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No. 74.

CAMP AT BIG BEND OF EEL RIVER.

*Twelve miles southeast from Humboldt, Sept. 12, 1851.*

SIR: My last letter was dated San Francisco, July 29th, to which referring, I have now the honor to report, that on the 8th ultimo I joined my escort of thirty-six mounted men, under command of Brevet Major H. W. Wessetts, at Sonoma, and on the morning of the 11th commenced our march for Humboldt bay.

As our route would be mainly through an uninhabited and almost unexplored region, we started with thirty days' rations, on pack mules, with a drove of one hundred and sixty head of cattle close in our rear. The cattle were sent along by General Estell, of Vallego, with the understanding that the escort party and my own should pay for the number used at the current rates of the country, leaving his agent to dispose of those remaining to the miners on the Klamath.

Owing to the want of funds in the Indian department, I was forced to employ men to manage my own pack train, whose wages, at the rates paid by Major Wessetts, say eighty to one hundred dollars per month, will add largely to my expenses. The mules required, except three or four riding animals, which I had to purchase, were, with thirty days' rations for twelve men, furnished by the department at Benicia; our estimates were quite low enough: for, by the 9th instant, when we reached the first white settlements on this river, (four weeks and one day out) our supplies were pretty well exhausted. Our caravan consisted of seventy men, one hundred and forty horses and mules, and one hundred and sixty head of cattle; of course reference to grass and water was of the first importance in selecting our camps. The general course from Sonoma to this place is northwest, and the distance not far from two hundred and fifty miles. The first seventy or eighty miles up the valley of Sonoma creek and Russian river, were accomplished with but little comparative difficulty; but from the time we left Russian river at its source and commenced crossing, what our guide, Mr. Thomas Scabeing, called the *divide* between Russian and Eel rivers,

we had for about one hundred miles a succession of hills, mountains, gulches, gorges, and sundry such as are not to be found east of the Rocky mountains, and but seldom even in California or Oregon. I am happy to say, however, we accomplished the journey with unexpected safety. Our men are all in health, and we lost but one horse, three or four mules, and six or eight head of cattle—the former broke down, the latter strayed off, and were probably stolen by the Indians.

At Sonoma I was fortunate in securing the services of Geo. Gibbs, esq., formerly of New York, and recently attached to the Indian commission in Oregon. He is acquainted with the Schinook or Chinook language, and the jargon spoken by all the tribes on the borders of Oregon and California. He is, moreover, a practical topographical engineer; has kept a journal of our entire route, and will furnish me, I hope in time for my annual report, a correct map or reconnoissance of the trail from Sonoma, showing the exact position of all the important rivers, lakes, mountains and valleys, together with a synopsis of the various dialects of the tribes we shall have met. In selecting reservations with a view to collect and colonize the remnants of the tribes scattered in all directions over this coast and among the mountains, it is important that close attention be paid to similarity of language, customs, &c.

On this journey, as elsewhere in California, I have found the Indian population almost universally overrated as to numbers, and underrated as to intelligence and capacity for improvement. From information at Benicia, Sonoma, &c., I was led to expect that I should find two or three thousand Indians on Russian river, at least three thousand on Clear lake, and two thousand five hundred or three thousand on Eel river. After passing through their country, and counting every soul in half a dozen rancheros, to test the accuracy of their own estimates as well as those of the whites, I make the actual number less than one-half, generally about two-fifths of the number usually estimated by the settlers below.

1. In the valleys of Sonoma and Russian river there may be in all, say	1,200
2. On Clear lake and mountains adjacent	1,000
3. In the two first valleys of south fork of Eel river, with language and customs similar to the above, and who should be colonized with them, from 1,000 to 1,100, say	1,100
4. On the coast, from the old Russian settlement at Fort Ross, down to San Francisco, and around the bay, by St. Raphael, Pelatoma, &c.	500
5. On the mountains and valleys of Eel river, South, Middle and Vanderson's forks, and about its mouth	500
6. From the mouth of Eel river south, on ——— river, Cape Mendocino, and to Fort Ross, say	400
7. On Humboldt bay, and north to Mad river, a mile or so above the head of the bay	300
Total	5,000

Having as yet visited but one or two rancheros on the coast, I do not offer the above estimate with much confidence, though I think it approximates the truth, while it is only about one-third or one-fourth of the num-

ber generally estimated by the old settlers. For many years past the Indian population has been rapidly diminishing by diseases introduced by the whites, internal dissensions, and, in some cases, by want of food. At Humboldt bay, and at other places on the coast, where they depend almost wholly on fish and crabs, many sicken and die every winter; and if the benevolent designs of our government for their preservation and improvement are not speedily set in operation and vigorously prosecuted, the Indians, now wearing out a miserable existence along the coast, will all die off.

