
Pioneer Journal of Mrs. Joan Rio Baker,
from England to the Salt Lake Valley, 1851.

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Human Interest Stories of the West

By DR. G. W. STATES
Preston, Idaho



NUMBER 27

Compiled from the Diary of Mrs.
Joan Rio Baker:

"We arrived at Kanessville, Iowa, July 2, 1851. It is on the east bank of the Missouri River and is a gathering place for our people on the second part of the journey to the mountains. Kanessville is quite a pretty town and the surrounding scenery very beautiful. Walking with Mrs. Burton this evening to the outskirts, I heard the Whip-poor-will for the second time. The note somewhat resembles that of our English nightingale but not, I think as sweet, it is more like a wail.

"We stayed two days in Kanessville where I purchased more provisions. I met many pleasant people and this morning we recommenced our journey. We crossed over the Missouri river bottoms which is four miles wide, most of the distance being under water caused by the heavy rains. Before reaching the river we came to higher ground in some woods. We were ferried over in safety and came up to the main camp at 12 o'clock noon.

"We found several of our shipmates in the main camp and we proceeded to organize for the second part of our journey. Mr. John Brown being appointed captain of the whole, we mustered 42 wagons, with four other of the brethren to take charge of 10 wagons each, subject of the orders from Mr. Brown.

"We started on this long division of our long journey at 6 a. m. on July 7.

We arrived at the Poppea Bridge a very dangerous crossing because of the steepness of the banks. This is the Elk Horn River. Thirty-two of us, Robins ten having had some breakages had stopped behind to make repairs. We are now in the country of the Omaha Indians.

We ferried over the Elk Horn in safety, except one of Chatterlwy's men who caught his hand in a chain, bursting one of his fingers, making a cut one and one half inches long. Mrs. Joseph Pierce and I sewed it up between us, and dressed it as well as we could under the circumstances. The next creek we came to, my son Willie upset his wagon loaded with dry goods, wetting most of the freight. We camped on the river bottom which two weeks ago was all under water. At this place the bottoms are about 4 miles wide. We found many fish in the hollows left by the receding waters and millions of mosquitos.

We crossed the Elk Horn bottom after a hard days travel and the breaking of many chains. We camped by the side of the Platt River where we found an Indian grave.

We halted for the day to repair damages and we women took the opportunity to wash up our dirty linen.

The next day we found sandy roads but got on very well. It is exceedingly hot, and we have just passed another Indian grave. We are stopping for the night beside a small lake. Plenty of red-root growing of which we have gathered enough for our supper, making a variety for our meal."

Preston, Idaho

This is July 12, 1851.

Nine wagons have overtaken us, and the travelers have requested to be allowed to join our company. We now number 54 wagons, three other wagons having joined us since we left the Missouri river.

Three new comers had started for Oregon but had been attacked by Indians, their oxen stolen and driven off. Some of their oxen were recovered. They were returning to the frontiers but on meeting our company they decided to join us and go on to Oregon. The next day we found 10 of the strangers missing cattle which was quite a God send to them.

One of our company shot a fine garfish (pike) in a stream by the roadside and presented it to Eliza, that made us a delicious supper. The fish weighed 10 pounds - I had also gathered some red-root green which when boiled are quite as good as spinach. We are now in the plains of the Pawnee Indians.

This is now the 15th of July and we have come to the spot where the Oregon company lost their cattle. Yokes and bones were lying in all directions. The boys found a nice yoke which just fitted two of my cows. We camped on Plum creek.

After traveling three hot days we are now in a violent thunder-storm. After raining all night we are obliged to build a bridge in order that Thom's team might get up to us as they were unable to cross last night as the rain rendered the creek dangerous to ford, but the rear wagons got over in safety.

We remained in camp repairing wagons.

On the 20th day of July at half past two, Sister Kempton died. She was in her usual health until two days ago. Aunt Bateman and I laid her out and sewed her body up in a sheet. She was buried by the brethren at sunset, on the summit of a small hill, where there were five other graves. Brother Pearce was baptized this morning.

