

4 Oct. '86

Dear Bob Michelson--

Your letter remarkably arrived on a day when I was writing a scene set on the Two Medicine River, a shearing time on the ridgeline north of the highway bridge; I'm at work now on a homesteader novel, about the grandparents of my narrator in "English Creek," in the period 1889-1919. So I was at least doubly pleased to ~~know~~ hear that my version of the Two Medicine country sounded okay to you.

In my writing, trying to recreate a time and place, I can always stand to know anything I can get my hands from other people's experiences and remembered details. If you can manage to and wouldn't mind, Bob, I wonder if you could provide me more information about a few of the things in your letter that particularly fascin~~ate~~ me:

--the buffalo skulls, skeletons, obsidian arrowheads etc.: did you find those simply along the banks of the Two Medicine, or at what might have been old buffalo wallows, or what? If I ever have a character make such a find, where--that is, what kind of country, riverbank or under an old buffalo jump or out on a plain or under a cutbank, or what--do you think I ought to have him do it?

--The Slippery Teat Saloon is a new one on me. Where was it, how'd it come by that name? Do you remember who ran it? Got any memories or stories about the place?

--Finally, this book I'm writing now will go through the hard winter of 1919. Do you have any lore or stories, out of your own family or the oldtimers you knew, about that big winter? I'm going to have something, for example, about the terrible North Dakota slew hay that was brought in at terrific prices. Anything like that, about how people tried to cope with that winter, how tough the winter was, would help a lot.

Needless to say, I was glad to hear from you. I hope you're thriving.

best regards

ROBERT L. MICHELSON

6075 Lincoln Drive - Suite 110

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Sunday, September 14, 1986

Mr Ivan Doig, Author, "English Creek"
c/o Atheneum Publishing Company
115 5th Ave.
New York, New York 10003

Dear Mr Doig:

I hope this reaches you by way of the Atheneum Company.

I want to tell you how much I have enjoyed reading your books, "This House of Sky", and "English Creek". I especially enjoyed "English Creek" because I grew up on the Two Medicine creek during the 1930's and know that country well. Our place was on the south fork of the Two Medicine tucked between the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and The Lewis & Clark national forest. There was a narrow strip of land between the two which was homesteaded by two or three families in the early 1900s.

I vividly remember the burned timber left by the fire of 1910 and hearing about that fire over and over again. It is amazing how that forest has grown up again.

The episode you described which I enjoyed the most was the 4th of July rodeo. One of my fondest memories was going to a rodeo at Sweetgrass before prohibition was repealed. What a wild town. Or, so it seemed to me then about 14 years old. Your description of the boys hanging around the chutes is absolutely perfect.

I remember a cowboy by the name of Ira Minike. He was a very large man and had a ranch on the Milk River. Ira was an excellent calf roper and always won first place. Ira had a buffalo skin overcoat which I admired. It was a very large garment. Poor Ira was shot and killed by a jealous husband. Ira was unmarried. His funeral in Browning was the largest ever. They led his sorrel horse with the boots in the stirrups behind the hearse. Very sad.

Another character was Osa St. Goddard. Osa was pronounced OSEY and St Goddard, SANK-A-DOOR. He lived on the Little Badger Creek. He was a French Canadian and told the most marvelous stories I ever heard. I believe that his son, Archie, is still living.

I remember a forest ranger who had a cabin on Big Badger Creek. He was the most profane man I ever met. Absolutely incredible. There were so many characters in that country that any one of them would be worth writing about. McGregor's son, Joe, for example. Tex and Ves Hughes and George Jennings. George shot most of the animals which were stuffed and mounted and were put in the big hotels in Glacier Park. His father had been a bishop in Wyoming and Owen Wister stayed in their house when he wrote "The Virginian". George's brother, Talbot, was a famous movie script writer who wrote "Mutiny on the Bounty" and many other important movies.

One summer I worked on a very large sheep ranch down near Great Falls. My job was to carry supplies out to the sheep herders by pack horse so your description of that brought back a flood of memories. I remember that they had 40 men putting up hay that summer and it was all done with horses. The ranch was so large

you could ride a horse ten miles in any direction from the main house and never leave the ranch. It was owned by a family by the name of Hibbard from Helena.

