

Abstract of journals from the 1845 Kearny Expedition

This excerpt from the congressional report of the Secretary of War includes the abstracts of two journals, one by Lieutenant William B. Franklin, a topographical engineer, and another by Lieutenant H.S. Turner of the 1st dragoons stationed at Fort Leavenworth. Under the command of Stephen Kearny, the 1st dragoons and their accompanying engineers left Fort Leavenworth on a military march, heading northwest on what would become the Oregon Trail, down along the Rocky Mountains to Mexican territory, and back up via the Santa Fe Trail. This march was intended as a display of the United States' military power to both native tribes and the British government (which at this time was exerting its authority over Oregon Territory). For the most part this abstract details their route, but it does include a transcription of a conversation between Kearny and a Sioux chief named Bull Tail.

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Abstract of journals from the 1845 Kearny Expedition

214

Doc. No. 2.

act of April 10, 1806, commonly called *Rules and Articles of War*. For the persons subject to this code, see the *beginning* of the act, and articles 96 and 97—also sec. 2, *Cross*, pp. 107, 122, and 123. All but the last of these provisions are founded on art. i, sec. 8, clauses 13, 14, and 15, of the constitution, and the 5th amendment. But the writ of *habeas corpus* may be suspended by Congress, in certain cases, and this it has been ignorantly supposed would let in *martial law* as applicable to persons *other* than those mentioned in the articles of war. Such persons might, no doubt, under the suspension of the writ, be deprived of their liberty for a time, but could only be further punished by the ordinary or civil courts of the land, if citizens, and consequently not "spies." Col. Kearny's suggestion, however, applies to the *Indian country* as defined in the act of 1834, and which lies *outside* of our States and organized Territories.

Respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War.

WINFIELD SCOTT.

NOVEMBER 10, 1845.

Abstract of journals kept by Lt. Turner, adjutant 1st dragoons, and Lt. Franklin, Top. Eng., during an expedition performed in the summer of 1845, by five companies of the 1st dragoons under the command of Colonel S. W. Kearny.

May 18, 1845, five companies of the 1st dragoons, fully equipped, left Fort Leavenworth under the command of Col. Kearny, for a tour to the prairies, which was to extend to the South Pass of the Rocky mountains, thence to Bent's fort, by way of Fort Laramie, and thence by the Santa Fe trace, back to Fort Leavenworth.

Two official journals of this expedition have been made—one by Lt. Turner, adjutant of the regiment, and the other by Lt. Franklin, corps of topographical engineers. A map accompanies the latter journal showing the route of the expedition and the adjacent country.

On the 13th of June the command arrived at Fort Laramie, a trading post of the American Fur Company, about 600 miles distant from Fort Leavenworth.

From Fort Leavenworth to where the trace of the command strikes the Platte river, the country is described as being the regular prairie land so common in the western States; but from this point to Fort Laramie the country is barren and desolate; being without timber or grass, except on the very banks of the streams, and very little even there.

Fort Laramie is situated at the junction of the Laramie fork and the North fork of the Platte river. The Platte is thinly timbered with cotton-wood; on the Laramie there is found some ash, as well as cotton-wood. There are a great many Sioux in this vicinity, who are probably attracted by the facilities for trading offered by the fort.

At the fort, 1,200 Sioux were gathered together in a few days, and a council was held with them, at which Col. Kearny addressed them as follows:

"Sioux: I am glad to see you. Your great father has learned much of his red children, and has sent me with a few *braves* to visit you. I am going to the waters which flow towards the setting sun. I shall return to this

Abstract of journals from the 1845 Kearny Expedition

Doc. No. 2.

215

place, and then march to the Arkansas, and then home. I am opening a road for the white people, and your great father directs that his red children shall not attempt to close it up. There are many whites now coming on this road, moving to the other side of the mountains; they take with them their women, children, and cattle. They all go to bury their bones there, and never to return. You must not disturb them in their persons or molest their property. Should you do so, your great father would be angry with you, and cause you to be punished.

