

Notes of Travel by the Overland Mail.

FROM EL PASO TO FORT SMITH.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL OVERLAND CORRESPONDENT.]

FORT SMITH, Ark., November 25, 1858.

Crossing the 25-mile Plain East of El Paso.

My last communication [see *Bulletin* of 27th November,] was written on board the stage, while under slow motion, across the twenty-five sandy plain east of El Paso, on the backward road of life from California to the Eastern States. (*Entre nous*, wise men come from the East—how is it with those who come from the West? It is an idle question, not entitled to much consideration in answering it. Pray let no reader of the *Bulletin* worry his brains about it, for the wise of Today are too often the fools of To-morrow. Well, then, to begin where I first left off.) We reached the middle of the plain about noon, where we found a barrel of water left by the wagons to supply the stage team. Having quenched our thirst, and that of the scrawny mules, (four in number,) we ate of bread and cheese, and again pursued our slow and tedious way over the sand. Our course on this day, 15th November, was a little North of East. It was not till four o'clock P. M., that we reached the Huaco Tanks Station—distance from El Paso 25 miles. Ten hours were consumed in crossing this plain.

The Huaco Tanks—Indian Hieroglyphics.

The Huaco Tanks are excavations made at the bottom of an immense pile of denuded rocks. One of the tanks, the largest, is capable of containing over a thousand barrels of water. The rocks at this station are visible for a distance of twenty miles on the plain. When they are reached they present a most wild and imposing aspect. Cathedral-like in shape, they appear as though pushed up out of the earth in a confused mass of solidity, with their bases surrounded by firm, even and pebbly-ground walks. After a most excellent supper, consisting of venison and other station delicacies, such as beans, and something else—which this time chanced to be an apple pie—we were told that horses had been sent off, twenty miles on, the previous day, for water, there being no supply here, and they were shortly expected.

Darkness had now set in, when Mr. Losiez, the station-keeper, proposed to show some Indian haunts among the rocks, which of course I readily accepted. Guarded by a lantern's uncertain glare, we proceeded to a very massive rock, at the base of a huge pile, and found a projection of a ledge of over thirty feet. On the walls of this projection were painted, in red and black characters, many Indian hieroglyphics and signs, and also some rude sketches of white men and Indians on horseback, riding against each other with spear and lance. This station has obtained some celebrity beyond its natural display of imposing piles of massive rocks, from the fact that it was here Captain (or Major) Marry fought the Apaches, and drove them with great slaughter over the immediate heights. We were not permitted to pursue our examination further, as the call from the station announced that the horses had returned and we were compelled, reluctantly, to retract our steps. I here had the pleasure of meeting Major H. Sulzhan, one of the company's agents and found in him a very intelligent and agreeable person.

On the Road—Alkali, Grass and Water about Crow Springs.

Under the direction of Mr. Roberts, one of the Company's conductors, we were soon under way for the Cormudas station, distant 36 miles, which we reached on Sunday morning, 14th November, at 8 o'clock. About 10 miles from this point, we obtained water by finding a spring—quite an unexpected discovery, but none the less acceptable. During this drive we crossed over a small mountain, and when the drive ended the horses were considerably fatigued.

Our next trip was to Crow Springs, near the base of the Guadalupe range of mountains. We started at 8 o'clock from the last station, Cormudas, and reached the Springs at 3 o'clock—distance 32 miles.

Crow Spring station is a most miserable apology for a station, or anything else in the way of a habitable abode. It is in charge of Mr. Wright, whose attendants are Mexicans of the *raguero* class. The mules—some 20 at this point—feed principally on alkali grass—are in bad condition though not thoroughly broken-down as we found at many subsequent places. The whole day's drive had been over white alkali plain. The springs, or water therein, is extremely brackish, and purges to excess, when drunk in any quantity. The water of these springs covers nearly an acre of ground. It is clear and without any sulphurous smell. It has no outlet, and probably is more of a drain from the plain than any discharge from a mountain source or stream. Having obtained a piece of bread and cup of coffee, we were preparing to start, when the mail stage from the East arrived. This delayed us sometime, in order to arrange the mules to meet the exit of the mail coaches.

An Approaching Storm—Crossing the Guadalupe Pass—Wind, Snow and Frost—Indians.

The wind now began blowing furiously from the north, while the extreme point of the Guadalupe range of mountains gave warning of an approaching storm, by the dark snow-clouds that began to blacken its summit. We took our seats in the coach with unpleasant forebodings of a disagreeable night in store for us; and this unpleasant apprehension was doubly increased when the conductor of the mail from the East informed us, that on the top of the mountains it blew with such violence as to displace the bridles from the heads of the mules, on the previous evening.

Bidding adieu to Crow Springs, and attended by an outside rider, whose duty it is to slash the mules as he rides along, we directed our course towards the Guadalupe Pass. We had scarcely proceeded four miles, when we were informed by the driver that we were near a lay of sand four miles in length, and that we must walk through it we expected ever to arrive at our next station, called the Finery, 26 miles from Crow Springs. Scarcely had we commenced our tramp on foot, before the young moon was veiled in a fleecy mist, which came down upon us poor devils and continued to play away upon our dusty hats and blankets until we had plodded our weary way four miles through the deep and heavy sand. By this time we had reached the foot of the mountains, when we rode some six or seven miles, until we struck the foot of the mountain pass. Then we again took to footing it up its winding way to the summit of the main ridge. After ascending 300 feet, we encountered a fierce snow-storm. It lasted but half an hour, but during its continuance the bitter wind blew directly in our faces, and made us shiver, complain and swear at a terrible rate. The storm soon abated, however, and the weather moderated. Though the road itself was free from snow, yet to the very edges of our path it lay half a foot deep, giving to all things an almost blinding glare of whiteness. This pass, though long, is not difficult of access. The atmosphere is generally of a moderate temperature through it, owing to the path winding through steep precipices, which shut out the cold winds of the north.

