

The Narrative
OF
Samuel Hancock

1845-1860

With an Introduction by
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And a Map of
THE OREGON TRAIL



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EMIGRANT ROUTE FROM MISSOURI TO OREGON

Emigrants to Oregon Territory cross the Rocky Mountains by the South Pass, a gap of about 20 miles wide. It is at the head of the Sweetwater, a tributary of the North Fork of the Platte or Nebraska River, in Lat. 12° 25' N. and Lon. 32° 10' W. from Washington or 109° 10' W. from Greenwich 950 miles from the mouth of Kansas River and 1,174 from the mouth of the Columbia. The following are the reputed distances of the points of interest on the route. The first column of figures shows the number of miles from point to point and second of each point from the beginning:

	MILES	
Westport to Kansas River crossings.....	70	
Platte River	215	285
Forks of Platte R.	115	400
Chimney Rock	150	550
Scott's Bluff	20	570
Fort Laramie	60	630
Red Buttes	161	791
Rock Independence	52	843
South Pass	107	950
Green River	80	1,030
Bear River	130	1,160
Fort Hall	60	1,220
American Falls	22	1,242
Lewis River crossings	180	1,422
Fort Boise	128	1,550
Burnt River	114	1,664
Grande Ronde or Great Circle	30	1,694

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A NOTE ON THE MAP

	MILES	
Fort Walla Walla	82	1,776
John Day's River	112	1,888
Falls River	21	1,909
Dalles of Columbia River	25	1,934
Cascades	36	1,970
Fort Vancouver	54	2,024
Oregon City	16	2,040

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The Narrative of SAMUEL HANCOCK

Chapter i

IN the Spring of 1845, the author of this book took his departure from Independence, Mo., in company with two hundred others, their wagon and necessary teams, for the long, and at that time uncertain journey across the Plains. The destination of the party was Oregon, which at that time might be considered somewhat indefinite as the whole of the possessions of the United States on the North West Coast of the Pacific embracing an immense area of country, beginning at the 42° of latitude south, extending to the 49° North, thence East to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, and from there to the line separating this territory on the seashore from California.

At the time referred to, the Now State of Oregon, and the present extensive and flourishing Territory of Washington, constituted this far off and attractive part of the world known as Oregon, and which seemed to our adventurous citizens, to possess the inducements necessary for them to go, and undertake the settlement, and there build up new homes, and if possible new everything; and in undertaking this the reader can well imagine it was

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no trifling task to separate one's self from the old associations of early life and start upon such an enterprise, at such a time; for little was then known of the route across from the Atlantic to the Pacific; it is true a small emigration crossed the year before, but little information was derived from these early pioneers other than that they reached Oregon after a long and hazardous journey.

Our party after leaving Independence, proceeded up the Missouri river for four days, when it was thought advisable to halt, and remain there a week, there being good grass at the encampment, and recruiting our animals, get everything in proper readiness for the progress of our long journey; our company at this encampment all collected together numbering about forty wagons. Soon after our arrival at this point, we discovered fresh signs of Indians, which caused us to keep a pretty close guard over our animals, and indeed ourselves, for we were disposed to regard these Indians suspiciously, from accounts we had heard of them before leaving the settlements.

During the second day at this place; Indians could be seen on the hills adjacent to all appearances taking a survey of our encampment, doubtless for the purpose of making a descent either upon us or our cattle, neither of which we particularly desired; so we detailed a double guard to provide against a surprise and secure our cattle, as the Indians could see this movement, and doubtless did; for in two or three hours after this extra guard was instituted, they left, seemingly, but were still near evidently, for in the night of the third day it was discovered that the cattle were very restless and apparently frightened at Indians; we immediately took the precaution

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of staking our horses near the corral formed by placing our wagons around; this formed a kind of fortification, besides being a place of comparative safety for our stock. In addition to the guard already on duty we detailed a special horse guard, the night being very dark indeed so that we could not distinguish any object a little remote.

