

CHAPTER ...XXI...

LONG'S EXPEDITION TO THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

The expedition led by Major Stephen Harriman Long, from the Missouri river to the Rocky Mountains of ~~southern~~ Colorado and north-eastern New Mexico, and thence eastward down the Canadian and Arkansas rivers to Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1820, was, ~~purportedly~~ ^{in 1820} a lateral outgrowth of, and an apologetic substitute for a far more pretentious enterprise undertaken by the United States under Monroe's administration, and known as "the Yellowstone Expedition."

Long's Yellowstone Expedition was sent forth in 1819, to build a post at the mouth of the Yellowstone river, to establish our national influence and commerce, as opposed to that of the British, among the Indian tribes of the Northwest, and to obtain detailed information about that region. ~~and~~

Many hoped that it would result in carrying our commerce

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"Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, performed in the years 1819 and '20, by order of The Hon. J. C. Calhoun, Sec'y of War: under the command of Major Stephen H. Long. From ^{the} Notes of Major Long, Mr. T. Say, and other gentlemen of the exploring party. Compiled by Edwin James, Botanist and Geologist for the Expedition. In two volumes.—With an Atlas. Philadelphia: H. C. Carey and I. Lea, Chestnut St. 1823." (The Atlas bears date of 1822.)

A ~~misleading~~ history of the organization, going ~~forth~~, and failure of the Yellowstone Expedition is given, with a sketch of Long's excursion to the Pike's Peak region, ~~and~~ in Chittenden's American Fur Trade of the Far West, Vol. III; Chapter II of Part III.

An edition of Doctor James original Account, has recently been published, in four volumes, by the Arthur H. Clark Company, Cleveland, Ohio. Edited and annotated by Dr. Reuben Gold Thwaites, of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin,

(See also *Explorations of the Rocky Mountains* by John C. Frémont, 1848)

speedily to the Pacific and, in a large way, even to China. The undertaking was popular from its inception. Congress appropriated liberally for its equipment. It was lauded by the President and ^{the} Secretary of War, and heralded by the press, for the glorious things it promised for the nation. Preparations were made for it on a grand and elaborate scale. Pack-trains and keel-boats — which would have landed the expedition at its destination within a few months after the time of starting — were ^{for the most part} disdained. A fleet of six steamboats, that cost the government more than a quarter of a million dollars, was built for the conveyance of troops and scientific staff. But the expedition never reached the Yellowstone. An advance ^{force} detachment of troops was sent forward in the fall of 1818, and wintered at "Camp Martin" on Ile au Vache (Cow Island), Missouri river, ^{about 9 miles above} ~~place where Fort Leavenworth was later to be~~ ^{now present} ~~Atkinson, Kansas~~. In the following year the ~~main~~ expedition went forth, under the command of Major ~~Stephen~~ Long. It succeeded in getting one of the steamboats and a cumbersome military escort up the Missouri to the Council Bluffs, where, near Manuel Lisa's trading post "Camp Missouri" (later to become Fort Atkinson and Fort Calhoun) for the troops, and "Engineer Cantonment" for the scientific staff, were then established as winter quarters. A special party had come thither by the way of the Kansas Indian village on Kansas river east of the mouth of the Blue. By the spring of 1820, the expedition had already cost, besides a vast sum of money, the lives of about a hundred men, who died of scurvy at Camp ~~Missouri~~ Missouri. Congress and the people were disgusted; the original appropriations proved insufficient, and Congress declined to vote new ones; the ^{enterprise} ~~expedition~~ was abandoned; and a small overland expedition, to what are now eastern Colorado and northeastern New Mexico, was meagerly outfitted, in part by the members themselves, and made as a sort of substitute. As this expedition was not honored by Congress with provision for an official report, an "Account" of it was privately published ^{in 1823} under the editorship of Dr. James, its botanist; and through this it ^{came to be} known as "Long's expedition to the Rocky Mountains". But it should be understood as a reconnaissance literally to, and not into, the Rocky Mountains; for exploration in these was confined to the Front Range, and besides ~~Pike's~~ Pike's Peak, — whose summit was reached for the first time so far as known, by Doctor James and two others, on the 14th of July 1820, and whose height above base was measured with approximate accuracy by Lieutenant Swift, — the expedition touched even the Front Range at but three other points; namely, the lower canon of the South Platte, the vicinity of Palmer Lake, and the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas. Its information about the mountain region beyond that range, was mainly that had from Bijnou and Ledoux, who had traversed portions of it with the trapping parties of

Chouteau and De Mun, and from the writings of Lewis and Clark. It was, indeed, largely an expedition on and of the plains, to which, rather than to the mountains, the preponderance of its ~~unvaluable collection of~~ scientific and historical data relates; but even in this capacity, it committed one cardinal error, inasmuch as it proclaimed the western plains a barren waste, and furnished Daniel Webster with part of his material for the rhetorical figure and figment of "the Great American Desert", with which he branded them, retarding for a generation the development of western Louisiana, and nearly losing Oregon to the United States.

