

Travel Guides and Descriptions of Traveling the Oregon Trail Diary of Basil Nelson Longsworth

Except from the *Diary of Basil Nelson Longsworth, March 15, 1853 to January 22, 1854
Covering the Period of his Migration from Ohio to Oregon*. Denver, CO: DE Harrington, 1927.
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[July] 23rd [1853]. We left Poison Creek, which is said to sink a little ways below where we camped, and traveled ten miles up this valley; the road is level and very good but we crossed a number of small streams and some swails [sic] which were muddy with chuck holes. At noon we crossed a dead stream of water running down the valley which was twenty to thirty feet wide and two or three feet deep. There was a kind of bridge built across this stream and we had to pay 20c toll on each wagon. After dinner we commenced the ascent of the chain of mountains which separate the waters of the Bear and Snake Rivers. We traveled five or six miles when we found ourselves on the summit. The ascent was not difficult. While we were going up it commenced raining and rained for an hour until the rain wet us through our coats. We passed down a gradual descent of a mile when we came to the finest spring I ever saw. It bursted [sic] out of the mountain clear as crystal and in vast quantities, forming quite a creek, two feet wide and a foot deep with a rapid current. We passed this spring a mile and camped for the night on the bank of a beautiful stream with everything plentiful.

24th. We remained in camp this day, there being also a number of camps near us. At 11:00 we had a sermon by Mr. Conyer but I had to attend the cattle and did not hear it. In the afternoon Mr. Clark addressed us from a part of the 16th verse and sixth chapter of Daniel.

25th. This morning was pleasant and we pursued our journey on down the stream on which we were encamped. We traveled a few miles when we crossed to the north side; crossing not good; the road was then rough and crooked for some distances. This evening we crossed the creek again (it was thirty feet wide and three feet deep) and camped on the south side, having made near twenty miles. the creek near us is in many places ten feet deep and in the morning we had some trouble with a few cattle which crossed it.

26th. We started late and made fifteen miles. At noon we crossed the Portneth, a large stream of water that has its source near the Soda Springs. It is a crooked, slow stream and near forty yards wide and three feet deep at the ford. We camped on the Fannes River.

27th. This day we traveled some sixteen miles and in the evening we passed the American Falls of Snake River. The river here is near two hundred yards wide and descends near thirty feet. The fall is not perpendicular but rushes down a ledge of rocks which is very rough, the rocks in many places extending above the water, which causes it to foam and dash furiously and in some places it falls for a number of feet perpendicular and upon the whole of it is a beautiful

view and the first falls I ever saw which are of any movement. We camped three miles below them and were amused by the roaring of the waters.

28th. We traveled fifteen miles over a rough road, both corked and steep and camped on the bluffs near the bank of the river and had but poor grass as our cattle had to graze on the barren sage plains, there being no bottom on this side of the river here.

29th. This day we traveled over a very sandy road to Raft River, a distance of seven miles. We followed up this stream a mile and camped with plenty of good grass. This morning was employed in washing and the like.

30th. This day is very warm; we started by 6:00 o'clock, drove back a mile to the ford and crossed Raft River. Ford three rods wide and three feet deep. Raft River is a very deep and rapid stream and runs north to Snake River. After leaving the river we ascended a hill and found ourselves on a strange plain which, I think, has been the scene of volcanic action. All over this plain there are piles of rocks which look as if they were thrown up from the bowels of the earth and fell in confused masses, and in many places there are chasms in the center of these masses which are now nearly closed by the sand and stone falling in for ages immemorial; the entire plain appearing as if it had once been melted with liquid heat, the rocks also appearing as if there were once in a melted condition and are now nearly as hard as iron and twice as heavy as common sandstone. We traveled sixteen miles and camped at Marsh Springs and had good grass for our cattle. Here we neglected to watch our cattle and in the evening when we went to drive them in they were missing, having wandered among the wild grass which was above our heads and they could not be found, so we gave over our search till the following morning.

31st. This morning we resumed our search for the cattle and at 7:00 o'clock we all were found and drove to camp. The soil on the creek is the richest I ever saw, and the richest crop of grass and weeds. We remained in camp and some were busy in making arrangements for the week. We had no religious exercises and the day passed away slowly.

