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by

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Professor of History and Director of the
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Volume IV

The California Trail from Hall to Placerville

with Branch to Salt Lake City
The California Trail
Fort Hall to Placerville.

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Note.

The paucity of diaries written on The California Trail in its most intensifying years, 1849 and 1850, is striking commentary on the exceeding hardship of the journey. Journals拐曲ely been must have been neglected and then thrown away by the score as an orderly migration took on the semblance of a rout when the Sink of the Humboldt and Carson River were reached. Diaries were less important than wagons; yet here on the Carson tracks of 2000 wagons were to be seen in a space of six miles in 1850. Decaying carcasses of 5000 cattle lined that forty mile stretch of this famous pathway.

Fortunately, however, light is thrown on the route of the old trail by reports made by explorers for later mail and railway lines; these supplement the precious journals of the Argonauts.

To Dr. J. D. Peterson, of the U. S. Geological Survey, the editor is, again, indebted for advice and criticism.

[Signature]

Colorado Springs, Colo. December 1, 1926.
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** With Fremont's Expedition of 1845.
Key to California Trail, Fort Hall to Placerville
Map based on map in Simpson, Explorations, showing the line of the California-Oregon Trail (a) from Fort Hall to Raft River at Yale, Ida. This section is given in detail in Vol. III, maps 16-20, Roads (b) to Soda Springs and (c) to Salt Lake meet the California Trail on Raft River. Date of drawing, 1858-1859.
The parting of the California from the Oregon Trail near the present Yale, Idaho, post office is mentioned by most Oregon as well as California travelers; cf. Vol. III, map 20. The Raft River was known as Ogden's River (III, 10), Decasure Creek (Marcy, 281, 282) and Cassia Creek, evidently a contraction for one of its present branches. Cf. Pacific Wagon Roads, 62; Harlan, 52; for various pathways up the valley.
Orlando (161) found the '49ers crossing the Raft as many as three times in the space of sixteen miles. For all the dust (Harlan, 52), and lack of fuel except willows (Thompson, 62), this route was preferable for ox teams even as late as 1859, Lander, 31. Hudspeth's Cut-off ('5' on Map No. 6) from Soda Springs entered the older trail near Conant, junction point not identified to date; many 185.
At the point where Raft River bears to the west the road indicated "To Kelton" continues southward. This was the line of an ancient Indian and fur trader's highway long before the Raft River section of it was known to California immigrants. Odgen, a quarter of a century earlier, found it a highway to Great Salt Lake; Ch. III, 26.
The junctions there with the early trails from Salt Lake City to the Raft, in R. 26 and R. 24, became important as the Mormon settlement grew, and until the "Southern" route (see Map 5) supplanted that of the '49ers. Such meeting points of trails were local post offices, where, on sticks, and under stones, messages were left for on-coming friends or to be carried back homeward by chance travelers; Orlando, 151, 156.
The mind 12,000-acre tract known as "City of Rocks" near Gooding, Ida., through which, for three miles, the old trail ran "merraculously" (Harlan, 53) was well-known to the migrating Argonauts. Good camp-sites on the various nearby creeks gave relief to jaded teams. Cf. Delano, 151; Pac. Wagons Roads, 62; Lynde 241, 252. For earliest wagon train to pass this way (1845) see Simpson, 22 note.
The "strange, wild valley of Goose Creek" (Orlano, 152), which offered easy ascent of the spurs of Goose Creek Mountains (Lynde, 241), was the pathway of the '49ers for eighteen miles. Here the meager grass supply was soon exhausted; Hartlan found "100 wagons jammed close together ... 33 miles and no grass yet," 53; cf. Kelly, 183.
Save for the rugged ridge near Bear River (III, 8.), Goose Creek Mountains offered the only serious handicap to winter travel on the California Trail east of the Sierras, Simpson, 92. Their fantastic formations (Ingalls, 162) aroused the fever of many an Argonaut; Kelly describes men spending the "noon hour digging for gold "without finding a speck", 153; cf. Orleano, 153.
The pathway to the summit of the divide (preceding map) was comparatively smooth; the descent into the valley of Rock Spring Creek was more difficult, cf. Dilano, 153; Lynde 247. The springs (hot and cold) hereabouts were greatly relished by the hurried travelers; Harlan, 53. By some the valley was called "Well Spring"; by others "Hot Spring".
The mystery of Thousand Springs Creek Valley, the first desert stream encountered by the '49ers which had no outlet save a "sink," and confused by some with Goose Creek, is reflected in their diaries. One optimist states that the gas from the Hot Springs might be conveyed in pipes "to assure a small community here for fuel and light" (Harlan, 54). An abrupt climb (Bishop, 42) (cont.).
led over the divide to the famous landmark of this section of the route, Humboldt Wells. Here the forlorn desert plain "was pitted over for miles like a ten-yard, with oblong holes, some of which were very deep, and of a remarkable appearance, looking as if formed by art; they were so equally spread and so uniformly shaped; all were deep (con't)"
and [1849] half-filled with stagnant water," Kelly, 185.

