

From the Peoria North Western Gazetteer, Nov. 9.

TRAVELLING IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE OREGON EXPEDITION.

Mr. Obadiah Oakley, one of the party who left Peoria in May for Oregon, returned home on Sunday last, having separated from his companions in the Rocky Mountains. The following is an outline of his journey and adventures.

The company consisted, on leaving Peoria, of fifteen members. At Quincy, they were joined by another; all of whom reached Independence, Mo., the 20th of May, twenty days after leaving Peoria.

At Independence, two more joined the company. Before leaving Independence they exchanged their waggon and some of their horses for other horses and pack mules.

Mounted and provisioned, the company, 18 in number, left Independence the 20th of May, on the Santa Fe road, which is a distinct waggon track. The first adventure they met with was the loss of two horses the following night, while they were encamped five miles from Independence. The owners returned to that town the next day, and recovered them.

Ten miles farther, and fifteen from Independence, brought them to the Western line of Missouri, where Mr. Fitzhugh resides in a log cabin, and this was the last house they saw until they reached some of the posts of the American fur company.

A day or two afterward, when they had reached Elm grove, forty miles from Independence, and had there encamped for the night, they discovered that two other horses were missing. As they had doubtless returned to Independence, the owners started in pursuit, while the remainder of the company, after halting a day at the grove, continued on leisurely, the owners returned with the recovered horses, about a day and a half afterward. Their practice at night, after unlading the horses, was to 'stake' them in the prairie, i. e. to drive notched stakes into the ground, to which they would fix one end of the halter, giving the animals sufficient play to enable them to feed in abundance.

At the Osage River, about 100 miles from Independence, they met a returning party who had passed along a few days before to assist Captain Kelley's Santa Fe company over the worst part of the road. It consisted of seven waggons, with a proportionate number of men. They were now on their return. Our adventurers had been a week from Independence, during which they had not seen a human being, the sight of fellow countryman now kindled the warmest feelings of sympathy in their hearts, and three of them resolved at once to return. Here also two Caw Indians, the first of any tribe they had seen, came to the camp, and received from the party some trifling presents. On the next day they saw 30 or 40 of the same tribe. They were returning from a hunting excursion, and were entirely ignorant of our language.

The Osage river was here about 30 yards wide, and about knee deep.

Parting with the Santa Fe escort the next day, the party continued on to Council Grove, 50 miles farther, which they reached on the 9th of June, 10 days from Independence.

On the 12th, while pursuing their journey, they were overtaken by a tremendous storm, more awful than any thing they had ever before seen or read of. The thunder and the lightning appalling beyond description. Mr. Oakley's gun, which he held in his hand, was struck from him, and he nearly thrown from his horse. The others were more or less affected by the subtle element.

The same evening they overtook Captain Kelley's company, bound to Santa Fe. It numbered fourteen waggons and twenty-nine men. With them our adventurers were invited to camp for the night, an offer which they gladly accepted, as they had no wood, nor was a tree to be seen.

By this time the provisions obtained at Independence were nearly exhausted, and they had met with no game to shoot. It became, therefore, necessary that the party should divide, by choosing hunters to go ahead and procure a supply. Messrs. Oakley, Shortess, Jordan and Fletcher were chosen accordingly, and they set out on the following morning.

June 13.—The four hunters, leaving with the main party all the provisions, set out, themselves destitute, in search of game. They soon saw some elk, two of which they wounded, but they escaped. At 4 in the afternoon, when within eight miles of Little Arkansas river, they met a trading company, consisting of thirty old men and ten waggons, loaded with peltries from the Rocky Mountains, under the command of Mr. Bent, who resides at Bent's Fort, on the Arkansas river. With it were also two hundred sheep, bound for a lower market. By this company the hunters were kindly treated, and feasted for the night. Captain Bent informed them that he had lost from his caravan, since he left home, thirty mules and seven horses, which had strayed away, and requested, if they found them, to take them in charge, and leave them at his fort as they passed it.

