

Life Sketches

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About twenty miles from the Missouri River we came to the winter quarters of the Mormon excursion of 1846 and 1847. There was no one there, but we secured a Mormon Guide Book, and it proved of great assistance. They had measured the roads, and distances from camp to camp were recorded. The entire distance from the winter quarters to Salt Lake City was a thousand and thirty-one miles, and but two houses in the entire distance. These were at Fort Lorina and Fort Bridger.

At the first fort there were twenty soldiers, and at the latter only Bridger and some Indians. I just mention a little incident here. Several of us boys had gone ahead of the train and were enjoying ourselves asking Bridger questions. He was an old mountaineer and could give us good advice. While we were talking, Indians began to pour in from different quarters, very much excited and saying Indians were coming. Everybody hustled around, the Indians flocked in, the doors were barred, rifles made ready for the scrap, when a pack train hove in sight. It was an emigrant train from Arkansaw, and being the first one from that direction, from a distance, it was natural to infer they were Indians.

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Things like this and happenings of interest, made the time pass rapidly. Soon after passing Wood River we came into the buffalo country. Here we saw thousands at one time, all with their massive heads pointing to the north and feeding as they passed along. They didn't seem wild, and it was no trouble to get in range with them when we wished to. Some of the boys shot them down for the sake of the sport. It seemed wrong to me and sinful, but in after years they were slaughtered by the thousands just for their hides. But a few years elapsed before the buffalo became practically extinct on the plains, and only here and there in the fastnesses of the mountains could be seen a small number.

There were many different classes of wolves to be seen on the prairies: the common prairie wolf, the gray, the black and another, a large long-legged wolf, the latter being found always near the herds of buffalo and was a constant terror to the calves. While the herds were travelling the cows and calves always kept the center with the bulls on the outside, affording protection against the Buffalo Rangers, as these wolves were called. These wolves were ferocious, and a band of them would attack men, if hungry.

On one occasion some of the boys were out and away from the train, when a hard rain storm overtook them at night fall. They sought shelter under a bank seven to eight feet in height, all loaded with the choicest of buffalo meat, the tongues and the hump. In a short time they were attacked by a band of these Buffalo Rangers (wolves). They would have surrounded the boys had it not been for the bank on one side, as it was they attacked from every side and came so close the boys had to poke them away with their guns. There were five boys, and they fought the wolves all night long, as shooting them had no effect at all, and when daylight came and the wolves sneaked away. They had left the imprint of their teeth in the gun barrels that could be seen very distinctly. The boys were glad enough to get back to camp and good and hungry after their night's fight.

We did not lack for amusements; we had some very good musicians in our company and almost every night we had a dance around the camp fire. To avoid confusion one-half wore handkerchiefs on their heads, so there was no trouble telling the girls from the boys, for out of the fifty wagons that started there was not a single woman in the crowd. During the emigration of forty-nine, I think the average of women was about one in five hundred, so our chances for being bachelors was pretty good for a number of years. I know I roamed about for twenty years before I found my mate, and have never regretted the waiting.

The cholera was bad that year. We passed trains every day laying by on account of cholera. Many died along the Platte River. I had it myself after passing Fort Larima, but we lost only one night and a half a day on my account, though the slightest jolt of the wagon created intense suffering, but I had started for California, and I was bound to come through. I am satisfied that there were many people who died with fever as well as with cholera, for, once attacked death seemed certain.

Many amusing incidents happened every day hardly worth recording. In the evenings, many times friendly Indians came into camp numbering thirty or forty. Sometimes they brought things to trade, and then again they begged for food. Indians seem to be hungry at all times. One evening, while the Indians were in camp, a man with false teeth went up to them smiling a most pleasing smile and showing his beautiful white teeth. He would turn around, grin at them again, this time showing his gums. He

11 had only to repeat this several times when the Indians would back away, walk off, and in a few moments start into a trot until they were out of sight. They thought, of course, that the man was an evil spirit, but I have often wondered just what they did think.

