

ACROSS THE NEVADA DESERT

When Brigham Young came into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake on July 24, 1847, he said, "If our enemies will give us ten years in these mountains unmolested, we shall ask no odds of them." It seems a strange coincidence that ten years later to the day, almost to the hour, messengers arrived bringing word that the government of the United States was sending an army to put down the rebellion in Utah.

Brother Brigham's response was instant: "With God's help, they shall NOT come here!"

The first move must be to gather in the scattered colonies, to arm and train all available men, and to set up barricades against the invaders. But the fastest messenger was the horse. When young John Pulsipher wrote seriously that his brother carried the word to some of the settlements, riding his own horse at a speed of fifteen miles an hour, he was saying that his brother was willing to sacrifice his best horse. To us, fifteen miles an hour seems slow, indeed, but no horse could keep up that gait for long. That is the reason the rider would carry in his hand an order for the Bishop of the town to supply a fresh horse immediately.

In this way they dispatched riders south through the towns as far as San Bernardino, north to Green River, and west to the Carson Valley in Nevada. It is with this last company that we are concerned here.

Co-captains of the group were Oliver B. Huntington and Peter

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Wilson Conover, both seasoned frontiersmen.

Upon orders of Brigham Young, Conover had collected a group of fourteen young men in their late teens and early twenties, whose business was to go east to harass the approaching army. Then, sensing the need for ammunition with which to carry on this war, President Young changed these orders and sent the company west to the Carson Valley to call home the saints of that area and to secure ammunition from the coast. Since Oliver B. Huntington had been over the route two years before with Lieutenant Colonel Steptoe, he was appointed to accompany the group as guide.

Both captains kept careful journals, so we are able to follow them day by day, and re-live with them this grueling trip.

Oliver B. Huntington began his account:

"In 1857 Sat. Aug. 15 I was called upon by the First Presidency to go to Carson Valley for the purpose of calling the brethren home. I started Monday 17th about five o'clock a.m. Reach the settlement in Rush Valley about 4 p.m. on the 18th where I found P. W. Conover with a party of 14 from Provo. Names: (here arranged alphabetically)

Bean, George W.	Moore, S. B.
Canfield, David	Order, Everet
Carter, Lyman	Peck, James
Dalton, S. C.	Townsend, J. F.
Daniels, George	Wheeler, Wesley
Dudley, Joseph	Whitney, Joshua
Hoops, William	Wilson, Urvin (Ervin?)

"Joshua Whitney and I messed and packed together. I furnished four mules for the trip." These would be pack animals.

Their dates agree perfectly, but often one would insert an item or two overlooked by the other. For example: On August 25 Huntington

notes: "During the night our guard dug and found water with sticks and knives. Watered all the animals tolerably."

On August 25 they came to the Hastings road and to "Breakdown Pass." At ten o'clock they nooned at a creek where there was plenty of water. After noon they came to where the road was so steep that they must all dismount and lead their horses up. At the top of the mountain they could see behind them the whole route of their journey, while before them the cliffs were high and dangerous. At this place Hastings had been forced to take his wagons apart and lower them piece by piece with ropes, and then re-assemble them below. They had cut long poles to slide the wagon boxes down on, and these poles were still lying at the bottom where Hastings had left them. Hence the name "Breakdown Pass."

As for this company of horsemen, the business of getting their animals down without accident was a major victory. Then back to the desert floor, the problem was the lack of water. Streams that had been running in June two years before, now in August were only dry gulches. The group pushed on into the night, but again found no water where water had been before.

On Sunday, August 30th they came at nine o'clock to the place where they had been sure of water. It too was dry. Ten or fifteen miles ahead, there must certainly be this creek that had been running so lively before. They reached it at three p.m. to find it stone dry.

What to do now? Their mission was so urgent that they must not turn back. The next water ahead was seventy miles. Overcome by the heat, Huntington had rolled off his horse and was unconscious on the sand, all his faculties evidently dried up. Conover and Bean

were two miles behind, trying to help along a horse that was almost to fall.

Two teen-age boys, Joe Dudley and Stephen Moore, had started toward a green clump of brush high on the side of the mountain. If they found water, they said they would send up a smoke signal.

Conover and Bean, seeing the young men start up the mountain toward the green spot, turned their animals in that direction. One pack mule, smelling water, almost pulled Conover off his horse in his haste to reach it. By the time the boys had the smoke signal going well, others were on their way. Steve Moore was wearing a bright red shirt, and as he came running down the mountain side, leaping over the brush, some thought that he was on horseback. He ran six miles to carry water to his perishing companions, as did also Joe Dudley. Conover's account is so vivid that we quote briefly from it:

...Joe Dudley met me with half a gallon of water. Oh! what a draught! It seemed like I never in my whole life tasted anything half so good. I rode my horse right into the water, and commenced drinking and throwing water on myself and horse.... Then I turned my attention to the others as they came up. When they began to drink I would throw water on them.

