

and high but variable winds. Between twelve o'clock and sunset, the mercury in Fahrenheit's thermometer, fell nineteen degrees, from 89° to 60° ."

[July] "3rd. Breakfast was despatched, and we had mounted our horses before five o'clock.

"As we approached the mountains, wood became much more abundant along the Platte. We had often heard our guide, in speaking of the country two or three days journey from the mountains, mention the Grand Forest, and were a little surprised on arriving at it, to find no more than a narrow but ~~un~~interrupted strip of timber, extending along the immediate banks of the river, never occupying the space of half a mile in width.

"For several days the direction of course in ascending the Platte, had inclined considerably to the south, varying from due west to south 20° west.

"In the course of the day, we passed the mouths of three large creeks, heading in the mountains and entering the Platte from the northwest. One of these, nearly opposite to which we encamped, is called Potera's creek, from a Frenchman of that name, who is said to have been bewildered upon it, wandering about for twenty days, almost without food. He was then found by a band of Kiawas, who frequent this part of the country, and ~~restored~~ returned to his companions, a party of hunters, at that time encamped on the Arkansas."

Although one of these large creeks enters the Platte from the southwest, and flows from the northwest only in the upper part of its course, there are no other three streams to which Dr. James could thus refer, than Cache à la Poudre, Big Thompson, and St. Vrain; and ~~thus~~ as camp was made near the third or southernmost of these soon after passing it, Potera's creek (so far, at least, as the lower or trunk part of it was concerned) was what is now known as St. Vrain's creek,* and the

*Bookplate
Sublette
Page*

*I have not been able to find other record of a French name spelled "Potera", in connection with the early Far West. Two or three decades later, however, among the French engagés of Fremont's first Rocky Mountain expedition (1842) there was a "Pôtra", which is perhaps only a different spelling of the same name. This engagé, whose name was Benjamin Potra, may possibly, indeed, have been the very one whom ~~had~~ prior to 1820, ~~MP~~otera creek had been ~~named~~, since Fremont informs us that his men of that expedition were "principally Creole and Canadian voyageurs, who had become familiar with prairie life in the service of the fur companies in the Indian country".

In the early forties, St. Vrain's creek was known not only by the latter name, but also by the name Sublette's creek. Thus Sage, in his Scenes in the Rocky Mountains (published in 1846), mis-spelling the

name, mentions his own camp, upon the right hand fork of Soublet's creek", ~~the~~ apparently on the site of ~~the~~ the present town of Boulder, on the night of the 29th of October, 1843. There was also a branch (possibly Boulder creek) of St. Vrain's creek which was, until as late as 1858, known sometimes as "Benito Fork of St. Vrain creek" (see Smiley's History of Denver, p. 195), and which was probably named after one Benito Vasquez, born in 1780, who probably traded on the South Platte in the very earliest decades of the 19th century. William L. Sublette (born 1799) and Pierre Louis Vasquez (born 1798) had a trading post, Fort Vasquez, on South Platte river, ~~in~~ 1838-'40. On the map accompanying the official report of Col. Henry Dodge's expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1838 (published 1836), St. Vrain's creek is legended "Otter Creek". F.W.C.

camp was between the latter and the present town of Platteville. ~~Ex-~~ ^{the Platte} cepting ~~one~~ just above ~~the~~ forks, all camps made by the expedition as a whole, on the South Platte, were on the south side of the river.

"Throughout the day we were approaching the mountains obliquely,

and from our encampment at evening we supposed them to be about twenty miles distant. Clouds were hanging about all the higher parts of the mountains, which were sometimes observed to collect together and descend in showers, circumscribed to a limited district. This state of the weather obstructed the clearness, but added greatly to the imposing grandeur of some of the views which the mountain [Long's Peak] presented." An extra pint of maize was issued to each mess, and a small portion of whiskey distributed." Just what constituted "a small portion" of the latter commodity, is not stated; for some reason Dr. James thought it best ~~to~~ ^{to} be less specific in ^{this} matter ~~than~~ than in that of the maize, but he seems to have wished us to infer that it was less than a pint, which we will therefore assume. He continues:

"On leaving the camp in the morning, Major Long and Lieutenant Swift preceded the party, intending to select a suitable place for encampment, where they proposed to commence a set of observations, and to wait the arrival of the remainder of the party. But as they had gone forward about two miles, the point of woods at which they had left the course, was mistaken by the main body, which moved on until about eleven o'clock. By this time much anxiety was felt on account of their absence, and persons were sent out to attempt to discover them, but returned unsuccessful. A circumstance tending to increase the anxiety we felt was, that Indians were reported to have been seen in the course of the morning, by several of the party. Captain Bell was about to despatch as large a force as it was thought prudent to spare from the camp, to search for them in all the distance which had been passed since they were seen — when they arrived at the encampment of the main body, at half past one P.M.

"The observations which had been made, were of course lost, as the corresponding equal altitudes for the correction of time could not be had.

"In the evening the meridional altitude of Antares, was taken for

It was but little south of the site of Fort St. Vrain, a tiny post of some ~~days~~ ^{days} ~~years~~ ^{years} later.

latitude. The party remained encamped during the afternoon, when the extra allowance of corn was cooked and eaten, and the whiskey drank in honor of the day."