Back on the rivers and mountains, the Indians are generally a hale, healthy, vigorous looking people, though of small stature. They are all docile in their habits, and evince a great desire to learn our language and the arts of agriculture; with proper instructions and assistance for a few years, I have entire confidence in their reclamation from ignorance, idleness and heathenism, and their ability to maintain themselves and families.

On Russian river, near Felix rancho, while our runners were out collecting the Indians for a grand *pow-wow*, I took a few men for an escort, with five or six pack mules to carry our provisions, blankets, &c., for presents, and crossed the mountains into the valley of Clear lake: we found a blind trail, and the route very difficult: distance from fifteen to twenty miles. The eight tribes, who claim the valley and lake, were apprised of our approach, and their chiefs and headmen came promptly to our camp to learn what the great chief at Washington had to propose. They said some white men had been there, and made treaties with them, but did not live up to them, and they were now satisfied they were not *big chiefs*. After a number of interviews and explanations, which my secretary's journal will give you more fully, we finally concluded a treaty on the 20th August, which, if approved and promptly carried out by the Indian Department, will, I am in hopes, quiet the Indians in that quarter, and secure the safety of the white settlements in the neighboring valleys of Nappa, Russian river, &c. I am very glad now that I took the lake in my route, as the Indians were in a very unsettled, unsatisfactory condition, and doubtless meditating revenge and reprisals on the whites in the settlements, against whom, as well as the military which went out against them last year, they make loud complaints. That they have suffered severely by the war, and also by disease, induced by privation, I have no doubt. After much reflection, personal examination, and consultation with Major Wessetts of the escort, and with General Estell of the State militia, who kindly accompanied me to the lake, I concluded to reserve and set apart the *whole valley*, and, if practicable, include the entire Indian population, scattered along the coast about Bogeda, Petaloma, &c., to San Francisco, together with those on Russian river, and the head waters of Eel river, to remove to and colonize there. I do not think another location so completely isolated, and in all respects so desirable for the settlement and improvement of three or four thousand Indians, can be found in the State. The valley has, at present, no white inhabitants, and there are no claimants to any part of it except Don Salvadore Vallejo, of Sonoma, who is said to have a *grazing and ranching* privilege from the Mexican governor and about sixteen leagues in that quarter. Generally this grant is considered of no validity or value whatever; and that he has but little confidence in it himself is plain, from the fact of his offering to sell his interest in it for some five or six

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thousand dollars. If it should ever become desirable to quiet this claim, which I think altogether improbable, the government can well afford to do it, as it will obtain for the white settlers a far more desirable country on Russian river, and now in possession of the Indians. With the general plan proposed the Indians on the lake were well satisfied, and several of their principal chiefs returned with me to Russian river, and rendered important aid in negotiating a treaty with four of the largest bands on that river.

Copies of both these treaties will be forwarded for your examination at an early day, as soon as my secretary can find some better accommodations for writing than on his knee, in the open air, or with the light afforded by a camp fire. I will here add, that the tribes last treated with are to remove to the lake within one year, or as soon as the necessary arrangements are made by your department. It will be of the utmost importance to the peace and security of this State that full and liberal provision be made by the ensuing Congress for carrying out these California treaties *as early in the coming year as may be at all practicable.*

Finding it impossible to visit on this journey many of the smaller tribes or bands scattered among the mountains of the coast range, and on the coast south of Humboldt, and that it was quite necessary that some one or two white men should be selected to advise, and protect if necessary, the Indians treated with in my absence, and until resident sub-agents are appointed, I arranged with Gen. Estell, of Vallejo, and Mr. George Parker Armstrong, of Russian river, to attend to these matters, and particularly to the delivery and proper distribution of beef and flour, stipulated to be furnished the present fall and ensuing winter; the beef (100 head for each treaty) I get from Gen. Estell; the flour (10,000 lbs. for each treaty) from Messrs. Morehead, Waddington & Co., San Francisco, both to be paid for after Congress shall have made the necessary appropriations. This arrangement I consider highly fortunate for the country, and exceedingly liberal on the part of the gentlemen named: especially when it is considered that both are to be furnished at the *lowest cash prices* at the time of delivery.

Mr. Armstrong, besides visiting the lake occasionally, will, in the present month, visit all the Indians in the coast range and on the coast not already treated with, ascertain their numbers and arrange with their chiefs to meet me at some convenient point in the Sonoma and Russian river valleys, at some time during the present fall or ensuing spring, as I may find possible after the present expedition: mean time he is to report the facts to me at San Francisco by the first November.

