

1846-1847 - Cooke and the Mormon Battalion. Neither Philip nor the Mormon Battalion were enthusiastic about each other when they first met as Cooke was a "Gentile" (in other words, not a Mormon), and Philip was never fond of volunteers. However at the end of their journey, Philip was full of praise for the battalion and they considered him to be, as Pvt. John Riser recalled, "One of the ablest officers in the Army". Philip wrote home that the column was handicapped in their march Westward due to the fact that the Mormons were accompanied by their families and that the size of the families multiplied frequently while en route to California. Despite his reservations, on Oct 13th, 1846, at the age of 37, he took command. Some of the women and children and those too ill to march - 273 people in all - wintered over at Pueblo.

While many of us have read the speech Col. Cooke gave upon reaching California, the fact is that besides "marching half-naked and half fed" there were many other challenges to be had as well. I hadn't given it much thought until I read "A true copy of my daily record, P.St. Geo Cooke, Lt. Colonel Comdg. San Luis Rey, Feby. 22d, 1847." in a book titled Exploring Southwest Trails 1846 - 1854 by Cooke, Whiting and Aubry and edited by Ralph P. Bieber in collaboration with Averam B. Bender. Porcupine Press Philadelphia 1974. It includes Cooke's journal published from the manuscript copy in the old files section of the adjutant-general's office entitled "Journal of the march of the Mormon Battalion of infantry volunteers under the command Lieut.Col. P.St. Geo. Cooke, also captain of dragoons, from Santa Fe N.M. to San Diego, Cal. - kept by himself by direction of the comd'g. General Army of the West." I prefer this journal to The Conquest of New Mexico & California for its immediacy.

On October 2 Kearny appointed Cooke to be the commander of the Mormon Battalion, and instructed him to lead it to California over the route being followed by his detachment of First dragoons. However, Kearny's progress was so slow that his guide Kit Carson, predicted that at the existing rate of travel, more than four months would be required to make the journey to Los Angeles. On October 9 Kearny decided to leave the wagons in New Mexico and continue the march with only the best of the available pack mules to expedite his march to the Pacific. He had planned to find the best wagon road and send his guides back to meet Cooke to conduct them without unnecessary delay, but on October 15 Kearny assigned Cooke "the task of opening a wagon road to the Pacific". This meant not only finding the road, but constructing it as well. Three days later Kearny made arrangements to provide guides for the Mormon Battalion, Charbonneau being one of them. These instructions were the last Cooke received before Kearny's arrival in California. Cooke wrote "But the experiment is not a fair one, as the mules are nearly broken down at the outset." However, rather than being daunted, my esteemed ancestor became even more determined to succeed.

On Oct 18 Cooke wrote in his journal "I have reluctantly consented to take five women - the wives of officers and sergeants. They are transported and provisioned at their own expense." The women ranged in age from 18 to 49 and one of them was pregnant on the trip. Their names were Phoebe Draper Brown, Melissa Burton Corey, Susanna Moses Davis, Nancy Brown Davis and Lydia Ann Edmunds Hunter. I'd like to acknowledge all of these brave women for their

courage, fortitude, and strength for marching so many miles from Council Bluffs to Santa Fe and on to California through incredibly rough and trying conditions. (Confirmation of names comes with thanks from Lucy Archer).

The march started on October 19th 1846 six days after Cooke had taken command. They had "sixty days' rations of flour, sugar and coffee, and salt, thirty of salt pork, and twenty of soap" for a journey which would take over 100 days to complete. He realized these were inadequate supplies, but this was all he could obtain in Santa Fe at the time. On October 23 Cooke wrote: "Our camp ground last night was on coarse sand and stone and little hillocks of bunch grass. There was wind and some rain, and I slept under a fallen tent. All my servants, too, are sick, and many of the men." ...."I am directed to keep a journal. I have not one minute of time unoccupied and am unwell. An influenza is prevailing. For several days before today, the heat and dust has been great, whilst I have been kept awake at night (sleeping under three blankets) by cold." On the 25th he still had a cold, there were black frosts nightly, and they had no fuel for fires.

