

The Old Divide Trail was probably travelled over, in part of its course at least, in the eighteenth century by Spaniards and Frenchmen and in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century by James Pursesley, the first American in the region and Baptiste Lalande, both mentioned by Pike as being in the region before he came. Then came "Zeke Williams in 1811-13; Philibert in 1814; Chouteau-De Mun 1815-17; Silvestre Pratt 1824 (and perhaps earlier) to 1828; General Ashley in the winter of 1824-25 and perhaps Louis Vasquez and Antoine Robidoux in the twenties, beside other American-Anglo and French traders and trappers and Mexicans known to have penetrated to the Pikes Peak Region. Of these early journeys we are not well enough informed nor do their accounts when they made them, mention this particular trail.

Before the trader James Daugherty had left his name to the Daugherty's of Jimmy's Camp Creek or to Jimmy's Spring; and ere in 1834 Fort-Laramie (the second Fort William of the central Rocky Mountains) had been built on the Laramie River; and ere young William Bent had married into the Cheyenne tribe through a chief's family and induced the Cheyennes to bring their winter villages to the Big Timbers of the Arkansas and make there their general headquarters, within convenient trading distance of the firm's location; it is practically certain that the said young Bent, of the firm of Bent and St Vrain & Company, had for several years used the Old Divide Trail for conveying, by pack-train, company trading goods from Bent's Fort (begun in 1828-29 and finished in 1832) to the villages of the Cheyenne in the Black Hills Country* and bringing back the peltries obtained in his trade. Indeed it is probable that William Bent and other members or employees of the firm had similarly used the same trail even from the time of the small picket trading post, which is said to have been the great fort's predecessor, ~~at 1828~~, the date of of the Bent Brothers first coming to the Arkansas Valley, and that it was so used by the company of Gannt and Blackwell, who made the first treaty of peace and trade with the Arapahoes of the upper Arkansas Valley in 1831-32. In the fall of the later year they had built a post on the north side of the Arkansas six miles below Fountain Creek, which post they operated during the winter of 1832-33.*

* The region of the Laramie Hills in what is now southeastern Wyoming. These hills then bore the same name as did those between the forks of the Cheyenne River in the present South Dakota.

* Chittenden; Hist. American Fur Trade, II, 943 makes the location of this post six miles above Fountain Creek and the error is copied by Wagner in his edition of the Narrative of Zenas Leonard, but the Journal of Dodge's Expedition of 1835 and Sages, Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, show that it was six miles below Fountain Creek. A letter written to me by George Bent (son of "Old Bill Bent") in 1905 after conference with the oldest Cheyennes, also confirms the latter location. Also this location of Gannt's Fort was confirmed to me by Tom Autobeas, whose father came to the mountains in 1832, and by O.H.P. Baxter of Pueblo (1858) who owned the land and built a brick house near the old fort site.

Two trapping parties of Gen Ashley (St Louis) came to and operated in Colorado in 1824: one belated by delays enroute, came by a Platte River route and reached the South Platte valley late in the fall; the other of which Albert G. Boone and Robert Campbell were members came by the Arkansas River trapped in its valley and packed their beaver over the divide to the South Platte valley where Col. Boone hunted buffalo in 1824, as he subsequently stated, on the present site of Denver. This parties beaver catch was therefore presumably packed over the Black Squirrel-Pinery Divide via the Old Divide Trail

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One of the first accounts of this trail and region is that of William Sublette.

ACCOUNT OF WILLIAM SUBLETTE, March 1829.

On the 17 th day of March, 1829, a band of about sixty mounted men, - traders, trappers, and raw recruits, - in charge, a horse and mule pack train, left St. Louis Mo. for the Far West. It was one of the annual caravans of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and was commanded by Capt. William L. Sublette, an experienced man of the mountains and partner of the firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette which since the retirement of Gen William Henry Ashley, had constituted the company. The train conveyed goods for the Indian trade and supplies for the Company's trappers; and its destination was the annual "rendezvous" in the mountains, which was this year to be held on the Popo Agie, a tributary of the Wind River in western Wyoming. The caravan proceeded thru the "Boone's Lick Country" of Missouri and through Independence. From the latter place (which at that time contained a dwelling house, cotton - gin and grocery), by the Santa Fe trail to Chouteaus Island on the Arkansas River (opposite the present Hartland, Kansas) where at that time the Santa Fe Trail turned south and left the river. From this early crossing of the Arkansas (as distinguished from the later well known one at Cimarron, Kan,) the caravan continued up the river past the point where the massive adobe walls of Ft. William - destined to become more famous as Bent's Fort was soon to be reared. Over the divide they went through the Black Squirrel Pinery to the South Fork of the Platte and from there to the North Fork, the Sweetwater and the Popo Agie.

