

Notes of a Journey

- 17 15th: [May] Crossed Shell creek a little before noon on a very poor bridge. Camped on the bank of the Platte. Had to wade to an island for wood. Grass moderately good. It rained all night. Joe was on guard the forepart and Marion the after part of the night. They growled considerably about the wind and rain. Contrary to our expectation the Davidson train came up. They traveled till late to make the trip. It being very bad weather for guarding they just turned everything loose and went to bed. In the morning the sheep were missing but after some search they were found. They found two the wolves had killed and suspected them of killing several more.
- 16th: We got a late start it soon commenced raining. The rest of the folks turned into camp but we kept on, came to the Loup Fork about 1 o'clock and had to lay by till next day on account of wind and weather, for we could not get across.
- 17th: We laid by waiting for the ferry to get itself regulated but the river was up so that they could not fix it. Wind blowed very hard all day right down stream. There is a small cabin here for the use of the ferryman. It is covered with Buffalo hides with a sign up which says, Nebraska Hotel and Pawnee Post Office. It is as much P.O. as Hotel. (I started a letter back which went all right to its destination)
- 18 18th: We drove our cattle about 1½ miles to grass after they had time to fill we brought them back and yoked up expecting to get across the river soon. They got their ropes up about noon. This done the wind raised and we could not get over that day, so we had to wait as patiently as the nature of the case would admit. Camped with Bowen, Davidson & Co.
- 19th: This morning we have a fine prospect of continuing our meanderings. We took one yoke of oxen over on the boat the other we swam over with Bowens cattle. This is a strange stream. Almost every bar is merely a bed of quick sand. The stream is not very deep but rapid. Report says 30 miles to a ford. Davidsons train went by way of the ford, expecting to meet us in the course of a few days. Camped in the open prairie in sight of Loup fork. Some of the boys saw some Indians in the timber near the river and run for life.
- [sic] 20th: Our road lay up Loup fork bottom. Mostly level occasionally encroaching. Some on the hills. Camped early on the bank of the river. This is said to be the last point of timber for 50 miles. My sore leg began to hurt me so much that I was obliged to take to the wagon. The boys report seeing a snake with a head on both ends, don't know how it was. Rather fishy
- 21st: S. This morning the road takes square up the bluffs, One of the boys and I went a hunting and saw one of the long eared rabbits for the first. Camped in sight of timber on Loup fork. No water but a little which rained during the night and ran into a slough. Ground poor being nearly clear sand easily blown about into ridges, resembling waves.
- 19 22nd: Still traveling over the sand ridges during the day we saw several buffale skulls and other bones, but as yet we have not been able to see any live specimens. Being out a shooting I suddenly came to a prairie dogtown. The inhabitants seemed to be very much surprised, but after a bit their curiosity overcame their fears and they began to peep from their houses and commenced a quick sharp barking. I succeeded in killing two and stunning one, so that I caught it and brought it into camp. Camped in the open prairie without wood or water. During the day we crossed one slough containing water, it was only a wet weather concern. We saw the first deserted wagon. It had been a very good one but the emigrants had cut it so much as to render it useless only for fire wood.

23rd: Last night was my second on guard it was not as hard by considerable as my first. Davidsons had passed and this morning they took the start and went clear ahead. Crossed Prairie Creek about noon. It is like the generality of streams with steep, miry banks. We came to the creek in the evening again and camped on it. I got a thorough ducking by accident. After dark we had quite a serenade from a pack of prairie wolves.

24th: I went out a hunting. Saw an antelope and shot a wolfe. I came out two miles ahead of the train, at a mail station and trading post on Wood river established by D. Clarke. While the company were coming up I busied myself writing a letter home. This river is about 20 feet wide with steep, miry banks. They have made a bridge of poles and only charge 50 cts per wagon. Here we left Mr. Bowens company. They traveled too slow. Camped alone in the open prairie. No wood or water except a little of each which we had brought along. Guarded the cattle by tying them to stakes.

25th: This morning I went a hunting. Struck for timber on the Platte about four miles distant. When I came to the river I discovered that the timber was on the other side. Passed through a prairie dog town. We are in the Platte bottom, it is about five or six miles wide and looks at a distance to be as level as a floor. Drove off of the road at noon for water. Camped on a small stream near some Missourians with a drove of cattle. I have
20 been trying hard for the last few days to get some game, but it is no go. I can see plenty but can not get close enough to shoot with much certainty of killing.

26th: We made a good days drive. Country of the same appearance as yesterday. It rained in the afternoon and made the road rather sloppy. We came near loosing our wagon in crossing a bridge over a small stream (Buffalo Creek) which we have been following up for some time. Camped on this stream by driving a little off of the road. We find that our cattle do better and take less watching than when we are in larger companies. Saw some scattering specimens of the prickly pear tribe. I got some that was entirely new to me.

27th: Made a good drive over a good road. Camped on the banks of the Platte by driving $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles off of the road. It was the nearest we could find wood and water. Then had to wade to an island for the wood. It rained some during the night.

