

JOURNEY ON THE PLAINS

Extracts from a letter from Mr. F. S. Dean, late of this city.

On the Platte, )  
Sunday, June 10th, 1849. )

We are encamped on the Platte river for the Sabbath, and I have little time to spare, which I devote to writing you a letter. In the first place I will state that all our company are well. I have enjoyed good health so far, with the exception of two attacks of the nervous head ache.

We have had, taking it together, a pleasant journey so far. Some of our men have been sick of bowel complaint, but we have lost none of our number, and have met with no serious accidents. We are now 900 miles from home, 560 miles from St. Joe, and are within 30 miles of Fort Laramie. We have not traveled on a single Sabbath, and have only stopped a part of one week day, and that on account of a storm. We have been traveling up the Platte for about 300 miles; most of the time in sight of it. We have traveled about 180 miles up the South Fork; and at the point where we left it, there was a small village of Sioux Indians. Three white men reside with them, and have been with them for 13 or 14 years. These Indians are friendly and well off, but our men could not trade with them. We could have purchased ponies if we could have paid for them in whiskey. The first article the Indian asks for if he is disposed to trade with white men, is whiskey. They wanted that very much.

After we left the South Fork, we crossed over the country 25 miles, to the North Fork. Just before descending into the valley of that branch of the Platte, we went down into a beautiful ravine called Ash Hollow. Here was a fine spring and plenty of wood,--the first wood we had found for a long way. There is but little wood on the Platte; some willows on its margin, and cedars on the bluffs; but in both cases this fuel is sometimes at a great distance from the road. We have used 'buffalo chips' sometimes, but then we have had a good deal of rain and they cannot always be made to burn. We have cut off two feet and the projections of our wagon boxes, which has furnished us with some wood. We have picked some wood on the road, and occasionally some of our men will go three or four miles to the bluff, and bring to the camp dry cedars. We have thus been enabled always to have our hot coffee.

The Platte is in some places two miles wide, and in others one and a half, and even less. It is so shallow that it can be waded almost any where.--It is a muddy stream, appears rather sluggish; its waters are sweet and cool, coming from snowy mountains; but the sand in it makes it unpleasant to drink. We use it, however, when we are near enough to get it. We have had to use a good deal of poor water.

Our teams are getting thin, though the grass is better than we expected. We have thrown out every thing we could spare, all our heavy iron ware, about eight bushels of beans, (we had too many), fifty pounds nails, &c. We find a great deal of property on the road. All the wagons have been loaded too heavy. We find bacon, flour, beans, trunks, stoves, crow bars, and many other valuable articles. Some companies have thrown out part of their loading, put the remainder on one or two

wagons and cut up or burnt the rest, and doubled their teams and pushed ahead. We shall try and trade some of our mules, or buy others, when we get to the Fort.

There are about 500 teams ahead of us, and as many more behind us. The road is full of teams while I am writing. Some stop on Sundays; others do not; but they will all have to stop and rest their teams. When the road gets harder and the weather hotter, the ox teams will have to be driven slower. I fear that there will be a good deal of suffering before all the emigrants get through; but we hope for the best.

The weather has been cold so far as to render winter clothing comfortable. We have had some terrible thunder storms and wind. Three nights ago we observed clouds rising in the west. They looked threatening for some time. Just after it commenced to thunder and lighten, which was followed by a high wind, and it took all hands to keep our tents from blowing away. We had our supper ready, but were compelled to wait for it until the wind had ceased. Some two miles above us, two wagons were blown over, and both badly injured, and their tents and camp articles blown away. Out of the wagons, they made one, and proceeded on. Such storms are frequent on the plains.

There are two companies U. S. dragoons on their way to Fort Hall, some 5 or 600 miles beyond us. These troops have been near us for the last three weeks. The last three Sundays we have had preaching--the first by a methodist and the last two by a congregationalist missionary. We have no trouble from the Indians. They are always civil when troops are near at hand.

I am now driving our team for a month. Mr. Bilson assists me. The teams have all changed drivers. Two are detailed for each wagon. We have ropes thirty feet long, one end of which is to tie round the neck of the mule, and at the other there is a long pin, to drive into the ground. When we stop we take the animals some distance from the camp, drive down the pin into the ground, and leave them till near night, when we fetch them near the camp and secure them in the same manner for the night. This is called picketing.

Captain Roberts is ahead of us. His company travels on Sundays. The Springfield ox wagons are all some days behind us.