August the 1st. We drove down Marsh Creek seven miles and crossed and four miles from there struck the river – ate dinner and drove ten miles, making twenty miles and camped on Goose Creek with good grass.

2nd. We traveled to Dry Creek eight miles – ate dinner and then to Rock River nine miles and camped for the night with very good grass.

3rd. We started late this morning and passed down Rock River eight miles and crossed it and drove seven miles and camped again on this creek with some grass and water.

4th. This day we made ten miles and camped on Snake River, our camp being on a high bluff with the river lying half a mile distant and six or eight hundred feet below us with very bluff banks. We drove our cattle down a very rough and steep road to the river, watered them and drove them up the bottom one and one-half miles to grass. This is a remarkably strange place. The ground is level to the very edge of the bluffs, which are two miles apart and perpendicular for two or three hundred feet and then slope at an angle of 45° and are covered with broken rocks

which apparently have been torn from the perpendicular rocks above and tumbled down in wild confused masses. This range of rocks covers a height of three or four hundred feet, there is then a slope of land extending to the water which is quite steep and rocky. Through this the water flows with a rapid current and in places considerable falls.

5th. We drove ten miles when we passed down the river bank and watered our cattle and ate some dinner. We then drove miles to Salmon Falls River and camped without any grass.

6th. We started early and drove one mile and camped found a little grass. Captain Crow then went to the ferry to engage our ferrage [sic] over the river. He returned with a rather hard report of the crossing and we remained in camp through the day. The roads this week have been very stony and rough in places, and very dusty and the weather quite warm, which made traveling unpleasant.

7th. Sabbath. For the last four or five days we have had but very little grass and our cattle look very bad. Near noon we hitched our cattle and drove four miles to the ferry, the road being very heavy. There were thirty wagons to cross before us, and we drove our cattle to the hills some four miles distant for grass. In the evening three of us took our blankets and went to guard our cattle. We searched until 11:00 o'clock but could not find anything of them and returned to camp.

8th. This morning by daylight our wagons were crossing the river. We had to load and unload our wagons, row the skiff and then pay \$4 per wagon and 50 cents a head for swimming cattle by the side of the boat. By 8:00 o'clock our wagons were all safely over and the ferryman demanded his ferrage. The captain being absent we requested him to wait until he came to settle, but he refused and threatened to carry our wagons back. We told him we had not seen men enough to do that and I think he believed it. Our cattle now came to camp, but the wind was high and we did not swim out cattle until in the afternoon. We then drove our cattle one mile down the river and a little below the falls and swam to an island. Three men whom we had employed swam to the island and drove our cattle across the remaining part of the river. They also swam three other lots of cattle, for which they received \$2 per lot. Our cattle all crossed without injury. This day the Mason Company, who had been travelling near us, left and continued down the south side of the river, being afraid to swim their cattle, as many of them were weak for want of food. The salmon Falls here are pretty and descend fifteen or twenty feet, forming many beautiful cascades, the greatest fall in any one place being near ten feet and the roaring of the waters can be heard for five or six miles. Along the river for four miles there is a vast quantity of crystal spring water pouring down the rocky cliffs into the river. In many places it falls down from one to three hundred feet and nearly cover the rocks for hundreds of feet together, forming a most pleasing and sublime spectacle. The water falls in such large quantities that for miles along the river the water is perfectly clear for from thirty to sixty yards from the shore. About 4:00 this evening we hitched out teams and drove two miles and camped for the night; we had good grass and a little west of our camp and a half mile east of us there is a splendid spring affording more water than any spring that I have seen yet; it pours out among the rocks, forming a channel fifteen feet wide and nearly two feet deep. This evening our cattle got their fill of grass for the first time since last Tuesday.

9th. This morning we drove four miles to Rush Creek and camped. We remained here though the day and had good grass.

10th. This morning we started early and drove six miles to Shoot Creek, so called from the swiftness of its current, and crossed it in two streams separated by a small island. The first was twenty yards wide and thirty or thirty-six inches deep with a rocky bottom and very swift current. The second twelve yards wide and twenty inches deep. We then made fourteen miles and came to a creek, the name of which I did not learn, and camped, it being dark by this time. We had good grass.

