

the rapid foaming current he reached the ice on the opposite shore a long way down the stream. He leaped from his horse upon the ice and soon had his noble animal by his side. The guide and myself forced in the pack animals and followed the doctor's example, and were soon on the opposite shore drying our frozen clothes by a comfortable fire, [Doubtless within the sheltering walls of Fort Uncompahgre, which was on the south shore of the Gunnison, at Robidoux's Ford, east of ~~the~~ ~~mouth~~ Robidoux Creek and not far west of the present town of Delta, Colorado.]

We took a new guide and started for Taos. "Here [at Fort Uncompahgre] our stay was very short. After being out some four or five days we encountered a terrific snow storm, which forced us to seek shelter in a deep ravine, [dark defile," says the letter to Gray] where we remained snowed in for four days, at which time the storm had somewhat abated, and we attempted to make our way out upon the highlands, but the snow was so deep and the winds so piercing and cold we were compelled to return to camp and wait a few days ~~for a change of weather~~ [evidently six, since that number added to the preceding "four" makes the "ten" mentioned in the letter to Gray] for a change of weather. Our next effort to reach the highlands was more successful; but after spending several days wandering around in the snow without making much headway, our guide told us that the deep snow had so changed the face of the country that he was completely lost and could take us no further. This was a terrible blow to the doctor, but he was determined not to give it up without another effort. We at once agreed that the doctor should take the guide and return to Fort Uncompahgre and get a new guide, and I remain in camp with the animals ~~at the house~~ ["feeding them on cotton-wood bark," says the letter to Gray] until he could return, which he did in seven days with our new guide, and we were now on our route again."

This route was probably the well-known one through Cochetope Pass, and San Luis Park; and the deep and dark ravine or defile of this detention camp of ten and seven days was probably in the region of White Earth, where the trail ascends to the highlands.

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The following story related in a lecture by Rev. H. H. Spalding, Whitman's fellow missionary in Oregon in the thirties and forties, and probably heard by ^{him} either from the doctor himself or from Lovejoy,

affords ~~some~~ interesting details of one of the "several attempts" which, according to the letter to Gray, were made, to push on from this deeply impounded detention camp; although the narrator is in error in naming "13th of January, 1843," as the date of the incident, ~~which~~ for in the letter to Gray, Lovejoy tells us that, before that date, Whitman had gotten far beyond the mountains, and was pushing on over the Plains to the east of Bent's Fort:

"On that terrible 13th of January, 1843, when so many in all parts of our country froze to death, the doctor, against the advice of his Mexican guide, left his camp in a deep gorge of the mountains of New Mexico, in the morning, to pursue his journey. But on reaching the divide, the cold became so intense, and the animals actually becoming maddened by the driving snows, the doctor saw his peril, and attempted to retrace his ~~steps~~ steps, and, if possible, to find his camp, as the only hope of saving their lives. But the drifting snow had totally obliterated every trace, and the air becoming almost as dark as night by the maddening storm, the doctor saw that it would be impossible for any human being to find camp, and commending himself and distant wife to his covenant-keeping God, he gave himself, his faithful guide, and animals up to their snowy grave, which was fast closing about them, when the guide, observing the ears of one of the mules intently bent forward, sprang upon him, giving him the reins, exclaiming: 'This mule will find the camp if he can live to reach it.' The doctor mounted another and followed. The faithful animal kept down the divide a short distance, and then turned square down the steep mountain. Through deep snow-drifts, over frightful precipices, down, down, he pushed, unguided and unurged, as if he knew the lives of the two men and the fate of the great expedition depended upon his endurance and his faithfulness, and into the thick timber, and stopped suddenly over a bare spot, and as the doctor dismounted—the Mexican was too far gone—behold the very fire-place of their morning camp! Two brands of fire were yet alive and smoking; plenty of timber in reach. The buffalo hides had done much to protect the doctor, and providentially he could move about and collect dry limbs, and soon had a rousing fire. The guide revived, but both were badly frozen. They remained in this secluded hole in the mountains several days, till the cold and the storm ~~was~~ abated."

Enroute again, "We reached Taos," says the letter to Atkinson, "in about thirty days, ~~we~~ suffered greatly from cold and scarcity of provisions. We were compelled to use mule meat, dogs,

