

A Trip Across the Plains

- 1 Left St. Joseph for California via Salt Lake, May 24th, 1849. May 25th--Passed Savannah, Nodawa River, Little Sarkey River and Big Sarkey River. June 1st--Passed Linden, county seat of Atchison. Sunday, June 3d--Crossed the Shnabotany. June 7th--Passed Cainville, and encountered a tremendous thunder shower. June 8th--Arrived at Upper Ferry Bayou, and stopped there till the 1st of July. July 2d--Crossed the Missouri river. July 4th--Encamped in Indian Territory--Omahans Indians--near Mormon Winter quarters, a city built of logs by Mormons, containing some seven or eight hundred houses, or rather hovels, all of which, at present, are deserted. July 6th--Left Mormon Winter Quarters, and arrived at Elkhorn River on the evening of the 7th, 27 miles from Missouri. The Elkhorn River is from four to six rods in width, with about four feet of water--a dirty stream, and empties into Platte River. July 10th--Crossed Elkhorn River in six hours and forty minutes, with sixty-five wagons and encamped on the bank of the Platte River, at the Liberty Pole; here we found some bodies of dead Indians, apparently killed in battle. The plain we passed over is beautiful. July 12th--Nothing particular--we traveled thirteen miles over a beautiful plain; the day was very warm, and passed the First Fifty. July 13th--We traveled ten miles, crossed a branch called the Shell, and encamped by an excellent spring; this was the
- 2 first good water we found after leaving Winter Quarters. July 14th--Traveled twelve miles, had a bad road, crossed two sloughs, saw one deer, the first we saw on the Plains, and encamped on the banks of the Platte. Sunday, July 15th--Traveled ten miles and a half, had good roads, and encamped on Loup Fork; beautiful camping ground. The Loup Fork empties into the Platte River; the bank and bed of this river is composed of white sand; this section of the country is claimed by the Pawnee Indians. July 16th--Traveled nine and a half miles, coralled, and that night had a stampede in the coral; broke two wagons, killed one sheep, and broke the horns off several head of cattle. July 17th--Mended the wagons and moved a short distance; made a strong coral, and that night had another stampede; nothing killed; one cow crippled. July 18th--
- In the morning, after the cattle were all yoked, and most of them chained together, we had another stampede, which was truly awful to behold; cattle rushed from the coral chained together, from 2 to 3, 4 and 5 yoke, and were literally piled up in heaps, some with broken legs, some with horns broken off, but none killed; two men badly and two slightly hurt. Through the course of the day, we had some six or eight stampedes, and it was with extreme difficulty that we got them quieted; we then separated them into squads of ten; during this operation I think I saw some of the tracks of the "big elephant." July 19th--Traveled eighteen miles, and encamped on Loup Fork, near Pawnee village. The Pawnee country is beautiful. July 20th--Removed from near Pawnee town and encamped six miles from Loup Fork Fording, some twelve miles travel; crossed Cedar Creek, which is from 4 to 5 rods wide, and from 2 to 3 feet deep. July 21st--
- The past night was noted for a remarkably severe shower of rain; we commenced our march at daylight in the morning, and traveled six miles to the Loup Ferry, in a heavy rain, and encamped; through the day a draft of thirty men, from the One Hundred, was made, to examine the fording. They reported unfavorably. At this place we found a letter left by Mr.
- 3 Egan, captain of a company that passed this place, on the 29th of June last, stating the death of 4 men, two from cholera, one from drowning, and one killed by the Indians. July 22d--We lay in camp all day, waiting for Alred's Fifty, to pass over the Loup Fork River. July 23d--We crossed the river; had very good luck, and encamped one mile distant. The bed of this river is quick-sand, and the borders are liable to change materially in half an hour. The water was, at the time of crossing, about twenty inches deep. July 25th--We took up our line of march in the morning, traveled twelve miles through a different country from the east of the river; the plains were round hills of sand, and the road was sandy and hard to travel on; grass thin and short; water scarce, and no wood at all. This day I saw the first antelope; it was killed by the

