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[California 1859]

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Extract.  
from the.

Report of the Results of  
an Expedition to Omnes  
Lake and River, with the  
Topographical Features of  
the Country, its Climate,  
Soil, Timber, Water, &c  
and also the Habits, Arms,  
and Means of Subsistence  
of the Indian Tribes,  
seen upon the March.

By Captain John W. Davidson  
1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Dragoons  
July & August 1859.

Extract from the "Report of the Results of an Expedition to Owen's Lake, and River, with the Topographical Features, of the Country, the Climate, Soil, Timber, Water, &c, and also, The Habits, Arms, and Means of Subsistence of the Indian Tribes, seen upon the march." by Captain John W. Davidson 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Dragoons, July & August 1859.

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Topographical Features of the Country.

The Country from Fort Lyon, [Cañada de las Aras] to Walker's Pass, is so well described by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut Williamson Top. Engineer, in his notes on the exploration of the Passes of the Sierra Nevada, that I have not placed its Topography upon the map, nor inserted into a description of it here.

Leaving Walker's Pass, our route lay at the edge of the Great Desert, along the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada, for twenty miles, the soil being loose granitic gravel, and sand, with huge boulders scattered here, and there.

At this distance, you have reached the Southern extremity of a low range of Mountains, running

(2.)

nearly North, and South, the termination being of scoriaceous Lava. Six miles beyond, ascending gradually several hundred feet above the Desert, through fields of lava, and volcanic debris, you reach Lake Beall upon a higher level or bench, which continues to Owen's Lake.

The Springs at the South end of Lake Beall, which I have spoken of, in a former part of my Report, contain Carbonate of Lime in solution, and have deposited it in their course, so as to form regular canals, some of them entirely arched over. There is a fine meadow of various grasses here, several hundred acres in extent. The water of the Lake, is pure to the taste, that of the Springs has already been described.

The valley between the Sierra, and the right hand range, continues, from this point, at an average width of three miles, as far as Care Spring, a distance of fourteen miles, where the two ranges approach each other so closely, that you have to cross over a spur of the eastern range.

Care Spring, has a very limited supply of water, say for 10 head of animals. Near this Spring is a mountain of Crystalline rock, not a block

(3.)

of which is larger than an ordinary sized adobe, giving one, at first glance, the impression of some violent throw of Nature, having shattered it to pieces.

From Cave Spring to "K" Co Meadows, the valley has narrowed, to a few hundred yards in width, throughout this distance of six miles. Fine Springs with abundance of water, are found at these meadows, which are of about the same extent as those at Lake Bell.

The right hand range is here getting perceptibly lower, with broken, chalky hills projecting from its western slope.

From "K" Co Meadows to Owen's Lake, a distance of fifteen miles, the valley widens gradually, until it is some four miles across, at the Lake, and the right hand range drops down into the plain, terminating at the Lake, where it is overlapped eastwardly, by a still higher range, which now comes into view from the north.

In this distance, of fifteen miles, you have again ascended, to a second level, or bench above the Desert, very gradually, and which bench is some four, or five hundred feet, [estimated] above Lake Bell.

On this second level, is Owen's Lake, which as well as I was able to ascertain, by an imperfect

measurement is nineteen miles long, and from four to eight miles broad. Its waters are strongly saline, and of very buoyant character. So far as any living thing, in its waters, is concerned, it is a perfect Dead Sea. But upon its surface, swarm myriads of flies, sometimes darkening the air, and far out, are whole narves of aquatic birds, the species of which is unknown to me. I could not get a single specimen of these birds, as it is only when the winds are propitious, that they ride in shore. From what I could see of them at a distance, they are about the size of the jack snipe, have a sharp, straight bill, and the Indians represent them, as half-mobbed, and having a small fleshy paddle upon the outer toe.

The shore marks upon the Lake, give evidence of its being about 30 feet higher, than at its present level, at the season of rains, and at the melting of the snows, patches of which now make their appearance amidst the lofty peaks of the Sierra Nevada. At its southern end, two fine mountain streams, coming from the West, spread their waters over the soil, and give rise to a luxuriant meadow of 1000, to 1500 acres in extent.

(5.)

