

Northern Coast of California - Its Early Settlement

WOOD'S NARRATIVE

At your request I have been induced to write out from a memorandum made at the time, a brief narrative of the events that occurred during an expedition of which I was a member, undertaken in the winter of 1849, and which resulted in the

DISCOVERY OF NUMBOLDITY

It may serve also to give an idea of, and at the same time delineate the mode of living in California at that period, and while the Californian of 1849 will, perhaps recognize in the narrative nothing more than a recapitulation of his own experience, yet to those who have never experienced the "rough and tumble" of a frontier life—who have never wandered as it were beyond the sunny horizon that encircles a cherished and happy home, it may be read with interest.

The month of October, 1849, found me on the Trinity river, at a point now called "Kitch Bar." How I came there, and from whence, over what route, by what conveyance, or for what object, it matters not; suffice it to say that I was there, and that, too, without provisions, poorly clad, and worse than all in this condition at the commencement of a California winter. The company at this place numbered some forty persons, the most of whom were in much the same situation and condition as myself. Now this bar was an Indian ranch, from which, during the prevalence of the rain that was pouring down as if in contemplation of a second flood, we received frequent visits. From them we learned that the ocean was distant from this place not more than eight days' travel, and that there was a large and beautiful bay, surrounded by fine and extensive prairie lands.

The rainy season having now to all appearances set in, alternate rain and snow continually falling, a scanty supply of provisions for the number of persons now here, and scarcely a possibility of the stock being replenished before the rains should cease, the idea was conceived of undertaking an expedition, with the view to ascertain whether the bay, of which the Indians had given a description, in reality existed. Among the first and most active in getting up and organizing the expedition, was a gentleman by the name of Josiah Gregg, a physician by profession, formerly of Missouri. He went with him all the instruments necessary to guide us through the uninhabited, trackless region of country that lay between us and the point to be sought. No one so good a hunter-qualified to guide and direct an expedition of this description than he. Upon him, therefore, the choice fell to take command. The number of persons that had expressed a desire to join the company up to this time, was twenty-four. The day fixed upon by the Captain for setting out was the fifth day of November. In the meantime, whatever preparations were necessary, and in our power, were made. The Captain had negotiated with the chief of the rancharia for two of his men to act as guides. Nothing more remained to be done—all were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the day fixed upon, and a cessation of the rain, which was still falling idly torrents.

The day of departure arrived, but with the same change in the weather, save an occasional change from rain to snow. Many of the party now began to exhibit a marked symptom of a desire to with-

draw an expedition, the marked and prominent features of which were constant and unmitigated toil, and hardship, privation, and suffering. Before we started, as far as the eye could reach, lay mountains, huge and rugged, deep valleys and difficult-annon, now filled with water by the recent heavy rains. After leaving the river we struck up the mountain, in the direction indicated by the two Indians who were to have been our guides. The ascent, at any time tedious, was now particularly difficult. Without any other trail or pathway than an occasional elk or Indian trail through the dense stunted undergrowth, the ground for a long distance up the mountain completely saturated with water from the great quantity of rain that had fallen, our ascent, as might be expected, was not fully tedious and difficult, but extremely fatiguing. Before reaching the summit, however, the character of the ascent was materially changed. Snow had taken the place of slippery mud; which had completely obliterated all that was of a trail, its depth increasing in proportion to the altitude gained. We had now to grope our way as best we might, slowly and silently we continued to ascend, up the steep part of the mountain in order to shorten the distance.

At length we reached the summit. Our first glance was cast in the direction indicated to us as our course. As I gazed upon the wild and rugged country spread out before us, and the thought that all these snow-capped mountains lay between us and our place of destination, a feeling of dread came over me. I could hardly refrain from giving expression to the feelings of doubt with which I was impressed, as to the result of the expedition we had undertaken; but the time for reconsideration had passed.

As it was, about sunset, when the summit was gained, preparations were made for going into camp. Now, "camping" in California is not precisely the same thing implied by that term in other countries. It consists of nothing more than taking your saddle and blankets from the animal and depositing them on the first convenient spot of mother earth, (or, as applied to us this night, on snow). To have a choice in ground on which to camp would be deemed fastidious, and to form what Crum-bullies a foolish expenditure of time and labor. Unpacking of animals and getting supper were the things first to be attended to, this being done, our blankets were spread, and in them we passed the first night of our expedition.

