

**ALPHONSO B. NEWCOMB**

Diary

April 15 - July 12, 1850

Transcribed

October 1999

# ALPHONSO B. NEWCOMB

Diary

1850

Left Iowa city May[crossed out] Apr 15, were detained two weeks in Washington Co.

Crossed the Missouri at the upper ferry at Council Bluffs May 19, in the P M[,] drove 6 miles, camped on a high rolling prairie, in the night a violent rain and wind storm came upon us and thoroughly drenched us.

[May] 20

Traveled over a beautiful rolling prairie, destitute of timber and not very well watered, ferried the Elk Horn a stream 9 rods wide[,] 3 ft deep and camped on a small creek 2 miles west saw plenty of Pawnees both at the ferry and at our camp. They were a dirty ill looking people clothed in

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buffalo robes, which they wore over the left shoulder leaving the right one bare, and a belt around the waist, they were armed with bows and arrows.

[May] 21

traveled 25 miles the last 10 of it being on the north side of the Platte[.]

[May] 22

this day made 22 miles, nooned at Shell creek. met near the creek 35 or 40 Indians all armed. Our Captain called a halt that the men might prepare themselves for an attack if one was intended but they did not molest only[,] by begging[.] The Chief, two of his relatives (young men) and two braves took dinner with us and we made them some presents. we camped on the bank of the Platte[.] This night we were visited by the most violent rain and wind storm that I ever experienced, the quantity of water that fell rendered the road

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almost impassable.

[May] 23

only made 6 miles and camped at Loup Fork ferry.

[May] 24

crossed the Loup[,] a very rapid stream and difficult to cross being over 300 yds wide with a quicksand bottom.

[May] 25

traveled 23 miles up the south side of the Loup[.] Saw some deer and elk and several antelope but our hunters did not succeed in taking any.

[May] 26

traveled over a beautiful level prairie on the South side of Loup Fork, camped within 4 miles of the upper ford, on the site of an old Indian town and encampment, and it was the most beautiful

spot, and afforded the most pleasing picturesque view that I ever beheld. In the back ground the high land that separates the Loup from the

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Platt rose at the distance of 5 or 6 miles and descended gradually to the edge of the Bluff where we were encamped on the old town; this town was burned by the sioux in (46)[.] In front of us was the river, immediately beyond it the river bottom 3 or 4 miles in width and studded with small lakes, each one margined with trees and trees could also be seen in the distance on the river, both above and below us, though there was none in front and to the north of the bottom lands rose another line of bluffs, high and smooth.

The bottom land and the table land on which we were appeared as smooth as a well rolled lawn[?][.]

5

[May] 27

traveled 24 miles to Prairie creek very good road but no water.

[May] 28

traveled 25 miles[,] camped on Platt.

[May] 29

made 26 miles through a country thickly inhabited by prairie dogs, passed through several of their towns, and saw great numbers of them. camped in one of their villages.

[May] 30

traveled 20 miles crossed buffalo creek at noon, and camped on Platt[.] Saw buffalo at distance and also antelope.

June 1

traveled 68 ½[!] miles over sand ridges and wet prairie and camped on Skunk creek, this is the commencement of the great Pawnee Swamp[.]

[June] 2

traveled 21 miles, passed a spring of pure cold water, the first good water we have seen since leaving Iowa, camped on Platt

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and commenced using buffalo Chips for fuel, there being no timber this side of the river[.] plenty of deer and antelope meat in camp[.]

[June] 3

traveled 22 miles[,] bad roads either muddy or sandy and camped on bluff creek.

[June] 4

traveled 20 1/2 miles[,] heavy roads. camped on rattlesnake creek opposite a high rock bluff[,] the first rock we seen west of the Missouri and also saw a drove of buffalo crossing the

bluffs near our camp. they were near us from some time.

[June] 5

traveled 19 miles[.] camped on watch creek, roads very wet and feed poor.

[June] 6

traveled 27 miles[.] passed the lone cedar tree and also castle bluffs, camped on the Prairie[.]

[June] 7

traveled 19 miles. very good road most of the way[.] camped at bluff ruins, with good feed for cattle and gathered flood wood enough to cook ourselves a warm supper, the first we have had in several days for the late rains have rendered the buffalo chips not usable[.]

