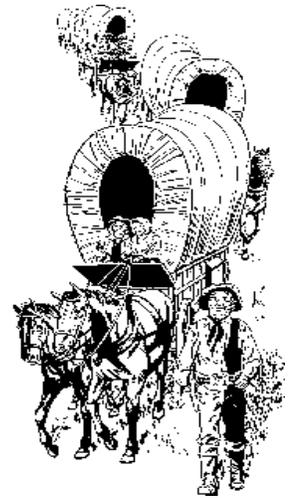


# Trail Dust

Newsletter of the Oregon-California Trails  
Association, Idaho Chapter



**Vol. XXXII Issue 2 Nancy Briggs, Editor, Summer 2020**

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## Tentative Calendar of Events for 2020

September tba	Outing to OT Reserve and Recreation Area in Boise.
September 18th	OCTA Board Meeting (Virtual)
September 19 <sup>th</sup>	OCTA Membership Meeting (Virtual)
October 10th	IOCTA Fall Meeting (Burley or Virtual)

# Message from the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

Greetings from the Idaho chapter of OCTA. Yes, we still are here, just not doing anything fun at this point. The coronavirus pandemic has changed the world as we know it. For at least a while longer we are curtailing all activities. National has already postponed the Elko convention until next year so we can look forward to that again.

We had some great activities planned for the year, but they have all been cancelled. Maybe we will have an opportunity to have trail related outings later in the fall, maybe not.

I have thought about trying to get out in the field again. We could all drive our own vehicles, wear face masks, and keep a safe distance from each other in the field. My concern, however, is what happens when we make a restroom stop at a truck stop or highway rest area at one of the few available places across the state. We would then be exposed to what all of the travelers who had visited the facility were carrying. The last thing I want to do is to sponsor an activity and have somebody catch the virus on the outing. Consequently, I cannot get back out in the field at this time.

One of our members suggested we do something close to Boise which would not require restroom facilities. That may be possible later in the year if the pandemic gets better. Currently Idaho and much of the rest of the country are moving rapidly in the wrong direction.

Hopefully, you read the wonderful article by Idaho member Jim Hardee in the latest *Overland Journal*. In "Bartolome Baca and French Trappers in the Southwest," Jim provides an excellent summary of the early trappers in the northern Mexico area. Jim truly is an incredible resource and we are very fortunate to have him share his knowledge with us.

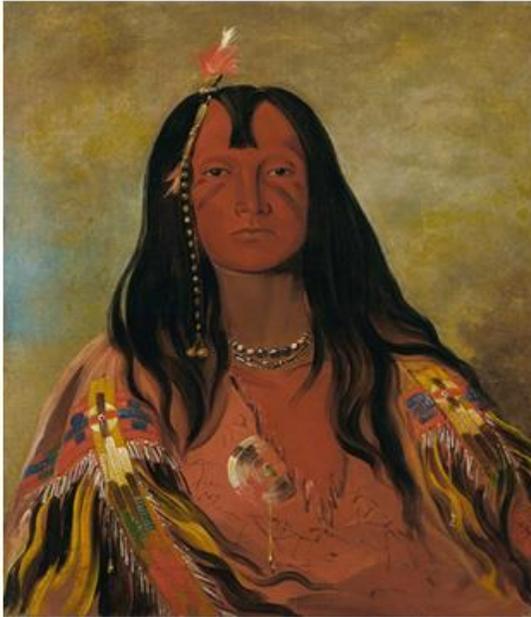
Our fall chapter meeting is planned for Saturday, October 10. Although I reserved the Perkins Restaurant in Burley for the meeting, it is looking more likely that it will be another Zoom video meeting like the spring meeting was. That meeting turned out fine, but I missed seeing everyone in person.

Stay safe and hopefully we'll be back out on the trails soon.

# The Reverend Jason Lee's Mission to Oregon in 1834

John Briggs

In 1831 perhaps as many as six Native Americans set off for St. Louis from Idaho. Although five made it to St. Louis, one of them was already terminally ill. They came looking for the white man's 'Book of Heaven', the Bible. They came looking for the 'Black Robes', the priests. It has been suggested that the devastating impact of sickness in their tribes caused them to believe this could be 'solved' by the white man's 'God' about whom they had heard.