Few miles above the Lake [the southern extremity] two streams Sunday Creek, and Kennedy Creek empty into it, coming from the Sierra, their banks fringed with the Oak, Willow, and Cottonwood.

Several Springs exist along the western shore, but their waters are brackish, and unpleasant to the taste. The spurs of the Sierra occasionally run down very close to the Lake, making our road skirt its margin.

This is covered to the extent of 50 or 60 yards, wherever we touched the lake, with an incrustation of Carbonate of Soda, & other Salts.

Specimens, both of the Salts, and of the water of the Lake, have been submitted to an Analytical Chemist, and the results of his analysis, will be made known.

Few miles beyond Kennedy Creek, you enter the valley proper, of Owens River, which empties into the Lake, at the northern extremity of its eastern shore. This valley continues for one hundred miles, from the mouth of the River. Its average width is from four to six miles.

The eastern range of mountains flows down no streams to swell the river, but now, upon the right bank, every few miles,

are crossed numerous water courses, which take their rise amid the perennial snows of the Sierra Nevada.

Oren's River, at points observed, is a muddy stream, with abrupt banks, and flowing with a gentle current. The banks are but a few feet in height. The river averages 50 feet in width, and about 15 feet in depth.

The conviction is forced upon my mind, by the appearance of the country below the Lake, that the river has once run throughout the valley, bending to the eastward, most probably, below Lake Bull, & pouring its waters into the Desert, in the direction of the Mojave. But, that some violent volcanic upheaval, has dammed up its waters, all along from "K" Co Meadows, to the point marked "H" all of Sara's on the Map, and thus formed the Lake.

Evaporation from a surface of the extent of that of the Lake, does not in my opinion, account for the body of water poured into it, by Oren's River, and other tributaries. It may possibly therefore, find a subterranean outlet, below the sands of the Desert.

(7)  
Every step now taken, shows you that Nature has been lavish of her stores. The mountains are clad with timber, the valleys well-watered, and clothed with luxuriant grass. Some of the meadows, contain at a moderate estimate, ten thousand acres of land, every foot of which, can be irrigated.

About ten miles beyond the northern end of the Lake, Cold Creek, and Crusquite Creek, a mile apart, break through a low range of hills, at the foot of the Sierra. Eleven miles farther on, you reach the Snow Creek, three in number, seven miles from them, Pine Creek, and one mile beyond this last, is Pea Vine Creek running through groves of magnificent Oaks, and far away to the River, which washes the base of the eastern range, the eye wanders over a sea of green.

Bluff Creek, is crossed about seven miles, beyond Pea Vine Creek. From thence to Sara Creek a distance of six miles, you pass over a field of angular, vesicular lava, about two miles in width. At its edge towards the River, bursts forth from a single spring, a stream, 15 feet wide, and 3/4 foot deep, I have called it Sara Creek. Thence to Hopo Creek is six miles, and ten miles beyond,

is Dragoon Fork, a large tributary. Between Hope Creek, and Dragoon Fork, occurs a Spring rising in the plain, still larger than the one which forms Sara Creek. I have called it Mammoth Spring. The water of both these Springs, is clear as crystal, cold, and delicious to the taste. Nine miles above Dragoon Fork is Surprise Creek, and about one mile beyond at the foot of a spur of the Sierra, occurs a Hot Spring. Upon immersion of a Fahrenheit Thermometer, it showed  $138^{\circ}$ . The water upon being cooled during the night, in a bottle, discovered no mineral taste.

Five miles, farther on, is Câche Creek, and two miles above, this creek, is Clark's Fork by far the largest tributary, I have yet seen, and which brings down a larger volume of water, than Keon River. Cañon Creek, is nine miles in advance of Clark's Fork, and six miles beyond is Mary's Creek. Thence to the Cañon of Orren's River, five miles, at which point, terminated my exploration.

The River here comes through a spur of the Sierra Nevada, with a rapid current. A low range, extends upward, from the foot of this spur, in a north easterly direction,

and a dry fork of the main River, follows its Southern base.

Now, casting his eye back, the reader will perceive a fertile valley, of over one hundred miles, in length, extending from this point to Owens Lake, watered abundantly throughout its extent, and waiting but the hand of civilized man, that its vast agricultural resources may be opened.

