

Spaniards, and among them I saw a young Spanish woman from Taos, whom I found to be Beckwith's wife.

*July 10th.*—We parted with our hospitable host after breakfast the next morning, and reached St. Vrain's Fort, about forty-five miles from St. Helena, late in the evening. This post is situated on the South Fork of the Platte, immediately under the mountains, about seventeen miles east of Long's Peak. It is on the right bank, on the verge of the upland prairie, about forty feet above the river, of which the immediate valley is about six hundred yards wide. The stream is divided into various branches by small islands, among which it runs with a swift current. The bed of the river is sand and gravel, the water very clear, and here may be called a mountain stream. This region appears to be entirely free from the limestones and marls which give to the Lower Platte its yellow and dirty color. The Black Hills lie between the stream and the mountains, whose snowy peaks glitter a few miles beyond. At the fort we found Mr. St. Vrain, who received us with much kindness and hospitality. Maxwell had spent the last two or three years between this post and the village of Taos; and here he was at home, and among his friends. Spaniards frequently come over in search of employment; and several came in shortly after our arrival. They usually obtain about six dollars a month, generally paid to them in goods. They are very useful in a camp, in taking care of horses and mules; and I engaged one, who proved to be an active, laborious man, and was of very considerable service to me. The elevation of the Platte here is five thousand four hundred feet above the sea. The neighboring mountains did not appear to enter far the region of perpetual snow, which was generally confined to the northern side of the peaks. On the southern, I remarked very little. Here it appeared, so far as I could judge in the distance, to descend but a few hundred feet below the summits.

I regretted that time did not permit me to visit them; but the proper object of my survey lay among the mountains farther north; and I looked forward to an exploration of their snowy recesses with great pleasure. The piney region of the mountains to the south was enveloped in smoke, and I was informed had been on fire several months. Pike's Peak is said to be visible from this place, about one hundred miles to the southward; but the smoky state of the atmosphere prevented my seeing it. The weather continued overcast during my stay here, so that I failed in determining the latitude, but obtained good observations for time on the mornings of the 11th and 12th. An assumed latitude of  $40^{\circ} 22' 30''$  from the evening position of the 12th, enabled me to obtain, for a tolerably correct longitude,  $105^{\circ} 12' 12''$ .

*July 12th.*—The kindness of Mr. St. Vrain had enabled me to obtain a couple of horses and three good mules; and with a further addition to our

party of the Spaniard whom I had hired, and two others, who were going to obtain service at Laramie's Fork, we resumed our journey at ten, on the morning of the 12th. We had been able to procure nothing at the post in the way of provision. An expected supply from Taos had not yet arrived, and a few pounds of coffee was all that could be spared to us. In addition to this, we had dried meat enough for the first day; on the next, we expected to find buffalo. From this post, according to the estimate of the country, the fort at the mouth of Laramie's Fork, which was our next point of destination, was nearly due north, distant about one hundred and twenty-five miles.

For a short distance, our road lay down the valley of the Platte, which resembled a garden in the splendor of fields of varied flowers which filled the air with fragrance. The only timber I noticed consisted of poplar, birch, cottonwood, and willow. In something less than three miles, we crossed Thompson's Creek, one of the affluents to the left bank of the South Fork—a fine stream, about sixty-five feet wide, and three feet deep. Journeying on, the low dark line of the Black Hills lying between us and the mountains to the left, in about ten miles from the fort we reached *Cache à la Poudre*, where we halted to noon. This is a very beautiful mountain stream, about one hundred feet wide, flowing with a full swift current over a rocky bed. We halted under the shade of some cottonwoods, with which the stream is wooded scatteringly. In the upper part of its course, it runs amid the wildest mountain scenery, and, breaking through the Black Hills, falls into the Platte, about ten miles below this place. In the course of our late journey, I had managed to become the possessor of a very untractable mule—a perfect vixen—and her I had turned over to my Spaniard. It occupied us about half an hour to-day to get the saddle upon her; but, once on her back, José could not be dismounted, realizing the accounts given of Mexican horses and horsemanship; and we continued our route in the afternoon.

At evening we encamped on Crow (?) Creek, having travelled about twenty-eight miles. None of the party were well acquainted with the country, and I had great difficulty in ascertaining what were the names of the streams we crossed between the North and South Forks of the Platte. This I supposed to be Crow Creek. It is what is called a salt stream, and the water stands in pools having no continuous course. A fine-grained sandstone made its appearance in the banks. The observations of the night placed us in latitude  $40^{\circ} 42'$ , longitude  $104^{\circ} 57' 49''$ . The barometer at sunset was 25.231; attached thermometer at  $66^{\circ}$ . Sky clear, except in the east, with a light wind from the north.