Through reading the original journal I gained appreciation for:

Weather - which could go from extreme cold to the heat of summer in a single day. Drought, wind, gales, rain, snow. Once it was so cold that water froze in his hair while he was washing.

Livestock It was essential to herd sheep, and keep track of many "beeves", oxen and mules. The battalion would march at sunrise as otherwise the mules were hard to find and harness in the dark.

Roads Cooke found that constructing 10 miles of road as they went along was harder than marching 25 miles on a good road. They faced a wide variety of different conditions rocks, soft sand, hard clay, clumps of grass, etc.

Maps On Nov 20 he wrote "I discover that the maps are worthless; they can be depended on for nothing".

Baggage To get rid of extra weight and facilitate travel, Cooke cut down on the number of men, returning 55 who were "weakly or old or debilitated or trifling" to Santa Fe. He returned most of the wagons and instead packed weight on the mules (60-80 lbs) and oxen (200 lbs each). He even got rid of the upright tent poles, substituted muskets in their place, and reduced the tents to one for nine men. On Nov 22 there were three wagons to a company. Each wagon would take the lead alternatively stopping for one and a half hours until all had passed by.

Water Cooke was constantly concerned about the amount of water for the animals and men, which he considered to be "the biggest risk" especially when faced with a drought and a long march across the desert. There were several wives of officers on the march which had to be provisioned for privately. At one point when they were desperately digging for water Cooke asked for a washtub owned by one of the Captains and his wife. They refused. Cooke was astonished "That they were unwilling to give up that valuable article almost our lives depending

on it, it seemed to me. I had it taken".

Food Rations were often short and at times the men were reduced to eating the guts of the animals. On Dec 28th he wrote that "Marching with knapsack, blanket and musket as well as building roads along the way gave the men enormous appetites so "When the rations became insufficient stealing of provisions became troublesome". By Jan 15 he wrote " We have contented ourselves today with a solitary meal: breakfast at one or two o'clock".

Guides turned out to be not as familiar with the country as Cooke had been led to believe. He would send the guides ahead with 6 men to gather information, look for water sources, and hunt. Each day one man was sent back to Cooke with their report. On Dec 14 he referred to the guides as "stupid and worthless".

Jan 22 On reaching Agua Caliente, the men bathed and it is mentioned how the Indians would actually sleep in the warm water at night.

On Jan 27 there was great excitement as there was "a glimpse of the ocean a mile or two off".

On Jan 29 Water and good grass was available as they reached San Diego. Cooke wrote on that day "This evening I rode down by moonlight and reported to the general in San Diego." It must have given him a great deal of satisfaction knowing that through patience, perseverance and energy he had achieved the goal.

Less than a month later he submitted the report on which the above research is founded - Lt. Col P. St. Geo Cooke True Copy Feb 22 1847

Cooke's Journal (Order Number 1 Headquarters Mormon Battalion, Mission of San Diego, January 30, 1847): "The lieutenant-colonel commanding congratulates the battalion on their safe arrival on the shore of the Pacific ocean, and the conclusion of the march of over two thousand miles. History may be searched in vain for an equal march of infantry. Nine-tenths of it has been through a wilderness where nothing but savages and wild beasts are found, of deserts where, for lack of water, there is no living creature. There, with almost hopeless labor, we have dug deep wells which the future traveler will enjoy. Without a guide who had traversed them, we have ventured into trackless prairies where water was not found for several marches. With crowbar and pick and ax in hand we have worked our way over mountains which seemed to defy aught save the wild goat, and hewed a passage through a chasm of living rock more narrow than our wagons. To bring these first wagons to the Pacific, we have preserved the strength of our mules by herding them over large tracts, which you have laboriously guarded