"Sioux: You have enemies about you, but the greatest of them all is whiskey. I learn that some bad white men bring it here from Taas, and sell it to you. Open your ears and listen to me. It is contrary to the wishes of your great father that whiskey should be brought here, and I advise you, whenever you find it in your country, no matter in whose possession, to spill it all on the ground. The ground may drink it without injury, but you cannot. I wish you, Sioux, to remember what I have now said to you, and that you who have heard me will tell those who are not present. Your great father is the friend of his red children, and as long as they behave themselves properly, will continue to be so. I have not come among you to bring you presents; but your great father has sent a few things, that you may remember what I have said to you."

Bull Tail, the principal chief, made a few remarks in reply, to the following purport:

"If my people will be good to the whites, they will find that the presents they are about to receive will often come. Father, this does very well, and pleases me. What you have told me I am glad of from my very heart. All you have told me is very good. I have found a father. We will no longer think of dying, but will live. I remember the words you have this day spoken to us. My people shall do as I say."

One of the *braves* then spoke as follows:

"You make me remember old times, my father. My own father went down to see Gov. Clark, and died there. I am the son of *Blackboon*; (produced papers which had been given to his father.) Different bands of Sioux are around us in the country; I am one of them, and live on the other side of the river. I don't consider myself a chief, but am here with my band, and was glad to hear what you have said to us. The country is now smoother, and the clouds higher. I tell my people to spread what you have said, all about the country. You are from a long distance, and I have this day found out that we shall live."

The presents, consisting of scarlet and blue cloth, with red and green blankets, tobacco, knives, looking-glasses, beads, &c., &c., were now distributed, during which several old men expressed their delight by incessant singing. The council was then broken up. Before leaving the ground three hollow shot were fired from one of the howitzers, which had been brought down from our camp for the purpose. This was something entirely new to the Indians, and seemed to fill them with astonishment.

June 17th, the expedition left Fort Laramie for the South Pass, distant about 280 miles, and arrived there on the 30th of June. Here the command was mustered, and the next day commenced their eastward route, arriving at Fort Laramie again on the 13th of July.

The country between Fort Laramie and the Pass is the most interesting region for the geologist visited by the command. From Laramie, some distance west, the road runs over hills of coarse gravel, usually known as



Abstract of journals from the 1845 Kearny Expedition

216

Doc. No. 2.

drift. The Platte river is locked by high banks of the red sandstone formation, underlaid in many places by silicious limestone. This continues for about 50 miles up the Platte, where the road runs over a sandy barren tract of country. The only grass is along the borders of the streams, with very little timber any where, except on some of the high banks before mentioned, which are perfectly inaccessible to wagons.

One hundred and twenty five miles from Laramie the road leaves the Platte and crosses the Sweet Water river, which it follows until it strikes across the dividing ridge. Between these two rivers there was an indistinct appearance of coal. The red sandstone formation abounds, however, and it is probable that coal would be found after proper examination by any competent person.

The Sweet Water is bordered, on both sides, by mountains of granite, frequently intersected by dikes of trap. It is not timbered, but has a very good growth of grass upon its banks. The distance between these two ranges of mountains is about 20 miles; but this district of country is very barren, producing nothing but wild sage, except on the edge of the stream.

In the Pass there is no timber, and none in its vicinity except on the Wind river mountains, which would be inaccessible to wagons.

On the 14th of July, the command set out for Bent's fort, distant from Fort Laramie about 400 miles, nearly due south.

On the Chugwater, a branch of the Laramie, a village of Cheyennes, containing about 30 lodges, was visited, and a council held with them, at which presents were made to the Indians. This, and the council at Laramie, were the only *talks* held with the Indians during the expedition.

The command struck the south fork of the Platte on the 20th of July, and after travelling along it for a day or two it was left for Bent's fort, arriving there on the 29th of July.

From Fort Laramie to the south fork, the country is very barren, without any timber and with but little water. The south fork itself is timbered with cotton-wood, but the grass is indifferent and the soil generally sandy.