About daylight, the cattle made another demonstration of uneasiness, and one of the guard perceived an Indian rise from his place of concealment and run; the guard discharged his rifle at him, hurriedly, but without effect, notwithstanding all this vigilance on our part, these wily Indians succeeded in stealing quite a number of our cattle; upon this being ascertained a party of twenty-five immediately started out from camp in the direction that we heard a bell, that was around the neck of a trusty animal, the Indians had driven off amongst the others they had stolen; this animal being frightened at the appearance of these unfamiliar masters, would not allow them to approach her, to remove the bell, and by this means we were enabled to continue the pursuit. The Indians finding it impossible to get near this "bell cow" endeavored to kill her, for we found a number of arrows had pierced the poor creature and it seemed to be an effort on the part of the Indians to get her out of hearing, for she was in advance of all the rest of the stock and in the pursuit we passed nearly all, save this animal, and perhaps two or three others, hurried along by means of this bell.

When fairly light we saw perhaps a dozen Indians on horses, and others on foot forcing the cattle along. As soon as they discovered us, they abandoned the cattle and fled, we taking possession, and driving them back, found others belonging to us that had broken from the Indians

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in the stampede. On our return to camp we found three still missing and a party started immediately in search of them, but finding where one had been butchered the night before, gave up the search and returned to camp, where we killed the bell animal in consequence of the many wounds she had received from the bows of the Indians. Breakfast being over, we yoked our teams and making a short day's drive encamped in fine grass, where we enjoyed a quiet night's rest, without any interruption. About sun rise next morning one of the party hearing a noise a short distance from camp, and supposing it to be game of some kind, went out to secure it, when behold! he discovered an Indian perched in the fork of a tree, probably making observations for the purpose of facilitating some subsequent movement against us; the gentleman discovering him having no very kind feeling toward the "Red Skins" thought he would make one less of their number, so leveling his rifle brought the Indian to the ground, to be cared for by his friends, should they chance that way.

Soon after this affair, we broke up this encampment and after a long day's drive encamped for the night on what is called the Big Blue; here we saw indications of the encampment of the little party called "The first emigration," who preceded us in the year 1843; from these indications we supposed they must have had rather an unpleasant time just here; in fact I have since learned that they were obliged in consequence of high waters to remain here for three weeks or more, the whole country contiguous to the River being completely inundated. Our party here being more fortunate than our predecessors,

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had no difficulty in crossing, it being in very good stage for fording.

From the encampment on the Big Blue we journeyed on, encountering Indians that day who did not seem badly disposed; that night however, we kept a pretty strict watch, though nothing occurred particularly worthy of note.

Next night we encamped on the Little Blue, where we established for the time being a sort of ferry, converting our wagon beds into boats for transportation, having before starting proved ourselves with those which would answer the double purpose of both land and water craft.

At this encampment on the Little Blue there were more wolves than I ever saw, or I might say ever heard of before, for they made the night hideous with their yelling, and to persons unaccustomed to such sounds, and in a strange country it is anything but musical; at least it seemed to me as if all the wolves for a thousand miles around had congregated at this particular place, for our especial benefit. In the morning they could be seen dispersing in droves, in different directions, and we were by no means loth to part with these "traveling musicians."

From Little Blue we passed on west from day to day without seeing or hearing anything particularly worthy of note, other than is always the case in a travel of this kind, always seeing a variety of game, which imparts some little interest, and relieved the monotony of our mode of travel.

We were now fairly in the Platte River Country and the rain for the past twenty-four hours pouring down in torrents. At the expiration of this day, we stopped and

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encamped for the night. Smoke could be seen at some distance and fearing interruption from the Indians our guard was instantly placed on duty; but whether they discharged their duties faithfully, the reader can decide, when informed that morning discovered several of our horses missing; this being ascertained the wagon train proceeded forward up the valley of the Platte River, while myself with nine others of the party armed and mounted on fine horses started in pursuit of the party having our horses. We had at times some difficulty in keeping on their track, for the Indians displayed considerable ingenuity, traveling in the creeks for the purpose of avoiding detection.