Dave Canfield came up and began drinking. I was going to throw some on him, when he turned and said if you throw water on me I will shoot you. I laughed at him and said, Why Dave you will kill yourself. It is none of your business if I do, he said. He drank until he could drink no more and turned and crawled around on the ground. Oh, the pain he was in! I called one of the boys to come and help me drag him to the hill. We each took a leg and started up the bank him kicking and trying hard to get loose. We dragged him to the top of the bank, then the water commenced running out of his mouth like water running out of a hole in a barrel. Then he called for more water and I went and got him a quart which he drank. I said, you have nearly killed yourself now. His animal stood where he had left it. I told one of the boys to get his blanket off the horse and spread it out and lay him on it. We laid him in the shade of a cedar, where he laid like a dog until night. After that he was all right.

Huntington's experience was quite different. While Conover and Bean and several of the other boys were drinking at the spring, he was still back on the burning sand, deaf and blind and unconscious. "All my faculties seemed to be dried up," he wrote later. When the cry, "Smoke! Smoke!" rang out, most of the boys with new courage started toward it. Meeting Steve Moore with his canteen full, they each took but a few swallows, and encouraged him to hurry on because, "Oliver is about gone!" But Oliver knew enough to restrain himself from taking too much. He wrote:

I drank one swaller at first, but could not taste it, then in a minute 3 or 4 and so on, increasing a little after every minute or two until my judgment checked me. I sat up and talked, until I felt my faculties returning. Then I rode toward the water, praising God in my soul as I rode along. Within two miles I met Bro. Conover with a canteen of water out of which I took a good drink, rode on another mile and met Joe Dudley with another canteen out of which I ventured to take my fill.

The captains decided to spend a whole day here, resting and recovering from the past strain. They were all hungry. Some of the boys started to hunt, but found only a few currants that had dried on the bushes and some wild rose seed-balls. Conover cooked the remaining mush into a thin gruel, which he divided among them, a half-cup for each.

The boys had been told to go and butcher the horse that had not been able to get to water, so by the time the mush was finished off, some came with strips of meat from the hind-quarter. This they roasted on the Coals, eating it as fast as it was cooked. Their hunger satisfied, they went back and brought the remaining edible meat, which they proceeded to "jerk" or dry. This they did by putting it into a boiling salt

solution for a few minutes--long enough to set the blood---and then hang it on a rope "line" in the sun.

Huntington resolved to be prepared for the seventy-mile desert which he knew lay ahead. This he did "by cleansing all the small guts, cut them in links about 2 feet long and filled them with water, tied both ends together, and in this way took 8 or 10 gallons with us, besides all the canteens full." With this extra water he was able to save a young mare that laid down and lost a colt. He gave her two gut-links of water, and after a little while she got up and went on all right.

If some people today are shocked and repelled by this procedure, they should be reminded that long before Father Abraham, the nomads of the Arabian deserts were using this method of carrying water. In every desert land, water carried in similar gut-link containers has saved the lives of both animal and man.

They started about an hour before sundown and traveled all night, which was a blessing to both man and beast. In the meantime, Conover, with Wesley Wheeler and a few others rode ahead to an Indian camp. Wheeler had been here before, and knew some of the Indian language. They asked the Chief how long it would take to go to Rag Town.

He said that if we went up the river, it would take all day, but that he could take us there in two hours. I told him that if he would take us there, we would pay him in tobacco and ammunition. So he agreed to pilot us to Rag Town, where we could get provisions.

Conover did get the provisions and return to the company, who were on their second day without food. While the two men report different amounts, both agree that they did bring flour, bacon, sugar, coffee, and tobacco, sufficient to last until they could get into the Mormon

settlements and be taken temporarily into Mormon homes.

Before proceeding further, perhaps we should give an over-all summary of the Mormon settlements in the Carson Valley, and the whole general vicinity. The first permanent settlers were the Salt Lake City merchants, John and Enoch Reese. A Mr. Robert Lyons, traveling overland to California, wrote: "...I arrived at the Mormon Station on July 20, 1850....There was one store where they kept for sale flour, beans, tea, coffee, sugar, dried peaches, sardines, tobacco, miner's clothing, overalls, shirts, etc. They had a good log house completed all but the roof."

The next year the Deseret News for May 15, 1851 noted that 10 or 12 wagons loaded with staple goods for trading and seeds for planting were headed for the Carson Valley, along with a herd of loose stock and horses. The Mormon station was a very busy center. Reference to the Mormon activities in the Carson Valley area were frequent during the next two years.

