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Report of the Explorations for a Route for the Pacific Railroad 1854

E. G. Beckwith

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WINDINGS
Lisa Grossman
Courtesy of the Artist

Report of the Explorations for a Route for the Pacific Railroad - 1854

Excerpt from Lieutenant E.G. Beckwith's
Report of the Explorations for a Route for the Pacific Railroad, (1854), pp. 15-16.



JULY 2 [1853]

We had another rainy night. This morning we travelled northwest for 4½ miles, and encamped. Captain Morris left for the Republican fork of the Kansas, northeast; but after four hours' travelling, returned, the guide having mistaken Blue river for that stream. We again moved forward, and crossed No-Name creek [most likely McDowell Creek], as Ent-ho-ki-pe [the Delaware guide] calls it - an operation of no small labor. The escort, in endeavoring to follow, mired one horse and injured another, by which they were so long detained, the wagon having gone ahead, that they could not follow its trail after dark, and they therefore slept on the hill all night, a mile from

camp, without food or water. The road wound up the high hills to the top of a dividing ridge between two creeks, affluents of the Kansas, and we had a fine view of the groves on that river, and soon came in view of the long-desired fort on the Republican. But we had a frightful hill to descend, and just at dark, arrived on the brow of the bluff, where trees whose tops are nearly on a level with us are growing in the valley of the creek. Here we encamped, rather laid down.

JULY 3

The escort came in at sunrise, and we crossed the Mahungasa creek, which is 100 feet wide and 3 deep, with a swift current, and is the largest creek we have yet crossed. It is rightly named

The valley of the Smoky Hill fork is on our left, and is from one to two miles wide, with the circuitous river-bed in it fringed with poplars, presenting a lovely picture, and is very favorable for the construction of a railroad.

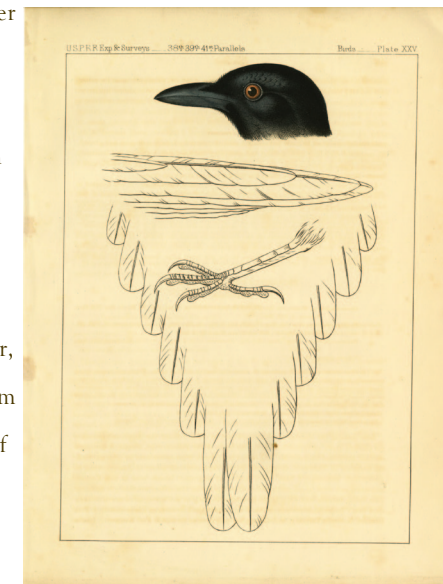
Big Stone [Clarks Creek today], for at the ford we found its bed covered with boulders. In two and half miles we arrived on the bluff opposite the new fort on the Pawnee river, (or Republican fork,) and prepared for the rest of Sunday. We communicated with our friends at Fort Riley. The fort is to be built of white limestone, quarried or lifted from the escarpment of the bluff; and the soldiers' barracks, in a half-finished state, already make a fine appearance from a distance.

JULY 4

We were notified by a rifle report, at daylight, of the arrival of the national anniversary. After numerous discharges of fire-arms, we started for the Kansas river for the purpose of crossing to the opposite side. An India Rubber ponton, procured from Fort Riley by the kindness of Major Ogden and Lieut. Sergeant, acting assistant quartermaster, was placed too low for our light vehicle, and it upset while floating across - a small incident for the 4th of July. Our horses were crossed by swimming, and we arrived about noon at the fort. This is placed at the junction of the Pawnee river with the Kansas, and not in the forks of the Smoky Hill and Pawnee, as we were before informed. There is a noble spring near the site, which appears to be well chosen at the head of navigation on the Kansas, from whence supplies can be sent to the posts in the Indian county and to New Mexico. A ferry across the Pawnee river (as the officers call the

Republican fork) conveyed our wagon over; which was a difficult operation, however, but safely accomplished under the direction of Mr. Homans, after which I was indulgent enough to myself to accept the invitation of Captain Lovell, commanding, to dine at the officer's mess. After a short nooning, I proceeded 7.59 miles to a spring in the bottom, near the Smoky Hill, passing one of delicious cool water, out from the bottom and under the bluff a half mile back, but where there is, unfortunately, no wood. After having crossed Pawnee river we entered upon the bottom in the forks, which is a mile and a half in width, and of rich alluvial soil. In seasons when not overflowed

- and it is believed it rarely is covered with flood—it would produce fine fields of hemp. For two miles from this bottom, the ascent is so gentle as hardly to be discernible. At the junction of the two forks there is a body of large cotton-wood, with elms intermixed; and the ravines on the hill-sides are also well filled with small oaks, which are useful for fuel, but few are suitable for building purposes. The valley of the Smoky Hill fork is on our left, and is from one to two miles wide, with the circuitous river-bed in it fringed with poplars, presenting a lovely picture, and is very favorable for the construction of a railroad.



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