An evident improvement in the country appeared as the command went south; and along Cherry creek, the soil is represented to be better than any before passed over. Near the head of this stream there is fine timber, and, for one day's journey, a part of the road, six miles in length, led through a pine forest.

The command travelled near the foot of the mountains on the greater part of this route, and encamped once very near the foot of Pike's peak, said to be one of the highest points of the whole chain. For want of time no one ascended it.

The Arkansas river, which was struck about 70 miles west of Bent's fort, is, at this point, well timbered with cotton wood, but the river bottoms are sandy, producing some grass, but so dry that it is hardly probable that any thing else would grow there.

Bent's fort is a post built much after the manner of Fort Laramie, (of unburnt bricks,) and for the same purposes. It belongs to Messrs. Bents and St. Vrain, from whom the command received a hearty welcome. A halt, only sufficiently long to take some provisions that had been sent to this fort nearly two years before, was here made. The provisions were still in a perfect state of preservation, not even the rice or hard bread being spoiled; a remarkable evidence of the dryness and purity of the mountain air.

From this place to the point where the command left the river, the grass



Abstract of journals from the 1845 Kearny Expedition

Doc. No. 2.

217

was very good ; but there was little timber, and the soil was very sandy. The only grass in the country was that on the river, the surrounding hills being almost entirely bare. Buffaloes were plenty, and quite fat.

The distance from Bent's fort to Fort Leavenworth is about 600 miles ; and after travelling 200 miles on the Arkansas, the command left it where it turns to the south, and, keeping along the Santa Fe trace, arrived at Fort Leavenworth on the 24th of August.

The latter part of the route was through by much the most beautiful country passed over ; and a progressive improvement in soil was observed from the river to Council grove, where the regular prairie country of the States is thought to commence.

The whole distance travelled during this expedition was about 2,200 miles ; and, as the dragoons were absent from Fort Leavenworth 99 days, their average daily march was therefore more than 21 miles ;—a march, considering its extent and other attendant circumstances, never paralleled for rapidity of execution. And if it be recollected that their horses subsisted during the whole time upon grass alone, and that each horse carried a dragoon the whole distance, the power of endurance of these animals must impress us with as much astonishment as their size and strength did the wild Indians visited.

FORT ATKINSON, I. T., *August 23, 1845.*

SIR: In compliance with instructions from department headquarters, dated May 7, 1845, I marched from this post with "B" company 1st dragoons on the 3d day of June.

The prairies were very wet and the streams all full, which delayed my arrival at "Traverse des Sioux" till June 22. I came up with Capt. Allen, on the 13th of June, about half way between this and the St. Peter's, and the companies continued together from that time. On the 16th of June two men of "I" company 1st dragoons were seriously injured by the accidental discharge of a pistol. I sent those men down to Fort Snelling by water. One of them, private Berry, died after his leg was amputated by Dr. Turner ; the other, private Howard, the man by whose carelessness the accident happened, has recovered.

On my arrival at Traverse des Sioux, I found a boat from Fort Snelling, with my howitzers, provisions, &c. A great mistake was made in the provisions forwarded by Major R. B. Lee, commissary: instead of 31 barrels of flour, which should have been sent, 17 only were forwarded. This mistake subjected my command to great inconvenience, for I was not in a country where it could be corrected by purchase. I marched from Traverse des Sioux on the 25th of June, and reached "Lac qui Parle" on the 1st of July. I found there a large band of "Wapeton Sioux;" and after holding a council with them, I gave them a part of the presents that had been sent to me for the Indians. I said to these Indians, as I said afterwards to all those I met in council—that our government felt a deep interest in their welfare ; and that so long as they conducted themselves properly, and did not wantonly molest the whites, they might be sure of protection. I impressed upon them, at the same time, the fact, that our government had now become so strong that no crime could remain unpunished—that there was no part of the Indian country in which a criminal could not be reached,

14 B