

HISTORICAL NOTES, 13 Dec. 1998 Published 12 Feb 1999

by Allen Osmundson

Not quite one half mile south, then 1 mile east, of the Ringsaker church and schoolhouse there is a round, conical hill with its highest elevation located in the very southwest corner of section 24, township 147, range 58 (Romness Twp., Griggs co., N.D.), having an elevation of 1400 feet above sea level, according to the topographical map I'm using.

The Sheyenne River makes a bend at that point that nearly touches the southwest base of that hill. The summit of this hill is very close to the corner that joins sections 23, 24, 25 and 26, as it appears on my map.

On the west base of this hill there were, at one time, three farms, the homes of three Olson families, all of them related. On the east slope of this hill lives Clifford Christopherson, also a relative of the Olsons. All the Olson farms are now unoccupied, tho a few buildings are still standing.

On very early maps of this region this hill is called "Horse Butte", but when I talked to Christopherson last week he said that the people who lived there had always called it Horse hill, so we will continue to call it that.

As is quite often the case it can be difficult, or almost impossible, to get all the facts pertaining to people of long ago, or about events that took place in the far distant past, but fortunately we have some info about Horse hill that was found for us, in this case Horse hill, by Major Dana Wright who lived at St. John, ND during his later years, and he then researched many areas of historic significance in ND, and who was here also. In his investigation of Horse hill he apparently had conversed with Anton Olson, who lived at the base of the hill, and told Wright that the hill was named circa 1835, and that in about 1853 a group of people descended from French trapper fathers and Indian mothers, the children being called Metis. These Metis warriors had grazed a herd of horses near the hill, and then a group of full-blood Indians had tried to stampede and run off these horses, so a battle had ensued, and as a result 28 people of both groups were killed, and are buried on the sloping hillside, so graves were visible many years later, when the settlers came here in about 1880.

An Indian boy, who was about fifteen years old, was along herding these horses when the battle occurred, and he was said to have related this event to Omund Nelson Opheim, the very first settler in Griggs County in 1879, I believe. Opheim had told of this event to Anton and Gilbert Olson, who then had told it to Major Wright.

I have learned more about Horse hill from my friend Louie Garcia of Tokio, ND. The French name for the hill is LA LOGE DE CHEVAUX, and the Sioux name being SUNKAWAKAN TIPI, which equals "horse dwelling". This butte is a Medicine butte, home of a giant spirit horse. He states also that the Metis/Indian battle took place there, and that there were 28 graves noted on the slope of the hill nearby. This info from WPA records collected in the 1930s and 40s by US government activity.

At this point this is all the info I have on Horse Butte.

## Historical Notes

Allen Osmundson

### About Butte Michaux

Butte Michaux is a well-known landmark in Griggs County, North Dakota, and was a point of reference for Indians, and early-day travelers, such as trappers, military expeditions and settlers. Early maps spell that name Michaux, NOT Michaud. No letter D on the end, just the X, but it is silent in French.

Butte Michaux is located eleven miles north of present-day Cooperstown, N.D., and its apex appearing to be in the SW 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of section 35-148-59, Pilot Mound Township, according to my 1993 topographical map, and my latest information declares its elevation to be 1586 feet above sea level.

Pilot Mound Township was apparently surveyed three different times, with the north and west boundaries surveyed in July, 1873, the south and east boundaries surveyed in August, 1875. Then the quarter section survey was done between 9 and 19 July, 1881, by Scott and Sturdevant surveyors, this info being entered at the Surveyor General's office at Yankton, Dakota Territory. That office was moved to Huron, Dakota Territory by December, 1883.

The 1873 and 1875 surveys were apparently done to establish the land grant rights granted to the Northern Pacific Railroad Co. But the 1881 survey was apparently done for the benefit of settlers who were already moving into that area.

That September, 1881, survey shows that there were already seven homesteaders in Pilot Mound Township, namely Nels Rukke in section 1, Rollef Johnson and Tore Olson in section 24, Elef Olson in section 26, Sever Johnson in section 25, and Isaac and Seth Mills in section 36. Ole Alfson settled in section 24 in the fall of 1881, after the survey.

The survey map is of interest to me since it shows that Isaac and Seth Mills, and Tore Olson had plowed land right across quarter section lines, thus indicating tht they had settled before that last survey had been made, or prior to September, 188, not knowing the boundaries for quarter sections.

I obtained the informatopn for all three above surveys from the U. S. Dept. of Interior at Billings, in Montana, in March, 1996.

