

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### CITY OF ROCKS DIARY EXTRACTS

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#### City of Rocks (California Trail)

Monday, July 2d.--During the morning's march a cold, pitiless rain assailed us. Once more Cashire Creek was crossed.

About noon we struck the old Oregon trail, being the continuance of that from which we diverged in the valley of Green River, and which leads past Fort Hall. Near the point where the two roads meet were some peaks called the Three Towers, conspicuous objects, which, under different circumstances, would have merited our admiration. But almost under their shadow we met three men whose presence was as unexpected as if they had been apparitions.

They were riding in advance of a train some distance back on the Oregon road, to which they belonged; and it was one we had passed long since, eastward of the Rocky Mountains on Platte River, with no expectation of ever meeting it again. From this fact it was easy to realize that still others left in our rear might also be in advance of us, whilst we had been flattering ourselves that with the exception of Captain Paul's pack train--and even this a matter of doubt--we were in the lead of all emigrants.

The deception practiced by Vasquez, whom it will be recalled we had met at the South Pass, was now painfully apparent, his object doubtless having been to turn the tide of emigration past Fort Bridger, that he might derive profit arising from the sale of supplies. By far the most toilsome part of our journey, crossing the Utah Mountains, was a result of this manoeuvre. There we encountered difficulties innumerable, of which our attempt at description falls immeasurably short of the reality. All this happened to us by listening to the advice of a stranger, rather than following that of the experienced mountaineer, Hudspeth, as we have hereto related. The latter, Stewart, from long acquaintance, knew as thoroughly reliable, hence it is unaccountable that he should have been so ensnared by the wily Spaniard. When brought to face the facts thus forcibly revealed to him his wrath scarce knew bounds. In his fury he talked of returning to the South Pass to punish the author of this deception, but when his wrath cooled to permit his better judgment to be exercised, he announced it as his determination once again to be in the lead of every wagon train.

William G. Johnston, July 2, 1849

Entered into the mountain ridge that divides the waters into the Pacific and the Great American Basin. We pass into these mountains through a gorge or ravine on either side of which are ridges several hundred ft high, very rocky in the gorge, the rockiest & most difficult road we have passed requiring great care with wagons. Here are rocks jutting out near the road of peculiar shapes from 5 to 100 ft high. Some are hollow--this is a romantic spot, the rock of course is of granite. Passed into a basin of several miles extent & camped for the night.

Peter Decker, July 4, 1849

July the 8th was Sunday and we laid over and thair was a bout one hundred and seventy packed muels pased by ours and a bout fifty ox wagons this done in one day. I can see a plenty of snow on the mountains. We have no rain of any a count for som time except two or three shours just a nouf to lay the dust

July the 9th we went 23 miles and camped on a small creek up next to the mountains we crossed two or thre creek this fornoon and some in the after noon good camping places in every few miles. the road to day has been good and we got sedar and pine to burn

July the 10th we left the campe and foled up this creek betwixt the mountains and we had a bout forty rods of vary stony and rocky road and in seven miles of the plase whare we camped the mormon road coms in from salt lake. From the junction of these roads to the mormon settlement at salt lake is one hundred and seventy or eighty miles and from these to fort hall is a bout one hundred miles. We had to day vary bad hills to go over and they were vary bad for our oxons feet on the a count of the small stones and gravel the distance that we traveled today is a bout 20 miles and we reached goos creek and camped by it and found good grass and willow and sage to burn we struck a small creek in two or thre miles of this creek a vary good plase to campe. Goos creek is a bout twelve feet wid and two feet deep. And on the flats thair is wild flax.

Randall Fuller, Overland Journal, July 10, 1849

Wednesday, July 17. This morning we started early, at half past five o'clock, and nearly all day traveled over rough roads.

During the forenoon we passed through a stone village composed of huge, isolated rocks of various and singular shapes, some resembling cottages, others steeples and domes. It is called the "City of Rocks," but I think the name "Pyramid City" more suitable. It is a sublime, strange, and wonderful scene--one of nature's most interesting works. The Salt Lake road, which turned off between Dry Sandy and Little Sandy, and which we passed on the twenty-sixth day of June, rejoins our road at this point.

The altitude of Pyramid City is five thousand nine hundred seventy-five feet, being the highest point between the top of the

Bear River Range and where the emigrant road crosses the Sierra Nevada.

Eight miles from Pyramid City we recrossed, going southwest, for forty-second parallel of latitude, which we had first crossed, going north, on the eighth day of June, near Fort Laramie.