At an early hour in the morning, having breakfasted and packed our animals, we resumed our journey, descending the mountain, keeping us near our course as the nature of the country would permit. It would have been to us a source of some encouragement, if, when we had attained the summit of a mountain, or mountain ridge, our course would have permitted us to continue on such ridge; but the case was otherwise. The ridges or mountains that constitute and are denominated the Coast Range, are nearly parallel with each other, and likewise parallel with the sea coast; therefore, as the general direction of the coast is nearly north and the mountain ridges the same, and our course nearly west, we were compelled to pass over a continual succession of mountains, now over the top of one, then through the deep valley beneath, and again, climbing the steep side of another.

Nothing beyond the ordinary routine of constant traveling by day, and stretch-

ing our weary way, was to be expected, as we reached the top of this bank, we came suddenly upon an Indian Rancharia, to us this was entirely unexpected, and undoubtedly welcome as to them. Had it not been for the storm, I might say ludicrous, scene that followed immediately upon their discovering us, I would not reach but that some, if not most of the company would have betrayed signs of timidity, if not of actual fear, for our firearms had been rendered entirely unfit for use, from constant exposure to the rain, which continued through the whole of this day. Knowing this, we were fully conscious that should they meditate any immediate harm toward us, we could make but a sorry show at a defense. A moment's consideration, however, taught us that it was not necessary, nor was it likely, that these savages should know our precise situation, and it was our policy to give them to understand we were in no fear of them. But the scene that followed, at the moment wholly directed our minds of all apprehension of danger, for so soon as they saw us, men, women and children, fled in the wildest confusion, and in every direction, some plunging headlong into the river, not venturing to look behind them until they had reached a considerable elevation upon the mountain on the opposite side of the river, while others sought refuge in the thickets and among the rocks, leaving every thing behind them. So soon as they had stopped in their flight, those who were yet in view we endeavored by signs to induce them to return, giving them to understand, as best we could, that we intended them no harm; but for the present, it was all to no purpose. They had never before seen a white man, nor had they received any intelligence of our coming; and to their being thus suddenly brought in contact with a race of beings so totally different in color, dress and appearance, from any they had ever seen or heard of, is attributable the overwhelming fear they betrayed.

Our stock of provisions was now nearly exhausted, and what portion of our journey had been accomplished were of course entirely ignorant, one thing however, was apparent, that from this forward, upon Providence, and our good will, our dependence for food must rest. Having failed to induce the Indians to return to their Rancharia, and observing that they had considerable quantities of salmon in their huts, which they had obtained and cured for their subsistence during the winter, we helped ourselves to as much as was wanted, leaving in its place a quantity of venison that had been killed by some one of our party a short time previous, invoking, as a justification for so doing, the old adage, "a fair exchange is no robbery," and pressed forward on our journey with all diligence.

We had hoped that the Indians would not care to become better acquainted with us, and would allow us to pass on unmolested. Imagine our surprise, then, when as we were about camping for the night, there came marching toward us some seventy-five or eighty warriors, their shoes and bodies painted, looking like so many demons, and armed and prepared for battle. There needed no calling a council of war on our part to arrange plans or determine the course to be pursued in the emergency that now presented itself to us. Our guns were available at this moment for no other purpose than to use as clubs, for the reason before stated. The only alternative, therefore, left to us, was to assume an air of perfect indifference to their ap-

...the expedition. The two Indian guides refused to go, assigning as a reason, that the great storm had expirped on the river, had been a continuous snow-storm in the mountains, and that the depth of the snow would present an insuperable barrier to our progress, and endanger the safety of the whole party, to attempt the passage. This was sufficient for those who had manifested a desire to withdraw; and the number of the company was speedily reduced to eight men, including the Captain whose determination was only the more firmly fixed, because so large a number had abandoned the expedition.

The company now consisted of the following persons: Dr. Josiah Gregg, Captain, Thomas Sebring, of Ottawa, Illinois; David A. Beck, of New York; J. B. Truesdell, of Oregon; Van Dusen, Charles C. Southard, of Boston; Isaac Wilson, of Missouri; and your humble servant, of Mason county, Kentucky.