and such other animals as came in our reach. We remained at Taos a few days only. ["15 days," says the letter to Gray] and started for Bent's and Savery's [Bent and St. Vrain's] Fort, on the head waters of the Arkansas river. When we had been out some ~~15~~¹⁵ or ~~20~~²⁰ days, ~~we~~ we met George Bent, a brother of Gov. Bent, on his way to Taos. He told us that a party of mountain men would leave Bent's Fort in a few days for St. Louis, but said we would not reach the fort with our pack animals in time to join the party. The doctor being very anxious to join the party so he could push on as rapidly as possible to Washington, concluded to leave myself and guide with the animals, and he himself taking the best animal with some bedding and a small allowance of provision, started alone, hoping by rapid travel to reach the fort in time to join the St. Louis party, but to do so he would have to travel on the Sabbath, something we had not done before. Myself and guide traveled on slowly and reached the fort in four days, but imagine our astonishment when on making inquiry about the doctor we were told that he had not arrived nor had he been heard of. I learned that the party for St. Louis was camped at the Big Cottonwood, ~~Big Timbers~~ [Big Timbers] forty miles from the fort, and at my request Mr. Savery [St. Vrain] sent an express, telling the party not to proceed any further until we learned something of Dr. Whitman's whereabouts, as he wished to accompany them to St. Louis. Being furnished by the gentlemen of the fort with a suitable guide, I started in search of the doctor, and traveled up ^[Purgatory] the river about one hundred miles. ^[The dates in the letter to Gray show that the distance could hardly have been so much] I learned from the Indians that a man had been there who was lost and was trying to find Bent's Fort. They said they had directed him to go down the river and how to find the fort. I knew from their description it was the doctor. I returned to the fort as rapidly as possible, but the doctor had not arrived. We had all become very anxious about him. Late in the afternoon he came in very much fatigued and desponding; said that he knew that God had bewildered ^{to punish him} him for traveling on the Sabbath. During the whole trip he was very regular in his morning and evening devotions, and that was the only time I ever knew him to travel on the Sabbath.

"The doctor remained all night at the Fort, starting early on the following morning to join the St. Louis party. Here we parted. [His, ~~the~~ according to ~~the~~ the letter to Gray, was on January 7th, Lovejoy having reached the fort on the 3d.] The doctor proceeded to Washington. [Says the letter to Gray, "I have no doubt the doctor's interviews with the President and others resulted greatly to the benefit of Oregon and the entire coast."] I

remained at Bent's Fort until spring, and joined the doctor ~~XXXX~~ the following July near Fort Laramie, on his way to Oregon in company with a train of emigrants."

We have one more anecdote of the battle of Whitman with this terrible winter. The scene of it was apparently on the Purgatory River. As ^{by Spalding} related in the lecture already referred to, it is as follows:

"At another time, with another guide, on the head-waters of the ~~XXXX~~ Arkansas, after traveling all day in a terrible storm, they reached a small river for camp, but without a stick of wood anywhere to be had except on the other side of the stream, which was covered with ice, but too thin to support a man erect. The storm cleared away, and the night bid fair to be intensely cold; besides, they must have fire to prepare bread and food. The doctor took his ax in one hand and a willow stick in the other, laid himself upon the thin ice, and spreading his legs and arms, he worked himself over on his breast, cut his wood and slid it over, and returned the same way. That was the last time the doctor enjoyed the luxury of his ax—so indispensable at that season of the year, in such a country. That night a wolf poked his nose under the foot of the bed where the ax had been placed for safe-keeping, and took it off for a leather string that had been wrapped around the split helve."

Of Doctor Whitman's condition on his arrival at St. Louis, Rev. William Barrows, D.D., who met him there on that occasion, wrote, ^{from the New York Observer,} as quoted in ~~Mowry's~~ "Marcus Whitman," "With all the warmth and almost burden of skin and fur clothing, he bore the marks of the irresistible cold and merciless storms of his journey. His fingers, ears, nose and feet had been frost-bitten, and were giving him much trouble."

And of the severity of the winter at St. Louis, the same writer bears testimony in his description of the doctor's crossing of the Mississippi, where he says, "Exchanging saddle for stage—for the river was closed by ice—he pressed on, and arrived at Washington March 31."

But notwithstanding its wide-spread severity, the winter of '42-3 did not impress itself upon the memories of pioneers and Indians in the Rocky Mountains as did that of "the Big Snow" ^{winter} which came two years later; and from this fact in part, and from the closeness of these two hard winters to each other, it has come to pass in later days, as already seen, that reminiscence has in some instances attributed to the latter winter, events that transpired in the former.

The winter next following that of '42-43, was on the whole rather

mild and open in the country west of the Mississippi. Cold and snows there were, of course, in the Rocky Mountains; but these were moderate, and spring set in early.