We crossed the Loup Fork (near Columbus, Neb.) all safe and sound and came upon a bluff and then five miles of very heavy road,

A bad sandy road. By the side of the road we found the skull of an elk with a message written on it, informing us that Indians were on the lookout for opportunities to steal our cattle.

In going down into Wood river one of Robin's wagons was upset. I was so scared that preferred wading to riding but found the water only a few inches deep.

This is July 24 and the hottest day we have had. We have crossed 14 miles of prairie and near the end of the day were met by a hot wind. It was so hot that one of my oxen fell down and died in a few minutes. Several of the teams were suffering in like manner from the heat but mine was the only one that died.

The following day not quite so hot but we traveled slowly on account of the weakness of the cattle arising from the hot wind of yesterday. On the 26th we came near to Ft. Kerney where I bought an ox to take the place of the one that died. He cost me 30 dollars.

The 27th was Sunday and we remained in Camp all-day. Had a prayer meeting in the afternoon.

Preston, Idaho

This is the 28th day of July, 1851. We came in sight of buffalo today. Our company shot a young one and we enjoyed a treat of fresh meat. Our captain of fifty has crossed the plains five times and is consequently well acquainted with the country. He tells us that sometimes the buffalo number ten thousand in a single herd.

Today we met three wagons, one of them from Salt Lake which had overtaken the other two on the road. They report that three companies of fifties are eight days ahead of us, and that we are still ahead of Elder Pratt's company which left Kanessville two weeks before we did. In consequence of the high water they went around the Elk Horn river instead of fording it, making the journey 150 miles longer. From other reports too, we fear his company has been attacked by Indians. Elder Orson Hyde, who went on alone, they tell us had overtaken those ahead of us, but had previously been stopped by some Indians and robbed of nearly everything they had.

We are much bothered by buffalo, which are numerous. Stragglers are apt to run in among our cattle, stampeding and terrifying them very much, and it has been all the horsemen could do to prevent their doing mischief when we camp for the night.

We saw another company of 115 wagons about a mile before us. They had endeavored to go around the Elk Horn but found it impracticable so crossed higher up than we did. They have come 400 miles, had a very trying journey and have had their cattle stampeded by Indians and lost 18 head of them. Sister Kingsby who was among them was run over and killed. They are under the leadership of Elder Phelps. We saw no buffalo today.

This is August the first and are traveling in sight of the company ahead of us. This evening two

of our shipmates, Sister Whitaker and Sister Ross who are with them came over to see us.

We passed Elder Phelps' company today and have made 100 miles since Monday morning. We saw a few buffalo this evening. Two of our people went out to shoot one, which they did but it being too dark to cut it up, left intending to fetch it in tomorrow morning.

This is Sunday morning, August 3. The men went out early this morning to bring in the meat but found the wolves had been there before them and left nothing but the bones. However they shot two more so we have another week's supply of fresh meat.

One of the strangers in our company spoke at our meeting this afternoon and pleased us very much by his testimony in our favor.

This is Monday morning and the traveling is heavy as we have had to cross a great many mud hills. We saw thousands of lizards, snakes and grasshoppers. Ray got his wagon tongue broken. The country is wild and romantic. We have a continuation of yesterday's difficulties.

On the sixth of August we met a company returning from California. They had passed through Salt Lake valley where the people were finishing their early harvest which was abundant.

We have not seen an Indian since leaving Lamar. They tell us there is a Mormon company 15 miles ahead of us with whom they camped last night. The man who cooks for Robb's tent and one of his children were run over. They were much bruised but no bones broken."

NUMBER 30

"This is August 7, 1851. The hind wheel of Chatterly's wagon turned inside out or outside in.

Mr. Collett gave Elizabeth a puppy, much to her delight which she will take with her to Salt Lake.

We passed two graves, one that of a member of the old Independent church who died in August 1849 but the name too indistinct to be deciphered; the other that of Hannah Hawkes, age 46, who died the same week.

It is very pleasant traveling all day. We met a returning merchant train from Salt Lake. They had one of their wagons take fire. Two men trying to extinguish it were killed when their gun-powder exploded.

We shot two fine antelope today.

This evening as one of Harbin's men was milking, the cow kicked, nearly killing him. He was carried to one of the wagons quite insensible.