Here, by one route or another, travellers now enter
The long-looked-for Humboldt River valley. Possibly
no migration pathway in history is described in such
contradictory terms by its historians as this track
of the California Trail between the "Wello" and the "Sink"
of the Humboldt. These range from Captain (con't.)
Ingalls's observation in 1865: "I never journeyed 200 miles along any river with the enjoyment and satisfaction I did on the Humboldt [with 450 mules, 300 horses and 70 wagons]" to the most frightful accounts of hardship, insanity, and death. The explanation is to be found in the fact that stagnant water was usually poisonous and flowing water healthful; also (cont)
in the fact that, in dry seasons, a fair road and good grass was found near the river; whereas in times of floods the emigrant trains were forced onto the sandy bluffs at the cost of physical exertion many men and animals could not afford (Bishop, 40; Bryant, 201; Beckwith, 35). Near the mouth of the La Moile more provision of forage was available (cont.)
Then usual. This was located as the "Old Hay Reserve" of later days when the Central Pacific was being built by the site of Camp Halleck (Top. Land Office map "Nevada", 1914). High water in the river brought alkali deposits to such meadows rendering grass, which had been good, very poisonous to cattle. The only recourse then was to the parched hills for forage.
Between the present Elko and Fremont's Canon, the South fork enters Humboldt; it became a later route to this valley from Salt Lake City, known as The Hastings's Road, see map No. 5; cf. Bryant, Ch. XIV; Holman, 445; Harlan, 54; Simpson, 64. Hudspeth was looking for this cut-off in 1846, Bryant, 170. The Donner party delayed so long looking for it that tragedy overtook them. 24. 260.
Traversing Fremont's Canon (map preceding, Bishop, 41), meadows known later as the Old Carlin Hay Reserve were found near the mouths of Susie's and Maggie's Creeks. West of Carlin the main track was forced away from the river by the southern foot-hills of the Pusercaraway Mountains. A vivid story of a night's march through them is given by Kelly, 191.
Gravelly ford was a landmark on the trail, the passage through the range being difficult. Simpson, 2764; Bishop, 41. Here the later Chorpenning & Co. "Mule Express" (antecedating the "Pony Express") mail line (1859) ran into the old trail from the south; it came over the Hastings Road, but kept south of the river to this point, possibly on the track of Beckwith's trail; see map in Simpson Report. G. Lynde, 341; Bishop, 41.
At about the present site of Argenta the trail broke into two branches on either side of the river which I indicate as the "North" and "South" routes. Bidwell kept mostly on the north bank (126); it was the usual route in 1850 (Harlan, 55), although forage and the state of water governed decisions. Cf. Ingalls, 163; Kelly, 193.
To the men of the era of '49 the Battle Mountain country presented scenes fit only for the pen of a Dante. "These mountains," wrote Harlan, "have all been burnt down to ash hills; some of them look hot yet. . . . This morning our cattle had no grass and we have driven them ten miles down the river to tolerable grass (cont.)
(Though scarce) ... Today m herd had a coal
work mnd, roads mny duaty. m have roled
on about 11 miles". As the river was descended
Indian pilfering became more annoying, but efforts
"to chastise the Redmen " is very much like running
down greyhounds with bull dogs; Harlan notes, 55
Beyond the present Iron Point Station. (End)
The monitory of the sun-burnt valley was relieved by hot springs and tule swamps. "...in passing a slory point," wrote Harlan, "there was several small hot springs near one of which I measured some bull Rusher over 12 feet high standing erect; 55-56. The meadows here were recommended by Kirk as a good site for a fort to overawe the Indians, 37.
The Big Bend of the Humboldt, northeast of Winnemucca, was known for its tile swamps and heavy sanded tracks through them, cf. Bidwell, 126 and Kerlan (56) who writes: "... our road today has been send from 4 to 6 inches deep, the matter hot. There are hundreds of persons with packs on their backs that live on rose
berries and frogs having no other means of subsistence; flour has been sold at $1.00 per pound and two dollars a pound has been refused in many cases." The hope of finding a more tolerable course on the South side of the river was attempted by many a '49er: "We took up our march over an ash plain on which there is neither water (con't.)
nor a spear of grass... most of this distance the river minds its way among high lime and ash boulders; small bottoms but few willows and no must go further and this place is not called a desert!" Already the terrors of the dreaded Humboldt Sink region before them greet the 49ers here, putrid cattle lying along the trail, forty three horses being seen in one spot.