I have an old Colton's map of Minnesota and what was then called Dakota Territory. That Dakota Territory then consisted of present-day North and South Dakota from the Red River west to the Missouri River. West of the Missouri River we see what was Nebraska Territory. Nebraska Territory boundaries were later changed, and it became a state in 1867.

I do not see the year of that map, but from Sioux Falls city all the way north to Pembina on the Canada boundary, I find only Sisseton Village and Breckenridge listed as habitations on that whole Minnesota-Dakota Territory border on the Red River. That map is an early one.

However, on this map we find Butte Michaux several miles east of Lake Jessie. Michaux ends with an X, NOT a D. Incidentally, on this map present Stump Lake is called Wamduska Lake, and Devils Lake is called Minnewakan Lake.

All the above leads us to the question -- How did Butte Michaux get its name?

In January, 1997, I wrote to the National Archives of Canada at Ottawa, to ask if they perhaps had any info on Butte Michaux or that Hudson's Bay Co. trading post reported to be located near the butte, and possibly some info on the Ottawa Indians.

Tho I have received helpful info from those archives in the past, their reply to me said they had no info on a man called Michaux, nor on a Hudson's Bay trading post, but they did send some info on the Ottawa Indians, that the tribe had headquartered-in the Lakes Huron and Michigan area in earlier times. One wonders how the Ottawa Church near Butte Michaux got its name. Perhaps someone can tell us that.

However, in February, 1998, I was reading the book about the Lewis and Clark expedition through the Louisiana Purchase titled "Undaunted Courage", by author Stephen E. Ambrose, and on page 70, I encountered the name ANDRE MICHAUX. I stopped reading immediately and wrote a letter to the author Ambrose at his winter home at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, to ask if he perhaps had more info on Michaux. But as yet, November, 1998, I have had no reply from Ambrose.

You see, that book tells us that President Thomas Jefferson had retained Andre Michaux to do some research/exploring of that northern mountain area. But President Jefferson consequently learned that the Frenchman Michaux might possibly be on a secret mission for France to investigate various aspects of that land area, so Jefferson fired him, and later sent Lewis and Clark.

But that same day, February 12, 1998, I also wrote a letter to the Hudson's Bay Co. Archives at Winnipeg, and in their reply stated that they were unable to locate a HBC trading post in the Cooperstown/Butte Michaux region . But though HBC had no trading posts in (North) Dakota south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as far west as the Rocky Mountains. (The above info from an exchange of letters between the North Dakota State Historical Society and Hudson's Bay Co. headquarters at Winnipeg and HBC Archives in London, dealing with the years 1801 thru 1823.)

So it would seem that if there was a trading post near Butte Michaux it was affiliated with either the North West Co., or perhaps the American Fur Co., or even the St. Louis, Missouri Co. Perhaps someone might have some further, definite info on a trading post near Butte Michaux. I have exhausted by sources.

During this past summer of 1998, I contacted my friend, John E. Bye, Archivist for the North Dakota State University at Fargo, asking if he had any info on Butte Michaux. He then sent me a page of info from the

collection of the very able Griggs County historian, Myrtle Porterville, which contained some info which contained some info that Major Dana Wright (who had done much research on early North Dakota history) had learned from an early Griggs County settler named John Fosholdt. Fosholdt had told Wright that an Indian half-blood had been lost near a very high hill, or butte, in the north part of present-day Griggs County, and when he was found there, the butte was given his name, Michaux. However, Wright quoted two other versions, one that the butte was named for an Indian chief, and the other that an Indian scout named Michaux was buried there. Quite conflicting versions really.

But nevertheless, the name Michaux, definitely a French name, is connected to that butte.

So one day this (1998) fall I was in the Griggs County Library and one of the librarians found a book for me that contained names, and brief histories, of world-wide prominent people, and there I found the name of Andre Michaux.

Briefly, he was born March 7, 1746, at Satory, France, and died November 13, 1802, at Tamatave, Madagascar.

He was a botanist, and among the countries he visited were England, Spain, Persia, also Madagascar, studying plants at the behest of the French government.

Then in 1785, the French government sent him to North America to collect plants/trees for the then depleted forest of Rambouillet, southwest of Paris.

During his stay in the United States, which lasted 12 years, until 1797, he stocked two French nurseries with plants he found in his travels in the Midwestern and southeastern U.S. states.

In 1800, he went to Madagascar, where he contracted a fever from which he died at age 56.