28th: It was raining in the morning and we took a late start. I had a very disagreeable pet on the side of my face in the shape of a boil. I rode in the wagon about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day. About four miles from camp the river and bluffs come together. The road forks one goes over the hill and the other around it a little below high water mark. In the evening we were much amused at a chase which we saw. An Irishman in a company immediately before us saw something which he took after. The Capt. told him to come back but he said Och and I'll kill the ferocious varmint. As he approached it with hat in one hand and whip in the other he met with an unexpected salute, for it was no more nor less than a skunk. This only made him more furious and he went to beating it with buffalo chips which took but little effect. Presently he found a buffalo skull and sure enough killed the varmint. Camped at the foot of the bluffs. Rained during the night, bad roads on account of recent rains and the level surface
21 of the country.

29th: In spite of wind and weather we managed to get out breakfast and get off before the rest of the campers in our vicinity. 4 or 5 miles from camp we came to the famous "big spring" it is one of the springs sure enough affording water sufficient to run a mill if you could only get fall. Excellent water. Two miles further we crossed a creek and about two more we camped at the last timber. For two hundred miles. This timber is on the other side of the river. Bishop and I went over and brought a load it is about three hours work there and back. Current swift, quick sand knee deep, and deeper water from six inches to 6 or 10 feet deep. At night there was a very severe storm. Our wagon stood facing it. The storm blew the cattle all over the

bottom leaving the guards without anything to guard.

30th: We started next after a dutch company, kept near them all day. We had some very bad sloughs to cross and were obliged to get some assistance or we would not have been able to get away. Broke one of our yokes. Camped with our dutch friends in a small hollow to the right of the road. Where we camped last night was said to be the last sight for timber. But we have seen some along the other side of the river. It would be very unhandy to come at on account of sloughs.

22 31st: This morning we saw some companies that had camped six or eight miles behind us, the night before last. They had found a track which led around these bad mud holes. Several companies passed us last night after we had camped, but we took the start of them this morning and left them behind. About noon we crossed a creek and immediately the road ascended the bluffs very deep sand about two miles farther it descended directly it went over the bluffs again. Here we saw a wagon stalled on the top of a hill where there was no mud. At the foot of this bluff is a trading establishment kept by some men from Council Bluffs. Sugar 25 per lb. whiskey \$4.00 per gal. brandy \$10.00. No sales. Camped about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from this stand. While the rest were getting supper I shot a skunk and two weasels with a revolver without leaving camp fifty yards. The width of the river bottom along here varies from zero to seven hundred yards. The bluffs are nearly clear sand plenty of sand burs.

June 1st: Thursday: Started moderately early, within about 3 miles crossed 3 spring branches. Then over the sand ridges. Very hard pulling, presently down into the bottom. Afternoon some bad roads. Camped on the bank of Platte near some Dutchmen, that had lost 12 head of horses. They had been looking for them for a week and allowed to leave in one or two more days.

2nd: Crossed Rattle Snake creek Road in the bottom till near noon. Crossed several small branches bottom wet and spongy. Crossed Wolf Creek but before getting to it I went to sleep by the road side and got nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ day behind the team before waking. This is quite a stream at the foot of the bluffs which are very sandy. Hard roads to travel. Descended to the bottom and camped about two miles from the creek. Bishop began to complain of weakness in one of his legs. Grass, and water good.

23 3rd: Rough road, it is not muddy, but has been. About 10 o'clock we met some Indians. Jo and got some moccasins. We crossed Castle creek this is quite a stream. Some French half breeds have a small trading post here. While we were stopped for dinner there was quite a thunder storm with hail and rain. After the rain was over our attention was attracted by a noise resembling a rush of wind in the direction of the river. Looking round we saw a water spout carrying up Platte water by the quantity. It carried up a straight column for about 100 feet. It was then inclined some by a gentle breeze and was finally lost in a black cloud over our heads. It followed the course of the river as far as we could see to distinguish it from the clouds. We camped in the river bottom. The mosquitoes were so bad that they made two of our oxen break loose and run away. After we had gone to bed, we got up and followed them about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, brought them back and hitched up drove about 4 miles. We got settled again about midnight.

Sunday 4th: Drove awhile in the morning then stopped to let the boys rest and sleep some as it was Sunday. Afternoon we crossed a small stream named Crab Creek. A trading post here for buying up the lame cattle and such as give out and selling whiskey. Some Sioux Indians were camped here. Half a dozen little ones nearly naked with their bows and arrows playing in the creek. Eight miles farther we crossed cobble hills, they do look cobling enough, look as if they had been pitched together promiscuously. Another trader here in the common business, selling liquor. After we had camped our old friend from Drakeville, Iowa came in along side and camped also. Along the bluffs is what is called the ancient bluff ruins. They bear some resemblance to ruins and with a little imagination it is easily pictured out.