[Adventures], July 17, 1849

This afternoon we passed some of the highest peaks of rocks that I have ever seen. Some of them supposed to be 600 feet high. They present a magnificent sight. The Mormon City, or Salt Lake road, that leads at the South Pass, intersected our trail today, 100 miles this side of Fort Hall.

Benjamin Hoffman, July 19, 1849

The road here lies between high & immense rocky mountains, with not a particle of herbage or vegetation upon them, but being white & smooth upon their surface. Just opposite to where we encamped was one which struck us as particularly curious. It was a perfect face upon the highest cliff around . . . . The road continued between these & around these rocky piles but the road itself was good. You can imagine among these massive piles, church domes, spires, pyramids, &c., & in fact, with a little fancying you can see [anything] from the Capitol at Washington to a lowly thatched cottage. Four miles brought us to the coming in of the Mormon Road. Half [a] mile before striking it we passed through a narrow pass of rock, just wide enough for the wagons, & which evidently had been made by some adventurers before us. Three miles farther we came to another valley.

Vincent Geiger and Wakeman Bryarly diary, July 19, 1849

August 3. Took another cutoff this week called Sublets. Struck Raft River; from thence to Swamp Creek. Passed some beautiful scenery, high cliffs of rocks resembling old ruins or dilapidated buildings.

Sallie Hester, August 3, 1849

Passed on through what I called pyramid pass. The Grey Granite rocks stand in pyramid, mountain & dome forms, here & there towering aloft. The road winds along between them. Emigrants names are written with tar-keel & on these curious structures. Here was truly manifested in a temporal point, the figures used in the Scriptures like unto the Shadow of a great rock in a weary land. The shadow was cool--inviting and brought to mind the Spiritus 1 illustration--of the figure--the Scenery was grand & the concave rocks at the narrow pass was quite a curiosity. 4 miles on to the connection of the Salt Lake Road (the road named as connecting yesterday was a branch of the same I presume). A number of emigrants came by the way of the Lake.

August Burbank diary, August 4, 1849

We encamped at the city of the rocks, a noted place from the granite rocks rising abruptly out of the ground. They are in a romantic valley clustered together which gives them the appearance of a city. I took several sketches of them. 5 miles from this comes in the new Mormon road which goes by the city of the salt lake.

James F. Wilkins diary, August 13, 1849

An entire range on our left, of volcanic hills, for about 15 miles; and on our right, similar formations for about 10 ms. when we entered a very extraordinary valley, called the "City of Castles." A couple of miles long, and probably  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile broad. A light grey decipitating granite, (probably altered by fire) in blocks of every size, from that of a barrel to the dimensions of a large dwelling house; groups, Masses on Masses, and Cliffs; and worn, by the action of ages of elementary affluences, into strange and romantic forms.--The travellers had marked several large blocks, as their fancy dictated the resemblance to houses, castles, &c.--On one was marked (with tar) "NAPOLEON'S CASTLE," another "CITY HOTEL," &c. We nooned among these curious monuments of nature. I dined hastily, on bread & water, and while others rested, I explored and sketched some of these queer rocks. A group, on left of the trail, resembled gigantic fungii, petrified, other clusters were worn in cells and caverns: and one, which contrasted with the size and h[e]ight of the adjacent rocks, seemed no larger than a big chest, was, to my astonishment, when close to it, quite large, hollow, with an arch'd entrance, and capable of containing a dozen persons. This, from its peculiar shape, I named the "Sarcophagus Rock."

J. Goldsborough Bruff, August 29, 1849

Sept. 14th. We were early in the saddle this morning, and passing through a rather barren kind of country we made "Steeple Rocks" fourteen miles from camp where at a fine spring and good grass, we took dinner. Here the old Fort Hall road, and the Salt Lake City road, come together. Steeple Rocks looked to me more like battered and storm-beaten old lighthouses than steeples. Here we overtook a company who were about abandoning their wagons, and like us, packing. They made us a present of a sack of panola, which was very acceptable, as, from the sulphurous unpleasantness of the water all the way from Salt Lake City, we had used ours and reduced our stock of that article.

James Mason Hutchings, September 14, 1849

Last eve went to the City rocks. They are at the junction of the California & Salt Lake roads. They are white & about 300 ft high running up to a peak. They are composed of a substance resembling salts & are in a state of decomposition. A few more years & then will be leveled with the ground. They look at a distance like a ruined city.