Owing to this great diminution in the number of the company, it became necessary before setting out, to examine the condition of our commissary department - from which it was ascertained that the stock of provisions had suffered, even greater diminution than had the company in point of numbers. The articles found were flour, pork, and beans, and of these scarcely sufficient for ten days rations. Notwithstanding this, an advance was determined upon, and accordingly we broke up camp. Here commenced an expedition, the marked and prominent features of which were constant and unmitigated toil, and hardship, privation, and suffering. Before us, stretching us far as the eye could reach, lay mountains, huge and rugged, deep valleys and difficult canyons, now filled with water by the recent heavy rains. After leaving the river we struck up the mountain, in the direction indicated by the two Indians who were to have been our guides. The ascent, at any time tedious, was now particularly difficult. Without any other trail or pathway than an occasional oak or Indian trail through the dense stunted undergrowth, the ground for a long distance up the mountain completely saturated with water from the great quantity of rain that had fallen, our ascent, as might be expected, was not only tedious and difficult, but extremely fatiguing. Before reaching the summit, however, the character of the ascent was materially changed. Snow had taken the place of slippery mud, which had completely obliterated all that was of a trail, its depth increasing in proportion to the altitude gained. We had now to grope our way as best we might, slowly and silently, we continued to ascend, up the steepest part of the mountain in order to shorten the distance.

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ing our wearied limbs upon the snow or cold, wet ground, by night, occurred during the succeeding four days worthy of notice.

Towards the evening of the next day, while passing over a stony, rugged, rocky country, we heard what appeared to be the rolling and breaking of the surf upon the distant sea-shore, or the roaring of some waterfall. A halt was therefore determined upon, and we resolved to ascertain the cause of this before proceeding further, and here pitched our camp. Early the next morning Mr. Buck left camp alone, for the purpose above expressed, and before night returned, bringing with him a quantity of sand, which from its appearance, as well as that of the place where it was gathered, he thought indicated the presence of gold; but not being on a gold-hunting expedition, we thought it the better discretion to use all possible despatch in reaching the coast. The result of this search was that he found a stream at the foot of a rugged descent, whose roar, swollen with torrents, rushed with terrific speed and violence. This, then, was what we heard. The gleam of hope that had for the moment animated us was as soon dispelled. This stream is the South Fork of Trinity.

Having ascertained that it was impossible to effect a crossing at or near this place, we continued on down, keeping as near it as was possible, until we came to its junction with the Trinity River. Here we succeeded in crossing. Upon gaining the opposite shore, we had a steep bank to ascend. As we reached the top of this bank, we came suddenly upon an Indian Rancheria. To us this was entirely unexpected, and undoubtedly, not less so to them. And it not been for the strange, almost ludicrous, scene that followed immediately upon their discovering us, I would not recollect but that some, if not most of the company would have betrayed signs of timidity, if not of actual fear, for our firearms had been rendered entirely unfit for use, from constant exposure to the rain, which continued through the whole of this day. Knowing this, we were fully conscious that should they meditate any immediate harm toward us, we could make but a sorry show at a defence. A moment's consideration, however, taught us that it was not necessary, nor was it likely, that these savages should know our precise situation, and it was our policy to give them to understand we were in no fear of them. But the scene that followed, for the moment wholly divested our minds of all apprehension of danger, for so soon as they saw us, men, women and children, fled in the wildest confusion, and in every direction; some plunging headlong into the river, not venturing to look behind them until they had reached a considerable elevation upon the mountain on the opposite side of the river, while others sought refuge in the thickets and among the rocks, leaving everything behind them. So soon as they had stopped in their flight, those who were yet in view were undeterred by signs to induce them to return, giving them to understand, as best we could, that we intended them no harm; but for the present, it was all to no purpose. They had never before seen a white man, nor had they received any intimation of our coming; and to their being thus suddenly brought in contact with a race of beings so totally

different from themselves, they had advanced to within one hundred yards of us, we, by signs, forbid their coming nearer, and in obedience to our commands, they halted. Two of our company advanced toward them, holding up to their view bows and other fancy articles which we fortunately had in our possession. With these they appeared highly pleased, and at length seemed persuaded that it was neither our desire, or intention to disturb or injure them, had soon become quiet and apparently friendly. They represented to us that their people were very numerous, and seemed desirous of impressing upon our minds that we were within their power and at their mercy, and in order to make this more evident, they assured us that any moment they wished they could kill the whole company. I need scarcely tell you that we lost little time in disabusing their minds on this subject. It was a matter not only of surprise, but of evident curiosity with them, to know how so small a number of men could successfully resist a force so vastly superior. The secret was in our weapons. The use of these, however, they could not understand. In order to accomplish our object, we gave them to understand that one of our guns would kill or maim any of them at a single shot as could stand one behind the other. This, however, did not seem to satisfy them, they appeared disposed to doubt our representations. As an evidence of this, they insisted upon our giving them an opportunity of witnessing the effects produced, by shooting at a mark. This we declined then to do, not desiring to attempt a display of our skill with guns that perhaps would require fifteen minutes to discharge, but promised to gratify them the next morning.

(To be continued.)

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