CHAPTER XX.
THE OLD DIVIDE TRAIL.
THROUGH JIMMY CAMP AND THE BLACK SQUIRREL PIMERIES.

From the Arkansas river, over the divide by way of Fountain and Jimmy Camp creeks, across the heads of Black Squirrel and Kiowa, and thence down Cherry creek to the South Fork of the Platte, led formerly a noted trail. It was the main thoroughfare between the Arkansas river and the South Platte, and was by no means for the first time a well travelled road when, in June of 1858, under Hick and Russell, passed over it as the vanguard of the great immigration to what was then known as "the Pike's Peak country" of which the junction of Cherry creek with the South Platte was destined to become the center. The span of its usefulness to white men was from time immemorial till the ranch fences blocked it.

This old trail -- especially in the sixties and later -- was often called "the Jimmy Camp Trail", or "Jimmy Camp Road". It formed one part of the series of roads collectively known as "the Cherokee Trail", and leading from the Cherokee country to California, and was therefore, in the fifties especially, sometimes rather misleadingly referred to as "the Cherokee Trail".

In his Annual Report of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories for 1858, referring to the Cherokee Trail proper, in Wyoming, A. E. Hayden says, "The old Cherokee trail derives its name from the fact that a party of these Indians cut their way through the thick pines, about thirty years ago, with a train of about 300 wagons."

The year was in fact 1850. The discrepancy in estimates being found in that part of the road north of Jimmy Camp Spring, and especially in that north of Black Foot Camp.

The camping places on this trail, as named in these itineraries, are: Fort el Pueblo; Fountain creek, where reached by the "Sixt out-off"; the present railway station of Brittle, something over 20 miles north of Pueblo; Fountain creek, where the Old Divide Trail left it, near the present town of Fountain; Jimmy's Spring, or Jimmy's Camp, which the several authorities agree in making 45 miles by trail from Fort el Pueblo; Black Squirrel creek, which the trail crossed a short distance west of present东ville, and which was, by the trail this and following place-names and distances were given by Colonel Loring. Black Squirrel creek is a branch of the South Platte or Ken Loring.
13 miles* north of Jimmy Camp; Point of Rocks*, known more commonly, since May, 1858, as "Dagin's Grave", on the dividing ridge, at the head of Kiowa creek, 6 or 7 miles* north of Black Squirrel; Black Foot* (called "Blackfoot camp" by Sage), about 12 miles* north of Rocks, and "still on the dividing ridge", this camp having "water" (now called Running creek, and then called Blackfoot creek?), about three-quarters of a mile west of the road; points on Cherry creek; junction of Cherry creek with the South Platte. In 1842, apparently near the present town of Parker, Sage found a camp where were living four families: those of three squaw-men and a Blackfoot Indian. He evidently erred in making the distance of this squawmen's camp 15 miles from Black Foot and 18 from the mouth of Cherry creek, since these two distances would be inconsistent with each other, the measured distance between Black Foot and the mouth of Cherry creek being, according to Loring, 42.5 miles. But as Sage seems to have considered it about midway between those two points, we place it near Parker.

Neither travel nor trail, of course, stopped at the mouth of Cherry creek as a terminus, prior to 1858; but the route between that point and Fort El Pueblo was descriptively known "the Divide Trail". The main road went on through present Denver and down the South Fork of Platte river, past the old trading posts, Fort Vasquez of the later thirties and Forts George, Lancaster, and Lock and Randolph of the early forties, whose presence in their times it accommodated, and thence down the main Platte to the Missouri, and by another branch, to Fort Laramie on the North fork of the Platte.

The old trail that continued the Divide trail northward and constituted the "artery of commerce" between Santa Fe and Bent's Fort, Fort El Pueblo, Taos, and other northern points of the south, and the northern posts of the Platte became later a military and general road between the United States army posts in those respective regions; and Smiley, in his excellent and laboriously wrought History of Denver, tells us that it "passed through the site of Denver City" along the general line of Fifteenth street, crossing Cherry creek at the intersection of Blake street, and the Platte river at the foot of Eleventh (old Ferry) street.

There was also a trail, sometimes mentioned as a northwesterly connection of the Divide Trail, that branched off to the left at the yet-to-be Denver, crossing to the west side of the river below Cherry creek, and keeping nearer the mountains (a few miles west of Loveland, and now present La Porte and Virginia Dale), passed around the Medicine Bow range and thence northwesterly to the Oregon trail, and westward to Fort Bridger; but the history of these trails, so far at least
well known, dates from subsequent to the discovery of gold in California. Such a trail, in 1850, was travelled by a party of Cherokee, as part of their route (the so-called Cherokee Trail) from the Cherokee Nation to California; other parts of the Cherokee Trail being formed by the much older Santa Fe Trail and by the Old Bent's Fort branch of the latter and the prehistoric Old Divide Trail, etc.