*July 13th.*—There being no wood here, we used last night the *bois de vache*, which is very plentiful. At our camp this morning the barometer



was at 25,235; the attached thermometer 60°. A few clouds were moving through a deep-blue sky, with a light wind from the west. After a ride of twelve miles, in a northerly direction, over a plain covered with innumerable quantities of *cacti*, we reached a small creek in which there was water, and where several herds of buffalo were scattered about among the ravines, which always afford good pasturage. We seem now to be passing along the base of a plateau of the Black Hills, in which the formation consists of marls, some of them white and laminated; the country to the left rising suddenly, and falling off gradually and uniformly to the right. In five or six miles of a northeasterly course, we struck a high ridge, broken into conical peaks, on whose summits large boulders were gathered in heaps. The magnetic direction of the ridge is northwest and southeast, the glittering white of its precipitous sides making it visible for many miles to the south. It is composed of a soft earthy limestone and marls, resembling that hereafter described in the neighborhood of the Chimney rock, on the North Fork of the Platte, easily worked by the winds and rains, and sometimes moulded into very fantastic shapes. At the foot of the northern slope was the bed of a creek, some forty feet wide, coming, by frequent falls, from the bench above. It was shut in by high perpendicular banks, in which were strata of white laminated marl. Its bed was perfectly dry, and the leading feature of the whole region is one of remarkable aridity, and perfect freedom from moisture. In about six miles we crossed the bed of another dry creek; and, continuing our ride over a high level prairie, a little before sundown we came suddenly upon a beautiful creek, which revived us with a feeling of delighted surprise by the pleasant contrast of the deep verdure of its banks with the parched desert we had passed. We had suffered much to-day, both men and horses, for want of water; having met with it but once in our uninterrupted march of forty miles, and an exclusive meat diet creates much thirst.

"*Las bestias tienen mucha hambre*," said the young Spaniard, inquiringly; "*y la gente tambien*," said I: "*amigo*, we'll camp here." A stream of good and clear water ran winding about through the little valley, and a herd of buffalo were quietly feeding a little distance below. It was quite a hunter's paradise; and while some ran down toward the band to kill one for supper, others collected *bois de vache* for a fire, there being no wood; and I amused myself with hunting for plants among the grass.

It will be seen, by occasional remarks on the geological formation, that the constituents of the soil in these regions are good, and every day served to strengthen the impression in my mind, confirmed by subsequent observation, that the barren appearance of the country is due almost entirely to the extreme dryness of the climate. Along our route the country

had seemed to increase constantly in elevation. According to the indication of the barometer, we were at our encampment five thousand four hundred and forty feet above the sea.

The evening was very clear, with a fresh breeze from the south, 50° east. The barometer at sunset was 24.862, the thermometer attached showing 68°. I supposed this to be a fork of Lodge Pole Creek, so far as I could determine from our uncertain means of information. Astronomical observations gave for the camp a longitude of 104° 39' 37", and latitude 41° 08' 31".

July 14th.—The wind continued fresh from the same quarter in the morning; the day being clear, with the exception of a few clouds in the horizon. At our camp at six o'clock the height of the barometer was 24.830, the attached thermometer 61°. Our course this morning was directly north by compass, the variation being 15° or 16° easterly. A ride of four miles brought us to Lodge Pole Creek, which we had seen at its mouth on the South Fork; crossing on the way two dry streams, in eighteen miles from our encampment of the past night, we reached a high bleak ridge, composed entirely of the same earthy limestone and marl previously described. I had never seen anything which impressed so strongly on my mind a feeling of desolation. The valley, through which ran the waters of Horse Creek, lay in view to the north, but too far to have any influence on the immediate view. On the peak of the ridge where I was standing, some six or seven hundred feet above the river, the wind was high and bleak; the barren and arid country seemed as if it had been swept by fires, and in every direction the same dull ash-colored hue, derived from the formation, met the eye. On the summits were some stunted pines, many of them dead, all wearing the same ashen hue of desolation. We left the place with pleasure; and, after we had descended several hundred feet, halted in one of the ravines, which, at the distance of every mile or two, cut the flanks of the ridge with little rushing streams, wearing something of a mountain character. We had already begun to exchange the comparatively barren lands for those of a more fertile character. Though the sandstone formed the broken banks of the creek, yet they were covered with a thin grass; and the fifty or sixty feet which formed the bottom land of the little stream were clothed with very luxuriant grass, among which I remarked willow and cherry (*Cerasus virginiana*); and a quantity of gooseberry and currant bushes occupied the greater part.