But it is with the western end of the expedition, its doings in and near the front of the Rocky Mountains, that we shall occupy the pages of two chapters in the study of it here presented.

Long's expedition to the Rocky Mountains left Engineer Cantonment on the 5th of June, 1820. Its personnel, at the start, was as follows:

Major Stephen Harriman Long, U.S. Topographical Engineers, commanding the expedition,

Captain John R. Bell, appointed to act as official journalist,

Lieutenant William H. Swift, Assistant Topographer, commanding guard, Thomas Say, Zoologist, etc.,

Doctor Edwin James, Botanist, Geologist and Surgeon,

Titian R. Peale, Assistant Naturalist,

Samuel Seymour, Landscape Painter,

Stephen Julien, Interpreter, French and Indian,

H. Dougherty, Hunter,

D. Adams, Spanish interpreter,

Z. Wilson, Baggage Master,

Oakley and Duncan, Engagés,

Corporal Parish,

and six privates of the U.S. Army.

On the morning of the 9th, three days later, at the Pawnee Indian villages.

Arriving at the Loop fork of Platte river, Biseau and Ledoux,

two Frenchmen resident at the ~~Pawnee~~ villages, ^{Paris}, were added to

the party, the former as guide and interpreter, and the latter as

hunter, farier, etc.

Leaving the vicinity of the ~~Pawnee~~ villages on the morning of the 14th, striking Platte river near the upper end of Grand Island, and the rolling up the north side of the river,

they passed the forks of the Platte on the 22nd, and on the same day crossed ^{the} the North Fork, or whose head basin, North Park, then

known to the trappers as "the Bull Pen",* Dr. James gives a description

*A mountain-men's slang translation of its Indian name. The Shoshonean name was "De-cay-a-que", meaning "Buffalo Bull-pen", according to a letter written from Fort Bridger, August 22nd, 1849, by Indian agent John Wilson, arrived at the fort the day before, and who obtained his information from "Major Vasques" (Vasquez), who had been in the Rocky Mountains quite as long as his then absent partner, Jim Bridger, after whom the fort was named. Fremont, who ~~had~~ passed through North Park in 1844, and mentioned it under another of its synonyms, "New Park", wrote of it, "The Indian name for it signifies 'cow lodge'.

based upon observations made in or about 1816 by Bijeau. In the Atlas accompanying Dr. James' work, the North fork of the Platte is represented as issuing from the Bull Pen eastward, directly out upon the plains; and this error (possibly however due to lack of space on the left-hand border of the map) is strangely coupled with that, in the narrative, of supposing that the northerly flowing stream (Eagle river) legended on Captain Pike's "Map of the Internal Provinces of New Spain" as the Piedra Amarilla,* or Yellowstone, was the North fork

Footnote *Made by a misprint, "Rio de Piedra Amarilla del Missouri" on that map.

of the Platte*.

Footnote *In our chapter on Zebulon M. Pike in Colorado, it is shown that Captain Pike ascended the Arkansas from the vicinity of its small tributary now called Trouf creek, to a mountain between 20 and 25 miles above the present town of Buena Vista, — perhaps to the point of the mesa north of Pine creek, at ~~about~~ about 11,000 feet elevation, — whence he could look over, through a gap several hundred feet lower (Tennessee pass), ~~and~~ and catch a glimpse of the Grand river country.

Crossing the South fork on the 23rd, they proceeded up the latter, their journey from this crossing, to the mountains, being pursued on the south or east side of the river. In the South Platte valley, ^{on} the 23rd and 24th, the party passed through immense herds of buffalo, which, with more zoological accuracy than deference to popular usage, Dr. James and Mr. Say invariably call bison.