The tables of astronomical and other observations appended to the Account of the expedition, show that the latitude deduced for this locality was $39^{\circ} 57' 40''$ N., and describe it as "Camp on Platte, thirty-two miles below the point where it issues from the Rocky Mountains"; which fixes ~~thirteen~~ this ~~middle~~ camp, in the immediate vicinity of Brighton. Thus, the main part of this first known Colorado Fourth of July, ^{celebration} took place at Brighton, the pyrotechnic display being one of corn-crackers and fire-water; but there is nothing to show that the explorers did not wet their whistles a wee bit at Platteville, in whose vicinity, at least, the first steps toward the celebration were taken ~~Monday~~ in the morning by the issue of extra rations. The point of woods ~~which~~ Major Long and Lieutenant ^{had} Swift selected ~~middle~~ in the early forenoon, with intent to make it Fourth of July headquarters for the expedition, but which the main party inadvertently passed, so that it had to be given up, was probably ~~that~~ ^{below} the Lock and Randolph trading post of 1841, and

¹
*The adobe walls ruins of this post may still be seen a short distance south of Platteville. See chapter on Some Early Trading Posts ~~middle~~ of the South Platte Valley, for farther notice of this post, and of the duel fought in the timber above it.

which Sage describes as "a point of timber occupying a large bottom", where in the winter of 1841-'42 was fought the ~~infamous~~ ^{infatuated} Herring-Bear duel.

Interesting observations were made on plants, birds, mammals and reptiles of the vicinity; but these, like many ~~most~~ of those made at other localities on the route, must here be omitted for lack of space. ~~Early~~
On the 5th, the party proceeded about ten miles farther up the Platte, ^{and encamped for the day.} They were now near present Derby and Irondale, a little above the mouth of Clear creek. The latter stream, ^{Dr. James sprang} ~~the~~ ^{he here may have confused} ~~the~~ ^{had from} ~~given them by~~ the guide, since ^{elsewhere it applies to} ~~it applies to~~ ^{the} name, "Medicine-lodge creek", to Clear creek. It was, ~~probably~~ perhaps Boulder creek that Bijeau and his former trapper associates had known as Cannon-ball creek.*

(Continued on 10a)

The following ~~several~~ observations ~~made~~ on plants, birds, mammals and reptiles, are recorded in connection with ^{the} Fourth of July camp:

"Several valuable plants were here collected, and among others a large suffruticose species of Lupine. The long-leaved cotton-wood*

Populus angustifolia, J.

of Lewis and Clark, which is, according to their suggestion, a species of *Populus*, is here of very common occurrence. It is found intermixed with the common cotton-wood, resembling it in size and general aspect. Its leaves are long and narrow, its trunk smoother, and its branches more slender and flexible, than those of the *Populus angustata*. Some of its fruit was fortunately still remaining, affording us an opportunity to be entirely satisfied of its relation to this genus.

"Here we also observed both species of the splendid and interesting *Bartonia**, the *B. nuda* in full flower, the *ornata* not yet expanded.

Grouped
"The plants here referred to as *Bartonia*, are species of *Menzelia*.—
P.W.C.

"These most singular plants are interesting on several accounts, particularly the regular expansion of their large and beautiful flowers, towards the evening of several successive days. In the morning the long and slender petals, and the petal-like nectaries, which compose the flower, are found accurately closed upon each other, forming a cone of about an inch in length. In this situation they remain, if the weather be clear, until about sunset, when they gradually expand. If the weather is dark and cloudy, with a humid atmosphere, they are awakened from their slumbers at an earlier hour. We have, in some instances, seen them fully expanded early in the afternoon, but this has always been in stormy or cloudy weather. In this particular the *Bartonia* [redacted] bears some resemblance to the great night-flowering [redacted] *cereus*....., but the gaudy petals of the *cereus*, once unfolded, fall into a state of irretrievable collapse, whereas the *Bartonia* closes and expands its flowers for many days in succession.*

"Other plants were collected about this encampment, among which we distinguished an interesting species of *Ranunculus*, having a flower somewhat larger than that of *R. fluviatilis*, with which it grows, often extending, however, to some distance about the margins of the pools in which it is principally found. *R. amphibius*; slender, floating or decumbent, leaves reniform, four or five lobed, divisions cuneate-oblong, margin crenate, petioles long and alternate. The submersed leaves are in every respect similar to the floating ones. *Pentstemon arianthera*, N., *Poa quinquefida*, *Potentilla anserina*, *Scrophularia lanceolata*, *Myosotis glomerata*, N.?, &c., were also seen here."

"A number of young magpies were seen in the bushes about the river, also the nests and young of the mocking bird (Turdus Orpheus, Vieil.)"

Footnote | *Mimus polyglottus, (L.) Boie. — F. W. C.