Of the weather at the eastern front of the ~~Rocky Mountains~~ Rockies on North St. Vrain Creek in December, 1843, Rufus Sage wrote, "The weather continued cold, and several falls of snow had occurred, covering the prairies to the depth of six or seven inches, and the mountains to the depth of many feet, though it rarely remained in the warm valleys and upon the sunny hill-sides to exceed three successive hours.....; the day time frequently affording a spring-like warmth, though the nights were usually cold. A peculiar species of grass among the hills retained its verdancy the entire season, as did also another variety in the valleys. Our horses and mules continued to thrive and even fatten upon the nourishing herbage thus afforded by these secret chambers of spring." Of February 26, 1844, on Clear Creek, he observed, "The fresh grass upon the hill-sides has assumed a thrifty appearance. Insects have begun to quit their winter retreats, and, ~~com-~~ mingling their shrill notes with the music of birds, hail the approaching spring. I was delighted to find in my rambles a cluster of wild flowers in full bloom, shedding their fragrance to the breeze from a sweet, sunny spot among the hills, and I sat for a time to admire its new-born loveliness." On the night of the 27th, to be sure, a light snow fell, and frost cut down these venturesome blossoms; but by the 4th of March, "spring" was "making rapid advances."

Far east of this, that winter, where Kansas City, Kansas, now nestles in the angle between the Missouri and Kansas rivers, the Wyandotte Indians, then recently arrived with families from Ohio and Michigan, were spared much suffering that must have ensued but for the mildness of the season, which enabled them to continue with the building of their houses throughout the winter.

The winter of 1844-5, ~~although~~ although colder than its immediate predecessor, does not seem to have been a ~~severe~~ ^{phenomenally} severe one in that eastern section of the Plains; but it was never forgotten by either white men or red men who witnessed it in the Rocky Mountains. ~~Colorado, and Wyoming.~~ By the red men of the latter region, and by white hunters, trappers, and traders as well, it was known as the time of the Big Snow.

In the days when many yet lived who had experienced it, the Utes and their neighbor nations never tired of telling about "the Big Snow." And among the whites—the "mountain men"—swapping stories around

wilderness camp fires, or before blazing hearths within the sheltering walls of trading posts and lone cabins from Bent's Fort to ~~near~~ ^{the upper} ~~the upper~~ ^{Missouri}, in the stores and saloons of Santa Fe, and in the snug adobe homes of many an old-time trapper who had at length been trapped by a sefforita and had settled down in that mountaineer's eden, Fernandez de Taos, "the Big Snow" was equally a favorite theme. And well might it have been so; for—as in another way that of '39-40 had done—it marked an epoch in Rocky Mountain history.

In Binckley and Hartwell's "Southern Colorado," a little work published ~~in~~ in Cañon City in 1879 as a historical and descriptive account of Fremont and Custer counties, we find the following, relative to this Big Snow:

"From the hunters and trappers, many of whom are still alive, the information is obtained, that in 1844 snow fell along the base of the mountains, to the depth of four feet, except in Cañon Park, where it was not over two feet, on an average. As it lay on the ground a long time, the consequent destruction of animals was very great, almost entirely destroying every species of large game, such as bison, elk, deer, antelope, etc."

Again, of the same event, we read in Capt. B. A. Rockafellow's History of Fremont County (contributed to the G. L. Baskin "History of the Arkansas Valley"), that ^{in 1860} the old French hunter and trader, "Maurice" (Maurice Leduc, who is said to have established himself on Adobe Creek about 1830,) told J. A. Toof, Esq., "that in 1844, four feet of snow fell all over his country, and lasted three moons, at the time of the great St. Louis inundation, and that it killed all the bison and many elk and deer. Mr. Toof thought it correct, as bison heads were seen all about the country."

"It is a singular fact," wrote George F. Ruxton, ~~the~~ ^{of 1846-7 as to} the English traveler, ~~recording his observations~~ ^{recording his observations} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~book~~ ^{book} ~~"Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains"~~ ^{"Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains"} "that within the last two years the prairies, extending from the mountains to a hundred miles or more down the Arkansas, have been entirely abandoned by the buffalo. Indeed, in crossing from the settlements of New Mexico, the boundary of their former range is marked by skulls and bones, which appear fresher as the traveler advances westward and toward the waters of the Platte. As the skulls are said to last only three years on the surface of the ground, that period has consequently seen the gradual disappearance of the buffalo from their former haunts. With the exception of the Bayou Salado, [South Park,] one of their favorite pastures, they are now rarely met with in large

bands on the upper waters of the Arkansas; but straggling bulls pass occasionally the foot of the mountains, seeking wintering-places on the elevated plateaus, which are generally more free from snow than the lowland prairies, by reason of the high winds."

From Ruxton's statement it would seem ~~that some of the~~ older and more decomposed skulls above referred to—those nearer the southern limit of the buffalo's former range—were of animals that had perished in the hard winter of 1842-43; ^{and earlier} but that the fresher ones seen westward (toward the Hardscrabble, or Adobe Creek, region) and northward (toward the Platte) from Fort Pueblo, the center of Ruxton's ~~advices~~ ^{advices}, were the relics of the wholesale destruction of piedmont buffalo by the Big Snow of 1844.