[June] 8

passed the court house and jail and traveled nearly to chimney rock.

[June] 9

passed chimney rock and camped opposite Scots bluffs.

[June] 10

camped on bluff creek.

[June] 11

camped on Platt 10 miles below the ford[.]

[June] 12 & 13

spent in crossing the river[.] the water was very high and the ferry boat had been swept away, we crossed in our wagon beds without accident[.] one man was drowned while we were crossing belonging

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to another company and we were told he was the 5 that had drowned there this spring[.]

[June] 14

Traveled 24 miles over very hilly roads and passed the warm springs. camped on bitter creek[.]

[June] 15

traveled 23 miles[.] camped on a small creek among the bluffs[.]

[June] 16

traveled 13 miles over very hilly and flinty roads and camped on La Bonte[.] a stream of clear water 30 ft wide[,] 2 deep.

[June] 17

traveled 19½ miles to the La Prele, river 16 ft wide[,] 2 deep. Our roads this day were very rough, five miles of it was over dark red sand, and situated among this sand were several hills of

plaster, said by some of our company who had been dealers in that article to be clean and purer than they ever saw of the imported plaster of Paris and of a better quality, we also saw some of the toads with horns and tails.

[June] 18

traveled 20 miles over a dry and barren country, and camped 2 miles west of deer river[.] found no feed for teams.

[June] 19

traveled 13 miles and then drove our stock back among the hills for feed, snow was visible on the tops of the hills.

[June] 20

drove 8 miles and ferried to the north Side of Platt[.]

[June] 21

camped on the brow of a hill 7 miles above the upper ford.

[June] 22

passed the poison lake and spring[.] went through the rock avenue and crossed some alkali marshes and creeks[.] the road was strewn with dead and dying horses[,] cattle and mules[.] we camped a few miles west of willow creek[.]

[June] 23

passed a number of Salaratus lakes whose surface was as white as milk[.] gathered some for use, also forded the Sweetwater near Independance rock and drove two miles from the road for feed under the lee of the Sweetwater mountains, ascended one of the mountains, for observation.

[June] 24

passed by the devils gate[.] this is a passage cut by the river through a granite mountain 400 ft high and ½ mile through, crossed the river[.]

[June] 25

lay by most of the day for the press of teams to pass us, and traveled in the night. so as not to be hindered by them. passed the alkali lakes[,] marshes and ice spring[.] camped on a bluff without feed[.]

[June] 26

made a hard days drive[.] camped on the Sweetwater at the commencement of rocky ridges[.]

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[June] 27

camped 4 miles above the upper ford on Sweetwater in the Pass.

[June] 28

went through the remainder of the Pass by the Pacific spring and camped at the junction of California and Oregon roads, having traveled 24 ½ miles[.]

[June] 29

only drove to the little Sandy and rested our teams[.]

[June] 30

traveled 12 miles beyond the ford of Big Sandy and camped on a high ridge[.]

July 1<sup>st</sup>

traveled 12 miles to green river ferry, ferried at the Indian ferry and attended the funeral of one of their men buried in the Indian style,

[July] 2 and 3

laid by to recruit.

[July] 4

traveled 17 miles and camped on Blacks fork[.]

[July] 5

traveled 27 miles[,] camped in ft Bridger valley, this is a lovely place, a small valley Surrounded by high mountains covered with Snow and water by ½ dozen custaiy[?]

10

streams.

[July] 6

camped in a very pretty green valley in which were some snake Indians, and a delaware who had married a Snake, who could talk english. they took supper with us[.] while we were eating a runner came in and reported that there had been a massacre of Indians by the whites to get possession of their horses, he said the Snakes had always been friendly with the whites and if the report proved true he feared many an innocent white man would suffer for it.

[July] 7

crossed the dividing ridge and camp on Bear river[.]

[July] 8

traveled 20 miles[,] camped in Echo creek valley near where the whites and Indians had their fight, we heard that a party of whites brough along some whiskey on purpose to trade with, and when they had made them intoxicated they swindled them out of some of their best horses[.] when the Indians became sober they undertook to take them back by force[.] 26 Indians were killed and five whites[.]