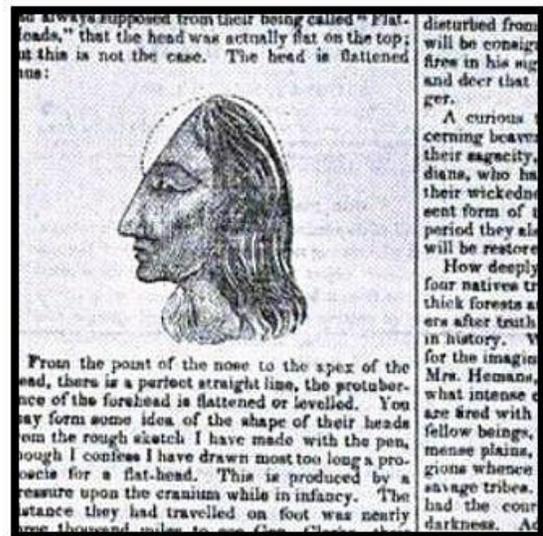
H'co-a-h'co-a-h'cotes-min (No Horns On His Head) and Hee-oh'ks-te-kin (Rabbit Skin Leggings), two of the four Indians who traveled to St. Louis in the fall of 1831. Both portraits were painted by George Catlin in 1832 when he accompanied the two men on their journey home from St. Louis

From where had they heard this?

One possibility is William Clark, from his days with them on the Lewis and Clark expedition and who in 1831 was Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Missouri Territory.

Other possibilities include encounters with trappers such as the devout David Thompson, who carried his bible with him everywhere, the French-Canadian Catholics, or from the 'educated' Iroquois who came with the trappers. Another possibility is Spokane Garry, of the Spokane nation, who had been educated in the Church of England Mission School in what is now Winnipeg, Manitoba.

They were not immediately successful, and only one of them lived to return to Idaho, but in 1833 the 'New York Advocate' carried a letter by William Walker which told of this delegation. The letter was reprinted with an illustration of the Flathead visitor.



Disoway's sketch of a Flathead Indian that accompanied his article published in the March 1, 1833 issue of the *Christian Advocate and Zion City Herald*

At least three more delegations were to follow.

The supposed oration of the Native Americans who may have been Flatheads or may have been Nez Perce :

*You were friends of my fathers, who have all gone the long way. I came with an eye partly open for my people who sit in darkness. I go back with both eyes closed. How can I go blind to my blind people? I made my way to you with strong arms through many enemies and strange lands that I might carry much back to them. I go back with both arms broken and empty. Two fathers came with us; they were braves of many winters and many wars. We leave them asleep here by your great waters and wigwams. They were tired in many moons and their moccasins wore out .....*

And so, the Methodist Church decided to send the Rev Jason Lee to Oregon as a Missionary to the Flathead Indians.



Reverend Jason Lee (1803-1845)

Rev. Lee's journey starts in 1833 in Stanstead, Quebec. He collected donations for his Mission as he made his way to NY. From NY he traveled to St Louis where he met with William Clark. On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1834 he arrived at Independence and joined up with Nathaniel Wyeth, headed for the Rendezvous, who was to be his guide and 'captain' for the journey.

At 10 am on Monday April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1834 Milton Sublette led the train of seventy men and 250 horses, mules, and cattle out of Independence and into Indian Country. Jason Lee and his cows, the first to cross on the Oregon Trail, were in the rear. Inflammation of an old leg injury forced Milton Sublette to return to St

Louis. As he returned he met up briefly with his older brother William Sublette, Wyeth's competition, also headed for the Rendezvous.

As Lee crossed Kansas and Nebraska he offered the following thoughts :

*"It seemed to him as if his theological sea had suddenly become boundless, and he might sail unquestioned withersoever the winds should carry him. It was delightful, this cutting loose from conventionalisms, for even Methodist preachers are men .... He felt himself more than ever the chosen of God, as he was thus brought nearer him where he was sustained and guarded by day and at night folded in his starry covering" Jason Lee*

*"..but there is one difficulty: many of our young men become so effeminate for want of proper exercise and of too close application to their books, that they think they have not physical force or energy to leave their New England....Send your pale and emaciated dispepticks a trip to the Rocky Mountains and let them breathe His pure atmosphere and live awhile on buffaloe meat and they will find that such a trip is far more beneficial to them than all their dieting, and all the apothecary stuff!" Jason Lee*

June 20<sup>th</sup>, Friday they arrived at the Ham's Fork Rendezvous where Wyeth expected to do business, but William Sublette had arrived earlier and persuaded the partners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to renege on their contract with Wyeth. They, Wyeth and Lee, leave on Jul 2<sup>nd</sup>.