14.—Separating from the company, the hunters continued on, and in 8 miles reached the Little Arkansas. Though about such a stream as the Osage, between 30 and 40 yards wide, it was now prodigiously swollen, being at least 15 feet deep, and running with great velocity. As it was impracticable to cross it, the hunters planted themselves leisurely upon its bank, took out their fishing

lines, and commenced fishing. In a little while they caught 12 catfish, which proved to be of excellent flavor. While thus engaged, three men of Capt. Bent's company, who had been left behind to hunt for the stray mules and horses, appeared on the opposite side of the river, after an unsuccessful search. As they were destitute of food, and the surest resource lay in overtaking the company they had left, the river was to them a feeble obstacle. Immediately on reaching it, they drove in their horses, which swam directly across, then stripped themselves and followed their example. One of them, a Spaniard, whom familiarity with the water had rendered half amphibious, took the saddle from the horse and held it in one hand, while he swam across with the other. They had eaten nothing for 3 days. Another fish was consequently laid on the coals and speedily devoured. After spending the night together, the hunters sent by the strangers some fish to Capt. Bent, and after leaving three of the largest in the water for their comrades, when they came up, and to which their attention was directed by a signal, they prepared to cross the river.

15.—The passage across the river was affected in this way:—The halters were taken from the horses and tied into a line, which was found to be in length double the width of the river. The horses were then driven across; after which two of the men swam over, carrying one end of the line with them. Those who remained tied the luggage in a bundle to the rope on the edge of the shore; then holding the rope behind the bundle, and letting it slip through their hands as those on the opposite side pulled, both parties keeping the rope so well stretched as to hold it above the water, the bundle was conveyed safely over. During this day five other streams were swung and waded. Nothing escaped being thoroughly drenched except the powder, which was carried in small canisters on the body. The mosquitoes were 'dreadful.' Camped at night on Big Cow creek, were Capt. Bent had said they would find buffalo, though they did not.

16.—As a supply of meat become more and more desirable, the hunters determined to leave their baggage at the spot where they had camped, and go forth unencumbered in pursuit of Buffalo. After riding seven miles and finding none, it was arranged that two should go back for the baggage, and take it on to a point named,—Walnut creek grove,—while the other two should sweep the country, and meet the others at sundown. Oakley and Jordan went back for the baggage, and Shortess and Fletcher continued the hunt. As the former, in prosecuting their journey, approached the grove about sundown, Jordan said he saw the glister of a gun barrel and that there must be Indians. They stopped to consult, when Jordan was for returning; but Oakley said that would be useless, as the Indians, if such, must have seen them and would speedily overtake them. As they advanced they saw oxen and soon discovered the party to be a company of traders.—They were bound for Santa Fe, and numbered 53 men and 53 waggons. Our adventurers met with a severe reprimand from them for travelling in the exposed manner they did, subject to be met almost hourly by Indians, who would prove hostile or friendly, just as their inclination or their wants at the moment might prompt them. After dark Shortess and Fletcher arrived, without having killed anything.—The four had been three days with but one meal of catfish to eat. With the Santa Fe company, however, they once more fared sumptuously. They here discovered the reason why they had found no Buffalo on and around Big Cow creek, as Capt. Bent had told them they would. The Caw Indians, who hovered around and in front of this company, had driven them off, that they might enhance their value, and by killing them themselves, sell the meat at a good price to the traders.

18.—The four hunters, being somewhat in advance of the company, saw seven Buffalo bulls and gave chase. The bulls, as the pursuit continued, separated and fled in different directions; but one was run down after a chase of 2½ miles by the two hunters named, and easily killed. He weighed about 900 lbs. After taking the *fleece*, i. e. the most fleshy parts, weighing about 300 lbs. and leaving the carcass, they loaded their horses and returned to the company. This was the first Buffalo they had killed, and they found the meat superior in flavor to any they had ever eaten. The flesh now obtained they "jerked," and it lasted 5 or 6 days.

19.—Two of the hunters went back with a portion of the Buffalo to meet their comrades, from whom they had now been separated 6 days. They found them 8 miles back, with nothing to eat, having in this interval killed but one antelope. They had found the fish also, and had previously met Captain Bent's company. They had also found his stray mules and horses, and now had them in company.—(On leaving them afterwards at Bent's fort, Capt. B.'s brother generously presented the company with two of the mules and 200 lbs. of flour for their trouble.) The same day the whole party overtook the Santa Feans, who had proceeded but 6 miles from where the two hunters separated from them. All encamped that night at Pawnee fork. The Caw Indians, before spoken of, had killed 62 Buffaloes.

28.—Reached the Santa Fe crossings of the Arkansas river this afternoon. The distance is computed to be 450 miles from Independence, and one month had just been consumed in the journey. Here it became necessary that the two companies should separate, the larger to continue the plain beaten road to Mexico—the other to penetrate the trackless wilderness to the mouth of the Colum-

bia. In view of the latter prospect, three of the company became discouraged and determined to join the Santa Fe party. The others maintained stout hearts, and responded to the motto of their leader, "OREGON OR THE GRAVE."