Although, at ~~that~~ that time, and for some years thereafter, a few buffalo still remained east of the Missouri, ~~yet~~ yet on the west side of that river, in the vicinity of Engineer Cantonment, the "buffalo wallows", — which in ~~actually~~ ^{seen} actually frequented range are basins of dust, mud, or foul water, according to season or weather, — were in 1819-'20 overgrown with grass; indicating that the buffalo had, several years since, forsaken the latter locality for more westerly pastures, probably owing to the presence of white traders and hunters and their establishments at Council Bluffs, Bellevue, etc. Within six miles of the Pawnee Indian villages on Loup fork, ~~Long's~~ Long's party had seen a single bison; and about these villages, it observed numerous skulls of bison that had been killed from herds that had ranged there in the previous spring, in the course of their northward migration. Thence westward, the number of these animals ^{seen} increased to a maximum in the region near and above the forks of the Platte. Two were killed ^{by Long's party} of the 24th, from the immense herds "blackening the whole surface of the country" through which it was passing, and the choice parts were packed to the evening camp. "It appeared to

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We

Although of a somewhat coarser fibre, yet after making due allowance for the situation in which we were placed, our appetites often increased by hunger and privation, that us," says Dr. James, "that the flesh of the bison is in no degree inferior in delicacy and sweetnessto that of the common ox. It was preferred by the party to the flesh of the elk or deer, which was thrown away when it could be substituted by the bison meat. To the fat of the bison, we conceded a decided superiority over that of the common ox, as being richer and sweeter in taste."*

(Footnote)

"Messrs. J. C. Eldridge, Com'r of Ind. Affairs for Texas, and Hamilton P. Bee and Thos. Torrey, of the Republic of Texas, during their treaty-making expedition ~~to the northern part of the Mexican Republic~~ of 1843 to the wild tribes in northern Texas, were soon out of other provisions, and reduced "to an entire dependence on wild meat, which however, was abundant, and they soon found the tallow of the buffalo, quite unlike that of the cow, a good substitute for bread. They carried abundant strings of cooked meat on their pack-mules." ~~in 1843~~ (Brown's Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas, p. 96.). — P. W. C.

No advance was made on the 25th, which was Sabbath, and devoted chiefly to rest. Some of the buffalo meat was dried or "jerked", and the magnetic variation for the locality of their camp, was determined and found to be 14° east. Observations for longitude were made, but are not given in the tables of the Appendix, and if they were, could, as usual, probably not be closely relied upon; attempt was made to take the meridional altitude of Antares, for latitude, but was begun too late, and failed.

July "26th"....."In the forenoon we passed a range of hills more elevated than any we had seen west of the Missouri. These hills cross the Platte from north to south, and though inconsiderable in magnitude, they can be distinguished extending several miles on each side of the river. They consist principally of gravel, intermixed with small water-worn fragments of granite and other primitive rocks, but are based on a stratum of coarse friable sandstone, of a dark gray colour, which has been uncovered and cut through by the bed of the Platte."

This range of bold bluffs, consisting of the Loup Fork and related ~~now noted for fossil remains of rhinoceros, 3-toed horses, etc.~~ Tertiary fresh-water formations, Dr. James surmised, "may perhaps be a continuation or spur from the black hills mentioned by Lewis and Clark, as ~~mountains~~ containing the sources of the Shianne and other tributaries of the Missouri, at no great distance to the north of the place where we now were."*

(Footnote)

*The Laramie hills and their continuation northeastward, were for many years afterward known to the Trappers and traders as the "Black Hills", like those now known by the latter name, and for ~~the same reason~~ one not so much geological as botanical, — to wit, their being covered with pine forests which gave them a black appearance when viewed ~~from a~~ from a distance. It is likely that the early mountain men ~~had~~ invented the name from the Indians, — P. W. C.

On the evening of the 26th, camp was made in a scattering grove of cotton-

woods, near an Indian fort, the latter being a circular breastwork, about five feet high, constructed of broken, half-decayed logs and buffalo skeletons, and having an opening on the east side. ~~Next~~ In front of the fort entrance "was a semicircular row of sixteen bison skulls, with their noses pointing down the river. Near the centre of the circle which this row would describe, if continued, was another skull marked with a number of red lines". This ~~meantime~~ device ~~meantime~~ served, among the Indians, essentially the same purpose as does the bulletin-board in our cities today, namely, that of temporarily gazetting the news for the benefit of ~~the~~ passers-by. It was "designed to communicate the following information, namely, that the camp had been occupied by a war party of the Skeerees or Pawnee Loup Indians, who had lately come from an excursion against the Cumancias, Ietans, or some of the western tribes. The number of red lines traced on the painted skull indicated the number of the party to have been thirty-six; the position in which the skulls were placed, that they were on their return to their own country. Two small rods stuck in the ground, with a few hairs tied in two parcels to the end of each, signified that four scalps had been taken".

~~On the 28th, several herds of wild horses were seen, and~~
 This aboriginal "bulletin" was "posted" at a locality that could not have been far from the mouth of Lodgepole creek, which, travelling on the south side of the river, the party seems to have passed without

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