In 1854 and 1855 two large companies of Mormons were sent to colonize Carson Valley, for Brigham Young hoped to stretch the Utah line west to include this area. With a majority of Mormon votes, they could set up a county government there. These included Orson Hyde, Richard Bentley, William Price, Chester Loveland, and many others. They set up a saw mill in the Washoe Valley, and a grist mill. They had also built a central meeting house.

With their arrival in the Carson Valley, the boys from Utah had completed only the first part of their assignment, and with all its troubles, perhaps the easiest. For they were also charged to bring back

ammunition, to help settlers get ready to leave, and to drive some cattle to the coast to exchange for ammunition and other necessities.

II

The first business was to reach Chester Loveland, the President of the Stake, and deliver the letter from President Brigham Young. They had learned that one company of Mormons were already preparing to leave, but the instructions were that all should travel together. The letter in full is as follows:

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
S. L. City
Aug't 15, 1857

Elder Chester Loveland and the Brethren in Carson Co:

Dear Brethren:

We have concluded that it is wisdom that you should dispose of your property as well as you can and come home. If you cannot sell to advantage lease your places, and get your pay in advance.

We send this counsel to you by Express that you may avail yourselves of the present emigration to dispose of your property. We want you to secure as much ammunition as you can. Be wise, "and let not the right hand know what the left hand doeth." "A hint to the wise is sufficient." Make no noise about your business, but let all things be done quietly and in order. You are aware that you sell at better advantage if you can keep your own counsel.

The express party will remain and assist you in fitting up and return with you on the northern route. Brother W. R. Smith, who went to California with Capt'n Hooper's stock, will it is presumed be ready to come with you.

Come in one company, and keep together so that you can protect yourselves against all foes, both white and red.

We learn there is an army of from twenty five to thirty five hundred men now enroute for this Territory, besides some ten or twelve hundred teamsters &c seven hundred wagons with ox teams loaded with supplies; and about four hundred more mule and horse teams loaded with personal effects, camp equipage, &c, seven thousand beef cattle. The supplies are designed to last them fifteen months after they arrive in this Territory. We do not expect them to come here, although the last we heard of them,

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100 of the wagons were 180 miles on the way, and a train of 30 wagons starting every other day, and the troops were to start off the 15th of last month; they are to march on foot.

My counsel is for you to leave your farms with as good gentiles as you can, if you cannot sell to advantage, for we would just as soon own the property as not. Buy all the powder, Lead and Caps you possibly can, but do not tarry to go over into California, or at least to detain you any length of time.

BRIGHAM YOUNG

The company rode up to the home of Brother Chester Loveland, the Stake President, and waited for him to read the letter. He at once took steps to call together all the people in the immediate area, that they might get the message at once. The word would then be carried to every village and hamlet until every member should hear it. Then each could act accordingly. In the end, only three families decided not to return to Zion.

As to the boys who had made this long journey, we know of the activities of only a few. Whether the others remained in the area, each helping as he could, or whether they were given rations and were encouraged to return to Utah, we do not know. Three left written accounts from which we shall quote briefly.

George Washington Bean wrote:

...Meanwhile I was detailed with others to take surplus stock to California, make sales thereof, and to purchase wagons, teams and goods. I had charge of Brother John C. Nail's horned stock. I started with seventy head, little ones and big ones....

On top of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, I met a Mr. Douglass ...He offered to buy all our stock right there for \$1100, which price we agreed upon. He gave me a pencil order on a Placerville Bank, which proved to be good.

At Sacramento, Bean met Wm. R. Smith, agent for W. H. Hooper.

Smith had received the pay for Hooper's stock and was carrying over

\$24,000.00 in checks in payment. Small wonder he was nervous and fearful that he might be robbed. The two men purchased teams, wagons, harnesses, guns, ammunition, and supplies. They returned horseback, while others brought the powder and lead, guns and pistols.

Oliver B. Huntington wrote briefly of his activities:

After dinner I got on a fresh animal and rode to Genoa, 25 miles to mail the letters I had for California and to give the word to the brethren in Carson. Bro. Conover and C. Loveland also went in a wagon....We waited for the powder one week, hired teams to take it as soon as it arrived.

Robert Walker was a clerk in William Nixon's store, and he did much of the buying of the general stock of goods in San Francisco. So they started him with \$1260.00 in gold, to purchase the ammunition and have it delivered by boat to Stockton. Huntington and Conover decided that they should go out to meet the wagons to see that they arrived safely. Accordingly they traveled on horseback and rode long hours for three days until they came to Angels Camp high in the mountains. Conover had a letter of introduction to the tavern keeper from a Mr. Nickerson, so the two men, he and Huntington, were well treated. Conover was much concerned about whether Bob could get the ammunition.

I got up early and made inquiries about Bob Walker. I told the tavern keeper that I was anxious to hear from Walker. He said he would tell me in about an hour for \$2.50. I paid it. He went in and telegraphed and asked him if he had got what he went after, and the answer came back in about ten minutes that he had got all he went for and had it all ready to be shipped on the steamboat.