The next prominent point, after leaving the Santa Fe crossings on Arkansas river, is Bent's fort, 160 miles further up that stream. The route is along a tolerably distinct waggon track, and they reached the fort on the 5th of July, six days after leaving the crossings. On the way, in consequence of the mutinous spirit manifested by a few of the company, Capt. Farnham threw up the command. The fort is an enclosure of about one quarter of an acre, with several rooms attached to the walls, capable of accommodating 100 men. It contains 1000 stand of arms and one brass cannon, the force being intended to intimidate the surrounding Indians and keep the hostile in check.

The Arkansas river is about as wide as the Missouri, and the water of the same color, though far less deep and rapid.

After spending six days at the fort, the party prepared to leave, the spirit of disaffection resulted in a division of the company into two parties, one with Shortess for their leader. The other with Kelly for their leader and guide.

Both parties left the fort on the 11th of July, with the design of reaching the Columbia river,—Shortess's for Bent and Sublett's fort on the south fork of Platte river, 220 miles distant, by a plain waggon road,—and Kelley's for Brown's Hole in the Rocky Mountains.

July 18.—At 10 o'clock entered the Rocky Mountains by a ravine, and were soon saluted by a tremendous hail storm. The heights around were covered with snow, and the atmosphere indicated a degree of cold about equal to freezing.

20.—Killed a buffalo bull, an antelope, and a mountain hen, called by the hunters sage cock. While dressing the buffalo, a multitude of others came round, bellowing and pawing. The men sprang to their horses and guns, expecting the enraged animals would tear them to pieces. After awhile, however, they retreated. The road to day was equally rugged with that of the two last, and the Mountains destitute of trees save here and there a hemlock, pine, balsam or willow.

21.—Saw several fresh tracks in the sand, which their leader pronounced to be those of Indians, caused the party to keep a better look out. Encamped to night in a beautiful valley, called Bayon Selard, a level prairie, 30 miles long and 3 wide, covered with a thick growth of flax, which every year springs up spontaneously.

23.—Crossed the dividing ridge between the stream just mentioned and Grand river, the first western water, and emptying into the Gulf of California. They were consequently upon the backbone of the western continent, and descending towards the Pacific ocean.

31.—Very rough travelling to-day, through and over fallen pine timber. Though constant diligence was used, the company were unable to overcome more than four miles.

August 2.—Met three trappers belonging to a company of ten, who had with them their Indian wives and children.

13.—Arrived at Brown's Hole, the men nearly famished, having been without food for four days. This is a trapper's fort in the mountains, on the east branch of Green river, belonging to Craig & —, and affords shelter and accommodation for 30 men, when all are present. All were now out on trapping excursions but two, and these were without any provisions except dog meat, which they obtained from the Indians. Some Indians passing with dogs shortly after, a bargain was struck for three or four, the dogs being valued at \$15 apiece, and the articles given for them as follows: powder \$4 a pint; vermilion \$1 a paper of 1½ oz; tobacco \$5 a pound; and lead and knives at corresponding prices.

Here the party remained six days, when as they were preparing to resume their journey, a company of five persons appeared in sight, travelling from the west. They proved to be a party which had a few weeks previous escorted to Fort Hall, in the Nez Perces or Flat Head country, about 300 miles farther, two missionaries, with their wives. One of them spent two years in the Oregon country, had been to the mouth of the Columbia, was well acquainted at Fort Vancouver, and had visited the Methodist missionary station at Wilhamet. To meet and converse with him was therefore a matter of the deepest interest to our adventurers. The prosecution of the journey was deferred, and all gathered around the speaker to listen to his relation. With an air of truth that demanded implicit confidence, he represented the country as undesirable in all its aspects. In the richest portions, about Vancouver and Wilhamet, not more than 15 bushels of wheat could be raised to the acre. The rainy season continued five months, and this was followed by six months drought, in consequence of which neither corn nor potatoes ever came to maturity. The ears of the former sprouted from the stalk at the ground, and after a sickly growth, were invariably cut off by the frost—and the latter seldom exceeded the size of a walnut. In point of health, the picture was equally gloomy, the Indians labouring under fever and ague the year round. These representations were not without their effect upon the minds of two of