Phelph's company overtook us on the 9th and were all well but we afterwards passed them. Here we saw Chimney Rock. I climbed to the top of the bluff to view the country. The scenery grand.

On the 10th we had our Sunday meeting as usual.

The following three days the traveling good.

On the 14th, a very heavy rain made the road very heavy. We passed a very smart Indian, one of the Sioux tribe. In the evening we found quite a number were camped near us. These Indians are fine looking fellows, and very gaily attired. The dresses of the women, some of them, are nearly covered with beadwork. They came to the camp and stayed with us till dark.

During the night of the 16th some of our cattle strayed away and were not found till noon.

At the Chimney Rock trading post I purchased four fine hams. I also found it necessary to purchase another yoke of oxen for which I paid \$65.

This is Sunday the 17th of August and we were compelled to travel part of the day in order to

find grass. We crossed the Platt River and camped. We are surrounded by small mountains covered with cedars and pines.

Today the going was hard, we crossed some mountains, the view from the top no pen can describe. It was hard work but we have made twenty miles and did not come into camp until 11 o'clock.

Previous Emigrants had had trouble. We saw four oxen dead, broken wheels, axles and tires, the results of accidents. We had two wheels broken. Along the streams are loads of cherries and currants.

On the 19th we remained in camp all day repairing damages. Sister Sharkey gave birth to a daughter and both doing well.

We are traveling through a very beautiful country but the roads are very dusty. We have crossed the Platt River twice and camped with the Phelph's company by the river's side.

On Sunday we had our meeting as usual and Brother Thomas preached on the first principles of the Gospel of Christ.

On the 25th we traveled ten miles and camped by the river.

I was sent for to go see Sister Henderson who had been sick two days. In an hour I was enabled to assist her in giving birth to a daughter. The mother is so exhausted that I fear she will not rally again."

"This is August 26th. We remained in camp all day setting tires. The hunting party which set out yesterday returned to camp with a plentiful supply of fresh meat. Sister Henderson is very low but the infant is quite strong and well. Sister Henderson died at noon today, the 27th and we buried her at nine this evening. She left seven children.

We crossed the Platt river again today. Captain Brown passed the word for all wagons to keep close as there were Indians in the vicinity. In looking forward I saw a little army of them about a mile in the distance coming down the side of a mountain. Our men loaded their guns, but on our approaching the Indians opened their ranks and we passed along without trouble.

The government agent was with them in a buggy and sitting between his knees was the daughter of the chief, a pretty little creature of about three years, who seemed to be quite pleased at our appearance. The agent told us that these were some of the Shoshones, that there were 3,000 camped on the banks of the Sweetwater, twenty miles from us. Those we encountered were 90 of their principal warriors with their families going a great council of various tribes in an endeavor to settle their differences and bury the tomahawk.

They made a good appearance, all on horseback and very gaily dressed, some with lances, others with bows and arrows or guns. They had many ponies carrying their luggage and tents. The men passed on one side and the women and children the other. All of them were well mounted. Their clothing was beautiful and trimmed with small beads. Altogether it was a very imposing procession.

This is August 29th and we are among the Rocky mountains. The valley country is desert, except here and there a patch of grass along the small streams. I have

walked under overhanging rocks which seemed only to need the pressure of a touch of the hand to send them down upon us. Many of them resemble the ruin of an old castle and it needs but a little stretch of the imagination to fancy yourself in the deserted hall of some palace or temple.

There seems to be much metal among the rocks. I picked up some specimens of rock which I am told contain iron and silver, also some lumps of coal which burned brightly.

In places our road is so steep it seems like going down a staircase. We killed a mountain sheep today which makes a nice change in our food.

Today on August 30 we camped on the Sweetwater. We saw hundreds of hare and rabbits and some buffalo but had no time to shoot any.

This is Sunday the 31st and Elder G. D. Pratt gave a sermon on the New Birth.

Mrs. Richards, an English woman who with her husband and five children are in our company gave me a fine fat hare this morning which made us a delicious supper.

NUMBER 32

"On Sept. 4 we saw the snow capped mountains for the first time. Our cattle show signs of fatigue. Richard Margetts had an ox die yesterday and two of mine gave out.