11th. We traveled down this creek five miles and camped for the day in order to let the cattle rest, and recruit ourselves. The grass is good all along this creek.

12th. We drove eight miles and watered our cattle in a creek to the left of the road. We then drove six miles to a creek and camped. There is good camping all along this creek, everything being plentiful.

13th. We started early and ascended a hill two miles long and in some places quite steep and rough and stoney [sic]. At the end of six miles we came to a creek and watered our stock. The banks of this creek are rocky, the bottom narrow and affords little grass. Six miles farther we came to a creek and bottom which affords grass, and water in the fore part of the season; here we let our cattle rest and ate some dinner; we then drove three miles to Barrel Creek and camped. Here is as good grass and soil as heart would wish. Our camp is one hundred yards north of the road, with a fine spring of good water boiling up at the edge of the creek near by. The country between here and shoot creek has been the scene of volcanic action, the earth opening in hundreds of places – the earth heaving up and forming backbones which have a chasm in the middle and the sides slope off like the back of an animal while the stones scattered over the plains are literally burned to cinders.

14th. Sabbath. We remained in camp. The day was fine and we enjoyed ourselves remarkably well and we enjoyed some good company among the emigrants camped near us.

15th. We started early and drove hard. There were eleven graves by our camp this morning. At noon we stopped near a good spring a little north of the road. We had fine grass at noon, and a little before camping we passed eight more graves, all or nearly all of these twenty-four graves were made last August, the cholera having been very bad here. This evening we camped late and had rushes and swamp grass for our cattle.

16th. We drove until noon and had spring water to drink and in the evening drove three miles to the Hot Springs. There are a number of these springs near together and run out of the ground in a flattish piece of ground, the heat of the wood being near the boiling point, and looks in no wise different from common spring water. This evening the sun set just as we camped; our camp is situated in a beautiful little valley with splendid grass, but the water did not run in the creek and the standing water was quite scarce.

17th. We drove up a long hill with many large columns of rock to our right. At noon we came to a fine creek and watered out stock and ate some dinner, and then drove to a number of springs, their names I don't remember, and there camped for the night.

18th. This morning early we ascended a long hill and after driving three or four miles one of us saw Boise River. One of oxen was quite sick and would not eat. About 1:00 we struck the river which is a beautiful river forty or fifty yards in width. The water has a rapid current and is as clear as crystal and quite full of fish. The road passed over this week is quite rough and for forty miles was quite rocky. After an hour's noon we traveled seven miles and camped. Grass very good.

19th. This day we drove fifteen miles, some of the time the road lay in the bottom and some time on the bluff. This evening I struck down a hollow from the bluff into the bottom and then drove three miles through a very rich growth of grass upon which an ox had never trod to the track. Three other wagons followed while the remaining four kept to the bluffs and had a very dusty road.

20th. We left camp and drove until noon over a very dusty and sandy road which was covered with sage, we then crossed over a point of the bluffs which came to the river and struck the river on the west side of the bluff, where we ate some dinner and then drove on until we reached the ford of Boise River late in the evening and camped on this side. There is a very good soil along Boise River, the bottoms being from two to four miles wide and mostly covered with a heavy growth of grass. There might be thousands of tons of pretty fine hay made here.

21st. Sabbath day warm. This morning Crow, Connor and Kenoyer left camp and drove down the river while Edwards and Kent remained in camp; Mrs. Kent being very sick. This morning by daylight I drove the cattle to grass, one of our oxen went with the rest and by breakfast one of them had come near camp and was dead. This evening another which had been sick since Thursday morning died. They were both in good order and I think evidently died of disease in the brain. Here Edwards left a yoke of cattle lying dead and within a few yards of each other.

22nd. We started late, crossed Boise River, and drove sixteen or eighteen miles to the ferry across the Snake River and Fort Boise, the rest of the company having crossed their wagons previous. It was night when we arrived and James did not cross until morning when we ran both our wagons on the boat and in a few minutes were safely on the other side, for which we paid \$16. This money was made by the ferryman in half an hour. This is the way to wring hard-earned money from the starving poor.