[July] 9

traveld 18 miles[,] camped on the red fork of weber river. Our way for the last 25 miles has been following a small creek in a narrow deep ravine with gigantic piles of red sand stone piled

hundreds of feet above us.

[July] 10

took the new road up the red fork and camped on it.

[July] 11

camped in a ravine among the Timpanoes mountains. bad roads

11

all of the way[.]

[July] 12

camped in Salt Lake valley. in the mormon City.

City of the Salt Lake July 13 1850

Dear Father & Mother Wakeley

We have at last arrived safely in the Mormon City, though not so early as we expected by some days. We were detained two days at Fort Larimer in crossing the river, the ferry boat was swept off by the uncommon high water the morning we reached there, we ferried in one of our wagon beds, which was not only tedious but dangerous, one man from Michigan was drowned while we were crossing he belonged to another company and we were told was the 5th that had been drowned there this spring. There was some excitement at the fort in consequence of a murder that had just taken place. Two brothers (Cox by name) emigrants became angry at card-playing and settled the dispute with their Bowie knives, one was killed on the spot, the other dangerously wounded. The living one was taken into custody at the fort, also the two that were playing with them as accomplices.

The Black Hills proved very hard on our cattle, not the hills but the materials of which they are composed. They are principally formed of flint and gravel which cut the oxen's feet like traveling on glass. They are covered with pitch pine and wild sage, which gives them a dark gloomy appearance. June 20 we ferried to the north side of the Platt a few miles above Fox river, The ferryman told us there had been 13 drowned there this spring. There has been a new road opened on the north side of the Platt that saves the necessity of crossing it at all, and also avoids the Black Hill, we made a great mistake in not taking it. 22 we passed the poison lake and spring, went through the rock avenue, and crossed some alkali marshes and brooks the road was strewn with dead and dying cattle, horses, and mules.

23 passed a number of Salasabro Lakes with a surface as white as snow.

The lakes that have water in them do not crust over, but throw their crystallizations, on the shores in win-rows. Those that present so white an appearance are dead down, but are so soft that a man cannot walk on it without mixing, we obtained some of the crust that was about three inches in thickness, the upper two inches as pure and clear as any pearl ash you ever saw, the lower inch that rested on the ashes quite dark. Some of the emigrants rise it, we dare not, for it is so poisonous for cattle we think there is some mineral mixed with it. We have seen some companies that have lost from 25 to 30 head of cattle in one night just from eating the grass near it. All the banks of the streams and low lands are frosted over with it till we came west of Green river, we were obliged to drive our stock on to the high lands, where we did not always find good feed.

24 passed Independence Rock, and the devil gate, this last is a passage cut by the Sweetwater river, through a granite mountain 400 ft high and 2 mile through. 27 we camped in the South Pass, this by ascending one of the hills affords a splendid view. The valley of the sweetwater fringed with willow, the wind river mountains covered with eternal snow and glittering in the sun like silver, stretching to the north as far as the eye can reach, to the north west the twin and table mountains. To the south the rocky line of mountains, beyond them the green river mountains to the west covered with snow, and the bear river mountains to the south west whose peaks look like spires of silver, all together make it one of the most lovely views to be met with on the road.

July 1<sup>st</sup> ferried Green river, there are two ferries kept here one by the Mormons and one by half breeds (Snake Indians and French) we crossed at the half breeds, and attended the funeral ceremonies of one of the Indians. He was wrapped in 4 blankets of different colors. then a new buffalo robe was fastened round his with ropes. he was put in the grave

then another buffalo robe spread over him, then his wife brought all of his clothes and put at his head, a sack of provisions and a jay of powder at his feet. His gun, ammunition, and a plentiful supply of tobacco at his side, that he might not enter the distant hunting grounds empty handed.

5<sup>th</sup> camped in fort Bridger valley, this is a trading establishment and is a beautiful place. It is a small valley at the east foot of Bear mountains the snow peaks towering above it and sending down some half a dozen rushing streams of melting snow water. The snakes have always been very friendly to the whites. We have seen great numbers of them, and have camped among them and eat with them several times. They have the most splendid Spanish horses, and cattle that I ever saw, and the most of them, and they have been in the habit of camping on the road for the purpose of trading with the emigrants. But that is now at an end.

