Fremont and Nicollet went on their 1839 expedition for several reasons. At that time the sources of the Red River, Sheyenne River and James River had not been ascertained, and the government wanted to get a better idea of where they came from and whether the surrounding land was a desert or could be used for agriculture. One of their main goals was to determine the geographic location of Mini Wakan or Devil’s Lake. They also recorded the latitude, longitude and altitude of their journey along both the James and Sheyenne to help give everyone who followed much better maps of the new area.

Nicollet used a sextant to determine the latitude, a chronometer to determine the longitude and a barometer to determine the altitude. He was very meticulous and his readings have all turned out to be remarkably accurate. One major outcome is that he discovered that the area between the James River and Sheyenne Rivers was much larger than had been previously thought. Part of the reason for it was that the source of the Mississippi River had been mistakenly shown as three quarters of a degree too far to the west, and it simply didn’t leave room for all the land he explored in 1839 until it was corrected.

On July 24, 1839 they camped near where a small creek emptied into the Sheyenne River. The creek was called *la rivière aux premieres buttes pelées*. We know it today as Bald Hill Creek. He said it got its name from "one hill slashed by a vertical cliff without vegetation which is on the right bank of the Sheyenne near the junction of this river."

 Nicollet was not a geologist but he gave an excellent description of these Bald Hills saying "These bald hills are made by cutting through the plateau that is about 150 feet above the bed of the river. The base of this land is bituminous clay belonging at the top of the last stage of the great formation I have described along the Missouri. Here the bald hills are remarkable. They resemble Indian mounds made by the hand of man. There are seven or eight of them, round and conical, lining the slope of the plateau along the river, their bases at various heights above the river. One cannot mistake their origin. The rolled granite rocks of the vast ancient deposit which covers the Northwest and which is everywhere around these buttes lining the valley down to the river spring from the deposit which is superimposed on all of the sedimentary formations in these regions of the Northwest.

Part 1 of 2

Last week we gave Nicollet's excellent description of the Bald Hills. Fremont also could be very descriptive and his notes said "In our journey along this river, mosquitoes had infested the camp in such swarms and such pertinacity that the animals would quit feeding and come up to the fires to shelter themselves in the smoke. So virulent were they that to eat in any quiet was impossible, and we found it necessary to use the long green veils, which to this end had been recommended to us by the fur traders. Tied around our straw hats the brims kept the veils from our faces, making a space within which the plates could be held, and behind these screens we contrived to eat without having the food uncomfortably flavored by *mosquito sauce piquante*."

Nicollet's notes say that the Bald Hill flows from a "big salt lake". A lot of historians think this was in reference to the unnamed two mile long lake or slough in Bartley Township, but the Bald Hill Creek also has tributaries stemming from the general area of Red Willow Lake, Lake Sibley and Lake Juanita so it could have referred to other lakes or sloughs.

Their next camp was at a series of lakes that the Sioux called *Lake of the Woods* in their language for the remarkable number of trees. The French translated the Indian name to *Chan Mde – Lac Des Bois*. Fremont gave the middle lake the name of Lake Jessie for his fiancé. Twenty four years later Fisk would give the southern lake the name of Lake Addie to honor his wife and the northern one became known as Long Lake.

They also refer to a second *Lake of the Woods* that they called *Chan Mde Nompa*. Today we call it Plum Lake, a few miles from Long Lake.

Part 2 of 2