We traveled that day perhaps fifty miles, and at last, the sun not being more than an hour high, we espied our horses standing in close proximity to some Indians who were apparently engaged in preparing food for themselves. We commenced a charge when perhaps half a mile distant, but they did not discover us until we were within two hundred yards, when they sprang for the horses; but anticipating this moment on their part, we commenced a tremendous yelling, and urging our horses forward, succeeded in preventing the Indians reaching them. In this charge we not only recovered our own horses but captured seven additional ones from the retreating Indians, who, to the number of about thirty, took refuge in a thicket where we deemed it inadvisable to penetrate. Feeling very well satisfied with the result of the little expedition, we determined to make our way to the company, and traveled about twenty miles in that direction, encamping for the night very noiselessly and without fire. On the evening of the next day we over-

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took our company and enjoyed a night free from disturbance.

Next morning we started in good health and spirits, and during our day's travel, one of the party killed a porcupine, which afforded considerable sport, the animal evincing his fretful propensities to the amusement of some and the alarm of others, none of us before having seen a living specimen.

Toward evening we came in sight of quite a large Indian village, and there being a probability that we would not find water until after dark we determined to camp here for the night; the Indians soon visited us, and seemed disposed to cultivate a friendly intercourse which we gave them to understand we appreciated, supposing we were in need of food, they brought us a few dead prairie dogs, and some screech owls; doubtless these are considered delicacies among them, but fortunately we had plenty of food more familiar and palatable to us, and we declined partaking of these rare dishes, though they were strongly recommended to us, as nearly as we could understand the language of our visitors. They brought deer skins, buffalo robes, and many other things which they were desirous of trading and some of which we purchased. We then visited their camp and discovered many curious things to us; they made us understand that they wanted any and every kind of clothing for which they would give us anything, in return. After spending some time with them, as it was growing dark we thought it advisable to return to our own camp, not knowing but that from the unreliable character of Indians all this intimacy might terminate in a flare up.

Notwithstanding we had every assurance from them

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that we should be safe both in our persons and property, while we remained, we felt some apprehension and took the precaution to corral our stock and secure our horses, besides keeping up the regular guard; however there was not the slightest indication of a disposition to molest us in any way. In the morning we made the chief some little presents which pleased him and his people very much; we then turned out our stock to feed, and the Indians visited us as before, wishing to trade. This we did not embark in to any great extent our pursuits being in a different channel, but we contrived to keep them well pleased, and they contributed no little to our entertainment, while we remained at this encampment. These Indians, known as the Sioux tribe, are considered pretty numerous and are rather good looking, both male and female; in their rude and uncultivated way they seemed to have some regard to their appearance and deportment, at least during our sojourn amongst them. Their clothing was composed of dressed skins of various kinds and it may be here remarked that some of the women have pretty features and as a general thing, are comfortably dressed, to all appearances their gowns being composed of the dressed elk and deer hides and made long with some observance of decency, which cannot be said of all Indians; the children who are too small to use the bow and arrow, however, are permitted to run at large, in a state of nudity, this exposure in all probability prepares them for the subsequent hardships they have to endure.

We left this encampment and after a long day's drive, reached a place where we could obtain plenty of grass and water; up to this point in our journey, we were able to have in camp an old fashioned wood fire, but here there

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was no wood obtainable, and we were obliged to take blankets and sally forth to procure "Buffalo chips"; this the young men disliked very much, being the first time they were ever engaged in such business; particularly as there were some ladies in our company which fact I neglected to mention before, and for which the reader will doubtless pardon me, when assured they comprised decidedly the most interesting portion of our company, but there being no alternative the ladies were obliged to divest themselves of all fastidiousness and make use of this fuel for all cooking purposes, which after the first shock proved an excellent substitute for fire wood. Holes were dug in the ground and filled with these chips, at which the ladies soon cooked us excellent suppers, after enjoying which, we had a night of uninterrupted quietude.

Early next morning everything in camp was prepared to leave, and we traveled until about one o'clock when we had to cross Platte River, while making preparations for crossing, an immense herd of buffalo came in view; in fact the whole country as far as we could see, presented a mass of buffaloes on a stampede, coming towards us; having heard of the danger of encountering these roving herds in their stampede, we immediately went to work preparing ourselves as best we could, by driving the wagons around in a circle, to make a fortification for ourselves and animals, against the approach of these formidable travelers of the Plains. Several of our company more daring than the others took a position on an eminence and keeping an incessant firing of guns and pistols, succeeded in a diversion of their route, to within two hundred yards of us, so that we shot quite a number of them. It was estimated that this army of buffaloes was

Chapter ii

WE were now traveling up the north fork of the Platte River, where there was profusion of game, consisting principally of deer and antelopes; we here found no difficulty in procuring as much as we wished particularly the antelopes, as we could easily decoy them as near as desired by tying a red handkerchief to the end of a stick, lying down and waving it. This day we were gratified with a view of quite a large drove of wild horses; they came near us, stopped and looked at us and then started at rapid speed across the prairie; some of these had the appearance of being noble animals, and many of us wished we could call them our own.