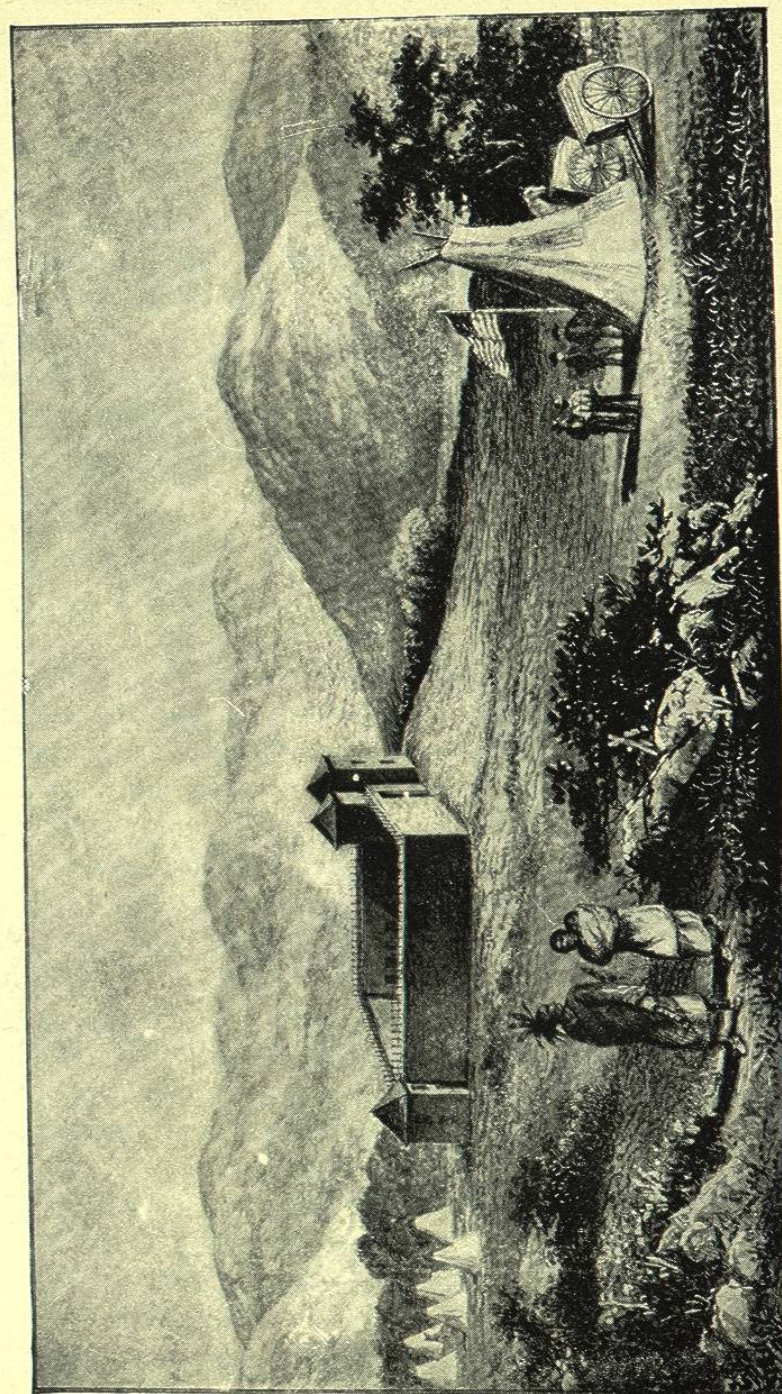
The creek was three or four feet broad, and about six inches deep, with a swift current of clear water, and tolerably cool. We had struck it too low down to find the cold water, which we should have enjoyed nearer to its sources. At two P.M. the barometer was at 25.050, the attached



thermometer  $104^{\circ}$ . A day of hot sunshine, with clouds, and a moderate breeze from the south. Continuing down the stream, in about four miles we reached its mouth, at one of the main branches of Horse Creek. Looking back upon the ridge, whose direction appeared to be a little to the north of east, we saw it seamed at frequent intervals with the dark lines of wooded streams, affluents of the river that flowed so far as we could see along its base. We crossed, in the space of twelve miles from our noon halt, three or four forks of Horse Creek, and encamped at sunset on the most easterly.