Among the recruits in this bold cavalcade was Joseph L. Meek, a young Virginian, whose exploits in the Rocky Mountains from 1829-1840 and in Oregon from that day forward, have been immortalized by Mrs Victor in her "River of the West", who relates an incident of the company's experience in what is now El Paso Co. Colorado as follows;

"The first adventure the company met with worthy of mention after leaving Independence, was in crossing the country between the Arkansas and the Platte. Here the camp was surprised one morning by a band of Indians a thousand strong, that came sweeping down upon them in such a warlike style that even Captain Sublette was fain to believe it his last battle. Upon the open prairie there is no such thing as flight, nor any cover under which to conceal a party even for a few moments. It is always fight or die, if the assailants are in the humor for war. Happily on this occasion the band proved to be more peaceably disposed than their appearance indicated, being the warriors of several tribes - the Sioux Arapahoes, Kiowas and Cheyennes, who had been holding a council to consider probably what mischief they could do to some other tribes. The spectacle they presented as they came at full speed on horseback, armed, painted, brandishing their weapons, and yelling in first rate Indian style, was one which might well strike with a palsey the stoutest heart and arm. What were a band of sixty men against a thousand armed warriors in full fighting trim, with spears shields, bows, battleaxes and not a few guns?"

"But it is the rule of the mountain men to fight - and that there is a chance for life until the breath is out of the body; therefore Captain Sublette had his little force drawn up in line of battle. On came the savages, whooping and swinging their weapons above their heads. Sublette turned to his men. "When you hear my shot, then fire". Still they came on until about fifty paces of the line of waiting men. Sublette turned his head and saw his command with their guns all up to their faces ready to fire, then

Account of William Sublette;

raised his own gun. Just at this moment the principal chief sprang off his horse and laid his weapon on the ground, making signs of peace. Then followed a talk after the giving of a considerable present, Sublette was allowed to depart. This he did with all dispatch the company putting as much distance as possible between themselves and their visitors before making their next camp. Considering the warlike character of these tribes and their superior numbers it was as narrow an escape on the part of the company as it was an exceptional freak of generosity on the part of the savages to allow it. But Indians have all a great respect for a man who shows no fear; and it was most probably the warlike movement of Captain Sublette and his party which inspired a willingness on the part of the chief to accept a present when he had it in his power to have taken the whole train. Beside according to Indian logic the present cost him nothing and it might have cost him many warriors to have captured the train. But had there been the least wavering on Sublette's part or fear in the countenances of his men the end of the affair would have been different." *

When these red centaurs of the wilderness were met by the whites, the latter still a considerable distance short of the pinery, were climbing-- while the former were descending--the south slope of the "divide", by the ancient route known later as the Jimmy Camp Trail, which leaves Fountain Creek at the present village of Fountain, passes up Jimmy Creek to Jimmy's Camp Spring, thence out on the high prairie, reaching the pinery in the western vicinity of Eastonville. Had the two meeting parties been travelling by the less used route of Monument Creek Valley, followed by Colonel Dodge in 1835 and for convenience in exploring the mountains by Long's Expedition in 1820 both trees and shelter would have been constantly at hand and the expression, "upon the open prairie" would not have been used. The latter expression also indicates that the meeting of the whites with the Indians took place on that part of the trail which was north of Jimmy Camp Spring, after Sublette's train had come up out of the Jimmy Camp Creek valley to the open prairie.

The "council" which the Indians "had been holding" was probably one of the grand camps, or Indian trading fairs, at which in the early decades of that century, the four tribes above named together with the Kiowa-Apaches and frequently the Comanches also, trafficked horses and their other possessions for goods brought annually to these grand camps at the base of the Rocky Mountains by an enterprising merchant band of Cheyennes who obtained them chiefly from the white traders (preferably and in the first two decades almost wholly British) on the upper Missouri. As elsewhere noticed a favorite place for such fairs or grand camps, at least as early as the second decade of the nineteenth century, gave its earliest known name of Grand Camp Creek, to that small left-hand tributary of the South Platte that passes Morrison Colorado and is to-day known as Bear Creek. Intertribal gatherings for trade, horse-racing, and foot-racing, medicin making etc, seem to have taken place, especially between the southwestern Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apaches and northern Comanches-- at a number of localities near the front of the Rocky Mountains in those early years with more or less frequency and to have been commonest in autumn which seems to have been a sort of social season, or "Peace Moon" between them

* Mrs F.F. Victor; The River of the West. N.Y. 1870. pp46-48

Though the relation of these tribes to each other save perhaps those between Sioux and Comanches, were not ordinarily hostile.