This evening we camped at a place where the grass was short, so concluded to swim our cattle across the Platte River, where grass was abundant; as night approached some were desirous for the cattle to remain on that side of the river, and a guard detailed for their protection, while others were in favor of bringing them back to the camp and having them corralled for the night; the result was that some left their cattle over the river, and others brought them near camp, and corralled them, when guards were appointed for both places. During the night the cattle became frightened at Indians prowling around their feeding ground and commenced a stampede down the river, when the guard discovered and fired on the Indians at the same time saying Indians! Indians! Quite a con-

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fusion ensued, the females of our company being much frightened and indeed the entire party considerably alarmed; for we thought it most probable we should lose our cattle, which would be disastrous indeed, even if so fortunate as to escape ourselves. The guard on the other side secured all the cattle they could, or rather some of those that had not joined in the stampede, and dashing into the river brought them safely to camp for protection. Immediately fifteen of the Company started in pursuit of the stolen cattle, and the rest remained on guard at camp.

In the disposition of the stock on this ill-fated evening a part of our horses were picketed on the unfortunate side of the river, some distance from the cattle. As soon as we became sufficiently composed to look around, we found that four or five horses were missing also; finding a shoal in the river we crossed over to get the remaining stock; there, when we ascertained our loss to be twenty-five cattle, in addition to the horses. The stock we found on this side of the river were driven to camp, where we awaited the result of the expedition, uncertain of the difficulties they might encounter. The day was one of great anxiety and at night our comrades were still absent, and their wives and children were almost inconsolable, conjecturing that the party in their attempt to recover their property had perished at the hands of the savages. About midnight they returned, however, bringing with them only five of our missing stock; their return was greeted with pleasure, yet some feeling of disappointment, as it was evident we must now abandon our cattle.

When they discovered the Indians it was ascertained that they had taken the precaution to have their horses

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on the opposite side of the river, the more effectually to assist in their escape, if detected. As soon as our men approached them, they jumped in the river and were soon out of sight, numbering eight men, after their retreat they found five head of cattle, which were killed and left on the ground by the Indians which with the five they drove back were all they could find; so it was evident the other cattle and horses must have gone in another direction.

The next morning we left this encampment and proceeded from day to day on our journey up the river, until we concluded to halt for the purpose of washing our clothes and recruiting our teams. Early the next morning after our encampment here we discovered a large party of Indians approaching us, which created considerable bustle; fire arms were brought into requisition examined and put into readiness for use should they make any hostile demonstration; but they halted at a respectful distance, and the chief accompanied by a half breed, came up and asked us for tobacco, which was given him, he then said through his interpreter, this half breed, that he was our friend, and that this people should commit no trespasses on us or our property. They were a party of Sioux, and were traveling rather strangely equipped, having long poles lashed to either side of their horses, perhaps fifteen feet long resembling in appearance, what is known in some parts of the United States as a "jumper" used in sleighing, upon these odd looking affairs they had all their movables piled, and really seemed heavily loaded as they dragged along, there were about eighty horses in the company and about two hundred Indians. They encamped near us, and these poles used as a conveyance

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for their goods, were converted into tent poles, as well, and erected in such a way as to give them a sugar loaf shape, when the dressed hides stretched over them. In the morning the Chief again visited us, and we determined to give them an entertainment each wagon contributing two dishes to the feast, making in all eighty dishes. They were invited to dinner and the food placed on the ground before them, when four chiefs acting as waiters helped the others, in the most primitive style, sticking their hands into pease, rice mush and pudding without reference to knives, forks or spoons. After demolishing nearly everything before them, the head chief expressed a desire through his interpreter to deliver a speech, which we requested him to do: "My White brothers and friends this is the first time I ever had an opportunity of speaking to you, but I hope it will not be the last. I have been treated badly by some white people but you have treated me like brothers."

