

# Through Indian Country to California

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JOHN P. SHERBURNE'S DIARY OF THE  
WHIPPLE EXPEDITION, 1853-1854

Edited by Mary McDougall Gordon







A lithograph of Möllhausen's drawing of San Francisco Mountain. In this region the expedition celebrated a memorable Christmas Eve. Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society.

determined that the wagons should go under & trying with *all his influence & authority* to effect that result.

There appears now no great obstacle to prevent us taking our wagons to Calafornia [*sic*] & accomplishing that which has never been done before. I can already imagine the rejoicing of the friends of this road in that vicinity as they see a train of 12 or 15 wagons winding their way through the streets.

Christmas we hope to spend at Leroux' spring, on San Francisco Mountain, where there is an abundance of water & wood as well as grass for the animals. In one month we hope to cross the Colorado & in two months to enter Los Angeles—the distance being estimated at 400 miles.<sup>28</sup> The party on their return were remarkably hard looking, as the smoke from the pine wood had blackened their faces & would not yield to water. They had travelled about 25 miles since morning.

<sup>28</sup> Sherburne is too optimistic.

*December 21.* Ther. sunrise 26°5. Lay by today to recruit. Reduced transportation by throwing away pork barrels, boxes, mess-chests, harness, wagon covers, etc. Parke better tho' feverish. Teamster about the same.

*December 22.* Camp 88. Ther. sunrise 27°5. Made 11 m. 1812 ft.— Road good. No wood (excepting small bushes) or water in Camp. 9 p.m. snowing.

*December 23.* Camp 89. Ther. sunrise 28°. Started early this morning in the midst of a snow storm. Very cold throughout day. Ther. being at the highest 37°. We reached camp very late—about sundown, making but 13 m. 2242 ft. When we reached Camp snow was two and a half inches deep. It was very difficult travelling for the mules on account of the snow clogging the wheels and their feet. Before reaching Camp a number of them gave out and were obliged to be replaced by others. The night was intensely cold, the Ther. at 10 p.m. being down to 3°5, the coldest yet experienced by us. We had an abundance of wood as we encamped in thick timber of pine and cedar. Also good water.

It snowed nearly all the day and we were obliged to dismount often and build fires to warm ourselves. The road (excepting snow) was good, latter part being entirely volcanic. The place passed over by the wagons was a hard ground of ashes and cinders, on each side volcanic peaks and jagged rocks of lava.<sup>29</sup> As we rode on to a "mesa" it represented a vast amphitheater. On every side rose conical volcanic peaks, numbering about 10 or 12. We were on a huge plain perhaps 5 or 6 miles in width. On our right was a cañon about 70 ft. deep. Lieut. Ives and Dr. Kennely taken sick today with fever & ague (so says the Dr.). Ives quite sick.

Not much game on the road today, nothing seen excepting rabbits and one fox. Dr. Bigelow who left the road saw a herd of near 1000 antelope, and others of the party saw antelope and

<sup>29</sup>The expedition is entering the southern edge of what now is known as the San Francisco Volcanic Field. Called Sierra San Francisco by the Spaniards in the early seventeenth century, it was first described in print by Capt. Sitgreaves. The Sitgreaves trail moved in a loop along the northern edge of the Field back south around San Francisco Mountain to the Mogollon Rim, and then west toward Bill Williams Mountain. See Wallace, "Across Arizona to the Big Colorado," pp. 335-36.

blacktailed deer. On account of the mules 'tis decided to lay by tomorrow and also next day it being both Christmas and Sunday.

December 24. Ther. sunrise  $-3^{\circ}5$  (below zero). Lay by. Our Camp is near a number of caves, called "Conino Caves."<sup>30</sup> I visited them today with Mr. W. They are natural, being formed by the lava running from above. They number 30 or more. Some are very large and have from one to five smaller ones in back. They were formerly inhabited by the Conino Indians, from whence they derive their name. The traces of the Indians still remain in the shape of broken pottery, etc. In one of the largest caves were several niches apparently dug out in the wall and lined with pieces of pottery. Most of them were walled inside with dirt and stones, the front partially walled with stone. Dirt has recently fallen in these caves to a large amount but still in most of them I could stand erect and when inhabited were in all probability 10 or 12 ft. in height. The whole country in this vicinity is volcanic.