Lassen's or Lawson's Meadows offered a dubious oasis in the sun-baked valley. Here the Honey Lake, or Noble, road led northeastward to the Rogue River Valley in Oregon: Beckwith, 42; Bryant, 196, 249; Volo, 178. The old California Trail turns southward toward the Siskiyou of the Humboldt and Carson River. Cf. Simpson, 26; Beckworth, 36; Kelly, 194; Ingalls, 163.
Every record bears testimony of the hardships of the '49ers on any of these southward tracks. Forage, such as it was, secured at Cassen's, was brought forward into the desert region now extend; Kelly 195-7. If the 'met' route was chosen, the traveller found rough ground between the spurs of Trinity Mountains and the river as then encountered, in T. 27 (con't.)
The troublesome Slough of the Humboldt above The Sink. If the "East" route was essayed, a wide circle was made to avoid the dismal stretches of Carson Sink. Added to privation, was the difficulty of following a sure pathway; Bryant found this a trial in 1846 (208-213) as did Kern before him (478). Cf. Simpson, 92; Kelly, 195; Harlan, 57; Bishop, 43.
All travelers who kept records described the Strange Sink, Kern Co. The earliest of these (1845) stated, "This lake is about 8 miles long by 2 in width; it is marshy, overgrown with bullrushes, at the upper end... The country here becomes more desolate in its appearance... The outlet, after running several miles toward the rim of this basin, forms a large marsh in the midst of the sand hills" (478-479).
Kern’s record shows that the earlier track through the alkali flats, now known as Carson Sink, was the line via White Plains Depot and Desert Quartz Mill (479), but the easterly line, crossing the Slough near the lake, was the main track of the ’49ers; Simpson, 92; Yarbrough, 58; Bryant, 212; Kelly, 208. The scenes, when the great migration of 1849 broke (cont’.)
across the Carson flats and on by the Desert well (Marcy, 270) to Ragtown (Lustville, Nev.), beggar description; 
Mar. water at 700 a gallon, no forage whatever, and 
outfits abandoning equipment at every camp, it was 
a case of sauvé qui peut, unlike anything known in 
American history. Joining Carson River, outfits 
spread up and down its banks to recuperate (cont.)
for the race to the oases of the Truckee. Old Cottonwood Station (Northern, Nev.) was a well-known breathing spot on the Carson; Starlan 58; Kelly 214. One 20-acre track along the river was said to contain the wrecks of 3000 wagons in the summer of 1850; Starlan, 58. The wild race for life turned white men into savages, more to be feared than the half-starved native "Digger" (cont.)
Indians, Holeman, 442. In the anxiety to get forward, various routes across country to Dayton were followed, (Kelly, 217) see preceding map; Harlan 58. The main track followed the river to Fort Churchill (Simpson, 93) and Dayton, where it struck eastward (Harlan, 59) to the present Empire City and Carson.
from Carson and its region, destined to such fame a decade later. The pathway of the '49ers struck southward across Clear Creek (Simpson, 92) and followed near to Carson into the more fruitful country of Reese's Ranch, the present Genoa (map following) cf. Simpson, No 92; Marcy, 275.
While fate placed the highest barrier for the California pioneers (the Sierras) in the very last stages of their pilgrimage, yet the refreshing streams tributary to Lake Tahoe gave them the needed courage for the mountain climb beyond; Bryant, 223; Herlan, 61; Simpson, 16, 93. Numerous ancient trails from Lake Tahoe crossed the mountain ranges. The deepest valley,
Trail, as one of these came to be known, branched from the main route near the Nevada-California line (map preceding); it crossed Johnson's Pass (Simpson, 96) to the East Fork of the American, locally known as Strawberry Creek in 1859. Another trail left the main route in the S.W. corner of T. 12 (map preceding) and crossed the range to the head of the East Fork of the American; it later became (as above) the Placerville-Carson Road. From it (con't.)
diverged Johnson's Cut-off (map preceding) in T. 11, crossing the divide through Johnson's Pass, and used by wagon trains as early as 1845; Simpson, 22, 97. Another trail followed the Truckee to Carson Pass (map preceding) and gained the divide indicated in T. 9, R. 16. This route "continuing along the foot of the Sierra Nevada for 18 or 20 miles before turning to the west" (Simpson, 95-96) was the main (cont)
trail of the '49ers. Earlier trains had also entered California by another pathway, from Walker's River to the Stanislaus; Bidwell, 128. The Johnson, Sagget, Placerville-Carson and 'California Road' converged, as above, in the motion part of T. 11 R. 13. The crossing of the Sierras is described by practically every diarist. "The transit from the arid plains...to the quick, teeming country (con't.)
on the western slope is most singularly marked and sudden, and shows how much, irrespective of latitude, the laws of climate and production are dependent upon physical circumstances and features of country; Simpson, 96. Fremont (Exploring Expedition, 245-247) gives a map of the American River Valley and trail with a record of travel over it in 1844.
Branch from Salt Lake City to Raft River

