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PIONEER LINE REACHES FT. KEARNEY

Ft. Kearney

June 19, 1849

The cry is still they come. Five thousand and ninety-two wagons at sundown last night had moved past this place toward the golden regions of California, and 1,000 more are still behind, I think. The fever, however, in many cases, has completely subsided, and in others, a few more doses of rain will put them in a fair way for recovery. A few are daily turning back, and many more would follow suit, did they not stand in fear of ridicule that is sure to wait them upon reaching home. The Pioneer Company of Fast Coaches (from Independence) reached here on the 8th, advertised to go through in 70 or 100 days, I forget which - the end of the month finds them but three hundred miles on the road. A great error was made in fitting out this line, resulting either from ignorance or lack of means. The baggage wagons are entirely too heavily loaded, to move with the rapidity of such a line, and the carriages carrying but six persons are drawn by but two mules, and small ones at that. The passengers were loud in denouncing all fast lines, and the Pioneer Line in particular. A strong feeling of discontent prevailed throughout the company, owing entirely to the want of sufficient transportation, and the chances are strongly in favor of a general exploding. It must be said, however, in justice to Mr. Turner, who, I believe, is in charge of the train, that he is a man of energy and does all that a man can do in under existing conditions. The devil himself would find it impossible to give satisfaction to an incongruous crowd of one hundred and twenty persons drawn from all parts of the world and thrown together for the first time, as is the case with the Pioneer Line. There are to be found doctors, lawyers, divines, gentlemen of leisure, clerks, speculators, etc., etc., tumbled in together and obliged to stand guard, cook victuals, bring wood and water, wash dishes, and haul wagons out of mud holes. Can anything imaginable be more difficult than the smoothing down of such a heterogeneous mass, but I presume the proprietors foresaw this before embarking in the business, and are prepared for any contingency.

"PAWNEE"

Missouri REPUBLICAN, July 6, 1849

reached Fort Kearney, 300 miles from St. Joseph, beyond which point but few cases if any were seen or heard of. We lost two of our company of 17, one of them Samuel Wilson, of St. Joseph, a very stout hardy Irishman, a blacksmith by trade, and had been in the volunteer service, was taken down with the cholera about 75 miles from the Mo. river, and died in seven hours after first complaining—the other gentleman was Mr. Hugh Riddle, late of Baltimore, Md. He received a mortal wound on Mary's river about 100 miles after striking the head of it; he stepped out some ten steps from his pile of packs at a late hour of the night to see about his mules, and was discovered near the mule by a fellow called Kirkwood, a great poltroon and fool doubtlessly, but not knowing whom it was, hailed him three times, (so said) but getting no reply to his question shot him while in a few yards of camp . . . He was shot on the night of 17th of June, and died on the morning of the 19th.

I stood the trip across equally as well as I expected, and although anticipating many hardships, and inconveniences on the road, I must acknowledge that they exceed all anticipation. And I say now that I don't think I will ever be caught on the plains again, if there is any other safe chance of getting to the States. I must admit that those who had wagons had many advantages over us as to comforts, but I know of several mountains on the route that I would not attempt to drive a wagon and team over for them. We were not exposed to many hard storms, some times we had tents but most of the way we had no tent poles, and we cut up the tent cloth for saddle cloths; 8 or 900 miles from here the plains presented a picture this summer before unheard of in the history of emigration. There has been the most profuse waste and destruction of most everything started with by the emigrants, the cause has been from having their wagons entirely too large, over loading them and breaking their teams down; the

greater part of the road from here to Missouri, was strewn as we came along with a great many articles. I suppose we saw something like a hundred wagons thrown away, some of them burnt, cut up and so forth. There are fearful apprehensions by many persons here about the emigrants, who are some distance back; it is believed that at least one-third of the wagons can't possibly get here in consequence of grass being bad in many places. We saw where quantities of bacon, flour, salt, beans, saleratus, coffee, sugar, tools of every description, such as picks, spades, shovels, axes, saws, augurs, chisels, planes etc., gold washers and cooking stoves in abundance, log-chains, powder, lead and any number of guns, dry goods, law books, novels, and a little of everything else, I believe. There is a great deal of stock broken down on the road, I lost my riding animal (Phillis) on Mary's river, and I had a mule to break down while crossing a very repulsive desert to me.