Tonight is one of the most memorable nights of our trip. Tomorrow being Christmas, a double ration was issued the men and preparations made for a merry Christmas. In the evening the Mexicans obtained permission to build fires, say mass and fire four rounds of cartridges in commemoration of "buenos [buenas] noches." They commenced soon after dark by setting fire to the thick trees round camp so that at one time there were near a dozen fires going, illuminating everything around. It was a grand sight to see the noble pines 100 ft. in height in a blaze shooting the forked flame high in the air. During the conflagration of pines one read mass and at certain portions of the service guns were discharged by the others.

Just after dark, Lieut. Jones came with the compliments of his mess for us to celebrate "buenos noches" by partaking of "egg-nog." Repairing to his tent, we found an abundant supply of bottles & glasses in the center of which was a bucket of "egg-

<sup>30</sup>Whipple named the Cosnino (not Conino) Caves during his exploration of Dec. 19. Cosnino was the term used by Antoine Leroux for the Havasupai Indians, a small band of Yuman stock living in the vicinity. Another name for the Havasupai was Coconino; like Cosnino, it was a corruption of the Moqui name for those Indians. See Whipple, *Report*, Dec. 19, 23, 1853; Stanley, *Diary*, Dec. 23, 1853.



nog." The remainder of the party had already assembled. After taking a "round" or so and having a few songs 'twas proposed to send for the Mexican songsters. They came numbering three or four. After instilling in them the "proper spirit" they favored us with a theatrical play in which "The Devil" played no small part. After this was finished the two opposition singers gave us a song, extemporaneously, first one singing a verse and then the other. They sang an hour or so, without ceasing and continued until obliged to stop from "exhaustion." In the course of the song they brought in every one of the party a number of times making some very laughable and amusing rhymes. The celebration broke up about 12 with every one of the party more or less merry. Even the steady old Dr. was unable to relieve his feet of his boots and was obliged to call in his Mexy boy to pull them off.

Whipple, *Report*: "Christmas Eve has been celebrated with considerable eclat. . . . An Indian dance, by some *ci-devant* Navajo prisoners, was succeeded by songs from the teamsters, and a pastoral enacted by the Mexicans, after their usual custom at this festival. Leroux's servant, a tamed Crow Indian, and a herder, then performed a duet improvisated, in which they took the liberty of saying what they pleased of the company present—an amusement common in New Mexico and California, where this troubadour singing is much in vogue at fandangoes. . . . The plaintive tones of the singers, and the strange simplicity of the people, lead one's fancy back to the middle ages. In this state of society, so free from ambition for wealth or power, where the realities of life are in a great measure subject to the ideal, there is a tinge of romance that would well repay the researches of a literary explorer."

*December 25.* Ther. sunrise 3:5. Visions of roast Turkeys, plum puddings and mince pies are rolling through my brain. I would like a slice off one of the many New England puddings today. Even if it were not of the best quality. Still I would not have it thought we were destitute of all the luxuries of life. I will give you the "Bill of fare" of our mess at dinner. "Leg of roast mut-ton," "Beef a la mode," "Bass," "Wild Duck," "roast squirrel," and "claret" formed part of the Bill. In one of the other messes they were so luxurious as to have "oyster soup" and "jam."<sup>31</sup> The day passed very pleasantly and much to the satisfaction of all.

<sup>31</sup> Lieut. Stanley's mess had the oyster soup. Only Sherburne and Stanley could bring themselves to write about food after the celebration the evening before.

