



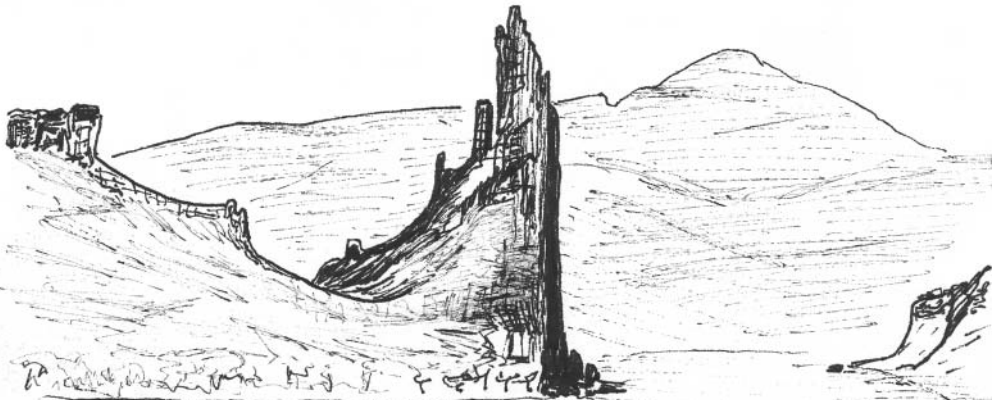
Colin Simms – poet, naturalist, and lifelong independent observer – was born in 1939, and lives as an author and freelance naturalist in the North of England, with journeys throughout the northern hemisphere, wherever his objectives live – his homes have been where the martens, otters, birds of prey and other enthusiasms are. He is not an orthodox conservationist, but insists on the privacy, ‘isness’, for wildlife which modern trends deny. He also demonstrates the poet-naturalist’s concern for precise observation, apposite language and cadence. North American wildlife and the Native American tribes, and their history, have been a life-long fascination of his; this volume brings together all of his long poems, and a large number of shorter poems on these themes.

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The American Poems

COLIN SIMMS



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Carcajou in Eyes Own Ideas (Pig Press, Durham, 1987)

Missouri River-Songs (Genera Editions, 1980)

A Celebration of the Stones in a Watercourse (Galloping Dog Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1981)

Parflèche (Galloping Dog Press, Swansea, 1977)

Rushmore Inhabitation (Blue Cloud Quarterly chapbook n° 2, Marvin, S. Dakota, 1976)

The Compression of the Bones of Crazy Horse (*Poetry Review*, Vol. 67: 1 & 2, 1977)

Some of the shorter poems printed here first appeared in the following: *Blue Cloud Quarterly*, *Limestone*, *London Review of Books*, *New Hope International*, *Planet Drum Review*, *Poetry North-East*, *Poetry Review*, *Quickenings*, *Spectacular Diseases*; *SubVoicive Poetry*, *Adders & Other Worms* (Headland Poetry Publications, Sheffield, 1972); *Bear Skull* (2nd edition, North York Poetry, York, 1974); *The Other Poetry Book* (ed. G Sargent, Northwoods Press, Bigfork, MN, 1974); *Black Hambleton – Black Hills Songs* (Genera Editions, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1977); *Voices* (The Many Press, London, 1977); *Some Company* (Genera, Newcastle, 1980); *A First Book of Birds* (Genera, Newcastle, 1980); *A Second Book of / Look at Birds* (Genera, New York, 1981); *Time Over Tyne* (The Many Press, London, 1981); *Eyes Own Ideas* (Pig Press, Durham, 1987). Some of these poems were also read on Radio KTCY; Radio Raleigh, NC; Radio KRAB. The author extends his thanks to the editors and publishers for their support.

The illustrations on the title page, on the section title for Missouri River Songs, and on page 58 are all by Colin Simms: respectively, "Prairie Falcon Lookout, Upper Missouri"; "Mountains beyond river and a high terrace of the Upper Missouri"; "Cattlepath to summer pasture, Montana". The cover shows a photograph by the author of a Ghost-Dance costume worn by one of his ancestors in the 1890s. The costume is made from mule-deerskin and the feathers of prairie-mountain meadow birds. All of these illustrations and photographs are copyright © Colin Simms, 2005. The portrait of Colin Simms on the flyleaf, and the 'Crazy Horse' woodblock on page 129 are by E M Makepeace and are reproduced here by permission of the artist. Copyright © E M Makepeace, 1995, 2005.