The grass on Mary's river has been grossly misrepresented by many of the guide books; it is very bad for about 100 miles on the lower part of it. We went about that distance and reached the sink on that river which is a very disagreeable place; the water is horrid, being unfit for man or beast, it has a strong alkaline taste, no grass, all the chance for grazing is on coarse rushes. We left that place late in the evening for a desert of 45 miles, without any grass or a drop of water, with the exception of a branch, 12 miles from the sink, of the most poisonous quality; we took a left hand road when we got a mile or two into it, called Child's route; it strikes over on to Carson river; that route does not touch Truckee river at all—most of the emigrants take the road we traveled. The desert is a very hazardous place to cross, it is a road of very heavy sand, quantities of stock will perish on it for want of water and grass; the stock is in such bad condition when they enter it that a great many of them can't stand

have broken in pretty effectively upon the monotony of our prairie life.

One of the men with the Mormon mail, is just from the "diggings," in California, and is certainly a happy fellow, for he says he has as much gold as he wants. He showed a stocking full as a specimen, and as you may well suppose, the emigrants opened wide their eyes at the sight of the glittering mass.

"PAWNEE"

Missouri Republican, June 4, 1849

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"PAWNEE"

Missouri Republican, July 6, 1849

LIFE EN ROUTE

Chimney Rock, North Fork of Platte
June 3, 1849

I believe my last to you was written from the main Platte, since then I have had no chance of sending letters. We are now nearing Fort Laramie and I begin preparing a mission to transmit from that point. But in advance I must again say you can hardly conceive of the difficulties of preparing letters on our



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SALT LAKE CITY AFFECTED BY THE GOLD RUSH

The valley has been a place of general deposit for property, goods, etc. . . . When they [the emigrants] saw a few bags and kegs of gold dust that had been gathered and brought in by our boys, it made them completely enthusiastic. Pack mules and horses that were worth twenty-five or thirty dollars in ordinary times, would readily bring two hundred dollars in property at the lowest price. Goods and other property were daily offered at auction in all parts of the city. For a light Yankee wagon, sometimes three or four great heavy ones would be offered in exchange, and a yoke of oxen thrown in. Common domestic sheeting sold from five to ten cents per yard by the bolt. The best of spades and shovels for fifty cents each. Vests that cost in St. Louis one dollar and fifty cents each, were sold at Salt Lake City for three bits, or $37\frac{1}{2}$ cents. Full chests of joiner's tools that would cost one hundred and fifty dollars in the East, were sold for \$25. Indeed, almost every article, except sugar and coffee, is selling on an average fifty per cent below wholesale prices in the Eastern cities. Would it not be a grand speculation for Kanesville and St. Joseph merchants to go to Salt Lake to lay in their fall stock of goods? They can buy plenty of wagons there for less than one half what the iron cost in St. Louis, and any number of cattle to haul them back. This kind of operation has put the people on their legs in the valley, but when the alcohol was brought forward and sold, it threw some of them off their legs, not having had any for a couple of years or so, and being rather exhausted by digging gold all the time, they were not wise to hazard a contest with so potent an enemy, more to be dreaded than the mobs of Illinois . . . Many of the emigrants would pay no attention to the warnings of our people not to let their cattle drink of the water so strongly impregnated with saleratus. They said it was all a "Mormon humbug" about the alkali being strong enough

Salt Lake City

to kill their cattle, and the consequences were more than two thousand dead carcasses of oxen lay strewn along the way, and the very offensive smell caused there by, rendered it almost impossible to travel near the road. The cholera has been very fatal among the Indians. In one place Mr. Babbit mentions as having passed ten lodges with many dead Indians lying about and their bodies torn and half eaten by wolves.

Kanesville *Frontier Guardian*, quoted
by St. Joseph *Adventure*, Sept. 14, 1849

OVERLAND WITH A PACK TRAIN EMIGRANT

Sacramento City, Aug. 7, 1849

After a long and tedious, perplexing and fatiguing trip, I have reached the much talked of place, the Sacramento valley, in good health and spirits.

I left the Missouri river on the 12th of May last, I arrived here on Aug. 5th, making 86 days out. We were detained on the route 17 days, about 14 of which was on account of sickness of some of the company. Every man in it was at different times too sick to stand guard, except brother Mason and myself, and some of them were dangerously ill. Immediately after leaving the river we found the cholera wending its way over the plains, passing several fresh graves every day, until we