"The prairie-dog villages we had observed to become more frequent and more extensive, as we approached the mountains, ~~midway~~.... We observed in the numerous burrows, an appearance of greater antiquity than in those more remote from the mountains. Many of the mounds occupy an extent of several yards in diameter, though of but inconsiderable elevation, and with the exception of the present entrance, overgrown with a scanty herbage, which always marks the area of the prairie-dog villages. Indeed we have observed several large villages with scarce a trace of vegetation about them. The food of the marmot, consisting of grasses and herbaceous plants, it is not perhaps easy to assign a reason for the preference which, in selecting the site of his habitation, he ~~should~~ always shows for the most barren places, unless it be that he may enjoy an unobstructed view of the surrounding country, in order to be seasonably warned of the approach of wolves, or other enemies.

"Rattle snakes of a particular species* are sometimes seen in these

Hawthorne
 *Say describes in a footnote here, Crotalus tergeminus, as the "particular species". The species of rattlesnake that he describes elsewhere as Crotalus confluentus, is a true representative of the genus Crotalus, having the crown of the head scaly, and is the common rattlesnake of the western plains and of the prairie-dog towns. But the species which, in footnote, he describes as Crotalus tergeminus, is one of the plate-crowned group, for which the oldest unoccupied name is Sistrurus, proposed by Samuel Garman in his work on North American Reptiles (1883); see also Cope's Crocodilians, Lizards and Snakes of North America. The specific name catenatus (Rafinesque, 1818) has precedence over that of tergeminus. The Sistrurus catenatus is prevailingly an eastern form, centering in Ohio, where it was known to the Indians, and later to the whites, as the "Massasauga". That Long's party met with six or eight specimens of the latter on Boyer creek, in Nebraska, is possible. The present writer has found it near the 100th meridian (Ford county), in Kansas; and it is known to occur as far west as Utah; but it is not, either in prairie-dog towns or on the plains in general, ~~midway~~ the common species. — F. W. C.

villages. They are found between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains, and appear to prefer an unproductive soil, where their sluggish gait may not be retarded by.... grass and weeds. Whilst exploring Boyer Creek, of the Missouri, in the Spring of 1820, our party met with six or eight of them during one day's march on the prairie, and on our subsequent journey to the Rocky Mountains we several times encountered equal or even greater numbers, in the same space of time. This is the species of serpent which travellers have observed to frequent the villages of the prairie-dogs, and to which they have attrib-

uted the unnatural habit of voluntary domiciliation with that interesting animal. It is true that the tergeminus, like many other serpents, will secure a refuge from danger in any hole of the earth, rock, or fallen tree, that may present itself, regardless of the rightful occupant; but we witnessed no facts which could be received as proof that it is an acceptable inmate of the dwelling of the Arctomys. [Cynomys.] *

*Prof. Cope's "Crocodilians, Lizards, and Snakes of North America," pp. 1173-'74, quotes from the American Naturalist, XVI, 1882, p. 565, the following statement of Dr. H. A. Broun, as to the relations existing between the rattlesnake, ~~prairie~~ prairie marmot, and prairie owl;

"Prairie dogs (Cynomys ludovicianus) seem to have a most intense dread of rattlesnakes (Crotalus confluentus). This little animal dreads not only its venomous bite, but more the loss of its young, which serve as food for these snakes that enter their burrows, take possession, and drive them from their homes. Where does one find a prairie-dog town but that it is teaming with snakes and the strange little owl (Speotyto cunicularia) that 'ducks' to passers in ludicrous solemnity? These do not constitute a happy family. The owls, though they generally occupy an abandoned hole or burrow, destroy the young dogs. Nor do the eggs and nestlings of the owls fare with any better treatment from the snakes; between these exists much enmity. One afternoon, while passing through one of these dog towns in Wallace County, Kansas, we heard a most unusual noise and stir (in the town), as though they were holding a bellicose council. They were collected around a hill, into which they were scraping dirt vigorously. On examining the burrow it was found to contain a large rattlesnake that the dogs were trying to entomb. I noticed this several times, as did other members of our party. To leave no doubt upon the subject, we dug out the snakes after shooting them." —F. W. C.

"From the disparity in the number of plates and scales, and from the greater size of the vertebral spots in this species than in the C. miliaris, we have been induced to consider this a distinct species. Specimens are in the Philadelphia museum.

"On the 5th ~~of~~ July we left ^{our} camp at an early hour, and ascended the Platte about ten miles. Here the party encamped for the day". They ~~were now~~ ^{supposedly about half} ~~little above~~ the mouth of Clear creek, in the vicinity ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{Ans} suburbs of Denver. ^{The latitude of camp, according to the observations of Long and Swift, was} Dr. James and Mr. Peale with two riflemen, Verplank and Bernard, went out for an excursion on foot, intending to ascend the Cannon-ball* creek to the mountains, which appeared to be

*present Clear creek. Between the period in which it was known as Cannon-ball creek and that ~~now~~ of its present name, it was for many years known as ~~the~~ Vasquez, after a well-known mountain trader. See chapter on Some Old Trading Posts of the South Platte Valley.

about five [but were in reality ~~not~~ not less than twelve] miles distant.

*This creek is rapid and clear, flowing over a bed paved with rounded masses of granite and gneiss. It is from a supposed resemblance of these masses to cannon balls, that the creek has received its name from the French hunters. The channel is sunk from fifty to one hundred