Sublette
It is not likely that the Indians met by Sublette on the Jimmy Camp Trail, would have attacked his caravan even if they had felt able to have wiped it out without a serious loss of their braves. A trading post Bent's stockade fort had been established for them in 1826 three years before this happened and in 1828 a much larger one of adobe had been located and its construction begun in 1829 (though interrupted by a small ~~pox~~ epidemic among the Mexican workman) This Ft. William better known as Bent's fort was situated on the Arkansas toward which river the Indians were proceeding when they fell in with Sublette's party. No doubt the savages knew that an attack upon any white traders at that time and in that region might prevent or discourage the construction of this fort where they hoped to trade for firearms and ammunition which they needed for fighting their enemies.

Smith
The Old Divide Trail was in fact a thoroughfare for both Indians and whites from at least as early as the earliest days of the fur trade in this region (1811-1817) until the making of new roads by eastern Colorado settlers in the sixties and the establishment of the D & R.G. railway route by Palmer Lake in 1871.

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D.R.S. *continue* We will ~~continue~~ our account of this trail by adding here for convenience of reference, portions of certain itineraries relating to it, by Sage, Loring and Marcy as they saw it in 1842 and 1858. Also we shall add two tales of less historic value but none the less interesting.

We must likewise mention an expedition of Col. Stephen Kearney in 1845, ~~who~~ traversed this trail with a command of five well mounted and equipped companies (each of 50 men) of the 1st Regiment of U.S. Dragoons, in his expedition from Ft. Leavenworth to the Rocky Mountains. His route was westward up the Platte and its north fork to South Pass; thence back to Ft. Laramie and south by the Old Divide Trail to the Arkansas River, and thence eastward down the latter stream and by the Santa Fe and branch trails to Ft. Leavenworth. With this command was conveyed two mountain howitzers. The writer has seen but few details of this expedition the two journals of it which were kept were never published. The first camp was made a few miles up Cherry Creek, the second on upper Cherry Creek, the third on the Divide at the head of a small creek mistakenly called Bijou, and the fourth at the present Fountain on July 22, 23, 24, 25 respectively.

L. A. P. S.

Here account Kearney Dec 8/16.
* The 1858 Report of the Secretary of War and Cooke's, Scenes and Adventures in the Rocky Mountains. The Map of the official report of the expedition shows the route and dates of camps.

ACCOUNT REEFUS B. SAGE: 1842

We give first an extract from "Scenes in the Rocky Mountains", by Rufus B. Sage, describing the Divide Trail part of ~~his~~ a journey which he made in the fall of 1842, from Fort Lancaster to Taos.

"Sept. 10th. Arrangements being completed for resuming my journey, I left Fort Lancaster in company with four others, intending to proceed as far as Taos in New Mexico. We were all mounted upon stout horses, and provided with two pack-mules for the conveyance of baggage and provisions.

"Following the trail leading from the Platte to the Arkansas, or Rio Napeste, we continued our way some thirty-five miles, and halted with a camp of free traders and hunters, on Cherry creek. *Down*

"This stream is an affluent of the Platte from the southeast, heading in a broad ridge of pine hills and rocks, known as the "Divide". It pursues its course for nearly sixty miles, through a broad valley of rich soil, tolerably well timbered, and shut in for the most part by high plats of table land, — at intervals thickly studded with lateral pines, cedars, oaks and shrubs of various kinds, — gradually expanding its banks as it proceeds, and exchanging a bed of rocks and pebbles for one of quicksand and gravel, till it finally attains a width of nearly two hundred yards, and in places is almost lost in the sand. The stream derives its name from the abundance of cherry found upon it.

"The country passed over from the Fort to this place, is generally sandy, but yields quite a generous growth of grass. We passed, in our course, the dry beds of two transient creeks, one eight and the other fifteen miles from the Fort.

"Our route bore nearly due south for twenty miles, following the Platte bottom to the mouth of Cherry creek, thence southeast, continuing up the valley of the latter. The Platte presented heavy groves of timber upon both banks, as did also its islands, while its bottoms appeared fertile.

"The mountains, some fifteen miles to our right, towering aloft with their snow-capped summits and dark frowning sides, looked like vast piles of clouds, big with storm and heaped upon the lap of earth; while the vapor-scuds that flitted around them, seemed to us the ministers of pent up wrath, in readiness to pour forth their torrents and deluge the surrounding plains, or let loose the fierce tornado and strew its path with desolation.