Monday 5th June: We started ahead of Drakeville. I went to the bluffs a hunting. Saw some antelope got a shot but did not kill. The bluffs here are different from those back a piece. They are topped out with a kind of limestone rock, the soil, if there ever was any is about blown away. Some heavy sandy roads passed Convent or Courthouse Rock, not near enough to tell what it looks like. Passed through a village of Sioux Indians containing 10 lodges. They, the Indians, seemed as if they had not had anything to eat lately for they were begging continually for something to stick down their throats. Camped with Mitchels Co. from Mo. with a drove of cattle.

24 Tuesday 6th: We passed the famous chimney rock a little before noon. This looks like some big hay stack with an awful big stick stuck in the top of it. It is on the S side of the river not quite as high as the neighboring hills. Camped opposite Scotts Bluffs distant about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles. They are the steepest and highest clay bluffs we have seen yet, the sides and top in places are covered with small cedars.

Wednesday 7th: The Company which we camped with had some shoeing to do so we drove along in about 4 or 5 miles we came to a creek of clear cold water on the S of the road followed it up for some distance. Had some sandy roads, passed two trading fixings with Indians. Camped by each. After leaving the last we went about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to where the Bluffs and river come close together. Here we camped and turned our cattle on an island. Rained during the night. We have had plenty of prickly pear for a day or two. Guide says they continue the rest of the route. I am now wearing moccasins, these prickles sometimes give me a dig, but I find that boots are not altogether proof against them.

Thursday 8th: Six or eight miles from camp we found timber on the north side of the river. Five miles from the timber we crossed a creek which would have been dry but for last night's rain. Camped some distance from the road in a bend of the river on creek or slough of very clear cold water.

25 Friday 9th: We had some good roads this morning, not quite as sandy as yesterday evening. Passed a smith's shop 4 miles E of Ft Laramie, arrived opposite the fort about noon. The Platte here is about 200 yards wide. I paid 25 cts for going over and back. Went up to the Fort, but it don't look much like a fort according to my preconceived ideas of such a thing. It is situated on a small raise of ground elevated about ten or twelve feet above surrounding prairie, completely overlooked by hills but at some distance. Flanked on the east by Laramie Creek, open on the north to the river 800 yards. There are two large frame houses, one frame barn and quite a number of adobe houses, two smith shops, one a government concern, one bakery, one store, etc. I put some letters in the office here and had to pay 5 cts over and above postage. Flour \$10.50. None for sale. Caps 25 cts per box other things in proportion. We got shoes enough to shoe one ox for \$2.00. They charge \$4.00 for shoeing a horse. At the ferry on the N side of the river is a Sioux village of about 100 lodges. They seem very peaceable only bothering about eatables. Camped on the river about four miles from the Fort. We had company for supper. I got a bow and some arrows of an Indian.

Saturday 10th: After driving about four miles we entered the pass in the black hills, and they are really black, in places being covered with a kind of dark colored stone. Drove in edge-ways and in other places with dwarf cedar and pine of from 3 to six feet from the fork to the ground. From the time we entered the pass till night it was nothing but a succession of hills and hollows and some very steep and rocky ones. Some places I felt very doubtful about our old wagon being able to make the trip over these hills without thinking once of California.

Mining Experiences

Of the multitude who trudged their way to California to make a State few were so well fitted as George McCowen.

He was a mechanical genius and an all around athlete. He could lift fifteen hundred pounds. Any dangerous work high in the air or under water he did with dexterity and ease.

After a few years he returned to the East to study dentistry, which he practiced in Ukiah, California till his retirement.

He is now over ninety years old and can still do the "Bear Dance".

J. W. Hudson

- 1 September 16, 1854. Arrived at Grass Valley found it a good sized village the mountains rising considerable above the town on three sides, on the fourth side was a gradual decline.

Enquiries failed to elicit any information as to the residence of Uncle John Leonard until I arrived at the Post Office. There I got full directions. Found him located at the eastern outskirt of the town on a little flat of about ten acres, on the road to the Mt. George saw mill.

Along one side of this flat was a strip containing two or three acres of the very richest of soil, with water standing or rather percolating at a depth of eighteen inches to two feet below the surface.

Garden stuff planted on this piece had all the moisture it could use and made a most wonderful growth.

But with all these luxuriant prospects, there was a most serious drawback. A person could only obtain a possessory title as a farmer or gardener, finding a piece of unoccupied ground a man might build a house, but should a passing miner suspect there was gold near he could enter the premises and remove the earth to the bed rock on all sides to within ten feet of the buildings and the owner had no recourse.

In the garden spot I have described it was no uncommon occurrence to look out and see two or three men in the midst of a garden bed sinking a prospect hole. They would scatter the earth in any direction that suited their convenience. It was generally from twelve to fifteen feet to the bed rock. Four-fifths of the depth would be through sand and coarse gravel which would be well spread over the garden. Reaching the bed rock they would scrape up a pan full of sand from the surface and proceed to pan . . .