July 5<sup>th</sup>, they reached the Bear River in Idaho.



IOCTA members near where the Hudspeth Cutoff and main Oregon Trail split just west of Soda Springs

July 9<sup>th</sup>, they were at Soda Springs.

July 10th, they met up with Captain Bonneville who was in Idaho to spy on British activities in Oregon! ...or to frustrate David Thomson who was spying on the Americans!

July 16<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday, sees them at 'The Bottoms' of the Snake River and Wyeth determines to build a trading post using the surplus materials. The construction of Fort Hall begins. Here on Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup> the Rev Lee held the first Protestant religious service in Idaho and probably in the whole Mountain West. The service was followed by horse races in which a half-breed by the name Kanseau was killed. Lee conducted his burial service – another, if sadder, first.

*"At the time appointed about thirty Indians and as many whites, came together to hear the word of the Lord. Brother Lee (Jason's nephew Daniel) opened the meeting by reading the 15<sup>th</sup> Psalm and singing the hymn "The Lord of Sabbath Let Us Praise". Prayer and an address followed by J. Lee. The congregation gave the most profound and solemn attention and the whole season was encouraging, being the first season of public worship, I have enjoyed in five months"*  
Cyrus Shephard

*"We should note, though, that Rev Lee, although tolerant of human frailties, had been much impressed by the intemperate drinking and eating habits of the 'Mountain Men' which .... Inspired his choice as the text of Paul's warning message to the Corinthians, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"*  
Z A Mudge

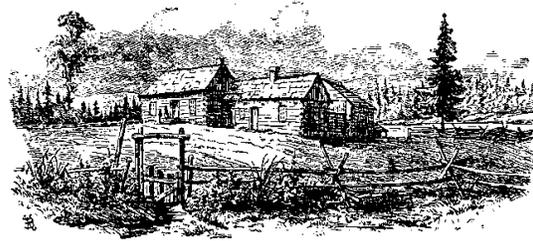
July 30<sup>th</sup> Lee sets out for Fort Walla Walla guided now by Thomas McKay as Wyeth stays to complete Fort Hall. They take the Trail on the south side of the Snake – the track which was to become the Oregon Trail. August 12 – 18 they rest at Three Island Crossing, (Glenn's Ferry) ID, where they have good pasture. McKay leaves them to head up to the Boise River. Lee continues his journey on the south bank – the future South Alternate of the OT.

September 1<sup>st</sup> after passing through Grande Ronde and the Blue Mountains the party arrives at Fort Walla Walla, Washington

September 4 – 15 the team take a barge down the Columbia to HBC's Fort Vancouver where they meet

with Dr John McLoughlin. Late that month they explore the Willamette valley and select a site near present day Salem. By March of 1835, the Indian Mission School had been built and Lee was asking for families to be sent to the Mission – since 'white females would have far more influence among Indians than males.'

By late 1837 Lee felt the need to enlarge his mission program to include the more distant yet more certain goal of ministering to the incoming race of American pioneers.



Jason Lee's first Mission building

In March 1838 Lee returns east to promote white colonization of Oregon by the USA..

In September of 1838 Lee speaks to 'the opportunity in Oregon' at Springfield and then Peoria in Illinois. This promotion is the stimulus for the decision by the Peoria Party in May 1839 to colonize Oregon for the USA and drive out the British. They are among the first 'settlers' to blaze the Oregon Trail.

Later that year he is in Washington DC to present a petition to Congress. He proposes to expand the presence of the Wesleyan Missionaries in Oregon and this is agreed. He and these new Missionaries sail to Oregon in the Lausanne arriving in 1840 with 51 others in 'The Great Expansion'. This is the same year that Father Pierre-Jean De Smet passes through Wyoming and Idaho on his way to the Flathead Indians in Montana (see next article on page 6).

#### **Reading**

'Jason Lee Prophet of the New Oregon', Cornelius Brosnan, The MacMillan Co, 1932

'Hope Maintains Her Throne', Jim Hardee, Sublette County Historical Society, 2018.

'The Diary of Rev Jason Lee', Early Journal Content on JSTOR (Digital).