Along the Platte River we found the corpses of Indians, well wrapped in bark and tied to the limbs of trees with bark. This was the custom of the Pawnees, but after we got further on the plains there were no trees. In fact no trees for five hundred miles. So we had no fuel, and had to use the buffalo chips, which, if dry, made a very hot fire. Just before camping time we each of us took a sack, scattered out and came back to camp with sacks full, having a generous supply for cooking our supper and breakfast. But if the rain came on, our much prized chips would not burn at all, and we had to be content with hard tack and raw bacon, and no hot coffee for breakfast.

It was well nigh impossible to measure distance by the eye, objects that appeared close to, would often prove to be days travel away. A party of us started for Chimney Rock, and as it seemed a short distance away we started early in the morning. We walked fast until after noon, and then seemed no nearer, so we held a council and came to the conclusion to retrace our steps, arriving at camp tired and hungry. There being no settlements and no smoke the atmosphere was as clear as could be. I think we sighted Pikes Peak, over two hundred miles away, and it seemed as if we should never pass it.

On the Black Hills we came into the Crow Indian country, but we never saw one. They were not friendly to the whites, and when an Indian is not friendly you never see them in their own country. We came to the Show-shu-nees Tribe, or Snake, as they were sometimes called, but they disliked the name, Snake. They were friendly to us. At one time my chum and I slipped away, and visited their camp and they treated us royally. The chief's wife talked good English, and we were shown all through the camp, there being over five hundred in number. They had many pets, both birds and beasts. We were invited to go with them on a buffalo hunt, and I should have enjoyed it, but all my possessions were with the train, so we remained only the day. But this was long enough to worry the older men of the party, especially the father of my chum, and all thought we had been murdered by the Indians.

About four to six weeks later, as I was walking in the streets of Salt Lake City, I heard a horse galloping behind me, and here was the same Indian Chief, and he appeared to be tickled to see me, as a boy with his first toy. His wife on her pony appeared equally glad. She had been educated at some mission, and so had acquired English.

All up the Platte River, and well into the Black Hills, we had many thunder storms; the lightning seemed to strike all around us, and sometimes very near. On

one occasion we came to a team of four yoke of oxen, hitched to a wagon in regular order, and every one dead, having been struck by lightning. This must have been a terrible misfortune to the owners.

12 There were all kinds of disagreements and quarrels over trivial matters, and the only way of settling the difficulty would be to make a division of property. The wagon would be cut in two, one party taking the front and the other the hind part, dividing the team and provisions, and each party proceed on the cart of two wheels.

We were very much over-loaded and in consequence the cattle could not stand the strain, and grew weaker day by day. So hundreds of pounds of the finest bacon, beans, flour and sugar were left on the wayside. The bacon was piled like cordwood, and some of the men poured turpentine on the provisions and set fire to them, so the Indians couldn't eat them. Some men seem to be born mean, but to me such meanness was despicable.

Coming to the second crossing of the Platte River we found a small ferry that could accomodate but one empty wagon at a time. The ferry was owned by every train that came along, that is a train would buy the ferry, do their crossing and then sell it to the next train that was in waiting.

We reached the river Sweet Water, a small but swift stream a distance from the Platte. We forded without any trouble, and found the noted landmark, Independence Rock, covering an acre of ground and two hundred feet high. It was discovered, I believe, on the Fourth of July, and so received its name. A little further on we came to Devil's Gate, a narrow cut or gorge through the mountains like a crevice. It was reported that no one had ever passed through its passage. Many had started, but had to turn back. So it was a great incentive for us to try. A party of us started, but there was only two to complete the trip, one other fellow, who nearly lost his life, and myself.

We crossed and recrossed several times, and at one crossing he was swept down stream by the current, and under a shelving rock. He held to the rock with his hands, his body swept under the rock by the current. I had crossed the stream safely a little further up, and so was able to come to his rescue. In some places we had to climb almost perpendicular walls, almost a hundred feet in height, then walk along a narrow ledge where a mountain goat would hardly venture.

I have heard of foolhardy escapades, and have often wondered how we ever managed to come through with our lives, but luck must have been with us, for it makes me shudder even now to think of the danger we were constantly in.

Passing up the Sweet Water for quite a distance, then turning to our right we travelled up a long gentle grade for almost twenty miles, where we came to the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains. There we camped on a large flat, finding many springs, the water from these springs taking their course to either side, some to the Atlantic and some to the Pacific Ocean. We had heavy frosts, and some ice and this was in the latter part of July.

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