These Indians are rather good looking being some of same tribe we met before, and their countenances seemed to express a great deal of friendship, but notwithstanding all these civilities we kept an eye on their movements until we left next morning.

We traveled on without anything very material occurring but seeing all the time abundance of game, the plains abounding with elk, deer, antelopes, buffaloes, long eared rabbits, some bears and thousands of wolves. We came to an Indian village which the inhabitants were just vacating and we were particularly impressed by their manner of transporting their effects, which was somewhat after the style of the Sioux heretofore described, other than these were employing wolves or dogs resembling them

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Next morning we made an early start and after traveling a short distance, saw near us a single buffalo, two young men went out on horseback to have some sport, and if possible to kill him, when in their pursuit they ran him close by the train where he received a number of shots; he fell upon his haunches, but standing erect on his forelegs, made battle with all who came near him; finally he was shot through the heart, which ended the career of the lonely buffalo. Abundance of game could be seen throughout the day, and we encamped early, in good grass, and passed a quiet night. Thence we continued our journey for several days uninterruptedly, when we came up to an encampment of Indians who proved to be a war party of two hundred or more of the Crow Tribe, and equipped for battle. They asked us through an interpreter, whether we had seen any of the Sioux Tribe; this question we answered rather evasively, not wishing to be the bearers of any information which might lead to a difficulty; particularly when we recollected the assurances of friendship and the quiet deportment of the last party of Sioux we had seen. These Indians said the Sioux had been killing their buffalo and other game on their lands, and that they were now in search of them to obtain redress for these injuries, and they presented quite a formidable appearance. This conversation took place between a deputation of five of our company and the Indians, which was done to prevent their coming too near us, and frightening our cattle, which showed signs of alarm, though we took the precaution to drive some distance around them. Notwithstanding all this, an Indian approached a wagon in the rear, having a mule team attached, which became frightened and rushed forward, causing all the other teams to start also, and the whole train of forty wagons

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dashed across the plains, the drivers having no control over the frantic animals, and the women and children who were inmates of the wagons, screaming with all their voices, some of the wagons upset, thus creating a state of affairs in our midst truly alarming, and it was some time before we could again exert any control over our teams, and stop them; when we finally did, it was ascertained that we had sustained considerable injury, some of our wagons lying on one side and teams detached from them in some instances, others with the wheels broken, and the contents strewn promiscuously around, while some of our company were lying out with broken legs, and others seriously injured, the whole scene presenting a most disastrous appearance. The Indians having witnessed the entire affair, were hastening to us, prompted no doubt by curiosity; but we, entertaining no very kind feeling for them just then, sent a guard of twenty men to intercept them and request they should advance no nearer; this being accomplished, we encamped to repair our damages. Fortunately there was a grove of cotton wood in this vicinity where we could obtain wood for heating our wheel tires, and after a two days' delay we again started westward. In the evening we encamped at Fort Laramie, an American trading post, which some of us visited and found the occupants clever people who seemed pleased to see us, while we were equally glad to meet with them; a white settlement so remote from civilization seeming a kind of protection, in the midst of this wild country. Bidding adieu to these adventurers we resumed our journey and traveled on very comfortably, toward evening encamping on one of the many tributaries of North Platte River about twenty miles distant from Fort Laramie in good grass.

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Chapter iii

CONTINUING our journey day after day, up streams, and ascending hills, being now in the Black Hills, we encamped one evening at a place called the Red Buttes, or rather in sight of this strange looking place, which has the appearance of the river having forced its way through the mountains, and leaving these Buttes standing high in the air, a monument of what existed in the past.

After two days farther travel we encamped near Independence Rock, which curiosity we visited and found inscribed on its eternal sides the names of many of the Company who passed by in the first emigration, besides many others, doubtless of mountaineers and trappers. According to our estimation this rock occupies an area of two or three acres and is about a hundred and fifty feet high, having other peculiarities of interest to the traveler. It is situated near Sweet Water River, a tributary of the Great Platte, upon whose banks we have traveled so far, and to which we bade adieu, some distance behind. I may here say this Sweet Water River is justly entitled to the name it bears, for the water is truly sweet, coming directly out of the Rocky Mountains pure and sparkling.