How well I ^{am} rember using Prince Albert tobacco cans for putting grasshoppers in for ~~fish~~ⁱⁿg bait just as you described.

Lastly, I should mention The Slippery Teat Saloon. Wow! What a ~~place~~.

I'm sorry that my typing leaves something to be desired. I hope that you have been able to decipher it.

Thank~~y~~ you Mr Doig for writing so well about the country I knew so well so many years ago.

Sincerely,

Bob Michelson

P.S. One thing I forgot to mention above was the way we used to find buffalo skulls and arrow heads. We even found a complete buffalo skeleton one~~time~~. We had literally dozens of buffalo skulls around the place that we found. I ^{am} rember pitching horseshoes one day and the shoe hitting a beautiful obsideon arrow head. I ^{am} rember sitting beside a small creek one day and kicking the dirt with my boot heel and uncovering a buffalo skull,

ROBERT L. MICHELSON

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Thursday, October 9, 1986

Dear Mr Doig,

Thank you for your fast response to my letter. I am delighted that you received it since it had to be forwarded from New York.

The buffalo skulls, arrowheads, etc. that we found, were found mostly along Hard Trigger Creek which flows into the South Fork of the Two Medicine River. Hard Trigger Creek is the first creek flowing into the river after the flats (prairie) end and the hills and forests begin. Running parallel to Hard Trigger Creek and also emptying into the Two Medicine are Mettler Coulee, Hyde Creek and Box Creek. The obsidian arrowhead that I remember most we found one time when we were pitching horseshoes. One of the shoes struck something in the depression around the stake. The nearly complete buffalo skeleton we found was in a small depression which I suppose must have been a wallow. I remember one buffalo skull I found when I was sitting along a creek bank and kicked the dirt away with my boot heel and discovered the skull.

The Slippery Teat Saloon was a very small beer joint on highway 2 about 3 or 4 miles west of East Glacier Park. I doubt if it is still there. There was another bar near there but I cannot remember its name. The Bar DN ranch was near there as was the forest ranger's house. I was there with a friend in September 1939 when World War 2 began. The friend was later killed in Africa. The saloon had a marvelous piano player who's name I cannot remember but he was good, also an alcoholic.

The winter of 1919 was ahead of my time. I do remember hearing about a bad winter which well could have been in 1919 when the wind blew the tin roofs of the Great Northern Railroad box cars and people around there collected the tin sheets and used them for roofs on their barns. Also one winter a box car got blown off the tracks. It was filled with canned salmon. People around there gathered up the salmon and used it for baiting traps as well as for their own use. I mentioned George Jennings to you in my first letter. George kept meticulous diaries. They date from the late 1890's to the 1950's. He always kept track of the weather in his diaries. I have no idea what has become of those diaries but if you could get your hands on them they would surely furnish you with a lot of information including about the winter of 1919. George had a sister-in-law, Betsy Jennings, who was postmistress in East Glacier for a while around 1950. Betsy had a nephew or some relation who might possibly still live out there. I have an idea that he might have those diaries. Unfortunately, I do not know his name. It was not Jennings. I am quite sure Betsy died some time ago. Maybe there is someone in East Glacier who would know about the Jennings although I do not know who that might be. Maybe somebody in the post office.

One time a fellow by the name of Johnnie Parent, an indian, and I were looking for stray horses on the ridgeline north of the highway bridge. We came upon a large band of sheep. Johnnie and I started roping the sheep just for the hell of it. Dumb. Anyway the sheepherder, of course, took a dim view of what we were doing and shot at us with his rifle. Fortunately he was quite a long ways away from us or else he was a lousy shot and we did not get hit. We did get out of there in a hurry. I remember that it was a bright sunny day and the herder was wearing a large yellow slicker which we thought was funny.

I wish I could be more helpful. It has been so long since I've been out there that I've lost track of people who might be more helpful. The only person I can think of other than Betsy Jennings' nephew is Archie St. Goddard whom I believe is still living at Little Badger near Browning.

Mrs. Michelson and I are looking forward to reading more of your books. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Bob Michelson

20 Oct. '86

Dear Bob--Your letter was a great help; thanks so much for taking time to put all that Two Medicine lore down for me. I'll digest it, and may be get back to you if I find anything more that I'm long ignorant on--but for now, my real appreciation.

best wishes