After leaving Mr. Armstrong's ranche, the last settlement on the trail, travelling over some stupendous mountains, we descended into the first valley on the south fork of Eel river, near its source, and found in a little valley, called by the Indians Betumki, five small tribes, viz:

Tribe and principal chief.	Men.	Women.	Children.	Total.
Na-loh, Car-lots-a-po.....	36	26	19	75
Chow-e-chak, Obe-do-chog. ....	25	25	27	77
Choi-te-u, Mis-a-lah.....	34	42	12	89
Ba-cow-a, Tu-wa-nah.....	23	29	28	80
Sa-min-da, Cack-e-nah.....	15	25	19	59
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One or two other small parties were absent across a mountain and could not be seen. In all, this valley may contain 450 or 475. We remained two days in this valley, and supplied them liberally with beef and hard bread, and as many blankets, shirts, &c., as our small stock would afford. About 20 miles further on the trail, after crossing another ridge of mountains we descended again to the river, and in a valley called Batin-da-kia, found another Indian settlement. They were of the same general stock or family of Indians, but spoke a somewhat different lingo or dialect, and we had more difficulty in getting them to understand our objects. Many of them had never seen a white man, a horse, or a gun before, and were consequently extremely timid and fearful. They had two principal chiefs, Lum-ka and Con-a-cho-ca, and their rancheros were reported to contain 153 men, 200 women, and 144 children—497. One or two other small parties did not come in, and may increase the total number in this valley to 600 souls. We remained here one day, killed for them one or two beeves, and made them sundry presents, with which they appeared much pleased, and promised to treat kindly all white men who may hereafter pass through their country. The Indians in both valley should, I think, be removed to the Clear lake. They will be invited to meet me for consultation on Russian river, when Mr. Armstrong shall have arranged the time and place. I gave them certificates in writing of their good conduct to us, and recommending them to the protection of the whites passing through their country.

These were the last Indians we could communicate with, though we saw several other small parties on the mountains; and after we again descended to the river, all we met after leaving Batin-da-kia speak a different *lingo*, and were supposed to belong to the general family who live below them on this river. On our arrival here I visited Humboldt to obtain some supplies, and if possible interpreters, to open a communication with the tribes in our neighborhood. In the latter I was unsuccessful, the only two men who understand their language being absent in the mines on Trinity river, eighty or one hundred miles distant. Through Mr. Robinson, who resides near, and his *squaw wife*, I have been able to get a number of the Indians to visit our camp, to whom we have made presents. At present, the Indians here and at Humboldt bay are quiet and peaceable, express a desire to work for the settlers, eat their food, and learn their arts; all which is desirable, and it is a source of much regret that we cannot, for want of interpreters, conclude a formal treaty with them. This, from the necessity of the case, will have to be postponed till some future time. In the mean time I shall make them some more presents as soon as the messenger sent for the goods to Port Trinidad, about forty miles, returns, and set off a reservation of land

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for them at or near the mouth of this river, which is twelve or fourteen miles by the channel below our camp, and by the coast fifteen or sixteen miles south from Humboldt. This appears to be necessary at the present time, to avoid difficulties hereafter with our own people, who are moving into and settling upon claims in this fertile and beautiful valley every day. Here the lands are exceedingly rich, well watered, convenient to timber, and irrigation *wholly unnecessary*. Such advantages will insure to this vicinity a speedy settlement.

It has been suggested to me by Mr. Dupere, (formerly of Norfolk, Va. now a merchant in Humboldt,) and others, that no more effectual way to benefit these Indians could be devised than to have for their use two or three pairs of good work oxen to break up a few acres of land to be planted for them in potatoes and other vegetables, and thus at once give them some idea of the advantages of cultivating the soil. I have the matter under advisement, and may adopt the suggestion if some of the gentlemen in the neighborhood will volunteer their services and see the plan carried out. The general character of the soil on this river, and the mountains also, even to their summits, is that of exceeding fertility. On the very tops of the mountains, many thousand feet above the ocean, we found grass of the finest kind in great abundance, interspersed with groves of the most magnificent timber. We encamped a few nights since under a redwood fifty-five feet in circumference six feet from the ground, and between two and three hundred feet high. I measured another, which had been burned at the roots and blown down, three hundred and twenty-five feet in length. Another gentleman of our party found a tree eighty-seven feet in the girth four feet from the ground.

The river *here* is affected by the tide and may be navigated by very small boats as high as the junction of the South and Middle forks—say forty to fifty miles. Here and there it affords fine wide prairie bottoms, but in general the bottoms are heavily timbered with redwood, maple, alder, &c. The climate being very fine and uniform I anticipate that all the good lands will be very soon appropriated by actual settlers.

I expect to remain here until the 18th instant to recruit our animals and then resume our march for the Klamath, via Humboldt, Eureka, Union and Port Trinidad. We have still a long journey before us and many Indians to visit, and, if possible, conciliate. Since leaving Sonoma we have had five or six days of wet weather, from which some conclude that the rainy season will this year set in early. If it should, our operations will be necessarily suspended. My escort will probably take up winter quarters and I shall be forced to disband my party and return by the coast to San Francisco. I indulge the hope that if the rains do not set in till the usual time, say first part of November, that I can keep the field and yet accomplish much, if not all the work before me in the northern part of the State. All agree as to the importance of the undertaking, and personally I am anxious to avoid the labor and expense of another expedition.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

REDICK McKEE.

Hon. LUKE LEA,  
Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington City.