Lucena Parsons, Covered Wagon Women, V. II, p. 279,  
April 23, 1850

At 3 oclock this morning we wer all stiring & shortly after we had commenced this days travel. 3 miles from morning camp we crossed a low swampy, springy piece of ground. At the head of this is a warm spring near the foot of the mountain where it boils up clear as crystal. Half a mile farther there is a small spring and 3 miles from there the road turns up a ravine between two high mountains, passing through Castle City (or Steeple Rocks) [City of Rocks]. These are a curiosity worth the travelers notice, having the appearance [of] decayed castels and lofty steeples, an ther are the names of travelers paointed in various coulars. 2 miles from this is the junction of the Salt Lake road with the California and Oregon road. 2 miles from this is a small creek. 5 miles from this the road ascends a high mountain. The descent is about 4 miles long, and in some places verry steep. At the foot of this is Birch Creek, and two miles from this brought us to Goos Creek, whee we encamped, having traveled during the day 25 miles. Found good grass at our encampment. No wood but sage and willow brush. Saw some men this evening that came by the way of Salt Lake. They report that ther will be a great many emmigrants detained thee till after harvest, being no provisions there to be had. White flour ther was to be had at first sale for 80 to 100 dollars per hundred. They also say that it is 100 miles farther to come the Lake route.

Thomas Christy, July 1, 1850

During the forenoon we passed through a stone village composed of huge, isolated rocks of various and singular shapes, some resembling cottages, others steeples and domes. It is called the "City of Rocks," but I think the name "Pyramid City" more suitable. It is a sublime, strange, and wonderful scene-- one of nature's most interesting works. The Salt Lake Road, which turned off between Dry Sandy and Little Sandy, and which we passed on the Twentieth-sixth day of June, rejoins our road at this point. The altitude of Pyramid City is five thousand nine hundred seventy-five feet, being the highest point between the top of the Bear River Range and where the emigrant road crosses the Sierra Nevada. Eight miles from Pyramid City we recrossed, going southwest, the forty-second parallel of latitude, which we had crossed, going north, on the eighth day of June, near Fort Laramie.

Margaret A. Frink, Covered Wagon Women, V. II, pp. 120-121, July 17, 1850

August 3rd Saturday. Pleasant. A few clouds in the evening.

There is a high snowy mountain in front [Cache Peak, 10,350

ft.] and high hills on each side. Crossed the creek and left it on the right, and by an easy ascent reached a summit and as gradually descended to a valley of sage and sand sloping to the South East, the streams running towards the Salt Lake and either emptying into it or losing themselves in the plain. Considerable grass in strips where we nooned and we can see the Salt Lake road to the South East. In the afternoon we crossed two divides. Passed some high isolated granite hills or peaks, many of them single rocks standing in the valley, many of them rising from spires, towers, forts, &c. One on the road is well covered with names and surrounded with a grassy field. Springs issuing from near the foot. To the right these hills form a mountain range with high peaks of the same kind. The granite is much decomposed, the earth mostly composed of the debris and at the foot of the peaks quite coarse. I think that some call these Chapel Rocks.

Byron McKinstry diary, August 3, 1850

Then went through a Novelty Pass, distance of three miles, to Echo Gap. This pass through the mountains is called Novelty Pass from the great mountains of singularly shaped rock on either side of the road. There is a very large rock on the left, close to the road, that I named Temple or Recorder's rock. Here, upon its base, is recorded many an emigrant's name. This rock may be one hundred and twenty feet high and runs up nearly perpendicularly. A little farther and on the right is another with a small prong sticking up on its top that appears a little like a cupola. I might give names to many of these monuments of Nature but they are too numerous. Echo Gap is fifteen or twenty feet wide, with perpendicular rocks on each side from fifty to one hundred and fifty high, and receives its name from having the loudest echo that I have ever heard. One mile after leaving Echo Gap brings us to where the Salt Lake Road comes in.

Cyrus C. Loveland diary, August 7, 1850

Camped at Steeple or Castle Rocks here is a sublime scenery to the romantic the Rocks resemble an old City of Ruins there are thousands of names here I registered Mine on a large Rock which we named the Castle Rock Hotel.