The night before we were at Bear river, we were camped in a small valley with some snakes, among whom was a Delaware who had married a snake and who could talk English, and who seemed to be in considerable authority among them. He was eating supper with us, when a runner came in and reported that there had been a massacre of the Indians by the emigrants, to get possession of their horses. He made the observation that if the report proved true many an innocent white man would have to suffer for it, that there were many Indians at Bear river who would know the truth of it, but we found no Indians there nor have seen any since, except at a distance, we have seen many places where they have left their hair as a signal of defiance, and in Echo creek valley we saw a mound newly raised with an inscription on a board that five whites were buried there who were killed by the Indians. There were several barrels and pieces of flesh scattered round and some dead Indians. We have since learned that the whites merited their fate, they brought along some whiskey on purpose to trade with the Indians and when they were intoxicated they swindled them out of a number of their best horses the Indians would not abide by their trade when they became sober, they tried to take back their horses by force and 26 Indians among whom were several squaws were killed and 5 whites. The Indians have some revenge which they will doubtless put in execution.

We arrived here yesterday, all well but one, I have been sick ever since we left Green river with what they call the mountain fever.

The general opinion of our journey thus far is, that we would not take the trip over again as we have taken it for all the gold in California.

way, Our only fear is bad roads, and want of feed for cattle, and that cannot well be worse than some parts that we have passed over

The mormon that piloted that company down the Colorado last year has never been heard from, his family still live here

I will write you again when we reach Sacramento City and I suppose you will receive it nearly as soon as this, you have ever manifested so warm an interest in my welfare that I flatter myself I do not intrude in sending a few lines, I shall ever remember you with gratitude and affection

Y<sup>rs</sup> M<sup>r</sup>

Mr. Johnson  
W. W. W. W. W.

W. W. W. W. W.

W. W. W.

We think of remaining 1 week to recruit our cattle and horses and then pursue our journey westward. we are too early for garden vegetables, and with our hard bread is becoming rather unpalatable. I don't think I am becoming particular about my diet. Salt Lake valley is full of emigrants and more constantly coming in. many have sold off their teams intending to spend the winter here, and return in the spring, very many are discouraged, The mormons tell some frightful stories about the remainder of the

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saw plenty of Prairie both at the

ferry and at our camp they were

daily with looking people both in

buffalo robes, which they wore over the left shoulder leaving the right one bare, and a belt around the waist, they were armed with bows and arrows.

21. Traveled 25 miles to the east 100 of it being on the north side of the Platte.

22. This day made 22 miles across a shell creek, met near the creek 5 or 10 Indians

all armed, our Captain called a halt that the men might prepare themselves

for an attack, if we was intended that they did not molest only by begging

The Chief, two of his relatives young ones and two boys took dinner with us

and we made them some presents we camped on the bank of the Platte

This night we were visited by the most violent rain and wind storm

that I ever experienced, the quantity of water that fell rendered the road

almost impassable. 23 only made 6 miles and camped at Long Fork ferry, 24 crossed

the Leap a very rapid stream and difficult to cross being over 300 yds wide

with a quick sand bottom, 25 traveled 23 miles up the south side of the Leap

saw some deer and elk and several antelope, but our hunters did not

succeed in taking any, 26 traveled over a beautiful level prairie on the

south side of Long Fork, camped within 4 miles of the upper ford on

the site of an old Indian town and encamped, and it was the most beautiful

spot and afforded the most pleasing perspective view that I ever beheld

In the best ground the high land that separates the Leap from the

Platt rose at the distance of 5 or 6 miles and descended gradually to the edge of the bluff where we were encamped on the old tower. (This tower was built by the Sioux in 1860) In front of us was the river, immediately beyond it the river bottom is 4 or 5 miles in width and stretched with small lakes, each one surrounded with trees and trees could also be seen in the distance on the river, both above and below us, though there was not a in front and to the north of the bottom level was the edge of bluffs, high and smooth. The bottom level and the table land in which we were encamped and smooth as a well rolled lawn

