rode began to give out. The warriors, on foot, gained. Abandoning his mount, Fitzpatrick (Broken Hand), crawled under a rocky ledge and arranged brush and leaves to cover the entry. The Indians searched in vain, some nearby. At dusk they gave up and taking his two horses, returned to their camp. In the darkness, Fitzpatrick crept from his refuge and descended the mountain. Around a corner he strode and walked right into the Arapaho camp. Fortunately they did not see him because they were enjoying racing his two horses. Hastily backing out, he returned to his hiding place. The next day the warriors returned and took up their search, without success. They were really mad that they could not find this mountain man.

When nightfall came, Broken Hand again set forth on foot, this time taking a long route around the village and putting distance between himself and the Indians. Day after day he pushed on, living off of roots and berries; fearful that a rifle shot aimed at game would alert the enemy. Crossing one stream he slipped and lost his rifle and shot pouch. One night a wolf pack assailed him, and he escaped only by climbing a tree and remaining until daylight. Shreds of meat carved from a rotting buffalo he found on the trail, sustained him. He grew weaker and more haggard and expected every day to be his last. But physical toughness and enormous skill as a mountain man brought him though to a joyous welcome at the Pierre's Hole Rendezvous.

Thomas Fitzpatrick, the Booshway, ordeal was so difficult that it turned his black hair almost completely white overnight. From then on 'Broken Hand' Fitzpatrick was known as 'White Hair'.