The valley of Marys Creek, called on my map, Wind Valley, is the finest, and most picturesque we have yet seen.

It would be the fittest location for a military post, or for an Agency. A very fine quarry of Truston occurs near Canio Creek, outcropping from a low range of subsidiary hills. Timber, is found in abundance hard by, and water, and grass and other requisites exist in profusion.

### Climate

The Climate of the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada, during our expedition was delightful. The prevailing winds, came from the South, and though blowing from the Desert, were not unpleasantly warm.

The average of the Thermometer, at "B" Co Meadows going, and returning was at Sunset,  $79^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit; at Sunrise  $65^{\circ}$ .

At the Camp at the foot of Owen's Lake, at Sunset  $87^{\circ}$  at Sunrise  $60^{\circ}$ .

Camp on Musquito Creek, at Sunset  $81^{\circ}$  at Sunrise  $56^{\circ}$ .

Camp on Paw Pine Creek, at Sunset  $81^{\circ}$  at Sunrise  $54^{\circ}$ .

Camp on Dragon Fork, during the three days, spent by a detachment of my command there, the average reading was at sunset  $80^{\circ}$ , at sunrise  $51^{\circ}$ .

I should judge that the Spring opened late, from the fresh, and green appearance of the Vegetation, at this season.

But the pinon-nuts, and the acorns, had ripened about the same time, on the South fork of Kern River, and at the Tejon!

The Indians tell me, that the snow, which falls in the valley of Owen's River, remains upon the ground but three, or four days.

It was thought by some, who accompanied the expedition, that the winter climate of Clark's Fork, and of Winn Valley is severe. But the current of the River, does not show any very great descent, from Winn Valley to the Lake, nor could I find that the Indians provided themselves with any furs, or covering beyond what they had

ow to resist the rigor of a hard winter.

The Indians of Washers basin, lying west of the summit of the Sierra, were already preparing robes of rabbit furs, and these animals are as plentiful, in the one part of the country, as in the other.

## Soil

From the foot of the Lake, to the Canon of Owen's River, this is chiefly of granitic gravel, and sand, or drift from the Mountains, near the River, it becomes mixed with alluvial deposit. Whichever water touches it, it acts like the wand of an Enchanter, and the Indians of the River, may with truth be said, to have made some portions of their Country, which else were desert, to bloom, and blossom as the rose. Their acequias from the mountain affluents of the River, spread over the land, like the threads of the Spider's web.

I should think the soil well suited to the growth of wheat, oats, rye, barley, & near the Lake, corns. The apple & the pear, among fruits, would flourish here, and at the base of, and among the Lava fields, probably the grape. The potato also, I think would grow

mill, as the soil seems adapted to tuberosc plants. The grasses, more of luxuriant growth. In one meadow, that of Winn Valley, the grass over two feet in height, broad leaved, and juicy, extended for miles.

I do not think, that the bottom lands of the River, are subject to overflow. I examined very carefully during my march, up the valley, for any indications, but did not discover them.

To the Grazer, this is one of the finest portions of the State, to the Farmer, it offers every advantage, but a market; to the Indian, Nature, unaided by cultivation, kindly bears on her bosom, the means of his Subsistence.

### Timber.

At Clark's, and Dagoon Forks, and at Pine Creek, pine timber of fine quality, and easy of access, is found in abundance.

Some idea, is given of the size of these pines, by one, which I felled at random, on Dagoon Fork. It measured six feet in diameter, and was one hundred, and twenty feet long.

As a general thing, the trees were straight, sound and clear of knots. There is timber enough for all the uses of a population, commensurate with the Agricultural resources of the Valley.

Water

I found it plentiful everywhere upon the route, except at Soldier's Well, Indian Well, and Care Spring, nor does the country, at these three points, present anything very inviting.

It is superfluous to say anything under this head, about the valley of Owen's River. Not a single Creek, that I have mentioned, or marked upon my Map, but what furnishes more water than the Tizon, [San Sebastian Reserve] and from their snowy origin, I should think, they never dry.