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Author's Note

Acknowledgements must be attempted, and a few pointers to other realities. Readings given at a series of Quaker meetings and Methodist Missions gave many early contacts amongst The People. For encouragement at critical points in my involvements, 'politics' and 'poetry', many in North America and Britain and Eurasia are responsible and some I know don't want mentioning here. A few names are in the text. Many remembered with gratitude and a few who are mostly dead now: Sid Chaplin, Basil Bunting, Benét Tvedten, Chris Grieve ('Hugh MacDiarmid'), Marlon Brando, Bob Mitchum. Earlier publishers, especially Bob Cobbing, Peter Hodgkiss, Eric Mottram, Gary Greenup and John Welch were very supportive, as were a few journalists in Britain and America but not the *Sunday Times* who reneged on me at Wounded Knee II. Joy Ufford over thirty years, relatives of mine over there even longer, have made a lot of work possible, and for hospitality over thirty years' of visits, 1967-97, on reservations, in camps, in homes of all sorts – hogans, tepees, trailers, log and tar shacks, ranches, 'hotels' . . . Hospitality here in return to several, with whom I've walked and ridden the Scottish Borders and West, Cumberland and Northumberland and the Durham Dales and Yorkshire Dales and North Riding moors.

Amerindian music was and is essential; texts from Frances Densmore on 'Native American Ceremonial songs' tapes †7702A and B (1977) (Leonard and Mary and Christine Crow Dog), Jerome Rothenberg's 'Horse Songs' and "total translations" of Navaho songs originally sung by Frank Mitchell (7707A). These, and earlier versions, were transcribed and prepared from time to time by careful friends who have also proved critics in their different ways and persisted with me – including Mary Hider, Lesley Simms, Vivien Taylor, Bob Cobbing, Harry Gilonis, E. Kelly and Margaret Hartley. The Native Americans Paul War Cloud, Leonard Crow Dog, Gladys Bissonette are only a few of the many reservation and other men, women and children, from Manitoba to Arizona and Oklahoma, Alaska to Baja California and in cities – especially Seattle, St. Louis, San Francisco, Denver, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York – who helped, all sorts of ways, and provided good crack. Some of these pieces were written in their homes; as was 'NNWP' at Muirburn and Brownsbank‡ in Lanarkshire in the company of Chris Grieve and his wife Valda. My thanks to all. May my inadequacies spur on others . . .

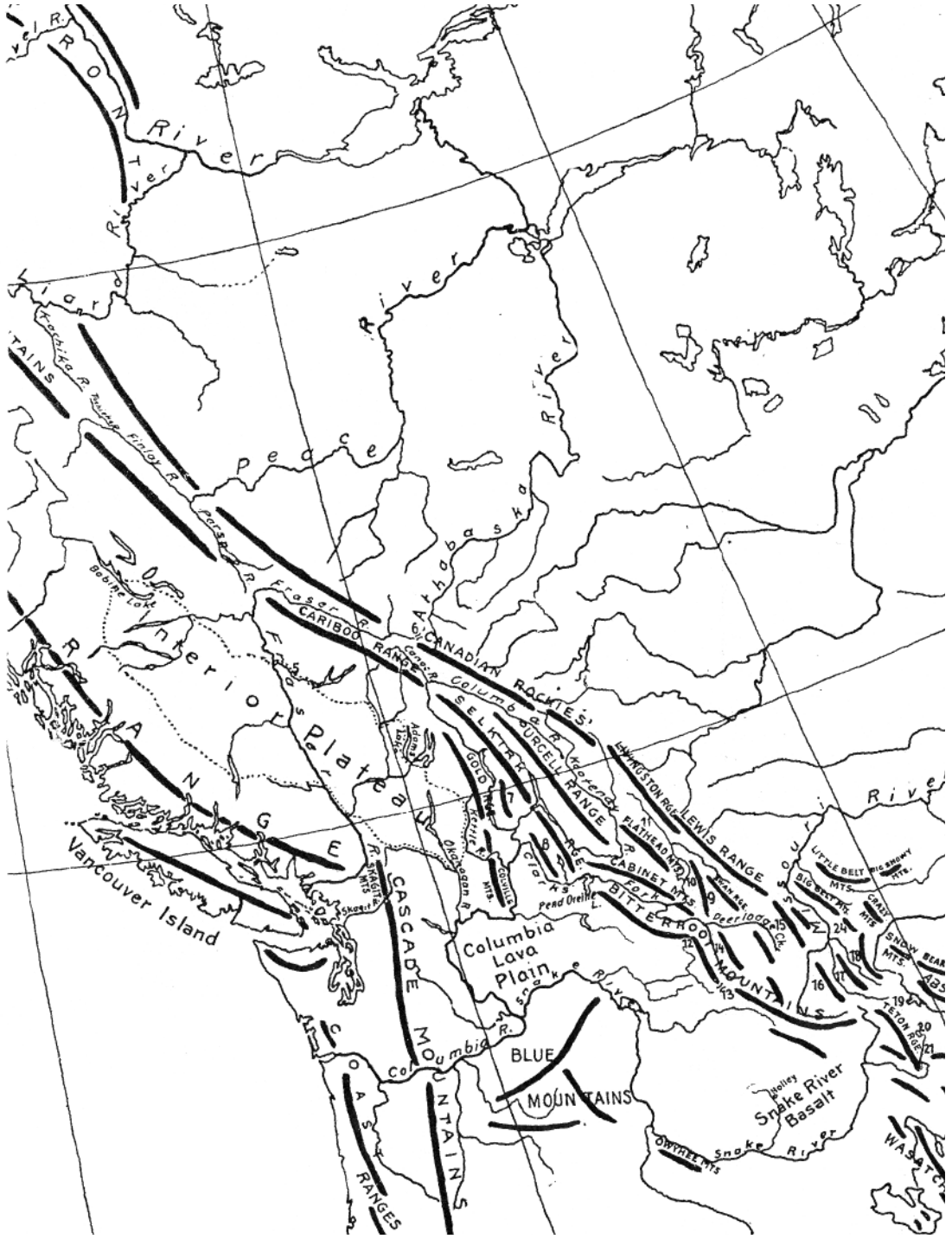
Colin Simms, 2005.