it. I did not get but a few miles into it before my riding mule broke down, and I had to get on a company horse, putting a light pack on my mule. We went a few miles further and Mason had to leave a fine saddle horse, and take a mule; we went on then till morning, when we found ourselves some 18 miles or 20 miles from Carson river; my mule refused to go at all, and knowing it to be for want of water, I desired to get him out; I took the pack off and put it on the horse I was riding, and then took it on foot—Mason and myself riding time about; I almost suffocated for water before I could get in. The road was strewn with wagons for some 10 miles in the desert, where the emigrants had to drive them to water & graze them before they could get out. Carson river is a very pretty stream and splendid grass on it, we went up that stream about 90 miles and took across the Sierra Nevada Mountains, which is enough to paralyze [*sic*] the energies of most any person to undertake to cross some of the ridges. It is a travel of 3 or 4 days to get out of them. There is very fine grass in the mountains for the first 40 or 50 miles, and then on to this place there is very little good grass. When within about 65 miles, we as well as others, had to leave the road 3 or 4 miles to recruit our stock, to enable them to make the balance of the route.

D. H. Moss, to his relatives

Paris (Missouri) Mercury, quoted by St. Joseph *Adventure*, Nov. 2, 1849

RELIEF FOR THE EMIGRANTS

Rio Rico Mines, Feb. 12, 1850

I did not remain long at the Mocolumne river mines, being strongly urged to accompany an express which was about to be sent across the Sierra Nevada mountains, under the command of Capt. Kilburn, of the U. S. army, to ascertain the condition of the emigrants, many of whom had not yet passed

the mountains, and were reported to be in much need of succor.

I returned to Sacramento City, from which point our party started on the 11th of September last. Our route was the middle or "Trucky river" route, via Johnston's rancho, Bear River, thence across the Sierra Nevada to Trucky river and the Sink of the Humboldt, or Mary's river. From that point we returned by the "Carson river route" to Sacramento. We found the emigration in much need of assistance. On account of the scarcity of grass on the latter part of the journey many of the oxen were dead, as well as mules, leaving, in many cases, whole families of men, women, and children to perform the remainder of the journey on foot. Some were entirely destitute of provisions, and were required to subsist on dead mules, cattle, etc., they found along the route. Immediately on the return of Capt. Kilburn's express, a large train of pack mules was fitted out, and despatched under the command of Mr. Tobert Hunt, of St. Louis. Other trains were sent out on various routes, under command of Col. Forman, of Illinois, Capt. Chandler, an old mountaineer, and Major Rocker, of the U. S. army. I accompanied Mr. Hunt's company, whose route was the southern, or Carson river route. We immediately crossed the mountains, during which time many mules and provisions were distributed to those of the emigrants that were destitute. Soon after leaving the mountains, on the eastern side, we met with the last train of emigrants on our route. Capt. Sackett and family, of St. Louis, were with this train, and, although not in very destitute condition, the remainder of our unpacked mules were immediately turned over to them and everything done to hasten their passage of the mountains, on account of the great danger of snow storms in them at this season of the year, it being then about 1st. November.

In two days we re-crossed the summit, the most dangerous point on the mountains, and encamped some 10 or 15 miles

at the monte bank, have made enough to go home, and some to boot; some, by a rare streak of good luck, have made \$6,000 or \$8,000 by digging and working. Since the first of November, the probability is, there has not been more than enough to pay the expense of living.

Provisions are, of course, much higher at the mines than in Sacramento; especially so, when the communications are cut off by rains. Such has been the case this winter. Flour and pork have been worth from \$1.00 to \$1.50 a pound, and other things in proportion. On an average, those who arrived here with no capital, but have been so fortunate as to enjoy good health, have probably made from \$300 to \$500. Those who have been sick even a part of the time, have made nothing. Those who have been sick all the time, and they are not a few, of course, are in debt to their friends and to strangers. Still, after all the disadvantages of the country, there is not another place on the face of the earth where a man can make money so fast as he can here, if he can keep his health. A man can make his ten dollars a day at almost any kind of work. A good cook in a public house gets from \$200 to \$300 per month; a boy, of eighteen years of age, in the Masonic and Odd Fellows' hospital, gets \$150 per month.

"M. M.," to Chambers and Knapp
Missouri Republican, Mar. 22, 1850

A FORTY-NINER ADVISES ON OUTFITTING

Sutter's Fort, Jan. 24, 1850

I do not advise any man to come, rich or poor, but to those who will come, I can give them a little good advice, especially if they come by land. Ox teams are allowed by all, or nearly so, to be much the surest teams. But the load and the wagon must be properly adjusted to the team. In the first place, no wagons should be taken on the road heavier than a light two horse wagon; it should be new, or as good as new, and made of the

very best timber, especially the running gears. The spindles must be not too large, so as to turn stiffly on the axle; but when raised and well greased with black lead and tallow, you should be able to turn the wheels as you do the rim of a spinning wheel. The bed and tongue, and other parts, should be light in proportion. To each team there should be not less than four yoke of oxen: five are none too many; then if you lose one or two yoke you can still go on by lighting up a little, and safely get through. To each team there should be four hands, and not less than three—four are none too many, especially if one be sick. To each team 1,600 pounds are all that should be put on—your load should be weighed, every pound of it.