From this station we started next morning up the Sweet Water River in the direction of the south pass of the Rocky Mountains, finally encamping on the Summit of this Pass, leaving here we came to a place where there was good grass and again established our camp; here we

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soon found an ox mired in apparently solid ground, and in extricating him, observed a peculiarity of the earth, which seemed to be floating on the surface of the water, for in walking on it, one would be impressed with this belief, from its waving, rocking motion; this is a somewhat justifiable conclusion as there is an abundance of water at this locality which is known as the Pacific Spring.

After spending the night pleasantly here, we started early in the morning with the entire party in splendid spirits, as it was evident we were now descending the western slope of the Rocky Mountains and encamped in the evening on one of the tributaries of the Pacific Ocean. Here we noticed that Indians had been encamped but a short time previous, a rather unpleasant discovery, as it obliged us to again keep the strictest watch over our persons and property. However, we passed the night quietly and next morning traveled on finely, our road being descending we were able to wheel over the road at quite a brisk rate.

In the afternoon Indians were observed on the hills around taking a view of us, and late in the evening we stopped on a little stream where there was considerable brush; as soon as the horses and cattle had finished feeding we corralled the latter, and tied the horses to the wagons. One of the men who manifested a great deal of solicitude for his horse, wishing him to have all the advantages in feeding, said he would take blankets and lie where there was grass, near the brush, with one end of the rope attached to the horse around his arm, and let him feed all night we expostulated with him, but to no purpose.

The guards were placed for the night, but the wolves

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kept such an incessant howling that it was impossible to sleep; towards day one of the guards fired, as he supposed at a wolf, when an Indian ran off; the report of the gun aroused the man who had been so careful of his horse to find his rope cut and the horse gone; at daylight we searched around for the animal but could only see where the Indians had been crawling about in the grass; most probably the noise we supposed to be of wolves was made by the Indians, to conceal their advance on us; this ruse is frequently practiced by them. Upon consultation we determined that as the owner of the horse had acted contrary to our advice we would not pursue the Indians to recover him, and making an early start we traveled all of this day and night, until nine o'clock in the morning, when we rested our teams and let them feed.

Resuming our journey and breaking our road through sage brushes all the way which was rather tedious and fatiguing to our animals, we encamped in the evening near quite a large stream and passed the night comfortably after a laborious drive of two days and a night, without rest for ourselves or animals. The next day was occupied in transporting our effects across this river in wagon beds, which being accomplished we remained until morning; we then traveled on for three days, finding plenty of grass and water at all our encampments, and seeing abundance of game of all kinds, except the buffalo, which we have not found since leaving the country contiguous to Fort Laramie, though finding occasionally a herd of wild horses. Here we are much annoyed by the Army crickets, the whole surface of the ground being covered with these insects, about an inch and a half long, and without wings; these insects seem to be migratory; for

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they are always moving in myriads over the entire country it seemed. Arriving at Bear River we camped and met there with a party of Indians and three Frenchmen, living with them, and having Indian wives; these people were busily engaged in catching the Army crickets before alluded to, by sticking the ends of sticks in the ground, in rows so thick that the crickets could not pass through them, and terminating the rows in points like the letter V with an opening at the end where they placed a basket to receive the crickets they drove into the traps; in an incredibly brief time the basket would be filled and they would place another, continuing this all day; they thus caught immense quantities which were dried on a stone kiln and then removed to a mortar manufactured by themselves, where with a pestle they reduced these singular insects to meal or flour which seemed to be regarded as a staple and delicate article of food among them, which they eat heartily and grow fat upon. In preparing it for food, this meal is stirred into a kettle of boiling water until rendered thick mush, when an inch of grease remains on top; they say that this meal will keep for a year, upon hearing which I could but voluntarily exclaim that it would last in my possession much longer, if for my own eating alone.

Leaving this camp next morning we pursued our journey along Bear River, and encamped in the evening at a natural soda spring, where we found two Frenchmen, their squaws and their half breed children, they very hospitably invited us to partake of some cricket mush and one of our companions induced by the kindness of their manner, tasted some, which immediately made him sick, perhaps owing to his knowledge of the manufacture;