'Across the Wide Missouri', Bernard Devoto, Houghton Mifflin, 1947.

# Oregon California Trail Beginnings: the Father De Smet Connection

by Don Wind, Rigby, Idaho

Pierre-Jean De Smet (1801-1873) traveled to America as a young man in 1821, from what is today Belgium, to join the Society of Jesus (S.J.), a Catholic religious order commonly called Jesuits. Once he was ordained a priest in 1827, Father De Smet committed himself to establishing permanent Indian missions in the Missouri River Valley, the Rockies and the Pacific Northwest.



*Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. Source: Oregon Jesuit Archives*

Father De Smet's story is fascinating, having a positive, far-reaching impact on the peoples of America and Europe in the 1800s. In the course of his work with the Indian tribes of the West, he travelled from St. Louis to the Northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest 18 times. Of significance to the Idaho portion of the Oregon California Trails, Father De Smet travelled through Soda Springs and Fort Hall in 1841 and played a significant role in the success of the first emigrant wagon train to pass through Idaho on the Oregon California Trail.

Responding in 1840 to requests from the Flathead Tribe for "Black Robes" to visit them, Father De Smet traveled portions of what was to become the Oregon Trail to the Green River Rendezvous near present-day Pinedale, Wyoming, before heading north to Pierre's Hole, Henry's Lake, the Three Forks area of Montana, Fort Union and returning to St. Louis via the Missouri River.

Promising the Flathead Tribe to return the next year, Father De Smet embarked on his second trip to the Rocky Mountains in 1841. He boarded the paddle wheeler *Oceana* in St. Louis with his companions on April 30<sup>th</sup> to begin the trip. Although De Smet had travelled as far as the Green River Rendezvous the prior year, he sought out a guide to help ensure the success of his trip. After steaming up the Missouri River, De Smet encountered mountain man Thomas Fitzpatrick in Westport, Missouri and hired him as a guide. At about the same time, the Bidwell-Bartleson party, who were members of the newly-formed Western Emigration Society, had the goal of traveling to California, but had no idea how to get there. John Bidwell admitted "Our ignorance of the route was complete. We knew that California lay west, and that was the extent of our knowledge." Bidwell later wrote ". . . we were ready to start [from Sapling Grove, Kansas], but no one knew where to go, not even the captain [John Bartleson]. Finally, a man came up and announced that Catholic missionaries were on their way from St. Louis to the Flathead nation of Indians with an old Rocky Mountaineer [Thomas Fitzpatrick] for a guide, and that if we would wait another day, they would be up with us. We waited for them to come up; and it was well we did, for otherwise probably not one of us would ever have reached California, because of our inexperience."

John Bidwell requested and received permission to merge his westward-bound pioneers with Father De Smet's party. The route to Soda Springs established by the combined parties became the primary route for future emigrants determined to reach California and Oregon. Indeed, with this trek, Oregon California Trail emigration was born!

In his book titled *Encyclopedia of Exploration*, author Carl Waldman wrote "Pierre De Smet contributed to U.S. exploration and settlement by helping guide the first wagon train westward. The route he and [Thomas] Fitzpatrick followed became the primary route for thousands of emigrants heading for California via the Oregon and California Trails."

The Bidwell-Bartleson party consisted of sixty-nine members – men, women and children. Father De Smet's party was comprised of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Father Nicolas Point, S.J., French artist, architect, and college educator; Father Gregory Mengarini, S.J., Italian linguist, physician, and musician; three Jesuit brothers, three Canadian teamsters and Iroquois Indian and professional hunter John Gray, for whom Grays Lake in eastern Idaho and Greys River in western Wyoming are named. Others who joined the De Smet Party included three trappers and three sightseers seeking adventure, although they parted company with the trekkers at Fort Laramie and the Green River.

The Jesuit missionaries' four two-wheeled carts, called Red River carts, formed the vanguard of the combined parties, each drawn by two mules hitched in tandem. The three Jesuit priests rode saddled horses, while the three brothers tended the carts and wagon with the assistance of three teamsters. They followed the Santa Fe Trail for two days out of Sapling Grove before branching off on a faint path used by fur traders who had already made the journey to Fort Laramie.