Ten ahead of us. July 26th--Traveled ten miles; saw one antelope; crossed one mile of wet bottom and deep mud, and encamped within five miles of Platte River, in a heavy rain; had no wood. July 27th--Traveled eight miles. Mr. Gray broke his wagon tongue in the morning, which hindered us; we encamped on Wood River. This river is from twelve to eighteen feet wide; eighteen inches water and excellent camping ground. Here we found thirty-seven head of cattle, evidently lost by some emigrants ahead of us; the most of them were work-cattle. The real cause of their being found astray from their owners is shrouded with the mantle of invisibility. It may be, however, they were stampeded by the Indians or buffaloes. From this on, we expect to see sights--hear old women dream and young men prophecy. This morning we had to repair Hatch's wagon wheel, and, consequently, started at a very late hour. July 28th--In the morning we made some division of above-mentioned cattle and with a protracted start, traveled fifteen miles, and encamped on Platte River. Opposite Grand Island, passed two graves; one designated by the name of Moses Hale, from Wisconsin,--died of cholera. Wood River runs parallel, partly, with Platte River, widening from one to ten miles, in traveling fifteen miles west,

4 and it is the most beautiful country I ever saw. Here I saw the first prairie dogs: they resemble the dog, but they partake more of the nature of the rabbit; they are about as large as a small ground hog, and live in little villages, containing from one half to one acre of territory. Their holes are very thick; they live on grass, and they are good to eat. Sunday, July 29th--Traveled twelve miles and encamped on the prairie; had bad roads, and passed the grave of Capt. Gully and one of his men, who died of cholera; he was captain of the Hundred, that started four weeks previous to us. This day we found forty head more of cattle. July 30th--Traveled eighteen miles and encamped near Dry Creek, at the head of Grand Island. We passed Fort Kearny this forenoon, which lies about six miles south, on Grand Island. The country remains handsome, and the prairie dogs are as thick as grass-hoppers. We are now two hundred and twenty miles from Missouri, or Mormon Winter Quarters. This was the first night we used buffalo chips to cook with. July 31st--Traveled fifteen miles and encamped. Plenty of grass and water, but no wood. The evenings and mornings are quite cool, and the days are rather cool for this season of the year.

August 1st--Traveled twelve miles, and encamped near the Platte River. Started rather late on account of a broken axletree. August 2d--Traveled eighteen miles; this day, for the first time, we were gratified with the sight of the buffalo; I suppose we saw one thousand; our company killed two and one deer; I made two shots without effect. August 3d--Lay in camp, and hunted buffalo; caught none, but wounded several. Here we found a grave; death out of the Hawk Eye Company, Iowa--named Haggard. August 4th--Traveled 13 miles, and our company killed and brought in one buffalo and one calf, and killed several more. This day we found the road very bad, and the owners came for the cattle we had found. They belonged to Captain Owens' Company of gold-diggers, from New York and Wisconsin; they lost them during a severe storm, which lasted two days and one night. Sunday, August 5th--Traveled twelve miles over tremendous bad roads of sand and mud, and encamped near Skunk Creek. This day we received intelligence from G. A. Smith, that England had sent sixty thousand troops to California, and as many more to Mexico; and that France and England were in difficulty; also of the death of James K. Polk and Gen. Gaines. Here we met five wagons of gold-diggers, on their return home, on the south side of the river; they had lost some of their men and got discouraged. August 6th--Traveled thirteen miles over bad roads; for the last three or four days the country has not been so handsome; the prairies are low and wet, with occasional sand hills. We pass a very large spring of excellent water, a great luxury to me, as it was the first draught of good water I had enjoyed for four weeks. We also passed the junction of the South Fork of Platte River; kept up by the North Branch and encamped on the bank of the river; had no wood, and were compelled to boil our mush-pot with buffalo chips. August 7th--Lay in camp. S. Snider killed one buffalo and one antelope. Here we gave up the lost cattle. We