Richard Augustus Keen diary, June 22, 1852

leave encampment at last crossing of raft river and turn left through a large valley find small branch this leads me into a romantic place caled City of rocks--the Mountains tower with sharp peaks, mostly of a sugar loaf shape--six miles from this point I find the junction of the salt lake road

Jay Green diary, June 25, 1852

. . . encamped in Granite City one of the finest natural places of its kind in the World, I banter the World to beat it

This City is Walled in on every side with towering Granite mountains some peaks shooting athwart the sky like towering domes. While hundreds of piles, peaks, steeples & domes of all shapes possible in the distance looking like an old delapidated City. In a south Eastern direction may be seen a large mountain made up of Mica schist This after noon we passed through a most beautiful basin surrounded with fine mountains. To this Granite City seems to be but two out lets, a narrow gorge where we entered, and a wider space where we made our exite Here I obtained several specimens one from the Mansion house as I call it, as a token or remembrance This City is situated near the half way place between Raft River and Goose Creek

Dr. John Hudson Wayman diary, July 12, 1852

July 13. Had a nice shower of rain to-day, which, greatly to our liking, settled the dust, and it has cleared off cool and pleasant. We are in camp to-night at Steeple Rock. There are a great many names on the rocks. Distance traveled, eighteen miles.

Francis Sawyer, July 13, 1852

19th. Monday - Made an early start and went four miles and crossed Raft River, a little brook, nothing more. The other road is in sight. Went up the stream some distance and up through a canyon opposite Steeple Rocks, magnificent, conical rocks as white as marble, glossy and bright, several hundred feet in height.

Mariett Foster Cummings, July 19, 1852

Monday, August 9th. Traveled eight miles when we entered Pyramid Circle. This is one of the greatest curiosities on the road. In some places a piller rises to a height of one hundred and fifty feet, with smaller ones piled on the top and sides, looking as though a breath of air would hurl them down. These pyramids are of various colors. The sides have been washed by the rains in all manner of fantastic shapes, giving the place a most romantic and picturesque appearance. The circle is five miles long and three miles wide, level within the wall around and entirely surrounded by these pyramids or cliffs except an inlet at the east end of about fifty yards, and an outlet at the western end just wide enough to permit the wagons to pass through. The rocks are covered as far up as one can reach or climb, with names of emigrants. We left ours with date in a conspicuous place for the boys behind. We saw the names of some of our acquaintances who passed here two years ago.

Tuesday, August 10th, 1852. Had some very rough road today. Came near getting our wagons smashed coming down the mountain to Goose Creek. Traveled fifteen miles today and camped on Goose Creek. Good grass and water.

Eliza Ann McAuley, August 9, 1852

Saw Mr. McGrew's people. Took a ride with them. We came over some very bad hills, very steep indeed. [Granite Pass]  
 Mary Stuart Bailey, Ho for California: Women's Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library, p. 79, August 19, 1852

At eve we encamped in Pyramid Circle, a delightful place indeed and one which requires the pen of the poet or the pencil of a painter to portray its beauties. It is a perfectly level plain, surrounded by mountains which are covered with pine and cedar trees and studded throughout with numerous tall white and green stones from sixty to one hundred and fifty feet and from ten to twenty feet in diameter at the base. As we view it this eve, the full moon shining upon it, our camp fires blazing near and striving, with their lurid light, to vie with the silvery moon in brightness. Our tents and wagons grouped together and a merry party tripping the light fantastic toe upon the green, whose cheerful, happy voices echo from the hills around us, presents a scene altogether picturesque and novel.

Harriet Sherrill Ward, August 19, 1853

Aug 26th Rode on back in the morning in company with Maria Ducker. Passed through Pyramid Circle. The Pyramids resemble more than anything else petrified hay stacks. Broken the wagon tongue and we will have to walk, but we are accustomed to that

Aug 27th Had the worst roads that I ever saw. Up and down all day long. Sometimes on the top of a high mountain, and then again in the valley. Sometimes crossing creeks and then wandering through mazes of luxuriant sage brush. Encamped on Goose Creek where there was plenty of grass, although at some distance from the road.

Rachel Taylor, August 26, 1853

At noon we encamped near the so-called Monumental rocks. They are a cluster of rocks forming a sort of semi-circle. They rise to a great height and are of a light grey color and look like the ruins of some enormous structure. They are situated in an amphitheatre of mountains, with snow capped summits. The rocks themselves rise out of a little plain covered with velvet sod. A small stream issues from their base and glitters along down the valley. A sort of thin mist hangs in the air, giving a dreamy appearance to the whole scene . . . . All afternoon we travelled along the same valley among rocks of the most singular shapes, some rising to great heights like the spires of churches, others of a more tower like appearance. Encamped on a sage plain near a little creek with tolerable grass.