The oxen should not be less than five years old nor more than seven; in no case will four year old steers hold out, especially if not inured to work and well broke before you start. Your yokes should all, except those of the wheel cattle, be of the lightest material—lynn timber is the best—that for the wheel oxen may be made of maple and heavier than any other. The bows must not be too tight, if they are, your steers will be found to swell up as tight as a drum head. To each man 125 pounds of bacon and 125 pounds of flour is an abundance. One half of his bacon had better be in hams, for the sake of his health; it is much better to eat on the road. The emigrant ought to eat as little greasy food as possible to keep off the scurvy. Risen bread is much better than lard and saleratus biscuit. Yeast can be kept all the way out. The bread to be baked in the morning should be made up the night before, with yeast in it; if it sours too much, it can be corrected with a little saleratus. A plenty of pickles, $\frac{1}{4}$ bushel of onions, and $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel of beans to each man, is not too much. Vinegar should be used every day.

Apple and peach fruit and rice are as useful articles of food as can possibly be taken on the road. To each man 80 pounds of rice, and three quarters of a bushel of apple or peach fruit,

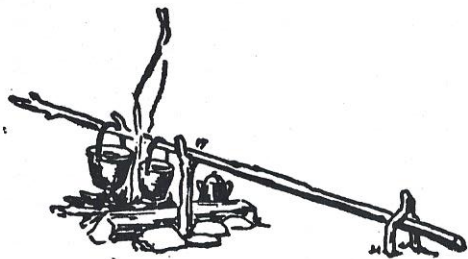
at least are necessary, being easily cooked, they are always convenient. Now, if the emigrant will use as little side bacon, and also very little hot lard and saleratus biscuit, and more of other articles, as above mentioned, I will warrant him to come through unscathed with scurvy. Bacon hams are much less objectionable than greasy sides. Very great errors were committed by the last emigration, in this respect. Still, every mess ought to have some side meat, to use for cooking fresh meat, and lard for bread. The way to cook beans on the road (the ship bean is the best) is to stew them; but they must be boiled in fresh water until they are soft, before any salt or bacon be put into them—otherwise they will not cook well; they ought to be very thoroughly cooked, and well seasoned with cayenne pepper—if so, they are the most wholesome food that can be used on the road. I have been very cautious about articles of diet, because scurvy has been the poison bane of the last emigration. Recollect therefore, that all articles I have mentioned are antscorbutics, except hot lard, bread, and greasy bacon.

"M. M.," to Chambers and Knapp
Missouri Republican, Mar. 22, 1850

BUY MULES AND LONG WAGONS

Dry Diggings, Oct. 12, 1849

The trip across the plains is easy, provided the right preparation is made at home before starting; otherwise it is very



hard. I would advise all who wish to come across the Plains to avoid a large mess; let it not exceed four men of known even temper. A heavy one-horse wagon, combining all the strength that can be given a vehicle of that size, is far preferable. To this hitch four good aged mules, (Mexican mules would be preferred by me,) having in addition two surplus ones to change as occasion may require. By having the wagon body lengthy a sufficient supply of provisions can be started with and, as the worst of the road is the other side of the South Pass from the States, the body can be shortened to a proper length and the wheels brought closer together. The load being much lightened, care taken to feed the animals on grass (for that is all they can get,) plentifully and often on the way, a vigilant watch kept to prevent Indian depredations, and I will venture to warrant the passage will be easy and safe. Some thousand of heavy wagons, with their cargoes thrown away, are being strewed over the Plains, their teams broken down. Some, being compelled to leave all behind, have had to take the road a-foot.

Simeon Switzler, to his son
Missouri Statesman, Jan. 25, 1850

AN EMIGRANT ADVISES LIGHT WAGONS AND GOOD OXEN

Weaverville, California, 50 miles
east of Sacramento City
Nov. 21, 1849

If any of my friends should wish to come out, I do not want them to be caught in the same snap I was. Tell them this: that if I were back and knew what I know now, I should get through in a great deal less time, with more ease to myself, and less trouble. I would join two others, and fit out as light as possible, a light wagon and no more provisions than would just last us through—everything light, save team, this I would have of the best kind of stock; a small rifle, if I brought any at all—no