That brief history of Andre Michaux states nothing about a wife or children back in France. But he MAY have married, or lived with, an Indian woman during his sojourn in North America or at least fathered a boy who MAY, or may not, have been one of the Indians spoken of by John Fosholdt to Major Wright. OR was Andre Michaux actually in our area, thus naming the butte?

Surely Michaux must have kept a journal of his stay in Canada, Dakota Territory, or possibly Montana, and it could be very interesting to read that. If he did, can that journal be obtained?

Louis Garcia, my correspondent from Tokio, North Dakota, informed me that the Dakota Indians had a name for Butte Michaux, and it is Upizica Oti Paha, translated "The Hill where the Yellow Tailed Hawk lives." Garcia said the reason for this name is lot.

At this point I cannot think of more info about Butte Michaux. But I can look out our east kitchen window and clearly see the butte about four miles to the east of our home and remember that I have climbed to its summit a number of times during my 72 years, and seen surrounding towns in Nelson, Griggs and Steele Counties, and imagine some of the history that has swirled around this Griggs County landmark. Wouldn't it be exciting to see God's camcorder film of the events that have occurred around

Butte Michaux? And who knows, will there be future battles that will rage around the Butte? We need only look at the history of Europe and Asia or even at the Indian/Indian or Indian/US military history of the not-so-distant past.

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Another look at Butte Michaux.

I have received many comments, and also help, about more information on Butte Michaux.

On Feb. 26 I received a packet of info, and letter, from Dennis and Lorna (Vigesaa) Olson of Bismarck which contained sidelights about Andre Michaux concerning his travels here in USA and Canada, and about his return to France.

(Incidentally, Lorna's grandparents were Paul and Sophie Overby who lived on a farm near Binford. I knew them both, wonderful people, and both passed away. Walter Vigesaa is her father, and I know him, and I believe he lives in Arizona.) A h i c l R E

Yes, Dennis and Lorna supplied me with much about Andre Michaux, but the mystery remains; how did that butte get his name?

Briefly I will herein tell what I did learn about Michaux.

He was born March 7, 1746 on the farm that had been in his family for many generations near Versailles, Satory, France. His parents both died before he was 20 years old, leaving him to raise his brother and sisters.

He was married to Cecile Claye, a farm girl from Beauce, in 1769. She died eleven months later after giving birth to their son Francois Andre. He was in deep despair at her death, then turned his attention to the study of botany, and became an avid botanist/explorer.

Michaux had great ability at learning new languages, to the extent that he completed a French-Persian dictionary while in Persia for three years.

Botany was his chief interest however, so in October 1785 Michaux, and son Francois (then age 15) arrived at New York to search for suitable trees and plants which he could send back to France to rejuvenate its depleted forests.

He traveled to New Jersey, Penn., Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and other southeastern states on this mission. In 1789 son Francois returned to France.

Michaux returned to Philadelphia in 1792, and there it seems Thomas Jefferson approached him about investigating the recent Louisiana Purchase, and on to Oregon. But this expedition did not materialize, due to Jefferson's misgivings about Michaux's loyalties to the USA or France. The matter was dropped.

So in 1792 he botanized in Canada, among other places Hudson Bay and area. But on July 15, 1793 he left Philadelphia for his famous mid-western travels, (of which no area or Territory is directly mentioned other than upper-midwest in one source).

It would seem that it would be during that three-year period that the possibility of his name being attached to our Butte, either through his physical presence, or fathering another son, who MAY have contributed to the Butte's name.

In April 1796 he returned to Charleston, South Carolina, and we are told that he left for France in August 1796 on the ship Ophir, and three weeks later the ship encountered a violent storm which drove it onto the shore at Egmont, Holland, where it was battered to pieces by waves, Michaux was rescued unconscious by nearby townspeople.

It seems that most of the boxes and chests containing his plant specimens, bird skins, and his journal note books were salvaged.

So I am still "in the dark" as to exactly how our Butte got its name. Can we ever know? But we do occasionally read about an old manuscript being found that has very valuable information.

At any rate the name Butte Michaux appears on the old government map drawn by I.N. Stevens who had been appointed governor of Washington Territory, and made his way, with about fifty men, from Wahpeton in a northwesterly direction to Griggs county and Jessie Lake in 1853. The map was printed in 1855.

Again, I thank Dennis and Lorna Olson for their help.

Incidentally, a week ago I visited with Loren Haugen, formerly of Hannaford, but now teaching history in Hawaii. If I recall correctly he said he was teaching his students about the westward movement of prairie settlers, and found these Courier stories of interest.