We have been obliged to remain in camp all day to give our sick oxen a rest. Our men went out and killed three antelope for the camp, besides we caught lots of fish.

Today the traveling has been comfortable and we have crossed the Sweetwater four times and camped in a pretty spot by the river. We killed two more antelope today.

We started at noon, crossing a rocky ridge which has been given the name, "The Devils Backbone". A very barren country.

On September the 5th we met the mail stage from Salt Lake and with it was Dr. John Bernhisel, the Utah delegate on his way to Washington. The news he brought was of a cheering kind.

Very pretty scenery, very good grass and at noon halted for the day.

The following morning several of the cattle had strayed away, which delayed our starting time. We traveled two miles when one of my oxen fell down and died. We think he had been poisoned by Indian plant.

One of Robins wagons broke down, another smashed a wheel, so leaving their ten to patch up we came on 19 miles without stopping because of the scarcity of grass. We camped by the side of Pacific Springs.

We remained in camp all day of the 10th. One of Brother Norton's daughters had her leg broken from the kick of a cow while milking. Her father set the bone and she seems to be doing well as no inflammation has appeared.

Two men came into camp, one from Alfred's and the other from Cardon's company. They left on

account of provisions running short and the teams giving out. They tell us that the companies were throwing away all they possibly could spare in order to lighten their loads. They said nineteen wagons had left Pratt's company and overtaken Cardon's.

They had been visited by a band of Indians who had robbed six of them, bidding the owners defiance and telling them they had 500 warriors on the other side of the hill. It seems our people were frightened and suffered them to do as they pleased, except one Englishman who gave one of the Indians a sound thrashing with his bull whip.

These two men started out without provisions, taking their chances on meeting with other companies. They supped with us and started on traveling at night only in order to avoid the high winds which we constantly have in the day time. The nights are usually calm and peaceful."

Preston, Idaho

NUMBER 33

Compiled from the diary of Mrs. Joan Rio Baker in 1851:

"The two men traveling alone and at night hope to arrive in Salt Lake in time to send out provisions to the various companies who are behind, who we fear will be much distressed.

Two other men overtook us today. They are from Laramie and have six mules. They say there are a thousand Indian lodges around the fort and many more are expected. They seem to be apprehensive that trouble is brewing.

They also reported that two Shoshonie Indians had been killed by a party of Cheyennes, that the Shoshonies had in return slaughtered about thirty Cheyennes. Poor prospects for peace as the thirty were delegates to the peace conference.

It is warmer since we crossed the divide or mountain ridge.

It is good traveling but a scarcity of grass. We camped on Pacific creek. The wolves were very troublesome around the camp with their howling, which was accompanied by the barking of all the dogs in the camp.

This morning of the 13th a general strike took place among Robin's teamsters. There has been dissatisfaction for some weeks, owing to the scantiness and inferior quality of their rations and Robin's refusing to make any improvement. The men shouldered their blankets and set off intending to take their chances for provisions on the road as they went along.

An hour afterwards the camp started. By noon the captain had overtaken the men and expressed his wish that they would return, in order that there might be an investigation of the matter. They agreed to do so and we went on until sundown and camped on the Big Sandy river,

to the great joy of ourselves and cattle. They had not seen grass or water for 16 miles. Our captain then supplied the mutineers with a tent, plenty of buffalo robes and we all retired for the night.

This is Sunday, the 14th of September. It is a lovely morning. After breakfast, Walter, William and Derrick went out with their guns in the hope of finding game but were disappointed. We are using our last ham for dinner.

During the morning Robins held a confab with his men. Six out of nine agreed to remain with him, the other three would have nothing to do with him on any terms.

Three wagons from Salt Lake came up to us.

They had brought out provisions but had sold all they had to companies ahead of us, and were going to meet those in the rear to see if they needed assistance. They told us that were some wagons laden with flour to meet us so we hope to see them in a day or two.

We had a meeting in the afternoon with a sermon by Captain Brown on the Kingdom of Heaven. Elder Margetts also spoke. John Tout, who had been baptized during the week was then publicly received into the church and the meeting closed.