The late Benjamin Hall, ranchman of Fountain Creek, ~~and Colorado~~ and Colorado pioneer of 1861, was told by Col. Ceran St. Vrain that in the winter of the Big Snow the snow fell eleven feet deep on a level in Fountain Creek Valley; buffalo and antelopes gathered in herds, and walked round and round in the deep snow until they died. Several such bunches of buffalo were seen by Col. St. Vrain ^{near} where Colorado City now is; all one had to do was to walk up and shoot them. East ~~of~~ ^{of} Fountain Creek in 1861, Mr. Hall saw a number of "bone-yards" of both buffalo and antelope; and these he regarded as confirming ^{of snow named to the writer by Mr. Hall, seems incredible, and may} what Colonel St. Vrain had told him. The depth ^{have been a slip of} memory; but an indian trader is said to have seen a depth of 8 or 7 feet ^{at Cherry Creek.}

In connection with the killing around of buffalo in the deep snow, described by St. Vrain to Hall, the following observations in Fremont's "Memoirs" are of interest:

"The buffalo herds, when caught in such storms [the "poudreries," or blizzards, of the Missouri plateau] and no timber in sight, huddle together in compact masses, all on the outside crowding and fighting to get to the inside; and so, kept warm by the struggling, incessant motion, the snow meanwhile being stamped away under their feet, protect themselves from the fiercest storms." But it would seem that in the winter of the Big Snow, ~~in some~~ ^{in some certain} ~~portions of~~ ^{portions of} the Rocky Mountain region, such was the depth, incrustation, and persistence of the snow, that even this usually effective expedient could not avail to prevent death by prolonged cold and starvation.

The mountain buffalo were more favorably circumstanced; for most of these, ^{even in such a winter,} could forage on the quaking aspen. In giving an account of his third Rocky Mountain expedition, in the work above mentioned, Fremont says: "In a pine grove at the head of the [Arkansas] river ^{[on the 3d of September, 1845,} we came to our delighted surprise upon a small herd of buffalo, which were enjoy-

ing themselves in the shade and fresh grass and water. It was now very rare that these animals were found so far west, and this made for us a most pleasant and welcome incident, as it was long now since we had parted from the buffalo. This must have been a stray herd which had found its way into the upper mountains and ~~there~~ ^{here [misprinted "they"]} had remained for a long time undisturbed. Sometimes in severe winters deer find their way into the highest parts of the wooded mountains, and remain there, keeping fat and sheltered in the aspen groves which furnish them food.

Probably this little herd of buffalo had done the same. "They were doubtless of the dark variety called Mountain Buffalo or Wood Buffalo, some of which remained in the mountain parts of the Front Range till near the end of last century."

~~The Big Snow~~ ~~was a~~ ~~notably a~~ ~~Rocky Mountain~~ ~~region~~ ~~affair,~~ ~~(for~~ ~~the~~ ~~winter~~ ~~of~~ ~~1844)~~ ~~has~~ ~~not~~ ~~appeared~~ ~~to~~ ~~have~~ ~~been~~ ~~one~~ ~~of~~ ~~very~~ ~~remarkable~~ ~~character~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~lower~~ ~~parts~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~range.~~ ~~It~~ ~~was~~ ~~not~~ ~~confined~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~area~~ ~~of~~ ~~present~~ ~~Colorado,~~ ~~but~~ ~~prevailed~~ ~~over~~ ~~the~~ ~~entire~~ ~~Rocky~~ ~~Mountains~~ ~~and~~ ~~adjoining~~ ~~plains.~~

~~As mentioned in our~~ ~~published~~ ~~to~~ ~~Wyoming,~~ in Col. Richard Irving Dodge's "Hunting Grounds of the Great West," written in 1875, we read:

(a considerable part of the)

"Forty years ago the buffalo ranged from the plains of Texas to beyond the British line; from the Missouri and Upper Mississippi to the eastern slopes [and—he might truthfully have added—to parts also of the western slopes] of the Rocky Mountains. Every portion of this immense area was either the permanent home of great numbers of buffalo, or might be expected to have each year one or more visits from migratory thousands.

"Hunters' tradition says that the first great break in his regular irregularity occurred about the winter of 1844-5, in that portion of country now known as Laramie Plains. That whole section was visited by a most extraordinary snow-storm. Contrary to all precedent, there was no wind, and the snow covered the surface evenly to the depth of nearly four feet. Immediately after the storm a bright sun softened the surface, which at night froze into a crust so firm that it was weeks before any heavy animal could make headway through it.

"The Laramie Plains, being entirely surrounded by mountains, had always been a favourite wintering place for buffalo. Thousands were caught in this storm and perished miserably. Since that time not a single buffalo has ever visited the Laramie Plains. When I first crossed these plains in 1848, the whole country was dotted with skulls of buffalo, and all apparently of the same age, giving some foundation for the tradition. Indeed, it was in answer to my request for explanation of the numbers, appearance, and identity of age of these skulls, that the tradition was related to me by an old hunter, who, however,