"Thras or four miles before reaching our present camp, we passed a village of the Arapahos on its way to the mountains, in pursuit of game. [Here follows a general account of the Arapaho nation, which we omit.]

* SAGE, Scenes in Rocky Mountains P. 165 and following of First (1846) Edition.

ACCOUNT R.B.SAGE:1842.

"The camp at which we are at present located consists of four lodges, -three of whites and one of Black Foot Indians. Each of the whites has his squaw wife and the usual accompaniment of ruddy faced children. In regard to the later I must say that they are more beautiful, interesting and intelligent than the same number of full-bloods, -either of whites or Indians. These men were living after the fashion of their new found relatives and seemed to enjoy themselves as well as circumstances would admit. They had a number of horses with the requisite supply of arms and ammunition, - the sure source of wealth and comfort in a country abounding with game.

The Indian family were relatives by marriage and were one of some fifteen lodges of Blackfoot among the Arapaho, who forsook their nation on account of its uncompromising hostility to the white. Quite a number of these Indians have also joined the Sioux and Nesperces (Nex Perces) for a like reason.

We were entertained very kindly by our new friends who spared no effort to render our stay agreeable. Among the delicacies set before us was one deserving of notice, -it consisted of the fruit of the prickly pears (cacti) boiled in water for some ten or twelve hours till it becomes perfectly soft, when it was compressed through a thin cloth into the fluid in which it had been boiled. This forms a delicious variety in mountain fare, and one highly stimulating and nutritious. The immense quantities of cacti fruit found near the mountains at the proper season render the above an entertainment not uncommon.

"Sept. 13th. Again under way; after a ride of fifteen miles, night finds us at Blackfoot-camp, snugly chambered in a spacious cave, to avoid the disagreeable effects of a snow-storm that comes upon the reluctant prairie with all the withering keenness of winter.

"The cave affording us shelter is formed in an abrupt embankment of limestone, and marks the eastern limits of a beautiful valley through which a small affluent [Blackfoot creek?] of Cherry creek traces its way. The floor is of dry gravel and rock, about fifty feet long by fifteen wide, while upon one side a crystal spring presents its tempting draughts. Thus chambered, a small fire soon rendered us comfortable and happy, notwithstanding the dreary weather without.

* These were probable not true Blackfeet but neighbors of the Blackfeet (Atsinas, Gros Ventres of the prairie) and often confused with them by trappers. They spoke the language of the Arapaho of whom they were northern relatives. One of the severest battles the trappers ever had was with the so called Blackfeet, was really with the Atsinas in Pierre's Hole (S.E. Idaho) 1832.

ACCOUNT OF SAGE: 1842.

"Our course during the day bore southward, and led from the valley of Cherry creek to an interesting plateau, furrowed at intervals by deep cañons, inclosing broad bottoms of rich alluvium, and ridged upon either hand by high hills of pine and ledges of naked rock.

"The streams are generally timberless, -- the soil of the highlands is of a red, clayey mould, and quite fertile. Instead of the aridity incident to the neighboring prairies, it is usually humid.

"The country hereabouts, for an extent of upwards [or] one thousand square miles, is much subject to storms of rain, hail, snow, and wind, -- and it is rarely a person can pass through it without being caught by a storm of some kind. I can account for this in no other way than by supposing it has some connection with the vast quantities of minerals lying embedded in its hills and valleys. //

"Sept. 14th. Morning was ushered in with a pleasant sunshine, that soon caused the snow of the past night to yield beneath its melting influences.

"When on the point of raising camp, an old grizzly bear made her appearance with three cubs. An effort to approach her proved futile, -- she, having snuffed the closeness of danger with the breeze, made a hasty retreat with her offspring.

"I allude to the above incident for this reason, that it is generally supposed the bear produces but two at a birth. //

"Continuing our journey till late at night, we reached an affluent of Fontaine qui Bouit, called Daugherty's creek, after travelling a distance of some thirty miles. Here we remained for three or four days, to procure a further supply of provisions.

"The route from Blackfoot-camp, for the most part, led over a rough country, interspersed with high piney ridges and beautiful valleys, sustaining a luxuriant growth of vegetation, which is known as the Divide.

"This romantic region gives rise to several large tributaries both of the Platte and Arkansas, and furnishes the main branches of the Kansas. Its geological classifications consist of sandstone, limestone, granite, and cretaceous rock. Large quantities of silix are also found, together with many interesting specimens of petrification that principally consist of pine wood; these, in many cases, exhibit the tree in its perfect shape, with all the grains and pores that marked its growth.