In closing April and early May of 1858, during the "Mormon War", Captain Randolph B. Marcy had passed over the trail with a force of soldiers and "about a hundred of the best horsemen, hunters and Indian fighters in New Mexico," escorting a large relief train of provisions and supplies for the army of Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston in Utah.

Prior to that, and back to 1849, it had been used every year by some portion of the great influx to "golden California," including Norton's party of 1853 (the Cherokee party of 1850), and many others; and still earlier by some of the immigration to Oregon. In those years it was also traversed by many trappers and traders — Anglo-American, French and Spanish, with and without pack-trains and wagons — and by semicivilized Cherokee, Shawnee and Delaware hunters, and by Indians of the wild tribes, singly and in parties.

In the summer of 1853, Kit Carson, with two friends and a number of hired shepherds, drove a flock of 3,600 sheep from New Mexico over the Old Divide Trail to Fort Laramie, and thence to California, where they realized on them handsomely, sheep at that time commanding exorbitant prices at the Golden Gate.

In the spring of 1847, it was travelled by a community of Mormon families, bound to Salt Lake, from the temporary (or, cabin village) in which they had spent the previous winter at what is now Pueblo, Colorado.

On the opening day of April of the same year, a similar place of mingled tragedy and romance is the English traveller, Ruxton, in his "Life in the Far West". Although, with the Chase family of the Mormon faith, they had wintered in a Mormon village near Fort El Pueblo, left them, they had arrived somewhat in advance of the Mormons to continue their journey to the Pacific. Following the trail northward, they had made camp at Black Rock, north of the Pueblo, when they were attacked by some Arapahoes. Old Mr. Chase was wounded.

two of his grandchildren killed, their lonely grave to be marked and protected from wolves by a simple cairn on the bank of the Pueblo River, where their ashes now rest; and his daughter, Mary, was well nigh taken prisoner by the Indians.
From these strong affirmations there can be no doubt that the Chase party was attacked by the Arapahoes on the Old Divide Trail, on or near the crest of the divide; though Ruxton, who seems to have been present a witness of the affair, has taken liberties with some of the details, to make his story a little more romantic. The only question that concerns us here especially, is as to the exact place; or in other words, as to the identity of Ruxton's "Black Horse creek". There neither is nor was, so far as the present writer can learn, any creek of that name between the Arkansas and Platte rivers; and by "Black Horse" Ruxton must have meant either Blackfoot (the then current name of a well-known camping place on the Old Divide Trail, near the head of what is now called Running creek, and apparently also for the latter creek itself) or Black Squirrel*. His letter to the

*He makes a similar substitution in the first chapter of the book (page 9, second edition) where he apparently the same locality, as "Black Tail". Confusions in fact abound, apparently to a needless extent, in Ruxton's writings. To cite another example from among the many, both in "Life in the Far West" and in his "Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains" (the latter a record of his travels), he makes it William Bent who was killed in the Taos massacre (night of Jan. 19, 1847), whereas it was William's older brother, Charles, (first territorial United States governor of New Mexico) who was so killed. William, the long-time and noted trader of Bent's Fort, did not die till 1869. Such an error as the latter, seems at first almost inexcusable, in view of Ruxton's actual visiting of Taos, Bent's Fort, etc., in that part of country; but we are more than willing to concede the mistakes of so interesting a writer, and it may be said, that his observations at any one place were usually brief and his writings hastily composed under difficulties, and printed without due opportunity for revision.

In 1845, Col. Stephen W. Kearny traversed this trail with a command of five well mounted and equipped companies (each of 50 men) of the 1st Regiment of U. S. Dragoons, in his expedition from Fort Leavenworth to the Rocky Mountains. His route was westward up the Platte and its North fork to South Pass; thence back to Fort Laramie; thence south, by way of the Old Divide Trail, to the Arkansas river; and thence westward down the latter stream and by the Santa Fe and branch trails to Fort Leavenworth. With this command were conveyed two mountain howitzers. We have only brief account of this expedition in the 1856 Report of the Secretary of War, and Socket's Scenes and Adventures in the Rocky Mountains. The map of the official report of the expedition shows route and dates of camps.