have been traveling amongst the Sioux Indians since we left Grand Island. Their country extends from Independence Rock. The Crow Indians occupy the country lying between the South Fork and Francis River. August 8th--Traveled fourteen miles; had good roads in the fore part of the day, and encamped on the bank, across the river. We saw buffaloes in droves, and at night some of them tried to cross over to our camp. I should have mentioned that on the 7th we had a dance. August 9th--Traveled seventeen miles, and encamped on the river. In the fore part of the day we had good roads, but in the latter part sandy and hilly. Crossed Bluff Creek, six rods wide, eighteen inches water, sandy bottom and good crossing. This day we passed Capt. Alred's Fifty, resting their cattle. They had killed two buffalo; plenty of buffalo now in sight. August 10--Traveled twelve miles over hard hills and sandy roads; passed several streams of good water, and encamped under the Bluff,

6 plenty of Buffalo in sight all day. August 11th--Traveled seventeen miles over good roads, and passed Cedar Bluff. Sunday, August 12th--Lay in camp; killed four ducks; in the afternoon we had a religious meeting, the first we enjoyed since we started. August 13th--Traveled fourteen miles, one mile and a half being high sandy Bluff, in consequence of which we had to double teams. The bottom land has grown much narrower, and the Bluffs more rocky. The river here will average three-fourths of a mile in width, but I think the water would all run in a stream twenty rods wide and four feet deep. The Bluffs on the south side are partially covered with small cedar. We passed the grave of a gold-digger, from Iowa. August 14th--Traveled sixteen miles; passed Ash Hollow, on the south side of the river, and the Lonely Tree on the north side; this is the only tree on the north side of the river, for the distance of two hundred miles--from this it takes its name. It is cotton wood, and stands about half way between the road and the river. We passed the grave of a gold-digger, from Adams County, Illinois--died of cholera. August 15th--Traveled fourteen miles; good roads. Received request from Captain Taylor to stop till he came up. This evening, Mr. Perkins came on and informed us that they had had a stampede in the wagons--about fifty; they broke some and injured several persons. We furnished them with two new axles, and a blacksmith to repair damages; encamped on the bank of the river. August 16th--Lay in camp all day; nothing worthy of notice transpired. August 17th--Still in camp; at evening, Perkins and Moore's teams came up, and also Alred's Fifty, and informed us that one woman had died of the wounds she received in the stampedes. August 18th--In the morning we had a meeting of the One Hundred, called by Capt. Taylor. The Mormons quarreled like fiends, and I think besmeared about three-fourths of an acre of ground, but Perkins' Ten went ahead; in the evening we met brother Babbit, from Salt Lake; we traveled ten miles. August 19th--In the morning we heard some letters read, from the

7 valley; quite interesting and cheering, and I believe we all traveled on with much lighter hearts than we commenced our journey. We traveled eighteen miles and encamped on the bank of the river; had good roads and good feed. August 20th--In the morning we saw twenty-nine government wagons pass down the south side of the river; they were from Fort Laramie, bound for the States; they had with them some unfortunate gold-diggers, one crazy man, and several crippled by being in a stampede; we traveled twenty miles and encamped on the river, opposite Chimney Rock. This rock is quite notorious, and can be seen forty or fifty miles with the naked eye. This rock, together with the bluffs, up to the Scott's Bluffs, are very interesting, and many of them appear more like the work of art than of nature. August 21st--Traveled nineteen miles and encamped on the river, opposite Scott's Bluff. These bluffs appear like so many fortifications; they are from one to three hundred feet high. August 22d--Traveled fifteen miles; nothing particular transpired. It was, however, a very warm day and one ox gave out. August 23d--Traveled fourteen miles; weather excessively warm. August 24th--In the morning, we received a visit from three Indians, the first we had seen since we left Missouri, a distance of five hundred miles, through an Indian territory; they were Sioux and ostensibly very friendly; we traveled five miles, and

found an Indian camp with some French traders with them. Sioux is a new trading post, fifteen miles east of Fort Laramie; they received us with friendship; we stopped some four hours and traded with them, giving flour, meal, powder, lead and clothes, for buffalo robes and moccasins. In the evening we traveled six miles, over a heavy, sandy road, and encamped on the river in the night. August 25th—Lay in camp; set wagon tire and made general repairs; in the afternoon the wind blew a hurricane, and the sand rose in clouds and drifted like snow. Sunday, August 26th—Lay in camp until three o'clock and finished repairs; then traveled five miles and encamped on the river, four miles below Fort Laramie:

- 8 we received a visit from some teamsters across the river, going to the Fort; Gray broke his wagon. August 27th—We crossed the north branch of the river, at Fort Laramie. Here stands an old Fort, called Fort John, built by the Western Fur Company; it is nearly torn down; Laramie Fort is built one mile up Laramie River, a beautiful place for a town. Here the roads from Independence, Fort Leavenworth, Saint Joseph, Council Bluff and Arkansas River come together. From this place we began to see the destruction of both life and property; in the first eight miles we saw five graves, made within the last two months. Here begins what is called the Black Hills; they are high bluffs, covered with pitch pine; the river at this place is easily forded, in common stages of water. August 28th—Traveled eighteen miles; the day was very windy and dusty, the road tolerably good, though we had to encounter some high and rocky mountains; we took the river road; saw the head of a mountain sheep—its horns were very large. August 29th—In the morning killed a buffalo; he came to the camp; it then commenced raining and ended in snow, lasting until noon. In the afternoon, we traveled ten miles over mountains high as the clouds; saw, northwest of us, a mountain white with snow; this is the first we ever saw in August. We came down on the Platte River bottom, and encamped at the mouth of a ravine; here we saw fresh signs of plenty of elk and bear; here Captain Taylor pushed us hard; the country here is mountainous and never can be inhabited: but a small amount of vegetation grows here. August 30th—Traveled twenty miles and encamped on the river alone, for the first time since we left George, Charley and Taylor; shot at and wounded a buffalo, driven across the road by some hunters; the roads were tolerably good; the country is poor, with thin sandy soil, producing but little, except in patches on the river; we had frost every night since the 27th. August 31st—Traveled eighteen miles; came into
- 9 the road that leads over the hills, a little north of Laramie Peak; here we commenced going down hill, until we came to Labonte River. Mr. Gray broke his wagon while here; Captain Samuel Snider and myself had a little quarrel: we are now on the Crow Indian Territory.

Sept. 1st—Left Sam. Snider, and joined George Snider's team and traveled eighteen and one-fourth miles, and encamped on a small stream. Found no grass. Here we covered the dead body of a buffalo with sand, to keep ourselves from being stunk out of camp. Sept. 2d—Traveled eight miles, and encamped on the Seboyn River, at 12 o'clock. In the afternoon, Mr. Barnet and myself made a hunting excursion, but found no game. In the evening, Mr. Campbell and two others returned from Geo. A. Smith's camp, with the express from Salt Lake, and drew on our party for horses and provisions. Sept. 3d—Traveled twelve miles and encamped on the river, where we had a beautiful camping-ground, and good feed. Here we found the remains of a number of wagons, which had been cut up, burnt and destroyed, together with the remnants of various other camping materials. Sept. 4th—Traveled fifteen miles; had good roads, but very windy and dusty. Encamped on the river. Passed one good wagon. The wagons above alluded to were left by gold diggers. In the evening the Express returned, and stopped with us over night. Had a religious meeting in the evening. Sept. 5th—Returned back and met Capt. Alred's Fifty. Our party stayed with Capt. Taylor over night. Sept. 6th—Came back; forded Platte River—knee deep; overtook the wagons in a dry place, without wood or water. In the evening, joined with some others to go to the river for water for supper. We