The fork on which we encamped appeared to have followed an easterly direction up to this place; but here it makes a very sudden bend to the north, passing between two ranges of precipitous hills, called, as I was informed, Goshen's Hole. There is somewhere in or near this locality a place so called, but I am not certain that it was the place of our encampment. Looking back upon the spot, at the distance of a few miles to the northward, the hills appear to shut in the prairie, through which runs the creek, with a semi-circular sweep, which might very naturally be called a hole in the hills. The geological composition of the ridge is the same which constitutes the rock of the Court-house and Chimney, on the North Fork, which appeared to me a continuation of this ridge. The winds and rains work this formation into a variety of singular forms. The pass into Goshen's Hole is about two miles wide, and the hill on the western side imitates, in an extraordinary manner, a massive fortified place, with a remarkable fulness of detail. The rock is marl and earthy limestone, white, without the least appearance of vegetation, and much resembles masonry at a little distance; and here it sweeps around a level area two or three hundred yards in diameter, and in the form of a half-moon, terminating on either extremity in enormous bastions. Along the whole line of the parapets appear domes and slender minarets, forty or fifty feet high, giving it every appearance of an old fortified town.

On the waters of White River, where this formation exists in great extent, it presents appearances which excite the admiration of the solitary voyageur, and form a frequent theme of their conversation when speaking of the wonders of the country. Sometimes it offers the perfectly illusive appearance of a large city, with numerous streets and magnificent buildings, among which the Canadians never fail to see their *cabaret*; and sometimes it takes the form of a solitary house, with many large chambers, into which they drive their horses at night, and sleep in these natural defences perfectly secure from any attack of prowling savages. Before reaching our camp at Goshen's Hole, in crossing the immense detritus at the foot of the Castle Rock, we were involved amid winding passages cut by the waters of the hill; and where, with a breadth scarcely large enough



FORT LARAMIE.



for the passage of a horse, the walls rise thirty and forty feet perpendicularly. This formation supplies the discoloration of the Platte. At sunset, the height of the mercurial column was 25.500, the attached thermometer  $80^{\circ}$ , and wind moderate from S.  $38^{\circ}$  E. Clouds covered the sky with the rise of the moon, but I succeeded in obtaining the usual astronomical observations, which placed us in latitude  $41^{\circ} 40' 13''$ , and longitude  $104^{\circ} 24' 36''$ .

*July 15th.*—At six this morning the barometer was at 25.515, the thermometer  $72^{\circ}$ ; the day was fine, with some clouds looking dark on the south, with a fresh breeze from the same quarter. We found that in our journey across the country we had kept too much to the eastward. This morning, accordingly, we travelled by compass some  $15^{\circ}$  or  $20^{\circ}$  to the west of north, and struck the Platte some thirteen miles below Fort Laramie. The day was extremely hot, and among the hills the wind seemed to have just issued from an oven. Our horses were much distressed, as we had travelled hard, and it was with some difficulty that they were all brought to the Platte; which we reached at one o'clock. In riding in toward the river, we found the trail of our carts, which appeared to have passed a day or two since.

After having allowed our animals two hours for food and repose, we resumed our journey, and toward the close of the day came in sight of Laramie's Fork. Issuing from the river hills, we came first in view of Fort Platte, a post belonging to Messrs. Sybille, Adams & Co., situated immediately in the point of land at the junction of Laramie with the Platte. Like the post we had visited on the South Fork, it was built of earth, and still unfinished, being enclosed with walls (or rather houses) on three of the sides, and open on the fourth to the river. A few hundred yards brought us in view of the post of the American Fur Company, called Fort John, or Laramie. This was a large post, having more the air of military construction than the fort at the mouth of the river. It is on the left bank, on a rising ground some twenty-five feet above the water; and its lofty walls, white-washed and picketed, with the large bastions at the angles, gave it quite an imposing appearance in the uncertain light of evening. A cluster of lodges, which the language told us belonged to Sioux Indians, was pitched under the walls, and, with the fine background of the Black Hills and the prominent peak of Laramie Mountain, strongly drawn in the clear light of the western sky where the sun had already set, the whole formed at the moment a strikingly beautiful picture. From the company at St. Louis I had letters for Mr. Boudeau, the gentleman in charge of the post, by whom I was received with great hospitality and an efficient kindness, which was invaluable to me during my stay in the country. I found our people encamped on the bank, a short distance above the fort.



All were well: and in the enjoyment of a bountiful supper, which coffee and bread made luxurious to us, we soon forgot the fatigues of the last ten days.