† For instance: available also with Jackson MacLow, Charlie Morrow and other poets on 7711 A (1977) from the New Wilderness Foundation, Inc., 365 West End Avenue, New York N.Y. 10024.

‡ From a tape-recording of that meeting, following a reading of the poem:

C.S.— “. . . and *that* is surely *too long*?”

C.M.G.— “Oh, [laughing] – it is not *long enough*! Each of these American long-poems are remarkable . . . and powerful *enough*: ye ken ye hev a subject of muir importance than anything I've read for a long time. God! . . .”



The Compression of the Bones of Crazy Horse

(Wahtunka Witko) Oglala Sioux, 1842–77, leaving no known likeness
no known resting place. Translated words,
spoiled, bracketed, are his own and others' of The People



PLEASE DON'T
DISTURB WILDLIFE:
Ingleby Estates

Moor Grouse for the Big guns.

As the Cleveland Blackamore Hills do for North Yorkshire
so the Black Hills presentiment the westward mountains eastward
Blue Clouds piled loud as Harney's Peak
spilled dark on their pediments

impediments to Ultimate Destiny
the heart-rest of Plains Indians extend
the West eastward biogeographically
withstand resistance to

the cars
a Horned Lark bare-place *Eremophila alpestris* rings
the whole hemisphere only his decreasing circle sings day-stars
(I am of one mind
with the place I am) single syllables span

the broad dome, the Red 'Valley' girdle inset around it in trance
geomorphologists naming it the Race Track, Red Cinders
Sundance to Rapid City to Hot Springs and back north to Sundance
from the laccolithic ancient centre outward granitic, igneous
indigenous as its Indian, like them a Quaternary Development
crystalline schistose metamorphic

unglaciated limestone-plateau like its people
sedimentary

parkland on this
the whole ringed by the Dakota Coteau and Hog-back
(if I were a rock I would he very old
and lie around all day)*

cheek by jowl with the Bad Land this rich heartland
the hearth of the sky's teepee
(I am close to the Holy Hills and will always see

how happy
the mule-deer will be picking-up new scents:

they are like me and will hide me)

High-Plains inflection
A lonely tree speaks to an old telephone-pole
'The snow has made me cold and weary
But that's what winter is'
'Some more is on its way')

'I will lead them up and down
break their legs in the prairie-dog town
I will lead them up and down'
the most elementary discipline-diction
it says

And the telephone-pole answers

on being released
the captive raptor
turns its claws on itself
and its own kind
not a wild thing any more!

subtended, displaced
bear no relation to the ground they are from
the poorest land: the Reservation
waits and had been waiting
clear for the cleaning of the land

Waiting for Blue Grama Grass
Butelova gracilis
and Buffalo Grass *Buchloé*

EXIT FOR FAUNA PARK . . . SAUNA

In Custer National Park today the apparently-wild animals play
blue skirted locust *Dissoteira*, fluttering Common Wood-nymphs and Satyrs
their apparently-idyllic, apparently-alpine way and the British in Arabia sprayed
their locusts and the sheep lost wool and died you know

U.S. SPRAYS

whole States

AGAINST RODENTS

and Gooks

Allah and Manitto

keep as-careful books.