27 traveled 24 miles to Prairie creek very good road but no water, 28 traveled 25 miles camped on Platt, 29 made 26 miles through a country thickly inhabited by prairie dogs, passed through several of their towns and saw great numbers of them, camped in one of these valleys, 30 traveled 30 miles, crossed Buffalo creek, at noon and camped on Platt. Saw buffaloes at a distance and also antelope. Some traveled 19 1/2 miles over sand ridges and not prairie and camped on third creek, this is the commencement of the great prairie drainage & traveled 21 miles, passed a spring of pure cold water, the first good water we have seen since leaving Iowa, camped on Platt

and commenced using buffalo chips for fuel, there being no timber this side of the river. A party of deer and antelope hunt in camp. I traveled 22 miles back roads with a party of ten, and camped on bluff. I traveled 20 miles heavy roads, camped on waterhole creek opposite a high rock bluff the first rock we have seen west of the Missouri and also saw a drove of buffalo crossing the bluffs near my camp. They have never been so near here.

5 traveled 19 miles camped on water creek roads very wet and feet poor.

6 traveled 27 miles passed the lone cedar tree, and also castle bluffs camped on the Prairie. I traveled 19 miles very good road most of the way camped at bluff arrived with good feed for cattle and gathered fuel with intention to work mules in a warm supper. The first we have had in several days for the last, rains have rendered that buffalo chips not usable.

8 passed the worst horse mill trail and traveled nearly to chimney rock. I passed chimney rock and camped opposite bluff. Bluffs 10 camped on bluff camp 10 camped on bluff 10 miles below the ford.

12 & 13 spent in crossing the river the water was very high and the ferry boat had been shipped away, we started in our wagon beds without accident one man was drowned while we were eating belonging

to another company and we were told he was the 5 that had drowned there this spring. 14 traveled 24 miles over very hilly roads and passed the warm springs, camped on bitter creek. 15 traveled 23 miles camped on a small creek among the bluffs. 16 traveled 18 miles over very hilly and rocky roads and camped at La Roche a stream of clear water 30 ft wide & deep. 17 traveled 18 1/2 miles to the La Roche river, 16 ft wide & deep. Clear roads this day were very rough, four miles of it was out of track and several interesting among this sand was several hills of bluffs, soil by some of our company who had been dealers in that article to be clear and purer than they ever saw of the imported planks of Java and of a better quality, we also saw some of the trade with sand and tails.

18 traveled 29 miles over a dry and barren country, and passed 8 miles west of deer river found no feed for teams. 19 traveled 18 miles and then drove our stock back among the hills for feed, snow was visible on the tops of the hills.

20 drove 8 miles and joined to the north side of Platt 21 camped on the lower of a hill 7 miles above the upper ford.

22 passed the former lake and spring west thereof. The rock occurs and covered with alkali, mules and oxen eat the rock, the road was strewed with dead and dying horses cattle and mules. We caught a few miles west of willow creek.

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25 lay by most of the day for the pieces of teams to pass us, and traveled in the night so as not to be hindered by them. passed the alkali lakes, marshes and we spring camped on a bluff without feed

26 while a hard days drive camped on the Sweetwater at the commencement of rocky ridges

27 camped 4 miles above the upper part on Sweetwater in the Pass, 28 went through the remainder of the Pass, by the Pacific spring and camped at the junction of California and Oregon roads, having traveled 24 1/2 miles 29 only drove to the little sandy and rested our teams

30 traveled 12 miles beyond the first of Big Sandy and camped on a high ridge July 1st traveled 10 miles to Green river ferry, passed at the Indian ferry and attended the funeral of one of their men buried in the Indian

Style, 2 and 3 laid by to recruit 4 traveled 17 miles and camped on Blackfoot 5 traveled 27 miles camped in Ft. Bridger valley, this is a lovely place, a small valley surrounded by high mountains covered with snow with water by E. H. Gray camped

Streams. 6 camped in a very pretty green valley in which were found snake Indians, and a Delaware who had married a Snake, who could both English. They took supper with us while we were eating dinner, came in and reported that there had been a massacre of Indians by the whites to get possession of their horses. He said the Snake had always been friendly with the whites and if the report proved true, he feared among an ancient white man would suffer for it.

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2581. 21 July. Left 1700 ft. camp of the Green Hills of red sand stone hills. Hundreds of feet above 2580 took the new road up the red fork and camped at 2581.

11 camped in a ravine among the Shipaon mountains, had rocks

all of the way. 12 camped in Salt Lake valley, in the Mormon City