Joining the California Trail in Map 10; cf. Key Maps 5 and 6. The later historic mail and stage route from Salt Lake City went south and west of Great Salt Lake; see Simpson's Explorations and Root and Connellley, The Overland Stage to California.
The old trail through present Salt Lake City leading northward to the Bear and Soda Springs (cf. Vol. III, map 11), to Fort Hall (map 6), or to the Snake via Raft River (cf. maps 7 and 9, also Vol. III, map 20) was of ancient origin. With the rush to California in '49 the latter (Raft Creek) branch became temporarily important. For comments on the trail northward to Farmington see Kelly, 166; cf. Lynde, 240-245.
No '49er who traversed this track left so minute account as did Kelly; our quotations are from him, giving only page references: beyond Farmington "our trail took a decided bend towards the mountain in the direction of ... The Weber ... which I reached in good time, but were taken aback by seeing, from the lofty, overhanging bank, that it was both deep and rapid" (170). Cf. Ingalls, 161.
"There was a... low, gravelly island [in the Weber] that in me enabled to get to... and in me not more than two hours getting across. ... The ground [north of Ogden] over which the trail lay was soft and swampy, with banks of thick jungle that had never before [?] been penetrated" (170). The crossing of the "Ogden" in Ogden's Hole was not difficult; the pathway beyond was deflected by a little swamp.
Intense heat and a species of "gigantic fly" gave this pioneer party trouble. Two men suffered sun stroke and were placed in the wagons; the flies forced the travellers to have recourse to their "mice Mormon butter" as salve for protection. The shores of the lake from the site of the present Willard attracted attention.
The Box Elder was a rendezvous for redskins of various clans who plundered all these mountain trails, Tormey, 239-240; cf. Holman, 440. The rush to the gold fields led to establishing a ferry across the Bear, Kelly's party being the first served (173). A better crossing was found by later comers on the present site of Corinne; Ingalls, 162. At five miles from the Bear Kelly found the Malade a "narrow, deep stream" (174).
At times the stage of water drove emigrants far up to Bear before a crossing could be effected, taking them well out of the direct route; cf. Ingalls, 162; Lynde's crossing is indicated as at (a) or two and a half miles from the Malade; 246. Blind, or Blair, Springs offered a watering place on the "Smalls of the sounding ocean" (174) of the plains beyond the Malade; Ingalls, 162; Lynde, 246.
The ford of the Malade near Plymouth was
deeper in bad seasons than those lying further down
the river, Lynde, 143. This officer gives the only detailed
description and itinerary of the Salt Lake - Raft River
route known to the editor; it is dated, however,
in 1859; Lynde, 245-255.
The land pull over the waterless (but well grassed, Lynde, 253) prairie to Blue Creek made even its slightly saline contribution most welcome. "That morning we launched out [from Blue Spring] upon the desert of sage and sand... the bushes being so close and strong... as to call our oxen into requisition" (76). For Blue Spring cf. Map 2, Pristie Railway; Lander map in Pacific Mail Roads; March, 274.
Heavy sage, but better water, was found on the site of the later Dillie Ranch, at Hansel's ("Hazel") Spring and on Deep Creek; cf. Lander map, Pacific Wagon Roads; Lynde, 253; Many, 274. Divergence even from a "blind" trail was found by Kelly to be costly; after cutting a new roadway for two miles, heretofore, his party was forced to return to the main pathway. 177.
"Next day the sun was oppressively hot, and we toiled on through sage and sand. We had [carried] plenty of water, which, running without shade though those hot sands, was at blood heat and not very agreeable to drink while sheltering ourselves in the solar fire" (179). Cf. Marcy, 274; Lynde, 246.
Reaching the foothills of the Raft River Mountains, the desert gave way to "a fine range of green hills" (160). Emigrant Spring, called Cedar Springs by Mary (274), ten miles from Rock or Clear Creek, marked the end of the long pull from the Bear to the head of Raft River. The trail now led into a grassy ravine, wooded with gnarled cedar, which was twisted into most (cont.)
fantastic shapes... where we had a good delirium.

promising times. This next morning,

in a place where our path intersects into an open valley. '181. The alternate route from

Cedar Springs (preceeding map) must have approached the

dotted line (a); see continuation on map following.