When we struck the summit of the ridge it began freezing, when four or five passengers, guided by a mule, struck out for the station, which they reached about day-break, suffering all the while severely from the biting coldness of the north wind. I remained with the coach, and it was all we could do to manage to get the animals to the Finery, where we found a rousing fire awaiting our coming. The night was one of extreme suffering on our part—probably owing to our freedom from any cold spells of weather.

The Indians inhabiting these ranges of mountains are a tribe of the merciless Apaches. As yet, however, they have committed no depredations upon the whites. Though not a very numerous tribe, yet they are allies of the Camanches, and are ranked among the most warlike of the Apache nation.

On the Road—Preparations to Cross the 80-Mile Desert—Travel through the Camanche Pass.

Our next drive was to the Cooper Station, 27 miles. We arrived at the Delaware Station at 12 o'clock on the 15th November; crossed the Delaware river—a very small stream of clear water—then to Hope station, 30 miles. Next drive, November 16th, we proceeded to Stillman Station—25 miles from Hope Station. The next drive was to Emigrant Crossing—40 miles. Six mules were used in dragging us this last distance, where we arrived on the evening of 16th November. The road was quite sandy and fatiguing, and two of the mules gave out. On the evening of the 16th we started, at 6 o'clock, for the Langton Station, which we reached after a tramp of eleven hours.

On November 17th we arrived from Langton's Station, at Horse-Head Crossing—distance 25 miles. We saw some Indians (Camanches), but they manifested no hostile intent. At Horse-Head Crossing we took four mules to coach, attended by three men on horseback, who, as well as the conductor and driver, were all armed to the teeth with knives, revolvers and rifles. As this is the great stretch of eighty miles without water, it is necessary, in making the journey from this station, to be as fast as possible; consequently, eight fresh mules were driven with the coach by the guard. Directing our course towards the Camanche Pass in the Castle Mountain range, we traversed a sandy plain. Though the drawing of the coach was not severe upon the animals, yet, when half way up the pass, the four mules which had drawn us over the plain of 12 miles in length, were taken out of harness and driven home by one of the outriders. Fresh mules were added, four in number; and we again proceeded through the Pass without trouble of any kind.

The road through this mountain range is not difficult. In fact, I consider this part of the journey a pleasant trip. There is no steep place, and the ascent is so gradual that one is surprised when he reaches the top. After the plain is struck, on the other side of the mountain, the riding is delightful. The road is excellent, and one can sleep without fear of bumps and jacks of hats. At 12 o'clock at night, after we had proceeded 20 miles from the first change of horses, we halted for a change of mules, built a fire out of mesquit bushes, made coffee and ate cold venison. We were soon on our journey again, and, after another stretch of 20 miles, made a fire and had coffee, about daybreak. The morning's encampment found us 20 miles from the Concho Station, which we reached on the 15th, at 1 o'clock, just at good dinner time. We had thus made the whole distance of 80 miles, without water, in 23 hours, with three sets of mules—four each change.

On the Road—List of Distances to Fort Smith.

After dining at the Concho Station, we left for Pennington's Station, 30 miles distant. Here I saw the only land that appeared to me to be adapted for grazing purposes. Cottonwood and a species of elm are found in this bottom. The person with whom we dined had one hundred head of cows grazing in the vicinity. Let him look out and be wide-awake, or the Camanches will have them before spring! Game is very abundant, as we saw many deer and antelope and some wild turkeys, during this drive.

On 19th November we came to Bolt's Station, after leaving Pennington—distance, 25 miles. Then 20 more miles took us to Lyland. Then 25 miles to Colorado. Next 17 miles to Fort Chadburn. We took supper at the Fort station, and left on the same evening with a mule team at 11 o'clock. The first drive was 50 miles. We arrived at Phantom Hill at 11 o'clock on 20th November, where we took dinner—distance, 30 miles. Here follow the remaining distances to Fort Smith, which I give at present without remark, leaving to another opportunity some comments on this part of the route:

From Phantom Hill to Smith's, 12 miles; to Jackson's, 25; Francis', 10; Clark's, 12; Fort Belknap, 40; Murphy's, 16; Jack's, Bourrough, 22; Earhart's, 17; Connolly's, 10; Spring, 12; Davis', 10; Gainesville, 13; Diamond's, 20; Sherman's, 16; Colbert's Ferry, (Red

River), 13; Fisher's, 12; Walls', 13; Boggy Depot, 17; Gary's, 17; Water's, 15; Blackburn's, 18; Pusley's, 17; Riddle's, 17; Holloway's, 17; Trahern's, 17; Gov. Walker's, 17; Fort Smith, 15.

These, and all my other estimates of distance, are not from the printed schedule, but are stated as given to me by the drivers, corrected by my own calculations. Many of the drivers vary from one another as to the length of the distances, and I found it a difficult task to arrive at any given result. The nights have been so long and cold that we were compelled to keep the curtains down at early evening and morning.