*December 26.* Camp 90. Ther. sunrise  $-5^{\circ}5$  (below zero). Travelled 12 mi. 410 ft. and camped without water, though an *abundance* of snow. It was the intention to go to San Francisco spring but the mules were pretty well tired and 'twas thought expedient to camp before reaching it. The snow increased in depth being the latter part of the day about 12 in. deep. A few bare places served to partially graze the animals. An antelope shot today by Dr. Kennely, also numerous squirrels by members of the party. The squirrels of this country are very large with long hair on the ends of the ears, stripes of red on the back and long bushy tail, tipped with white. Dr. Kennely and Lieut. Ives quite sick today.

*December 27.* Camp 91. Ther. sunrise  $29^{\circ}$ . Travelled 12 m. 3956 ft. & halted at Leroux' spring—passed San Francisco Spring on route. Snow about 18 in. deep. Lieut. Ives broke out today with the varioloid.<sup>32</sup> Campbell, H. taken sick with symptoms of small pox. Several others slightly sick.

Whipple, Diary: "Where we are to go now is a great question that sits like a night-mare upon my breast. Leroux says we cannot proceed west nor southwest. North northwest to Savedra's [Sitgreaves's] route he proposes to lead us—then west & southwest to Mohave River. To that route I have several objections. It is circuitous. It is said to keep upon a dividing ridge, so as to be level for a long distance. Favorable as the latter may seem it follows of necessity that the descent to the Colorado must be sudden & precipitous so as to present an insurmountable barrier to a railroad. . . . We must therefore . . . descend Williams Fork to within striking distance of Rio Colorado. Both Leroux & Savedra say that terrible cañons & mountains render this impossible. Still we deem it proper to explore so as to satisfy ourselves by ocular proof."<sup>33</sup>

Whipple merely noted that it was a pleasant day, and Möllhausen piously observed that it passed "in perfect quiet, in thinking over past times and distant homes." See Stanley, Diary, Dec. 25, 1853; Whipple, *Report*, Dec. 25, 1853; Möllhausen, *Diary*, II, p. 154.

<sup>32</sup>Varioloid is a modified form of smallpox, occurring in those who have had smallpox or been vaccinated. Whipple named Leroux's (now simply Leroux) Spring when his exploring party first reached it on December 17. At the head of what is now Fort Valley, it is about seven miles northwest of Flagstaff, Arizona, and 7,600 feet above sea level. Leroux had discovered this fine watering place in 1851; the Sitgreaves expedition had approached it from a different direction, passing around the northern end of San Francisco Mountain. The Santa Fe Railroad later followed the Whipple reconnaissance route from Camp 82 (modern Winslow) to nearby Flagstaff. See Whipple, *Report*, Dec. 17, 1853; Wallace, "Across Arizona to the Big Colorado," p. 343.

<sup>33</sup>Whipple, of course, wanted to avoid following the Sitgreaves trail, which

*December 28.* Ther. sunrise 23°.5. Lay by today to recruit animals. Much difficulty in finding grass as 'twas mostly covered with snow. Campbell, H. quite sick today. Lieut. Jones taken sick tonight.

A small exploring party consisting of Mr. Whipple, White, Leroux, Sevadra & a Mexy went out today about 6 miles & returned about 3 p.m.<sup>34</sup> Found rather good country for wagons.

Stanley, Diary: "Dr. K. and myself determined to try and ascend to the top of San Francisco Mountain.<sup>35</sup> . . . After ascending more than two-thirds of the way to the top, we were compelled, much against our inclination, to stop as the labor became insupportable. . . . With the excellent glass we had, I could see quite well an extent of country much greater than the State of Ohio. On the east we could see to the Sierra Madre. West the Colorado. South the mountains on the Gila, but if the view was magnificent it was equally disheartening to the explorer for a railroad route. The country is decidedly one of mountains and chain upon chain can be seen in every direction. Our sight was equally discouraging as to the fate of our expedition. Snow covered the ground for fully eighty miles to the west and the Doct. and I pronounced the fate of our waggons at a glance."