And whatever happened to the Predator
when English banks closed-off the Open Range before 1910
and the Indian with bringing-them-in to the Agencies
Ironically for an arid land

Bad Land Topography has developed a Fine-Drainage Texture . . .
in one of these Beheaded Streams in Blind Valleys
the bayoneted heart and bones of Crazy Horse are buried

in White River Sands

with the carocoids of dinosaurs his coracle is clavigled
 one grave that will not be robbed.
 After The Winter They Didnt Come In Crazy Horse's choice
 when Little Big Man who had fought in the snow with him became a Police-man
 reminds me of the subtlety those Americans come to England or Europe to find
 they've left behind (Land is not on paper.
 How can we sell what we walk upon) The State Experts
 they thought *Mustela nigripes* was gone forever (Pispiza etopta sapa:
 The Black-footed Ferret just because they had not seen it
 If a Wasichu looks at you with malice — you will chew
 his gut, hypnotise him to bad luck just as they do
 the Prairie-Dog *Cynomys*) (never mind Old Nokomis)
 there's gold in them thar someone's Going To Get It
 Where did the Buffalo go

for a while birches lash each others' faces
 fray in the wind, strip leaves
 and then the wind changes
 and aspens take up the fray and chant
 braes brant aslant

the sperrit it is a widderin' thing
 like the willow-tree wind in a quiet wood
 Or this circumscribed cottonwood's skullridge
 Whistling to us of an arrow struck on wood

it shakes confined in a radius rings sharp marks out a chord
 sharp syntax awed, stood (we stuck to the land, quivered with it
 As I ride through by B.M.W. and H-D Cheyenne to Laramie the old buffalo-trail
 erosion pavement you can see thru a peneplain or a Wayland's etch-plain
 (the ambush I am in charge of because for me it is) I conspire with geography
 (geology is under) like the Pronghorn Antelope walking this Gangplank over the High Plains
 where they've laid their rails on the pedepain the buffalo made for them
 (Earth doesn't belong to anyone, but we are all part of it)

struggle only ever made warriors

or poets

'Texas' or 'Dakota' means 'our people'

to come here

I will ask the Dakotas their permission

RIDERS BEWARE GOPHER-HOLES

to the Prairie-Dog Town the Burrowing Owl
 brings consternation

Speotyto cunicularia
 there's always life in a lower level

specularisation
 sun motes
 to relaxing of concentration
 walking or riding I have felt some tension

a surprise
 sudden through the legs with a stiffness in the thighs
 unrelated to any extra exercise

a suspension

the dregs of consciousness then
 the drifting-off into a dream

like the twitch that comes on sudden near-to-sleep
 in a sinking-soft sense of stream

with surprise remembered after years
 those seeming-same sensations

reverse the accepted screen of given appropriations
 approximations the same extension
 between the eyes

as I passed them, Herb Elliot and Frank Shorter

the glint of whitened quartz-sand glimpsed bleached boreally
 High Plains and North Yorkshire

the limn of the White River Sands reaches back shear of gyration
 so the distant horse dance before the eyes their legs foreshortened
 no mirage your quarter-horses. Crazy Horse
 and your reported dream.

That stiffness in the thighs, long-distance eyes
 with the vision in, on stream
 is the Mixture As Before
 for Jimmy Deans - Moves - Camp a century later
 who only dreamed of quality with Equus equality

He was forever out on his own
no matter like El'Aurens
into the deserted space his place the pace of it nomad
c.f. Pamir

Hi-Ho'ing Kill-deer *Charadrius vociferus*
the Long Gun of the hunter and the long-drawn querulous call so that they all,
the tourists, think our Lapwing Plover must be a Bird of Prey
it's no more that than, say, their

Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*
forgotten

by the rancher as the Indian 'just something that was there'
to sing in the spring, describe a circle limited, in the air
(Earth Doesn't Belong to Anyone, But We Are Part Of It)*
(the snow flakes are talking too they say
Our Friends are on their way)*
when you'd have thought it needed most
it's out there on its own.

DIVIDED HIGHWAY

The Winter They Didn't Come In

he had to get rid of his friends
to bring out his tactics make them
work over and above his love that is his measure.
Now the Promoters 'of the wilderness' are
'ordering the mess', out of greediness.
Forget the rhyme and we can begin to see rhythm
being is a place for hunting, standing out it
the Black Hills will be again
the Sun and its Dance, again
national sovereignty somewhere in this is
there is no absentee-landlordship of the spirit
The security of sun had dancing made
motes in it are Sprague's Pipits retina'd
as green the Prairie Rattlesnake *Crotalus viridis*
just suppose it is as it is for a moment
The Black Hills and the Bad lands are juxtaposed
(the one is beside the other as sister and brother)
positive magic and negative desert in aspect

black-full with pine or yellow with empty light.
(I have asked the Lakota, expect their permission to fight)

at Wounded Knee battlefield, April 1973

*Contributions from schoolchildren, Pine Ridge 1973.

The boxed words are:

1. a noticeboard on the North Yorkshire Moors, The 'Blackamore' of their best authors
2. & 3. sign beside I 90, S. Dakota
4. U.S. National Park sign
5. Road Sign, Wounded Knee, April 1973