On the route, around the eastern base of the Sierra, Supt Stovbridge found abundance of water at some Springs 30 miles South of Walker's Pass, and again 35 miles beyond this point - Thence to Oak Creek 8 miles, where the road becomes well known.

Taking what I saw, as far as the Cañon of Owen's River, into consideration, with what is represented of the Country beyond, and as far as Mono Lake, it is the finest watered portion, of the Southern half of the State.

Indian Tribes.Walker's Basin

The first Indians, to be met with, on our route, are those of Walker's Basin. They number about 50 souls.

They are represented by the white settlers as being an honest race of people who give the farmers of the neighborhood no trouble, and afford them assistance at harvest time, in gathering & housing their crops.

Their weapons are, the bow, and arrow.

They subsist on such game as they can kill, the seeds of various grasses, acorns, and pine-nuts, great quantities of which, grow in this part of the Sierra Nevada.

Many of these Indians have sought employment in the mining districts of Kern River, and earn a livelihood in that way. I found some stock, among them, three horses, of which had not been vented. These, they informed me, were purchased from the Indians of the San Sebastian Reservation, who certainly bear the worst character of any Indians, met upon our route.

I found no sign, of an attempt to cultivate the soil, among this tribe, tho' they are

living, almost in the midst of farmers. From their own account, they have been rapidly diminishing in number for many years past, certainly ever since the discovery of the Gold Mines on Keon River, and the settlement of the "Basin", their former home, by the whites. They were once a numerous tribe; for I was through this section of country with a party of Draycocks in 1848, and can speak knowingly, but they are now exemplifying the fact, that the Indian race is passing away before a higher, and better power, than ever ran wild in woods, and the time is coming when their places, shall know them no more.

These are living within 30 miles of a Reservation established by the Government for the support, and protection of the Indians, who can be subsisted upon it, certainly not for the maintenance of the petty number of 3 or 400 souls, who are nominally living on it, and yet I cannot find that any attempt has been made to bring them to this Reserve, and to teach them to earn their support by the cultivation of the soil, or by the exercise of some handicraft. I found no implements of agriculture among them, and they complained to me, bitterly, of their wants, not their country.

had been taken from them.

## Kern River.

These Indians were living at the time of my expedition upon the north fork of Kern River, and about six miles above the junction of the North, and South forks.

I estimated them to number about 200 souls. They differ but little in appearance, or habits from the Indians of Walker's basin, have the same arms, and subsist in about the same manner. They have attempted cultivation of some of their lands, taking Acquias out of the main River, but their crops looked very indifferently. They need seeds, implements of Agriculture, and instruction. Along some of the bottom lands of the South fork, grows a species of Cane, which these Indians cut when ripe, and expose to the Sun. From the Cane thus exposed, exudes a saccharine juice, which the Indians thresh in a dried state from the Cane, and make of it, a very well flavored Panoche, put up in small cakes, like our Maple Sugar. I should think the Indians of both the tribes above named,

could be gathered upon a Reservation, with but little trouble, and with advantage to both the Indians, and the whites.

### Owen's Lake, and River

These Indians [the Wokopced] whom I have already spoken of, in my Report, live upon the shores of Owen's Lake, and in the valley of Owen's River, and upon its numerous tributaries. Their habitations in Summer, are rude huts, of the boughs of trees, in Winter, they make an excavation in the ground to the depth of 3 feet, and several feet in diameter, over which they interweave the branches of trees, and long grass.

I saw no other weapons among them, but the bow, and arrow, and I believe they have no other. They number in my opinion, about 1200 souls, tho' my guide, and Mr David McKenzie, a mountaineer of great experience, and good judgment, make them, much more numerous.

They subsist upon the flesh of such game, as they can kill, the Deer, Antelope, and Hare upon the seeds of various grasses, the acorn, piñon- nut, and the "grass- nut." [Tu-pöös.]

This latter is a tuber of a very nutritious species of grass, of which our horses were very fond. It is about the size of a marrow-fat pea, has a coarse skin, or rind, and resembles the "Chincapin" in flavor. Whole fields, miles in extent, of this grass, are watered with great care. Digging the tubers, destroys the fields, and the "nuts" are reproduced by planting.