On the fourth day...the newsboy threw the daily paper in on the stand. I picked it up and read it. The first thing I saw was that Harney had started with, I am not sure whether the number is 15,000 or 1,500 to handle the Mormons. And that on the 22 of July, the Mormons and Harney had a fight, and that the Mormons had killed six-hundred of his men and that he had

gone back for reinforcements. That the Mormons had sent for two thousand dollars worth of ammunition and many pistols and guns, and that the Mormons with the ammunition must be stopped at some point; that the Governor had issued orders to stop them at Angel's Point. This then was the place where they must be stopped. I read this in the Sacramento Bee. I laughed....The tavern keeper said, What's up now? I told him I was laughing at this damned lie in the paper.

Said he, how do you know that it is a lie? I said, because I started out on the 17th, and the Mormons were all at home, minding their own business. Right there I gave him a Masonic sign and he returned it.

Said I, John, two heads are better than one. He called me into a back room and asked me what was up. We sat down on a sofa and I told him the whole truth, and what we had come for, and all about it. Well, he said, you have paid for it and you shall have it...

Next morning Travers handed me the key to his warehouse, where the goods were consigned to. Our horses were stabled close by....We had a tent and slept in it to guard them. When we went in to breakfast, the same paper came again, with the statement doubled. The miners that boarded at the tavern were determined to take the ammunition away from me as soon as it arrived.

It arrived on the 15th, in the night, in a big rainstorm. We were lying at the warehouse watching for it. I opened the gate myself for the wagons to come in. As soon as the wagons stopped, I slid under and loosened the trail wagon, and we ran it into the warehouse and locked it up. Then I came out and took the hind endgate out of the big wagon where the twelve thousand pounds of goods were. Just as I got that done about fifty men came pouring out, with a big Missourian at their head.

I said to them, Gentlemen, I am glad you have come, for I want to help to unload so that I can get away from here as soon as possible. The Captain said that what they had come for was the ammunition and that they were going to have it.

The first thing that presented itself in the big wagon was a big barrel of whiskey. The Captain took hold and helped me set it on the scales to weigh. When it was weighed, I put it on the platform and took a big augur down from overhead and bored a hole and drew a bucket full. We called on all hands to come and have a drink. They came to a man. Then the Captain and I got into the wagon and began handing out the goods, Walker weighing and loading into the other wagon, with

others helping him.

The Captain did not know anything about carrying powder in boxes, so as we handed out the cases of canister, the same as the other goods, he kept on until we had it all unloaded and loaded into the other wagon. It was now about 11 o'clock at night. The Captain was very much disappointed at not finding a keg of powder in the wagon, and got very mad and swore that if he had the man that printed that newspaper, he would hang him in a minute, for there was not a pound of ammunition, nor a gun, nor a pistol.

Then they began going by twos and threes, until there was not one of them with us....After all was still, I rolled out the trail wagon. I had reserved two small wagons to haul the ammunition in. We weighed it and loaded it onto these wagons. Then as the moon had risen the boys hitched up their teams and started right out. Huntington, Walker, and myself staid...to settle with the Tavern keeper and get our breakfast.

After breakfast the big Captain came to me and wanted to know what I was going to do with the guns and ammunition I had bought. I told him what I had bought was mine, and it was none of his business what I done with it. Well, said he, I will see you before you get to Carson. Well, said I, if you follow me, I will kill you and bury you without a sheet. We started out and I never did see the Captain again. Some of the miners did follow us, but they made us no trouble.

They arrived at Genoa on the 20th of September, and were there to see the first companies on the road west. By the 26th all were on their way: 123 wagons and about 450 souls. The men were divided into 12 companies; these were divided into two divisions, and all moved in order.

Huntington wrote that: "We traveled with the company until at the head of Humbolt River directly west of G.S.L.City, when Peter W. Conover, Evert Order, Wesley Wheeler, Gilbert Webb, and William Hoops, started the direct course, leaving the road, and made the city in 7 days; it took the company by going the road 14 days." These horsemen arrived on November 4th. They all were much concerned, for they knew that if

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the army had made any time at all, they could have reached the Valley at least three weeks before the ammunition so dearly paid for could reach there.

But what did they find? The Army had been stopped dead in its tracks on October 17, not by Mormon action, but by the weather. On that date a blizzard struck; by the 19th the thermometer dropped to 45 below zero. Of the 144 horses in the original command only 14 remained alive. Mules and cattle likewise were frozen in such numbers that the Army must wait until fresh animals could be brought from Santa Fe.

The Mormon troops had been called back home, with only a few at the outposts, and the citizens of Salt Lake City, relaxed and cheerful, enjoyed the holiday season and waited the approach of spring, when they must face the fact that the Army was actually going to come. That, of course, is another story.