*Example of a Red River Cart*

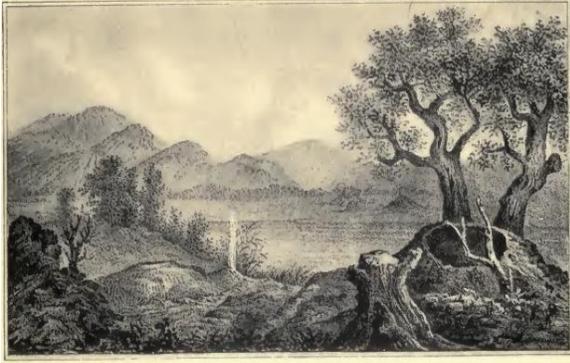
On May 16th, 1841, Father De Smet wrote in his journal: "I hope that the journey will end well; it has

begun badly. One of our wagons was burned on the steamboat; a horse ran away and was never found; a second fell ill, which I was obliged to exchange for another at a loss. Some of the mules took fright and ran off, leaving their wagons; others, with wagons, have been stalled in the mud. We have faced perilous situations in crossing steep declivities, deep ravines, marshes and rivers."

In his memoirs, John Bidwell described De Smet as a person: "He was genial, of fine presence, and one of the saintliest men I have ever known. He was a man of great kindness and great affability under all circumstances; nothing seemed to disturb his temper. Sometimes a cart would go over, breaking everything in it to pieces; and at such times Father De Smet would be just the same – beaming with good humor."

In July the travelers had difficulty finding enough buffalo to kill. The difficult terrain meant the wagon train was travelling at a slower pace. The journey from Fort Laramie to Soda Springs took forty-eight days to cover 560 miles, an average of twelve miles per day. When the combined parties reached the site of the 1840 Green River Rendezvous, De Smet found Flathead Indian Francis Xavier awaiting his arrival as agreed the previous year at the Three Forks of the Missouri.

Travelling west from the Rendezvous site, the party trekked near present-day Cokeville, Wyoming and Montpelier, Idaho arriving at the Soda Springs on the Bear River on August 10, 1841. In his writings, Father De Smet described his observations in Soda Springs: "Some places on Bear River exhibit great natural curiosities. A square plain presents an even surface of fuller's earth of pure whiteness, like that of marble. Situated near this plain are a great many springs, differing in size and temperature. Several of them have a slight taste of soda, and the temperature of these is cold. The others are of a milk-warm temperature and must be wholesome. In the same locality there is a remarkable spring, which has made for itself a little mound, of a mixed stony and sulphurous substance, in the shape of an inverted kettle. It has only a small opening at the top; from this hole issue alternately a jet of water and a gush of steam. The earth for some distance around resounds like an immense vault and is apt to frighten the solitary traveler as he passes along."



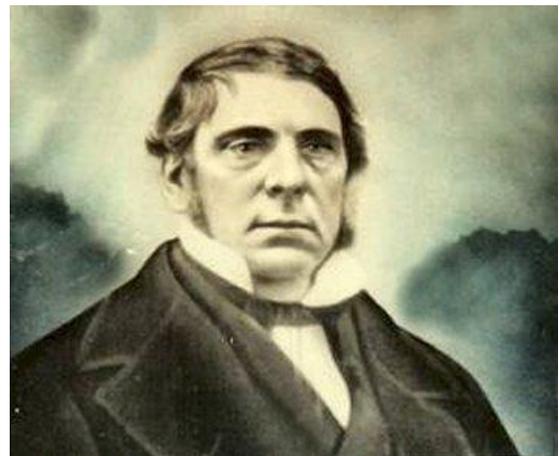
*Engraving of a scene in the Soda Springs area by Father Nicolas Point, member of the De Smet party, 1841. This is one of the earliest known illustrations of the Soda Springs area, published in 1843 in Father De Smet's book, Letters and Sketches: with a Narrative of a Year's Residence Among the Indian Tribes of the Rocky Mountains. Source: California Digital Library.*

Father De Smet's observations were brief because he departed that same evening for Fort Hall with the Flathead Indian Francis Xavier. After crossing a mountain pass, they followed the Portneuf River, passing several friendly Shoshone families along the way, arriving at Fort Hall on August 12<sup>th</sup>. The rest of De Smet's group departed the Soda Springs area on August 11<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Fort Hall on August 14<sup>th</sup>. At Fort Hall, De Smet wrote that Frank Ermatinger, employed by the Hudson's Bay Company as the chief factor, treated the Jesuits with great kindness, even selling them goods at cost or a liberal discount, a generous consideration inasmuch as it was a thousand miles to the next supply outlet. De Smet appreciated Ermatinger's obliging attitude, though Father Mengarini scoffed at the "bargains." In his judgment the chief factor inflated prices excessively and could therefore afford to offer a discount. Mengarini also was not impressed with the quality of Ermatinger's goods, noting that "toro," his freshest product merely combined portions of buffalo meat, grease and berries.