The River is filled with a small fish, supposed to be a new species. It is about 2 inches long, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch deep, the dorsal fin, rising from a humped back, and the tail, instead of being bifurcate, is rounded at the end, as below represented.

The Indians catch these fish in great quantities in Suro-like baskets, and dry them in the sun. They form an important article of food with them, and they pack away their sun-dried store for winter use.

Another, very plentiful addition to their means of subsistence, are the Larvæ, and Pupæ, of dipterous insects. These are seen floating upon the surface of the water of the Lake, in masses about the size of a nutmeg, and the Indians gather them at this season, as they are driven ashore by the winds.

They then, dry them, and separate by threshing and winnowing, the husks or skeletons of the Larva from the grub, which they pack away for daily consumption. I may safely say, that I saw hundreds of bushels of this kind of food, in process of preparation, and prepared.

These Indians, say the deposits are of yearly occurrence, and certainly it seemed to me, to be so, for I could not find the shore lined, nor the bottom covered with them, as Captain Stansbury reports of the Larva, and Cypridae of insects, found at Great Salt Lake [p. 164. 177]

Here, however are consumers, to prevent the accumulation of them, in such vast quantities as he describes. I say Larva, and pupa, because in the specimens brought home, I think I can distinguish between the grub, and the imperfectly-formed fly. The Indians, as well as I was able to gather from the humble Spaniard of my Interpreter, speak of this food, as of two classes, [otra cosa]. It must be a very nutritious food, for all the Indians, were fat, and oily, who were engaged in this annual business of laying in stores, which to them, must seem to drop from Heaven -

Now it began to suggest itself to us, why the vast quantities of aquatic birds, were here.

They no doubt, sought this same food,  
 Under the glass, the pupae appear to belong  
 to the same class of fly, which we saw,  
 Swarming upon the surface of the Lake.  
 The fly is smaller than the common house-fly  
 has a brown body with silvery wings.  
 Mosquitoes exist in great quantities upon  
 the tributaries of the River, none upon the  
 Lake, but I believe these pupae do not  
 belong to the Mosquito.

As a general thing, the  
 Indians of the Lake, and tributaries are  
 of fine stature, the women good-looking  
 and the men robust. I learn from them  
 that they have never been at war, with  
 any other tribe, or people. This would  
 seem to be established by their form of  
 government, for they have no principal  
 Chief, or Leader, which warfare would make  
 necessary, but are ruled by the heads of  
 families - a patriarchal mode of govern-  
 -ment.

Their women, are said to be chaste, and  
 to remain faithful to the marriage state.  
 No evidences of Venereal disease, was seen  
 among them, and but one instance of de-

-formity. I believe they are truthful, and honest, several articles of equipment, dropped by the men upon the daily marches, were brought into our Camps, at night.

I could not find that they had any idea of a Supreme Being, but they seemed to have a belief in a Future State - They bury their dead in the ground, placing in the grave, by the side of the deceased, his bow & quiver, his little personal trinkets [usually of bones & shells] and some food, for his journey into Eternity?

They are not wanting in intelligence, They caught the idea of the Cause, and how to make it, with quickness.

They have no dress, using the breech-cloth for the Adamal fig leaf. As I said before, I think them a peculiarly interesting people, ranking with the Peris, in honesty, industry and mild, peaceful habits, and fully as deserving of the care of our Government.

But if any steps are to be taken for their improvement, and security, [for settlers, when the resources of this Country become known, will soon swarm over their lands] they should be taken now, before the Indians have learned the vices, which the

white man brings in his train.

These Indians are living in an almost isolated condition, having but little intercourse with other tribes. Their country is large enough and rich enough, not only for them, but for all the Indians of Southern California.

After what I have said, in my description of this country, it will hardly be necessary for me to say much upon the subject of an Indian Reservation. Its singular adaptability to that purpose, must suggest itself to the reader.

Bounded, on the east, and South, by the Great Desert, ~~it is~~ the West by the snows of the Sierra Nevada, it is shut out from the encroachment of settlers, from these quarters. Properly managed, a Reservation here, should cost nothing to the Government, but the first outfit. After the first harvest, it ought to be self-sustaining, for the means are here, and nothing is lacking but their honest application.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

John Davidson

Capt. Oregon