without loss. The garrisons of four presidios of Sonora, concentrated within the walls of Tucson, gave us no pause. We drove them out with their artillery, but our intercourse with the citizens was unmarked by a single act of injustice. Thus, marching half-naked and half fed, and living upon wild animals, we have discovered and made a road of great value to our country. Arrived at the first settlement of California after a single day's rest, you cheerfully turned off from the route to this point of promised repose to enter upon a campaign, and meet, as we believed, the approach of the enemy; and this, too, without even salt to season your sole subsistence of fresh meat. Lieutenants A.J. Smith and George Stoneman, of the First dragoons, have shared and given valuable aid in all these labors. Thus, volunteers, you have exhibited some high and essential qualities of veterans. But much remains undone. Soon you will turn your strict attention to the drill, to system and order, to forms also, which are all necessary to the soldier. By order of Lieutenant-colonel P. St. Geo. Cooke, P.C. MERRILL, Adjutant (Verified as "A true copy of my daily record. P. St. Geo. Cooke. Lt. Colonel Comdg. San Luis Rey, Feby. 22d, 1847." From Exploring Southwestern Trails 1846-1854 Porcupine Press Philadelphia 1974

The 2,000 miles in the order refers to the Mormon's journey from Council Bluffs to California which was one of the longest military marches in history (<http://htg-is.vianet.net/~artpike/cook11.htm>) Although Doniphan's epic march proved to be longer (3,500 mi) Cooke would have been unaware of this achievement as it occurred during the same period of time (1846-47) and communication was limited.

1847 March 23 Cooke and the Mormon Battalion reached Los Angeles. There are details of this period at the end of Cooke's Conquest of New Mexico and California New York G.P Putnam's Sons 1878 for those who are interested. Wikipedia states that "The most significant service the battalion provided in California and during the war, was as a reliable unit under Cooke that General Kearny could rely on to block Fremont's mutinous bid to control California." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon\\_Battalion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon_Battalion)

Gwen Bristow in her book Jubilee Trail 1953 writes on p.287, "A battalion of Mormons had reached California after an overland march, and they were going to garrison Los Angeles." And on p. 309: "As John had told them, Los Angeles was teeming with Yankees. There were men of the regular army; Fremont was here with the men who had marched with him from the north; and there was also the Mormon battalion under Colonel Philip St. George Cooke. The Mormons were very well behaved. This was partly because their religion enjoined a strict code of morals, and partly because Colonel Cooke kept them so busy that they had little time for mischief. He first set them to work getting rid of the wild dogs that swarmed over Los Angeles; next he told them to clean up the town. They cleared the streets of garbage, whitewashed the houses, and cut down the weeds. Garnet and Florinda wished they would stay forever."

I had never thought much about what happened to Cooke and the battalion after they reached San Diego, and even though Jubilee Trail is a novel, there may be some truth in what Bristow has written. When I picked up this book for a dollar in a second-hand book shop here in New Zealand, in my quest to read anything on the 19th century American West, I had no idea that Cooke would be in it. It's not the first time this has happened and has kept me searching through dusty old stacks for more finds such as this.

The wagon road across Northern Mexico led to the Gold rush of 1849. In the last paragraph of *The Conquest of New Mexico and California* (1878) Philip St. George Cooke wrote: "The sequel of the military conquest is told in few words; for the poor natives of that great country, and all their discontent and restlessness, their hatred, threats, and seditions, were soon to be over-whelmed and extinguished, as by the stroke of Fate. Two men, discharged from the Mormon battalion, and employed by Captain Sutter to dig a millrace, a few months later discovered, in prodigal abundance, placer GOLD." [Placer = a deposit of sand or gravel in the bed of a river or lake containing particles of valuable minerals.]

This march brought Philip St. George Cooke recognition as a builder of a practical wagon road through the Southwest to California that others were to use in later years. It was also part of the reason for the Gadsden Purchase and to California becoming a state in 1850.

According to my grandmother, the Mormons gave him respect given to few gentiles, and years later asked that his body be buried in New Zion. Although this request was turned down (his body is buried in Detroit), he features prominently on the Mormon Battalion Monument erected in 1925 on the Utah State Capitol grounds in Salt Lake City, his sword in the air, leading the men on the march from Santa Fe to California..

1847 Feb 16th Philip became a major of the 2nd Dragoons, and on the 20th he was brevetted Lieutenant Colonel for his "faithful and gallant conduct in California" 1896 Biographical Review for Cumberland County, NJ.

*Continue...*