*The 1856 Report of the Secretary of War, and Socket's Scenes and Adventures in the Rocky Mountains. The map of the official report of the expedition shows route and dates of camps.
The abandonment of Fort St. Vrain. For a while previous to this, in the early forties, there was maintained over this highway, between the great Bent's Fort and its auxiliary establishment, Fort St. Vrain, a regular weekly express, for the conveyance of correspondence, money and other valuables between the two posts, a sort of "pony express", as the frontier carriers of a later day would perhaps call it, but rather slower generally than the pony express of the sixties, as the horseman was often encumbered with one or two pack-animals when a considerable quantity of merchandise or specie was to be transmitted. It was established, says "Uncle Dick" Wooton, (who for a while was one of the express-messengers), in 1842; and was continued through the winter of '42-'43 and possibly through the winter next following.

The summer of 1843, Fremont's second expedition to the Rocky Mountains used part of this old thoroughfare in proceeding from Bijou Basin to Fort el Pueblo, at the mouth of the Fountain, and retraced the whole of it on his way back to Fort St. Vrain.

In the fall of 1842, Rufus B. Sage, who, like Fremont, was a college-bred man and an intelligent traveller, observer and recorder of his observations, though only an humble hunter, trader and adventurer during his stay in the Rocky Mountains, threaded the old road with a party of five other wilderness wanderers, mounted on stout horses and leading two pack-mules, from Fort Lancaster to Taos, whence he went with Robidoux to Fort Uintah, far west of the Rockies.

But a few days or weeks earlier than this, a dozen or more swarthy Mexicans had toiled up over the divide, with a pack-train from Taos, "laden with flour, corn, beans, onions, dried pumpkin, salt and red pepper, to barter for robes, skins, furs, meat, moccasins, bows and arrows, ammunition, guns, coffee, calico, cloth, tobacco and old clothes", with which precious freight, a short time afterward, they plodded the old road back again.

Four years before this, in 1838, the heavy ox-wagons of the caravan of Sublette and Vasquez, the traders, had creaked their lumberous way from Independence, Missouri, in one of the dryest and hottest of summers, "pushing heavily" over the still more famous old Santa Fe trail to the "Crossing of the Arkansaw", and thence up the latter river, past Bent's Fort, to the mouth of the Chico (or, less probably to the mouth of the Fountain, at which Fort el Pueblo had not yet at that time been constructed), and thence up the Fountain and Jimmy Camp creeks, by this ancient highway, across the divide, to the South Platte, for the completing and stocking of Fort Vasquez, their trading post.
Before, in the middle or late thirties, the trader James Daugherty had left his name to Daugherty’s or Jimmy Camp creek, or to Jimmy’s Spring; and ere, in 1834, Fort Laramie (the second “Fort William” of the central Rocky Mountains) had been built on Laramie river; and ere young William Bent had married into the Cheyenne tribe through a chief’s family and induced the Cheyennes to bring their winter villages to the Big Timber of the Arkansas and make there their general headquarters, within convenient trading distance of the firm’s location; it is practically certain that the said young Bent, of the firm of Bent, St. Vrain & Company, had for several years used the Old Divide Trail for conveying, by pack-train, company trading goods from Bent’s Fort (the first “Fort William” of the central Rocky Mountains, begun in 1828-’29 and finished in 1832) to villages of the Cheyennes in the “Black Hills” country* and bringing back the peltries obtained in his trade. Indeed the region of the Laramie hills in what is now southeastern Wyoming. These hills then bore the same name as did those between the forks of Cheyenne river in present South Dakota.

It is probable that William Bent or other members or employees of the firm, had similarly used the same trail even from the time of the small pittance trading post which is said to have been the great fort’s predecessor of 1826, the date of the Bent brothers’ first coming to the upper Arkansas valley; and that it was so used by Company of Gantt and Blackwell, who made the first treaty of peace and trade with the Arapahoes of the upper Arkansas valley in 1831 or 1832, and in the latter year built a post on the north side of the Arkansas, about six miles below Mountain creek, which post they operated during the winter of 1832-’33.

The trail was probably travelled over, in part of its course, at least, in the eighteenth century by Spaniards and Frenchmen, and in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century by several French and American wanderers, such as James Pursley, and members of the parties of Lalande in 1804, “Zeke” Williams in 1811-’13, Phillibert in 1814, Chouteau and DeMun in 1816-’17, Meriwether in 1819-’20, Silvestre Pratte in 1824 (and perhaps earlier) to 1828, General Ashley in the winter of 1824-’25, and perhaps Louis Vasquez and Antoine Robidoux in the twenties, besides other Anglo-American and French traders or trappers and Mexicans, but of those early journeys we have only known to have been to the Pike’s Peak region; but of these early journeys we are not well enough informed to confirm the presumption; and of early journeys over the Arkansas-Platte divide, mention in the Pike’s Peak region, the first of which we have any interesting details, is that of the noted fur-trader, William Sublette, which we will here relate, as there can be no reasonable doubt that this hardy trader was travelling by the Old Divide Trail.