

The Telegraph

Captain Randolph Marcy

Black Beaver was a famous Delaware Indian and on numerous occasions he would serve as interpreter or guide on expeditions. He was also noted for his wit and a number of humorous stories exist about him. This story which took place in 1849 was reported by Army Captain Randolph Marcy. Three different versions exist, and the one below is a blending of the three:

One evening I found Black Beaver and a Comanche guide seated by the fire and they were engaged in a very earnest and not very amicable conversation. I asked what the problem was. Beaver answered, "I've been telling this Comanche what I've seen among the white folks."

I said, "Well, Beaver, what did you tell him?" "I told him about the steamboats, and the heap of houses I saw in St. Louis." "Well, sir, what did he think of that?" "He said I'm telling him a damn lie!"

"Well, what else did you tell him?" "I told him about the railroads, but he still thought I'm telling him a lie."

"So I said to Beaver, "Tell him about the magnetic telegraph." "What's that?" said Beaver. I said, "You've heard of New York and New Orleans? Say we have a wire connecting those two cities about a thousand miles apart, and which would take a man thirty days to ride on a good horse. The man at one end of the wire touches it a few times and asks his friend at the other end of the wire what he had for breakfast. His friend at the other end touches it a few times and sends the answer within ten minutes - ham and eggs. Tell the Comanche about that, Beaver." "No, Captain, I won't tell him that, for I don't believe that lie myself."

I assured him that such was the fact, and that I had seen it myself. Black Beaver replied, "Indian can holler pretty loud, maybe so you hear him for half a mile. But now you say white man can talk thousand miles! I suspect you try to fool me now, Captain; maybe so you lie."