William Woodham diary, June 22, 1854

Passed the junction in the forenoon. Ironed. No water except a small puddle to wash hands in. From the time we struck

the junction till we encamped we saw 7 dead cattle.

Saw 8 or 9 more dead cattle. Awful roads, hilly, 5 miles descent, the last hill being very steep & dangerous. Emigrants need to let wagons down by ropes wound round the alder trees at the top of the hill. A mountain stream runs below as cold as ice water. In 2 miles we struck Goose Creek & nooned. Rolled on 4 miles perhaps & Hannibals wagon wheel broke off at the axel in crossing a small run. Mended it with a cedar stick.

Mary Burrell, August 14, 1854

Thur Clear an warm passed the Castle rocks [City of Rocks] the fore noon noon come to the conjunction of the Salt river on northern roads traveled 6 miles further an camped in the mountains raining this evening

Elizabeth Myrick, August 27, 1854

August 18th. All safe this morning. We are agreeably disappointed in not having a call last night. Some report having seen Indians and hearing them singing. As we are sure they were not far enough from camp to hear anything more than the rest of us the story is discredited. A few miles from camp we came to a stream which had but a scant amount of water, but by noon reached another that supplied plenty. Here a couple of Mormons have a blacksmith shop. In the next three miles passed considerable alkali. The ground is low and has a marshy appearance and pools of dark coffee colored water are in among the scant grass and weeds. It is a great deal of work to keep the stock away from this water. In spite of all that can be done, they get occasional sips. Another Mormon blacksmith shop.

Here we went into the mountains again but had a very good road. Two miles farther come to a narrow way which they call a pass. At the entrance of this was a newly made grave filled with stones. Near it a bit of board was picked up on which was written this brief account of the unfortunate one. "This man was killed by Indians, Aug. 7th. He was from Iowa and was traveling alone with a wagon and one horse." Emerging from the pass we came into what is known as Pyramid Circle. There was perhaps an acre of partially level and with a good sized stream flowing through it. On this level, and the hills which encircled it, were the most beautiful and wonderful white rocks that we ever saw. This known as the City rocks and certain bears a striking resemblance to a city. To be sure it was a good deal out of the usual, for the large and small houses were curiously intermingled and set at all angles, but it only made the place more charming.

There was everything one could imagine from a dog house to a church and courthouse. While the stock was being cared for the women and children wandered off to enjoy the sights of the city.

When they returned to camp a stern and well merited reprimand awaited them. "How could you do such a thing? Did not you know there might be an Indian behind every rock?" etc. etc. We were

so spellbound with the beauty and strangeness of it all that no thought of Indians entered our heads. Some of us, at least, are too young and thoughtless for our surroundings. The older ones did not forget to make all the possible arrangements they could for the safety of the camp.

August 19th. A few miles from the City Rocks the Salt Lake Road comes in. A mile farther came to a creek that has the appearance of being quite a stream at times but there was little water running. Eleven miles from camp came to some fine springs that gush out from underneath a rock. Nooned here and then started over the mountains. Very long, steep hills to go down. One place in particular was so bad that they only wonder is that the wagons kept right side up. Portions of the road were barely wide enough for the wagons. Steep mountains on one side and an abrupt bank on the other and at times very sidling. [Granite Pass] Camped on a small branch near the foot of the mountain. Good grass and plenty of cedar wood. This has been a tiresome day.

Helen Carpenter, Ho for California: Women's Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library, p. 159-60, August 18-19, 1857

After a few miles we entered the mountains and in 9 ½ miles from last camp came to Steeple rocks. Which are large while curiously shaped rocks scattered over a surface of several acres. Some of them run up to a point like the steeple of a church, many names are painted on their sides one mile from these rocks we came to where the Salt Lake road intersects and now all three roads are one again.

James Berry Brown diary, August 21, 1859

The work now is not so arduous as we turned the [650] cattle loose at night, thus enabling us to secure more rest and sleep, a most welcome and needed diversion after our long journey and nights of watching. The plains of Raft River were covered with splendid feed, and after passing the "City of Rocks," a great cluster of giant pinnacles that towered a hundred feet high, decided to lay over for several days in order to rest our cattle before entering the Snake desert. The mountains here afford a magnificent summer range, the bunch grass waving like a wheat field, and with water abundant. Our camp was located at the foot of a high mountain and where we herded the cattle and indulged in fishing and hunting during our spare time. At the end of our rest, we had accumulated over 200 pounds of "jerky" which was a great luxury on our long drives.

The Cattle Drives of David Shirk, p. 72, September 1871