- traveled about five miles to the river, and encamped over night, and returned in the morning with the water for breakfast. This is a dry, sandy, barren country, hilly and mountainous, and grows little else than wild sage. Sept. 7th--Stopped on the Plains until Capt. Thomas came up. We stopped over night, and then traveled seventeen miles over
- 10 hills and hot sand, and encamped three miles west of Willow Springs. At these Springs we found the remains of some ten or twelve wagons, which clearly evinced a vast destruction of property. Sunday, Sept. 9th--Traveled sixteen and a half miles over some very sandy roads. Here we passed the Saleratus Heads, presumed to be one hundred acres, as white as snow. It was a windy day, and the saleratus would drift like snow before the wind. We gathered all we wanted; went on, and encamped near Independence Rock. This Rock is notorious for size and is a great curiosity. I presume the names of more than three thousand people are recorded on it. Here we struck the Sweet Water River--a pretty, gravelly stream, which abounds with fine trout. It empties into Platte River. Sept. 10th--Traveled five miles to the Devil's Gate. This is an opening through the mountain, for the Sweet Water River to pass. The channel is one hundred feet wide, and the rock, each side, is four hundred feet high, perpendicular. In the afternoon, Mr. Shaw and myself made a hunting excursion; saw many antelope, but killed none. Sept. 11th--Lay in camp all day. Had a hunt; made two shots at a buffalo, but did not kill him. Saw between fifty and one hundred antelope; killed one antelope and twenty wolves. At this place I found a log chain, eighteen feet long. Sept. 12th--Traveled eleven miles, over sandy roads. Had a shot at an antelope; missed him, but killed some rattlesnakes, and encamped on the river Sweet Water. Sept. 13th and 14th--Traveled fourteen and fifteen miles; nothing but a continual scene of rocky mountains, sandy barren plains, destruction of cattle, wagons, and other property. Here the Rattlesnake has taken up his abode. This is a section of country usually coursed by herds of buffalo, but we found none; supposed to have been driven back by the Indians. Sept. 15th--Traveled sixteen miles over good roads, and encamped on the river; went on a hunting excursion; saw hundreds of antelope but killed none. At night, old Zabriskie and his wife had a tremendous fight. Sept. 16th--Traveled eight miles, and encamped
- 11 on the river; met the teams from the valley, going to meet Geo. Smith. They numbered twenty-one wagons. September 17th--Traveled five miles, and encamped on Sweet River. Mr. Brown killed one antelope in the morning, and I killed a duck, and found a log chain. Sept. 18th--Traveled ten miles; left the Sweet Water to the left, passing over high mountains and rocky roads, and encamped with Capt. Egbert, on a branch of the Sweet Water. Had poor feed and little wood. Sept. 19th--Traveled seven miles and encamped on the Sweet Water, at the upper fording;--last place of crossing. No feed for cattle. Sept. 20th--Traveled twelve and a half miles, going through the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, and encamped at the Pacific Springs. This was the first water we came across that empties into the Pacific Ocean. It is a nice little run, large enough to run a mill. Here we found some feed--the first good feed in several days travel. This morning we found two of our cattle dead, and the balance of them looking as if they had nothing in them. Sept. 21st--The passed night we were unusually troubled with wolves; we had to drive them off several times. In the morning we found another dead ox. This day we traveled twenty-four miles, without feed or water, and encamped on Little Sandy, two hours after dark. Sept. 22d--In the morning another cow dead; traveled twelve miles, and encamped on Big Sandy. The general appearance of the country, thus far west of the Pass, more level, but remains sandy and barren. Little or no grass to be found, except on the streams. For the last ten days we have been traveling in sight of a mountain of snow. We were, at one time, within ten miles of it; yet the weather was so warm that we experienced no inconvenience in traveling in our shirt sleeves. We have been in the Oregon Territory since we came through the Pass, and in the Snake Indian country: now two hundred miles from Salt Lake. Sept. 23d--Traveled seventeen miles; passed a Government train of thirty wagons, loaded with corn, and bound for Bear River, under the command of Capt. Reed, and encamped on Big Sandy.