

Platte River below Ft. Laramie May 6<sup>th</sup> 1852  
Dear Father

We are now about five miles below Fort Laramie on the river near a small trading post and provision store kept by a man who trades with the Indians and emigrants. I am in good health and hope this letter will find you all enjoying the same blessing. But the rest of the company have all had the diarrhea, which is caused by drinking the Platte river water, which is all more or less tinged with alkali water which in some places is very poisonous, but it can easily be told by a salty substance which is on the grass and ground around the edge of the water. Scott is very sick with it yet. But I think we can get medicine at the fort tomorrow that will cure him. We are in company with a man and his son from Centerville Warren Co Ohio. The name of Croffley and two other wagoners fifteen of us in all. We left Ft. Kearney just five weeks ago to day. The distance between the two forts is about three hundred and twenty five miles. The road lays up the Platte all the way and is the best natural road I ever saw with the exception of now and then a short stretch of deep sand, which makes very heavy pulling. But our oxen are improving in flesh all the time. We travel on an average about eighteen or twenty miles a day.

J. H. McDaniel letter 1852

Copy for Mamee J. McDaniel

San Platte River Road Narrative

entry 1238



Fort Kearney is situated on the main plate  
about ninety miles below the forks. The river be-  
low the forks resembles the Mississippi in width  
But is very shallow. I have seen wagons cross it  
where it is nearly two miles wide and no place  
over three ft deep. The land along the river bottom  
is a rich sandy loam until we get up on the  
south plate where it gets most sandy and bar-  
ren. There is any quantity of Buffalo on plate  
until we cross over to the north fork where they  
are very scarce. But I have seen none yet as they  
keep back of the bluffs until summer when they  
have to come to the river to get water. Wood along  
the plate is very scarce and we often have to use Bu-  
falo chips for fuel. They make an excellent fire  
and when dry are even preferable to wood. The dis-  
tance from the mouth of the south plate to where  
we cross it is sixty or seventy miles. We crossed it very  
easily by doubling our teams, although it could be  
done with a single team. It is about a half mile wide  
all a bed of quick sand and no where over two feet  
deep. we crossed over to the north fork which is  
eighteen miles from the south fork. We passed through  
a flat hollow just as we reached the river. It  
is a cold and desolate looking place. The road  
winds along in it for about four miles, bound in  
on each side by bluffs from two to three hundred  
feet high and they are covered with a growth



of scrubby cedar which contrasts with the  
black barren hills give it a very wild appearance  
in the distance. At the end of the hollow are a few scatter-  
ing ash trees from whence it takes its name.  
The north plateau is a great deal larger than the  
south fork and the a great deal of the road along  
it very sandy. The paper count house rock about  
a hundred miles below here it stands off from  
the road and appears to be about a mile away  
but is not less than six or seven and the guide  
says twelve persons are very little to get down  
here from some cause which I suppose is from  
the purity of the atmosphere. Chimney rock  
can also be seen very plain from here al-  
though it is more than twenty miles away.  
It is a very singular rock and I can compare  
it to nothing better than a funeral with the  
small to represent the chimney which rises out  
of the top of the hill to the height of thirty or forty  
feet. The next object of interest are Scotts Bluffs  
which appear to about four or five miles off  
but are not less than twenty miles. They are  
from three to four hundred feet high in some  
places nearly perpendicular and covered with  
a growth of scrubby pine and cedar. It is said  
that Larimer Peak can be seen from these bluffs  
but we have seen its snow capped summit for the last  
two days which looks more like a cloud than any thing else.



I wrote the foregoing while standing guard last night as we stand guard every night although there is but little danger from the Indians as we are in the Sioux (pronounced see or sue) country and they are very friendly with the whites. We arrived at Fort Sarnie this morning and expect to leave shortly. It is situated on Sarnie river about a mile above its mouth. It looks more like home than Fort Hecar. It contains several large frame buildings besides the garrison and hospital which are adobe houses with the stars and stripes waving over it. There are sixty four regular soldiers. They have a very large store here with as good an assortment as you could find any where. Flour is worth ten dollars a hundred. Bacon fifteen cts a pound. Cheese fifty retail and other things in proportion. The weather is warm and pleasant and is getting more uniform as we approach the mountains. We had a storm the sixteenth of May but has been warmer since with cool nights. We are ahead of the principal part of emigration. There is but about two hundred and fifty teams ahead of us and from two to four thousand behind us. There will be a great deal of suffering on the plains by the emigration behind as grass is very short and scarce. But I must close. I am writing in the Doctors office when Jim is getting sick. The mail does not leave here until the fifteenth of next month and if nothing happens will be nearly a week before you receive this. Remotely me to mother and the rest of the family. Yours affectionately J. H. McDonald