*July 16th.*—I found that, during my absence, the situation of affairs had undergone some change; and the usual quiet and somewhat monotonous regularity of the camp had given place to excitement and alarm. The circumstances which occasioned this change will be found narrated in the following extract from the journal of Mr. Preuss, which commences with the day of our separation on the South Fork of the Platte.

*"July 6th.*—We crossed the plateau or high land between the two forks in about six hours. I let my horse go as slow as he liked, to indemnify us both for the previous hardship; and about noon we reached the North Fork. There was no sign that our party had passed; we rode, therefore, to some pine-trees, unsaddled the horses, and stretched our limbs on the grass, awaiting the arrival of our company. After remaining here two hours, my companion became impatient, mounted his horse again, and rode off down the river to see if he could discover our people. I felt so *marode* yet, that it was a horrible idea to me to bestride that saddle again; so I lay still. I knew they could not come any other way, and then my companion, one of the best men of the company, would not abandon me. The sun went down; he did not come. Uneasy I did not feel, but very hungry; I had no provisions, but I could make a fire; and, as I espied two doves in a tree, I tried to kill one; but it needs a better marksman than myself to kill a little bird with a rifle. I made a large fire, however, lighted my pipe—this true friend of mine in every emergency—lay down, and let my thoughts wander to the far east. It was not many minutes after when I heard the tramp of a horse, and my faithful companion was by my side. He had found the party, who had been delayed by making their *cache*, about seven miles below. To the good supper which he brought with him I did ample justice. He had forgotten salt, and I tried the soldier's substitute in time of war, and used gunpowder; but it answered badly—bitter enough, but no flavor of kitchen salt. I slept well; and was only disturbed by two owls, which were attracted by the fire, and took their place in the tree under which we slept. Their music seemed as disagreeable to my companion as to myself; he fired his rifle twice, and then they let us alone.

*"July 7th.*—At about ten o'clock, the party arrived; and we continued our journey through a country which offered but little to interest the traveller. The soil was much more sandy than in the valley below the confluence of the forks, and the face of the country no longer presented the refreshing green which had hitherto characterized it. The rich grass was now found only in dispersed spots, on low grounds, and on the bot-

tom land of the streams. A long drought, joined to extreme heat, had so parched the upper prairies, that they were in many places bald or covered only with a thin growth of yellow and poor grass. The nature of the soil renders it extremely susceptible to the vicissitudes of the climate. Between the forks, and from their junction to the Black Hills, the formation consists of marl and a soft earthy limestone, with granitic sandstone. Such a formation cannot give rise to a sterile soil; and on our return in September, when the country had been watered by frequent rains, the valley of the Platte looked like a garden: so rich was the verdure of the grasses, and so luxuriant the bloom of abundant flowers. The wild sage begins to make its appearance, and timber is so scarce that we generally made our fires of the *bois de vache*. With the exception of now and then an isolated tree or two, standing like a light-house on the river bank, there is none whatever to be seen.

*"July 8th.*—Our road to-day was a solitary one. No game made its appearance—not even a buffalo or a stray antelope; and nothing occurred to break the monotony until about five o'clock, when the caravan made a sudden halt. There was a galloping in of scouts and horsemen from every side—a hurrying to and fro in noisy confusion; rifles were taken from their cover; bullet-pouches examined: in short, there was the cry of 'Indians' heard again. I had become so much accustomed to these alarms, that now they made but little impression on me; and before I had time to become excited the new-comers were ascertained to be whites. It was a large party of traders and trappers, conducted by Mr. Bridger, a man well known in the history of the country. As the sun was low, and there was a fine grass patch not far ahead, they turned back and encamped for the night with us.

"Mr. Bridger was invited to supper; and, after the *table-cloth* was removed, we listened with eager interest to an account of their adventures. What they had met we would be likely to encounter; the chances which had befallen them would probably happen to us; and we looked upon their life as a picture of our own. He informed us that the condition of the country had become exceedingly dangerous. The Sioux, who had been badly disposed, had broken out into open hostility, and in the preceding autumn his party had encountered them in a severe engagement, in which a number of lives had been lost on both sides. United with the Cheyenne and Gros Ventre Indians, they were scouring the upper country in war parties of great force, and were at this time in the neighborhood of the *Red Buttes*, a famous landmark, which was directly on our path. They had declared war upon every living thing which should be found westward of that point; though their main object was to attack a large camp of whites and Snake Indians who had a rendezvous in the Sweet Water