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, Father De Smet was met by a vanguard of the Flathead Indians who gratefully received their "Black Robe" as an answer to their prayers. The Flathead Indians escorted Father De Smet and his missionary party from Fort Hall to the

Bitterroot Valley where he founded St. Mary's Mission south of present-day Missoula.

On August 11, the Bidwell-Bartleson party traveled about six miles to the valley west of Soda Springs and divided, with half of the party proceeding to Oregon via Fort Hall, and the other half following the west bank of the Bear River to the Great Salt Lake, en route to California. At this point, Thomas Fitzpatrick parted company with the wagon train, having completed his assigned work and having business to attend to elsewhere. Fitzpatrick had urged John Bidwell to abandon his trek to California and travel to Oregon instead, citing the dangers of an untested route. Bidwell rejected that advice and courageously headed for California, crossing the San Joaquin River on November 3 and arriving at the foot of Mount Diablo, not far from San Francisco Bay, on November 4.



*Frank Ermatinger, chief factor at Fort Hall, 1841*

As for the Oregon-bound settlers, having reached Fort Hall, they successfully negotiated with Frank Ermatinger to guide them to the Willamette Valley. Ermatinger did so and remained in Oregon for much of the next five years. In 1845, Ermatinger completed construction of his home in Oregon City. It is on the national register of historic places and is recognized as the oldest standing home in Clackamas County.

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# *Diaries Across Idaho*

## Snake River Plain – Major Osborne Cross

By Jerry Eichhorst

Although the last Dairies Across Idaho spoke of the Snake River Plain, I elected to continue with another article describing conditions on the Snake River Plain. Major Osborne Cross was in command of the supply train for the Mounted Riflemen, under Colonel Mackay, on a trip to Oregon. He had been directed by the United States Quartermaster, General Thomas S. Jesup, to keep a detailed record of the journey. This report was published as part of the report of the quartermaster in 1850. The following account by Cross depicts the crossing of the Snake River Plain extremely well.

*August 4, 1849*

*We commenced our journey today for Fort Hall, which was not more than an ordinary day's march, but the fatigue of the teams of yesterday and the heavy, sandy road that we were to pass over between this and Fort Hall made it very doubtful if we accomplished the distance today, [it] being twenty-two miles. The first division left the encampment at six a.m. The morning was cold and as clear as you generally find in this country. Being calm, it indicated heat in the middle of the day. We descended a long hill which brought us into a sandy plain. This extends to Fort Hall and [to] the banks of the Portneuf [river]. After taking a circuitous route through the hills [it] strikes the road again at the base of the hills which we had just descended, making [the distance] eighteen miles from our encampment of the second. We continued along its banks for some distance, [then] it diverg[es] from the road and passing through the plain reach[es] the Snake river valley where it falls into the river about fifteen miles below Fort Hall.*

*Throughout the day the sand was very heavy, and the middle of the day [was] extremely warm. During the day the train became, in many instances, completely exhausted. At sundown we were just entering the valley of the Snake river,*

*Lewis's fork of the Columbia river. [We were] compelled from necessity to leave some of the wagons on the plain until the next morning, the mules having become too much exhausted to get them along.*

*As you cross the valley to approach the river there are many small streams to pass over, where the banks are miry and dangerous. [This condition was] rendered still [worse] in proportion to the number of wagons that had passed over them. It was therefore very late in the evening before the regimental train got into camp. The supply train [was so late that I was compelled] to park it until the next morning on the banks of a very miry pool. To have attempted to pass it in the night would have endangered the wagons. This was in sight of the command, which had nothing to do but ride forward in the morning and rest quietly until the arrival of the two trains in the [afternoon]. It was a very severe day's march, and though not a long distance, [it] was felt by the whole command, even by those who had but little to do and were therefore very little exposed.*

*Major Osborne Cross, March of the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen to Oregon in 1849, Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Washington, 1967*

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