*December 29.* Ther. sunrise 36°. Men obliged to lay by today on account of sickness & no means of transportation of them. There are eight on the sick list. A cook taken last night. San Francisco Mountain [Mt. Agassiz] measured yesterday & found to be 9688

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eventually veered to the northwest above the 35th parallel. Whipple depended on the Sitgreaves map, which showed Bill Williams Fork rising to the southwest of Bill Williams Mountain, and then flowing west into the Colorado River at the 35th parallel. But, on the basis of incorrect information from Leroux, the Sitgreaves party had mistaken an affluent of the Verde River for Bill Williams Fork. The source of the latter (the Big Sandy River) actually was 120 miles west of Leroux's Spring. From there the Big Sandy flowed to join the true Bill Williams Fork. See Wallace, "Across Arizona to the Big Colorado," p. 348; Foreman, ed., *A Pathfinder*, p. 174, n. 17; Conrad, "The Whipple Expedition in Arizona," p. 164.

<sup>34</sup>Whipple evidently ascended Wing Mountain, 5 miles southwest of Leroux's Spring. From this spot Whipple named a peak farther west after Capt. Sitgreaves, and another to the northwest after Major H. L. Kendrick, Sitgreaves' commander of escort. See Whipple, *Report*, Dec. 28, 1853; Barnes, *Arizona Place Names*, pp. 74, 86, 91; personal communication from Professor Andrew Wallace, Nov. 5, 1987.

<sup>35</sup>The San Francisco Peaks, named in the early seventeenth century by Franciscan missionaries, rim the caldera of an extinct volcano. The whole massif properly is called the San Francisco Mountain. The highest peak, Mt. Humphries, is 12,633 feet above sea level. Lt. Stanley and Dr. Kennerly probably attempted to



ft. above Camp being between 16000 & 17000 ft. above level of sea as this place is near 7000 ft. above. 'Tis thought by some to be a mistake, that it cannot be more than half so high. Quite probable will be measured again tomorrow. A party of four attempted to ascend it yesterday. Two gave out when near the bottom. The other two got about half way up & finding the snow two feet deep returned to camp pretty well exhausted.

*December 30.* Ther. sunrise 12°5. Lay by again today. The sick are all better this morning & no new cases. The Teamster who was dangerously sick was able to be out yesterday. This morning an exploring party consisting of Mr. Whipple, Dr. Bigelow, Campbell, A., White, & Leroux with Lieut. Tidball & 25 escort—also Mexys, cooks, servants, packmules, etc. etc.—started on a scout. They do not intend returning to this Camp, but propose sending us directions where to proceed. They took ten days rations & expect to be ahead for that length of time finding a road & occasionally or semi-occasionally sending back dispatches. We are anxious to leave this camp as a heavy fall of snow will lay us up. It is hardly possible to distinguish a White man from a Mexy, in this country. The timber is all heavy pine, giving out while burning a very black thick smoke. This smoke is settling on everything & everybody renders the skin so black as to entirely change a persons appearance & make him anything but an American in looks. The greatest difficulty is that only partially yielding to soap & water, it gives the face the appearance of a striped pig, or a warrior painted for the war party.

Another survey of San Francisco Mountain made today. It was found to be a mistake in the base line of 1000 ft., a 50 ft. chain being used in place of 100 ft. "Que suerte! Como es posible?" The mountain is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles distant & a little over 4600 ft. in height.<sup>36</sup> P.m.— Teamster took cold yesterday & in consequence very sick this morning. Very cool. Ther. 9 p.m. 17°5.

Stanley, Diary: "Everyone in camp presents the appearance of a coal

climb Mt. Agassiz, which rises directly above Leroux's Spring to 12,356 feet. I am indebted to Professor Andrew Wallace for advice on this region.

<sup>36</sup>The Spanish translates as "What luck! How is it possible?" The expedition has traveled approximately 360 miles on this leg of the journey.

heaver, or blacksmith who has neither indulged in the luxury of a wash, nor the extravagance of a clean garment for a long period. Our young gentlemen with white hats look most decidedly dirty—and all begin to wish ourselves at the end of our journey and our troubles over. Propose to move tomorrow; I fear the attempt—*nous verrons*.”